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A Subversive Partnership; or How a “Congregation” Affirmed a “Guerrilla of Grace”. A Case Study

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By any of our usual measures, guerrillas are a weaker force set against a superior and more organized power which exerts both subtle and blatant pressures to conform. Such pressures are not commonly or quickly perceived or interpreted as oppressive, but frequently something in them is experienced as, at least, vaguely stifling to the spirit. Guerrillas, then, are engaged in the battle to reclaim some territory, or some part of life, for a higher purpose, a truer cause. To wed guerrilla with grace suggests that the truer cause is God's kingdom.¹

Although this paper is about leadership in context, and I realize that others have reflected most ably on this area,² the nature of this particular context and the degree to which I experienced my own theology of ministry as not only different from but often in clear and sometimes threatening opposition to the contextual norm, explains the above subtitle, taken from Ted Loder's *Guerrillas of Grace, Prayers For The Battle*.³ As I hope will become clear, the setting and background described in this case study were such that it frequently seemed as if I were reclaiming territory step by step for a significantly different vision. And because that vision was one of radical inclusivity, especially of women and other marginalized people, and for human partnership as co-creators with God, I believe it is at least one angle of vision of God's kingdom. Hence my indebtedness to Loder.

The paper will be in two parts. The first will describe my experience over two years as an Anglican woman priest in the Philippines, a context in which the cultural and organizational history and expectations were significantly different from my own, and the impact this had both on the organization and on

me. The second part will explore the implications of that experience for leadership in ministry in general, focussing on some issues for cross cultural ministry and for women in leadership. Although I'm sure that many of my insights are not original, the "foreignness" of the context so sharpened my observations that I was led to see things with heightened awareness and to feel the need to draw attention to issues that perhaps we in North America either take totally for granted or have even forgotten altogether.

Time and time again, as I have listened to tapes of the proceedings of the Beijing Conference on women's issues, I have realized how critical it is that we tell the stories, raise the questions again and again, lest we become complacent simply because they may not be part of our immediate experience. Further, as we enter increasingly into a global view of things, a larger picture of the body of Christ and the cross cultural implications that necessarily arise, need to be explored. I do not claim to have answers, but I do believe that my own experience raises some important questions.

In 1993 I left a parish in the Diocese of New Westminster to take a position as Chaplain, Chair of Religion, and Executive Officer, of the Brent International School in Manila, Philippines. Now ten years old, this particular school was modelled after the first Brent School established in Baguio, then the summer capital of the Philippines in the Cordillera Mountains. The original founder, Bishop Brent, the first Episcopal missionary bishop to the Philippines during the American colonial period, had seen a need for English/American style education for the children of expatriate business and government families resident in the Philippines. In 1985 the Reverend Canon Gabriel Dimanche began the Manila Brent school with a view not only to attracting foreign students but also the children of Philippine families who had been previously educated abroad and residents for whom English language education and curriculum in a Christian setting were important. This school now has over 850 students from 27 nationalities, many of whom are the sons and daughters of the Philippines business elite. Its association with the Episcopal Church in the Philippines makes the spiritual life of the Brent community a priority and, in spite of the fact that the majority of the students, faculty and staff are Roman Catholic, the school must have an Episcopal/Anglican chaplain as one of the executive administrators of

the school. My own background includes many years of teaching and administration prior to being ordained to the Anglican priesthood. During an exposure trip to the Philippines in 1992 I had visited with Canon Dimanche at Brent school. He invited me to consider coming to Brent as chaplain should I ever decide to return to the Philippines with my husband who was frequently there on business.

And so I quite literally completed a parish assignment in the Diocese of New Westminster on a Sunday, boarded a plane on Monday, arrived in Hong Kong on Tuesday (date lines do this)—where I caught my breath for two days. Then Friday evening on the tail end of a typhoon I landed in Manila and entered my new role at Brent School. Although I had been an intentional student of the art of leadership for over fifteen years by then, I was about to embark on a very different experience of leadership. In retrospect the turbulence of the tail end of the typhoon has seemed almost prophetic. (God has such a sense of humour!) Let me try to explain by describing some of the context.

The culture of the country and of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines is very different from life in Canada and the Diocese of New Westminster. The Philippines in general and Manila in particular are an often puzzling mix of east and west. There is much that is Asian and Spanish and American, and all this mixed with the original indigenous culture of the archipelago which includes many distinct tribes, languages and customs. It is very easy for a westerner, especially a new one, to “get lost”. A lot of what you see on the surface looks deceptively familiar, very like home. But just when you think you have it figured out, something happens that illustrates that you are all wrong, without necessarily indicating where you might have taken a wrong turn. It is sometimes said, tongue in cheek, that the Philippine people lived for four hundred years in a convent, referring to the Spanish occupation, then 100 years in Disneyland, describing the American period, and now the country is trying to define who and what it really is. No wonder it is confusing to a new arrival.

Not surprisingly (given the Spanish presence), the country is largely Roman Catholic, of an almost pre-Vatican II flavour. The Episcopal Church is quite small by comparison, with its strength in Northern Luzon, one of the larger islands and where

Manila, the capital, is situated. There are some obvious differences, however, between the current Episcopal/Anglican ethos in North America and in the church in the Philippines. In fact it was at times like stepping back at least fifty years with “old” hymnody and theology, early twentieth century “high church” liturgy⁴ and “traditional”/conservative attitudes toward change. At the time of my arrival there was only one woman who had been ordained to the priesthood, a hotly debated issue still. And this woman had served as a deacon for over eight years prior to her priesting, a very long time indeed.

There has also been significant influence from the Anglican churches in Singapore and Korea. These tend to be quite evangelical and conservative which has led to some theological fundamentalism among many of the clergy and the people. In fact one of the surprising things I discovered was that in spite of the historical dominance of the Roman Catholic Church there is a growing non-denominational evangelical and charismatic movement in the churches in general. The people involved in these churches are often theologically and culturally quite conservative, and are frequently biblical literalists. Wives are usually expected to be “subject to their husbands”. I describe all this in some detail because it provides an important backdrop to my ministry at Brent School where many of the faculty and students were influenced by these recent trends.

There are some significant implications that arise from this context. The first is an historical assumption arising from the Spanish and Mexican Roman Catholic ethos that supports a fairly formal and rigid hierarchical system in which clergy see themselves as separate from and to some degree “above” the laity. There is always an explicit distance between clergy and laity from which clergy could be and are mostly quite directive. And on the whole people accept this directive style as the norm. Given the historical period of the first Episcopalian clergy, this formal ethos and top down style was characteristic there too. I discovered this early on when all I had to do was even suggest that I might like something for my office or the chapel of the school and it seemed to appear magically. I will admit to a certain pleasure in the resulting ease of getting things done. It was equally easy to make changes in curriculum or liturgy provided that I wanted to be directive and not consultative. The prevailing attitude seemed to be “Father knows best”.

That I wasn't exactly a "Father" of the church was another matter altogether.

The second implication is that a female priest is a shocking novelty. For many of the students and faculty I was the first woman priest they had ever seen, much less experienced. As I said earlier there is still discussion about women priests in the Episcopal Church in the Philippines and of course it is not even a discussion topic for the Roman Catholic hierarchy there. The fact that I was also one of the very few women administrators of the school as well, made me unusual on two accounts. Now, though many men and some women like to claim that women enjoy equality in the Philippines, I would beg to differ. From working with the female students and faculty at Brent, and the women of the Episcopal church at large, I would say rather that although many of the wealthy and professional women do enjoy considerable privilege, their place in society and opportunities for the future are primarily determined by fathers, brothers, uncles, etc. And so the arrival of a woman priest coming from a culture where women do expect and for the most part receive equal opportunity, and who operated on that assumption, was a shock for many men and women. At minimum it was a novelty. And for some, as I learned later, it had been quite difficult. I had to earn the right to be priest and leader among them.

It is also important to note here that my theological training and ministry had been in a liberal and inclusive environment where gender discussions usually had to do with more inclusive imagery for God, not the priesthood. Such consideration would be considered quite radical by most of the people I worked with in the Philippines. I would add as well that prior to entering seminary I had a ten year career in human resources and organizational behaviour and development and so am well versed in issues and processes of cultural and institutional change. Still wearing that consulting hat, so to speak, it was inevitable that I would be interested in at least trying to understand what was actually going on in comparison to what might appear to be happening. So all in all, given my background and the situation in which I found myself, it would be safe to say I was not on familiar terrain and the image of the resident alien was often in my mind.

My immediate dilemma was further complicated by the fact that school had already been in session for three weeks before

I could leave my parish assignment in Vancouver. Thus school life was already in full swing when the new chaplain, anticipated with curiosity, skepticism and some hostility, appeared on the scene. The fact that I had been told about the ongoing debate over how I was to be addressed had already alerted me to the formality I could expect. The Headmaster was "Father" to everyone, as are most of the local clergy. Not surprisingly this did not appeal to me in the least! Fortunately there is another term of address used for Episcopal clergy primarily in the northern Philippines, "Padi". Though it probably derives from "padre" it is nonetheless an accepted Igorot word (one of the many dialects in the Philippines and that of the predominant Philippine Episcopal Church) and as such has no gender, since the local language is without gender distinctions. When I had visited the country in 1992, this was what I was frequently called. So I suggested that this be how I would be known at the school. It was certainly not going to be possible to say, as I would to anyone in Canada, "I believe God calls me 'Thomi'". Please won't you do the same." Even socially it was difficult for people to call me by my name, regardless of my requests that they do so.

Though some people might think I am making too much of this issue, for me it reflects a whole theology of ministry. And though it is my ordained position to bless and break bread, to be sacrament among people, to be the "mana-person" as Urban Holmes so aptly puts it,⁵ my preference is to do that as a partner with the people, not someone who is set apart and certainly not above. But even before arriving at Brent I had realized that unfortunately my place as priest in the school was to be one who was set apart and who would probably somehow be seen in the same role as the patriarchal clergy who predominated in the culture and the church. Certainly this appeared to be the position of the Headmaster. Fortunately he carries his patriarchal privilege with compassion and benevolence and as a result is loved and respected in his own right as well as for his office.

So how did I begin as leader in this vastly different context and what did I learn from the experience? Initially, at least until I had a more accurate sense of the situation, the best strategy seemed to be to try to fit in with the way things usually were done. Using my opening image of guerrillas, it was

too early to stake any new ground. One incident illustrates a humorous result of this approach. While walking down a hallway one day in my first week someone called out "Father". There was no one else immediately in the vicinity and my first reaction was to look over my shoulder expecting to see Father Dimanche, the headmaster, somewhere behind me. He wasn't anywhere to be seen and with a jolt I realized that the person was calling me. For a split second I did not know how to respond and then decided that the best thing was to ignore the naming and simply respond to the person. Until the day I left, there were people who continued to address me as "Father". (If my husband was with me, it usually caused him some considerable internal mirth since he knew not only how I felt, but how my colleagues in Vancouver would also chuckle.) Eventually I came to see this as at least partly a functional title for people whose entire experience of priests was of "Fathers". It was not that they were necessarily rejecting me as priest among them, nor even apparently ignoring my gender. It was simply that priests were "Father" and that was that. At least I hoped that was the way it was.

This points to one of the more difficult aspects of my experience, namely, often not knowing with any certainty how well I was actually being accepted as a priest because I was a woman. Now I realize that this ongoing question is not unique to my situation in the Philippines. Even now in North America there are male clergy who blatantly refuse to recognize the legitimacy of women's orders.⁶ But because people at the school gave me the "lip service" that my position as priest demanded, it was not easy to discern how people really felt. Over time I was surprised, and not a little dismayed, to discover that in the absence of specific affirmation I began to doubt myself. Though this is obviously not rational it led me to some insights about the importance of the way a leader feels about herself/himself. In fact I suspect it also has something to say about how anyone in a minority position feels about himself/herself. Obviously this has implications far broader than leadership alone. I will revisit this later in the paper when I explore the general implications for leadership. Suffice to say for now that when we lead in new ways or in different contexts, much less both, there is a need for some sort of feedback mechanism that tells us how we are doing, whether we have in fact achieved, incarnated, the reality for which we strive.

As I look back on this experience I have come to see that leadership is not only an art but also a process, an ongoing process of becoming. “Becoming” is surely at the heart of the Christian journey of transformation and so I guess it is not surprising, then, that it is part of my theology of ministry. This is a journey toward being who we are to be, to becoming “real” in the Velveteen Rabbit sense of the thing.⁷ (*The Velveteen Rabbit* is a story set in a Victorian nursery about toys that become “real” in the eyes of those who love them. As such it is also a most important statement about authenticity and transformation. I was delighted to discover just before I left Manila, that my one person “altar guild” felt the same way. Her tearful farewell gift to me was a small stuffed rabbit as a memento of our time together.)

How then did my ministry at Brent unfold over time? There were public arenas and private opportunities. Most weeks I presided over seven short weekly chapels which gave me access to the entire student body and a mid-week Eucharist attended by about 15 to 20 faculty and staff. In addition there was a monthly school Eucharist for the entire community. That was a large congregation! These were the primary ongoing vehicles for contact. Early on I had realized that it would be through these times that I would have to earn the right to be priest among them. In spite of this rather “formal” contact I would need to project an openness which would hopefully invite trust. Though this is not that different from what any pastor faces on arriving in a new pastorate, the sheer size of the “congregation” and the span of ages and cultures added a new dimension to the problem of building relationship. How could I present an approach that was both authentic and accessible?

It was the vehicle of the story that became more than any other thing the process for catching people’s attention and then being able to present an idea or theme that could illustrate a point. In retrospect it is no surprise that so many spiritual leaders, Jesus among them, told stories. I had found a story called “Partners” from a book of modern midrash called *Does God Have a Big Toe?*⁸ This rather humorous story describes the creation of the world as a process of the angels nagging at God to “clean up this mess”. God goes through the various stages of creating and naming and the angels continue to ask if it is done yet. Finally God creates a man and a woman and tells

them that since he is now tired, they need to finish the earth. They respond that he has the plans and they are too little to do this job. But God tells them they are big enough and that they can also be partners in this enterprise. God then defines a partner as someone with whom you work on something so big that neither of you could possibly do it alone. God goes on to say that even on the days that they think he is not doing enough, and on the days he thinks they are not doing enough, even on those days they are still partners and they must not stop trying to finish the world. This story became the theme of my ministry and my leadership at Brent School. As I revisit the experience I see how much the trust and accountability that are at the heart of this story are also at the essence of my beliefs about leadership.

Probably because I had not been in a situation where questions of women's leadership style were so critical, I had not read widely in the literature describing the way women often see themselves as partners in ministry in a different way than men. Since returning to Canada I have begun more actively to explore feminist issues in ministry and leadership and have been interested to see how frequently this theme of partnership appears.⁹ I have become increasingly aware of the importance of these issues and the unfortunate double standard that exists in response to the way men and women exercise leadership and power. The only critical comments made to me about my style at Brent school had to do with the way I functioned as an executive administrator in areas of conflict. People found my straightforward western problem solving style "aggressive". The Asian culture expects that women will not assert their opinions especially if anyone else has to "lose face" through needing to admit they might have been wrong. Though we are not as concerned with loss of face in white North American culture, in areas of the country where there are increasing numbers of Asian immigrants I expect we will need to develop greater sensitivity to Asian attitudes. This could be particularly difficult for Caucasian women in leadership roles with Asian men and women. (I realize of course that there are many Caucasian men who find directive women equally threatening but for different reasons.)

Be that as it may, partnership was the way I presented to the Brent family our mutual responsibility as God's people.

The majority of our students were privileged people, some remarkably so. They rarely had to do anything for themselves, much less for anyone else. And so partnership with our creator in caring for one another and for the world became a recurring theme in my teaching and preaching. If some of these students were to become responsible leaders in the world, they needed to understand that indeed they had been given much, and with those gifts came responsibilities. But no one was ever argued into the kingdom of heaven and so stories became the way I would sneak up on them, so to speak. I had frequently used stories in my parish preaching, often with a similar intent. But a parish is a community of faith. A school is a captive audience, some of it unwilling at best, and there is a significant difference.

I hoped that by presenting the image of our partnership I might also help to break down the stereotype of "priest on a pedestal" that so many held. And so, though on the surface I accepted the formal address expected in the context, and the somewhat privileged place I had as priest in the community, I worked quietly and consistently at living out a different style of being among them. Over time, as I began to appreciate how deeply ingrained rigid patriarchy and hierarchy were in almost every situation, and how much power was at the heart of structures and policies, I began to see my way of being as literally subverting the system. Using the guerrilla metaphor again, I was staking some new territory. Instead of remaining at a formal distance, behind a clerical collar, I tried as much as possible to be visible, and thus readily accessible. Though the headmaster always claimed to be available, the fact that he was upstairs, in a separate area, in fairly intimidating surroundings, gave a different message. I was the only administrator who did not face people across a desk. There was obvious puzzlement when I had my office rearranged with my desk against the wall and a comfortable sitting area where I frequently served tea.

I tried always to be in my office at recess and at lunch time and after school. Had air conditioning not required closed doors, my door would have often been open as well, regardless of the noise. I had deliberately chosen an office site in a very busy corridor. Nearly everyone in the high school would have to pass my door at least once a day. There was always a weekly schedule on my door with instructions to mark off a block if

anyone wanted to see me, without a name if anonymity was important.

Since the primary school was up the road a bit I went to it to meet with the teachers and administrators on a regular basis and to be seen in the corridors and classrooms. It was a bit like the old management theory of "managing by walking around". But I was reminded daily how easy it was to have phone calls and other meetings get in the way of this ministry of presence and how vigorously I had to guard the time. Balancing priorities in this situation was even trickier than in parish ministry, simply because of the sheer size of the community and the diversity of tasks. It was an excellent reminder of the importance of knowing what it is you are really supposed to be doing so that you can let go of all the other stuff that tries to get in the way. Given the demands of the heat one of the things I had to accept was that you simply can not do as much in the tropics as you can in a temperate climate. I had to let things go—and the world did not end. Even the most conscientious leaders need to say "no" more often.

Although it was not easy to see immediate results, by December the Headmaster acknowledged that the chaplaincy seemed to be "working" for the first time in several years. Some days, after an endless series of pastoral visits from primarily female students who had never had a woman to talk to in that sort of role, I would feel that it was working too well. I was grateful for the training that my own daughter and her friends had unwittingly provided when they were that age. When the external accrediting association visited the school in February, they were particularly pleased with the kind of relationship they saw between the chaplain and the community. By Easter, faculty were also beginning to seek me out, and I knew that they were beginning to trust me. I began to see myself in the words of the book of Samuel, as possibly becoming a "trustworthy prophet". I use the term prophet deliberately since in this context I had realized how different my "voice" was from those of other faculty and administrators in the school. Perhaps "guerrillas of grace" are necessarily prophets. But most assuredly by simply being there and attempting to live out my own theology I was proclaiming a different vision.

Now that is not to say there wasn't opposition. It was clear from the many who never received communion from my hands,

that either because I was not Roman Catholic or because I was a woman, this offering was unacceptable or unwanted. Frankly I never had the courage to ask the headmaster whether more received when "he" was the celebrant, a role he consistently refused all the time I was there. What I learned to celebrate were the times people, men and women, received for the first time, or began to attend the mid week service, or would come to see me often without any particular agenda but simply to be in a safe place where they could talk in safety, and where they too could be "real". Repeatedly I said that whatever was discussed in my office was absolutely confidential, regardless of the fact that I was also an administrator of the school. Eventually they came to trust my word although there were other administrators who expected I would tell them whatever they hoped I might learn from students or faculty. Gossip is a way of life in the Philippines, and I had to be very careful to avoid it even though it made me appear aloof in the eyes of some of my colleagues.

None of this was easy. Often the progress seemed so slow that I would begin to doubt myself. Then I would have to think through each day to name the grace that had been there, which might have escaped me at the time. This became a valuable coping strategy. Being a foreigner (a "resident alien") was often very lonely and I quickly realized that my role and my intentional leadership style kept me away from the faculty lounge where I might have made friendships. The "prime times" there were the very times that I had committed to be "available" in my office.

In retrospect I think that it was the consistency of my approach that was important. If you are modelling a new way of being it takes time for people to have faith that this is not just a passing fancy, someone trying out the latest leadership theory. This was compounded I think by the fact that generally speaking the culture of the country is one of very low trust. (Just consider the apparent necessity of armed guards everywhere.) My consultant's analysis of the situation led me to see that the propensity for gossip among other things created a fluctuating trust level in the school.

In spite of the disadvantages that I have mentioned about being a woman, there were also some distinct advantages. As a woman it was "safe" for me to reach out and touch female

students or faculty, to be accessible in that sense too. It was acceptable for me to take the hands of a male colleague who was in distress as we prayed together. I could pat a shoulder in the hallway as I went by to reassure, or simply say "hello". I believe this made a significant difference to the way people came to see that it was "safe" to come to see me. I had a couple of occasions to reflect on this with colleagues and became more and more convinced that women in ministry now have this particular advantage, provided of course they are sensitive to those situations where it might not be appropriate. Only once did I ever put an arm around a male student and only then because his distress was so acute that it called for that kind of physical reassurance. He literally needed to be held together.

There is one other aspect of partnering that needs to be mentioned because it too was a kind of "presence", of "availability" and it began almost serendipitously. A chance conversation during one of my infrequent faculty lounge visits led to a discussion about English literature. Since I had been a literature major and a teacher for many years I guess it became apparent from my comments that I had some useful experience. And so I was invited into grade eight English classes to talk with the students about "archetypal symbols in the Bible". Not surprisingly we talked about journey motifs harkening back to the Exodus journey and that all quest stories are to some degree in that mode, including a great deal of science fiction. The students were somewhat surprised that I read science fiction, and that began a whole new perception of "Padi" as a "real" person. It also began a pattern of sharing classes with teachers on everything from ethics in upper school, to the questions of evolution and creation in biology. This opened many doors for conversation and sometimes fairly vigorous debate. Most importantly it was another vehicle for simply "being there". It illustrated to me again and again the importance of taking whatever opportunities present themselves to walk and talk with people, to be literally in their midst. The more the students and faculty experienced me as someone with whom they might argue a point, the easier it became to come to me with other sometimes difficult or painful issues.

The final way I tried to model my theology of ministry, leader as partner, was through my personal liturgical style

whether behind the altar, in gatherings of students, or in the endless amount of invocational praying I was asked to do. I was often less formal than many might have expected. That is not to say that I was “flippant” about my task as “mana-person”.¹⁰ Far from it. But I do not believe that liturgy has to be stiff and I do believe in making a “joyful noise”. I searched for and wrote as many intimate and down to earth prayers as possible. I invited primary students to share in preparing homilies for the school Eucharist, and regularly recruited “partners” for chapel leadership. Preaching to the entire school was some of the most challenging preaching I will ever do, simply because of the size of the group and their age span. It had to be accessible or it would literally fall flat. It didn’t always work, but feedback suggested that at least some of the time “it formed” as Buttrick would say.¹¹ I sought out support staff, including the school maintenance people, to share in serving at the altar. Given the rather rigid “class system” seen in the distinction between the professionals and the maintenance or security personnel of the school, this was also unusually egalitarian. And I always offered to pray for and to celebrate new life or memorials for the sick and those family members who had died. Walking around, finding out what was happening in people’s lives that needed prayer and celebrations, became an important ingredient of the liturgical life of the school.

After two years of work at Brent School I decided that it was time for me to return to Canada. The response of the Brent community to my decision was both affirming and surprising. It was clear that many people had thrived in the “new order”. I was thanked repeatedly for “being there”, for being someone who could be trusted, for being a “sounding board”. The Headmaster was both surprised and pleased at the amount that had been accomplished in only two years. (Western assertiveness again I guess!) I was quite moved by learning that people whom I had never suspected had been touched in any way sought me out to tell about conversations or incidents that they would always remember and for which they were grateful. I remember feeling that it would have been a whole lot more helpful to have heard some of that much earlier, especially on the days when I felt as if, like Jeremiah, I might be stuffed down a well. Although it was important for me to return to Canada when I did, I have often wondered what would have

happened if I had been able to stay another year. And I think now that implementing such a significant change in doing and being probably needs at least three years to make a lasting impact.

Though the learning in this situation took place in a very different context than North American parish life, there are a number of implications that I believe have wide application. The first is the need for the leader repeatedly to assess the situation in order to be able to determine how things have been done in the past and how to be authentic both to the immediate task and to one's own personal integrity. This is not ever to suggest that there should be manipulation of people or situations. Rather it is much more like family systems theory. There is already a relationship in existence. What does my presence do to that relationship? Personally I have never been completely comfortable with the literalist attitude that somehow the Holy Spirit will direct all things, like some sort of divine project manager. Why should God be bothered to do for us what we are gifted and capable of doing on our own? (There is a delightful story to illustrate this point. A disciple rushing to meet his Sufi master neglects to tie up his camel before running into the master's tent. He tells the master that he has such profound trust in God that he has not even taken the time to tie up the camel, probably his most important possession. The master's response is to the point. "Go, you fool," he says, "and tie up your camel. Why should God do for you what you are perfectly capable of doing for yourself!")

Being able to reflect on the practice of leadership and ministry necessarily assumes that the leader has some sense of her/his own theology of ministry and leadership to begin with. And that leads to ongoing reflection of what I am doing and why, even if I cannot immediately perceive how it is being received. I knew before I arrived at Brent how I preferred to lead. What I had to determine regularly was how to be true to that particular vision in those particular circumstances and then how to do that with authenticity and integrity. There is an implicit assumption in this too, that the leader has the tools and experience to assess the situation in the first place. Fortunately I have some of that experience from my consulting career. Unfortunately, this kind of training has not been part of most seminary curricula though that appears to be slowly changing.

It was also helpful to me personally that I had learned in my consulting days a great deal about organizational behaviour. One important aspect had to do with trust. I had learned that trust is one of the key ingredients of a well functioning organization. The problem is that once lost, trust is one of the most difficult things to regain. Recognizing that I was in a low trust environment to begin with cautioned me to be extremely careful in building and maintaining trusting relationships. For example, one of the ways we most easily lose trust is by not doing what we say we are going to do. Easily said. But every time I let something interfere with my ability actually to follow through on a task or meeting at the time I had agreed to do it, I knew I was undermining whatever trust I had established. Given the way phone calls and crises can easily get in the way in all forms of ministry, the danger of breaking the trust is heightened. Balancing priorities, and knowing when to say “no”, then take on critical importance. If we also remember that we live in a time in history in which many people have profound distrust for institutions of all sorts, especially the church, leaders need to be increasingly mindful of their integrity.

The second implication is to find some way of getting feedback and support. This was a critical area for me and it wasn't until well into my second year that I could allow myself to be as vulnerable as I needed to be with one colleague in order to ask the right questions. There has been much written about the need for support groups for parish clergy and other leaders which I would underline. The absence of people to be sounding boards or with whom I could share my concerns contributed to uncomfortable periods of personal doubt and loss of confidence. I did learn finally the importance of naming the grace of each day in my journal as a way of compensating for external affirmation or feedback. But I wish I had felt able to risk opening myself sooner. I would have felt less alone and probably experienced more joy as a result. Each of us needs partners.

Revisiting this aspect now that I am back in my own cultural context has raised another question for me. Is there something unhealthily competitive about parish life that makes it too risky for clergy, especially, to admit they need supporting partners? Just consider the “numbers game” we play: How

many people were in your church on Sunday? How many children are in your church school? Are we really any more open to new models of leadership than the formal hierarchy and cultural style I experienced in Manila? And how do our leaders get feedback and support in general? In the business world, with which I am also familiar, the feedback is most often readily available in “bottom lines” or personal and group performance. Now I am not suggesting that there are bottom lines to the gospel. But in the absence of the more obvious tangible indicators, how can we empower leaders to thrive through knowing that they are indeed on track?

All that aside, some of our efforts will undoubtedly be like the mustard seed, blooming in ways and at times we would never expect. It was only as I was leaving that the consequences of some of my efforts became clearer. Many students, faculty and parents had very positive and specific things to say about what to them were quite concrete differences in the life of the community.

This leads to another personal issue for leaders. Availability and accessibility are key to my own theology of ministry. But there is no question that this kind of ministry of presence can be personally draining. As an introvert, one who needs to be alone to replenish my energy level, the constant presence of so many different people in the Brent community was an ongoing challenge. I was forced to take care of myself more deliberately than I had in Canada. Downtime when I would be unavailable was critical. Fortunately I had friends outside the school with whom I could have very different relationships. Along with many other foreigners in the Philippines we became scuba divers, a sport that demands all of one’s attention and as such is a thorough diversion from anything else one might do. This has left me with a renewed conviction about the value of life apart from one’s ministry.

Unfortunately there still seems to be a belief that God’s work can and ought to be totally preoccupying to the detriment of anything else. I know that I was able to be more effective because I was regularly fully absorbed elsewhere. The fact that scuba diving required me to get serious about my physical condition and to exercise regularly, certainly helped. I am convinced that the more challenging and demanding our tasks, the more important it is for us to lay them down on a regular

basis. The increasing frequency of clergy burnout tells us how far we have to go on that score. And as a result I believe, more than ever, that we need seriously to revisit our expectations of church leaders, ordained and lay, to encourage them to take time for themselves in ways that are healthy and personally satisfying.

One of the values of an opportunity to practice ministry in such a different context is the stimulation it provides for ongoing attentiveness. One is less likely to find oneself on "autopilot" in unfamiliar terrain than one might otherwise be. It was this need to be constantly vigilant and conscious that enabled me actually to see many of the opportunities there were for learning and pastoral care, for leading and ministering in a variety of ways. I was told by one faculty member that I had a real gift for walking around, being aware and seeing what needed to happen. I don't know if it is a gift. I think more likely it was a pattern that grew initially out of necessity. I also believe it is a habit that leaders need to cultivate in any context. Unfortunately, the familiar tends to dull our consciousness. We need to remind ourselves of the value of being fully present in every moment. I used to be grateful for my ability to do several things at once, to "multiprocess" as I put it. Most of us do this in the belief we are somehow getting more done. Maybe so. But as leaders we need also to be equally aware of the value of full attention to the moment.

The final implication of this experience has to do with being a "resident alien". For a white middle class North American to live not only in a minority role as a foreigner, but also in a marginalized role as a woman priest, has provided me with much needed learning. This paper is not the place to explore all the dimensions of that learning. However, it has led me to ponder leadership from the underside, from the lens of the foreigner, or the person marginalized by sex, age, position, sexual orientation, etc. Perhaps leadership in context could expand to include explicitly many contexts, for most assuredly the body of Christ is as diverse as the world at large.

In a sense the journey has ended. In another sense, it may have just begun as I return to ministry and leadership in my own context but with a new awareness. An experience like this changes one forever. To some extent that leads to discomfort since one sees that the prophetic role simply continues in a

different way. And so the last words, like the first are Ted Loder's.

Lord

I believe my life is touched by you,
that you want something from me, and of me.

Give me ears to hear you,

Eyes to see the tracing of your finger,

And a heart quickened by the motions of your Spirit.¹²

Notes

- 1 Ted Loder, *Guerrillas of Grace* (San Diego: Lura Media, 1984) 7.
- 2 Arnold Weigel, *Congregational Leadership: An Art in Context* (Vancouver BC: The Centre for Study of Church and Ministry, Vancouver School of Theology, 1993).
- 3 Loder, *Guerrillas of Grace*.
- 4 The liturgical style brought by the American missionaries of the Episcopal Church was characterized by "high church" practices such as the use of incense and bells, veneration of the cross on Good Friday, to cite a few. Though many of these have received a more contemporary catholic flavour in recent year in the USA, their usage in the Philippines is strongly reminiscent of the influence of the earlier Oxford movement on American church practice.
- 5 Urban T. Holmes, *Ministry and Imagination* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976) 222. Holmes describes the "mana-person" as the one with power relating him/her to the divine as is the case in primitive religions. He also refers to Francoeur's use of the term for one who as the priest brings the bread of God in the Eucharist. The two meanings are obviously related and both resonate with the place of manna, the bread from heaven in the exodus story.
- 6 Jean Stairs quoting Sara Orem in "Realities Seen and Unseen: A Perspective on the Canadian Context as it Relates to Women and Men in Theological Education," *Consensus*, 21/1, 1995, 27.
- 7 Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1922).
- 8 Marc Gellman, *Does God Have A Big Toe?* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989).
- 9 Ann Rhodes, *Co-creating: A Feminist Vision of Ministry* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987) 19.
- 10 Holmes, *Ministry and Imagination*, 222.
- 11 David Buttrick, *Homiletics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). Buttrick repeatedly uses the metaphor of an image/idea taking shape for the listener in the same way a picture takes shape or "form" through the lens of a camera, in the sense of being able actually to "see" a concept or illustration.
- 12 Loder, *Guerrillas of Grace*, 29.