

REFLECTIONS ON MY INVOLVEMENT WITH THE MINISTER SEARCH TEAM

I was asked to share learnings from my involvement with the Minister Search Team. At the outset let me convey that this reflection will not be providing explanations for the decisions made. If there are still any questions on this, I or any member of the team, will be happy to discuss these you.

When I look back on our time together as a team, there are three learnings that I valued and none of which I would have anticipated.

The first learning was that our time together was about building relationships rather than following a process. My initial approach to our search was that we should define a process, and then prayerfully and wisely follow the steps in that process and ultimately arrive at a decision. Whilst at one level this did happen, at a deeper and more fundamental level I found the essence of what we were doing was building relationships at three levels.

The first level was our relationship with God. As we came to a shared understanding that this was God's undertaking, and not ours, we came to trust Him more and see more of His graceful and loving counsel and direction. I will return to the centrality of our prayer times in enabling this dependence.

The second level was building relationships with people on the team. I did not know any of the team members well but I felt we really got to know each other as we met almost weekly over the three or so months. A process like this quickly surfaces what you think is important in the Christian life. In so doing I came to better understand different perspectives, and to appreciate the real sincerity of each person's desire to extend God's love and purposes.

The third level of relationship was with the candidates themselves, especially the two on the shortlist. Through their CVs, listening to their sermons, interviews with their referees and extensive interviews with them and their spouses we were allowed deep into their respective lives and I am sure none of us will ever forget these two people. I was humbled by their quite different but very worthy gifts and qualities and their desire to serve God. We as a team felt bereft at not being able to sustain our relationship with the unsuccessful candidate.

The second learning was how vital it was to have prayer at the centre of what we did (I am aware that I should not be readily confessing that this was a learning to me!). At the outset when Duncan and Colleen said they thought we should have a 'business' meeting every second week and a prayer meeting every other week, I remember inwardly groaning at how many meetings this would entail and did we really need to pray that much! I could not have been more wrong. We each took time in facilitating the prayer meetings and there is no doubt in my mind that these prayer meetings were far more important than the 'business' meetings and were fundamental to the cohesion and direction we experienced. We were also very conscious of the prayer support of many people outside the team in this process.

The third learning related to the way the group was constructed. Whilst acknowledging that God is in control, rightly or wrongly I am sometimes a little wary of always attributing life's circumstances to God's direct hand. In this instance, however, I believe that God did bring together this group of people and moulded their unique contributions to create a whole that was much greater than the sum of its parts.

Finally, I want to acknowledge Duncan's wise and humble leadership of the team, and the gracious and capable way the wardens, Colleen, Barry and Dave, handled their additional responsibilities in this exercise. I want to thank each member of the team for their unique contributions to enhancing my walk with God during this time. Lastly, as a congregational representative in this undertaking, I am grateful to you for the opportunity to work with this team.