



# Malvern Mashal Makon 72

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### Keys to Making the Transition to Participatory Ministry (ii)

As I pondered how we can promote Participatory Ministry (PM) in ways that will make sense for the whole spectrum of Christian experience, from liturgical to independent churches, an acronym came to mind: TENS.

In the course of her work as an independent midwife, Ros occasionally encouraged women to use these TENS machines in labour, because of the pain relief they offer.<sup>1</sup> Tens machines stimulate nerves safely, in such a way as to block both acute and chronic pain. I would suggest that the Church today needs its muscles stimulating, and certain acute pains blocking: not least of the B for Boredom variety!

As we unpack the letters of this acronym and explore the steps we need to take, internally as well as externally, to embrace a greater degree of all member ministry,

T stands for Transition, moving from where we are to more Spirit-led patterns,

E will speak of encouragement: a crucial ingredient that enables people to fulfil their potential.

N will represent Nurture: the love and mentoring that meet our deepest needs

S, similarly, will speak of the Support that is required to implement PM successfully.

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<sup>1</sup> Electrical stimulation has been around for a long time for pain control. TENS machines are often confused with EMS machines which stimulate muscles. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcutaneous\\_electrical\\_nerve\\_stimulation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcutaneous_electrical_nerve_stimulation)



## **Making the Transition**

You may have noticed in popular dance programmes on television that marks are often won or lost according to how well the dancers

handle the transitions between one series of moves and the next. It requires poise and confidence to do so smoothly. When you reflect on the transition phase of labour, of course, it reminds us that the process itself may look quite ungainly at times.

Positioning is all important. If we are serious about wanting to make the transition to PM church, and allowing more of God's fullness to emerge in the church, we cannot afford to compromise by doing 'just enough to satisfy the more lively members.' We need to be honest enough to explore many of the underlying issues we are raising in this issue. For that reason, we are devoting the whole of it to T for Transition – not least because it requires effort as well as understanding, as well as a considerable degree of 'legwork' to explain things to those who find the prospect uncomfortable.

Most of us will have seen men and women of God, as well as churches, which led the way in previous moves of God, but which have struggled to catch the present wave. Sadly, some end up opposing the transition altogether.

This section is primarily aimed at helping those who are working within 'traditional' church patterns to explore more participatory models of ministry (PM). We will be exploring in particular the character qualities and emotional intelligence we need to 'compère' meetings in the Spirit. This is more challenging than just doing it all from up front from a prepared script. It calls for fleet spiritual footwork, both because it involves more people, and because it requires us to pick up on themes and nudges that the Lord may have been seeding throughout the meeting.

Much of this is intuitive, but intuition works best when undergirded by thoughtful preparation and a prayerful awareness of what it is we are

seeking to accomplish. We are therefore presenting a ‘bunch’ of keys that will hopefully stimulate our muscles, whilst blocking pain!

We will also be suggesting a number of questions to consider. Few of these have right or wrong answers. They are there to lead us in thinking about who we are, as well as to help us to present things more attractively, whatever form of leadership position we find ourselves in. You may find it helpful to talk these issues over with friends, mentors, and peer group leaders – or to write your thoughts down on paper and pray them through.



### **Led by the Spirit**

*When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the*

*strengthening of the church.*

(1 Cor. 14:26)

David Watson made a tragic comment that a large percentage of church activity could take place without the Holy Spirit’s direct leading. It is vital that the Church becomes used to being led by the Spirit, and this is dependent, in no small measure, on leaders being attuned to Him.<sup>1</sup> If we are not being led by the Spirit, we are likely to find ourselves doing what we, or others have always done, and never moving beyond this. Not only will we miss the joy of developing as a team player, but we are also perhaps more likely to remain in bondage to other people’s expectations.

The more we think these issues through, and are willing first to experiment and then to monitor how the experimenting is going, the more confident we will be in our leadership style.



### **Participatory Ministry is all about making ourselves available**

*Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.*

(Deut. 16:17)

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<sup>1</sup> You might find it helpful to listen to the orchestrated prayer for leaders on our album *Spirit of Prayer* For this reason we are making our track <http://www.ruachministries.org/Spiritofprayer2010sampletracks.htm>

Many years ago the Lord called me to plant His new ideas into the heart of the Church. When I was leading a student based ministry in Oxford from 1978-1981, it was easy to develop a participatory style of leadership. The sense of the Holy Spirit moving among us was so strong, and the eagerness of people to respond so great, that it was often appropriate for me to shorten talks, or even to set them aside altogether. I used to have quite a trayful of unused talks! We were free to follow His leading in meetings precisely because we did not have to conform to an outside agenda or curriculum.

As a student group, our greatest strength lay in our simple availability. We were free to undertake particular missions and to embark on various strategic initiatives as the Lord led. Indeed, a major aspect of my ministry still revolves around my ability to be available for the people He directs me to. As most of you know, we have recently begun a series of meetings in our converted shed, now a lovely sanctuary for the Lord. Our main emphasis remains to be available to the Lord, and to allow whatever threads He desires to come to the fore. It is a great blessing.

Whether your underlying theology veers more towards being separate from the world, or a longing to be deeply involved in society in order to see areas transformed for Christ, God loves to 'inscribe' His plans on our hearts. Some of these will be best outworked within the framework of our regular churching together, but others require like minded people to come together.

There is room for this because some visions are too specific for the average church to implement – especially when they involve such specific things as flying aeroplanes in remote regions, (MAF) working in 'closed' countries, (Open Doors) ministering to the visually impaired and other disadvantaged people.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is no cause here to be naïve. Para church frameworks are just as liable to the same dangers as mainstream churches for becoming stilted or top-heavy. Writing from the perspective of a mature Christian pastor and a top businessman, Tom Marshall has outstanding things to say about how institutions of whatever kind can become dominated by unhelpful matters. See the chapter Meet the Corporation in his excellent book '*Understanding Leadership*' Sovereign World. You may need to track this book down on Amazon.

The vital question is: can PM be meaningfully transposed into mainline churches, where programs are sometimes drawn up months in advance, and too many 'paid' pastors feel they need to justify their existence by ministering in areas where other members of their congregation may actually be more skilled than themselves.



### **Becoming a compère for the Lord**

*Solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.* (Hebrews 5:14)

The King James Version speaks of having our senses 'exercised'. This is a translation of the word *aistheteria*, which refers to the organs of sense, such as our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, fingers and the nervous system. Clearly, there are corresponding senses in our soul that corresponds to these, and which we need to build up. The word 'exercised' (*gymnazo*) means to train, and this imagery from the world of athletics reminds us that considerable effort is required in order to reach spiritual maturity.<sup>1</sup>

We certainly need to train ourselves to discern His voice, and to facilitate the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst. The more our hearts are sensitive to what He is doing, as well as to where the hearts of the people are, the more readily this will happen.

The Lord spoke to me clearly when I was 21. First He reassured me that I was the son of the King of Kings. Then he said that I would watch many of the people I mentored go much further and faster than I myself would go. Is that not always a teacher's desire? I have therefore taken that call seriously and look for opportunities to help people develop their gifting.

When we were in Karachi, we were constantly astonished to see cars hurtling into gaps which, to our way of thinking, were no gaps at all! In the same way, we are called to spot opportunities for the Lord. Although I am frequently called to exercise a specific teaching and preaching role in some

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<sup>1</sup> For more on discernment see *The Paths of Guidance* and *The Whispers of His Love in Intimacy and Eternity* that Sally Mowbray has beautifully illustrated our website. <http://www.ruachministries.org/intimacyandeternity/thepathsofguidance.htm> and

contexts, and a prophetic role in others, my primary role is often to be a 'compère' in meetings of all shapes, sizes and descriptions.

This means weaving in themes the Lord is highlighting in the course of a meeting, as well as releasing people, either into new ministries, or to fulfil existing ones. One of the great benefits of this is that it prevents words from the Lord falling to the ground.

However, we are unlikely to make room for participatory ministry so long as we are holding on too tightly to our own plans and ideas. If we are driven by a subconscious outlook that all that really matters in a meeting is the material that we have prepared, we may well look on everything else that happens in a service as being merely a 'warm up' for our contribution.

There is a delicate balance here. When I am invited somewhere as a guest speaker, the Lord often plants a message on my heart which I am desperately eager to share – and I am likely to feel grieved if precious moments appear to be being frittered away. After all, the compère has a duty not only to draw together what the Spirit is saying to individuals but also to make space for what He has YET to say. At the same time it is important to be aware that other people may have vital things to bring; less prepared and crafted than the preacher's, perhaps, but entirely relevant!



### **Teammanship**

The Lord has developed sufficient maturity in the Body of Christ to make a major shift towards participatory church not just possible but highly desirable. PM churches work best when they are led by a team who genuinely trust each other's gifts and abilities. We see this from the beginning of the church in the Acts of the Apostles (e.g. Acts 13:1)<sup>1</sup> At a foundational level, teams do not require everyone to think along precisely the same lines. As surely as some of us

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<sup>1</sup> This word was given to the disciples at Antioch, where the Lord had brought together a multi-national team of prophets, pastors and evangelists. The church in Antioch became a major resource for the whole of the region. When the different parts of the Body are functioning in harmony, it is much easier for the Lord to build his Church.

think visually, whilst others are more comfortable with words, it is healthy when a team is 'big' enough to include people with complementary styles, skills and ministries. Teams need visionaries (prophets, who represent the eyes of the Body)<sup>1</sup> as well as implementers, (fulfilling pastoral roles) and 'finishers' (teachers and administrators) – not to mention those with particular gifts of outreach (evangelists) and overseers with wider remits (who fulfil an apostolic role).

Our generation concentrates to a dangerous extent on short term planning. Whilst the best of us only have limited perceptiveness, God wants those of us with vision to see the long term consequences of things, and then those with perseverance to implement it. Eyes, of course, are the most sensitive part of the body; they need to be particularly valued and protected. And just as some people are long sighted (and others short sighted) so some prophets work primarily at a purely local level, whilst others range further afield. Roz, for example, has long been something of a prophet to the Midwifery profession on a wider level, whilst serving in a local capacity. Again it is worth asking some fundamental questions:

- What are you setting out to achieve?
- Who do you most admire? (ie who are your role models and inspirers?)



### **Let there be love shared among us**

When we were looking for to adopt a dog a few years ago, we were advised to choose one that willingly made eye contact with us. Just so, a healthy team will also make frequent eye contact with each other. There is nothing better than knowing that we are all rooting for each other: loving one another, seeking to build each other up, rejoicing when others do well and covering for them when they are struggling.

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<sup>1</sup> Now Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place about which the Lord said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will treat you well, for the Lord has promised good things to Israel." He answered, "No, I will not go; I am going back to my own land and my own people." But Moses said, "Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the desert, **and you can be our eyes.** If you come with us, we will share with you whatever good things the LORD gives us." (Num 10:30-32)

With the best of the teams that I have either led or been part of over the years, I can usually tell instantly by looking at the others whether we should be pursuing a particular theme further, taking the meeting back into worship, wider prayer, silence, body ministry or whatever. Where the sense of teams-man-ship is less developed, people have often been diffident or embarrassed because they were unsure of where they stood.

Godfrey Birtill wrote a wonderful song saying that when we look at the Cross, we do *not* see competition. There need be no strain striving or competition between roles. We are to be working with each other, for the Lord and against the enemy.

What we are as a team influences the whole church. The first thing to remember is that people tend to catch something of the feel and flavour of a fellowship or organisation long before they hear any sermon preached.

A song we used to sing regularly began, 'Let there be love shared among us, let there be love in our eyes.' I have often encouraged congregations to sing this song and apply the words literally – simply because so many congregations rarely if ever look at each other. (I am not just speaking here of those that meet in pews and rows of chairs!)

Where there is genuine PM, and love is flowing, people feel secure in attempting things, knowing that if they do get something wrong, they are in an affirming atmosphere and won't be disapproved of: either by the leaders or by everyone else. At the same time, they are secure because the leaders are on hand to address issues that arise, and to deal with contributions that are off beam.

By contrast, non participatory minded leaders, and teams where trust is lacking, tend to confine and strait jacket people by their written or unwritten expectations – effectively ruling out much that could usefully have been taught or and modelled. People feel hesitant in attempting anything unscripted.



Let's continue this overview of how to make the transition to PM by considering our own practice.



### **Defining our style of leadership**

Would we consider ourselves all-embracing or 'dictatorial' leaders?(!) Harsh pastors, like old fashioned monarchs, who believe in the inalienable right of kings, expect people to comply with their wishes. PM minded ones are eager to learn and share together. At the same time, they are open to any specific leadings the Lord may have. They aim to keep the prophetic and the pastoral in balance. In practice, the pastoral often crushes the prophetic – whilst the prophetic often fails to take sufficient account of the effect that their dreams and visions have on people's ability to respond. The former Bishop of Chester wisely said that all ministries need to be grounded in the pastoral. This is so true!



### **A few questions to consider:**

- What team(s) are you part of? What are your primary functions in it? Do these roles fit in with where you believe your primary giftings lie?
- What would you say your team is modelling to the wider Body of Christ? Would others agree with that assumption?
- Does your calling incline you more to the prophetic or the pastoral?
- Have you fully understood and embraced the pastoral aspect of the prophetic? If so, how does this express itself? If not, what can you do to develop a more pastoral heart?
- Do you make every effort to bring people to the point of prayer? Contact *with* the Lord is so important. That is so often when 'ordinary' times of fellowship become genuine encounters with the Lord.

- Do you remember to pray together to seal in blessings when you have finished ministering, and to ‘cut off’ to prevent spiritual ‘kickback?’ when you forget?
- How do you cope when things do not go as well as you hope? If you find that you are not getting through on one tack, are you able to adjust and attempt another?

Many in leadership ‘suffer’ from an underlying perfectionism. We want to get it right every time. We are afraid that if we get it wrong we will be reproved or demoted. It is easy to feel down and condemned when we get something wrong, or know that we could have presented something better. What do you do with these feelings?

May the Lord give us the grace to regard the embarrassing times as part of His training curve, rather than falling prey to feelings of shame.<sup>1</sup> On the last night of our first wider conference in 1982, our theme was to focus on a specific country. Someone came up to me, claiming that he had some words of knowledge for people to be healed. I hummed and hah’d for a moment and finally decided not to release them as I felt it would distract us from what we were focussing on. The man was very angry with me afterwards and said that I had quenched the Spirit. I went away after the conference in considerable agony to talk things over with the Lord. He spoke clearly to me, pointing out that He had appointed me as leader of the conference – and that He *endorsed* my decision. Note: He did *not* say whether I had been right or wrong; He merely affirmed as opposed to condemning me. With more experience, I could probably have found ways to have incorporated those words of knowledge without losing

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<sup>1</sup> This is such an important point that I wrote a publication on a subject you rarely hear teaching about, but which makes an enormous difference to the way we are.

[http://www.ruachministries.org/Talks/A\\_Pilgrim%27s\\_Guide\\_to\\_Overcoming\\_Shame.htm](http://www.ruachministries.org/Talks/A_Pilgrim%27s_Guide_to_Overcoming_Shame.htm)

the thrust of what we were doing – but that was one step beyond where I was then at!

- It is helpful occasionally to share our uncertainties and mistakes with others, to draw them into our pilgrimage – so long as this does not become maudlin, and draw unnecessary attention to ourselves. We could, perhaps, compare leaders who are prepared to do this with parents who are willing to say sorry to their children.
  - Perfectionism is an entirely faulty model. Imagine someone sprinting towards a finishing line in a race – and someone else moving the finishing tape ten metres away every time they get close to breasting it. This is how it is: whatever we say or do will never quite be good enough, if we are measuring things by perfectionist standards.<sup>1</sup>
  - Have you thought how to move from spoon feeding people to helping them learn to feed themselves? Just as this is a process that all mammals go through, so it should be for us as leaders. Whilst continuing to provide core material and necessary steering touches, it is time to *leave elementary things behind and to move on to mature things*. (Heb. 6:1)
  - Are you willing to ask others, “How do you think we should approach this subject?” – not necessarily because of a lack of understanding on your part, but because you genuinely want to break down the stereotypical ‘six foot above contradiction’ style of teaching and cultivate a more PM approach that welcomes other people’s insights.

### **A simple example of PM: Leading Prayers on Remembrance Sunday**

One of my great heartaches is how little prayer there usually is in a Sunday meeting. Where it does exist, it usually focuses only on specific people who are ill or on particular active ministry. I am always on the lookout to find ways to release more prayer into our services. This is not something that is

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<sup>1</sup> I often illustrate this by saying ‘I have been in training for the race and can now run a mile in four . . . kilograms! It is the wrong set of measuring tools!

best done from one angle only, any more than a documentary can be satisfactorily filmed by one camera only.

This year, for example, I was concerned that our church should join with many others in setting time aside in the month of November to pray for believers who are suffering for their faith. The simplest way to achieve this was to combine it with Remembrance Sunday. We so easily forget and ignore these situations, along the lines of 'out of mind and out of sight.' Now I could have stood at the front of the church and just rattled off lots of themes in prayer – but intercession is more effective when it comes from different angles and draws more people in.

I therefore opened with a prayer asking forgiveness for our short sightedness in so often equating the Body of Christ to our own congregation, rather than thinking of ourselves as being the Body of Christ in our locality and beyond. I then invited people to share burdens and situations they knew about. Many contributed. Some led prayers themselves (personal concern often adds urgency and authenticity to prayer).

In other instances, I was able to provide brief further insights, before leading that section of the intercession myself. This was such a simple thing to do, but it drew far more people into action than usual on a Sunday morning – and, as we saw last week, participation makes for a much deeper sense of ownership – of being fully involved and valued.<sup>1</sup>

### **Parkside: An example of flexible churching**

Whilst many churches are working towards a more PM style of meeting, for others it is the norm. Harmony Greenwood, who has been working on this document with me, writes of her of fifteen year experience as the co-leader of the Parkside Community Church in Malvern:

One of us would lead (be responsible) for a meeting: opening it, drawing themes together, and bringing things gently back into line when they threatened to go off course, as well as sensing when the time had come to hand over to whoever was leading the corporate

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<sup>1</sup> People often need help to make addressing 'big' issues a regular part of their spiritual experience. It is often helpful to start by praying for one specific person, place or specific situation as being representative of a wider category. As you start 'knee deep' in prayer, it is easy to move on from there to pray for others. You soon find that you are swimming in deep water!

worship or who was speaking. (We deliberately used the term corporate worship to differentiate it from 'worship' which is to be a 24/7 way of life.)

We usually knew what the subject matter of the talk would be beforehand. The whole body would come expectantly together, often ready to give a psalm, a prophecy, a testimony – but without in any way being possessive of these things. Finally, the compère, perhaps checking with others, would draw the meeting to a close when it felt right to do so.

Pray for churches to be open and willing to move away from traditional models to allow more room of the Lord and His people to breathe in our midst!



**Appendix: A few more fundamental questions to think through<sup>1</sup>**

- How do Christians involved in ministry elsewhere relate to their own churches?
- How far should they be expected to participate?
- For those who are not involved in wider ministry, does the local church sharpen their missionary zeal – or blunt it by being too taken up with its own concerns?
- The church has the difficult task of reaching out to people who are all at different stages on their spiritual journey. More than once I have heard pastors declare that their aim is to go at the pace of the slowest. On the basis that those who aim at nothing tend to hit it every time this is effectively sentencing ourselves to going nowhere! An underlying question to examine here, therefore, is whether there is a real vision for everyone to grow, or whether the aim is just to keep things going on an even keel – in other words, to provide a 'service pack product' that consumer users want. This is very different from cutting edge church!

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<sup>1</sup> This section was contributed by Linda Louisa

- Vision from leadership is key. Growth depends on how far the leadership is able to *trust* those in their congregation, and to call on the services of those outside who may be further on in some aspects of the Christian journey than they are themselves. We shall have more to say about the role of ‘experts’ in a subsequent edition.
- If leaders cannot take risks in this way, is it not akin to someone who possesses a treasure chest but who refuses to turn the key and let the treasure out?<sup>1</sup>
- People love it when church leaders are genuinely interested and concerned for their welfare. We feel confident to share with people who, far from ‘naming and shaming’ value and support each person’s ministry and contribution, irrespective of whether their calling works itself out primarily in church, family or professional fields.

Ros and I have always appreciated visiting people at their places of work. This not only helps us to understand their calling better, the Lord often finds ways to use such visits to extend participative ministry beyond the boundaries of church walls.

The reverse is unfortunately only too common. Take the example of a folk band, who achieved a considerable following in the secular music field. Instead of accepting that their schedule would not permit them to attend regular meetings, the pastor merely declared things like, ‘Well we won’t be seeing them at the prayer meeting tonight!’ Where is the strategic thinking, let alone the compassion in such attitudes? Is it not up to others in the Body of Christ to pile in behind such bands, and to recognise that the Lord has placed them on a cutting edge for Himself, reaching places where the rest of us cannot even remotely go? You can be sure that the band members will not have received the quality of nurture and support that they themselves so badly needed. Loving support and prayer input could have made all the difference for maintaining their sharp edge, and for them becoming still

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<sup>1</sup> Until recently, it was the accepted policy of one Pentecostal denomination to encourage pastors *not* to bring in anyone more anointed than themselves to minister to the fellowship in case it made the sheep restless. What a way to keep the lid on and the ceiling low!

more effective.

- Are we quick to recognise the hand of God in something – or do we find ourselves disapproving of something that God has raised up, simply because it is so far outside our immediate style and experience? The quicker we are, the easier we will find it to develop styles of participatory ministry that people find it easy to engage with.

In the natural world around us we expect to see a great variety of God's creation. These recent photos are 'pictures' of the variety we should rightly expect in God's church!



