

## Father, Make Us One

Here we are at Trinity Sunday already. This distinctly odd day in the Church's calendar is significant not just because of the theological and numerical conundrums it raises but because it's on this day that many clergy were ordained. Why so, I hear you ask? Well, for one thing, Trinity Sunday comes at the end of the season of prayer and fasting for ministry called 'Ember-tide' and that's as good a foundation on which to ordain as any.

In a concession to Church Historians, I need to add that the decision about ordinations at Trinity took place way back in 494AD, when the Pope of the day (*Gelasius I*) issued his decree (oddly enough called a 'Bull', but I will refrain from making an obvious crack about it) that ordinations ought to be preceded by prayer and fasting and started laying his hands on people on that day for that purpose. So the tradition was born.

It was roundabout that time that the professional class of males called 'priests' was developing into a group all of its own. They had appropriated their own privileges: of presiding at the Eucharist; of preaching the word; of visitation, and so on; and they have resolutely hung on to these privileges for centuries. Like forever.

Even today, with all our benefits of hindsight and historical inheritances and despite the plethora of writing and discussion on the subject, particularly in the last 40 years, clergy of all persuasions, from reformed to catholic, still hold to their 'pulpit-' or 'altar-' rights as sacrosanct and guard them jealously.

Yes, we clergy still enjoy the up-front, public, aspect of the role. I've been known to contemplate the connection between the theatre and the liturgy and have wondered about 'treading the boards' as a career option. You don't have to look far to know why I never took up the option. For all that, a part of me still enjoys the adulation that comes with a well-done liturgy.

There's a lot about power in all of this. Rowland Croucher reckons that this kind of power is the devil's 'primal trick'. What happens when we appropriate it for ourselves, he says, is that we deny that power to those who are actually destined to receive it; that is, to all the members of the Body of Christ.

Ministry is for everyone, so denying others their rightful empowerment is unjust. It's for this reason that I am committed to spending more time with people, helping to put that power into their hands by training them for leadership and ministry. What I try to avoid is getting involved with the silly turf wars of parish life that distract and suck us dry. You know the kind of things - arguing with fussy organists who won't play anything written after 1850; placating the guild president who is threatening to resign because of the mess the youth group left after their barbeque; calming down the churchwarden who wants to throttle the MDO. Anyone would think that clergy are nothing more than fire extinguishers.

I admit it needs a miracle for empowerment to occur but miracles do happen. The first thing we clergy have to do is to let go our rights - and that's really hard. It can only happen by the free gift of God. It's acknowledged when non-clergy people see us, not as functionaries but as people-developers, nurturing and building up others by our example and exhortation, in that order.

Somewhere we have lost that generation of clergy who aren't threatened by others with superior people-skills but who can shape their own life and work in a master-apprentice model. Even so, the days of the 'father-knows-and-does-best' still linger and although we have lots of the new-model clergy around, the ever-present danger of regression is close by.

So, when it comes to Trinity Sunday, it's easy to see why I get excited about ministry. And, in not too curious a way, this question of ministry is undergirded by one about unity. We can rightly pray for unity across the denominations but maybe if we focus that prayer in the area of unity-in-ministry something good will happen, too, and we will be singing from the same hymn book, as Bishop Bill so often describes our task.

Unity-in-diversity is what Trinity-tide is all about and no more cogently is that diversity seen on the ground than in the lives of the ministers.

*Some of you are aware that, along with at least one other Townsville vicar, I've got to watch what I eat, so it blessed me to read this advice from "Answers To Questions I've Never Been Game To Ask My GP"*

*Q: Aren't fried foods bad for you?*

*A: YOU'RE NOT LISTENING!!! .... Foods are fried these days in vegetable oil. In fact, they're permeated in it. How could getting more vegetables be bad for you?*

*Q: Will sit-ups help prevent me from getting a little soft around the middle?*

*A: Definitely not! When you exercise a muscle, it gets bigger. You should only be doing sit-ups if you want a bigger stomach.*

*Q: Is chocolate bad for me?*

*A: Are you crazy? HELLO Cocoa beans! Another vegetable!!! It's the best feel-good food around!*

*Q: Is swimming good for your figure?*

*A: If swimming is good for your figure, explain whales to me.*

*Q: Is getting in-shape important for my lifestyle?*

*A: Hey! 'Round' is a shape!*

Have a great weekend. Have fun because if it's not fun, you're not doing it right. Love lots.  
Laugh heaps.

In His Grip

*Ian*

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*He is no fool who gives away something he cannot keep to gain something he cannot lose - Jim Elliott*