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Riding Waves of Liturgical Change

Vaughan S Roberts

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Introduction

Water has long been recognised as a metaphor for organizational change and can be used in a number of different ways. The social psychologist Kurt Lewin has described such change coming about in terms of the thawing and freezing of water (see Hatch 1997); the management consultant and academic Gareth Morgan has written about the fluidity of organizational flux and transformation (Morgan 1997); whilst Stephen Cummins, a professor of strategy, has illustrated his understanding of the strategic challenges of change with an image drawn from ancient Greece – that of the *kubernetes*, the person steering the ship through dangerous inshore currents (Cummings 2002). My own interest in the different ways in which this metaphor can be employed has been explored in two papers (Roberts 1997, 2002) and the latter concluded by suggesting the contrast between the apparent permanency of land and fluidity of the ocean might be a useful image for the life of the Church: ‘The place where the stability of land and the fluidity of the sea meet is the beach or coastline. It could be that in using water as an organizational metaphor the Church is implicitly called to live on the edge of both change and constancy, embracing a dialectic of conflict and consensus’ (Roberts 2002: 39). This section aims to go on from such *theoretical* background to water as a metaphor for organizational change and explore how it might work out in the *practical* sphere of local church ministry. In particular how the image of ‘surfing’ might help understand change processes and explain them to others.

The specific context for this study is that of liturgical change which weaves in another personal, longstanding interest. It was the focus of a paper written in my first post as an Anglican minister offering reflections on liturgical practice in a suburban environment (Roberts 1989). That concluded with a call for churches to offer a broad range of worship and, with hindsight, reflects all the idealism of youth: ‘There will be those who need a quiet reflective service, those who need a formal "performance" style of worship, others who want to worship God in a much more informal setting. Those who form the "fringe" of the body of Christ are as vital to its life as those who are at the eucharistic centre. The *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Alternative Service Book* can actually meet the needs for

¹ This chapter began as a presentation to the Midlands Continuing Ministerial Education (CME) leadership course.

diversity and unity' (Roberts 1989: 14).² That vision of liturgical diversity within ecclesial unity ('conflict and consensus') continues to be a key theme in my own understanding of local ministry and will be an important element in these reflections upon my experience of bringing about liturgical change in two very different contexts. The first of these is a three-parish group in a rural setting called the Benefice of Hillside and the second is a more urban parish of St Edward's, Old Town.

Since what follows is grounded in personal experience it might be helpful to state what this implies. First, I'm not arguing that the most important example of organizational change is liturgical. It is my hope that, if there are lessons to be learned here, they could be applicable to other areas of church life and not only worship. Second, this is not a blueprint for parish ministry. It is not *The 10 Commandments for Strategic Renewal of Your Church*. What this chapter describes is the way one person went about things with the resources available. This will vary according to circumstances and the aim is to present some reflections on practice which will be helpful to others. Third, this is an example of a Church of England vicar at work in a particular tradition and as such it comes with the organizational vocabulary and structure of that denomination. Nevertheless, it is my hope that ministers in other traditions may be able to use some of these ideas in their situations. This chapter seeks to keep management jargon to a minimum and comes in the form of two case studies and a conclusion. Each study begins with (A) an outline of the context for ministry; followed by (B) a review of the liturgical changes that took place; then (C) it will explore some of the processes and thinking which contributed to these waves of change; and, finally, (D) show some statistical outcomes. To give a sense of immediacy the contexts of both studies are written in the present tense.

Case Study 1: The Benefice of Hillside

(A) Context

This is a rural benefice of three parishes – St Andrew, St Botolph and St Catherine:

(i) St Andrew is in a village with a population of around 500 that has a main road running through it linking a major sea-port and regional centre to a small cathedral city. It has a Church of England voluntary aided primary school, a pub, a general store, a residential care home, a village hall and a parish church. Until two generations ago all property was owned by the local Dudwell estate and there are people in the village who can recall the vicar living in the large vicarage (now the care home) with a cook, maid and chauffeur.

² In some ways, this could be seen as a liturgical precursor to Chris Anderson's more recent argument that endless *commercial* choice is creating unlimited *cultural* choice (Anderson 2006).

The previous Earl Dudwell had attended church regularly and held some of the key lay offices, but the present Earl is much less directly involved.

(ii) St Botolph is in a village with a population of around 250 people. A busy minor road passes by the village, taking local traffic and commuters to the major port, which is also a significant financial centre. The village has a pub, a village hall and a parish church. A generation ago it consisted mostly of working farms but these have gradually closed or amalgamated and it has largely become a settlement for commuters. The church has a lively Sunday School.

(iii) St Catherine is in another village of around 500 people, also with a main route running through it, linking the port with another sizeable town. Its school and shop have closed down. It has a bus-stop but no bus service. There is a residential care home, luxury hotel and a sports club all of which depend on people from outside for their survival. The parish church is one of the last local community organizations but it is somewhat out of the main village. The local population is a mixture of a few significant farming families and in-comers.

(B) Liturgical Changes

In the mid 1990s the benefice had a monthly pattern of services consisting of:³

First Sunday

8.00am Said Holy Communion (BCP) at St C
9.30am Choral Communion (ASB Rite B) at St A
6.30pm Sung Evensong (BCP) at St B

Second Sunday

9.30am Holy Communion with hymns and Sunday School (ASB Rite B) at St B
6.30pm Choral Evensong (BCP) at St A

Third Sunday

8.00am Said Holy Communion (BCP) at St B
9.30am Choral Communion (ASB Rite B) at St A
6.30pm Sung Evensong (BCP) at St C

³ BCP = 1662 Book of Common Prayer; ASB = 1980 Alternative Service Book

Fourth Sunday

- 8.00am Holy Communion (BCP) at St A
- 9.30am Holy Communion with hymns and Sunday School (ASB Rite B) at St B
- 11.00am Service of the Word in the residential care home at St C

Fifth Sunday

- 9.30am Benefice Communion Service at St A, St B and St C on a rotational basis (ASB Rite B)

All the services, including the 'Service of the Word' at the residential care home, used traditional language and met the needs of those who attended worship. However, five years later the pattern had moved to this – with changes highlighted in [green](#)⁴:

First Sunday

- 8.00am Said Holy Communion (BCP) at St C
- 9.30am [Choral Family Service \(CW Service of the Word\)](#) at St A

Second Sunday

- 9.30am Holy Communion with hymns and Sunday School [\(CW \[1\]: Modern\)](#) at St B
- 6.30pm Choral Evensong (BCP) at St A

Third Sunday

- 8.00am Said Holy Communion (BCP) at St B
- 9.30am Choral Eucharist [\(CW \[1\]: Modern\)](#) at St A

[11.00am](#) [Family Communion \(CW \[1\]: Modern\) at St C](#)

Fourth Sunday

- 8.00am Holy Communion (BCP) at St A
- 9.30am Holy Communion with hymns & Sunday School [\(CW \[1\]: Modern\)](#) at St B
- 11.00am Service of the Word in the residential care home at St C

⁴ CW = 2000 Common Worship; CW [1]: Modern = 2000 Common Worship Order 1: Modern Language

Fifth Sunday

9.30am Benefice Communion Service at St A, St B and St C on a rotational basis
(CW [1]: Modern)

(C) Waves of Change

This liturgical change came about in two waves: *Wave 1: The Introduction of the Junior Choir*; and *Wave 2: The Introduction of Common Worship*.

Wave 1: The Junior Choir

The first of two elements in this wave was the arrival into the Benefice of someone willing to set up a choir for children which would help lead worship in the churches. Frances was a music graduate and a teacher who had been involved with church choirs for much of her life. She did not feel able to run the existing adult choir at St Andrew's but was willing to start a junior choir which would sing in all three churches. She also had two children who would be involved. The second element was the local Church of England Primary School of which the vicar is a governor. This had reasonably close links with the Benefice, especially St Andrew's to which the school went for a termly service. Not only were the school willing to send a flier home with all the children inviting any who wished to become part of the new junior choir, they also provided the school hall as a venue for that choir to practice on Wednesday afternoons following school.

There were two other contributory factors to this wave. First, the number of people attending St Catherine's was very small. The community in which it was situated was the same size as the village in which St Andrew's was set, but church attendance was considerably lower. Interestingly St Botolph had the smallest local population but the highest degree of church going. As a result, St Catherine's was open to changing their services if it would draw more people into the worshipping life of the church and there was very little resistance to stopping their poorly attended monthly evensong and trying a monthly Family Eucharist instead. St Andrew's was more ambivalent about exchanging one of their fortnightly services of Choral Communion for a non-Eucharistic Family Service but there were sufficient numbers on the Church Council who felt the potential gain was sufficiently attractive to try it as an experiment for a year. This was the overall wave on which this aspect of organizational change surfed and it was supported by other developments which emerged following the changes. For instance, both St Andrew's and St Catherine's decided independently it would be good to offer drinks and biscuits after their Family Services, which helped the congregation to mix afterwards.

Wave 2: Common Worship

As already noted, my personal vision for church worship is one which encourages diversity. Furthermore, I would also argue that worship is one of the main expressions of Christian discipleship. In Graham Hughes' book *Worship as Meaning* he captures something of the contemporary multiplicity of culture with the delightful image of people who 'seem free to bring any sandwiches they like to the picnic of meaning' (Hughes 2003: 199). In such a context, it is a crucial part of the Church's mission to offer a breadth of liturgy which will embrace the formal and informal, Eucharistic and non-Eucharistic, all-age worship and the Book of Common Prayer. Another significant factor in this evolving situation, which does not appear to be commented upon very often is that, within those who have been life-long Anglicans, there are increasingly two groups – those that have been brought up using the traditional language of the BCP and those that have been brought up using modern language from Series 3, the ASB and Common Worship. Whilst it is good that people are exposed to new liturgical experience, it is also important to provide that which is familiar – both in traditional *and* modern language.

It is also worth noting that it's not the role of the vicar to only provide worship that he or she finds meaningful. We have to acknowledge that at any point in our ministry we shall be at a particular stage in our own life. Whether we are single or married, have children or do not have children, have work experience outside church or have been ordained for most of our working life – we are all passing through stages of life when certain things will mean more to us than at other times. It is right that such experience shapes and informs ministry but equally clergy should remain open to the fact that many other people are having many other forms of experience – making 'sandwiches' with completely different fillings to use Graham Hughes' image – and these other realms must be acknowledged and honoured as well. Self-awareness and awareness of others is an important element in this process. As Julia Balogun and Veronica Hope Hailey have observed in their book on strategic change: 'Individuals view organisations in fundamentally different ways. Without realising it, change agents often allow their personal philosophy to influence the change approach and interventions they choose. As a result, they may give limited consideration, if any, to the actual change context and its needs. Change agents should be driven by the needs of the organisation rather than by their own perceptions or prejudices of what has constituted 'good' change management in the past. It may also be easier for change agents to understand, and if necessary argue against, other people's prejudices or biases if they are armed with a degree of self-awareness' (Balogun & Hailey, 2004: 9).

As will be clear from the initial monthly pattern of worship in the Benefice of Hillside, there was not a great deal of diversity offered in the liturgical diet. All services used traditional language, either in the form of BCP or ASB Rite B. However, the breadth of worship being offered had broadened with the advent of the junior choir and the

introduction of the 'Family Eucharist' and 'Family Service'. It is important to note that my aim was not the wholesale change of Benefice liturgy. My vision of the Church is inclusive rather than exclusive and the objective was to widen the circle whilst at the same time keeping those who were already inside.

The opportunity to broaden the circle of worship presented itself through the replacement of the *ASB* with *Common Worship*. In particular, the resources provided by Praxis (www.praxisworship.org.uk) were especially helpful in explaining the changing context of worship and the more specific changes to worship. We introduced a series of seasonal booklets for the 9.30am services of Holy Communion at St Andrew and St Botolph, which were adapted following comments from the congregations. It is fair to say that not everyone was happy with these developments. One useful tip is not to be reticent about using encouraging statistics. The figures used in this paper were initially compiled to see what effect, if any, the junior choir was having on service attendance. If attendances have risen then it can be helpful to present that information as part of the report to the Annual Meeting, which allows those in favour of change to show their support and makes it harder for those who are resistant to these developments to press their case.⁵

(D) Statistical Changes

(i) St Andrew

- **April – March 1995/96**

Sunday Total	Easter Day	Christmas Day	Harvest
877	80	120	80

- **April – March 2001/02**

Sunday Total	Easter Day	Christmas Day	Harvest
1789	120	252	120

⁵ It can also be worth publishing the report and statistics in the first issue of the parish magazine following the Annual Meeting, which will reach a wider audience than the relatively small number who attend.

(ii) St Botulph

- **April – March 1995/96**

Sunday Total	Easter Day	Christmas Day	Harvest
1398	42	108	40

- **April – March 2001/02**

Sunday Total	Easter Day	Christmas Day	Harvest
1532	49	128	68

(iii) St Catherine

- **April – March 1995/96**

Sunday Total	Easter Day	Christmas Day	Harvest
198	37	8	47

- **April – March 2001/02**

Sunday Total	Easter Day	Christmas Day	Harvest
580	14	120	69

Summary

These changes produced a significant effect on the numbers attending worship Sunday-by-Sunday, especially at St Andrew and St Catherine. The totals do not distinguish between adults and children or between communicants and non-communicants but they show a rise that was over two-fold at St Andrew and nearly three-fold at St Catherine. There were also significant rises in attendance at Christmas services for these two churches. Attendance at St Botulph was already the healthiest of the three and the church experienced less liturgical change, so there was less of a marked rise in their numbers.

Case Study 2: The Parish of St Edward, Old Town

(A) Context

St Edward's is in the centre of Old Town which has a growing population, presently standing at around 25,000. This is served by four parish churches and a Local Ecumenical

Partnership (LEP) who work as a town-wide team. There are five ministers each of whom has responsibility for one centre of worship plus a role across the team. St Edward's has a well-established choral tradition and many people travel some distance to share in this type of worship. The parish itself is a mix of commercial building, council property and small, owner-occupier houses. In its analysis of the data from the 1990 census the diocesan statistical unit concluded that the level of deprivation in the parish itself meant that it was close to qualifying as an Urban Priority Area (UPA). There is little to suggest there has been a wholesale change in this situation since that time. Much of the contact with those residing in the parish comes through the occasional offices of baptisms, weddings and funerals rather than regular Sunday attendance. For the most part St Edward's liturgy is formal and traditional. The BCP is still widely used for Evensong, 8am Holy Communion and weekday services. The main exceptions are the weekly Choral Eucharist which is Common Worship: Order 1 – Traditional Language and the monthly Family Service, which is loosely based on Common Worship: Service of the Word.

(B) Liturgical Changes

In 2002/03 the pattern of worship at St Edward's was:

First Sunday

8.00am	Said Holy Communion (BCP)
10.00am	Family Service (CW Service of the Word)
11.00am	Choral Matins (BCP)
6.30pm	Choral Eucharist (CW1: Traditional)

Second, Third, Fourth & Fifth Sundays

8.00am	Said Holy Communion (BCP)
10.30am	Choral Eucharist (CW1: Traditional)
6.30pm	Choral Evensong (BCP)

In 2004/05 it had changed to:

First Sunday

- 8.00am Said Holy Communion (BCP)
- 9.30am Family Service (CW Service of the Word)
- 11.00am Choral Matins (BCP)
- 6.30pm Choral Eucharist (CW [1]: Modern)

Second, Third, Fourth & Fifth Sundays

- 8.00am Said Holy Communion (BCP)
- 10.30am Choral Eucharist (CW [1]: Modern)
- 6.30pm Choral Evensong (BCP)

(C) Waves of Change

Wave 1: The Family Service

The monthly 'Family Service' at St Edward's was started by the Church Council's Ministry Sub-Committee and has a dedicated team of lay people who resource and lead the worship. It is attended by the St Edward's Guides and Brownies, the Sunday School and a training choir for the main boys' choir. As an existing wave within the church, it clearly had momentum and was seeking to serve a different congregation to the main Choral Eucharist. One potential way of bridging the gap between St Edward's and those local people who brought their children for baptism could be the Family Service. We now ask those parents whose children are baptised outside a main act of worship to come along to the next all-age service for their child to be welcomed into the family of the Church. Whether we see contemporary culture as increasingly secular or as increasingly spiritually diffuse, it is important to work harder to maintain the links which many parents still want to establish with the church when children are born or adopted. This change has had a significant impact on the shape and attendance at the Family Service. The unique thing about this change, in my experience, is that no one has ever complained! Those who are involved with the local church always appear to love the opportunity of welcoming those who have been baptised and those whose parents come along seem to enjoy meeting other parents at a similar stage of life.

Another change which has helped to nurture this service is a renewed commitment to making the Family Service a regular fixture. Once again this is not a particularly groundbreaking development but it is sometimes easy to miss the obvious. In a church

where the main act of worship is the 10.30am Choral Eucharist, there were a number of occasions when it was justifiably felt that the monthly Family Service could be dropped and the Choral Eucharist re-instated. However, that sends out a potentially negative signal to those who came to the Family Service and make it even harder to build up a steady congregation. By making a commitment to that service come what may, it has helped to established it more firmly in the regular pattern of worship at St Edward's.

A much more controversial wave of change was to move the start-time of the service forward by half an hour. This wave started from the general practice of having drinks and biscuits after mid-morning services but, because the 10.00am Family Service was followed by 11.00am Choral Matins, refreshments were often a hurried affair. The Ministry Sub-Committee wanted the Family Service congregation to have more time to get to know each, so it suggested the Family Service should move to 9.30am for a trial period and see whether the new time worked. As we shall see, the improved statistics for the Family Service in the 04/05 period suggest that these three waves of changes have had a positive effect on attendances.

Wave 2: Easter Liturgy

When I arrived, the liturgical context at St Edward, Old Town, was very similar to that of the Benefice of Hillside, in that all the services used traditional language, either in the form of BCP or Common Worship: Order 1 (with the single exception of the monthly Family Service). Since, by that time, Common Worship had already been established there was not convenient wave about to break on the local church from the wider ocean but there were a number of ripples which came together to form a swell. The first of these was the rather mundane but chaotic practice of welcoming people to the 10.30am Choral Eucharist. This involved handing people a service booklet, a sheet with lectionary readings and prayers, a hymn book and a notice sheet (and a further sheet with additional liturgy on certain special occasions). Numerous comments were made that this was immensely complicated not only for regulars but especially visitors and it would be helpful if something could be done in this respect.

The second element in this swell was that, prior to the change of vicar at St Edward's, there had also been a change in the director of music. For the first time in its history, the centuries-old and predominantly male choral tradition, would be led by a woman. Gillian had come with a background in cathedral music and during the period between vicars she had introduced some significant liturgical changes, especially at Christmas and Easter, and these developments in worship incorporated the use of modern language. Special service leaflets had been printed up for these occasions and no comment was made about the move to modern language. Lent was a particularly complex time liturgically, which

involved worshippers receiving five items on arrival at church. However by introducing a new, weekly service leaflet in the style of those already produced for special occasions it was possible to reduce the number of things given out on the door from five to two. Since this was generally agreed to be a helpful development, it was a relatively straightforward step to continue using such a leaflet after Easter with the modern language version and thus provide a better liturgical balance. There were some critical comments but generally this change has been welcomed.

(C) Statistical Changes

- **April – March 02/03**

8am Holy Communion	10.30am Eucharist	Choral Evensong	Family Service	Harvest Eucharist	Christmas Eve/Day	Good Friday Services	Easter Day Services	Sunday Total
962	4644	1753	620	170	1688	124	574	12,109

- **April – March 04/05**

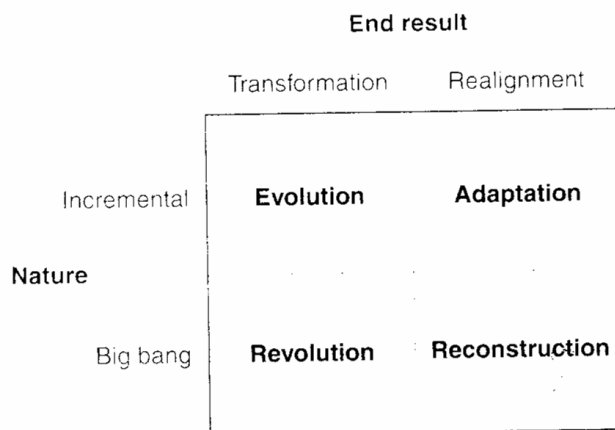
8am Holy Communion	10.30am Eucharist	Choral Evensong	Family Service	Harvest Eucharist	Christmas Eve/Day	Good Friday Services	Easter Day Services	Sunday Total
1009	5136	2633	1058	174	1662	261	612	14,343

Summary

These changes in liturgy at St Edward's correspond to a significant change in the numbers attending worship Sunday-by-Sunday. The regular 10.30am Choral Eucharist and the Family Service show a healthy increase. The additional worshippers on Good Friday are in large part due to an additional All-Age Service, whilst the large rise in numbers attending BCP Choral Evensong is attributable to a series of guest speakers during Lent.

Conclusion: Riding the Waves of Change

In this section I have outlined some of my experience of bringing about liturgical change in two different contexts of ministry – the Benefice of Hillside and the Parish of St Edward. My approach has been to look for already existing waves of change, take advantage of that momentum and then ‘surf’ on the breaker or the swell. As was stated at the outset, this is not presented as an off-the-peg blue print for everyone to follow – in my experience such programmes are rarely *directly* transferable. Instead my aim has been to show how an organisational metaphor can be followed through, to aid not only the process of organizational sensemaking but facilitate the process of change itself. However, readers will perceive these matters in different ways and one means of illustrating this is to ask individuals to plot the changes described here onto Balogum & Hailey’s types of ‘change path’ (Balogum & Hailey 2004: 20):



For some people, the changes outlined in this chapter would be merely ‘adaptive’; for others they would be ‘revolutionary’; and for others they would fall somewhere in between – ‘evolutionary’ or ‘reconstructive’. This brings us back to a key point that Balogun and Hailey make a number of times that self-awareness is a key component in the change process. They argue that the first aspect of a capability for managing change is: ‘the ability of individuals within an organisation to manage change within themselves. Anyone who has lived through a personal crisis such as a bereavement or a divorce will understand that personal change can be an overwhelming experience. However, the more reflective the individual, the more they can expect to learn from the experience, and

hopefully then be able to manage the process more effectively if it recurs' (Balogun & Hailey, 2004 p 77).

Some will find making the practical connections with this chapter harder than others – perhaps your church is less liturgically structured than the ones I served? Alternatively you may be aware that some of the resources which I have had to hand will not be available in your own setting. In many ways that does not matter because what this section argues is not that others should do as I have done but instead look for comparable opportunities in their own context – to use the image of sea and surf: find your own beach and your own board for surfing. But more than anything, as we undertake such organizational 'surfing', we need to know and understand ourselves. As Stephen Cummings, who has also used this image, has observed: 'It goes without saying that no surfer can make waves; he or she must work with what the gods give them. But a competitive surfer's skill is related to their ability to pick out from all the waves occurring in the environment at that time, the ones that suit their objectives and particular style, and then riding or promoting them for all they are worth. In organizations, too, it is a matter of identifying and connecting to those historical currents that one wants to repeat and build upon toward the future' (Cummings 2002: 278). Organizational change is an unavoidable element within the life of the Church in the 21st century and, as such, those who exercise leadership within the Body of Christ must learn how cope with it and how to help those they serve share in that learning process too.

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