

Reservoirs of hope



Reflections

After returning from the 2007 National Conference for Christians in School Leadership (formerly the National Christian Headteachers' Conference) I decided to jot down some of my professional and personal reflections.

I began teaching in 1974 and two years later married my boyfriend from my student days. Unfortunately, the marriage lasted only ten years and in 1986 I had a gigantic life change as I moved into single life in the town where I was already teaching. My parents were a strong rock on which I leaned, but I knew that I had to start again on my own. Knowing that God existed, but having thought no further than that, I decided to go to a church so that I could meet some new people. My next door neighbour offered to take me with her to the local Baptist Church. I accepted the offer with some trepidation, but found a community full of joy and love for God and each other. In the months that followed, I attended church without understanding everything, but was nurtured and supported by other Christians, old and young! God had everything in hand.

Tears at tea-time

During this time, a colleague at school invited me to join her parish group who were visiting Lee Abbey in Devon. She felt that it would be right for me. I was very nervous as I imagined monks and quiet rather than the vibrant conference centre by the sea. It was there, in 1987, that I made a

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commitment to God after collapsing, to my utter surprise at the time, in tears over afternoon tea!

In 1988, I was baptised in the church in Cirencester and to my joy, was supported by most of my family and friends as parents, aunts, and uncles came to join the celebration. Not all understood why I did it, but they were pleased to share in my happiness.

In 1989, I started to apply for headships and was appointed to Brimscombe School, a small voluntary aided village school on the edge of Stroud. I had not been short-listed for the post but when another candidate had dropped out at the end of the first day, I received a telephone call at 10pm asking me to go for interview the next day. No one was more astounded than I when I was offered the job! I could not even tell my parents easily as they were on holiday in their caravan.

The person for the job

God had that post ready for me as I struggled to learn about headship and also faith. I was nurtured by the people around me, especially when God arranged that Rowena should join the school. She had applied for a teaching post, but I did not appoint her. Later, when I needed someone to work with a specific new pupil with a myriad of problems across the academic, social and behavioural spectrums, I knew she was the person for the job! Her friendship and mature faith has since encouraged and supported me through three schools. The learning curve was steep as I moved

straight from the classroom to headship, in a community where faith was a real part of life, and so I learnt and grew.

In March 1990, I attended the second National Christian Headteachers' Conference at Warwick University. I met other Christian colleagues from around Britain and received further encouragement and support from colleagues and speakers alike.

New challenges

After five years at Brimscombe, I felt that God was telling me to push out the boundaries further and I was given the post of headteacher at a larger school with ten classes. This was a school with a chapel foundation, the only one in Gloucestershire at that time. It was also grant maintained. Here was a whole new suitcase of challenges. The community had pockets of quite severe rural deprivation and the school had a high level of special needs. After a while, Rowena was free to apply for the post of special needs teacher at this school, and she then did wonderful work with families, staff, children and me.

One particular pupil (I will call him Greg) had been fostered into the community and at the age of eight had never been anywhere for more than three months, home or school. He stayed with us for over two years and then experienced the first planned move in his life as he moved to secondary school. His foster home had broken down, but he continued to be taxied to us as we were giving him stability. However there is no gain without pain. He trashed a classroom, verbally assaulted children and adults, and had to be taught to run to a safe place (my room). I discovered that he had never been given a cuddly toy, so bought him a teddy bear to which he could talk when he needed to run.

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Through those years, Rowena prayed with others for the school and organised a group of people all over the country to pray specifically for Greg. She would also quickly pray with me during the day if a difficult meeting was anticipated. God sent her to me to support and encourage me as I faced the daily challenges of headship.

Prayer

We have a termly retreat day for heads in Gloucestershire which has been another important reservoir for me over the years.

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After some years in the post, I felt God was telling me it was time to move again. I do not have a very long concentration span! I applied for several posts, but they were not for me. Then I saw an advertisement for the headship at St Lawrence Primary School in Lechlade. By this time, I had a good strong team at my school and some were dismayed when I expressed a wish to apply elsewhere. St Lawrence had been my first school when I left college in 1974. Could I go back? After a pre-visit to the school, I knew this was right and when I was given the post, I was overjoyed. It is a voluntary aided school and the Chair of Governors rang me to give me the news by saying: 'Luke 2:10.' (This verse says: 'But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy for all the people."') At first, I was very lonely as it takes a while to build a new team, and the challenges may be different but they still exist to keep us on our toes. For example, through the Ofsted inspection in May 2005, the daily prayer cards arrived from Rowena, and my own house group prayed for us as well as the community in Lechlade.

Retreat

At the 2007 National Conference for Christians in School Leadership, we were told that reservoirs are always moving as they empty and re-fill. Reservoirs are open to the elements, ie those external influences that batter us at regular intervals. Unfilled reservoirs lead to drought.

I had not attended the annual conference for several years, but returned from last year's event with my reservoir full of fresh clean water. Everyone needs to top up their reservoirs, if they are to allow fresh water to flow out and share with others. On my journey so far I have met wonderful people who have encouraged and supported me, in school and outside, and I sincerely thank God for them.

I do not know what God has planned for me in 2008. My journey may take me to Devon where, in 2006, I bought a small house. I tried a few doors and God opened them so fast I nearly fell over, so I know He has plans for me there at some time, but until then I know that 'in Christ alone, my hope is found' and that I must 'wait on God' as I envisage the future.

■ Alison Lock

