



EXPLORING POSTURES: OPPORTUNITIES TO BE A DIFFERENT KIND OF LEADER

In a webinar recorded in July 2020 Roy Searle and Ruth Padilla DeBorst spoke together about leadership and responded to questions and contributions from many of the webinar participants. We have selected four video clips from this conversation. [Ruth Padilla DeBorst](#) lives in Costa Rica where she shares community life with the members of Casa Adobe. From here she is engaged in ministry locally, regionally and globally. Roy Searle is one of the founders of the [Northumbria Community](#), and a teacher and mentor for pioneers and other missional leaders.

In this first clip Ruth uses the metaphor of hands to describe a range of possible leadership postures.

Hands may be outstretched to engage with others. They may be clenched in defensiveness. They may be full but empty hands can reflect a sense of insufficiency, a need to receive from God and others. For Roy these images speak of leading out of who we are in vulnerability, listening and receptive, taking as a model John the Beloved who 'leant on Jesus' breast and heard the heartbeat of God'. Roy contrasts this posture with his own in his early years, leading a large church using an arsenal of techniques and resources. He describes the *Northumbria Community* rule of Availability and Vulnerability. We do not have a monopoly on the truth, we seek God. Ruth cautions that we must check our assumptions about ourselves. We are not the model, merely a channel.

Ruth opens this part of the conversation by querying our emphasis on professional religious leaders rather than embodied leadership within community. For Roy there are issues in training for leadership. We don't need experts or professionals; we need people who can model the good and beautiful life we see in Jesus. The pandemic has been empowering for some who have found they can connect with one another and grow in the knowledge and love of God without the ministrations of an expert. Ruth uses the language of the Body of Christ to describe the church. It's not about individuals running things but about being a community of Jesus where gifts are shared. Posture needs to be worked out in community, with, as Roy explains, a focus on formation in the love of God. Some of the church responses to the pandemic have spoken of self-preservation. Actually we now have more time to live simply in the neighbourhood. We have been turfed out of our churches and have the chance to discover God at work beyond them, perhaps as Ruth reminds us, among unlikely people.

Roy considers that the pandemic crisis offers an opportunity to embrace a different way of being church. He takes inspiration from the [Mont Fleur scenarios](#), four stories which came out of the reconstruction of South Africa. For him, leaders who desire a return to normal are represented by the ostrich or lame duck stories. The Icarus story represents those with high expectations from the disaster. But the flying flamingos story is the more hopeful story. These birds do find it difficult to get off the ground, but then as they fly, they are beautiful. There is a need to find the humility to deconstruct in order to find a more apostolic and prophetic way to be the church in a changing world. Ruth calls for a posture of compassion for professionalized clergy who are still acting out of a script formed from narratives of leadership which they have learned. She wants to avoid any polarization. These leaders are hurting, and Jesus, she feels, wants to liberate them. She wonders how we accompany these people to discover the real script and be free from false narratives of leadership.

Ruth describes the risk of 'sameness' when we gather in smaller groups. The challenge for the church is including the other. For the sake of the kingdom we need to include those who are not like us. Roy points out that in fact we live, often, in diverse neighbourhoods, and this diversity will be reflected in an incarnational, missional church. If we are truly a 'church without walls' then there will be room for seekers, unbelievers and broken people like ourselves, struggling to make sense of life.