

## Letter to the Editor of *Transforming Ministry* – 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2023

Madam

It was interesting to study the wording of the title of Alan Stanley's essay in the Spring 2023 edition of *Transforming Ministry* (pp 18-19). Overall, I tend to agree with him that the church may need to be lay led. However, the Church most certainly does not! Confused? Let me explain. The use of the word 'church' (lower-case 'c') is usually employed to refer to the building in which worship takes place, from a magnificent Norman cathedral, at one extreme, to a tent erected for a travelling mission, at the other. The Church (upper-case 'C') refers to what Dom Gregory Dix called the *Plebs Sancta Dei*, the holy common people of God.<sup>1</sup> These congregations of worshippers most assuredly do not need to be lay led, although lay persons will continue to be required to assist in the leading, and probably in increasing numbers. Yet, while the pastoral care of the Church must always remain in the hands of its episcopally ordained clergy, all too often those chosen for this sacerdotal role do not necessarily have the training, knowledge or skill sets to manage the business of being totally in charge of the everyday functioning of the church, let alone have the administrative ability to cope with responsibility for multiple benefices, sometimes comprising six, eight or more parishes. The principal responsibility of the priest must always be the Cure of Souls and Administration of the Sacraments, but Licenced Lay Readers and LLMs are increasingly in demand to support their respective clergy in these duties. Outside their sacerdotal roles many priests find that they do not have the innate abilities, or the time, to study, understand and administer such mundane areas as finance, architecture, insurance, heating and lighting, building care and churchyard maintenance, pandemics, the employment of organists, sextons, vergers, etc, or cope with the welter of rules, regulations and questionnaires that constantly filter down from diocesan headquarters with every post and e-mail. These are the areas where the church should be lay led, but this is not something new. I am sure that those benefactors of yesteryear who financed the building of the superb 'wool churches', so common in East Anglia and the Cotswolds, for example, could well have been considered to be leaders of the church. However, despite the consequent skills of artisans in stone and wood, these buildings would have had no purpose, other than as empty monuments to an area's financial wealth, without the appointment to them of episcopally ordained clergy. Yes, the church may, and perhaps should, have lay leadership, but the Church must always continue to remain in the sacred hands of its Holy Priesthood.

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, (London: Dacre Press, 1945), 744.