

Keith Elford, **Creating the Future of the Church: A Practical Guide to addressing Whole-System Change**, SPCK London 2013, 128pp
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'It is evident that it is virtually impossible to make anybody in the Church of England do something they do not want to do.' Keith Elford writes in a way that makes me smile. Often it is a smile of self-recognition – he knows the Church of England from the inside and he writes with honesty and yes, love, as he shares his wisdom and experience in addressing whole system change. And in reading this book we can be under no illusion. Whole system change is what is needed. But whilst the task may be daunting, Elford's practical wisdom and step-by-step approach leads us to conclude, with him, that 'it can be done'.

The great achievement of this book is its holistic and integrated style. The approach is non-dualistic, so we do not get into arguments about 'priest' versus 'leader,' or 'organisation' versus 'institution' or 'secular business model' versus 'ecclesiology.' Elford successfully marries organisational theory and practice with theology, faith in God and church experience. He uses words like 'ambition,' 'success' and 'leadership,' understanding that these can easily cause hackles to rise. He defines them carefully and enables the reader to see the very best that organisational theory can offer to the Church.

A thriving organisation needs to manage the present, create the future and nurture identity. Some of the most important questions are asked about culture and identity – who are we, why do we do what we do and how do we do it? Elford is blunt in his assessment: 'The reality is that the culture of the Church as it is most often experienced will not be attractive to new adherents'. But he remains positive that the Church has much to offer: faith that connects with life as it actually is, a place where community is seen at its best, where new ideas can flourish and 'the body of Christ' be experienced. Most helpfully, having spelled out the problems, he offers a clear process for transformation and practical ways to implement that process, even down to when to use pens and post-it notes. He charts the journey carefully, recognising that change involves loss and grief and will encounter resistance and conflict.

Keith Elford brings everything you've ever learned intentionally, or practised instinctively, about systems theory, change, vision, strategy and leadership into one slim volume with a deep understanding of the Church of England. It will be an invaluable guide and companion to anyone in leadership at any level of Church life, and I commend it highly, including to those who are engaged in the selection and training of the ministers of the future.

This is a book that connects theology, leadership theory and practical process. It is insightful, useful, and could change the church ... in 128 pages. Elford engenders a sense of urgency but without anxiety, so relax and read it and above all do it.

Jackie Searle, Archdeacon of Gloucester