



Voluntary and Community Sector Service Address | 7 June 2026 | 14:30

'Noses in, hands out!' My favourite definition of governance. 'Eyes and ears but no hands!' Oversight but not management. Governance but not operations. I'll leave experienced trustees to debate with each other exact definition of governance and the role of trustees over refreshments!

In this annual service which we hold to honour and recognize, celebrate and give thanks for the voluntary and community sector we choose one aspect of the sector on which to focus. This year we focus on the role of trustees. Volunteers themselves, they take responsibility for and oversee the sector. We owe all who step up to be trustees a great debt of gratitude for the self-less offering of themselves in the service of others. From Kerrie and Ray we have heard something of the challenges and the joys of being in the role.

So, what's in a name? 'Trustee' says it all. In the biblical languages, to trust someone is to put your faith in them. And if you do that then you take that leap of trust, having a firm belief that the person you trust will oversee things that are precious to you. And this is what we do in the sector: we place what we value most of all – our activities to enable our communities and those for whom we are concerned to be cared for and flourish – into the hands of trustees.

Those who have organized today hope that this service will be an encouragement to trustees across the County of Derbyshire and beyond. In our two readings today, there is encouragement and hope, especially when we are stretched to make sense of a world where funding is scarce, where there are complex political issues to navigate and where that aspect of human flourishing that we are passionate about is suddenly not flavour of the month. We are offered encouragement in the face of feeling tired and even overwhelmed by the demands of the role.

Moses was the greatest of all leaders within the Old Testament people of God. He was a pioneering leader and achieved remarkable things, even becoming a prototype for the longed for the coming Messiah. Not unlike a founder trustee or CEO! And yet the picture we have of him is all too human - exhausted, at his wits end, trying to make sense of all the detailed management required of a growing demand for justice.

Let's put our trustee hat on! Moses draws in a consultant to help him out – someone not from the people of God, but someone from outside - his wife's father – he accepts the importance of an objective look at the matter. He accepts advice and acts on it. He creates a team around him with clear lines of delegation and accountability. He brings organization and shape to a growing organization that faced an uncertain nomadic future. He sets himself free to give leadership, to become the one who can focus on the vision and strategy and lets others deliver the operational side of things.

We can be encouraged that many of the principles that we work to have been tried and tested over long periods of time, that we are part of a heritage that is rooted in the life of faith and that servant leadership ensures the well-being of both those being served and the one who offers

leadership. Through good governance practice the burden on all is eased, leadership is sustainable, the community becomes one that lives peaceably.

And then we heard from Julian of Norwich: 'All shall be well', she says. The headline for this service taken from the earliest surviving work in Olde English written by a woman. A religious who lived a reclusive life, someone with a key place in the history of English spirituality. Someone almost unheard of until the middle years of the last century when she was quoted by T S Eliot at the end of his poem, Little Gidding. 'All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well' – the promise of peace and fulfilment in a turbulent century, in a broken world and in our own post-war settlement.

Just as we have much to worry about in the way that the work of trustees becomes ever more complex, so Julian's world of 14th century England was one of significant challenge. England was at war with France; it was a time of austerity and significant food shortages; it was a dangerous time for the nation's health as the Black Plague had a deep grip and a large proportion of the population died.

When Julian become ill and entered her near-death experience she saw visions, or 'shewings' as they are called in Olde English; then after her recovery, and a period of twenty years of reflection she wrote: 'All shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well'. But this is no lazy half-hearted wish, no idle hope about things turning out alright in the end. It's a profound statement of hope in the love of God that triumphs over human adversity, in both our sinfulness and our suffering, in this unsatisfactory world.

Julian reminds us of the power of love to bring good out of the challenges of human living, and this is the encouragement for all involved with the voluntary and community sector – all who volunteer, all who are employed by the sector, all who support as well as those who offer to be trustees. No easy answers, no taking away the challenges, no avoiding the hard work, thinking and planning for the future, but the assurance that in our work across the sector nothing is wasted no matter what but **all** that we do – all notice the word all in what Julian says – is valued and nothing is lost.

Julian wove love into everything she said. So for the trustee, for all who work in the sector, for all who volunteer – we are to become 'weavers of love', building practical love for each other, for the members of our communities and networks – and dare I say, and this is the bit that so often gets missed – for ourselves into everything we do. Because if we weave love into our volunteering, then that is when the promise of God revealed in Julian's life and writing becomes active and 'All shall be well' takes on its deepest meaning.

And this, as I conclude, takes us into the heart of the meaning of all that we seek to do in the voluntary and community sector. In the early and middle years of the twentieth century faith had much to say about the importance of what were often called then 'intermediate associations', those structures in our society that stand between the life of the individual and the state.

William Temple, the archbishop of Canterbury in the early 1940s said this:

'no one is fitted for an insolated life; everyone has needs which they cannot supply for themselves; but we need not only what our neighbours contribute to the equipment of our lives but their actual selves as a complement to our own. We are naturally and incurably

social'; from William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, Penguin Books, 1942, 1976 edition, p.69 (adapted)

In other words, gathering together in families, in clubs, in schools in trades unions, in adult education groups and in societies *and* in organizations throughout the voluntary and community sector – it's as we gather with others - as human beings we fulfill our purpose in and through our encounters with each other. It is with each other and through each other that we become the person that we are destined to be. Without human fellowship human beings do not flourish and grow in the way that we are destined to through the eyes of faith. It's as we weave love into our daily lives and into our encounters with each other that we together with those whom we serve grow and develop and flourish. That surely is the purpose of the sector – to create relationships that nourish the weak and vulnerable in society, including ourselves.

So let's, after Julian of Norwich, become 'weavers of love' in our society as we continue the work of the sector and let's be encouraged today that nothing we do in the service that we offer will be lost and that even when we feel overwhelmed with the task in hand we may know that we have the inner resources that come from the life and insights of faith to renew us.

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