



Listening and Leading with Wisdom in Diversity

From 6pm on Wednesday 22nd March until 11.30am on Friday 24th

At a recent Leadership Fellows Dinner, this theme came to the fore with passion, concern and a desire to explore... The focus on belonging, diversity and inclusion is one of the great shifts in institutional life over the last decade – and yet there is still a growing and deepening sense that 'we are not getting this right'.

On one hand, there are people in minority groupings disappointed and frustrated that good words lead to little change in behaviour. On another, there are people in majority groupings disappointed and frustrated that, however they try, they cannot be free of perceptions of dominance and bias. Both can lead to a crippling wariness and self-consciousness. Moreover the 'boundary' labels we use to describe and sensitise ourselves to inclusion/exclusion can be counter productive and create unforeseen in-group/out-group dynamics.

More positively, there is recognition of the value that can be released into organisational decisions and activities by embracing more neurodiversity and human 'difference'. How do we get this right? Is it more about listening than enacting?

This two night Conversation will create a unique opportunity to go to depth on this theme, to explore diversity at a wisdom level, beyond the 'field of right and wrong'. Is there a better way?



"This is me"

After arriving in the Vicars' Hall and sharing some introductory thoughts and questions, we will begin the Conversation with the sharing of personal stories and encounters with diversity in our own capacity as leaders - and in that something of why this matters so much to us. 'This is how I am encountering it and this is how I am feeling about it'.

This will set the tone and basis for our ongoing conversation, formal and informal, throughout the coming two days – keeping it grounded in the raw honesty and truth of our personal experience, whatever that may be. This is our start point. Naturally the conversation will flow in many directions from here and we will have time over dinner and drinks to let it do so...

We open the next day with a sharing of our overnight reflections - 'What is surfacing for me?' – following which we start to focus on some of the deeper dynamics of inclusion/exclusion and how these are manifesting themselves across our contexts.

Fundamentally, this Conversation is about a very powerful and simple human need – 'Is it safe to be me here?'

To explore this, we will take a 'human library' approach to this phase of the conversation, creating a space for people from very different settings to share their profound personal experience of this – the reality and/or fear of it not being safe and the effect this has on them.

Alongside this we will do substantive 'inner work' on our listening – being attentive to our reactions, at different levels, to what is being shared and the effect this is having on us – in mind, heart and body. How we react, feel, respond. The way our minds get triggered. The judgements that arise, on self and others. How we feel pulled into acting these out. The consequences when we do.

This will require a sensitivity of noticing and an attentiveness to the 'relational field' that we will prime and consciously cultivate throughout the Conversation.



“Tell Us More”

In the hour or so before lunch, we will start to pull out some of the insights emerging from this experience of sharing and listening. What is this telling us about the deeper dynamics of diversity in action – here there will be a real questioning and exploring of assumptions, language and other forms of 'inner patterning' as well as a discerning of what are the productive states and conditions that release the experience of 'difference' into possibility over defendedness.

We will also explore the dynamics between diversity and power – real power or perceived. This will lead us into reflection over lunch about our own patterning and the patterning we see playing out around us in our organisations. In particular, we will explore the question of what is and is not 'safe' in our diverse contexts and the implications of this for our leadership.

We will also explore the role of perception and how this gets activated and filtered by how and with what we primed our attention – consciously and unconsciously. This is where we will be at our best as Fellows, listening closely to each other and helping each other see and sense our own patterns and potential 'blind spots'.

We will work on our own drivers here, particularly any quest for 'perfection' in this field. Part of working effectively with diversity is recognising that in many respects it is too late to correct much of our inner 'programming' which has been powerfully and deeply shaped by early life context and experience.

What we can do of course is cultivate the humility to recognise this and to accept getting this wrong, and learning, is an essential part of the process. How do we open ourselves to this and 'let be'.

Towards the end of the afternoon, we pause to reflect and to notice what is really speaking to each of us in all in relation to our own leadership practice. This takes us into the next phase of the Conversation.



“Yes I can!”

Returning from Evensong, we will start to shape our own responses to the Conversation and all that it has raised. Given the nature of the enquiry above there is likely to be both a deep personal element to this as we question our own inner process as well as a more practical level where we start to see how we can influence and shape the context in which we lead.

In the evening session we will do some experiential work together to ground and anchor our insights not just a conscious level, but also a more subconscious one - aligning our intentions with the deeper energy and peaceful conviction of our heart. Learning to stand in this place and to stay open as we engage with others helps overcome some of the triggers that hook our reactivity and close down our listening.

On the final morning, we take some clear time and space to capture the insights that have settled overnight and to consolidate what we have clarity on. This can be a very powerful and generative time, as the trust and openness that we have built together combines with the refined quality of our listening and new levels of personal awareness to generate very powerful learning conversations.

In other words, our attentiveness to the theme of difference and diversity throughout the two days should come to a peak here. Allowing us each to bring our own diversity fully into a conversation about how we may consciously influence the quality of interaction around us, less by any particular techniques or interventions, more by our own personal role modelling and quality of attention.

We will close the Conversation with a pause to look back and garner all the wisdom that has been gleaned and shared – particularly the very practical wisdom, the little tips, practices and insights that emerge spontaneously, often in offline chats, as we talk and share experiences together.

Finally, in pairs, we will help each other firm up on our specific commitments and intentions - and maybe even offer to stay in touch from time to time to help each other with this.



Timings: Wednesday 22nd March

- 1430 You are welcome to check in to your room in St George's House
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- 1630 Tea in the House for those joining Evensong in the Chapel
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- 1705 Evensong (*optional*)
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- 1750 **Vicars' Hall.** Refreshments, then start of the Conversation at 6.00pm. Introduction to the Guiding Principles and then on to Stage One: ***This is me!*** We share our personal stories as leaders in small groups, then any themes emerging – with the wider group. In light of the themes, we agree on our question to consider during discussions over dinner.
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- 1940 Free time/drinks in the Sitting Room No. 25 The Cloisters
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- 2000 Working dinner in the House Dining Room
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- 2130 We go back to the Sitting Room for tea/coffee, and after dinner drinks
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- 2145 Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel, departing the Sitting Room (*optional*).

Thursday 23rd March

- 0745 Breakfast is served in the House Dining Room.
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- 0845 We start again promptly in the Vicars' Hall, exploring in more depth some of the themes that emerged yesterday evening and identifying the most fruitful lines of enquiry in this for each of us. We start to challenge our assumptions and notice some of the core themes that we want to explore further.
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- 1000 We move on to Stage 2: ***Tell us more*** where we work more intentionally on deepening our insight and understanding of the subtleties at work below the surface of our observations, supporting and challenging each other in the process. This may be 'inner work' on our own leadership or 'outer work' on how we seek shape and transform our teams and organisations – or both.
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Thursday 23rd March cont...

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| 1100 | Personal reflection time |
| 1130 | We draw out key messages from our reflection time and take our enquiry in another round of small groups into a more focussed conversation about the implications for our own leadership roles and priorities. |
| 1300 | A hot buffet lunch is served in the Vicars' Hall and we work together in our groups |
| 1355 | Team photo on the West Steps of the Chapel ...Then we are back together as one group to explore our own personal and practical leadership in response to the insights crystallising during the morning. |
| 1515 | We pause to take stock and notice what is really landing for us and take a break for some tea and personal reflection time. |
| 1600 | We move onto Stage 3: Yes I can! As we go through this stretch stage, where we start to ground our learning and self-awareness in our own context, we encourage more feedback. We also make a point of focusing energy on anyone who feels stuck in any way and would appreciate additional group support to enable them to unlock their thinking and move forward. |
| 1705 | (Optional) Evensong in the Chapel |
| 1745 | Refreshments, then resume the Conversation at 6pm |
| 1915 | Free time and pre-dinner drinks in the Sitting Room of No. 25 |
| 2000 | Dinner is served in the Dining Room |
| 2130 | We go back to the Sitting Room for after dinner drinks |
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Friday 24th March

- 0730 Breakfast is served in St George's House. Please clear your luggage from your bedroom because the domestic staff need to service the rooms. You are welcome to leave bags in the Sitting Room or bring them down to the Vicars' Hall where we will be for the remainder of the Conversation
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- 0845 Vicars' Hall. We start again promptly and invite any personal insights that draw on our discussions the previous evening before agreeing our challenge for the final round of small groups. When we return from groups, we help each other, working in pairs to focus and firm up on our intentions and key takeaways. These will shape the practical and personal commitments we seek to engage with between now and the group follow-up.
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- 1115 We come together again as a whole group before closing the Conversation promptly at 11.30
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- 1130 Close of the Conversation
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Video link-up:

At the end of the Conversation we will confirm the arrangements for our follow-up zoom call to check in on the progress we have each made in progressing our resolves.

The key to us making the best possible use of our time in this is for Fellows to post a brief Whatsapp beforehand updating the rest of us on how you have been getting on, and especially which ones you found the most challenging. We then take it from there!