



The Asbury Crossing: Responding to Call

The Significance of Journaling as Mission Partners

Revd Dr Stephen Day and Rev Jane Day

The first journal entry was dated 4 December 2014. Jane and I were based at All Nations Christian College in Hertfordshire as we prepared to travel to Germiston in South Africa to begin our term as mission partners with the Methodist Church in Britain. I was due to travel to London to collect our visas the following morning; however, I recorded receiving an email at 5.32 pm stating that we needed a letter from the Methodist Church of Southern Africa stating repatriation arrangements should we die in South Africa. I remember the panic of arranging this letter and feeling thankful for the time difference which allowed me to receive the letter before travelling to London. Having received our passports with our visas, I noted: “It is strange to think about the effort and expense taken to receive a small piece of paper – the visa! Yet, it is this piece of paper which makes everything in South Africa possible for us.”

Journaling was a spiritual exercise that Jane had found valuable for many years before I began. It was while we were engaging in the *En Route* course at All Nations, as we prepared to go to South Africa that I made a conscious decision to begin journaling. As Francis Asbury noted in the preface of his journal, I sought to keep a record “of my intentions, resolutions, and actions, as a Christian and minister.” I knew that our service as mission partners was likely to be very different from previous expressions of ministry and wanted to have a record of these experiences.

I have found the spiritual practice of journaling one which has been profoundly significant. What began as a practice for our service as mission partners has continued in the UK. My journal enabled me to reflect upon the experience of adjusting to life in a new country and continent, such as living in a manse surrounded by a wall and metal gate with barred windows, driving with doors and windows shut, celebrating Christmas in the middle of summer, and the proximity of extreme wealth and poverty. I recorded things that shocked and surprised me as well as joys and unexpected blessings, such as the stream of church members who visited and helped us to navigate our new surroundings. My journal allowed me to notice and record significant moments in which I experienced God’s grace in action, allowing for thanksgiving and praise for God’s goodness, support and protection, which might otherwise have been overlooked in the busyness of each day. Equally, I could reflect upon relational difficulties and other challenges to take responsibility for my role within them and repent, seeking God’s wisdom and guidance in moving forward.



The Asbury Crossing: Responding to Call

Having recorded moments and insights in my journal they are available for review in the future, which can offer a fresh perspective on them. For example, I first remember the Sunday morning in 2015 when I first read the Bible in Shona¹ when leading worship in the service for the members of Zimbabwean origin in Germiston. The entry for that day allows me to feel again something of the fear and anxiety I felt when I prepared to read the Bible in Shona, uncertain whether I would pronounce words correctly and how the congregation would respond. Despite the anxiety I felt at the time and the fear of embarrassment, I remember the murmurs of encouragement and chuckles when I stumbled over a word. Six years later I appreciate the significance of that day in valuing the relationship between language and identity which led me to greet in several languages and seek support to lead worship in Shona and Xhosa². When I look back at the journal entry from that day in 2015 I am reminded of all the positive things which flowed from it, including seeing South Africans and Zimbabweans learn to greet in each other's heart languages.

I tended to make journal entries for the previous day. Towards the end of each day I would reflect back upon it using the framework of the Ignatian prayer of Examen³. The Examen has five steps:

1. Invite God's Holy Spirit to give us light and grace to pray and show what we cannot see by ourselves
2. Give thanks for the things of today as we have sensed the presence of the loving God who is generous beyond our imagining
3. Review the day, looking at what happened and the underlying reality. We seek to identify those things which move us towards God and others, the consolation which increases faith, hope and love. We may also sense the desolation which takes us away from the love of God and others, such as anxiety, restlessness, doubts, self-loathing and dejection
4. We face what is wrong as we examine to identify sins and faults to take responsibility for them and become more able to give ourselves to God
5. We resolve to make changes and open ourselves to God's grace which enables us to do these things, trusting God for all that may emerge when they are done

The Examen provides me with a helpful model for reflection at the end of each day; however, I tend to journal for the previous day, having allowed the review to continue.

¹ Shona is one of the principle languages in Zimbabwe alongside Ndebele.

² Xhosa is one of the eleven official languages spoken in South Africa.

³ Manney, J. (2011). *A Simple, Life-changing Prayer*. Loyola Press, Chicago, IL.



The Asbury Crossing: Responding to Call

Jane journals differently, tending to set aside an hour or more once or twice a week reviewing the past few days.

I record journal entries on my computer. I find this an easier way to record because I can type faster than I can write. I also find that I can search for particular themes if I am seeking to make new connections. However, Jane always buys journals and takes great care to pick books that appeal; for her, the journal itself is important and not just what is noted in it.

Asbury knew that he was entering a challenging environment in America; according to the preface of his journal he wrote so he might “have, through this medium, a constant and reasonable answer for mine accusers.” Thankfully, I didn’t begin journaling to defend myself, my colleagues or Methodism generally. My journal has essentially been about a spiritual discipline as an expression of my relationship with God and seeking to grow through the power of the Holy Spirit as a disciple of Christ. Yet, it has been remarkable how insights recorded in my journal have provided things to share with congregations in meetings and worship to stimulate, inspire and challenge. This sharing has allowed further interaction on themes that enriched, revised and stimulated the initial reflection.

I remain thankful to God for the inspiration which led me to begin journaling as a new mission partner and for all the revelations which have enabled me to develop as a Christian and a minister.

Responding:

- The following two books could help anyone seeking to begin the spiritual discipline of journaling: *Journaling as a Spiritual Practice* - H. Cepero (2008), InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.; and *The Artist’s Way* – J. Cameron (2020), Souvenir Press Ltd., London.
- In a video, Jane offered some tips from her experience of journaling: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZkhB42MC1Q>
- Francis Asbury’s full journals are available online: media.sabda.org/alkitab-6/wh3-ref/aj-v1.pdf

May God bless you in this journey of exploration and Christian spiritual growth.

Revd Dr Stephen Day and Revd Jane Day.