

## TEAM RELATIONSHIPS

### a paper for discussion

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Our church is big on teams.

- There is the "core ministry team" composed of the senior minister, the associate minister, the youth minister and the church administrator. Their weekly meetings are concerned substantially with the day-to-day ministry of the church, as also preparatory work on strategic issues to be brought to the Leadership Team and/or Church Meeting
- There is the "leadership team" composed of three ministers and 15 deacons and serviced by the church administrator. This team meets monthly and exercises a leadership role in all areas of church life, taking initiatives where appropriate as the team members oversee the church's mission and ministry.
- There are ten "task-oriented teams", normally led by deacons and accountable to the leadership team (and ultimately to the church meeting). These teams tend to meet every six to eight weeks. They have particular responsibility for overseeing and developing clearly defined areas of the church's mission and ministry: viz. social action, evangelism, nurture & development, pastoral, youth ministry, mission beyond Chelmsford, worship, fabric, finance, and media. The teams themselves are small in size and do not normally number more than seven members. The mandate of the team members is not do all the work themselves, but to empower and encourage others in the church to get behind whatever may be their particular project.
- Finally, there is the church itself, which may be likened to a team. One of the key tasks of a pastor is welding together what may appear initially to be a motley crew, each doing his or her own thing, into a team, working together to achieve a common task, i.e. to fulfil the mission of the church. This 'welding together' takes place at a number of levels in a number of ways - through the Sunday services, the monthly church meetings, and written forms of communication such as the monthly church magazine..

Whether or not I am justified in calling all these different groups "teams" is debatable. David Cormack, for instance, has written: "*Two's a company, three's a team, and more than fifteen's a crowd*" (*Team Spirit* 20)! Indeed, I tend to feel that any group of over 12 members is no longer a group, but a meeting. Certainly, the larger a group, the more relationships need to be formed. It has been estimated that "*Members of a group of six have 15 relationships with which they must deal to interact as a group. A group of eight persons has 28 potential relationships; a group of 10 has 45; a group of 15 has 105; and a group of 20 has the staggering possibility of 190 relationships*" (Howard Clinebell, *Growth Groups* 20,21). Research in group dynamics suggests that eight members may in fact be the optimum figure for the size of a team. If this is true, then those churches which have modelled their leadership teams on the number of "deacons" (seven!) found in Acts 6 are in fact onto a good thing.

However, my concern in this paper is not with the size of the various teams in the church, but rather with relationships within what I have termed the core ministry team. This concern stems not from any particular crisis, but simply from the fact that with the departure of an assistant minister and of a former church administrator we have recently had to renew the membership of the core ministry team. Our present

youth minister has been in post for a year, our present church administrator has been in post for almost two months, while the associate pastor was inducted into his office only two weeks ago. At a team Away Day last week it therefore seemed appropriate to reflect together on what it meant to be a team.

We began by reviewing the purpose of our weekly Monday morning meeting (Incidentally, none of us takes Monday off - primarily because there is always so much to catch up on after Sunday. As far as I am concerned, there is an additional reason: on Mondays I tend to be afflicted by the post-Sunday 'blues' and am therefore reluctant to have as my day off the very day when I feel at my worst!). The purpose of our Monday morning meetings (scheduled to last just an hour - sometimes, however, we overrun!) is to review the week that has gone - and not least the Sunday services; to share information, and not least news we have gained on Sunday; to plan the coming week's work; to strategise for the future; and in the light of all this to pray together.

This meeting together does not do away with the need for me to meet up with the members of my staff on an individual basis. For example, prior to our Monday morning team meeting I meet with my youth minister for half-an-hour to review his work and approve his work for the coming week. These meetings are particularly necessary, since my youth minister is still in the process of being trained through the Oasis Trust Youth Ministry Course. However, I also meet individually with my Associate Minister and my Church Administrator to review progress and set fresh goals.

As a church our overall goal or purpose is "to go Christ's way and to make disciples". At that Monday Away Day I reminded the ministry team of the goals which are specific to us: viz:

- To excite the church to fresh hope and faith in God
- To help the church embrace 'love of another kind'
- To encourage personal change and growth
- To empower for witness and service

The second ministry team goal touches on relationships. 'Love of another kind' is simply another way of speaking about 'agape' love, the love which loves even the unloving and unlovable. At the Away Day I spoke of the fact that we as a ministry team are called to model the kind of relationships that ideally should characterise the life of the church. I.e. as a team our life together should be characterised by 'one-anotherness'. We are called to love one another, to pray for one another, to honour one another, to care for one another, to encourage one another, to speak the truth in love to one another.....

However, there is more to team-work than 'one-anotherness'. If a team is to work effectively, then a certain 'discipline' of relationships needs to be maintained. In particular I picked out the following:

- Communication: we must keep one another informed of what we are doing. Hence the importance of the Monday meeting. We all need to come to our Monday meetings ready to contribute. Ideally, I like to have things written down: e.g. reports on pastoral visits.

- Openness: we need to open with one another - it does not help team relationships if we keep secrets from one another. In the case of certain pastoral confidences, then there may be times when the ministers will not be free to be open with the church administrator. However, there is no place for ministers to keep secrets from one another. A confidence does not necessarily mean that we cannot share information with one another. .
- Honesty: closely linked with openness. When it comes to our thoughts and our feelings we need to be honest with one another. If something has upset us, then we need to surface it. Today's niggle could be tomorrow's resentment, and next week's breakdown. Likewise in our decision-making, we need to be honest with one another. If a member of the team is unhappy with the decision being made, then he/she needs to say so. The very questioning of a decision often enables the making of a better decision
- Loyalty. Outside our meetings, we must always stand up for one another. None of us is perfect, and there will be times when we make a mess of things. However, we must resist the temptation of criticising one another to others.

On reflection, there are other virtues I could have added. I could have spoken of the need for mutual encouragement, patience, respect. and trust.

Maybe, too, I should have spoken of the inevitability of relationship problems. Occasional problems are inevitable, given that all of us are human. In the wise words of John Blattner, "*Wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, sooner or later there are going to be people problems*" (*Pastoral Renewal*, Feb 1987). But problems can be dealt with and overcome, if there is an underlying commitment to one another (does that commitment need to be expressed in the making of a formal covenant?) - in such a context the truth can be spoken in love and matters be put right.

Fortunately my experience of team relationships has generally been very good. It has been good because I have always insisted that as a team we work from the church. This gives us an opportunity not just to meet together once a week on a formal basis, but to meet every day on an informal basis. We drink coffee together in one another's offices, share experiences of the previous day, and generally enjoy one another's company. I am a great believer in working at relationships, because the more one works at them, the stronger they become.

But how do you manage your relationships? What ways do you think I could improve the way in which I seek to operate with members of my church staff?