

## **APPOINTING MINISTERS**

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Most settlements take place with the help of regional ministers. When ministers are seeking a (new) church, they put their name on the national settlement list – those regional ministers responsible for settlement at their monthly meetings then divide the names amongst themselves, and in due course three or so names are passed on to a church seeking a pastor. Regional ministers, however, are not the only people involved in the settlement process: as a college principal I was often approached by a church for a ‘name’, and even now I receive e-mails or phone calls asking for a recommendation. And, of course, sometimes churches call a minister without recourse to any outside body – instead they may appoint somebody already known by the fellowship, even perhaps somebody from within the fellowship. But what is common in all these diverse situations is that the ministers often feel ‘powerless’. True, they are able to put their name forward to churches through the settlement system, but they are not able to put their name forward to a particular church. Or, at least, not directly. For while some regional ministers are happy to show ministers in their care the list of churches seeking a pastor, and for the ministers to indicate which church they would like their name to be put to, they are not able to write directly to the church concerned. Over the years there has been some improvement to the settlement system: in the old days ministers were totally reliant on the recommendation of their college principal or area superintendent; now, although college principals and regional ministers are still able to influence churches, ministers do at least have a partial opportunity to ‘sell’ themselves by drawing up their own ‘profile’. Yet, even the format of the profile is dictated by the system – ministers are not given a free hand to express their individuality and creativity, but instead they have to conform to a particular way of presenting themselves. As a result many ministers feel that there should be another system – or, perhaps better, a system that complements our present system: viz a system whereby churches advertise their vacancies and ministers have an opportunity then to apply for a post of their liking. Indeed, already certain ministerial positions are advertised in the pages of the *Baptist Times*: e.g. hospital chaplaincies, Union and college appointments. There is no reason in principle why Baptist churches too might advertise their needs – just as Anglican churches are allowed to advertise their needs in the *Church Times*. Or, at least, there is no theological reason; there may, however, be another reason tied up with issues of power and influence! However, whatever way we go about putting a minister in touch with a church, there is one matter on which I feel strongly: viz. the desirability of references apart from those offered by regional ministers. I am puzzled that so few churches call for references. I would like to see it become standard for every minister to supply the names of three referees, at least one of which is ‘lay’. That would make the present appointment process a little less hazardous.

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