

MINISTERS NEED APPRAISALS

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It is my conviction that appraisals should be a way of life for pastors. As I write I am looking forward to my tenth ministerial appraisal. In preparation for this I shall have to submit a detailed review of the past year as also propose a number of key objectives for the following year. I will also review the opportunities for training and development, and share ideas for my future development. My appraisers will be the church's Senior Deacon and the Pastoral Deacon - normally we have also invited a minister from outside the church to be involved in the process, but this year we have decided that a 'lighter' approach would be more appropriate. Needless to say, the content of the appraisal is strictly confidential – nothing is shared with anybody else without the express permission of all concerned. I have no doubt that this year's appraisal will again be a good experience. Sadly, many ministers feel threatened by the prospect of appraisal. Believing themselves to be primarily accountable to God, they do not want to have to give account of their ministry to another. But if the word 'love' in 1 John 4.20 is changed to 'accountable', we find, 'We cannot be accountable to God whom we have not seen, of we are not willing to be accountable to our brother and sister whom we have seen'! If only ministers were to appreciate that appraisal, properly handled, is a positive experience with their interests in mind. In many ways appraisal is more helpful to ministers than almost any other group of workers. For ministry is by and large a lonely profession. Unlike other professionals, ministers for the most part do not work together in teams – they are on their own. True, they are part of a local church, but most deacons have no real idea of what is involved in the day-to-day ministry of their pastors. What a difference it makes to be able to share in confidence some of the pressures we face. Annual appraisals can break down some of the isolationism and in so doing prove to be extremely supportive. Annual appraisals are also intended to be a place for encouragement. They provide an opportunity for the appraiser(s) to affirm the pastor, to look back over the past and say 'Well done'; and then in the light of the past year set fresh goals for the coming year. In addition, annual appraisals provide an opportunity for any difficulties to be picked up at an early stage and dealt with appropriately. In this sense appraisals may be likened to a form of preventative medicine. Within the context of reviewing a person's ministry, a skilled appraiser can discern areas which, without attention, might lead to subsequent disaster. Appraisals provide an opportunity for early diagnosis of problems. They also provide a safe place for the kind of straight talking which is not otherwise normally possible. It is important, however, to emphasise that in the first place appraisals, rightly conducted, are positive up-building experiences.

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