

EVERY MINISTER NEEDS A CHURCH OFFICE

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Ministers need to work from church. Church offices for ministers are not a luxury to be enjoyed only by larger churches – they should be normal in every church, whatever the size.

In the first instance, working from church increases efficiency. With an office at church, ministers know that they need to begin work when everybody else does. Without a church office, ministers can easily be tempted to have a leisurely read of the morning paper or to take the children to school, and not actually get down to any solid work until well past nine o'clock. Without a church office, coffee breaks can often be longer – especially if there is cricket on the television or the wife is around! A church office helps a more disciplined approach to work.

In the second instance, working from church provides accessibility. For many people it takes a good deal of courage to knock at the door of the manse for help. Popping one's head around the door of the minister's office, is so much easier. Unless I am in confidential discussions, the door to my office is always open – a sign that I am always available to those who need me. In so far as I work in a seven-day-a-week church, where there is action from 8.30 in the morning to 10 o'clock at night, you might think that an open door would guarantee little formal work would be done. In fact, people respect my need to study and rarely abuse the hospitality of my office.

In the third place, working from church frees up home to be home. When I am finished work, I can go home and enjoy the privacy of my home. My members know that if they want me, then they can phone me – at church. Yes, of course, I am always available at home in times of emergency – whatever the day, whatever the time. But I am not available for routine pastoral demands which can be dealt with during the day. Furthermore, to encourage this notion of home being home, I do not conduct any business at home – if people want to see me, they see me at church; leadership (i.e. deacons') meetings and committee meetings are also held at church. The only time I open up my home to the church is when Caroline and I engage in genuine hospitality.

In the fourth place, in a team situation working from church fosters collegiality. Although I have a formal ministry team meeting every Monday morning, almost every day I meet with the members of my team on an informal basis. We drop into one another's offices for a coffee and reflect together on the latest pastoral challenge. We work together so much better precisely because we work from church together.

Yes, I appreciate that some churches are strapped for space. But I believe that the needs of the minister's office should take precedence over every other need in the church, bar the need to have space for worship!