

HOW SHOULD A MINISTER SPEND A SUNDAY OFF?

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The Baptist Union recommends that Baptist ministers receive five weeks for holiday plus another week for study. In addition, many Baptist ministers receive a further two, if not three Sundays off a year. In other words, most Baptist ministers can be away from their churches for eight if not nine Sundays a year. At first sight this seems to be a generous arrangement. Or is it? It certainly was in the 'old days', when most workers were limited to two or three weeks of holiday a year – then ministers tended to have much longer holidays than did their members. But today everybody seems to have at least five weeks holiday – indeed, when public holidays are added, it is not unusual for people to have six if not seven weeks of holiday. And, of course, in addition a good number of people regularly take advantage of cheap flights and within any given year will have a couple of weekends away on the Continent – not to count weekends spent visiting friends and relations. No wonder so many people only attend church twice a month!

It would be interesting to know, in addition to actual holidays, how often the average couple in our churches go away for a weekend together. Many more than are available to their ministers, I would think. In the past when most ministers' spouses didn't go out to work, this was not such a problem – but with most ministers' spouses now at work, there is no time during the week when such ministers and their spouses can get away together. Indeed, as I look through my diary for this autumn, I find that even most of my Saturdays are taken up with church work (e.g. five weddings). The fact is that, generally speaking, ministers and their spouses have much less opportunity to be together than do their members.

But what happens when ministers do have a free Sunday? What then? Many ministers, of course, will use the time to go and visit friends and relations. If there is money in the kitty, then they may well go and spend a 'cheap' weekend in Rome, Seville, or wherever. Some ministers use their free Sundays to preach – although I shall be doing precisely that on one Sunday this autumn, the cynic within me wonders whether sometimes we ministers preach away not so much out of sense of vocation, as out of a need to boost one's ego (its nice to be wanted) or one's bank balance (even a small preaching fee can make a difference)!

But what happens when one is home and has a free Sunday? Does one stay at home? Or does one visit another church? Although I have done both, if I'm at home I normally want to be in my own church, at least for the morning service. For church is family – and it seems unnatural not to go and be part of that family. Its great, however, not to be on duty – to be like others and turn up just in time for church, and then not to have to be the last to leave church. Yes, I delight in my free Sundays, even if it involves going to my own church!