

MINISTERS' WIVES

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Forgive me for being sexist, but I want to write about ministers' wives – and in particular about one minister's wife.

Years ago I was married to the perfect minister's wife. She was the real MacCoy! She was President of the Women's Meeting – even although she was at least 30 years younger than most of the members. She started an outreach meeting for younger ladies. She led three Bible studies a week for women in the church and hosted an evening home group in the Manse. Thanks to au-pairs in the home, she was present at both morning and evening service. What's more, she had four children and so boosted the numbers at the Sunday School. Almost nothing happened at the church without her. And, of course, at home she did all the cooking and all the baking – meals were always on time. She was a real full-time minister's wife.

Today, however, I am married to a very different woman. For the time came when Caroline retrained – she gained a law degree and became a barrister. Now she is one of only 24 'whole-time' coroners, and in that role has almost 5000 deaths reported to her every year. Apart from chairing the management committee of our child contact centre, she no longer has any official duties in the church. She is no longer a member of a home group – for most evenings she is preparing conducting inquests in court. She rarely attends the evening service – for that too is preparation time. Being a Coroner is quite literally a 24/7 job – we can't even go out to dinner without the mobile being on. She is involved in all sorts of national committees and is busy training other coroners. It's a very pressurised, high profile life. As for all the cooking and all the baking, life has changed considerably – her husband has now learned to cook. Yet she is also a minister's wife.

In many ways, life is very different today. However, in spite of the differences, some of the pressures are still the same. There is, for instance, the pressure of unsocial hours. Most evenings I am out until 10 o'clock – visiting or attending a meeting. What with services morning, afternoon, and evening. Sundays too are characterised by my absence from the home. Saturdays are often taken up with church events – in the next four weeks, for instance, I have weddings every Saturday. My free day is Friday – but it is only Friday evening when Caroline is free. That's why holidays are so important to us. We probably spend more on holidays than most people do – but they are almost the only time when we can be sure we can be together.

Yes, even for the most 'secular' of minister's wives, there is a price to be paid in ministry. We ministers should be grateful to God for our partners – and so too should the churches!

Paul Beasley-Murray