

Editorial

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By Paul Beasley-Murray

Busy Days and Mondays

"Sunday is your busy day". If I've heard it once, I've heard it a thousand times. And it infuriates me. Yes, I know that it is normally meant in jest, but I find it insulting and unthinking. Sunday is not my only busy day, for although I normally work an eleven hour day on a Sunday, that is nothing special. On average I put in over 60 hours a week, and without complaint. And that is true of many of my colleagues. Most ministers work pretty hard throughout the week. Yes, I know that there are exceptions - a young minister who told me recently that once his 37 hours were done, that was that, his duty is over. But for most of us, Sunday is only one of our many busy days.

Yet, Sunday is a particularly busy day for most ministers. Unlike other days in the week where I can, if necessary, be flexible with my diary, Sundays have certain fixed points. I have three services to take (morning, afternoon and evening), but, unlike some of my Anglican colleagues, I have others with whom to share the workload, so that I rarely have to preach at all three services.

Nonetheless, I find Sunday an exhausting day. In part, I guess, this is because, as a Nonconformist, every service has to be crafted for the occasion from start to finish. I have to expend tremendous energy in ensuring that the service 'works'. In both the preaching and the liturgy, a Nonconformist minister is very much a 'performer', particularly in a large church. An experienced Australian Baptist pastor of a thousand-strong congregation once spoke of the weekly 'show' he put on for his people. Such a description of worship may sound offensive, and understandably so. First and foremost, worship is about acknowledging God's worth and has nothing to do with impressing others. Yet, precisely because we ministers are seeking to enable people to worship God, we have to ensure that we give of our best to them too. For me, as I am sure for others, this involves a massive amount of preparation. Every Wednesday morning, for instance, I sit with my worship co-ordinator and agree on the shape of the service. Prior to that meeting the various worship bands (we have four worship bands to cope with the variety of services we put on) will have contributed their suggestions to the songs that we will sing. Hymns and readings need to be chosen. Other items need to be agreed. Next Sunday morning, for instance, a cello and piano duet will play during communion; last Sunday our Gospel choir sang; another Sunday our dance group might contribute. There might be an interview. The prayers of intercession (led by various church members) may need to be given a special focus. As senior minister I am at the heart of all this preparation. The upshot is that whether or not I am preaching, I am an integral part of almost every Sunday service.

So, there I am, every Sunday morning, afternoon, and evening, if not actually out front, then willing others on. Add to this standing at the door and meeting people, and then fare-welling them after the service, together with all the other demands of the day (last Sunday it was a newcomers' reception, this Sunday a dedication party, another Sunday a meeting of worship leaders), and I end up exhausted and good for nothing but to watch the late night television thriller.

As a result, on Monday morning I am far from being at my best. Indeed, if the truth be told, most Mondays I don't just feel tired, I often feel incredibly depressed. Some Mondays I could almost weep. And yet there is no rational reason for my sadness and depression; indeed, normally there is every reason why I should be grateful to God for the way in which Sunday went so well. What is happening is that I am just reacting to the release from all the pressure which accompanied the build-up to Sunday. It is not normally until Tuesday that I recover my normal 'bounce' and energy again.

No doubt it is precisely because of these 'Monday blues' that traditionally Monday is the minister's day off. Yet I take Friday as mine, partly because we hold our weekly team meeting on a Monday morning (there is always so much to catch up on after Sunday), and partly because Friday is a far better day for my wife (Friday evening is the one evening in the week when she knows that she doesn't have to prepare for the following day). There is also the somewhat perverse reasoning that I don't want to have as my day off the day when I feel my worst!

Goodness, I've just re-read the above and realised what a 'grumpy old man' I have been. Perhaps it is because I'm actually writing this on a Monday. The truth of the matter is that, however draining ministry can be, I feel exceedingly privileged to be a minister of the Gospel. There is certainly no 'job' I would rather I do. Furthermore, there are so many encouragements too. Ministry, for me at least, is immensely rewarding.

So am I being just unusually ungrateful when I go on about how draining Sundays can be? How do you experience Sundays? And how do you cope with the demands of Sunday? Answers, please, in the form of short contributions (300-500 words) to me as General Editor!