

Editorial

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By Paul Beasley-Murray

As a result of damaging my wrist by falling off the top of a ladder and not having power-assisted steering, I have been walking most days to my church this past week. It has been an interesting experience, for on my way I pass Chelmsford railway station, apparently the busiest commuter station in the South-East. As I walk down to church early in the morning I see hundreds of half-asleep commuters, and hundreds more of stressed-out commuters as I walk past the station in the early evening. The very sight of these 'half-dead' specimens of humanity reminds me of the privilege we have as ministers not to be commuters. Yes, most of us work long hours: every evening this week I have been out, and on most of those evenings I have had two if not three appointments. But at least we are doing something positive with those hours, rather than just commuting. In our area it is not unusual for some commuters to spend three or more hours a day commuting - multiply that by five, and it amounts up to a significant amount of time.

Commuting, too, affects the mid-week programme of the church. Although we offer a meal, we have found that we cannot run an Alpha course before seven o'clock, simply because people are not able to get back any earlier, and we always have some who do not arrive until 7.30pm. Other evening meetings in our church normally begin at 8 pm, but even then we have to ensure we end relatively early, because many of our commuters will be on the station platform not much after 6am (so-called 'early morning' prayer meetings at 7 a.m. are too late to catch most of our commuters).

But should we expect our commuters to attend our mid-week meetings? Are we really being fair to them? Furthermore, the problem becomes more acute when both husband and wife are commuting: it means that when they get home there is no meal on the table. By the time they have made a simple meal, collapsed on the settee to watch a few minutes of television, they are ready to go to bed. As one of my members once said to me, "I get so screwed up during the week, you are lucky to see me on a Sunday morning". I believe we ministers need to be more understanding of the stresses faced by our people, and tailor our church programmes accordingly.

The only alternative would be to challenge our members to adopt a simpler life-style by giving up jobs which require commuting. But what right have we as comfortable non-commuters to make such a challenge? And do we seriously want sections of our society to become 'Christian-free' zones?

What do you think? Why not post up your response on our Ministry Today web-site!