

Editorial

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By Paul Beasley-Murray

Is Ministry In Crisis?

Ten years ago at the launch of Ministry Today, then known as the Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry, I said: "Christian ministry is in crisis. And yet strangely many church people seem to be oblivious to it. In the last 25 years somewhere between a quarter and a third of those ordained into Christian ministry are now back in secular jobs. Of those who remain many are suffering from symptoms of burnout and disillusionment; others carry on with enthusiasm, but not always with great insight and skill".

That was in 1994. But are those words as true now? Or, as one of my friends responsible for the welfare of ministers in one of our mainline denominations, said to me: "Ministry is not in crisis - it is simply a number of individual clergy whose ministry is in crisis". I am not so sure..

* In my book *Power for God's Sake*, published in 1998, I wrote up the results of a survey of some 250 church leaders. That survey revealed that "most ministers under 45 have considered giving up their calling"; and that "one in six ministers leave their churches in 'unhappy circumstances'".

* In the autumn of 2000, CWR, in association with the Evangelical Alliance, published *Pastoral Care Today: Practice, Problems and Priorities in Churches Today*. Based on a survey of 754 pastors, it revealed that two out of every five pastors feel overwhelmed by pastoral care demands, and over half have considered leaving the ministry.

* In 2002 the Society of Mary and Martha published *Affirmation and Accountability: Practical Suggestions for preventing clergy stress, sickness and ill-health retirement*. Its authors, Carl Lee and Sarah Horsman, wrote: "We have not set out to quantify the problem ... We believe that the problems of clergy stress, sickness and early ill-health retirement are of sufficient magnitude to warrant serious attention..."

* In a survey of one major UK denomination, published in *Care for the Family* this year, the percentage of ministers who had considered leaving the ministry because of the workload was rated as 39%, a figure which did not include that who have considered leaving the ministry for other reasons!

* At this year's Baptist Assembly, I chaired a Ministry Today seminar where Nigel Coles, one of our Baptist regional ministers, presented the fruit of his research into Baptist ministry over a 50 year period (1946-1995). His conclusion? "50% of those entering ministry do not retire in it".

In the light of these statistics, is the word 'crisis' too strong a term? There is certainly a need out there. Hence the aim of Ministry Today to help ministers 'survive and thrive' in ministry. Or to be more precise, our aim "is to provide a supportive resource for all in Christian leadership, so that they may survive, grow, develop, and become more effective in the ministry to which Christ has called them".