

**College of Baptist Ministers  
Monthly Newsletter March 2016**

**Ignite: Investing in Leaders  
Some reflections from Paul Beasley-Murray**

The Board of the College of Baptist Ministers (CBM) read with great interest *Ignite: Investing in Leaders - a review of ministry for consideration by ministers, churches, and colleges* (Baptist Union of Great Britain, December 2015), and spent a whole day considering its proposals. At the very outset we wish to make clear that there is much in this report that we welcome and applaud – and not least the emphasis on the need for Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) to be part of the culture of Baptist ministry. It is within this context of appreciation that the criticisms that we have to offer should be read. In our response we follow the order of the report

### **Executive Summary**

“Ministry is Changing – our mission context is changing”. We recognise that change is not an option. At a time of rapid cultural change, it is vital for churches to respond to those changes. However, we are surprised at the uncritical acceptance of change. Not all change is good – and sometimes changing patterns of thought and behaviour need to be challenged.

### **Data analysis**

We welcome the statistical analysis.

- We note that the profile of ministers in active service appears to be ageing – in the pie chart only 2% of ministers under 30, while the largest segment is made up of ministers in the 51-60 age-group.
- We note with a little surprise that the major recession of 2007/2008 does not appear to have markedly affected the number of ministers in our churches. We would have been interested to know the number of ministers who are now working part-time. Our impression is that a number of ministers who previously worked full-time are now working part-time because their churches can no longer afford to pay them a full stipend (not least because due to the pension deficit the ‘cost’ of supporting a full-time minister has increased by more than £3000 per annum).
- In the data relating to churches with three or more ministers, we presume that the figures refer to ministers ‘recognised’ by the Baptist Union as distinct from ‘accredited’ by the Baptist Union. In our experience most larger staff teams contain a sizeable proportion of non-accredited ministers.
- We are concerned that the charts on members per minister are statistically compromised. No distinction is made between full and part-time ministers. The graph of average size of church with 0/1/2 ministers fails to indicate whether

average means arithmetic mean (total members divided by number of churches) or median (the middle church when ranked according to size smallest to largest).

## **Marks of ministry**

In the opening section of 'patterns of ministry' there seems to be an uncritical acceptance that leaders in some churches have not been formally trained for the ministry which they are exercising. At this point the authors of the report seem to be making 'a virtue out of a necessity'. Furthermore, we question whether this pattern of church-life "more genuinely reflects our understanding of what it means to be the 'Body of Christ'". In terms of our Baptist history the role of the pastor has always been highly valued and has been seen as distinct from other forms of Christian service. The fact that all God's people are gifted for service does not mean that all are called to serve as pastors in God's church. Reference is made to the way in which many churches appoint 'internal' candidates to lead the church: however, no mention is made of the difficulties which often follow.

In the section 'expressions of ministry', we question the assumption that traditional pastor-teachers tend not to be missional and strategic. Down through the years at every ordination service the ordinands has been reminded to 'do the work of an evangelist' (2 Tim 4.5). Any shepherd of the sheep is concerned for those who have yet to be part of the flock (John 10.16). The very rite of believer's baptism has meant that Baptist ministers (unlike perhaps some Anglican clergy in a traditional parish) have always been mission-minded. Spurgeon's College, for instance, was founded on the understanding that 'pastors' were evangelists and church planters.

We believe that the desire to develop a 'single list' of accredited persons runs the danger of looking for the lowest-common denominator. It appears to us that in order to accommodate the role of 'pioneers' the role of pastor-teachers has been watered down. We would prefer that we aim to equip all those we accredit to the highest levels of effective and dynamic ministry.

We would have liked the report to have been more explicit on the role of 'pioneers'. We are not sure of the Scriptural under-pinning of the role. We recognise that churches were planted throughout the Roman Empire, and Paul, as well as others, was active as a church planter, and that this may be construed as a particular expression of the apostolic ministry, not to be conflated with the Twelve. However, we question the assumption sometimes made that today's pioneers are the equivalent of the 'apostles' found in Eph 4.11. This assumption runs contrary to the accepted interpretation of scholars that the 'apostles' and 'prophets' exercised a foundational role as the authoritative recipients and proclaimers of the mystery of Christ (see Eph 2.20; 3.5). This is not to deny the need for cross-cultural 'evangelists' who can engage with men and women who have no knowledge of the Gospel, but whether all such evangelists should be regarded as 'ministers' is a moot point.

We believe that there is a distinct role of the pastor-teacher which is rooted in the Scriptural understanding of ministry, and do not see why ministers-in-training should not be prepared for that role. Central to that role, for instance, is preaching and teaching. We base this

assertion not just on one proof text (we find it significant that the Scripture passage constantly alluded to in the report is Eph 4.11 (wrongly referred to in the report as 'Ephesians 5'). Jesus, for instance, came preaching the Good News (Mark 1.14) and so too should those who serve him in today's ministry. A bishop, says Paul to Timothy, should be 'an apt teacher' (1 Tim 3.2); and Timothy himself is told to 'preach the word' (1 Tim 4.2-5). The report seems to assume that whatever a minister is called to, is a valid calling: but this form of post-modernism – 'whatever you feel is right' – is a nonsense. We recommend that the role of preacher or 'bearer of the Word' (as an earlier report described ministry) assume a higher priority than this report appears to give. We believe the Spirit of God still uses able preachers to proclaim the good news of Jesus, and to teach the people of God so that they become mature in the faith.

We question the statement that "it is primarily down to the local church to determine the core competencies for any ministry appointment it wishes to make". The local church may well create job-descriptions which give a particular emphasis to the way in which ministry is to be carried out, but this should not bring into question the 'core competencies' of ministry. There is still a place, we believe, for nationally agreed descriptions for the practice of ministry.

We question too the assumption that defining ministry in the language of competencies risk 'an ever expanding and unmanageable schedule'. This has not been our experience. Indeed, we have welcomed the emphasis on competency. We believe that ministry is not just a way of 'being' – it is also a way of 'doing'.

Having said that, clearly ministry does involve character, and so we welcome, for instance, the description of such 'marks of ministry calling' as "a personal maturity and deepening of a candidates relationship with Christ", "someone whom others naturally trust and follow", and "tenacity and character in the face of disappointment and struggle". Similarly in 'the marks of ministry formation' we like the emphasis on such virtues of "being someone who is a self-starter and takes initiative" and on the need to become "a leader and team-builder". However, we find there is a vagueness in the report on "being someone who seeks and draws others into an awareness of God's presence". In our view, amidst all the changes in ministry there still needs to be an ability to lead people in worship and to expound Scripture. We find it strange that the only reference to the Bible is in a quotation from Glen Marshall (which we happily endorse) to support the need for a ministers to be "a theologian or 'God thinker'". With regard to 'the ongoing marks of ministry', we like what is said – but are concerned about what has been left out. There is more to ministry than the qualities listed in this section.

### **Affirming and developing ministry**

We have no difficulty with the concept of 'living in covenant' – this been around for some time.

We note the way in which responsibility of recognising ministry is increasingly rooted in the Associations. However, removing decision-making (as distinct from a regulatory function)

from a centralised Ministerial Recognition Committee does run the risk of Associations being pressurised by some of the more 'powerful' churches in their Association – there are times when it is easier for a national body to decline a candidate. We therefore urge the adoption of external moderation of Association Ministerial Recognition panels by the inclusion of those who either represent the national voice, or who come from neighbouring associations.

### **Ministry Formation**

Within the context of the London Baptist Association there has been much to be said for the 'portfolio route' for certain individuals. However, we fear that this route is open to abuse. If this form of training comes to be regarded as an optional route open to all, then there is the danger that some will want to go that way just to save themselves the expense of college fees, which may in turn result in a poorer formation for ministry. At a time when increasingly a first degree is not sufficient to gain a job, we believe that it is vital that there is a clear academic component to the formation of ministry. We should be encouraging our ministers to achieve academically. If the academic component is regarded as optional, then many may well opt out simply to make life easier for themselves. We find it curious that in church life there is a resistance to academic preparation for ministry just at the time when in most other professions the bar for academic elements is being raised.

We welcome the general approach to 'formation partnerships'. However, we believe that more thought needs to be given to "who assumes 'overall responsibility' for an individual's ministry formation". There is a danger in giving ultimate authority to an Association – not least because a local association is always prone to pressure from individual churches. We believe that there is a role for a national body too. We would draw attention to the fact that most other professions have more than one qualifying body.

### **Ministry in Covenant**

We warmly welcome the emphasis on 'continuing ministerial development'. As an aside, however, we would take issue with the view that 'professionalization' of ministry could undermine the calling and vocational nature of accredited ministry. Rightly understood, professionalism in ministry is a reflection of our desire to give God our very best – it is an aspect of spirituality!

We too would wish CMD to be part of the 'culture' of ministry. However, we do not believe it is realistic for this to be managed by regional ministers: in the first instance, we do not see regional ministers having the time for this; in the second instance, we believe that the pastoral role of a regional minister would be in conflict with a regulatory role. Furthermore, if this overseeing of CMD were applied to regional ministers alone we believe the ground that has been gained in seeing regional ministry as in part a missional ministry would be lost. There is also the very practical concern that we do not see the Associations having the financial capacity to assume this task.

We believe that CMD is best conducted by bodies independent of the Association and which are not perceived as having an influence on a minister's 'career'. The College of Baptist Ministers would be very happy to be one of those bodies responsible for overseeing CMD of Baptist ministers and in this regard has already developed a business plan.

### **Helping churches to receive and recognise ministry**

We welcome the concept of a code of practice.

25/02/2016.