

RADICAL LEADERS

A guide for elders and deacons in Baptist churches

by Paul Beasley-Murray

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Paul Beasley-Murray Books
www.paulbeasleymurray.com

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Dedication

In appreciation of all those deacons who served with me in my churches in Altrincham and in Chelmsford. To a large degree I am what I am because of them

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A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Paul Beasley-Murray read Modern Languages (French and German) and Theology at Jesus College, Cambridge. While completing a PhD in New Testament studies at Manchester University, he trained for the ministry at the Northern Baptist College, Manchester, and at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Rüslikon-Zurich. Ordained on 10 October 1970, he served with the Baptist Missionary Society in Congo/Zaire, where he taught New Testament and Greek in the Protestant Theological Faculty of the National University (1970-1972). Paul pastored two churches: Altrincham Baptist Church, Cheshire (1973-1986) and Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, Essex (1993-2014). He was also Principal of Spurgeon's College, London (1986-1992).

Throughout his ministry Paul has been a prolific author. In addition to *Radical Leaders: a guide for elders and deacons* Paul has written *Radical Believers: the Baptist way of being the church* (1st edition 1992; 2nd edition 2006; 3rd edition 2020) and *Radical Disciples: a course for new Christians* (1st edition 1996; 2nd edition 2005; 3rd edition 2020). He also wrote *Baptism, Belonging and Breaking of Bread: preparing for baptism* (1st edition 2010; 2nd edition 2020). All of these are available electronically and are to be found on his web-site: www.paulbeasleymurray.com

Paul has written widely on ministry. His books in print or available electronically include *Power for God's Sake? Power & Abuse in the Local Church* (Paternoster 1998; republished 2005 by Wipf & Stock); *Transform Your Church: 50 Very Practical Steps* (IVP 2005); a four-volume guide to ministry, *Living Out the Call* (Feed-a-Read 2015; revised 2016); *Make the Most of Retirement: a guide for ministers* (BRF 2020); and *Fifty Lessons in Ministry: Reflections after Fifty Years of Ministry* (DLT 2020). In 2017 he updated two booklets on pastoral care, *A Loved One Dies: Help in the first few weeks* and *Happy Ever After? A workbook for couples preparing for marriage*, both published by the College of Baptist Ministers, and are available electronically on his website

Paul has also written more specifically on preaching. His books in print include *The Message of the Resurrection* (IVP 2000) and *Joy to the World: Preaching at Christmas* (IVP 2005). In 2021 IVP will publish *There is Hope! Preaching at Funerals*

He has had published two research reports on retirement: *Retirement Matters for Ministers: A report into a research project into how Baptist ministers experience retirement* (College of Baptist Ministers, 2018); and *Entering New Territory. Why are retired Baptist ministers moving to Anglican churches? What are the underlying theological issues?* (College of Baptist Ministers, 2019), both of which are available in print and electronically.

More generally he has written his autobiography; *This is my story: a story of life, faith, and ministry* (Wipf & Stock 2018)

In addition, every Thursday he posts a blog relating to *Church Matters*.

INTRODUCTION

“I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace” (Eph 3.7).

Finding our roots

Radical Believers, Radical Disciples, now Radical Leaders. Quite unintentionally a series has developed. *Radical Believers* seeks to root in the New Testament the Baptist way of being the church.¹ *Radical Disciples* is a baptismal course which looks at what the Scriptures have to say on various aspects of the Christian life.² And now *Radical Leaders* seeks to root the distinctive role of Christian leadership within the New Testament.

Let me make it clear from the start. Baptist churches today are undoubtedly different from the churches we encounter within the pages of the New Testament. Life has moved on, and conditions are so very different. Most Baptist churches, for instance, have their own building. Many Baptist churches have trained pastors. We have hymn books and PowerPoint to help us in our worship. There is no way in which we can re-create a New Testament church. Yet I believe that there are fundamental principles of church life to be found in the New Testament which are still of great relevance. Furthermore, what is true of church life in general, is true of Christian leadership in particular. Yes, I freely accept that there is no divine blueprint on which every aspect of church life and Christian leadership can be patterned. The church constitutions and rules by which we govern our life would no doubt amaze the Apostle Paul. Yet in spite of all the complexities of modern church life, people are still people. The emotions and aspirations which bubble beneath the surface of every church are not peculiar to our day, but rather would have been familiar to the apostles of old. Precisely because the human condition has not fundamentally changed, the teaching of the New Testament still speaks into our situation.

The conviction therefore underlying this guide to Christian leadership is that we need to root our life together in the New Testament. Hence the adjective ‘radical’. ‘Radical’ does not necessarily imply that every deacon or elder votes Labour and flies the Red Flag. Nor for that matter that every deacon or elder sports a straggly beard, wears open sandals even in the depths of winter and belongs to some freakish anti-technological group. No, the English word ‘radical’ is derived from the Latin word *radix* which means ‘root’. Radical leaders are those who root their practice and style of leadership in principles to be discerned in the pages of the New Testament.

The challenge of diversity

One of the difficulties I face in writing this guide to leadership is the differences which result from the size of churches. For instance, the dynamics of being a leader in

¹ *Radical Believers: the Baptist way of being the church* (Baptist Union of Great Britain 1st edition 1992; 2nd edition 2006). The 3rd edition (2020) is available electronically at www.paulbeasleymurray.com.

² *Radical Disciples: a course for new Christians* (Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1st edition 1996; 2nd edition 2005). The 3rd edition (2020) is available electronically at www.paulbeasleymurray.com.

a church with thirty-five members are very different from being a leader in a church with 350 members – and all the more so if the church with thirty five members is not able to support a pastor. At every stage it will be necessary for readers to contextualise what I am saying, so that it becomes relevant to you and your church.

A further difficulty is writing this guide for ‘lay’ leaders within Baptist churches is that of terminology. The very fact that I have had to put the word ‘lay’ in inverted commas is one sign of the difficulty. For in certain circles the word ‘lay’ is the ecclesiastic equivalent of a non-politically correct word. ‘Clergy’ (what an abominable word!) as much as ‘non-clergy’ belong to the people (Greek *laos*) of God. Indeed, bearing in mind the Greek term *laos*, it could be maintained that all of us, ordained and non-ordained, belong to God’s ‘laity’ (1 Pet 2.9). So what alternative generic term do we find for ‘lay’ leaders? Is this book for the non-ordained. The very term ‘non-ordained’ is a little negative and sounds a put-down, suggesting that something is missing! Is this a book for leaders who are not in ‘full-time’ service? Again the term is unhelpful and suggests that the world of work is of little value in the sight of God.

This book is for deacons and elders. But that description again begs a question. What is the difference between deacons and elders? The question becomes complicated since the majority of Baptist churches do not have elders. True, there was a time when one stream of Baptist life did have elders and deacons, but by and large the office of elder has died out. Since the 1960s the office of elder has been re-introduced into a number of Baptist churches, largely as a result of charismatic renewal. In such churches elders are seen as having a leadership role in the spiritual and pastoral affairs of the church, while deacons are seen as responsible for the more practical affairs of the church’s life. In practice, however, the distinction between the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘practical’ cannot easily be maintained – the handling of money, for instance, normally seen as a diaconal responsibility, calls for a high degree of spirituality! On the other hand, it is true to say that in some churches where there are no elders, although in theory the deacons are responsible for overseeing both the spiritual and practical affairs of the church’s life, time and again the practical concerns override the spiritual ones.

What does the New Testament have to say about this? Very little! As we shall see in the next chapter, although it is clear that in the church at Ephesus there were both elders and deacons (see 1 Tim 3.1-13), the pattern does not appear to have been repeated at Corinth or at Jerusalem. Furthermore, nobody can be sure of the difference in role between elders and deacons and Ephesus – the one clear distinguishing feature between elders (otherwise known as ‘bishops’ or ‘overseers’) is that they had to be gifted to teach (1 Tim 3.2). Add to all this the fact that the term ‘elder’ reflects a society where middle age did not exist (‘young’ men were deemed to be under forty, while anybody over forty was deemed to be an ‘old’ man!) and the re-introduction of the term becomes, to my way of thinking, all the more strange. The fact is that there is no one clear blueprint for leadership within the New Testament – there are simply principles for leadership.

But to return to my present dilemma. It is not my brief to bring about a change of terminology in Baptist churches. If you only have deacons in your church, God bless

you! If you have both deacons and elders in your church, God bless you too! My concern is to address the issue of leadership. Yet to speak in terms of ‘elders and deacons’ all the time can be cumbersome. I therefore propose to use the term ‘leaders’. ‘Leaders’ in this context includes both elders and deacons. ‘Leaders’ meetings’ (in some churches called leadership team meetings) refers both to elders’ meetings and deacons’ meetings. Pastors, of course, are also leaders – indeed, they are called to spearhead the mission and ministry of the church by acting as the leaders of the leaders. However, this book is not in the first place intended for pastors.

The ministry of all and the leadership of some

Amidst all the diversity to be found in Baptist churches, Baptists are at one in their belief in the ministry of all believers. A number of Bible passages could be cited supporting this doctrine, but the chapter which particularly comes to mind is 1 Corinthians 12. Here Paul develops the picture of the church as a body. God, says Paul, has so designed the body that the involvement of every person with his or her special gift is necessary for the proper functioning of the community. Every member has a unique role to play. However, there are particular leadership roles given by God to certain individuals, but these individuals do not have a monopoly of the Holy Spirit. For best results, all God’s people are needed, pulling together.

One expression of the ministry of all believers is to be found in the Baptist church meeting. Baptists believe that it is as they come together in the name of the Lord Jesus that God makes his will known for their life together. The church meeting is the ultimate authority in the life of any Baptist church. However, this is not to deny the place of leadership in the context of the church meeting. In the words of Frank Cooke, a former President of the Baptist Union:

“The church meeting is not a papal audience nor is it a ‘Parliamentary party battle ground’. It is the family of God rejoicing in its response to visionary and loving leadership, in worship, in prayer, and in mutual submission to one another.”³

It is important to point out that although ecclesiologically the church meeting has ultimate authority with regard to any decisions taken by the church, when it comes to the law the church’s leaders are held responsible for the church’s decisions. In legal terms the church’s leaders (whether they be ministers, elders or deacons) are the ‘charity trustees’ who ‘have the general control and management of the administration of the charity’ and who in turn are subject to the general requirement of charity law.⁴

High calling but high stress

³ See Frank Cooke, ‘Frankly Speaking’, *The Fraternal* 211 (July 1985) 9. For a more detailed consideration of the church meeting see *Radical Believers*, ‘Living under the Lordship of Christ – Authority among Baptists’.

⁴ This is a complex area. There are for instance differences between ‘unincorporated churches’ and ‘incorporated churches’ See the Baptist Union’s Guidelines Leaflets 15: ‘*Help I’m a charity trustee*’ and 16: ‘*Conflicts of interest*’.

It's a wonderful privilege to be elected a leader in the church of God. The church in its wisdom has expressed its confidence in you and in the gifts that God has given you. You have been given a special opportunity to serve God and your fellow church members as you help give shape and direction to your church. For the next few years you will be at the very heart of the church's life. There will be little that you will not know. Assuming that you have a pastor, you probably will be able to draw alongside your pastor in a way which would not normally be possible to other people. From time to time your involvement as a leader may expose you to a degree of pain; for inevitably as a leader you will experience perhaps more than most some of the heartaches of the church family to which you belong. Yet almost certainly the joys will outweigh the sorrows. Hopefully your very experience of working with other church leaders will prove to be catalyst to your own spiritual growth.

Yet there is also a considerable responsibility in being a leader. The spiritual vitality of any church, for instance, is to a large extent dependent on its leaders. Or to put it in personal terms, the success of your church's mission and ministry is not just dependent upon your pastor, but is just as equally dependent upon the vision and dedication which you and your fellow leaders possess. If your church has no pastor, then your church is even more dependent upon the spiritual calibre of its leaders. It's an awesome and challenging responsibility to be elected a deacon.

It's also a time-consuming calling. There is far more to being a leader than simply attending a leaders' meeting every now and again. For along with your normal commitments as a church member - and one would normally assume that this included regular attendance at all the main worship services and church meetings and whatever other core activities your church might feel it right to run - there are a host of other responsibilities which become now incumbent upon you. In this guide we shall seek to explore what some of these responsibilities involve. For leaders who also have responsibilities at work and at home, balancing all these conflicting interests is no easy thing. In a very real sense it is costly being a leader. But then did not David say: "I will not offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing" (2 Sam 24.24)?

1. BIBLICAL PATTERNS FOR LEADERSHIP

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3.16,17).

Leadership is a gift

All God's people are called to serve, but not all are called to lead. As Paul makes clear in 1 Corinthians 12, God gives many and various gifts, most of which relate to ministry in general. Some, however, relate to the ministry of leadership in particular.

In 1 Cor 12.28 Paul refers to “those with gifts of administration” (NIV), or more accurately, those with gifts of “leadership” (NRSV). The underlying Greek noun literally means ‘helmsmanship’. It was a term often used metaphorically in Greek literature of the art of government: the statesman guiding the ‘ship of state’. Here in 1 Corinthians 12 the ship in question is the church. Within the context of every-member-ministry there are those specially gifted to ‘preside’ over the church, guiding the life of the church in its worship, its mission, and its caring ministry.

This ministry of leadership appears also in the list of the gifts of the Spirit in Rom 12.8, where Paul says that “leaders” should exercise their gift with “diligence” (NRSV; NIV is similar), or as the GNB translates: “Whoever has authority should work hard”. It is true that in some older English versions a different translation is found: for instance, the RSV translates the phrase, “he who gives aid, with zeal”. In fact, the underlying Greek verb can mean both ‘to lead’ and ‘to care for’. However, rather than seeking to make distinctions between these two meanings, it is more helpful to note how the two meanings may interrelate: leadership within a church context is not about the exercise of power, but rather is about the exercise of care.

The concept of leadership is also present in Paul's third list of spiritual gifts in Eph 4.7-13, where Paul mentions the office of the pastor-teacher. Like all the other offices, in the first place the emphasis is upon the ‘enabling’ aspect of this ministry - pastor-teachers enable the people of God to fulfil their various ministries. However, the term “pastor” also carried clear overtones of leadership, for in the ancient world the word ‘pastor’ or ‘shepherd’ was often used as a synonym for a ‘leader’ or ‘king’.

Leadership is a gift for women too

The New Testament teaches that the Spirit gives his gifts irrespective of gender (Acts 2.17,18). Although certain cultural situations might limit leadership to men (see 1 Cor 11.3-6; 14.33-36; 1 Tim 2.11-15), in principle there is no Scriptural reason why women should not share in the leadership. In the church in Rome, for instance, women as well as men took the lead: thus Paul mentions that Phoebe was a deacon (Rom 16.1,2), Prisca was a teacher (Rom 16.3), and Junia was even an apostle (see Rom 16.7). From Acts 21.9 (see also Acts 2.17,18) we learn that women were also prophets.

There is therefore no reason why women may not share the leadership with men in today's church. The long-presumed superiority of male over against female no longer exists in Christ (Gal 3.28). In Christ a new order has come into being. Women can and should expect to play varying roles within Christian leadership.

Leadership is always shared

The churches of the New Testament always enjoyed shared ministry. For example, the leadership of the church at Antioch was in the hands of a group of “prophets and teachers” (Acts 13.1). In Asia Minor Paul and Barnabas appointed “elders” in each church (Acts 14.23). The leadership of the Jerusalem church was made up of “apostles and elders” (Acts 15.23). The church at Philippi had “bishops” and “deacons” (Phil 1,1).

It is in the context of shared ministry and shared leadership that pastors are called to exercise their specialist ministry. This specialist ministry will normally involve acting as the leader of the leaders – just as in the Jerusalem church James was clearly the ‘presiding elder’ (see Acts 15).

Patterns of leadership vary from church to church

There was no set pattern of leadership in the New Testament churches. For instance:

- At Philippi there were “bishops” and “deacons” (see Phil 1.1), but we do not know what their particular tasks involved. The word ‘deacon’, which comes from the Greek word for ‘servant’ (*diakonos*), implies that the deacons in Philippi helped the “bishops” (Greek *episkopos*, which literally means ‘overseer’), but no more can be deduced.
- At Ephesus, where Timothy exercised a key pastoral role, there were “bishops” (sometimes called “elders”) and “deacons”, but apart from the fact that bishops had to be “apt teachers” (1 Tim 3.2), nothing is said about their differing roles. Paul was more concerned with their quality of personal life rather than with their role in church life.
- At Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas appointed “elders” in each church (Acts 14.23) but nothing is said about deacons.
- Paul commended to the church at Rome “our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae” (Rom 16.1). Phoebe was a lady of some means, because she is described as “a benefactor of many and of myself as well” (Rom 16.2), but to what extent her generosity was linked with her official role in the church is uncertain. She appears to have hosted a ‘house church’ and may well have led it too.
- At Jerusalem there were “apostles and elders” (see Acts 15), but were there also “deacons” in the Jerusalem church? Traditionally Baptists on the basis of Acts 6.1-6 have answered ‘Yes’, and have argued that the “seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” were deacons, who freed the apostles for their particular ministry of “prayer and serving the word” by seeing to the pastoral problem posed by widows in the church. However, nowhere is it specially said that these men were deacons. True, they were called to “serve at tables” – whatever that particular phrase might mean – but

the use of the Greek verb *diakonein* (to serve) from which the noun *diakonos* (servant) comes, does not mean they necessarily filled the office of deacon: it simply means that they “served” the church by solving a particular problem, which in turn involved caring for the widows. Certainly nowhere else in Acts do we hear of deacons in the Jerusalem church.

Leadership is always servant leadership

On a number of occasions Jesus emphasised the necessity of the servant role if a person would be a leader. So when James and John asked if they might sit at his right and left hand in glory, Jesus replied: “You know that among the Gentiles those who they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all” (Mark 10.42-44; Matt 20.25-27; see also Luke 22.24-26).

Such teaching about servant ministry seems to have been a constant theme of Jesus. For on another occasion when his disciples were arguing as to who was the greatest, Jesus said: “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (Mark 9.35; Luke 9.48). Matthew 23 is a salutary chapter for any leader to read, for there Jesus denounces the religious leaders of his day. He condemns those who “love to have the place of honour” (23.6), who “love to have people call them rabbi” (23.7). Instead, said Jesus, “The greatest among you will be your servant” (23.11). There is no room for pride in the heart of any Christian leader.

Jesus not only taught servant ministry, he also lived out the life of a servant. Having washed his disciples’ feet, he said: “I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13.15). Jesus calls us to ‘the ministry of the towel’: i.e. to servant leadership, which focuses on the people to be cared for, and not just the job to be done. Servant leaders cannot trample on people, even in pursuit of the kingdom.

Servant leadership is always non-coercive.

Christian leadership is always a servant ministry which leaves people free to accept or not to accept its direction. It can never force others to do something over which they are basically unhappy. Power may manipulate, but love always gives the choice. There is a difference between leadership and “lordship” (see 1 Pet 5.2-3).

Leaders may have authority (see 1 Thess 5.12 & Hebs 13.17), but they can never be authoritarian. Christian leadership exhorts, rather than coerces (see 1 Tim 5.1). Servant leadership is never from ‘above’, it is always from ‘below’. This is brought out by Paul in 1 Cor 16.15-16: “you know that members of the household of Stephanas... have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; I urge you to put yourselves at the service of such people”. Confidence and trust in leaders develop in proportion to the extent to which leaders are perceived to love and care for their people. Ultimately people follow their leaders not because of what they say, but because of who they are.

Servant leadership is always accountable to the church

Although leaders are accountable to God (see Gal 1.1; Hebs 13.17), they are also accountable to the church which has recognised their calling and set them apart for service (Acts 13.1-3; 14.27). Accountability, however, does not rob leaders of their authority. Rightly understood, the church in appointing its leaders has delegated to them authority, which leaders are free to exercise until the church withdraws its recognition of them.

Christian leaders should be prepared to give an account of their ministry to the people of God, who have entrusted them with the responsibility of leadership. The concepts of authority, responsibility and leadership must be held together. In the words of one American Baptist leader: “Any individual who is given responsibility must be given adequate authority to accomplish the task. That individual must then be held to ascertain that the responsibility has been fulfilled.”⁵

There is an element of tension here. On the one hand, any church meeting would need to think hard and long before overturning a unanimous recommendation from their leaders with regard, for instance, to its budget proposals for the forthcoming year. On the other hand, leaders are not infallible. The church meeting is the place for testing all major proposals regarding church life. Rightly understood accountability must not be viewed as a restriction of ministry, but as an encouragement to ministry.

⁵ Paul Borden, *Hit The Bull's Eye: How denominations can aim the congregation at the mission field* (Abingdon, Nashville 2003) 127.

2. APPOINTING LEADERS TODAY: JERUSALEM REVISITED

“Select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word’. What they said pleased the whole community and they chose Stephen, a man of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus... They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. The word of God continued to spread; the number of disciples increased greatly...” (Acts 6.3-7a).

This guide to leadership in the local church is written primarily for people who are already leaders. Yet there may well be some readers who are considering allowing their names to go forward for election as leaders. Furthermore, from time to time every leadership team has to face the issue of renewing the team and finding new colleagues. For this reason it seems sensible to look at the process of appointing leaders in the local church – and to do so in part through focussing on how the Seven were appointed to serve in the Jerusalem church

Wanted leaders “full of the Spirit and of wisdom”

It is not by chance that the apostles list spirituality before ability. Clearly ability is important for those who lead God’s people, but it is not all-important. In the first place, leaders are to be “full of the Spirit”, men and women who are on fire for God because God’s Spirit has invaded their lives. They are to be people “of good standing” (Acts 6.3) – people liked and respected by the church and community at large.

A similar emphasis is found in 1 Tim 3.1-13, where Paul lists the qualities necessary for those aspiring to leadership in the church at Ephesus. The emphasis there is on ‘graces’ rather than gifts’. For the most part Paul tells us what leaders might be expected to be, rather than to do. For example, “A bishop must be above reproach” (1 Tim 3.2); “If they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons” (1 Tim 3.10). “Leaders must be well-thought of by outsiders” (1 Tim 3.7). If leaders are to be effective they must in the first place live lives that reflect the King whom they serve. “Power”, “love” and “self-discipline” (2 Tim 1.7) are all marks of a spiritual leader. ⁶

Wanted: leaders with proven qualities

Some Baptist churches today state that leaders have to be over 21 – or even over 25 – years of age before they can serve on the leadership team,. One could argue that such restrictions are out-dated in a society when 18 is generally acknowledged to mark the formal point of transition into adult life. Yet even such an argument misses the point: for when members elect deacons, they are hopefully looking not to elect people of a

⁶ The qualities that Paul lists are not an exhaustive list. It is significant that none of the items in the lists of qualities needed is distinctively Christian – nothing is said, for instance, about love, faith, purity and endurance, instead the list reflects the highest ideals of Hellenistic moral philosophy. It has been suggested that false teachers were, by their behaviours bringing the gospel into disrepute. Therefore Paul was concerned not only that the elders had Christian virtues (these are assumed) but that they reflect the highest ideals of the culture as well.”

certain age, but rather people who have begun to display gifts of leadership in the context of the church's worship, ministry and mission. As Paul made clear to Timothy, age should not be an issue (2 Tim 4.10). What counts is spiritual maturity (1 Tim 3.6).

Other churches limit eligibility to those who have been in membership for a year or more. However, in an increasingly mobile society in which people can move all over the country for reasons of work, such a restriction is limiting. On the other hand, for the purposes of "testing" (1 Tim 3.10) some kind of familiarisation process is necessary. Undue haste is certainly to be avoided (2 Tim 5.22). So does one go for a limited time restriction of say six months, or does one leave the questioning of suitability and timing to the discernment of the members?

Yet other churches restrict the leadership to members who have been baptised as believers. This, of course, is the only option where 'closed membership' is practised. Yet strangely a number of 'open membership' Baptist churches have similar restrictions: for although they may welcome into membership people who have not been baptised as believers (normally unbaptised members who have already been in good standing with another church), they are not prepared to allow them into leadership. The inevitable outcome is that those members who have not been baptised as believers are made to feel second class – and the church is not able to take advantage of all the gifts represented in the fellowship. It is not as if they would necessarily make the church less 'Baptist' – the fact that they have become members of a Baptist church shows that, at the very least, they are in sympathy with the practice of believers' baptism. If a safeguard is required, then surely it would be sufficient to state that a majority of the deacons be baptised believers?⁷

Wanted: leaders enjoying healthy relationships

Leaders lead by example in every area of their lives. The church needs to model healthy patterns of relating, and whilst growth in relationships is an ongoing process leaders need to demonstrate the reality of this in their personal lives. The quality of their personal relationships is very often a mirror of the calibre of their relationships with God. If married, both partners need to be secure in their relationship with one another, and ideally share a commitment to service for the Lord. The supporting spouse has a key role to play. Disunity in this area will very likely affect the marriage at some level with the potential for unhelpful repercussions. Although the importance of healthy relationships does not receive a mention in Acts 6, Paul certainly highlights the importance of family stability (1 Tim 3.2,4,5,12).⁸

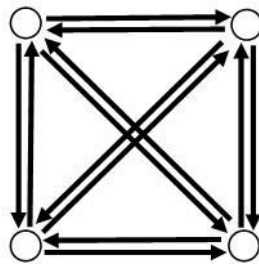
⁷ See the *Approved Governing Document* of the Baptist Union of Great Britain: section 15.7.

⁸ Much has been made of Paul's instructions that deacons should "manage their children... well" (1 Tim 3.12) and that their children should be "believers" (Tit 1.6). However, we bear in mind that in the ancient world a father's authority was absolute and he could even kill his child for disobedience! We live in a very different world where children are encouraged to think for themselves. Less attention has been devoted to the fact that bishops and deacons should be able to "manage" their own households well (3.4; 3.12), for "if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?" (3.5). The household here is an extended household, including extended family members and slaves. This is significant, for the first churches were small 'family-sized' communities, whose members Paul described as "members of the household" of faith (Gal 6.10) or of God (Eph 2.19). Paul was in essence saying that both bishops and deacons should have leadership skills!

Wanted: seven or more?

The church at Jerusalem limited the number of those to be elected as leaders to seven. On the other hand, there were already twelve apostles! Frankly, there is no number which is normative for us today. However, if a leadership team has too many people in it, the group becomes a ‘meeting’ and not a ‘team’ In my judgment twelve is the upper limit if leaders are to be able to participate meaningfully. Beyond that number the group tends to be dominated by a few strong characters.

In this regard I have been helped by a simple equation which expresses the number of relationships possible among people in various sized groups or teams: viz. $R = N(N-1)$! Here the number of relationships (R) equals the number of persons in the group (N), multiplied by one less than the number of persons in the group (N-1).⁹ To put it another way, as shown in the diagram below, when four people are involved in dialogue there is a pattern of twelve interpersonal relationships, or in terms of the equation: 4 people, multiplied by 3 [one less than the number of people present] = 12 relationships.



The number of relationships increases steeply as only a few extra are added to a group:

For a group of 6	(6 x 5)	30 relationships
For a group of 8	(8 x 7)	56 relationships
For a group of 10	(10 x 9)	90 relationships
For a group of 12	(12 x 11)	132 relationships
For a group of 15	(15 x 14)	210 relationships
For a group of 20	(20 x 19)	380 relationships

Wanted: diversity in leadership

The Seven elected to serve all had Greek names: viz. “Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch” (Acts 6.5). They were members of the Jewish diaspora –indeed, Nicolaus “had earlier been converted to Judaism” (GNB). By contrast the apostles were Palestinians and therefore spoke ‘Hebrew’ (Aramaic). Together the apostles and the Seven reflected the diversity that was present in the church of Jerusalem.. There was even greater ethnic and social diversity in the leadership of the church at Antioch: Barnabas was from Cyprus;

⁹ See John Mallison, *Building Small Groups in the Christian Community* (British edition, Scripture Union, London 1978), 55.

Simon called Niger was almost certainly an African, for Niger is a Latinism meaning ‘black’; Lucius of Cyrene came from North Africa; Manaen was a man of some considerable social standing for he was ‘a member of the court of Herod’; and Paul came from Tarsus (Acts 13.1). In today’s multi-cultural world, it is important that the church’s leadership is similarly diverse.

The nominations process

In the church at Jerusalem the selection of the Seven was very much in the hands of the church as a whole (Acts 6.3). Likewise today it is important for church members to be able to play a full part in the process of nominating potential deacons.

But leaders are church members too. There is therefore no reason why leaders, in their capacity as church members, should have nothing to do with the nomination process. Indeed, in their capacity as leaders, it surely makes sense for them to give thought to how they can encourage another generation of leaders to come forward and develop. Just as Barnabas identified the potential in Paul and then gave him opportunities to develop that potential (Acts 11.25,26), leaders today need to identify those who have the potential for leadership and give them opportunities to develop. Provided no restrictions are placed on the membership in general, there is a lot to be said for the subject of future leaders to be an item on the agenda of a leaders’ meeting, although care needs to be taken that this doesn’t become manipulative.

The method of election

Unlike the world of politics, leadership elections in the church normally require potential leaders to gain a minimum of 50% of the vote in order to be elected. If the Spirit is guiding his people, we should expect at least half those voting to sense his direction. Unfortunately sometimes difficulties arise, particularly when there are many more people nominated than there are places. For when there is a large number of candidates, votes tend to get split so that only one or two may be able to get 50% of the vote, with the result that there may well still be some vacancies on the leadership team. One way of getting around this difficulty is to allow every member to have as many votes as there are candidates. For example, if there are four vacancies and seven candidates, then everybody is allowed to vote for as many of the seven that they believe have been gifted by God for leadership. Provided they all have at least 50% of the votes, the four with the most votes are then elected. The process may seem a little like Alice-in-Wonderland, but it actually works! ¹⁰

The welcoming of new leaders

Church leaders are elected at a church meeting, but normally are publicly welcomed into office at a subsequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper. On such an occasion it is good to follow the custom of the Jerusalem church and to combine that welcome with prayer and laying-on of hands (Acts 6.6). In New Testament times such a ceremony had primarily God’s blessing in view, but probably also reflected the delegation of

¹⁰ There are other possibilities. See the *Approved Governing Document* of the Baptist Union option 1 of 2, section 15.12.2. which suggests that deacons should have received votes from at least 60% or 66% of those members voting.

authority to enable leaders to discharge their duties in the name of the church (see Acts 15.3; 1 Tim 4.14; 2 Tim 1.6). In today's church it is equally important that proper recognition is given to the church's leadership – and that the church members in turn promise to “support and encourage them” in their ministry.¹¹

Setting apart for a period

In Acts 6 the Seven were appointed to a particular task, which may have been time limited. When Paul and Barnabas were “set apart”, they were appointed for a specific piece of missionary service (Acts 15.1-3). Today leaders in most churches are appointed to serve for a particular period – often three years, with an option to serve a further term. In some larger churches there is a limit to the number of times a leader may serve consecutively: leaders often have to take a so-called ‘sabbatical’ and stand down for a year after two terms. There is a lot to be said for that practice, in so far as it encourages new ‘blood’ onto the leadership team. However, the term ‘sabbatical’ is unhelpful: it implies that leaders, after having stood down for a year, automatically allow their names to go forward for re-election. But this is not necessarily healthy, either for the individual or for the church.

Right structures lead to growth

One final point before we leave the Jerusalem church. With the appointment of the Seven and the apostles freed for their special ministry, “the number of the disciples increased greatly” (Acts 6.7). Rightly understood, leadership structures are not some bureaucratic necessity: rather they are the means by which church growth is fostered.

¹¹ *Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples* (Canterbury Press, Norwich 2005) 118.

3. RELATIONSHIPS ARE VITAL

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15.12-13).

Relationships are the key to the life of any church. A church where people do not get on with one another, where members criticise one another and maybe even play power games with one another, is a travesty of a church. If Christians cannot love one another, then why should the world take any notice of them? How can we expect people to believe in the love of God when a church fails to live out this love?

In particular, relationships are the key to the life of a Baptist church. When we welcome new members into fellowship, we are entering into a dynamic covenant relationship with one another – a relationship in which we commit ourselves not only to work together to extend Christ’s kingdom, but also to love one another and stand by one another whatever the cost.

It is in this context that relationships between the church’s leaders are so vital. In a very real sense, the leaders set the pattern for the church’s life together. If leaders are united, then the fellowship is likely to be united. But if the leadership team is made up of a bunch of rugged individualists, then the church in turn is likely to reflect that same individualism. In terms of relationships, the leadership team effectively sets the pace.

Inevitably relationships develop as leaders come together on a regular basis to face the everyday challenges of church life. Yet there is a limit to which relationships can develop when the pace and structure of leadership meetings are constantly dictated by the pressing concerns of a full agenda. Relationships are best nurtured in less structured and more relaxed settings. For this reason many churches have found it helpful to spend an occasional Saturday morning together, when the normal agenda may be put to one side and time is given to lengthy discussions about one or two central concerns. Yet other churches prefer to devote the whole of a Saturday to an ‘Awayday’, which can provide a good opportunity for an in-depth look ahead soon after new leaders join the team. Better still is to go away for a weekend together. Admittedly this is a costly exercise, both in terms of finance and time, but experience proves time and again that the investment pays enormous dividends. In a weekend a depth of relationship can come about which otherwise might take years to achieve.

Committed to one another

For the sake of the well-being of the church it is crucial that the leadership team does not view itself in secular terms as some kind of ‘board’ of management, but rather as a group of brothers and sisters committed to one another. In a sense the leadership team is akin to a ‘fellowship group’ whose members give each other the right to call on one another for help and support at any time.

One of the disciplines of being part of the leadership team is giving priority to all leadership team meetings. Except in cases of legitimate mitigating circumstances all

leaders will be present – and on time!

Another discipline is keeping anything that is shared in the meeting strictly confidential, unless clear permission is given to inform others.¹² Leaders need to be trustworthy (Prov 11.13). Those who are tempted to gossip should make Ps 141.3 their prayer: “Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips”.

Loyal to one another

Commitment to one another means that leaders should never criticise one another to others. Loyalty is not just “desirable” (Prov 19.22: see also Phil 4.3; 1 Tim 1.2; Tit 1.4) but paramount. Leaders should never let people play one leader off against the other, rather they should always support one another publicly. If there are grounds for criticism, then the criticism needs to be expressed face to face – ideally on a one to one basis, although there may be occasions when the criticism needs to surface in the leadership team meeting as a whole.

The practice of corporate responsibility is another expression of loyalty to one another. Once the leadership team has made a decision, then in public all the members stand by that decision. The only exception is when leaders in all good conscience feel that they cannot go along with the others and must make their different viewpoint known at the church meeting. Even then, that difference should not be expressed unless at a previous leaders’ meeting due notice has been given to the other leaders.

Speaking the truth in love to one another

At all times the truth needs to be spoken “in love” (Eph 4.15). It is never good to allow problems to fester. It has been said that ‘Today’s niggle could be tomorrow’s resentment, and next week’s breakdown’, yet honesty always needs to be combined with love. Frankness should always be tempered with consideration for the well-being of the other. Inevitably, there will be differences of viewpoint. But often the sharing of differences proves to be a learning experience for the whole group. Indeed, leadership teams are normally the stronger when differences of outlook and personality are present. As Prov 27.17 puts it: “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another”. In the clash of debate we can learn much from one another.

Speaking the truth in love is often far from easy. It can be difficult to express criticism face to face. Yet for the sake of the church, as also for the well-being of the team, concerns must not be suppressed. The expression of criticism or concerns need not, however, be always done in a confrontational manner. Often a carefully phrased question can have the same effect.

Encouraging one another

Few people remain on a perpetual even keel. All of us have our ups and downs, and

¹² Some, but not all, churches agree that leaders are allowed to discuss confidential matters with their spouses.

therefore all of us need a brother or sister to speak a word of encouragement into our lives. Hence the injunction of Paul to “encourage one another and build one another up” (1 Thess 5.11).

Leaders in particular need to encourage one another. For there are times when leadership can be a painful and difficult business – not least when members may misunderstand or mistrust the motives behind some of the proposals of the leadership team. Particularly when change is in the air, the moment leaders raise their heads above the parapet with a view to advancing in one direction or another, that moment they can become the target for snipers. When the flak is flying, strength can be drawn from mutual encouragement.

Welcoming one another

Hospitality helps relationships develop. Hopefully leaders and their spouses will want to welcome other leaders and their spouses into their homes. For only when we invite one another into our homes can we begin to know one another. On home ground pretence becomes more difficult. Furthermore, not only does the leadership team benefit from mutual friendships; the church as a whole also benefits when leaders enjoy friendship together. Friendships amongst leaders often have a ‘trickle-down’ effect and encourage the development of friendships amongst the membership in general.

Praying for one another

Praying for one another is a duty every Christian owes to one another (see Jas 5.16). It is good too for leaders to pray for one another, and in this way help bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6.2). For leadership can be tough – and life can be tough too! Hopefully such prayer for one another is not viewed as a duty, but rather as a natural expression of concern for one another. To pray for one another is just another way of loving one another (see Matt 5.44)

A team covenant

There is much to be said for a leadership team to create a team covenant, for if we are to work effectively together, then a certain 'discipline' of relationships needs to be maintained. The covenant should be renewed once a year, perhaps when new team members are elected. The following is an example of such a covenant:

- Mutual care. We will model the kind of relationships that should characterise the life of the church in general. We will love one another, pray for one another, honour one another, care for one another, encourage one another, speak the truth in love to one another, and at all times forgive one another. We will be there for one another, come hell or high water.
- Communication. We will keep one another informed of what we are doing – and of what we are hoping of doing. We will therefore come to our team meetings ready to share.
- Openness. We will be to open with one another. There may be times when the minister will not be free to be open with the rest of the team. However, a

confidence does not necessarily mean that we cannot share information with one another..

- Honesty. In our thoughts and our feelings we will be honest with one another. If something has upset us, then we will surface it.
- Loyalty. Outside our team meeting, we will always stand up for one another. While none of us is perfect, and there will be times when we make a mess of things, we will resist the temptation of criticising one another to other members. The place for criticism is either one-to-one or in the team meeting.
- Positivity. In our relationships with one another – and with the rest of the church – we will always exude a positive spirit. We will shun negative talking and thinking. We will instead affirm one another and will speak well of one another.
- Excellence: We will never be satisfied with the second-best. In our desire for excellence we will foster a healthy dissatisfaction with the way things are and will always strive for better.
- Faith: We will strengthen one another's hope and faith in God, and we will foster each other's passion for Christ. We will be bold in the way we develop our various ministries – and where there are failures, we will help one another to learn and then to use the failure as a stepping board for fresh advances.

4. THE ART OF LEADERSHIP

"I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you do it - not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5.1b-3).

Leaders are called to lead

Leadership is a key priority in today's churches. Leaders do the Lord and his church a disservice if they do not exercise their gifts and offer leadership. The fact that there have been those who have abused their position and have 'lorded it over those in their charge' is no argument against leadership *per se*. Rightly understood, leadership does not stand in opposition to service. It is an expression of service. Churches are the poorer where leaders fail to lead.

As research has shown, the degree to which churches grow and develop and make any kind of impact on our increasingly pagan world, is largely dependent on the kind of leadership that is exercised in them. It has been said that 'churches need more leaders, not more members'.¹³ At first sight this statement may appear to be an exaggeration. Yet there is truth in it. For once we have the right leaders, membership problems will begin to be solved - for with the right leadership effective strategies for mission can be implemented and people will be won for Christ and his church. True, we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit - and yet part of the art of leadership is setting the sails to catch the wind of the Spirit.

Clearly pastors have a key role to play in exercising leadership, but so too do deacons and elders. As we have already seen, leadership in the New Testament was always corporate. There are limits to what one person can achieve on their own. Elders and deacons are called not simply to 'manage' the church's affairs but to work with the pastor to help give shape and direction to the church's life. Furthermore, in so far as the pastor has a key role to play, the pastor needs to be held to account for the way in which the agreed vision and strategy of the church are implemented.

Defining leadership

Leaders make things happen; leaders make a difference. Leadership involves:

“Determination and the will to succeed
Belief in achieving extraordinary things
Willingness to learn
Desire for constant improvement
Trusting and empowering team-mates
The initiative to pursue an idea
Ability to have fun”¹⁴

¹³ Lloyd Perry, *Getting the Church on Target* (Moody Press, Chicago 1977) 73.

¹⁴ These are the leadership qualities looked for by a New Zealand trust set up in honour of Sir Peter Blake, the man behind New Zealand's successful Admiral's Cup bid some years ago.

The New Testament points to many qualities needed within leadership, but does not develop a model as such. However, one helpful model of leadership was developed by John Adair based on three interlocking circles. He defined the good leader as one who "works as a senior partner with other members to achieve the task, build the team, and meet individual needs".¹⁵ Translated into language associated with the Christian church, the "the other members" with whom the pastor as the "senior partner" works are the leaders of the church.



Together the leaders face three challenges:

Achieving the task

Within a Christian frame of reference, the task is the mission of the church. This mission might be interpreted in general terms relating to the overall implementation of the Great Commission. On the other hand, the mission might be interpreted in more specific terms, relating to the particular mission of a local church in a given area at a given time.

Before the task may be achieved, it must be defined. Such a defining of the task involves the leaders putting before the church a vision of what God is calling his people to be and do. Many churches find it helpful in this respect to develop a mission statement for the church's life together. For instance, on the basis of the Great Commission as found in Matt 28.18-20 and John 20.21 a church might state, 'Our mission is to go Christ's way and make disciples'. However, mission statements by themselves are of limited value. Aims and objectives need to be developed, along with appropriate strategies. This is the task of leadership. Of course, these aims and objectives and strategies will need to be accepted and owned by the church meeting – but the task of leadership is enabling the church meeting to grasp the vision.¹⁶

¹⁵ See John Adair, *Effective Leadership*, Pan, London 2009.

¹⁶ See Appendix 2: 'Ten characteristics of a good vision'.

Building the team

Within a Christian frame of reference the church is the team. What's more, the church is a team with a task. Every-member-ministry is then given direction. There is a common goal to which all can work. The task of leaders within the church is continually to seek to weld the 'team' together by giving it a common purpose and direction. When relationship difficulties arise, then leaders must be prepared to deal with such difficulties. For healing and harmony to prevail, this may involve confronting those who need to be confronted. At other times leaders need to act as peace-brokers and go-betweens. 'Teamsmanship' – the art of becoming a team-player – must constantly be worked at. Leaders have a particular responsibility to "make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4.3).

Meeting the needs of individuals

If members of the team are to work effectively as they seek to achieve the task, then their individual needs have to be met. What are these needs? It seems to me that they are five-fold: church members need to be led in worship, to be taught, to receive pastoral care, to experience fellowship, and to find avenues of service. It is as these basic needs are met that members are "equipped.... for the work of ministry" (Eph 4.11).

Mastering change

If the mission of the church is to be fulfilled, then change will have to be introduced. No church can afford to stand still. We live in a rapidly changing world, and 'constant change is here to stay' as much in the church as in the world. We can no longer rely upon yesterday's successes – we must find new ways of doing evangelism and being the church.

In so far as the Gospel is all about being a "new creation" (2 Cor 5.17) we might well think that Christians would take to change as ducks to water. Sadly, this is not always the case. Churches can be as resistant to change as any other institution. For leaders to effectively master change, they must be "as wise as serpents" (Matt 10.16) and understand two things in particular:

Change involves time

If major change is proposed, then leaders need to give the church sufficient time to think through the issue. One church meeting is often insufficient. In the context of a church meeting, change has been likened to having a baby without being pregnant for nine months. "The leaders have spent many hours in discussion, in the gestation of the idea. Then the 'baby' is suddenly presented at a church meeting which has forty-five minutes to make up its mind! No wonder there are so many unhappy births. The congregation must share in the pregnancy if it is to be a healthy baby."¹⁷

Some major changes may well take several months to effect. Indeed, some changes are best brought about on an experimental basis: e.g. a church agrees to allow change to take place in an area of its life on the understanding that six

¹⁷ Nick Mercer, 'Coping with change', *The Fraternal* 234 (April 1991) 5.

months down the track the issue is reviewed. If the experiment proves a success, then the church simply confirms the wisdom of the original decision!

Change involves a process

If leaders are to take the church with them, they must pay careful attention to the various rates of adoption as also to the various categories of adopters. For instance, research has shown:¹⁸

- Some 2.5% of the church are *innovators*, who are enthusiastic about change and promote its introduction to others.
- A further 13.5% are *early adopters*, who are quick to accept the change and are then happy to promote its introduction.
- A further 34% form the *early majority*. Many initially had reservations, but have been persuaded and now persuade others.
- A further 34%, the *late majority*, were initially resistant to the change, but have been gradually won over.
- The final 16% are the *laggards* who accept the change grudgingly. The dissidents remain in this group even after the change has become tradition!

Obviously there is a good deal of generalisation here. In small churches one or other of these categories may be absent or disproportionately represented.

Furthermore, the composition of these groups may vary according to the type of change being considered. Yet it is important for leaders to deal with the underlying dynamic relating to the process of change. If a church is not to be split unnecessarily leaders need to ensure that decisions are not taken at church meeting until the *late majority* has come on board. This does not guarantee unanimity – there will always be some die-hard *laggards*. However, without the *late majority* a church risks literally being split in two. Clearly there is no Scriptural foundation to such an analysis. Yet not to pay attention to such insights is to run the risk of being what Paul describes as “children in your thinking” (1 Cor 14.20).

Managing conflict

The management of change involves conflict. It is no exaggeration to say that where two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name, then there is almost bound to be conflict at one time or another. Certainly this was the experience of the New Testament churches. The “conflicts and disputes” (Jas 4.1) of which James speaks can be mirrored in all the Pauline churches too. Leaders need to be realistic in their understanding of human nature.

Realism does not mean that we accept human nature as it is. In the church meeting, for instance, “the truth” must be “spoken in love” (Eph 4.15). This means that leaders need to ensure that conflict is depersonalised – that issues and not personalities are discussed. The church meeting needs to know that it is OK to disagree and to express alternative points of view; but it is not OK to disagree in anger or with hostility. The church also needs to be helped to understand that what is at issue in a church meeting is not winning a point, but discovering the will of God. If God’s will is to be

¹⁸ See E.M. Rogers & F.F. Shoemaker, *The Communication of Innovation*, Collier Macmillan, New York 1971.

discovered, then everybody needs to listen to one another. It is significant that Paul links the gift of “discernment” with the gift of “prophecy” (1 Cor 12.8). Every contribution to a church meeting has to be weighed – or as John puts it, if we are not to be led astray by “false prophets” we need to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4.1). One of the key tasks of Christian leadership is ensuring that differences of opinion are handled in a truly Christian manner.

The fact is that differences of opinion are not always to be feared. Often they are to be welcomed. A church without any disagreements may well be a church where nothing is happening. Churches without some form of low-level conflict are probably churches where the leaders are not doing their job in seeking to lead out the people of God in adventurous mission. Differences of opinion can be a sign of life.

Leaders do the church no favours by seeking to suppress different viewpoints. The fact is that when people are able to express their feelings at a church meeting, they can feel undervalued and marginalised. By contrast, when people have been empowered to take a meaningful part in the decision making of the church, they are more likely to accept the outcome of the decision even although initially it may have not been what they desired.

Not all conflict will necessarily surface within the church meeting. Sometimes a conflict may involve two church members; alternatively a conflict may develop between two organisations wanting to use the church premises on the same day. On such occasions church leaders should be prepared to get involved and help the individuals or organisations concerned to resolve their differences. Disunity dishonours Christ.

5. THE CHALLENGE OF PASTORAL CARE

“Leaders... are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy” (Hebs 13.17).

In the first place, pastoral care is the responsibility of every member. Paul, for instance, spoke of the members having “the same care for one another” (1 Cor 12.25). He urged the Galatians to “bear each other’s burdens” which in turn involved caring for those straying from the faith (Gal 6.1,2). Paul expected the Thessalonians to share in every aspect of pastoral care: “admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak” (1 Thess 5.14). Similarly the Colossians were to “teach and admonish one another in all wisdom” (Col 3.16).

However, pastoral care is also a special responsibility of leaders. In the words of Paul to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, they are to “keep watch... over all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son” (Acts 20.28). In practical terms this involves:

Knowing everybody

Just as the good shepherd knows all his sheep by name (John 10.3), so too should leaders know the names of those in their care. In smaller churches knowing people by name may be no problem, but in larger churches where visitors may often be present this may pose quite a challenge. Unlike their American cousins, British people are sometimes ‘bad’ at names. It is not that Americans are cleverer than us, rather because it is that in their culture it is bad form not to know a person’s name, and as a result Americans tend to make a much greater effort. Such effort should also characterise leaders in a British Baptist church.

In earlier editions of this booklet, I encouraged churches to produce a church handbook consisting of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of people associated with the church as a way of helping leaders and also church members to get to know people. The introduction of the government’s data protection regulations (GDPR) has caused many churches do away with a church handbook. However, provided everybody has individually given their explicit consent to the inclusion of their names and contact details such handbooks are still possible.¹⁹

Welcoming visitors

Like the good shepherd who is concerned for the sheep who do not belong to his fold (John 10.16), leaders will want to be outward looking. Rightly understood, pastoral care can never be exclusive to church members. Precisely how care is directed toward visitors will vary from church to church. In some churches one of the responsibilities of leaders is to form a Sunday ‘door duty’ welcome rota – in other churches this welcome rota is shared with other members too. However, a formal handshake coupled with a few words of greeting does not necessarily equate with a welcome. While it is true that some visitors may wish to remain anonymous, most people

¹⁹ See Guideline Leaflet L13: *Data Protection* (Baptist Union of Great Britain).

appreciate the offer of friendship. Such an offer may be expressed in inviting visitors home for a coffee or indeed for a meal. Although the exercise of hospitality is not the exclusive preserve of leaders, Paul's instructions to Timothy suggest that leaders should set an example in this area (1 Tim 3.2: see also Tit 1.8).

This duty to welcome visitors and to engage with members and friends of the church applies to all leaders, whether or not they are on the rota for 'door duty'. Sunday is not a day for leaders to engage in 'church business' with other leaders, nor to spend undue time with friends. In this regard there is a lot to be said for leaders wearing name badges on a Sunday, so that they can be more easily identified by newcomers to the church.

Interviewing for membership

In most Baptist churches leaders will be involved – along with others – in visiting applicants for membership. On these occasions the conversation will in part centre around the responsibilities of church membership, and no doubt the opportunity will be taken to discern the gifts and skills the prospective new members have to offer. However, such visiting can also be a form of pastoral care, for there is also the opportunity to talk sensitively about where the potential members are in their Christian pilgrimage and to offer them appropriate encouragement and help. Hopefully the initial conversation will then prove the basis for subsequent meaningful conversations. Indeed, in some churches, the visitors for church membership are given responsibility for keeping a watchful eye on those they have visited for the first twelve months.²⁰

Exercising church discipline

Church discipline is also a form of pastoral care. Sadly in some churches 'discipline' has almost been equated with the last rites – when offending church members are deemed to be almost beyond hope, because in one way or another they have flagrantly overstepped the mark (often through some kind of sexual misdemeanour), their names are brought to the leaders and then to the church meeting with a view to removal from the church roll. Discipline needs to begin at a much earlier stage – while there is still hope. The aim of church discipline is to bring people back to the Lord, not to send them packing (see Gal 6.1). Furthermore, church discipline needs to be concerned for every aspect of the Christian life: constant gossip and criticism are as much in need of being dealt with as sins of a sexual nature. Likewise when a church meeting has been spoilt by ill-temper or by unloving remarks of one kind or another, Leaders have a responsibility for making it clear that such behaviour is unacceptable.

Church discipline may involve pastoral visits to individuals judged to be at fault. It may lead to having to make a public statement at a church meeting (see Matt 18.15-20). Leaders have a responsibility for safeguarding the spiritual health of the church.

Revising the church roll

Another form of pastoral care is the revision of the church roll. Ideally, it should be an

²⁰ See Appendix 3 on guidelines for visiting applicants for church membership.

annual activity, but in some churches the task is put off, with the result that their rolls then contain a good number of people who may technically be ‘in membership’, but are not actually ‘in fellowship’. This is a nonsense: church membership is not about belonging to an institution, but living together in community.

There are three good reasons to prune the membership roll. First, to encourage integrity as a church: it just isn’t honest for a church in its annual returns to the Baptist Union to claim more members than actually attend the church. Secondly, to encourage commitment as a church: it is difficult to encourage people to take their membership responsibilities seriously when there are members who have not attended the church for several years. Thirdly, to encourage church growth: growing churches for the most part are churches with high commitment – where “membership is not viewed as a destination, but rather as a pilgrimage that leads one towards unreserved discipleship and a higher level of religious commitment”.²¹

Because roll revision can be a sensitive issue, it is helpful if before any revision is undertaken the church is clear as to the precise basis of the revision. For example

‘Once members have left the area for more than a period of twelve months, their membership will lapse. When members living in the area do not attend church at all in a twelve-month period, they will be visited, and unless there is some good reason (e.g. ill health or old age) their membership will lapse.’

Hopefully the steps taken to prune the roll will result in many instances not in deletion of a name, but in restoration to fellowship. Roll revision is painful, and yet – in the words of Jesus’ parable of the vine – a branch is pruned “to make it bear more fruit” (John 15.2).

Visiting the fellowship

Pastoral visiting is as much the responsibility of the leaders of the church as that of the pastor. Acts 6 is instructive: there seven men were appointed to care for the widows in the church, so that the apostles were freed for their ministry of the word and of prayer. The principle is clear: those who have been appointed to minister God’s Word to his people cannot be responsible for caring for all those in their care – they need others to share with them that responsibility, and in this way free them up for the particular tasks to which God has called them. Clearly where there is a ‘crisis’ – in many families births and marriages are as much ‘crises’ as deaths, in the sense that they often cause the people involved to ask major questions of life – pastors will want to be involved. Routine pastoral visiting should be very much the brief of other members in the fellowship – and not least leaders.

Encouraging growth

Pastoral care has a much broader base than simply helping people in trouble. Rightly understood, pastoral care includes helping, encouraging and enabling people to grow and develop in the Christian faith. In the words of Paul, it is about the presentation of “everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1.28,29).

²¹ Lyle Schaller, an American church consultant..

Sometimes this involves helping members, who are stuck in their walk with the Lord, to get going and growing again. At other times it may involve enabling members to deal with past hurts and gain the courage to forgive and move on. If pastoral care is to have any depth, it needs to go beyond passing the time of day with people. In a gentle and sensitive fashion, leaders need to be able to talk with others about their spiritual life: where they have been, where they are now, and where by God's grace they would like to go.

Developing a system of pastoral care

Precisely how pastoral responsibility is shared will vary from church to church. In some churches every leader is viewed as a 'pastoral' leader. The list of the church's members and friends is split amongst the leaders, each of whom is responsible for caring for those in their charge. Opportunities are then given at every leaders' meeting for pastoral news and concerns to be shared. There are, however, some disadvantages to this system: in the first place, it assumes that every leader is pastorally gifted, whereas in fact most leadership reflect a mixture of gifts; in the second place, it assumes that every leader has time to care, whereas some may just be too busy because of responsibilities at work or in the church. The upshot is that with such a system, pastoral care tends to be patchy.

In other churches responsibility for day-to-day pastoral care is given to those leaders who have the gifts and the time, and who then form a 'pastoral team'. Clearly there can be many variations on this system. In some churches the pastoral team is expanded to include members who are not on the leadership team to help in the task of pastoral care.

In yet other churches pastoral care is delegated to 'home groups' (sometimes called 'cell groups' or 'fellowship groups' or 'small groups'). This system is fine for those who attend the groups. It can, however, prove not so effective in caring for those who have no meaningful involvement with the group.

There is no one pattern which churches should follow. The underlying principle is that pastoral care is shared in such a way that care is given effectively to all God's people.

6. PASTORS AND THEIR FAMILIES ALSO NEED LOOKING AFTER

“God has so arranged the body... that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Cor 12.24,25).

In many churches the above verses have been rewritten: ‘God has so arranged the body...that the pastors may have the care of the body’ with the result that nobody within the church takes responsibility for caring for the pastor. But pastors – and their families – are in as much need of pastoral care as anybody else. For pastors and their families are human too and are subject to all the stresses and strains of modern life. Furthermore, in a way which is not always true of others, they are particularly subject to all the strains and stresses of church life. Regional ministers can offer only limited support. The key carers of pastors are the churches whom they serve.

As Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 implies, in principle the whole church has a responsibility for their pastor. As many pastors and their families can testify, many members do a wonderful job of caring, not least by constantly encouraging them and praying regularly for them. Yet in so far as the leaders are responsible for the pastoral oversight of the church, they have a particular responsibility for their pastors and families. Just as once a year the leaders have to review the pastor’s stipend, so at least once a year the general well-being of the pastor – and family where appropriate – should be an agenda item. However, such pastoral care should be more than an agenda item. Pastoral care should be ongoing. Leaders can care in the following ways:

Praying for the pastor

Leaders need to pray daily for their pastor. As Paul reminds us, as Christians we are engaged in a spiritual battle (Eph 6.12) – and often the pastor is at the sharp end of the conflict. Like Aaron and Hur supporting Moses in prayer (Ex 17.12), leaders should want to support their pastor. What’s more, prayer is needed not simply for the ongoing tasks of ministry, but also for the pastor’s personal life. If the Devil can cause trouble to the pastor and the pastor’s family, then the whole church is in trouble.

On Sundays leaders have a special opportunity to pray with – and for – their pastor before the service. This prayer time can have a significant role in ‘warming up’ the pastor before the service starts. It is helpful therefore for as many leaders as possible to be present – and in good time!

Encouraging the pastor

All of us need affirmation and encouragement (1 Thess 5.11). According to William James, “The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated”. Although all God’s people need encouragement (see, for instance, Hebs 10.25), this is particularly true of ministers. Ministry can be tough. There are good times, but there can also be challenging times too. Leaders should look for ways to give encouragement. If God has spoken through a sermon, then mention it. When things have gone well, express appreciation. Even when things have not gone so well, seek to discern the positives among the negatives!

Defending the pastor

When difficulties arise, as inevitably they do (see, for instance 3 John 9.10), leaders should always be ready to defend their pastor against unfair criticism. In principle, pastors are Christ's gift to his church (Eph 4.12) and should be respected as such. Even where the criticism is fair, in the first place leaders should speak privately to the pastor, face to face, rather than join in the public criticism.

It is often said that the church secretary (or senior deacon) is the person who represents the pastor to the church and the church to the pastor. Yet sometimes there is a conflict of interests. This can be especially true where difficulties arise which are of the pastor's own making. In such a situation it can be helpful for the leaders to ensure that somebody is able to speak on the pastor's behalf and represent the pastor's concerns. If serious difficulties are threatened, there is much to be said for bringing in help from outside the church: for example, a regional minister.

Providing opportunities for study

This is one sure way of guaranteeing freshness and depth in the pastor's ministry! Although patterns of work have become increasingly flexible, there is much to be said for encouraging pastors to spend mornings in study and preparation (see 2 Tim 2.15). These study periods should be respected and not trespassed on, except in emergencies. Pastors need to be encouraged to take their annual study-week, and a further three month sabbatical every seven years after ordination.

Leaders need to ensure that the church makes appropriate provision for the costs of study. Books are important (see 2 Tim 4.13), but they can be expensive, as also courses and conferences. However, the fact is that the church never loses out when it invests in continuing ministerial development.

Ensure appropriate support

Ministry can be a lonely and demanding business and leaders need to ensure that their pastor has appropriate spiritual support. This can take the form of peer mentoring where pastors are accountable to one another for their spiritual walk.²² Alternatively regular meetings with a 'spiritual director' or experienced 'soul friend' can help to ensure that the inevitable discontinuity between the public expression and the private realities of spirituality are kept to a minimum. Annual 'retreats' help pastors to stand back from the pressures of ministry and gain new perspectives on their ministry. Other forms of support are 'supervision' and 'work consultancy' which enable pastors to reflect upon their practice of ministry and explore how they might handle people and situations differently. Again, leaders need to ensure that the costs involved are paid for by the church.

Providing office facilities

In the first place this may mean ensuring that there is an office in the church from

²² See The Order for Baptist Ministry: www.orderforbaptistministry.co.uk

which the pastor can work. Such an arrangement can encourage the pastor to be more disciplined and more efficient. It also can be beneficial to the church, for it provides accessibility – for many people it takes a good deal of courage to stand at the door of the manse and ask for help.

Unfortunately, however, not every church has space for a minister's office. In such a case, leaders need to ensure that there is provision for a good sized study in the manse – with space not just for books, but for office equipment too.

Wherever the pastor works the appropriate tools need to be available. In today's terms this means a high-end computer with a good broadband speed (which amongst other things will be able to host 'Zoom' meetings), a printer, a photocopier, and other office equipment. It also means providing phones – not just a landline, but also a mobile.

Administrative assistance – even if it be limited - is also essential, if pastors are not to get bogged down in 'running' the church, as distinct from devoting their time to living out their calling.

Ensuring adequate time off

Ultimately nobody benefits – not even the church – if the pastor works morning, noon and night. Effective pastors are disciplined pastors, and this affects leisure and work. At the very least this means that pastors observe the principle of the sabbath. If God needed to be "refreshed" (literally, 'to take a deep breath') after the six days of creation (Ex 31.17), even more do pastors need to be refreshed on a weekly basis. They need to have one formal day off in the week, which nobody may be allowed to disturb. Leaders need to ensure that everybody in the church knows and respects that day: this in turn will mean, for instance, that funerals are not arranged on that day. The pastor's day off can be usefully published in the church magazine or the weekly newsheet.

In addition, pastors should be encouraged to take time off at other periods in the week too. Almost no one else in the church works six days a week.

Likewise leaders need to ensure that their pastor takes their full holiday allowance – pastors can only fulfil their ministry effectively if they are fresh in the Lord's service.

Paying a fair stipend

"The labourer deserves to be paid" (Luke 10.7) said Jesus. Paul told Timothy that those who "rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching" (1 Tim 5.17), and as the GNB with its translation of "double pay" makes clear, such "honour" has financial implications! Clearly a pastor's stipend will be dependent upon what a church can afford to pay: some churches, for instance, may need to receive help from the Baptist Union's 'Home Mission' fund. Nonetheless it is only right that leaders ensure their pastor is fairly treated.

Leaders also need to ensure that the matter of their pastor's stipend is dealt with in a

sensitive and tactful manner. It is not helpful if every year there is a discussion in the church meeting of how much the pastor is worth. For churches not in receipt of Home Mission funding, it is good to establish some principle by which the minister's stipend is worked out so that the issue does not have to come before the church meeting every year. The stipend may, for instance, be based on the Home Mission 'standard stipend', or on a percentage increase above the 'standard stipend'.

Providing comfortable housing (or an adequate housing allowance)

Related to the stipend is the issue of housing. Where pastors own their own homes, then a fair housing allowance needs to be paid in addition to the stipend. However, where pastors are living in a church manse, then leaders need to ensure that the manse is of a sufficient size for the pastor's needs.²³

Furthermore, they need to ensure that the church properly looks after the manse. A fabric inspection of the manse should be carried out on an annual basis, and a report – agreed by the pastor and the fabric 'steward' – should be brought to the leaders' meeting. Where the pastor is married, then the pastor's spouse should also be party to the agreed report.

Setting up a system for an annual review

Annual reviews – often called 'appraisals' in the secular world – give an opportunity for leaders to affirm their pastor and to say 'well done', to review previously set objectives and set future goals, to provide a safe environment for discussing problems and, where necessary, to expression concerns, and to identify needs for further training and development. Rightly understood, annual review is a positive process.

In many ways annual reviews are more helpful to ministers than almost any other group of workers. Ministry is by and large a lonely profession, because ministers for the most part work on their own. The annual review can break down some of the isolationism and in doing so prove extremely supportive.

Reviews work best if the following actions are taken:

- The lead is taken by an external ministerial facilitator who knows from first-hand experience what ministry is all about.
- The internal representatives are limited to two deacons or elders.
- The interview (between the minister and those involved in the review) is limited to two hours.
- The review is based upon the minister's own self-appraisal (together with proposals for future ministry and self-development) circulated prior to the interview.

²³ The 1998 Church Commissioners' guidelines for Anglican ministers state: "The parsonage should normally have a total floor area of between 181 and 190 square metres. It should include a dedicated study, with a floor area of not less than 18 square metres. The rest of the accommodation should allow for two family rooms (excluding kitchen) and sleeping space for an occasional maximum of seven people in four rooms. One of the family rooms should be sufficiently large to allow clergy to offer hospitality to their parishioners – ideally between 20 and 22 metres."

- The annual review is not an opportunity to spring major surprises on the minister.
- The review process is kept confidential. Nothing should be relayed back to other leaders unless the minister has given express agreement.
- To ensure clarity, outcomes which may have been agreed at the interview should subsequently be put into writing and then formally agreed.

Reviews can be great blessing, and on theological grounds are to be commended.

"Evaluation is natural to the human experience. Evaluation is one of God's ways of bringing the history of the past into dialogue with the hope for the future. Without confession of sin there is no reconciliation; without the counting of blessings there is no thanksgiving; without the acknowledgement of accomplishments there is no celebration; without awareness of potential there is no hope; without hope there is no desire for growth; without desire for growth the past will dwarf the future. We are called into new growth and new ministries by taking a realistic and hopeful look at what we have been and what we can still become. Surrounded by God's grace and the crowd of witnesses in the faith, we can look at our past unafraid and from its insights eagerly face the future with new possibilities." ²⁴

²⁴ From a pamphlet prepared by the Division of Ordained Ministry of the United Methodist Church, quoted by Jill M. Hudson, *Evaluating Ministry: Principles & Processes for Clergy & Congregations* (Alban Institute, Washington D.C. 1992) 7.

7. HANDLING PASTORAL TRANSITION

“Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God...” (Acts 20.24).

Inevitably the time comes when the pastor moves on, and – as Paul’s farewell words to the elders in the church at Ephesus make clear – the leaders now have the responsibility for the church’s ministry and mission. This can involve a good deal more work!

Farewelling the pastor

It is usual for ministers to give their church at least three months’ notice of their intention to leave the pastorate. Three months’ notice may sound generous, but in a church context those months speed by. From the ministers’ point of view, although they may continue to work out their notice in a diligent fashion, inevitably their ministry changes gear. No longer is their focus on the future. They are simply engaged in the day-to-day business of pastoral ministry. There is also a subtle shift as far as their members are concerned. They too are now aware of the temporary nature of the ministry. Already the pastor is no longer the leader of the church – the mantle has now fallen on the leadership team.

One of the tasks of leadership at this stage is to ensure that the ministry ends on a positive note. This is all the more true if there have been differences in the church which have perhaps led to the decision of the minister to move on. The past cannot be undone. However, in a Christian context it should always be possible for the parties to leave at peace with one another (see Rom 12.17,18).

It is good to be able to mark the minister’s last weekend at the church in a festive way. However, it is important that the farewell arrangements gain the agreement of the minister and are not imposed. Many churches like to put on some social occasion at which former members are invited to return and give thanks for the past ministry. Along with words of thanks, tangible expressions of gratitude are normally given – a bouquet of flowers, a generous cheque, and gifts for the children where appropriate. It is right and proper to be generous to those who have been our teachers (Gal 6.6).

Appointing a ‘moderator’

In the absence of a minister, the first step a leadership team needs to take is to appoint a ‘chair’ for its meetings. In many cases the church secretary (or ‘senior deacon’) is the natural person to assume this responsibility. However, in some churches there may be another deacon who is more suitably gifted for this task (1 Cor 12.8).

In addition it is wise to appoint a competent ‘moderator’ from outside the church to act as an impartial chair when the leadership team or the church meets to consider the future pastorate. The fact is that the search for a new minister can prove demanding, not least when there are varying opinions as to the kind of pastor the church needs. It helps too if the moderator is a minister with experience of settlement procedures

within Baptist churches. However gifted a leadership team may be, it still can benefit from wise advice (see Prov 12.15; 13.10).

Beginning the search for a new pastor

Although it is not normally a good idea to bring any name to the church meeting before the previous pastor has left – apart from anything else the church needs time to grieve its loss – there is no reason why the search should not begin as soon as notice has been given. In many churches the leadership team as a whole forms the ‘search committee’. In some churches a small search committee is set up, often as a sub-committee of the leadership team, with perhaps one or two co-opted members.

As part of the search, a church ‘profile’ needs to be drawn up, which provides a description not only of the past history and present activities of the church, but also of possible future opportunities for mission and ministry (see 1 Cor 16.9). The drawing up of the church profile can be quite a creative exercise.

At an early stage it is helpful to invite a regional minister to come and meet with the leadership team. Although regional ministers do not control ministerial movements, they can be helpful facilitators of such movements. At the same time individual church members may suggest names of possible future ministers. Although currently almost half of ministers serving in churches belonging to the Baptist Union of Great Britain are not accredited, my own conviction is that it is normally best to restrict candidates to men and women whose names are on the Baptist Union’s register of accredited ministers.

The Baptist Union offers helpful guidelines on seeking a new minister, which should be carefully studied.²⁵ For many years churches were advised to consider one candidate at a time, but increasingly church leaders are meeting with a number of ministers in parallel before inviting a prospective candidate to preach with a view. However, as far as the church meeting is concerned, it is best to consider one person at a time – confusion otherwise tends to reign.

Maintaining the ministry

As churches who are never able to afford ministers know only too well, maintaining the ministry of the church in the absence of a minister is a demanding task. Preachers have to be found, pastoral care has to be exercised, and mission to the world has to go on. It is helpful to delegate these responsibilities: for instance, one member of the leadership team may be responsible for preachers, another for pastoral care, and another for mission.

On the positive side, a short period without a minister can prove to be a fruitful period. Churches can discover new gifts in their midst, which can be used and developed. However, when a ministerial vacancy lasts for more than a year, churches often regress.

There are occasions when churches appoint an ‘interim’ or ‘transitional’ minister’,

²⁵ See *Facing a Pastoral Vacancy* (Baptist Union of Great Britain 2017).

who by definition is not a permanent minister. This could be full-time. Alternatively they could be part-time': often they are retired ministers or ministers not in employment of a local church whose chief responsibilities are preaching on a Sunday and a limited amount of pastoral care. Interim ministers can provide a useful service not just in maintaining the ministry, but also in paving the way for a new minister, particularly if there have been unresolved pastoral problems linked with the previous pastorate.

Calling a new pastor

The mechanics of calling a new pastor are all helpfully dealt with in guidelines produced by the Baptist Union. The leadership team will always have met with the prospective minister at least once or twice before inviting the candidate to come and preach. There is a lot to be said for not just relying on a regional minister, but on gaining references too. Traditionally in Baptist churches everything hinges on the Sunday when the prospective minister preaches 'with a view'. Certainly the way in which worship is led and God's Word is expounded speak volumes about a person and are key to any ministry. However, it is unwise for both the church as also the prospective pastor to make such an important decision on the basis of just one Sunday, especially when so many churches have only a morning service. Many churches therefore ask the prospective minister to preach on two Sundays: the first occasion will be an opportunity for the church to begin to get to know the preacher; the second time will be 'with a view to the pastorate'. Opportunities also need to be provided for members of the church to meet informally with the prospective minister. Hopefully at the end of the process the church can say of its decision that "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15.28).

Welcoming the new pastor

The 'induction' service is the occasion when the new minister is formally welcomed and recognised as the church's new pastor. Traditionally such services have been held on a Saturday when representatives from other churches can be present – not least the members of the new minister's previous church. However, there is much to be said for holding the induction on a Sunday, when almost certainly a higher proportion of the church's members and friends will be there. True, this may mean that representatives of other churches may have to miss their own service – but so what?

An induction service is also a great opportunity to invite representatives from the local community to be present: for example, local councillors, the MP, social workers, police officers, leaders of other faith communities... An induction service allows the local community to begin to get to know the new pastor – and for the new pastor to begin to get to know some of the local community leaders.

Make the day a day to remember – with helium-filled balloons for the children and scrumptious food for all. Let everybody party!

8. OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER MINISTRY ABOUND

“Now there are varieties of gifts... varieties of service... and varieties of activities” (1 Cor 12.4-6).

The task of leadership is multi-faceted. What is more, not every leader is expected to be a carbon copy of another – for God gifts leaders in different ways for differing forms of Christian service. Nonetheless, there are certain tasks which are generally common to all members of the leadership team.

Serving at the Lord’s Table

In Baptist churches leaders help in the serving of the bread and wine. The historical roots of this custom probably go back to a time when Nonconformists wished to emphasise the priesthood of all believers (see 1 Pet 2.5,9) – they had no need of a priest to give them bread and wine. There is no Biblical ground for reserving this task for leaders alone. In some churches, past leaders - and perhaps retired ministers present - are also invited from time to time. However, the theological symbolism of leaders serving those in their care is a telling one and reflects the servant nature of leadership (see Luke 22.26)

It is also helpful to ensure that those serving are representative of the age groups, genders and ethnicities present. It would not be a positive sign of the Gospel, for instance, if those serving are all old white men! Instead there should be men and women, young and old, and - dependent on the setting – ‘people of colour’ too.

In many ways the serving of bread and wine is an undemanding task – often the most demanding aspect is remembering who is on the rota for that service! However, there is one aspect which can be overlooked. Inevitably, as leaders serve the bread and wine, they will notice that sometimes there are members who allow the plate or cup to pass them by. On such occasions there is much to be said for a sensitive enquiry afterwards: for example, “I happened to notice that this morning you did not choose to take communion. Are things OK? I just wondered whether there is any way in which I could be of help to you?”

Praying at the Lord’s Table

At the Last Supper Jesus in his role as the host took bread and “gave thanks” (1 Cor 11.24); he ‘blessed’ God for the cup (1 Cor 10.16). In many Baptist churches, when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, it is not the pastor, but rather one of the other leaders who gives thanks for the bread and wine. Again, the historical roots of this custom probably lie in a Nonconformist desire to emphasise that we need no priest to consecrate the ‘elements’. By contrast in other Christian traditions the prayer of thanksgiving is reserved for the priest to say and is regarded as the church’s central prayer. In the light of this it is clear that it is no small privilege and responsibility to take this prayer. It is therefore wise for leaders to come prepared. It can be helpful, for instance, to find out beforehand the theme of the sermon so that their prayer can neatly dovetail. Incidentally, although for Baptists extempore prayer is the order of

the day in the home and in prayer meetings, there is much to be said for writing out the communion prayer, so that well worn phrases and pious clichés are avoided. The Spirit's inspiration is not limited to the spontaneous!

It is important to note the primary purpose of the prayer: it is a prayer of thanksgiving (see 1 Cor 11.24). It is therefore normally inappropriate to include a prayer of confession, for almost certainly the congregation has been led in such a prayer at the beginning of the service. Nor it is appropriate to bring before God the needs of the fellowship, for almost certainly there is a pastoral prayer yet to come. No, the prayer needs to be one of praise and thanksgiving for the Lord Jesus.

If a guide is required then take a look at the first eucharistic prayer in the Anglican *Common Worship*.²⁶ It is a wonderful credal prayer of thanksgiving:

It is indeed right, it is our duty and joy,
at all times and in all places to give you thanks and praise,
holy Father, heavenly King, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ your only Son our Lord.

For he is your living Word;
through him you have created all things from the beginning,
and formed us in your own image.

Through him you have freed us from the slavery of sin,
giving him to be born of a woman and to die upon the cross;
you raised him from the dead and exalted him to your right hand on high.

Through him you have sent upon us your holy and life-giving Spirit,
and made us a people for your own possession.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven,
we proclaim your great and glorious name...

Praying for baptismal candidates

Many churches have revived the old Baptist practice of baptism being followed by prayer with laying-on of hands. Thus custom is not specifically Baptist, but goes back to Scripture (see Acts 8.17; 19.6; Hebs 6.2). Very often leaders are involved in praying for the baptismal candidates. In the light of such passages as Matt 3.16, 17 and Acts 1.8, it is important to note that the purpose of the prayer is to invoke the Spirit to come and fill the candidates with fresh power for service. As the candidates have been baptised in water, so a fresh baptism of the Spirit is requested. The candidates have already received the Spirit, but now they desire yet more of him. Some churches link the practice with the giving of a 'text' to the candidates (written on the baptismal certificate). If this is done, then before the prayer is made, the text can be publicly given and then woven into the following prayer.

²⁶ *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (Church House Publishing, London 2000).

Leading in worship and teaching

There are other tasks, particularly relating to worship and teaching, which will be undertaken by leaders according to their gifting. For example, some may well be involved in leading worship; others in preaching; yet others in leading small group of one kind or another. Increasingly one-person ministry is becoming a thing of the past in Baptist churches – opportunities for ministry abound.

Serving as church officers

Other leadership tasks relate to office. Traditionally in a Baptist church there are two key church officers: the church secretary (today sometimes known as the ‘senior deacon’) and the church treasurer. These two officers, together with the pastor, normally form the church ‘executive’.

The church secretary (or ‘senior deacon’)

The church secretary is appointed by the church as its senior officer and serves both the leadership team and the church meeting. The responsibilities of the church secretary include maintaining a broad overview of the life of the church, using opportunities to present the vision and the aims of the church, troubleshooting whenever necessary, listening to the concerns of church members, consulting regularly with the pastor, together with the pastor drawing up the agenda of the leadership team meeting and of the church meeting, keeping abreast of Baptist Union issues and of legislation which affects the church and corresponding with outside organisations and persons on behalf of the church on official matters.

The church treasurer

The church treasurer’s responsibilities can be divided into two. First of all, marrying together vision and financial resources by engendering enthusiasm for giving, developing innovative ways of increasing income, and preparing the budget and the accounts. Secondly controlling the church’s expenditure by overseeing all aspects of the church’s insurances, ensuring that all cash and other receipts are properly controlled and recorded, ensuring the maintenance of all necessary ‘book-keeping’ records, overseeing Gift Aided giving, dealing with all aspects of paying ministerial stipends, and allocating money to ‘outside’ causes as agreed by the church meeting. In addition the treasurer provides clear, meaningful and helpful analysis and feedback to the leadership team and to the church to assist in decision-making; and keeps abreast of any changes in the law or HMRC rules which may have an impact on the church.

In small churches there may be a shortage of these ideal skills. For instance, the pastor, if there is one, may have to take on some tasks of a church secretary. Similarly, the ideal church treasurer may not be available and the basic competences for paying a pastor may not be present. Rather than muddle through, urgent search will need to be made outside the leadership - or maybe even outside the membership – so that financial matters are ordered with due care. Meanwhile the leaders should consider who amongst them or the members might receive the necessary training for the bare minimum of the work of a treasurer. Although the treasurer needs to be a

‘trustee’, a non-trustee ‘book keeper’ can be appointed to manage the day-today finance jobs.

Serving in other specific areas of responsibility

Formerly many church secretaries were responsible for matters such as safeguarding and data protection. However, these tasks have become much more demanding, so that there is much to be said for appointing ‘a trustee responsible for safeguarding’ and also a ‘data protection officer’.

In addition another trustee needs to take responsibility for overseeing fabric matters relating to the church and to the manse, even although in many instances fabric tasks will need to be shared out with others in the church.

Encouraging the mission and ministry of the church

Important as are the tasks of administration, finance and fabric, a church must beware of simply getting into maintenance mode. For a church to be true to its Lord, mission and ministry are always required.

In a small church, at the very least, one leader needs to be given responsibility for mission, and another responsibility for nurture and development.

In a slightly bigger church the leadership team might be able to break down these tasks in a way that makes them even more specific. For instance, one leader might be responsible for social action, another for evangelism, another for nurture, and yet another for training and development.

In a large church, small teams – each perhaps led by a member of the leadership team – may be drawn together for specific tasks, which cover defined areas of the church’s mission and ministry. Where this happens the mandate of the members of the task teams should not be to do all the work themselves, but rather to empower and encourage others in the church to get behind whatever may be their particular project. Their membership needs to be approved by and accountable to the church meeting, and their activities should be monitored by the leadership team. Ideally every aspect of church life should come under the purview of the task teams. This would mean, for instance, that the leaders of all church organisations and activities would be accountable to the church meeting through the task-oriented teams, which would in turn be responsible for both providing support and ensuring that the work of all church organisations and activities is in line with the church’s overall strategy.²⁷

From the perspective of a small church, where there is often a shortage of people with essential skills, the organisation of a large church may seem complicated. Yet the underlying principle is simple: task-oriented teams in larger churches represent the extension of the principle that those with gifts of leadership should be empowered to serve God in and through his church. It is a way of giving expression to ‘the

²⁷ I am a great believer in ‘teams’ rather than committees. Committees tend just to be task-driven, while teams include a focus on relationships which provide the energy and the enthusiasm for completing the tasks in hand.

leadership of some'. In addition these teams also afford opportunities for other members to exercise and develop their gifts.

There is no one pattern for any church to follow. It is up to each church to develop a model of mission and ministry which is appropriate to them and which best enables the church to fulfil the Great Commission.

9. ORDERING LEADERS' MEETINGS

“All things should be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14.40).

If leaders' meetings had been a matter of contention in the life of the New Testament churches, we might have had some guidance from one or other apostle as to how they should be run. As it is, the New Testament is silent on this issue. Nonetheless, Paul's rubric for worship (1 Cor 14.40) is surely also applicable to the way in which we conduct church business. The fact that we come together to seek God's guidance does not make the need for “order” any less necessary: the Spirit works within (as also outside) structures!

From this the question then arises: how might we most effectively order our meetings today? What are the most helpful structures through which leaders can seek the mind of Christ with regard to the life of the church.

Meeting monthly

How frequently should leaders meet? There is no hard-and-fast rule. Most leaders conduct their business on a monthly basis, although there are churches where their leaders meet fortnightly or even weekly. However, unless a church is going through a period of crisis there is no good reason why leaders cannot restrict their business to a monthly meeting. The fact is that for most leaders life is pressurised. Responsibilities at work or in the church can be enormous. It makes good sense to restrict regular leaders' meeting to once a month, for we owe it to God to be good stewards of our time (Eph 5.16). Clearly such a principle does not rule out ‘specials’ from time to time.

Agreeing a venue

The early church never faced the issue of whether to meet at church or in a home – they only had homes! The dynamics of meeting around a formal ‘board’ table at church are different from sitting on comfortable chairs in one another's homes. The latter is certainly more relaxing. On the other hand there is no virtue in being so relaxed in the Lord's service that the meetings take twice as long to achieve half the business!

Prioritising the agenda

An agenda reflects the spiritual priorities of a church. In too many churches the top three items on the agenda of a leaders' meeting are: 1. finance; 2. fabric; 3. correspondence. Such agendas are surely the death-knell of the church. Clearly issues of maintenance have their place, but they must always be subservient to the wider goals of the church. When Jesus gave the Great Commission, he did not say ‘Keep the doors of my church open’, but “Go and make disciples” (Matt 28.19). The agenda of the leaders' meeting must reflect the mission of the church. This means that items like membership, evangelism and social action should normally come at the top of the

agenda. Leaders can then give their minds to the most important matters when they feel their freshest.

Agendas need to be sent out in good time. It is helpful if the agenda can be annotated to enable leaders to give prayerful consideration to items before they come to the meeting. The custom of indicating the hoped-for outcomes is particularly helpful. For example, instead of just stating 'Membership matters', the agenda might now read: 'Membership matters: to consider the applications of Bob and Sally'. However, in the light of current data protection regulations, it is unwise to add undue personal data: for it is possible for people named in agendas or minutes to ask for copies of everything in which they are mentioned.

Relating to the wider Christian family

Inevitably the major items on any leaders' agenda will centre on issues affecting the local church. However, it is not right for any one church to live in isolation from others. Not only are we individually members of one another, individual churches are also members of a larger body (see 1 Cor 12). Leaders therefore need to ensure that the church is kept in touch with the wider Christian family. In the first place this might involve doing things with neighbouring churches, whether sister Baptist churches or churches of other traditions (e.g. the local group of Churches Together). In the second place, this will involve fostering relationships with such bodies as the local Baptist association, the Baptist Union and BMS World Mission. Although for Baptists it is the local church which is the cutting edge of the kingdom, it is important that local churches do not become exclusively parochial in their vision. There is something to be said for wider issues of fellowship to be on the leaders' agenda at least once a quarter.

Leading the meeting

In many Baptist churches in the USA the pastor leaves the chair of the leaders' meetings to one of the other leaders. By contrast most British pastors prefer to take the chair and see this as part of their leadership role, which involves actively guiding and encouraging the meeting along. To use the picture found in 1 Cor 12.28, the leader can be likened to a 'helmsman', who seeks not only to steer the ship but also to catch the wind of the Spirit in the sails. Hopefully most pastors have this spiritual gift of 'helmsmanship'. However, if there is another leader equally if not more suitably gifted, there is no reason in principle why that person should not chair. Clearly were there no pastor, somebody else has to chair. This may be the church secretary – but not necessarily. It is all down to gifting.

Exercising proper time-management

Sometimes one hears horror stories of leaders' meetings going on until midnight. Unless there is a crisis, this length of meeting is unjustified – and all the more so, when perhaps many of the leaders have the following morning to be out of the house by seven o'clock in order to go to work. Meetings need to be limited. With good chairmanship and good organisation leaders should be able to do their business in two hours – or two and a half hours maximum. 10 p.m. should be the normal deadline. As

Paul says in another context, “the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets” (1 Cor 14.32).

Praying at all times

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5.17) wrote Paul. It is vital that leaders’ meetings are laced with prayer from start to finish. It is not sufficient to have prayer just at the beginning of the meeting, for at that stage the substance of some items may be still unknown. Nor is it good to have prayer just at the end of the meeting, for by that time some may feel too tired to pray in a concentrated fashion. There is a lot to be said for a prayer-slot half-way through the meeting. Prayer, of course, doesn’t have to be limited to the formal prayer-slots. When wrestling with a thorny issue it can be helpful to call a temporary halt to the discussion and ask the Lord for “wisdom” (see Jas 1.5). It’s amazing how often the way forward becomes clear.

Almost inevitably, the time for prayer at leaders’ meetings is limited. Somehow business tends to squeeze out time for concentrated prayer. Often the period for prayer gets reduced to ten minutes, if that. Hence it is good if leaders can make opportunities to meet together primarily for prayer. This could be of an evening. However Saturday prayer breakfasts (e.g. from 8.00 a.m. to 9.30 a.m.) often prove more popular – not least because most of the day is still free.

10. RELATING TO THE CHURCH: AN EPHESIAN MODEL

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4.4-6).

It is a truism to say that church leaders are only effective to the degree that they relate effectively to the whole church. For leadership to have any meaning, leaders have to work at their relationships with the church. Throughout this guide we have been looking at various specific ways in which leaders can serve their fellow members. In this section we shall take a more general look at the way in which leaders might relate to the church, and will root our thinking in Paul’s advice to the church at Ephesus.

Exciting fresh faith and hope in God

Effective leaders are visionaries, who have great faith and hope in God and are able to communicate their faith and hope to the people in their care. Christian leaders are optimists in the best sense of the word: they suffer neither from false optimism, which ignores or dismisses problems; nor from pessimism which allows people to be crippled by the problems that are around them. They see problems in the light of the God who “is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (Eph 3.20). One of their key tasks is to enable God’s people to see something of “the immeasurable greatness of God’s power” and to realise that it is available “for us who believe” (Eph 1.17-19).

This communication of the vision will at times take place on a one-to-one basis in private conversations. There will be other times when the vision is shared with the church at large. Leaders should not be afraid to speak out at church meetings, for they too are church members. Particularly when a recommendation is brought from the leadership team, it is often helpful for a number of leaders to speak in its support. Yes, church members need to be allowed to have their say, but leaders are also called to give a lead.

Embracing ‘love of another kind’

Effective leaders are so filled with “the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Eph 3.19) that they act as catalysts amongst the members to enable them in turn to love the loving and the unlovable. God’s love in Christ for his church – his *agape* love (Eph 5.25, 29) – is not just a model for relationships between husbands and wives, but for relationships in general. Leaders are to be to the forefront in living out, and encouraging others to live out, the injunction of Paul to “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you” (Eph 4.32).

Empowering for service

Effective leaders are in the business of enabling other members to live out their ‘passion’ and so fulfil their ‘ministry’ or service in the church (see Eph 4.12). Empowerment is the name of the game. One of their key roles is developing potential.

Leaders should always be looking to encourage, train and provide opportunities for the next generation of leaders.

Encouraging personal growth and development

Effective leaders are concerned to see not only the church but also individual members grow and develop in Christ (Eph 4.13-16). For this to happen they in turn need to be growing and developing themselves.

Serving with humility

There is no place for ‘airs and graces’ in church leaders. Leaders are not a different breed from other members. Paul’s call to mutual submission (Eph 5.21) applies to leaders as much as to anyone else. Leadership may be a privilege, but it is not an honour. It is servant-leadership, the kind of humility which always recognises the worth of others and acknowledges the mistakes of self.

Creating a positive climate

Effective leaders are positive and up-beat. There is no place for negativity and pessimism. They are to be ‘champions’ of the church and its values. Their concern is for “building up” (Eph 4.29) both individuals and the fellowship as a whole. When ideas are presented at the church meeting or elsewhere, they should first look for the good in them – how might they work, as distinct from how might they fail. Such an attitude does not do away with a critical mind, and there are times when leaders need to encourage the church to say ‘no’. However, it is all a matter of emphasis – about looking at the benefits first, and only then at the disadvantages. Rather than be devil’s advocates, leaders should play the role of an angel’s advocates.

More generally, leaders are called to be champions of the church and its values. When problems arise, they are also called to be ‘fire-fighters’ – not necessarily as a group, but as individuals.

Maintaining an open climate

Christian leaders are not the equivalent of M15! Except when matters of confidentiality are involved, decision-making should always be made in an open manner. As “children of the light” (Eph 5.8) we should not keep others unnecessarily in the dark. It is when the truth is spoken in love that the body of Christ is built up (Eph 4.15). The traffic should not all be one way. Leaders should also be able to consult and *listen* carefully to members, and take on board their concerns.

Praying for all God’s people

Last but not least. Christian leaders pray for those in their care (Eph 6.18). Christian leaders on a regular basis hold before God their brothers and sisters. Many find it helpful to work systematically through the church magazine or the weekly newsheet, the church handbook or the list of home group members. However, the system itself matters not – the essential point is that prayer is made.

AND FINALLY.....

“Keep watch over yourselves...” (Acts 20.28)

Throughout this guide we have been thinking about the task of leadership. Yet, if leaders are to lead the people of God, they must in the first place be followers (John 20.19). Or as Paul put it to the Ephesian elders at Miletus: if they would care for the flock, they must in the first place “keep watch” over themselves (Acts 20.28). Leaders must never be so busy in the service of God that they never have time for God. If leaders would be men and women of God, then they must maintain the basic disciplines of prayer and of reading God's Word, as also of being in fellowship with all God's people.

It is in this context of leaders keeping watch over themselves that I offer a spiritual checklist. This could be a helpful exercise for a leaders' retreat, when it could be worked on first individually, and then the resulting thoughts and feelings shared with fellow leaders, who could then pray for one another. Thank God, we are not called to walk the way of Christ alone, but rather together!

A SPIRITUAL CHECKLIST

My relationship with my Lord

1. Do I make time on a regular basis for private prayer and Bible study?
2. Am I truly sorry when I confess my sins? Do I 'mourn' over them?
3. Am I growing steadily?
4. Was I ever further forward than I am now?
5. Is there an area of my life over which Jesus is not truly Lord?
6. Am I filled with the Spirit's power?
7. Am I genuinely going 'all out' for Christ?
8. Do I delight to worship Christ?
9. Am I proud?
10. Am I aware of my gifts and am I using them for the Lord?

My relationship with my family

1. What am I like at home?
2. Is there anything concerning my behaviour at home of which I would be ashamed in company?
3. Do I love, comfort, honour and protect my partner?
4. Am I faithful to my partner in my thoughts as well as in my life?
5. Do I pray with my partner and share my deepest concerns?
6. Do I manage my children well?
7. What kind of spiritual lead do I give at home?
8. Do I have time for my family? Do I relax in their company?
9. Do I meet the needs of my parents?
10. Is our life together marked by the fruit of the Spirit?

My relationship with my fellow leaders

1. Do I pray for my pastor every day?
2. Do I encourage my pastor?
3. Am I aware of any needs the pastor (and pastor's family) might have?
4. Is there any leader whom I fear, dislike, criticise or hold a resentment towards?
5. Are there any leaders and their partners whom I have not welcomed to my home?
6. Is there any leader whom I have not encouraged recently?
7. Do I keep confidences entrusted to me?
8. Am I reliable in carrying out the tasks my fellow leaders entrust to me?
9. When did I last encourage the activity leaders in the church?
10. Can my fellow leaders count on me to pray through matters raised in earlier meetings of the leadership team?

My relationship with my church

1. Do I express love towards others in the fellowship?
2. Is there anybody in the fellowship I avoid?
3. Do I encourage others in the faith?
4. Am I loving enough to correct an erring brother or sister?
5. Do I make opportunities to pray with others in the fellowship?
6. Am I critical of others in the fellowship?
7. Is there anybody for whom I nourish an unforgiving spirit?
8. Do I pray for all the members of my house group?
9. Do I give generously to God's work?
10. Do I make an effort to get to know newcomers?

My relationships with 'the world'

1. Am I known as a Christian?
2. Am I seeking opportunities to build bridges of friendship with my non-Christian friends, neighbours and colleagues?
3. When did I last seek to share Christ with a friend, neighbour or colleague?
4. Am I praying for my non-Christian friends, neighbours and colleagues?
5. Do I get on with people in general?
6. Do I always speak the truth?
7. Am I a person of the strictest honesty?
8. Do I grumble or complain constantly?
9. Do I act like 'salt' in the world?
10. Do I keep up to date with the issues affecting my neighbourhood, town, country and world?

APPENDIX ONE: THE TASKS OF A LEADERSHIP TEAM

In my book *Dynamic Leadership* I listed the following list of responsibilities for church leaders: ²⁸

- **Visiting** Calling on members in their homes: e.g. the sick, the widowed, members of one's fellowship group, etc.
- **Leading in public prayer.** At the Communion Table, but also taking an active role in prayer meetings of all kinds.
- **Counselling.** As 'elder'(!) statesmen and stateswomen, counselling individuals on personal and spiritual problems.
- **Teaching.** Involvement not only in leading fellowship groups, but also in (specialist) groups such as Alpha or marriage preparation.
- **Supporting activity leaders.** Taking an active interest in the Sunday School and other organisations. Listening to the leaders and encouraging them in their work.
- **Leadership.** Seeing visions and dreaming dreams; producing ideas and showing initiative; setting the pace with the pastor.
- **Administration.** A management team, looking after the day-to-day business of the church, freeing the minister for ministry.
- **Supporting members in 'full-time' service.** Not leaving ongoing support to particular interest groups, but taking a special responsibility for those we have set apart.
- **Practical service.** Seeing to the practical needs of the building and of the fellowship — 'doers'.
- **Representation.** Representing the various age and interest groups in the church, so that the leadership automatically has the finger on the pulse of the church.
- **Interviewing.** Interviewing people for membership, and then maintaining an ongoing pastoral brief for them.
- **Wider church responsibilities.** Representing the church on various ecumenical and denominational committees.
- **Caring for the minister and the minister's family.** Exercising pastoral care for a family which otherwise might not be cared for.
- **Above all being a man or woman of God, and being men and women of God together.**

To these I would now add the following **tasks of charity trustees:**

- Managing the church **finance**, including accounts, budget and reserves policy.
- Taking care of the church **fabric**: church buildings, manse, equipment etc.
- Overseeing all the church **activities**, with ultimate responsibility for them
- Responsibility for **policies**: child protection, health and safety, equality, charity law etc
- Responsibility as **employers** for any staff, and caring for the minister (s)

²⁸ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Dynamic Leadership* (Marc, Eastbourne 1990, 1991) 126-127.

APPENDIX TWO: TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD VISION

I have found the following list of ‘ten characteristics of a good vision’ to be most helpful: ²⁹

1. A vision is related to mission but different. All churches have the same mission, which is to fulfil our Lord’s Great Commission. Vision is insight into how a particular church will carry out its mission in its context in the next five to ten years.
2. A vision is unique. Each vision, like a fingerprint, fits the individual church that has adopted a vision of how God will work in its situation. The vision not only reflects the contextual surroundings of the church but the personality and giftedness of the church.
3. A vision focuses on the future. While visions honour the past and what God has done to bring a church to the present, they focus on a preferred future for each church. It is the view of the future that changes the present life of the church in order to achieve the preferred future stated in the vision.
4. A vision is for others. The focus of a vision is what it will do for others who are not a part of the group stating the vision. A good vision is quite unselfish in its intent. It places as primary the needs of people not currently being served by the church.
5. A vision is realistic. All good visions stretch the imaginations of people, yet they are realistic enough to be achieved if God intervenes. Good visions are not statements of presumption; instead they are statements of faith.
6. A vision is lofty. Good visions inspire people to high standards and targets not easily achieved. The lofty statements force churches to be clear about their values while forcing them to choose which values they will honour and implement and which ones they will ignore.
7. A vision is inviting. Passive ‘ho-hum’ visions do not produce passion, commitment to service and the giving of resources. Visions helps people see how the future can be better and how they can, with God’s help, make that happen. Good leaders are able to help people see what their good deeds will produce and how corporately the group can achieve so much more than what individuals alone can make happen.
8. Vision is a group vision. All visions are shared by the group. They ring true for a majority of the people.
9. A vision is good news and bad news. It is good news in that it is a promise of a better future. It is bad news because it provides judgment on the past and the present. Therefore a vision always gets mixed reviews.
10. A vision is a sign of hope. Faith, hope, and love are crucial to God’s church. It is vision that provides a church with hope. Vision gives leaders hope and it gives followers hope of what God will do through them.

²⁹ My adaptation of a list first produced by Lovett Weems, *Church Leadership* (Abingdon, Nashville 1993).

APPENDIX THREE: GUIDELINES FOR VISITING APPLICANTS FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The privilege of being a church visitor

- Visiting for church membership is an enormous privilege, for during the visit applicants will open up their heart to visitors, who may well be complete strangers. They may speak of things which they would normally only speak about to their closest of friends. So treasure the opportunities you have to visit!
- Although the visit will involve telling the applicant about the church, first and foremost it involves listening to applicants speak about themselves and their faith in Christ. Visiting cannot be rushed. It may take a whole evening – but so what?
- Visiting for membership may involve the receiving of confidences. Not all that you hear may be right to share with others. Although you may need to jot down some of the information you receive, always ask the applicant's permission for you to do so.
- Visiting is a spiritual exercise. It should be natural at the end to pray for the applicant (and their family) and for the concerns that they may have raised.
- Visiting should always be positive in tone. Visitors will hopefully speak well of the church. Do not encourage the applicant to criticise other fellowships. Nor should you criticise other churches.
- Visiting is an exercise in Christian fellowship. Often it will involve visiting the home of the applicant: why not take some flowers as a sign of your delight in being able to visit their home? At other times it may involve inviting the applicant to your home: why not offer a meal and turn it into a social occasion? Do not interview applicants on church premises after the service – that makes the occasion so impersonal.

Things to find out

- **Some details about their background.** Most normal conversations begin with general introductions. Ask about where they have come from – their job – their children (if applicable) – their interests, Where appropriate, tell them a little about yourself.
- **It is their spiritual story that you need to hear:** how they came to faith and what their faith now means to them. Few people have a Damascus Road experience, so how has their faith developed? Was there a point when they consciously committed their life to Christ? Or was there a point (e.g. baptism) when they publicly declared their resolve to follow Christ?
- **When were they baptised?** If they were not baptised as believers, do they accept that believers' baptism is the norm? [You may need to explain what your church means by 'open membership'. Normally, if a person comes to faith within the church, then the only way to membership is through baptism, However, if a person comes from another church tradition and does not want to be baptised on the basis that for them their baptism as a child followed by confirmation was deeply meaningful, we are able to accept them into membership without baptism as a believer: in so doing we are not recognising the 'rite' of infant baptism, but rather recognising their standing in Christ]
- **What does Jesus mean to them today?** How do they sustain their relationship with Jesus? What pattern of Bible reading and prayer do they follow? How do

they relate their faith to their work? What tensions are there at work in being a follower of Jesus?

An understanding of church membership.

- **Why does the applicant wish to become a member of our church**, and not another church? What appeals to them about our church?"
- **Does the applicant understand that membership involves entering into a covenant relationship** in which we commit ourselves not only to work together to extend Christ's Kingdom, but also to love one another and stand by one another whatever the cost? Church membership is more than being about a name on a roll (see 1 Cor 12.25).
- **Explain how small groups relate to membership.** It is only within the context of small group that we can be open and honest with one another and so meaningfully encourage one another, pray for one another, and bear one another's burdens.
- **Does the applicant understand the Baptist concept of the church meeting?** There we come together to seek the mind of Christ,

A willingness to serve

- What is their passion? What gifts do they have? What experience of service do they bring? For those at work, their prime area of service will be at work, but hopefully even the busiest of people will take on some responsibility within the church.

A financial commitment

- Mention the way in which members are encouraged to give proportionately (a 'tithing'?) and systematically – either through envelopes or through a standing order. If they pay tax, do they understand about gift-aiding?

How to report

- In most situations the visit leaves you with the happy task of telling other members about your new friend. On very rare occasions visitors may be disturbed by the answers they have been given. If you have any hesitations, then you must contact the minister immediately.
- Give a thumbnail sketch of the person's general details, but go quickly to a brief account of their spiritual story. It is their faith in Christ and commitment to the church that will be at the core of your report. Highlight any strengths you are aware of, and, where appropriate, their service in previous churches. Assure the church that they understand what commitment involves and bring a firm proposal.
- It is important that the report is relatively brief and if word-processed should not run beyond half a page of A4! E-mail the minister a copy of your report.

And in the following 12 months....

Be sure that the interest and friendship you offered on your visit continues as they come into church membership. Particularly in the first year keep in regular touch – either visiting them in their home again or inviting them back to yours. Since you have already talked to them in some depth about spiritual things, it should be natural to continue to talk about their walk with God.

Be alert to offer practical support.

Remember them in your prayers.

Send a card to mark their birthday or wedding anniversary (this will involve research on your part!) as also to mark the anniversary of their baptism or of the day when they were received into membership.

Look out for them at church. Introduce them to others in the fellowship – especially those who may be of a similar age or come from a similar background

Help to integrate them into church life by reminding them of church meetings (ensuring in particular that they are aware of the date of the first church meeting after they have become members); inviting them, if appropriate, to your small group; and encouraging them to find an avenue of service within the fellowship.

Remember: **the help you give in the first 12 months can be crucial.**