

A COLLEGE OF PEERS

**The College of Baptist Ministers
2013-2021**

Editor: Paul Beasley-Murray

CBM
college of baptist ministers

A COLLEGE OF PEERS

The College of Baptist Ministers 2013-2021

Editor: Paul Beasley-Murray

Published 2021 by The College of Baptist Ministers

ISBN 978-1-9165035-2-6

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version Bible* (NRSV), Anglicised edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the national Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked GNB are from the *Good News Bible* published by The Bible Societies/HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, UK © American Bible Society 1966, 1971, 1976, 1992, used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Anglicised edition) copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, a Hachette UK company. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked REB are from *The Revised English Bible* published by Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1989. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked The Message are from *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene H. Peterson and published by NavPress, Colorado 2002. All rights reserved.

DEDICATION

To Ursula Rosemary Franklin,

a generous benefactor

CONTENTS

A College of Peers: an introduction

The History of the College

1. The beginnings and initial development 2010-2018
2. The subsequent history 2018-2021
3. Reflections on failure
4. Reflections on achievement

Documents of the College

1. The vision
2. A code of ethics
3. A supportive structure for Continuing Ministerial Development
4. Guidelines for review
5. Investing in leaders

Selected Letters of the College

1. A New Year's Eve watchnight service
2. A book a week keeps a pastor awake
3. Juggling with chickens
4. Guidelines for the professional conduct of clergy
5. Professionalism is to be welcomed
6. Leadership and accountability in the church
7. Building tomorrow's church today: young adults and the church
8. What do clergy do all week?
9. Preaching at Christmas
10. Post Truth and Donald Trump
11. Let's be concerned for our brother and sister ministers

12. Children in the church
13. Pastoral supervision
14. Counselling young people
15. Remembrance
16. Preparing for Christmas
17. Have we dumbed down our worship and preaching?
18. Labels are dangerous
19. Where do you find your support?
20. Church life post-Covid – some thoughts
21. Great reasons for meeting together one-to-one in a time of Covid
22. From coping to recovery of the post-lockdown church
23. Terminating ministry – an issue yet to be resolved
24. Ending well

Two further reflections on aspects of ministry by Paul Beasley-Murray

1. Leadership is always servant leadership
2. Celebrating the Faith: Christian worship through the lens of 1 & 2 Timothy

A COLLEGE OF PEERS: AN INTRODUCTION

A College of Peers. The title of this book is taken from the very last sentence in the original vision statement of the College of Baptist Ministers: “This is a College of Peers”. The term ‘peer’ goes back to the early thirteenth century, where it meant ‘an equal in rank, character, or status’ and is ultimately derived from the Latin word *par*, equal. In the College of Baptist Ministers we are all equals, from the least to the most experienced of us.

As befits an organisation of Baptist ministers, there was no sense of hierarchy amongst us. Yes, to function we had to have a board together with a chairman of the board, but we were first and foremost a service organisation, there to serve the needs of our brother and sister ministers. As we said in our vision statement: “the College of Baptist Ministers is made up of its members – we are there for one another”.

The College never sought to be a ‘political’ organisation. Unlike ‘Mainstream: Baptists for Life and Growth’, another organisation in which I was a co-founder, we were not in the business of seeking to change the Baptist Union of Great Britain. The fact that we were perceived by some national and regional Baptist leaders as a threat to their standing had no basis. We came into being to fill a need – to provide a resource for our colleagues in ministry, so that together we could rise to the challenges of mission and ministry in an ever-changing world.

This volume, *A College of Peers*, is a ‘legacy volume’. It is our final ‘gift’ to the wider Baptist family. To help ensure the permanency of the gift copies have gone not just to individuals, but also to all the Baptist theological colleges in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain, to the IBTS Centre (formerly the International Baptist Theological Seminary) now based in Amsterdam, and to all the six copyright libraries in Great Britain and Ireland.

Here we tell our story. We begin with a history of the College, and then move on to share some of the documents we produced. The bulk of the book is made up of a selection of letters written by members of the Board which were emailed out monthly to our members. The final contribution is made of up two ‘in memoriam’ pieces in which I reflect first on our calling to be first and foremost servants of God and servants of his people – Christian leadership is always servant leadership; and secondly on Christian worship seen through the lens of 1 & 2 Timothy. The story of A College of Peers is therefore a story of a group of ministers with a passion for ministry and should be of interest to all who are concerned for the wellbeing of ministry in Baptist churches.

Finally, A College of Peers as been dedicated to Ursula Franklin, a member of Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, who has a passion for pastoral care. At a crucial stage in our history Ursula made a very generous gift to the College, for which we are very grateful.

Paul Beasley-Murray, Chairman of the College.

THE HISTORY OF THE COLLEGE ¹

The beginnings and initial development 2010-2018

In *This is My Story* I provided the following history of the beginnings and development of the College: ²

The origins of the College of Baptist Ministers (CBM) go back to November 2010 when Paul Goodliff, then head of the Baptist Union's Department of Ministry, raised with me the possibility of an 'institute of ministry'. My heart leapt. It was a male equivalent of Elizabeth's response to Mary—a truly Spirit-filled moment. I was convinced this initiative was of God. A steering group came together, which invited some sixty ministers to a 'consultation' at Didcot on 29 January 2013 to consider proposals for what by then we termed a 'college'. There was a positive response for our vision of an independent professional 'college' committed to supporting its members. A board of management—with myself as chairman—was formed, and after a good deal of preparatory work the College was publicly launched in 2014. ³

Our vision

For the launch we developed a vision statement in which we set out some of the distinctive characteristics of this new College. In the first place, we said that we wanted to be '*a professional*

¹ Reflections by Paul Beasley-Murray.

² Paul Beasley-Murray, *This is My Story: a story of life, faith and ministry* (Wipf & Stock, Eugene, Oregon 2018) 173-178.

³ Technically the College of Baptist Ministers came into being at the Board meeting held immediately after the Didcot consultation on 29 January 2013, at which the decision was made to register the new College of Baptist Ministers with Companies House.

body’ for we wanted to offer to God our very best – both of mind and of heart. “We want to raise standards in ministry ‘to the greater glory of God’. That is the vision that drives us.”

In the second place, we said we wanted to be ‘*a caring fellowship*’, which would “provide peer support for ministers who find themselves in dispute with their church”. On those sad occasions when relationships have broken down, we want to be there for our members. We recognize that “regional ministers carry a prime responsibility for the care of ministers, but there are limits to what regional ministers can offer ministers. For when a regional minister is called into a troubled situation, the regional minister has to be there for both the church and the minister—and in so doing has the difficult task of holding in balance conflicting responsibilities. The church may feel the regional minister is on minister’s side, while the minister may believe the regional minister is on the church’s side. We believe that in times of trouble ministers can benefit from those whose sole purpose is to accompany them through difficult times.”

What is more, we want to be there “whatever the circumstances”. Often situations are not clear cut; ministers can say unhelpful things not because they want to be unhelpful, but because they are so stressed out. Hopefully, the presence of a supportive friend will make matters easier.

In the third place, as part of our desire to promote the health and well-being of ministers, we encourage our members to create their own *programme for Continuing Ministerial Development*, recorded on their own personal portfolio. [We initially identified seven strands as vital to the well-being of every minister, but later added ‘Ministry Opportunities’ and ‘Other’ which we have included in this list.] In alphabetical order, they are:

Accountability - Regularly opening our lives to the supportive scrutiny of one or two others, in a formal or informal relationship such as mentoring or peer supervision.

Applied Practice - Gaining new insights through reflecting on our experience of ministry and church life,

learning through failure as well as success, pioneering new ways of doing mission and ministry, creating courses that help people grow in their faith, becoming more effective as a preacher, developing new skills in managing change, resolving conflict, building team, and in leading God's people forward.

Collegiality - Meeting together with other ministers to strengthen, encourage and support one another.

Learning - Through attending courses, reading books, working for a formal qualification, or simply going on a broadening sabbatical.

Ministry Opportunities - This strand was introduced with retired ministers in mind, where they can list the various 'ministry' activities: e.g. preaching, leading a mid-week home group, mentoring, and pastoral care.

Practical Competencies - Relating to competencies identified by the Baptist Union in such areas as IT skills and safeguarding policies.

Review of Ministry - On a regular (annual or biennial) basis allowing others to help us review our ministries, affirming all that has been positive in the past year, and agreeing the shape of ministry for the coming year. The CBM Guidelines for Review of Ministry involve an external facilitator.

Spirituality - Sustaining and deepening our walk with God.

Other - A 'catch-all' category for other experiences which may have little to do with the church, but nonetheless enrich the minister as a person.

In the fourth place, we developed *a code of ethics* in ministry. Some argue that codes of ethics can lead to legalism, and what counts is a person's walk with the Lord. Yet, while codes of ethics may have their limitations, they do point to what it means in practice for ministers to go the way of Jesus. Perhaps one way of avoiding legalism is drawing up a simple code of

ethics, which in time will be accompanied with a more detailed commentary— akin to the Jewish *haggadah*—illustrating the way in which the code might be applied.

Promoting ministerial well-being

Through a series of nation-wide launches (‘road-shows’) entitled ‘Staying the Course’, we promoted not just the College, but also ways in which we can keep fit in ministry. With ministerial well-being in mind we have produced guidelines for ministerial review, and every month we email out a members’ newsletter in which board members take turns to share ideas and reflections relating to ministry. Thanks to the computing skills of Peter Thomas, our treasurer, we offer resources for ministry on our web site ... Up until the closure of Ministry Today UK in April 2018, three times a year CBM members received complimentary copies of the journal, *Ministry Today*. In addition, we have given every member free copies of books board members have written on various aspects of ministry.⁴ Furthermore, since 2017, we have drawn upon Peter Thomas’ experience of publishing, and have begun to produce a limited range of pastoral resources, on which we offer a discount to members.⁵

For what is still a small outfit, we have certainly been very active in supporting our members in ministry.

Encountering opposition

Despite all the good things we offer, promoting the College proved tougher than we initially envisaged. We knew that there would be a hesitancy on the part of some ministers, for whom

⁴ For example, *Prepared to give an answer* (books.pbthomas.com, 2016) by Peter Thomas; *The Passionate Leader* co-authored by Terry Calkin & Paul Beasley-Murray (Kimberley Trust, Auckland, New Zealand 2016).

⁵ *Happy Every After* and *A Loved One Dies* by Paul Beasley-Murray. On behalf of Ministry Today UK we published the eight volumes of *Ministry Today UK: 1994-2018*.

the practice of annual reviews and a commitment to continuing ministerial development could seem threatening. What we did not anticipate was the strength of the opposition we experienced first from some regional ministers, and then later from the Baptist Union itself.

From the very beginning we made an effort to get alongside the regional ministers with a view to helping them understand that in no way were we seeking to undermine their care of ministers. To that end Paul Goodliff and I met with the regional team leaders on 1 July 2013. To our surprise we discovered that there were some who were strongly opposed to the concept of the College. It was a difficult meeting.

After such an experience it was tempting to ignore the regional team ministers and simply get on with it. After all, as a body intent of being independent of the Baptist Union structures, we did not need their permission to set up shop. On the other hand, we knew that without their general blessing, the College would struggle. We arranged another meeting with the regional team leaders on 14 October 2013. Thankfully, this proved to be a much more positive experience. In my presentation I said:

“We believe the time is over-due for a professional body, which in the first place provides a simple framework for continuing ministerial education, and which in the second place offers non-adversarial peer support for ministers in difficulties with their church. Please note the term ‘non-adversarial’, We want to work with you, we want to support you, and in no way will we undermine you. . . We wish to be seen as an ally for all those concerned for the well-being of ministers.”

Then Paul Goodliff stepped down from his role as ministries team leader of the Baptist Union in September 2014. Although Paul has remained a Baptist minister.... there were consequences for the CBM. Whereas previously we had a good relationship with the ministries team—not just with Paul Goodliff, its leader, but also with Viv O’Brien, a colleague of Paul, who also came to board meetings—with Paul’s departure that relationship was ruptured and Viv O’Brien was no longer

allowed to attend our meetings. In spite of this, we continued to work at our relationship with the Baptist Union and its regional ministers. On 16 September 2015 we had for instance a positive meeting with Phil Jump, the regional team leader tasked with preparing a wide-ranging report on Baptist ministry.

The Ignite Report

To our delight when the report, *Ignite: Investing in Leaders*, was published in December 2015, there was a good deal of emphasis on the need for Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) to become a way of life for ministers. However, we had concerns. In our formal response, dated 21 January 2016, we said:

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

Our concerns proved well-founded. Although the *Ignite* report was welcomed by the Baptist Union Council, none of the associations—with the exception of the South Eastern Baptist Association—has sought to implement its recommendations on CMD. Most Baptist associations are hard-pressed and have other priorities.

An offer to help with CMD

The board then decided to approach individual associations with a view to offering help with CMD. Following our October 2016 board meeting we wrote to all regional team leaders:

“The place where that CMD might be delivered, according to *Ignite*, is through the associations, and that is where we would like to begin to engage in conversation to see where our part lies. Our hope is that there might be one or two associations, initially, who will work very closely with us to roll out a way of encouraging CMD. We already have our CMD reporting processes which enable ministers to capture every way in which they have accessed CMD, ministerial fellowship and accountability. . . We are developing our own appraisal process that will be available for College members to use, and one of the ways in which we may serve the wider community of Baptist ministers is to offer our services as appraisal guides or accompaniers.”

At this stage CBM is still in the process of exploring possibilities with individual associations. To our surprise there appears to be still suspicion and opposition among some. Nonetheless we are hopeful that the ‘slow burn’ period of development may soon be over, and that at last CBM may come of age.

The subsequent history 2018-2021

Alas, the optimism expressed in *This is My Story* proved not to be as well-founded as we had hoped. The leadership of the Baptist Union was determined to block the development of the College. Indeed, Paul Goodliff’s successor in the Ministry Department of the Baptist Union was instructed by the Union not to have any dealings with us, and as a result, for instance, our request to have the briefest of face-to-face meetings with him was turned down.⁶

⁶ See email from Andy Hughes, Ministries Team Leader, 30 March 2015: “In answer to your question about using the database I’m sorry but it will not be possible for us to make it available to the College. As I’m sure you’re aware the view of the Baptist

Similarly, the Baptist Union leadership sought to deny us access to Baptist ministers on the register of nationally accredited Baptist ministers. At one stage, for instance, we wanted to send out to every Baptist minister a booklet detailing not just our vision, but also articles setting out what we as a College had to offer. We needed the help of the Baptist Union because with the demise of the Baptist *Directory* (the last edition was published in 2013) there was no up-to-date list of names and addresses of ministers. We recognized that because of concerns for GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) we ourselves could not directly use the Baptist Union's database, but we hoped that by offering a substantial donation the Baptist Union might have sent out the mailing on our behalf. This help was refused, not because of the extra workload, but rather (it appeared to us) because the leadership of the Union felt there was no place for a body independent of their structures.⁷

However, we refused to give up. Instead we agreed to persevere. I remember quoting in one of our Board agendas the words of William Carey: "I can plod. This is my only genius. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything."⁸

At a Board meeting in February 2018 we decided to devote our energies to seeking to work with the regional associations. To this end we agreed to see if one or two regional ministers might be prepared to join the Board of the College. Furthermore, bearing in mind the sensitivity of regional ministers to our original vision of standing alongside ministers in difficulties, we agreed to rebrand CBM with a primary emphasis on ministerial growth and development.

Steering Group and Regional Team Leaders has been that the formation of a college was not something they were supportive of."

⁷ See Andy Hughes' response on 22 October 2015 to our offer: "As I've previously indicated to you the Baptist Steering Group do not want the Ministries Team to promote the CBM".

⁸ S Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1923) 28.

In November 2018 as chairman I wrote a personal letter to all regional team leaders, in which I enclosed our new vision statement, which we now described as ‘a vision for well-being in ministry’

The College of Baptist Ministers was established in 2013 to promote the well-being of Baptist ministers. As part of our vision

- We provide a wide-ranging thirteen-point code of ethics for ministers.
- We suggest a programme for continuing ministerial development with strands dealing with accountability, applied practice, collegiality, learning, ministry, practical competencies, review, and spirituality.
- We offer a range of ministry resources including guidelines for ministerial review, a booklet to help the bereaved coping with the death of a loved one, and a workbook for marriage preparation. We also make available in PDF form a ‘cornucopia of pastoral wisdom’ from articles first published in *Ministry Today* (1994-2018).
- Our concern for ministerial well-being includes the retired, as exemplified by *Retired Ministers Matters*, a report on how ministers experience retirement.
- We maintain a web site which contains even more on-line pastoral resources (www.collegeofbaptistministers.com).
- We send members complimentary copies of books written by board members on subjects such as faith-sharing and leadership; we also offer substantial discounts on other books written by board members.
- We mail out a monthly membership letter in which board members share ideas and reflections relating to ministry.

Although independent of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the College is exploring ways of working together with associations and their regional ministers to serve

the needs of its ministers, especially in the area of continuing ministerial development.

I had previously sent all the regional ministers a complimentary copy of the CBM publication *Retired Ministers Matter*. In the letter I asked for feedback on the book; offered to put regional ministers on the mailing list of our monthly members' letters in which we shared ideas on the practice of ministry; and said that I looked forward to hearing from them. Perhaps because of time constraints, not one regional minister replied. For the first time I felt dejected. Furthermore, neither of the two regional ministers we approached about the possibility of coming to our board meetings felt able to accept.

As a result in January 2019 I emailed the members of the CBM Board raising the possibility of winding up the College. "I still passionately believe in the original vision of CBM, but the truth is that we have not been able to turn the vision into reality". In their replies my colleagues felt that we should still keep going.

So we kept going – just. The monthly letters to members kept going. In October 2019 Peter Thomas and I met with Tim Fergusson, who had been just been appointed to promote continuing ministerial development in the Baptist Union. However, I felt increasingly conscious that as a retired minister I was no longer in the loop as far as the Baptist Union was concerned. In July 2020 I wrote to Peter Thomas:

"I find it significant that the two letters I have written to Andy Hughes, who has responsibility at Didcot for ministry, have been unanswered; and that in this period of Covid-19 which has particularly affected those over 70, as far as I am aware the regional ministers have not contacted retired ministers to see how we are doing – as yesterday's men and women, we have become invisible. I am happy to chair CBM (my title of chairman of CBM looks good on a book cover!), but if 'action' is needed in talking with the BU staff/regional ministers or promoting CBM to serving ministers, then I am not the man."

Then in September the Autumn 2020 edition of *Baptists Together* arrived with the announcement of a ‘Continuing Ministerial Development framework’ with a view to ‘Sustaining our well-being and capability’. At the heart of this new framework lie five habits:

1. Learning. We read, seek training, attend conferences, visit other settings, follow blogs, shadow different practitioners, join webinars... we learn in whatever way helps us to stay contemporary and fresh.
2. Attentiveness. We are whole people recognising that God has created our full humanity. We attend to our own relationship with God, to our physical well-being, our relationships, and our mental health and emotional health.
3. Accountability. We meet regularly with someone outside our immediate setting who helps us reflect on our ministry. This might be a mention, a pastoral supervisor, a spiritual director, a coach, a soul friend, or we may be part of an accountability group or learning community.
4. Connection: We connect with our fellow Baptist ministers for mutual support one-to-one, or in cluster meetings, ministers’ conferences, Assembly, and so on. Where possible we offer our time to the wider family of Baptists Together, perhaps as a mentor, moderator, trustee or member of a national network
5. Review. We submit our work as ministers to periodic review, using a ‘360 degree’ tool that seeks the views of those inside and outside our ministry setting. These views are collated by someone we trust to give us honest and frank feedback and who helps us determine any consequent actions

Clearly that for which we had campaigned for many years was in the process of becoming a reality. In that I rejoiced, and sent an email to Tim Fergusson to congratulate him on what had been achieved. Precisely how all this will come into being, at this stage we do not know. However, with a major part of our

vision hopefully becoming reality, it seemed that perhaps the time had come for us to 'bite the bullet' and bring the work of the College to an end.

On 19 November 2020 the Board met by Zoom and the decision was made to dissolve the College of Baptist Ministers.

Inevitably there was a degree of sadness. Not everything we had set out to do had been achieved. For instance, we had not been able to convince our colleagues in ministry of the need of an independent professional body. However, not having gained the confidence of the leadership of the Baptist Union, now seemed to be the time to bring to an end gracefully the College of Baptist Ministers.

At the same meeting the decision was made to publish *A College of Peers* as a legacy volume. To satisfy requirements laid down by Companies House the College was not formally closed until later in 2021.

Reflections on failure

At this juncture it is easy to be critical of the Baptist Union leadership as also of the regional ministers. What a difference their encouragement and support would have made. Although as a body independent of the Baptist Union structures we did not need the permission of anybody to 'set up shop', the fact is that without the blessing of the national and regional leaders, it was always going to be difficult to succeed. I personally am still puzzled as to why there was so much opposition – particularly in the early days. Thankfully, in other contexts, I have later found regional ministers extremely courteous and helpful.

However, we cannot just 'blame' the national and regional leadership for our failure to implement our vision. The fact is that we failed to sell the vision to our fellow Baptist ministers.

Clearly had Paul Goodliff remained as Head of the Ministry Department things could have been different – but then he would not have ended up as General Secretary of Churches Together in England. With hindsight, perhaps I was not the

best person to be Chairman of the College – at the time I did not realise the difference retirement could make to relationships with one's fellow Baptist ministers.

Much as we wish the Baptist Union well with its new initiative in creating a system for continuing ministerial development, I am sorry that we were not invited to help shape their new scheme – I am convinced that the nine-stranded programme we developed for CMD was a very good tool. Secondly, with disputes between ministers and churches remaining a fact of life, I am convinced that the need for peer support remains as urgent as ever.⁹ Hopefully, in God's time, an independent body representing the interests of ministers will emerge.

Reflections on achievement

Yet in spite of our failure to realise our initial vision, we have some achievements under our belt:

1. I dare to believe that we helped to put continuing ministerial development upon the agenda of the Baptist Union. True, we have not been the only voice, but we have been one of the voices.
2. We created a system of personal professional development which worked for those who used it. Or at least, that is my testimony. From the moment of its creation I created my own personal portfolio, and have used it to give account of the way in which I have been seeking to live out the call God has on my life. Surprising as it may seem to some, the multi-stranded nature of accountability which was built into the portfolio has been helpful to me. The one 'strand' missing from the College's proforma portfolio is the opportunity to reflect on future goals and projects – yes, even the retired can have goals and projects.

⁹ See membership letter 23, 'Terminating Ministry – an issue yet to be resolved'.

3. We produced a code of ethics for ministers, which is different from the disciplinary code of the Baptist Union which largely tells ministers what they may not do! I believe that any profession worthy of the name has a code of ethics. Although ministers do have the Bible as their primary guide for all matters of faith and practice, the fact is there are a host of consequences for ministers which need to be worked out with the practical realities of day-to-day pastoral ministry in mind.
4. We produced a set of guidelines for ministerial review. It is true that these guidelines were largely taken from my book *Living out the Call*,¹⁰ but nonetheless it was good that we formalised these guidelines for use by members of the College. I would like to think that they have been a blessing to at least some.
5. Most months we sent out a letter to our members where a member of the Board reflected upon a wide range of ministry issues. The standard of those letters has been surprisingly high, as can be seen from the selection of letters that have been reproduced in this volume.
6. We published resources for pastoral ministry. In this regard I am grateful to the Board for allowing *Happy Ever After?* and *A Loved One Dies* to be updated and re-published in 2017 and thereby have a new lease of life. In his review of *Happy Ever After?* in the Baptist Times Stephen Roe concluded: “I know of no other workbook so surely and encouraging for use by Baptist ministers and churches”.¹¹ Then there is *Ministry Today UK 1994-2018* (CBM 2018), the eight volumes of 512 articles from the former journal, *Ministry Today*, providing both a general index and a thematic index – it remains a ‘cornucopia of pastoral wisdom and insight’.
7. We published two reports I had written on ministers and retirement. *Retirement Matters for Ministers: a report on*

¹⁰ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Living Out the Call* (FeedA Read, 2nd edition 2016).

¹¹ ‘Happy Ever After?’ *The Baptist Times* 2 March 2018.

a research project into how Baptist ministers experience retirement (CBM 2018) and *Entering New Territory. Why are retired Baptist ministers moving to Anglican churches? What are the underlying theological issues?* (CBM 2019) Both these reports were well-received. The review by John Rackley on the general ministerial experience of retirement noted the sense of abandonment felt by many retired Baptist ministers: and called for those who bear “significant care for the wellbeing of ministers in the Baptist Union and Associations to receive this challenge and respond” ¹². Sadly the Baptist Union has yet to take that voice seriously. Interestingly, the second volume on the experience of retired Baptist ministers in Anglican churches received particular attention from Anglicans. In this respect let me quote from Stephen Cottrell, the new Archbishop of York: “Gregory the Great in his Pastoral Rule spoke about how it was important for ministers to look at things from what he called a ‘high-vantage point’, but what I interpret as meaning a ‘different vantage point’. And this, I think, is why I so enjoyed the book. Looking through the lens of a lifetime of ministry in the Baptist Church, your take on the Church of England is not just instructive for Baptists, but enables us in the Church of England to see ourselves from a different angle. I found this encouraging and challenging. So thank you.” I would like to think that the College can take part of the credit, for without their enabling this report would not have seen the light of day. Furthermore, it needs to be noted that all these resources and reports are to be found not just in the six copyright libraries, but in college libraries, both Baptist and non-Baptist, up and down the land and indeed beyond the shores of the UK.

8. This ‘legacy’ volume is, of course, another achievement. To quote Henry Wordsworth Longfellow: “Great is the art

¹² John Rackley, ‘Retirement Matters for Ministers’, *Baptist Ministers’ Journal* 342 (April 2019) 34-35.

of beginning, but greater is the art of ending”. I dare to believe that with the publication of *A College of Peers* we have ended well!

9. Last but not least, the regular Board meetings of the College have strengthened friendship and provided much thought and stimulation to its members. As chairman I want to thank every member of the Board for the time and effort, the wisdom and the insight they have given to the College: viz. Stephen Asibuo (Minister of Trinity Baptist Church, Croydon), Paul Goodliff (General Secretary of Churches Together in England) , Mike Thornton (Minister of Epsom Baptist Church), and in particular Peter Thomas (North Springfield Baptist Church, Chelmsford), who has served not just as our Treasurer, but also as our web master and our publisher.

¹³ No doubt the keen-eyed will have noticed we have had no women on the Board. From the beginning we realised that this was a weakness, but sadly all the women who we approached ultimately declined ¹⁴ What people may not realise is that without exception the members of the Board have been extraordinarily well qualified: Stephen Asibuo, a former civil engineer and a deputy school head, has degrees in education and theology; Paul Goodliff, a former geography teacher, has two first degrees, a Master’s degree, and a DMin; Mike Thornton, has a first degree, a Master’s and a DMin; Peter Thomas, a former chemistry teacher, has two first degrees and a Master’s degree; while I have a MA (in Modern Languages and Theology) and a PhD. In addition, the members of the Board have many years of pastoral experience and are or have been deeply involved in denominational service. The Board has been a formidable resource.

¹³ In the period of preparation for the public launch Rev Dr Clive Jarvis served as Secretary to the Board.

¹⁴ Until October 2014 Rev Vivienne O’Brien, who worked as Ministries Adviser for the Baptist Union, also attended our meetings, but was never a formal Board member..

DOCUMENTS OF THE COLLEGE

1. THE VISION ¹⁵

An ambitious organisation

Most Baptist ministers will want to grow and develop in their understanding and practice of ministry. They will want to maintain the highest standards and will seek to give of their very best as they exercise the ministry to which God has called them. All ministers need support in times of difficulty. The College of Baptist Ministers shares that vision and wants to provide a forum where ministers can resource one another so that together we can rise to the challenges of mission and ministry in an everchanging world. We recognise that there are other Baptist bodies, including theological colleges and associations, which already include these ambitions in their work – but this is our exclusive focus in which we as Baptist ministers seek to support one another.

A professional body

We want to be a professional body. Sadly amongst some the concept of ‘professionalism’ is misunderstood. There is the assumption that to be professional is to be unspiritual. We believe that to be a mistaken view.

The actual word ‘profession’ stems from the medieval Latin word ‘*professio*’, which was used of the taking of vows upon entering a religious order. Gradually the word broadened in its usage and came to indicate ‘a vocation in which a professed

¹⁵ This vision statement was presented to the consultation on 29 January 2013. As noted earlier, subsequently the CMD programme was extended from seven to nine strands by the addition of the ‘ministry opportunities’ strand and the catch-all ‘other’ strand.

knowledge of some department of learning or science is used in its application to the affairs of others or in the practice of an art founded upon it' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In other words, professionals are people who apply their knowledge in the service of others. Surely this is what we as Christian ministers seek to do? We are not in the business of knowledge for knowledge's sake – but rather we use our knowledge in the service of others.

Professionalism, rightly understood, implies offering to God our very best – both of mind and of heart. There is nothing cold or unspiritual about professionalism. Professionalism involves whole-hearted commitment to Christ and his church. A lack of professionalism in ministry is more often than not a mark of laziness rather than of unspirituality. "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing", said David (2 Samuel 24.24) – such a spirit is the spirit of the true professional. It is in this sense that we want to be a professional body. We want to raise standards in ministry 'to the greater glory of God'. That is the vision that drives us.

A caring fellowship

We want the best for God, and we want the best for Baptist ministers too. At one stage we were considering straplines for this new body. One possibility we suggested was 'to help you complete the course'; another was 'to keep you strong in your calling'. We have the welfare of ministers in mind. We want to be there for ministers when the going is tough; and we want to be there when ministry is flourishing, and there is much good to be celebrated. Yes ministry can be tough, but it can also be exhilarating. There is no calling which is higher and more fulfilling – but there is also no calling which is more stressful and more painful.

Our vision is that in those tough times we will be there. We recognise that we are not the only Baptist organisation concerned for the well-being of our members – not least the Baptist Ministers Fellowship continues to play a significant role

in pastoral care. However, we are different from the Baptist Ministers Fellowship. One of our set aims, for instance, is that “we will provide peer support for ministers who find themselves in dispute with their church”. On those sad occasions when relationships have broken down, we want to be there for our members.

Regional ministers carry a prime responsibility for the care of ministers, but the reality is that there are limits to what regional ministers can offer ministers. For when a regional minister is called into a troubled situation, the regional minister has to be there for both the church and the minister – and in so doing has the difficult task of holding in balance conflicting responsibilities. The church may feel the regional minister is on the side of the minister, while the minister may believe the regional minister is on the side of the church. We believe that in times of trouble ministers can benefit from those whose sole purpose is to accompany them through difficult times. At those times we want to be amongst those to whom our members can turn.

Indeed, we will be there for our members, whatever the circumstances. Often situations are not that clear cut; sadly ministers can say unhelpful things not because they want to be unhelpful, but because they are so stressed out. Hopefully the presence of a supportive friend will make matters easier. Whatever, we will be there to care.

A resource centre offering wisdom and expertise

We want to be there to provide help to ministers seeking advice, spiritual direction and work consultancy. The fact is that ministry can be a lonely business. The majority of our ministers do not have the privilege of working in team ministry – and even those who do can benefit from the wisdom of others beyond the local church.

Increasingly ministers are realising the benefits of regular spiritual direction and work supervision. Hopefully the College

will be able to point its members to people who are qualified to offer such direction and supervision.

In many churches annual appraisals have become the norm. However, experience shows that an outside ministerial facilitator working with a couple of deacons can make the process of appraisal much more worthwhile. Hopefully the College will be able to point ministers to trained facilitators willing to offer their services.

Most ministers now avail themselves of a sabbatical every seven years or so; for in doing so they have discovered them to be key opportunities for renewal and re-envisioning. However, many find the planning of the sabbatical difficult: the choice of a study topic, recommendations of where to go and what to read. Hopefully the College will be able to offer guidance to ensure that ministers make the most of their time.

Then there are the times when all of a sudden an issue raises its head, and a minister senses the need for advice. Hopefully the College will be able to provide consultants with wisdom and experience.

Finally, a key resource of the College is its interactive web site www.collegeofbaptistministers.com. It is interactive in the sense that members are able to share their own wisdom and expertise on every aspect of ministry. For instance, we envisage the website becoming a forum where sabbatical experiences and reports can be shared. The website will include details and links to resources ministers have created and documents they have produced.

We recognise that there are many other bodies which already offer all kinds of helpful resources to ministers, but a distinctive that we will have in common with association is that we will be operating within a Baptist context, offering resources, created by our members, meeting the specific needs of Baptist ministers.

A programme for personal continuing ministerial development

We want to promote the health and well-being of ministers through encouraging every one of our members to create their own personal programme for continuing ministerial development. With this in mind we have identified the following seven strands which we believe are vital to the well-being of every minister. In alphabetical order, they are: -.

Accountability – regularly opening our lives to the supportive scrutiny of one or two others.

Applied Practice – gaining new insights through reflecting on our experience of ministry and church life, learning through failure as well as success, pioneering new ways of doing mission and ministry, creating courses that help our people grow in their faith, becoming more effective as a preacher, developing new skills in managing change, resolving conflict, building team, and in leading God's people forward.

Appraisal – on an annual basis allowing others to help us review our ministries, affirming all that has been positive in the past year, and agreeing the shape of ministry for the coming year.

Collegiality – meeting together with other ministers to strengthen, encourage and support one another.

Learning – through attending courses, reading books, working for a formal qualification, or simply going on a broadening sabbatical.

Practical competencies – relating to some of the more practical competencies of ministry identified by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, such as IT skills and safeguarding policies.

Spirituality – sustaining and deepening our walk with God.

Every member will be helped to create a personal online portfolio accessed through the internet – this portfolio will be secure and accessible only to the member and to those charged to monitor the portfolio, unless specific permission is given to others by the member. Members will be encouraged to post regularly brief date-marked entries according to the strands - over the year we would expect members to post something in every strand. Apart from the spirituality strand, which would be difficult to assess, each experience of development would link to a way in which it could be confirmed, for the rare occasion where verification could be helpful to the minister together with the date when they would be encouraged to post entries regularly in their portfolio, at least every two months.

The fact is that in a fast-changing world we cannot simply fall back upon what we learnt in college. Continual updating of personal and professional skills is a ‘must’ if ministers are not to be ‘happy amateurs’. But at the moment most of us are. Some years ago the American church consultant Roy Oswald lamented that “only 20% of clergy in the US engage in regular continuing education events of five days or more each year”. Probably among Baptist ministers in the UK the percentage is much lower. Surely we could do better!

We wish to stress that first and foremost this programme of continuing ministerial development is for the benefit of the members. We do not believe that the maintenance of the online portfolio will prove burdensome – rather we trust that it will be viewed as a positive stimulus to growth and development. We hope that churches will welcome this new initiative. We could imagine that the maintenance of an on-line portfolio will cause ministers to be more attractive to churches seeking a new minister. Furthermore, the presence of such a portfolio could prove helpful to members on those rare occasions when there is a dispute – for the portfolio would be a clear sign of a minister’s professional approach to ministry.

A code of ministerial ethics

We are committed to developing an appropriate code of ethics for our members. Some work has already been done in this area. For instance, a *Code of Ethics for Baptist Ministry* emerged from a consultation at the Baptist colleges' staff conference in 2004; in 2011 the Baptist Union of Great Britain approved a document entitled *A Guide to Pastoral Realities and Ministry*. However, more work needs to be done in this area. What's more, a code of ethics cannot just be imposed – it needs to be understood and accepted by all concerned.

Some argue that codes of ethics can lead to legalism, and what counts is a person's walk with the Lord. And yet, while codes of ethics may have their limitations, they do point to what it means in practice for ministers to go the way of Jesus. Perhaps one way of avoiding legalism is deliberately drawing up a simple code of ethics, and then accompanying it with a more detailed commentary – somewhat akin to the Jewish haggadah – illustrating the way in which the code might be applied.

A College of Baptist Ministers

Finally, notice that we are not a College 'for' Baptist ministers, but a College 'of' Baptist ministers. The fact is that a college need not denote a training institution; the Oxford Dictionaries Online gives the second meaning of college as 'an organised group of professional people with particular aims, duties and privileges'. It is in this latter sense that we are a College composed of Baptist ministers – we are all 'colleagues' supporting one another.

The College of Baptist Ministers is very different from a theological college. A theological college is made up of experts and novices – the experts are the teachers, and the novices are the students. However, the College of Baptist Ministers is made up of its members – we are there for one another. Although eventually we may be able to employ paid staff, first and foremost the College will be run by its members for its members. Our vision is that our members will formulate

policies; our members will contribute to the website; our members will be there to offer wisdom and advice, support and advocacy, and whatever else other members need. This is a College of peers.

Frequently asked question

Who is eligible to join CBM?

We welcome all ministers of Baptist churches in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Baptist Union of Scotland, and the Baptist Union of Wales; we also welcome Baptist ministers serving with the Baptist Missionary Society.

What are some of the extra benefits of belonging to CBM?

We have collaborated with Ministry Today UK, whereby every CBM member will automatically receive the journal Ministry Today, the only ecumenical journal devoted to the practice of ministry.

We are also in the process of negotiating a fee for Professional Indemnity Insurance for our members, which they can purchase at a discount as CBM members.¹⁶

How many Baptist ministers will eventually join CBM?

We would like every minister to belong! However, at this early stage that is an unrealistic goal. Perhaps the day will come when every NAM will see joining CBM simply as the next step, but we believe that many Baptist ministers will see the value of CBM membership.

What is the relationship of the CBM to the Baptist Union of Great Britain?

CBM by its very nature is a body independent of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. There is, however, a good relationship and clear channels of communication between the Baptist

¹⁶ In the end that proved to be too expensive.

Union's ministries team and ourselves. At an early stage the regional team leaders and the Baptist theological colleges were informed of what we were seeking to achieve. We have continued to keep in touch with the regional team leaders and the colleges as CBM has developed.

What is the relationship of CBM to the regional Baptist associations?

One of the key strands in CBM's continuing ministerial development programme is 'collegiality'. We will expect our member to meet together with other ministers in networks and fellowships, with a view to strengthening, encouraging and supporting one another. In this respect we recognise the variety of formal and informal structures which exist within regional associations to support ministers. We are not in the business of creating an alternative rival 'network', but rather encouraging and developing the relationships between ministers that Associations and the Baptist Ministers Fellowship have already promoted. Our aim is to encourage ministers to fully utilize what already exists.

One way in which CBM may complement regional associations, is, where asked, to provide experienced ministers to support members in times of difficulty by becoming 'companions' to walk alongside them. The companion will act as a supportive non-judgmental friend to help the member find appropriate ways forward, providing support, advice, counsel, wisdom and prayer. The companion will not seek to take the place of a regional minister, nor will the companion act as a formal mediator. The companion may attend meetings where a minister is entitled to be accompanied by a non-legal supporter, if the minister should so request. We are in the process of developing guidelines for these companions. We would expect them to be appointed through a process of rigorous selection, to undergo suitable training, and to receive on-going supervision by CBM.

What is the relationship of CBM to regional ministers?

In difficult situations and times of conflict regional ministers – as also the Baptist Union's Ministries Team – should always be

consulted sooner rather than later, and we would expect regional ministers to provide the main resources for pastoral care of ministers in such circumstances. However, we hope that ministers will feel able to call on CBM in situations which they do not feel to be serious enough to consult their regional minister, and hopefully as a result difficulties may be prevented from escalating. We recognize that this already happens widely, with college tutors, old friends from college days, a minister's mentor from their days as a NAM, or another member of Fresh Streams, often being asked to be listening ear, and not just in times of difficulty. Indeed, we recognize that many regional ministers are themselves setting up networks for support and peer mentoring. CBM will take its place as another forum for conversation and reflection.

We do not see ourselves as replacing or competing with the work of regional ministers. We hope that regional ministers will find CBM a supportive asset.

Is CBM essentially a trade union of Baptist ministers?

Although there may appear to be similarities to Unite, the trade union with its clergy chapter (to which some Baptist ministers belong), we are very different. We are a professional association, not a union. We see ourselves offering non-adversarial peer support for ministers in difficulties. Although independent of the Baptist Union, we wish to be supportive of the Baptist Union and its leadership. In no way will we undermine or threaten the work of regional ministers. Indeed, where there are difficulties between ministers and their churches, we would expect the regional minister to be their first port of call.

We will always seek to encourage members toward reconciliation and the avoidance of legal proceedings. However, on the rare occasions that members may find themselves engaged in such procedures, we will provide personal support to the minister to ensure that they do not go through such procedures isolated and alone.

We recognize that there are also rare occasions when ministers find themselves engaged in proceedings that may place them in

disciplinary situations with their churches and with the Baptist Union. At such times it may be that the church and the Baptist Union must necessarily stand apart from the minister; CBM believes that regardless of the nature of such proceedings, ministers concerned should not be left alone and unsupported, and will seek to work with regional ministers in providing appropriate support. Although at such times it may appear that we are on an ‘opposite’ sides from the Baptist Union or a regional ministers, CBM will eschew any adversarial spirit – we want to be involved in a constructive and not a destructive process.

Why choose the name ‘College’?

The name ‘college’ was actually chosen for us! At one stage we explored using such terms as an ‘institute’, an ‘association’, or even a ‘society’ – but Companies House has ruled out their use by us. Instead the advice we received from Companies House and the Charities Commission was that we are a ‘college’ like the College of Health Care Chaplains.

2. A CODE OF ETHICS

As a condition of membership, I commit myself to observing the following code of ethics:

1. I will love God with my body, mind and spirit, and will love my neighbour as myself
2. In relation to God, I will serve him with all that I am, giving him my very best. I will root my life in Scripture and prayer. My life will be marked by faith, integrity, discipline, and sacrifice – and I will seek to bear the Spirit's fruit of love, joy, peace and hope. Arising out of my commitment to God, propriety will mark my sexual conduct and integrity my financial conduct; I will also seek to observe and implement good safeguarding practice.
3. In relation to myself, I will keep the principle of Sabbath rest, however busy I am. I will care for my body. I will delight in the world that God has made.
4. In relation to home life, I will make time and space for loved ones. In this respect I will seek to ensure that my life is characterised by faithfulness, creativity, energy, and play. I will seek to ensure that in my home there is always a welcome to outsiders.
5. In relation to God's church, I will serve people by exciting fresh hope and faith in God, encouraging them to love one another, enabling individuals to change and grow, and empowering the church for witness and service.
6. In relation to those with whom I share leadership in God's church, I will be a good team player, and always seeking to be positive and loyal, and I will shun negative talking and thinking. With an open life and diary, I will be accountable to them.
7. In relation to ministers, I will not engage in criticism of or gossip of others, but will affirm and encourage my colleagues. I will pray for those in difficulty, and where

opportunity arises, will seek to be there for them. Any confidences given to me, I will respect.

8. In relation to my practice of ministry I will seek to work within my competence, while also seeking always to enlarge and deepen my understanding and experience of ministry. In this regard I commit myself to a life-long learning, not least through working with the College's continuing ministerial development programme.
9. In relation to the wider community of Baptists, I commit myself to the Baptist way of being the church. I will not use my influence to alienate the church or any of its members from their denominational loyalty and support. If my convictions change, then I will withdraw from the church.
10. In relation to the wider community, I will engage with others to seek the good of all. At all times I will seek to exercise a positive Christian witness.
11. In relation to the created order, I will seek to live in ways which encourage sustainability.
12. In relation to my ministry, I will hold all confidences shared with me as sacred, unless otherwise compelled by a court of law or by imminent risk of serious harm to another person. If difficulties arise, I will seek help from regional ministers and where appropriate from the College itself; I will never resort to the courts of law for personal justification unless the College specifically encourages me to do so.
13. In retirement, I will honour the ministry of colleagues. In particular I will honour my successors and affirm their ministries. I will not engage in any form of pastoral care without their explicit consent.

3. A SUPPORTIVE STRUCTURE FOR CONTINUING MINISTERIAL DEVELOPMENT ¹⁷

As has been recognised by the *Ignite Report* (2016) presented to the Baptist Union Council, Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) is a real asset to the well-being of ministers. Over the last three years the College has pioneered a supportive structure for CMD, which it is happy to offer to all Baptist ministers, churches and Associations.

The support CBM offers

Responsibility for CMD rests with each individual minister but CBM can help in a number of ways.

1. The minister makes an agreement to engage with CMD using the College's support structure. Simply making that commitment, and opening oneself to the accountability process, will be helpful to many.
2. CBM provides a framework to record CMD through its CMD portfolio. This records CMD experiences in nine strands: Accountability; Applied Practice; Collegiality; Learning; Ministry/ministries; Practical competencies; Review of Ministry (our preferred term rather than Appraisal); Spirituality and Other.....Portfolio entries can be recorded in an online portal or by email. The minister will return his/her portfolio to CBM at least annually on an agreed timetable.
3. On behalf of CBM, a CMD Supervisor (an experienced minister trained and appointed by CBM) will review the portfolio entries periodically and offer email feedback to the minister which may include recommendations for future activities. This feedback will be purely advisory but may, if requested by the minister, be followed by further conversation on ways to enhance CMD, by email, telephone or face to face. In this way the CMD supervisor

¹⁷ This document was finalised in November 2016.

will be offering ongoing encouragement to the minister in their CMD.

4. The minister will engage in a regular (annual or biennial) review of ministry according to the CBM guidelines on review of ministry or an equivalent approved process. If the minister needs help finding an appropriate review facilitator for that process the College will make recommendations. Note that the review facilitator's fee and expenses should be covered directly by the church/association and not through CBM. The College will obtain written confirmation from the review facilitator or the church secretary that the annual review has taken place.
5. At the end of the agreed period the CMD supervisor will make a judgment on whether the minister has engaged positively with CMD. If so CBM will provide the minister with a "Certificate of Engagement with Continuing Ministerial Development" confirming this, and notify the church and/or association. Note that CBM fully recognises the differences between styles of ministry and between personalities and strengths of ministers. For example, some prefer to learn by individual study and others by discussion with other ministers. Some prefer large gatherings and others individual conversations. So the CMD supervisor will consider the overall shape of portfolio entries, rather than just tick boxes. That said, the regular review of ministry would normally be expected.....
6. If the minister appears not to be engaging with CMD through the year, the CMD supervisor will initiate a conversation and endeavour to encourage him/her. If that situation continues, CBM will not be able to provide the Certificate of Engagement with CMD. Note that CBM is only in a position to encourage a minister to engage with CMD. If further steps beyond those listed above are deemed necessary, that would be the responsibility of the church or association.

Costs

Expenses associated with supporting ministers would normally be borne by their church or association. The basic charge for CBM for providing CMD support for a minister will be £30, but this would not include extra costs such as face-to-face meetings with a CMD supervisor (see paragraph 3), the provision of a review facilitator (see paragraph 4), or for attendance at any conferences, seminars or training events run by CBM.

4. GUIDELINES FOR AN ANNUAL REVIEW

Introduction

Many ministers already benefit from an annual review of their ministry. To avoid overtones of employment, management or performance, we describe the process as review and not as appraisal. In response to requests, CBM offers these guidelines for a suggested process for an annual review of ministry as one aid to becoming the best ministers we can be.

A theological basis for the review of ministry is provided by the United Methodist Church of America: ¹⁸

“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

¹⁸ See Paul Beasley-Murray, *Living Out The Call: 1. Living for God’s Glory*, 42.

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."

A review of ministry helps ministers

- 1) to affirm their gifts, achievements and personality;
- 2) to step back and take stock (especially with reference to previous goals and unexpected happenings);
- 3) to reflect on (a) their personal aspirations and needs; (b) their effectiveness in their daily work;
- 4) to improve skills, insights and gifts;
- 5) to identify areas for profession and personal development;
- 6) to recognise challenges, identify achievable goals and determine appropriate strategies for future action.

An annual review can affirm ministers and say "well done". It can support them in their calling and personal life. It can review previously set objectives and set future goals. It can provide a safe environment for discussing problems and, where necessary, to express dissatisfaction by either minister or church. It can identify training needs and at the same time new opportunities. Yet the purpose of the review is not only to consider things which the minister might approach differently but also to explore ways in which the church might do things differently, and not least ways in which church and leadership can share the tasks of ministry and affirm and support the minister more effectively. The review of ministry should be a positive process. If there is any element of criticism then it should be constructive criticism with the well-being of the minister and of the church in mind.

Ministers rightly consider themselves accountable to God. We are servants of Christ, not servants of the church. A review of ministry, roughly every year and timed not to clash with major events in the Christian year or the church programme, is an appropriate way to express that accountability, but for that to

be most effective CBM strongly recommend that an external facilitator is invited to bring their experience and wisdom and steer the review process.

The role of the facilitator

The facilitator will be a person with understanding and direct experience of Christian ministry who would carry the full confidence of both minister and church leadership.

The facilitator will ensure that both minister and leadership have understood each other correctly. He/she will help the leadership to understand the unique challenges of ministry in order better to support their minister. At the same time the facilitator will help the minister to appreciate any concerns the leadership might express. The facilitator is not there to inspect, appraise or evaluate the ministry in any sense.

The facilitator will help minister and leadership together to discern priorities, explore ways forward and identify appropriate outcomes for any issues.

One understandable anxiety of ministers is that a review of ministry could be a tool which the church or church leadership could use to micro-manage the minister. The facilitator will be responsible for ensuring that the minister is always seen and treated as an office holder and not as an employee. The facilitator is there to make sure that the minister will find the review to be a safe and enriching process.

The process for an annual review

1. Appointment of an appropriate external facilitator acceptable both to the minister and to the church Leadership (e.g. elders, deacons or trustees).
2. The church leadership appoints one or two of their number to attend the review meeting with the minister and the facilitator.
3. Completion of review questionnaire
 - a. The minister completes a review questionnaire which will be confidential to the facilitator.

- b. The member(s) of the church leadership who are appointed to attend the review meeting submit a briefer single response to the review questionnaire which will be confidential to the facilitator. Those who will attend the review meeting may informally canvas other members of the leadership for their comments, but it would not be appropriate for the leadership to hold a formal 'pre-review' meeting to discuss their response.
4. The facilitator seeks clarification on any issues arising from the review questionnaires if necessary.
5. The facilitator draws up the agenda for the review meeting and circulates.
6. The facilitator chairs the review meeting which will last no more than two hours, involving herself/himself, the minister and the delegated member(s) of the leadership team. At that meeting it will not be appropriate for the leadership representative(s) to raise any issues for discussion which the Facilitator has not included on the agenda. It would be very unfair for that meeting to contain any surprises. The facilitator will however be free to raise issues not mentioned by minister or leadership if he/she is led to do so.
7. The facilitator offers a draft summary review report from the review meeting to the minister. This will list topics discussed but the focus will be on agreed outcomes and next steps.
8. After the minister has responded to the draft, the facilitator sends the finalised summary review report to the leadership team. This will be the only feedback from the meeting to the wider leadership team – all discussion in the meeting itself will remain confidential to those present. The review will be confidential to the minister and leadership team – any of its content will only be shared with the wider church with the full agreement of the minister.
9. The facilitator or the minister will inform their regional minister that the review has taken place, The minister may choose to send their regional minister a copy of the review report, or may choose not to, and nothing should be inferred from the minister's choice in that regard either way.

The ministry review questionnaire

The Baptist Union is developing a form for ministry review and ministers may choose to use that form. Alternatively ministers may wish the outline below. In addition to the review questionnaire, the minister will provide the facilitator (and possibly, at the minister's choice, the leadership representatives) with an up-to-date copy of their continuing ministerial development portfolio. Whatever form is used, completing the review questionnaire should only require a few hours work, although ministers should feel free to write more if they find it helpful to do so. The questionnaire's primary purpose should be to inform the agenda for the review meeting, rather than provide a comprehensive record of the ministry of the previous year.

Suggested pattern of a review questionnaire ¹⁹

- A. Statement of purpose: "With all the other members of the ministry team, to excite fresh hope and faith in God, encouraging God's people to embrace others with love of another kind, enabling individuals to change and grow, and empowering the church for witness and service. With all the other members of the ministry team, to implement the mission policy of the church as agreed in the church's development plan. To....." [The basis of this should be the job specification given to you]
- B. Review of last year's objectives and general review of last year: This is your opportunity to give an account of yourself. What, with God's help, did you achieve? What has encouraged you? What has frustrated you?
- C. Review of last year's training and development: Courses you have attended; books you have read etc. How have you grown as a disciple of Jesus? How have you developed as a leader in God's church?

¹⁹ Taken from Paul Beasley-Murray's *Living Out the Call: 1 Living for God's Glory*, 45

- D. Key objectives for the coming year: These objectives will need to be agreed and should link with the church's priorities.
- E. Standards of performance: What did you feel you did well? What could have been done better?
- F. Development plans: How do you hope to grow and develop as a leader in God's church over the next 12 months?
- G. Further long-term development: What are your long-term goals?

Ministers may wish to address other questions as well. Issues to consider could include spirituality, relationships with God and with family, physical and emotional well-being, work-life balance, hopes and fears for the future and longer term aims, levels of satisfaction and fulfilment, and indeed anything which the minister wishes to use the review process to raise with the church in the presence of the facilitator.

5. INVESTING IN LEADERS:

A review of *Ignite: Investing in Leaders* (Baptist Union of Great Britain, December 2015).

The Board of the College of Baptist Ministers read this report with great interest and spent a whole day considering its proposals. At the very outset we wish to make clear that there is much in this report that we welcome and applaud – and not least the emphasis on the need for Continuing Ministerial Development to be part of the culture of Baptist ministry. It is within this context of appreciation that the criticisms that we

have to offer should be read. In our response we follow the order of the report.²⁰

Executive Summary

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

Data analysis

We welcome the statistical analysis.

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

²⁰ This document was produced by the Board at its meeting on 25 January 2016. A copy of this response was sent to the Baptist Union as also to all members of the College.

larger staff teams contain a sizeable proportion of non-accredited ministers.

- We are concerned that the charts on members per minister are statistically compromised. No distinction is made between full and part-time ministers. The graph of average size of church with 0/1/2 ministers fails to indicate whether average means arithmetic mean (total members divided by number of churches) or median (the middle church when ranked according to size smallest to largest).

Marks of ministry

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

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

understanding that ‘pastors’ were evangelists and church planters.

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

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

We believe that there is a distinct role of the pastor-teacher which is rooted in the Scriptural understanding of ministry, and do not see why ministers-in-training should not be prepared for that role. Central to that role, for instance, is preaching and teaching. We base this assertion not just on one proof text (we find it significant that the Scripture passage constantly alluded to in the report is Eph 4.11 (wrongly referred to in the report as ‘Ephesians 5’). Jesus, for instance, came preaching the Good News (Mark 1.14) and so too should those who serve him in today’s ministry. A bishop, says Paul to Timothy, should be ‘an apt teacher’ (1 Tim 3.2); and Timothy himself is told to ‘preach the word’ (1 Tim 4.2-5). The report seems to assume that whatever a minister is called to, is a valid calling: but this form

of post-modernism – ‘whatever you feel is right’ – is a nonsense. We recommend that the role of preacher or ‘bearer of the Word’ (as an earlier report described ministry) assume a higher priority than this report appears to give. We believe the Spirit of God still uses able preachers to proclaim the good news of Jesus, and to teach the people of God so that they become mature in the faith.

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

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

Having said that, clearly ministry does involve character, and so we welcome, for instance, the description of such ‘marks of ministry calling’ as “a personal maturity and deepening of a candidates relationship with Christ”, “someone whom others naturally trust and follow”, and “tenacity and character in the face of disappointment and struggle”. Similarly in ‘the marks of ministry formation’ we like the emphasis on such virtues of “being someone who is a self-starter and takes initiative” and on the need to become “a leader and team-builder”. However, we find there is a vagueness in the report on “being someone who seeks and draws others into an awareness of God’s presence”. In our view, amidst all the changes in ministry there still needs to be an ability to lead people in worship and to expound Scripture. We find it strange that the only reference to the Bible is in a quotation from Glen Marshall (which we happily endorse) to support the need for a minister to be “a theologian

or ‘God thinker’”. With regard to ‘the ongoing marks of ministry’, we like what is said – but are concerned about what has been left out. There is more to ministry than the qualities listed in this section.

Affirming and developing ministry

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

We note the way in which responsibility of recognising ministry is increasingly rooted in the Associations. However, removing decision-making (as distinct from a regulatory function) from a centralised Ministerial Recognition Committee does run the risk of Associations being pressurised by some of the more ‘powerful’ churches in their Association – there are times when it is easier for a national body to decline a candidate. We therefore urge the adoption of external moderation of Association Ministerial Recognition panels by the inclusion of those who either represent the national voice, or who come from neighbouring associations.

Ministry Formation

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

preparation for ministry just at the time when in most other professions the bar for academic elements is being raised.

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

Ministry in Covenant

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

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

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

Helping churches to receive and recognise ministry

We welcome the concept of a code of practice.

This document was produced in response to the Baptist Union of Great Britain's desire for a general consultation with ministers, churches, and colleges. We were pleased that a number of our comments turned out to be reflected in the pattern of CMD which the Baptist Union is pursuing.

SELECTED LETTERS OF THE COLLEGE

Over forty letters written by members of the Board on the practice of ministry were sent to members. The following twenty-four letters are an edited selection.

1 A NEW YEAR'S EVE WATCHNIGHT SERVICE ²¹

In most white-majority churches, the New Year's Eve Watchnight service is a thing of the past - or if it is still held, then it is attended by relatively few people.²² However, in other parts of the world such as Africa and India, the New Year's Eve Watchnight service is often the highlight of the church year and draws large crowds. This is certainly our experience at Trinity Baptist Church, West Norwood. The church has a multicultural membership but most of our members are from Ghana, and families (with children in spite of the lateness of the hour) come in large numbers on New Year's Eve. Last year, for instance, we had a congregation of well over a 1000. With the encouragement

²¹ Stephen Asibuo, December 2015.

²² Editorial note: Although now generally confined to New Year's Eve, Watchnight services were originally eighteenth-century equivalents of today's charismatic celebrations. Thus according to David Tripp (*A New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, SCM, London 1986): "The watchnight began in spontaneous meetings held by enthusiastic Methodists in Kingswood (a mining area near Bristol), who often spent the greater part of the night in prayer and praise, and thanksgiving. Discovering these unofficial gatherings, probably in the early spring of 1742, John Wesley adopted and regularised the idea... Within a few months the watchnight had become a regular event at the main Methodist centres (Bristol, London, Newcastle), held from 8.30 p.m. to about 12.30 a.m. on the Friday nearest the full moon, so that members walked safely home through moonlit streets. It was also held on public and Methodist fast-days, and especially on New Year's Eve."

of the other members of the Board, I thought I would write about this special service at Trinity.

December 31st Watchnight service at Trinity is a significant end of year celebration, a time to reflect, and a time to hope for 'New' beginnings. The entire service is characterised by expressions and feelings of gratitude to God for his faithfulness, repentance for unworthy actions and deeds, but most importantly hope and anticipation for the 'New.' A Watchnight service at Trinity is usually held on New Year's Eve, starting from 7.00pm and ends after midnight. This provides the opportunity for church members to review the year that has passed and make confession, and then prepare for the year ahead by praying and resolving. The service often includes singing, dancing, prayers, exhorting, preaching as well as scripture reading. The service provides people within the community with a godly alternative to times of drunken revelry at pubs and parties. Hence, the sermon is more evangelistic in nature. The Watchnight service sets apart the last fleeting moments of the old year and the first of the new to penitence, special prayer, stirring appeal, and fresh resolve. This has set an example which many black churches in London do follow. The New Year's Eve service is also predominantly celebrated as a 'Watchnight' in the evangelical Pentecostal Christian tradition.

An invitation to the Trinity Watchnight service is included in the Pastor's Christmas Blessings card which is sent out to church members, the general public and people in the local community. This card highlights all the Christmas events in the church. The service layout commences with a special welcome extended to all attendants, and people are then asked to complete an update form with their personal details. The choir then engages the people with a celebration of worship and praise songs. The pastors take turns to lead specific prayers starting with a corporate prayer for repentance, reflection and thanksgiving for God's out-workings in the lives of the people. This is followed by prayers for the UK, the youth and children

so that there would be a commitment to God. Other gospel artists and musical groups are also given the opportunity to minister in songs. Watchnight celebrants are now given the opportunity to engage in spiritual warfare prayer overcoming the works of the devil upon their lives. The people then present their personal needs before the Lord believing that the New Year will be a year of success and prosperity.

The Senior Pastor will present his sermon which would incorporate the theme for the coming year. Many unsaved people and backsliding Christians see this occasion as a time to reconcile and start afresh with God. Most of such people had labelled the Watchnight service as a “cross- over” period. The minister preaches an evangelistic message and an altar call is made after the sermon inviting people who want to give their lives to Christ. Specially trained counsellors take the respondents to a counselling place to attend to them. During last year’s Watchnight service, twenty-two people gave their lives to Christ. After the preaching the minister then leads all attendants into a covenantal “positive confessions” prayer,

The climax of the Watchnight service is the 60 seconds countdown just after 2359 GMT. The big screen in the church auditorium will be showing the digital time, and everyone counts the reverse time until we enter the New Year. The choir then leads the congregation into a victory dance. The service finally comes to an end at 00:30 hrs after people have danced to the glory of God.

2 A BOOK A WEEK KEEPS A PASTOR AWAKE ²³

To keep fresh ministers must read. Rick Warren once wrote: ²⁴

“If you’ve ever been to Israel, you know there’s a real contrast between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee is full of water and full of life. There are trees and vegetation. They still do commercial fishing there. But the Dead Sea is just that – dead. There are no fish in it and no life around it. The Sea of Galilee is at the top of Israel and receives waters from the mountains of Lebanon. They all come into the top of it and then it gives out at the bottom. That water flows down through the Jordan River and enters into the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea takes in, but it never gives out. That’s why it’s stagnant. The point is, there must be a balance in our lives to stay fresh with both input and output. There’s got to be an inflow and an outflow.... Most Christians get too much input and not enough output. They attend Bible study after Bible study. They’re always taking in but they’re never doing any ministry. The problem we pastors and church leaders face is the opposite. You’re always giving out, and if you don’t get input, you’ll dry up.”

Centuries ago Solomon began his collection of proverbs by highlighting the importance of wisdom: “A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel” (Prov 1.5 AV) – or in the NRSV translation: “Let the wise hear and gain in learning and the discerning acquire skill”. It is true that in the first place these words are an encouragement to read the proverbs Solomon had collected - “There’s something here also for seasoned men and women, still a thing or two for the experienced to learn” (Eugene Peterson, *The Message*). However, this injunction can be applied to the

²³ Paul Beasley-Murray, January 2016.

²⁴ Rick Warren, *To be a great leader, you absolutely must be a reader* (23 October, 2014)

reading of books in general. Indeed, A.W. Tozer based a sermon on Prov 1.5 entitled 'Read or get out of ministry', words taken from advice by John Wesley to his young ministers.

Tozer also quoted an American Indian preacher, who encouraged his hearers to improve their minds for the honour of God by saying: "When you are chopping wood and you have a dull axe you must work all the harder to cut the log. A sharp axe makes easy work. So sharpen your axe all you can". Or in the words of Oswald Sanders, a past leader of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship:

"The man who desires to grow spiritually and intellectually will be constantly at his books. The lawyer who desires to succeed in his profession must keep abreast of important cases and changes in the law. The medical practitioner must follow the constantly changing discoveries in his field. Even so the spiritual leader must master God's Word and its principles, and know as well what is going on in the minds of those who look to him for guidance. To achieve these ends, he must, hand in hand with his personal contacts, engage in a course of selective reading".²⁵

It was precisely with this understanding of the importance of continuing learning that ministers used to call the room in which they worked their 'study'. Today many ministers refer to their place of work as their 'office' (which derives from a Latin word referring to the 'performance of a task') – I fear that this change of terminology points to a different understanding of ministry. As John Stott reflected: "Many are essentially administrators, whose symbols are the office rather than the study, and the telephone [now we would say 'the computer'] rather than the Bible".²⁶

²⁵ Oswald Sanders *Spiritual Leadership* (Marshall Morgan & Scott, London 1967) 95.

²⁶ John Stott *I Believe in Preaching*, (Hodder & Stoughton, London) 124.

Ministers need to read. In the first place they need to read and study their Bibles. However, they also need to read and study more broadly. C.H. Spurgeon had a large personal library and believed passionately in the importance of reading.

Commenting on Paul's words to Timothy, "Bring the books, and above all the parchments" (2 Tim 4:13), Spurgeon wrote: "He is inspired, yet he wants books. He has been preaching at least thirty years, yet he wants books. He's seen the Lord, yet he wants books. He's had a wider experience than most men, yet he wants books. He's been caught up to heaven and has heard things that are unlawful to utter, yet he wants books. He's written a major part of the New Testament, yet he wants books." ²⁷

To return to Rick Warren: "Leaders are readers. Every leader is a reader. Not all readers are leaders but all leaders are readers. A lot of people read but they're not leaders. If you're going to lead, you've got to be thinking further in advance than the people that you're leading." Warren advanced four reasons for reading:

1. We must read for inspiration and motivation;
2. We must read to sharpen our skills;
3. We must read to learn from others; and
4. We must read to stay current in a changing world.

Notice too that Warren did not have in mind ministers simply reading Christian books. We need to be in touch with the world in which we live.

If a book a week seems too ambitious an aim, then what about at least one book a month? Sadly, not even what I would regard as the minimum is the norm. For many life seems too busy. But at the end of the day it is surely a question of priorities. If something is important, there is always time.

²⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit IX*: sermon preached on 29 November 1863.

Oswald Sanders suggested that every minister should ‘determine’ (I like that word) to spend a minimum of half-an-hour a day in reading. John Stott expected more of ministers. He used to say, “Every day at least one hour; every week one morning, afternoon, or evening; every month a full day; every year a week. Set out like this it sounds very little. . . . Yet everybody who tries it is surprised to discover how much reading can be done within such a disciplined framework. It totals up to nearly 600 hours in the course of a year”.²⁸

Ultimately ministers need to develop a pattern which works for them. I think of a minister friend who used to get up at 5 o’clock every morning to read for an hour or so before the day began. Fred Craddock, a distinguished American Methodist, wrote: “The person who has a comfortable chair in a quiet corner beside which is always a book with a marker and who reads 20 minutes after dinner and before retiring will read dozens of books each year”.²⁹ In my own case, when as a young minister in Manchester I found myself having to travel down frequently to London for denominational committee meetings, I would always bring a pile of books onto the train and as a result got through many hours of reading. Some ministers finding it difficult to read at home go away every year for a reading week, either alone or with a group of peers.

‘A book a week keeps a minister awake’. Despite all the pressures on them, ministers need to make time to read – for their own pleasure, for their own profit, and for the sake of the people they serve.

²⁸ John Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* 127.

²⁹ Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Abingdon, Nashville 2nd edition 2000) 79.

3 JUGGLING WITH CHICKENS ³⁰

"How many chickens do you think a person could juggle with?" An old school friend once asked us that intriguing question on the bus home. We quickly established that the chickens we were talking about were not rubber chickens - although I can give you the titles of at least three books you can buy over the internet on how to juggle with rubber chickens. Nor did he mean the Sainsburys' frozen variety. If the world record stands at ten balls, in principle ten frozen chickens should not be impossible. But how many untrussed live and squawking chickens? We arrived at the opinion that five was probably the maximum number that even the most expert juggler could keep in the air for any length of time.

A member of my last church, now a Baptist minister, once asked me what it is to be a minister? My answer then would be the same today. Being a minister is remarkably like juggling with live chickens. When I say "live chickens", I am NOT thinking about deacons or church members, however much clucking and flapping and squawking they may do! I'm thinking about all the different responsibilities ministers have to juggle with.

Historically ministers were ministers of 'Word and Sacrament' – their roles were to administer the sacraments of communion and baptism, and to proclaim the Word of God. For nineteen centuries that was all many ministers had to do. Twenty years ago the Bible Society identified fourteen different kinds of responsibilities of a minister in today's church: preaching, teaching, visiting, counselling, worship, weddings, funerals, giving a lead, steering the ship, evangelism, training, enabling, administration, Union/Association commitments, ecumenical activities, prayer, study, and writing. Today they would have to add managing a business (health and safety, employment law, accounts), team-building, crisis management, change

³⁰ Peter Thomas, June 2016.

management, Then there are the other legitimate activities of a normal life which can easily get squeezed out – spouse, family, friends. All of these vital activities demand and deserve our time and energy, but each is as slippery and hard to juggle as a live chicken.

So what is it that a minister actually does - or should do? In a country parish a friend asked old Joe how the new vicar was settling in. “He’s got foot and mouth disease,” Joe replied. “Foot and mouth disease?” “Yep – he can’t preach and he don’t visit.” Here are the two of the most important functions which all churches expect from their minister. Preaching and pastoral care. Congregations will usually forgive a gifted and hardworking pastor if he/she is not a particularly inspiring preacher. They will sometimes value a good teacher and preacher even if he/she is not skilled at pastoral care. But a minister who can’t do either will not last long in ministry. Ministers are Christ’s gift to the church and are called to be ‘pastor-teachers’ (Eph 4.11). This is one role, not two. They are to be pastor teachers, literally “teaching shepherds”. They pastor by teaching!

Today it can be hard to be a pastor-teacher. Church members are highly educated, sometimes more educated than their ministers. Some people see the kind of polished entertaining yet deeply moving message which the Spring Harvest speaker has spent a year preparing to deliver, and expect that kind of quality from the pulpit of their home church twice every Sunday. We are all so skilled at finding out what we want to know for ourselves that many adults sub-consciously rebel at the idea that they might need somebody else to teach them, even a minister. So ministers are told they have to become “learning facilitators” rather than “teachers”. Juggling with chickens!

At the same time, ministers are also rightly called to devote their time to pastoral care. But again that task is often much harder than it should be, in this case because the very nature of pastoral care is often misunderstood. In our consumer society, congregations often see themselves as consumers of pastoral

care and pastors as providers of pastoral care. So the minister is pressured into charging around to meet the perceived needs of the congregation, visiting the sick and the shut-ins. But that is not what the Bible means by pastoral care. In the brilliant words of Pete Gilbert, true pastoral care is “not wiping spiritual noses but building spiritual muscles”! ³¹

³¹ Peter Gilbert, *Kiss and Tell: Evangelism as a Lifestyle* (CWR, Farnham 2003).

4 GUIDELINES FOR THE PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT OF THE CLERGY ³²

I have just been reading the revised edition of the Church of England's *Guidelines for the professional conduct of the clergy* which also contains a concluding theological reflection on ministry by Francis Bridger, Dean of Brechin in the Scottish Episcopal Church and Professor of Anglican Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. ³³ It makes for thought-provoking reading for ministers and church leaders of whatever denomination.

The primary aims of these Guidelines are:

- To encourage the clergy to aspire to the highest possible standards of conduct throughout a lifetime of ministry
- To identify certain minimum standards of behaviour
- To seek to ensure the welfare and the protection of individuals and groups with whom the clergy work, and of the clergy and their families
- To provide safe and effective boundaries for clerical ministry
- To encourage personal and corporate ministerial development

Let me share some of the 'nuggets' I came across in the 36 pages of the booklet. In the Foreword by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York there is a key paragraph:

"The care of souls and the proclamation of the gospel are demanding roles, but profoundly fulfilling. If we are to be effective we need to take proper care to refresh our learning and to refresh ourselves." ³⁴

³² Paul Beasley-Murray, July 2016.

³³ *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy* (Church House, London revised edition 2015).

³⁴ *Guidelines* ix.

I was struck not just by the emphasis on refreshing ourselves, but on refreshing our learning: the two go hand in hand. Continuing ministerial development is a means of sustaining our ministries.

But there is another strand that is necessary if we are to remain effective in ministry. Both in the Foreword as also within the guidelines themselves ministers are encouraged to remember the source of their strength. Twice these words from the Anglican ordinal are quoted:

“You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God. Pray therefore that your heart may be daily enlarged and your understanding of the Scriptures enlightened. Pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit.” ³⁵

Those ministers who decry professionalism need to take note that spirituality and professionalism go hand in hand. In this regard Francis Bridger reflects: “‘Profession’, in a clergy context, must be seen as possessing not one meaning but two: on the one hand to describe the sociological reality of a group of people who operate according to conventions and practices developed by the group; and on the other, as an indication that this group stands for – professes – a set of transcendent values and principles which derive from a theology of vocation”. ³⁶

In the section on care a clear distinction is made between pastoral care and counselling. Guideline 2.5 states that “at no time should they [ministers] provide formal counselling for those in their care”. ³⁷ It seems to me that pastoral care is compassion in action and is always proactive; by contrast counselling never takes the initiative and is always reactive.

In the section on learning and teaching, only one topic is specifically mentioned as needing to be taught: “It is part of the

³⁵ *Guidelines*, vii and 19.

³⁶ *Guidelines* 26.

³⁷ *Guidelines* 3.

mission of the clergy to teach those whom they serve both the ways and the delight of prayer, being open to learning these things as they do so” (Guideline 7.7). ³⁸ I wonder, what proportion of time does the average minister give to the teaching of prayer? Yet prayer is a key mark of a being a follower of Jesus. So when Paul was converted, the first thing he appears to have done was to pray (Acts 9.11). ³⁹

In the section on life and conduct, the emphasis on giving time to partners and children significant. Marriage, states Guideline 10.3 “should not be thought to be of secondary importance to their vocation to ministry. Being a parent is likewise a holy calling and so ordained ministry should not take priority over bringing up children with Godly love, care, time, and space”. The suggestion is made that time given to family life, as also to recreation and renewal, should be part of a minister’s annual review.

In more than one section reference is made to the use and misuse of power. So in the section on trust Guideline 12.2 reads: “In all forms of ministry, in leadership, teaching, preaching and presiding at worship, the clergy should resist all temptation to exercise power inappropriately. This power needs to be used to sustain others and harness their strengths, and not to abuse, bully, manipulate or denigrate.” ⁴⁰ Later Francis Bridger made the comment: “When seeking to achieve our objectives – whether with a group of people or in a one-to-one relationship – we must ask ourselves what kind of power we are seeking to exercise and for whose benefit”. ⁴¹ Sadly, it is all too easy for

³⁸ *Guidelines* 11.

³⁹ “Behold he prays” (AV & RSV). Unfortunately most modern English versions fail to give force to the underlying Greek demonstrative particle (*idou*) which Luke uses to emphasise the importance of Paul praying. As Arndt & Gingrich in their Greek-English Lexicon make clear, the particle can be translated as ‘Consider’.

⁴⁰ *Guidelines* 17.

⁴¹ *Guidelines* 29.

ministers not to be self-aware: hence the need for a spiritual director or pastoral supervisor.

Finally, let me draw attention to the section on the minister's own well-being. There Guideline 13.2 states: "In exercising their ministry, the clergy respond to the call of our Lord Jesus Christ. The development of their discipleship is in the discipline of prayer, worship, Bible study and the discernment of the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The clergy should make sure that time and resources are available for their own personal and spiritual life and take responsibility for their own ongoing training and development."⁴² Would that all ministers would see that continuing ministerial development is an aspect of our Christian discipleship!

Ministry is indeed a challenging calling! May God give us all the gifts and graces to fulfil our calling.

⁴² *Guidelines* 19.

5 PROFESSIONALISM IS TO BE WELCOMED ⁴³

Some years ago I wrote a blog with the title, 'Ministers' resistance against professionalism puzzles me' ⁴⁴. It began:

"The other day I was with four other ministers when one of them raised the issue of professionalization in ministry. To my utter amazement two of the ministers almost hit the roof as they vehemently decried such a concept. For them the idea of being a professional was anathema.

As far as they were concerned, they were accountable to God, and to God alone. They would certainly not be willing to be accountable to a professional body which might have expectations in terms of continuing ministerial development. And as for having to go through an appraisal process which might make them accountable to a group of deacons or elders, they would rather resign from ministry."

Seven years later, I sense there is still a resistance. If anything amongst some Baptist church leaders, ministry has become less professional. Furthermore, the concept of accountability to the church is dismissed by many ministers on the grounds that in British law ministers are regarded as office holders rather than as employees. By virtue of their ordination they work for God rather than for the church. In the first place they are accountable to God, rather than to the church: they therefore cannot sue the church for unfair dismissal. Ministers when responding to a call to a church do not enter into a contract with the church; rather they simply receive a letter of appointment.

⁴³ Paul Beasley-Murray's reflections on a CBM roadshow presentation which highlighted the need for professionalism.

⁴⁴ Paul Beasley-Murray, 'Ministers resistance against professionalism puzzles me', *Church Matters* 25 April 2013.

At many of the CBM early roadshows I went round the country banging the professionalism ‘drum’. At the time I was unaware of the Church of England’s *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy*,⁴⁵ which concludes with some helpful theological reflections by Francis Bridger on the nature of ministry – and of a professional ministry at that. Let me quote from that document:⁴⁶

‘Profession’ in a clergy context must be seen as possessing not one meaning but two: on the one hand to describe the sociological reality of a group of people who operate according to conventions and practices developed by the group; and on the other, as an indication that this group stands for – professes – a set of transcendent values and principles which derive from a theology of vocation. Both senses of the term profession must be kept in mind

From the principle of vocation follows the question: a vocation to what? The most obvious answer is ‘to serve’. But to serve whom? Theologically, service is firstly towards God and only secondly towards human beings. Moreover such service is only possible through relationships. This in turn requires the teasing out of a cluster of concepts that shape the notions of relationship and relationality, and at the centre of this cluster lies the idea of covenant.

The concept of covenant represents the wellspring from which a theology of professional responsibility flows. Its significance can be demonstrated by contrasting it with the concept that governs secular models of professional relationship, namely that of contract. ... The two are close cousins, but there are crucial differences. Contracts define the specific nature of the relationship and the precise rights and duties that follow it. Neither party can

⁴⁵ *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy* (Church House, London revised edition 2015).

⁴⁶ Francis Bridger. ‘A concluding theological reflection’, *Guidelines*, 26-27.

expect the other to go beyond the specified contractual duties, and each has the liberty to refuse requests to do so. Indeed, the expectation is that such requests will not be made or granted except *in extremis*... By contrast, the biblical model of covenant – exemplified most powerfully by the covenant relationship between God and his people, is based on grace. The covenant partners are bound together not by a set of legal requirements but by the relational nexus of gracious initiative followed by thankful response. Covenant goes further than the carefully defined obligations contained within a contract to the need for further actions that might be required by love. “When we act according to a covenant, we look beyond the minimum... Partners in a covenant are willing to go the extra miles to make things work out” (Richard Gula, 15).

It is this graciousness – the readiness “to make room for the gratuitous, not just the gratuities” (Gula 15) – that distinguishes covenant from contract and gives ministry its distinctive quality. Rooted in the covenant love of God, the covenantal ministry of clergy mirrors that of Christ himself who gave himself freely for the sake of the world and “who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil 2.6-7). The covenant model is, in the end, profoundly Christological.

The implication of this is that those who are called to ordained ministry must act out of a covenantal rather than a contractual motivation and mindset. They must be “willing to go the extra mile”, which means that they must be prepared to allow their ministry to be shaped by the needs of others rather than their own preconceptions of autonomy.”

For Baptists this language of ‘covenant’ fits in well with our ecclesiology. For instance, John Smyth, one of the first Baptist church leaders, defined a “visible community of saints” as “two or more joined together in covenant with God and themselves”.

In recent years there has been an increasing recognition among Baptists of the need to rediscover their roots and realise afresh that in becoming church members, we enter into a ‘covenant’ which involves ‘covenant relationships’. So when welcoming new church members I would say: “In a Baptist church, membership involves 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”. ⁴⁷

Ministers of local churches are part of that covenant, for they too are church members. However, ministers are also part of another covenant relationship made between the minister and the church at the time of the minister’s induction. For from a theological perspective at the heart of an induction is an act of covenant between the church and its new minister. This comes to explicit recognition in the latest British Baptist ‘service’ book, *Gathering for Worship*, where there is ‘A covenant pattern of induction’ in which the church and minister promise faithfulness to one another. ⁴⁸

Minister and church are not just accountable to God, they are also accountable to one another. In this regard let me draw your attention to some reflections of Scottish Baptist minister Catriona Gorton: ⁴⁹

“Induction services are sometimes compared with marriage ceremonies – happy occasions when we delight in new beginnings and within which we make solemn vows designed to help us fulfil our commitments one to the other whatever life brings. They are, whatever form

⁴⁷ See Paul Beasley-Murray, *Radical Believers: The Baptist way of being the church* (Baptist Union of Great Britain, Didcot 2nd edition 2006) 72-76.

⁴⁸ See Christopher Ellis & Myra Blyth (eds), *Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples* (Baptist Union of Great Britain – published by Canterbury Press, Norwich 2005) 140-143.

⁴⁹ Catriona Gorton, ‘Thoughts on Covenant’, *Baptists Together Magazine* (Spring 2016).

of words we choose to employ, covenant making services: minister and church each pledging to each other, and before God, their commitment. With each of the churches I have served, I have made a point, at or around the anniversary of the induction, to revisit some aspect of those promises and, usually, to renew the covenant. Just like marriage, church-minister relationships needed to be tended in order to thrive.

This understanding of covenant informed my approach to a challenging time shared with my first pastorate, when they were forced to give me notice as they could no longer afford to pay me: as well as a 'Covenant for Troubled Times,' which we used at the start of the notice period, I created a liturgy for 'release of covenant' which we used at our final service together. This allowed us to recognise and release the disappointments and failings on each side, and to celebrate all that had been good and Godly along the way. Importantly it gave us a sense of emotional and spiritual closure: this was no ugly 'divorce', nor was I abandoning them, rather we continued to value and affirm each other in the parting of the ways.

Covenant for me is a vibrant expression of the oft cited 'priesthood of all believers' – once explained to me as 'I'll be your priest and you'll be mine, we'll each be each other's'. Covenant means sticking together whatever life throws at us: it means weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice; it means that you are permitted to hold me accountable and I to challenge you. Covenant informs every aspect of church life, whether it is sharing communion with elderly house-bound folk, arranging rotas to make the after-service refreshments or making huge decisions to sell or redevelop premises (each of which have arisen in both my pastorates!)

For me professional ministry is about giving of my best to both God and his people – and thereby fulfilling my covenant obligations to both God. There is nothing cold and unspiritual about seeking to be professional – rather my professionalism is

an expression of love of and passion for Jesus Christ and his church. Or as Derek Tidball wrote in the context of preaching: “God is no more honoured by our bumbling amateurism than he is honoured by a shallow professionalism. He is worthy of servants who reach high standards, who display competence and produce quality work, not slapdash work, as they serve him.”⁵⁰

Or as Jesus once said: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded” (Luke 12.48). In other words, there is no place in ministry for us flying by the seat of our pants! Those who decry professionalism run the risk of endorsing mediocrity rather than excellence, sloppiness rather than carefulness, laziness rather than industry, the second-best rather than the best. Professionals, in the right sense of the word, are those who want to give their very best to God.

⁵⁰ Derek Tidball, *Preacher, Keep Yourself from Idols* (IVP, Nottingham 2011) 178

6 LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE CHURCH ⁵¹

Pastors are by definition leaders. Their task is to spearhead the ministry and mission of the local church. However, in Baptist churches pastors do not lead alone – they share the leadership with other leaders such as deacons and elders. These leaders are accountable to the church meeting, although, the reality is that in calling a minister and in appointing deacons and or elders, the church meeting delegates much of its authority to them.

As is often the case, there needs to be a balance in the way in which the Scriptures are interpreted in terms of leadership and accountability. On the one hand, ministers are accountable to God for the exercise of their ministry (see, for instance, 1 Cor 4.1-4; Gal 1.10; Heb 13.17), and therefore have a responsibility to exercise their ministry in a way that is responsive to the Spirit's leading. On the other hand, ministers also accountable to the church: just as Paul and Barnabas gave an account of their missionary activities to the church at Antioch which had set them apart for this particular work (Acts 13.1-3; 14.27), so today's pastors should be prepared to give an account of their ministry to the people of God, and not least to their deacons and/or elders who are the 'managing trustees' of the church.

Significantly in the New Testament 'management' is a metaphor for ministry. The Apostle Paul, for instance, wrote: "Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards ('managers') of God's mysteries" (1 Cor 4.1), and in so doing applies it to the faithful proclamation of the Gospel. However, Jesus, when he used this metaphor applied it to the effective resources of material possessions (Luke 16.12). As 'managing trustees' the leaders of the church share a responsibility for the effective use of the church's resources in the proclamation of the Gospel. Within this context many churches will expect a greater

⁵¹ Paul Beasley-Murray, May 2016.

degree of accountability from their ministers, and not surprisingly considering the large proportion of the church's resources spent on the minister. Rightly understood accountability is about trust and transparency, and not about control and power.

Examples of accountability include the following:

1. Clear job descriptions will be expected. Currently most ministers do not have an agreed job description. This may have been acceptable in the past, but this may no longer be so. Responsibilities need to be clearly defined. Clearly responsibilities will include preaching and teaching, worship and the Christian rites of passage, pastoral care and mission. No doubt guidelines from the Baptist Union will be helpful, but nonetheless they will be limited. The fact is that there can be no one standard job description for a minister - responsibilities will vary from church to church, and will differ according to a minister's personality and gifting. Indeed, they can even differ at various stages in a person's ministry.
2. Although ministers need to be given broad authority to exercise their agreed responsibilities, the church's lay leaders will no doubt expect regular ministry reports. Where there have been agreed goals, then there needs to be a good deal of latitude and flexibility in assessing the pursuit of those goals. Leaders need the freedom to fail so that they be willing to risk! Clearly such reports cannot include pastoral confidences, nor would they deal with the minutiae of day-to-day ministry. However, deacons and/or elders must be able to hold their ministers to account for their ministry. Such accounts will hopefully be a source of encouragement, a spur to prayer, a cause for corporate reflection, and lead to deeper commitment on the part of the deacons and/or elders to support the ministry of their pastor.

3. As part of their job description, ministers will want to make it clear that their ministry will often go beyond the borders of the local church. Some ministers, for instance, will be involved in their local community, while others will be serving God on wider Baptist or ecumenical bodies. Elders and deacons 'worth their salt' will always recognise that the kingdom is broader than the local church and will be happy to see such wider ministries as part of the work of their pastor. However, wise pastors will want to make sure that they give regular reports on these aspects of their ministry, and so make themselves accountable to their fellow leaders.
4. Ministers may well be required to give reports on conferences they have attended, study weeks they have taken, sabbaticals they have enjoyed. Most deacons and elders are genuinely delighted to discover how their ministers have been blessed by time away from the church.
5. Ministers will be expected to be like most other people and undergo annual review ('appraisal'). Because of the specialised nature of ministry, these reviews are best conducted by an external ministerial facilitator together with two representative deacons or elders. Reviews properly conducted can be a great source of encouragement and help.
6. Similarly, now that continuing professional development is a requirement in many jobs today, ministers will be expected to give evidence that they too are committed to continuing ministerial development. Hopefully membership of the new College of Baptist Ministers with its multi-stranded on-line portfolio will be seen by churches to be helpful in this regard – and as a result deacons and elders will realise that it is in their interest to pay the annual membership fee!

7. Perhaps within the context of appraisal, churches will want to ensure that their ministers are developing a healthy work/life balance, giving time not just to preparing sermons and visiting people in their homes, but also to developing their spiritual walk with God and supporting their families. They will want their minister to observe the principle of Sabbath, by enjoying a proper weekly day of rest, by taking proper holidays, and by going on a three-month sabbatical every seventh year. Churches know that it is in their interest to have a happy and healthy minister!

Ministers have nothing to fear about accountability – rather such forms of accountability are to be welcomed. All too often where relationship between ministers and churches break down, it is because there is a lack of trust and transparency. True, there may well be some deacons and elders who may be tempted to try to manage their ministers, but with the help of a professional body like the College of Baptist Ministers, such deacons and elders can be helped to see that ministers can combine their leadership role with proper accountability.

7 BUILDING TOMORROW'S CHURCH TODAY: YOUNG ADULTS AND THE CHURCH ⁵²

Introduction

There is growing concern among churches and denominational leaders about the rate young people are leaving the church. Recently the Evangelical Alliance conducted a series of meetings with church leaders, discussing how to engage, value and disciple young people in becoming good leaders in the church and society. Last year, I attended the official launching of *Building Tomorrow's Church Today*, the final report in the City of London, and I think these highlights will inspire you to ponder how your church is engaging with the young adults.

The Evangelical Alliance conducted an online survey of young people between October to November 2014, and then in March 2015. A total of 1,703 millennials (aged 18-37) living in UK, who undertook the survey, described themselves as Christians, and our discussion will be based on this group. Other vital statistics of the panel are: **Gender** (63% female and 37% male); **Denomination**- Church of England (36%), Independent Evangelical (15%), Other (13%), New Frontiers 10%, Baptist (7%), Redeemed Christian Church of Gog (5%), Vineyard (4%), Methodist (2%), Elim (2%), AOG (1%), Salvation Army (1%), URC (1%).

Key findings from the survey

Prayer seems to be more popular with millennials than Bible-reading, 63% praying every day compared with just 25% reading their bible daily. Young adults are also considered to be *generous* givers, most have given to their church in the past year (90%), others to Christian charities (75%), and non-Christian charities (60%). Over two thirds say they have a Christian mentor (68%), whereas a third (30%) do not have any kind of *mentor*. The majority say there are role models they look

⁵² Stephen Asibuo, September 2016.

up to and learn from in their church (93%). One fifth say older people in their church struggle to relate to them. Most attribute faith as the important factor in their decision making (77%), and 84% are currently serving in church activities that benefit the church family.

Major reasons why young adults attend their church are as follows:

- they feel their spiritual needs are met in that church
- they find the congregation loving and supportive
- they specifically felt God called them to be part of that church

Areas that millennials are most likely to say that their church does not really help them:

- in their personal evangelism
- have opportunities to meet a marriage partner
- in living out their faith at work
- to engage in social action

The main reasons young adults gave for leaving their previous church

- moving location
- feeling they were not growing spiritually
- feeling God calling them to move on

Reasons millennials gave for not currently attending a church

22% explained that it is in part because they have been hurt by a church in the past

39% say it is in part because they really struggle with the way churches are run.

There are five vital questions that churches need to address to retain young adults in the church. These questions are based on the following themes: millennials living out their faith; millennials' beliefs; millennials and other generations; churches equipping millennials; and millennials frustrations with church.

I. Does your church provide space for young adults to talk honestly about their beliefs and doubts?

II. Are theological and ethical issues discussed in your church, or are there assumptions about what people believe?

III. How can positive relationships and mentoring between different generations be encouraged in your church?

IV. Do young people in your church feel equipped in areas such as personal evangelism, social action or living out their faith at work? How could you find out?

V. Does your church deal well with hurtful situations that arise?

In conclusion, it is high time that churches start engaging in conversations with their young adults. We have to listen to their views and start implementing some of the findings of *Building Tomorrow's Church Today*. My church has put in place a transition team that is seeking to incorporate some of the findings in the Evangelical Alliance report. I will encourage fellow ministers to read the full report which is to be found at: eauk.org/tomorrowschurch.

8 POST TRUTH AND DONALD TRUMP ⁵³

In these monthly newsletters, we often discuss some aspect of the practice of ministry. However, occasionally, things happen that prompts a rather broader horizon, and I think the 2016 election of Donald Trump, on the back of the Brexit decision, is one such moment. When the topical comedy news show, *Have I got News for You*, aired the week after the election, Paul Merton very subversively offered the widening gulf between Toblerone triangles in the bid to reduce costs by its manufacturer as the number one item of news that week — and I think many churches have offered the ecclesial equivalent, by not talking about this momentous election result and what it might mean for a changing world order. But not this newsletter from The College of Baptist Ministers!

The Oxford English Dictionary word-of-the-year was ‘post-truth’. It expresses the notion that we are living in an era when what sounds like it ought to be true (but actually isn’t), counts for more than the truth itself. In public debate what counts as truth is now very slippery indeed, on both sides of the Atlantic. Donald Trump has pretty much normalized the brazen peddling of lies, while here in the Referendum campaign truth was manipulated to such an extent that many of our fellow citizens have come to trust few public statements at all — such is the level of cynicism and mistrust. This applies to issues both large and small. Let me give just one example. Trump called man-made climate change a ‘Chinese hoax’ to halt the American economy. Really? The overwhelming majority of climate scientists interpret the complex data to mean that the extent to which we have burnt fossil fuels over the past 200 years has pumped sufficient carbon dioxide into the atmosphere to significantly warm our planet, and even if we stopped today, the climate would not recover for decades. The fact we are unable to give up our addiction to oil, gas and coal means that we will

⁵³ Paul Goodliff, December 2016.

approach the tipping point of no return within our life-time, setting the planet on the road to such run-away heating as to eradicate most life in most places. Even if we do manage to implement the 2015 Paris agreement to halt temperature rise to 2 degrees, the impact upon many parts of the world will be catastrophic (and mainly, the poorest will be hit hardest.) Now, to call that a ‘Chinese hoax’ seems a pretty big risk, not to mention a ridiculous idea, but there are political and ideological reasons on both sides of the Atlantic to call into question the evidence for climate change — not least, the hidden funding of climate change deniers by those with most to lose from the reduction in fossil fuel consumption. Heaven forbid that the lifestyle and wealth of the richer nations (and biggest polluters) on earth should be harmed — “America first!” says Trump.

Now, you might have realized, this manipulation of truth makes me very cross! There is so much at stake when we make world-changing decisions on the back of ‘post-truth’ peddled by politicians and media owners for their short-term personal gain. If the moral vacuum produced by the deliberate use of misinformation and lies is not sufficient a reason to be angry, the impact that it will have on civil society and global prosperity and order provides the balance. If, as it now seems probable, Boris Johnson and Michael Gove supported the Leave campaign because they thought it would be the best way to further their personal political ambitions, then we have seen one of the most outrageous examples of personal gain promoted over the common good — with both knowing the outcome would be unlikely to achieve what had been claimed (that we would walk away almost scot-free, with great trade deals with Europe and a firm grip on migration — now almost certainly impossible. Yes, the manipulation of truth has very serious consequences.

The methods used are equally nauseous, as Andrew Rawnsley notes of Trump (*The Observer*, 20 November 2016, 37)

“His many noxious outpourings on the campaign trail were not said in spite of the fact that they would cause widespread revulsion. They were calculated to elicit a hot response from both his zealots and opponents and by

doing so generate massive amounts of media coverage. A similar shock-and-horrify strategy was employed by elements of the Leave campaign during the Brexit referendum. Arron Banks, friend and financier of [Nigel Farage](#) and one of the party who were recently received at Trump Tower, has published his account of their battle plan for the referendum campaign. “The more outrageous we are, the more attention we’ll get. The more attention we get, the more outrageous we’ll be.”

This is the politics of the radio shock-jock — mean and deliberately offensive. Such antics used to be reserved for the more rancorous corners of the media, but they have become mainstream, and normalized in the name of democracy (even when the margins are perilously close, whatever Leavers claim, and remembering almost half of the nation voted not to leave the EU, and over half of the popular vote in the USA voted for Clinton. In Church Meetings we would not dream of making decisions on the basis of such disunity, but work hard to gain a clearer idea of the mind of Christ expressed through our decisions from a much higher level of support. Even if, on rare occasions such decisions had to be made on the basis of almost equal support both ways, those who supported the final decision would certainly not crow about it!

So, how might we as ministers respond to a post-truth civil discourse and a culture characterized by swagger and arrogance? First, with humility. Making strong claims to bolster a point in a sermon is not beyond any of us, so we should exercise some caution before simply pointing the finger. But, we must be those whose integrity of word and life are beyond reproach. Jesus warned his disciples that their righteousness should exceed that of the Pharisees, and we might translate that today into an appeal for truth to be proclaimed in a post-truth society. If others manipulate and exaggerate, or even worse, tell downright lies, then we must not. Indeed, we cannot, if we are to remain true to the One who is the way, the truth and the life.

Second, perhaps this is the time for the church to stand up and confront lies. Anna Soubry, a member of David Cameron's cabinet, recalls how she challenged the casual racism of a comment she heard on the streets of Newark, from a man remarking how you no longer hear anyone speak English on its streets. "I thought, 'I've had enough of this' I looked him straight in the eye, and said 'That's crap and you know it.....of course you hear people speaking English on the streets of Newark. Overwhelmingly, they are speaking English in Newark'. And you could see him thinking: 'That's absolutely true.'" (*The Guardian*, Saturday 19 November 2016, 32) It is not just the political argument, either. How often do we hear it claimed with such certainty that science has disproved the claims of Christianity, or that all Christians are hypocrites. Perhaps it's time we stood up and said "That's crap, and you should know it!"

One of the reasons that those supporting Remain in Britain, or Hilary Clinton in the USA, lost those polls was that they did not realise early enough (or not at all) that they were playing by the "Queensbury rules — while the right takes the gloves off." (Jonathan Freedland, *The Guardian*, 19 November 2016, 35) While Obama attempted in his dignified and calm way, to be bipartisan, reaching out to his political opponents, the Republican right used a ruthless exercise of power to prevent him governing at all. You can be certain that the incoming administration in the USA will not do likewise. The appointment of Steve Bannon as Trump's chief strategist points in that direction, at least. In an interview after the election it is reported he said, "Darkness is good, Dick Cheney. Darth Vader. Satan. That's power. It only helps us when they get it wrong. When they are blind to who we are and what we're doing." His stated aim was to "govern for 50 years." (*The Sunday Times*, 20 November 2016, 17) Should we as ministers play as 'dirty' as they? Absolutely not! We must maintain integrity at all costs in the way we counter the forces that threaten civil society.

In similar terms, the minister needs to know the tactics of the enemy, and it is not likely to be fair play. So, why all this concern about politics all of a sudden? Isn't it more important to

improve our worship leading credentials, or sharpen the sermon and streamline those pastoral visits? I suspect, many would have us remain so, unengaged and confined to our ecclesial bubble. But if the times are changing at one of those epoch-making periods of change and risk, whichever side of the argument you might be on, to remain unengaged, withdrawn and unwilling to challenge ‘post-truthism’, then we deserve the further decline of the church into irrelevancy, (although I still cannot understand why the American religious evangelical wing is so committed to gun-ownership, and overwhelmingly supported a lewd, inexperienced, lying candidate in Donald Trump — but then it is another country, I guess, and not at all like Britain — but larger). Civic and political engagement has been rather dismissed in our panic to shore up a declining church with what passes for ‘mission’, but maybe the times have come to rethink our roles in the world that God loved so much he sent his only Son. Maybe if we loved the world a little more, we might follow in his footsteps.

9 PREACHING AT CHRISTMAS ⁵⁴

As one who pastored one church for thirteen years and another church for twenty-one years, I know the challenge of preaching at Christmas. It is not as if there is just one sermon to prepare – each year there are a host of occasions. There are the four Sundays in Advent (for me that always meant morning and evening) and of course Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Then there are all the carol services – many of which are targeted for various age groups: e.g. young families, young people, and senior adults. How can we find a fresh word to say, year in and year out?

Over the years I have found that the one way to keep fresh is to engage in expository preaching. In my experience, if we go for thematic preaching, we soon run dry. In the words of James Stewart, a Scottish preacher of a past generation: “The preacher who expounds his own stock of ideas becomes deadly wearisome at last. The preacher who expounds the Bible has endless variety at his disposal. For no two texts say exactly the same thing.” ⁵⁵

Although for many years I have used the Lectionary for my daily devotions, I have not been a Lectionary preacher. Instead, I have normally preached in ‘series’. However, at the same time I often tried to observe the themes for the different Sundays of Advent: Advent Sunday, with its emphasis on the Last Things; the second Sunday in Advent used to be known as Bible Sunday, and I confess that I continued to preach on a theme related to the Bible, even though Bible Sunday was then switched into earlier in the autumn; the third Sunday, Ministry Sunday, traditionally related to John the Baptist; then what I called ‘Christmas Sunday’ (the Sunday before Christmas) is

⁵⁴ Paul Beasley-Murray, October 2016.

⁵⁵ James Stewart, *Preaching* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2nd edition 1955) 12.

often linked with Mary. It was all quite a challenge to be different each year.

As I look back on my past preaching plans I see a variety of sermons series:

- Christmas Personalities: Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, Simeon
- Christmas Songs: The *Benedictus* (Zechariah's son), the Magnificat (Mary's song), the *Gloria* (the angels' song), the *Nunc Dimittis* (Simeon's song)
- Parables at Christmas: The Ten Bridesmaids (Advent Sunday), the Sower (Bible Sunday), the Talents (Ministry Sunday), the Tenants (Christmas Sunday).
- Christmas apologetics: on Advent Sunday, 'No God of love would send people to hell' (John 3.16-21); on Bible Sunday, 'You can't believe the Bible' (Luke 1.1-4; 1 Tim 3.16); for the third Sunday in Advent, 'Virgins don't have babies' (Matt 1.18-25); for the fourth Sunday in Advent, 'Christmas? It's a fairy story!' (John 1.14)

Another possibility is over a particular Christmas period to preach only from one part of Scripture: e.g.

The Good News according to Matthew

1. The genealogy of Jesus the Messiah (Matt 1.1-17)
2. The birth of Jesus (Matt 1.18-25)
3. The visit of the wise men (Matt 2.1-12)
4. The aftermath of the wise men's visit (Matt 2.13-23)
5. An overview: Who is Jesus?

The Good News according to Luke

1. The dedication to Theophilus (Luke 1.1-4)
2. The birth of Jesus foretold (Luke 1.26-38)
3. The visit of Mary to Elizabeth (Luke 1.39-45)

4. Mary's song of praise (Luke 1.46-55)
5. Zechariah's prophetic song (Luke 1.67-79)
6. The census (Luke 2.1-2)
7. The birth of Jesus (Luke 2.3-7)
8. The shepherds and the angels (Luke 2.8-20)
9. The presentation of Jesus in the temple (Luke 2.22-36)
10. An overview: Jesus the revolutionary

. The Good News according to John

1. Jesus is the universal Word (John 1.1-5)
2. A witness to the light (John 1.6-8)
3. Good news is for telling (John 1.10-13)
4. The Word became flesh (John 1.14-18)
5. God's Christmas gift (John 3.16)
6. An overview: The real meaning of Christmas

. The Good News anticipated in the Old Testament

1. The sign of Immanuel (Isaiah 7)
2. A new king is coming (Isaiah 9.2-7)
3. The dream of God's kingdom (Isaiah 11.1-9)
4. The ruler from Bethlehem (Micah 5.2-5)
5. An overview: Dreaming of peace

. The Good News reflected upon in the Epistles

1. Freedom begins in Bethlehem (Rom 8.3)
2. The Christmas jackpot (2 Cor 8.9)
3. God's timing is always right (Gal 4.4-5)

4. Jesus the servant-king (Phil 2.6-11)
5. Jesus the king of creation (Col 1.15-17)
6. Jesus the saviour (Titus 2.11)
7. Jesus the Word of God (Heb 1.1-4)
8. An overview: Christmas is good news for all

At this point some observant readers may note that I have just reproduced the contents page of my book, *Joy to the World: Preaching the Christmas story* (IVP, 2005). Still in print, at just over 200 pages, I dare to think it is still worth £9.99! The principal aim behind this book is to help preachers tell the Christmas story by engaging with Scripture. So, if you are stuck to know what to preach on maybe this might be a pointer in a helpful direction.

10 WHAT DO CLERGY DO ALL WEEK? ⁵⁶

Ministers are sometimes unkindly described as “six days invisible, on the seventh day incomprehensible.” This month I am celebrating thirty years in ministry. Back when I began, veteran ministers advised me that a minister’s time would usually be spent in the study in the mornings, out visiting in the afternoons and at meetings in the evenings. How the lives of ministers have changed! This week I rediscovered *Pulpit and Pew*, a programme of in-depth research on pastoral leadership in the USA undertaken between 2001 and 2005. In particular I appreciated the report by Becky R. McMillan discussing just how clergy use their time.⁵⁷

Half of the full-time ministers surveyed report working between 35 and 60 hours a week with one quarter less and the other quarter more than that range. I paused to reflect on the hours I work as a minister. In the spirit of openness, I share that during my first 10 years it was probably 60 hours a week. For the second decade the average would have been closer to 55. Nowadays I typically spend around 50 hours a week in the tasks of ministry and sleep ten hours a week more than I did when I first started. I am content to be average. I fondly believe that my church would rather have quality than quantity. I look back really wishing that I had taken this approach from the beginning (and so do my wife, my now-grown-up children and my spaniels).

The studies report that a minister’s typical working week is divided between planning worship including writing sermons (a median value of 33% of the time) providing pastoral care (19%), administration and attending meetings (15%), teaching and training others for ministry (13%), and denominational and community affairs (6%). Other common tasks include writing articles, fund-raising, correspondence and chaplaincy. Women

⁵⁶ Peter Thomas, October 2016.

⁵⁷ <http://pulpitandpew.org/what-do-clergy-do-all-week>.

ministers work the same number of hours as men but report spending less of their time in preparing sermons and more in administration and pastoral care. Ministers describing themselves as conservative (as I would) typically give more time to preaching and prayer and less time to administration. In churches with more than one minister, the senior pastors usually work more hours than their colleagues but curiously their time is used in similar proportion.

For myself, I found this analysis quite affirming, even recognising that there are significant differences in patterns of ministry in the USA. For me, still preaching two sermons every Sunday, around one third of my time is spent preparing and delivering those messages alongside preparing for and leading worship. Similarly, roughly one fifth of my time is spent in pastoral care, although over the years an increasing element of this is expressed using phone calls, emails, texts and social media such as Facebook and Messenger rather than in face-to-face conversations.

Preaching, teaching and pastoral care have always seemed to me to be the heart of pastoral ministry. By the lakeside the Risen Jesus commissioned Peter, “Feed my lambs. ... Take care of my sheep. ... Feed my sheep.” (John 21.15-17 NIV). One could even argue from this that nourishing our flocks by preaching and teaching is the highest priority in ministry and “taking care” of them is the next. I recently found myself puzzled by an advert I saw. A church was looking to recruit an Associate Minister to join their team to take responsibility for the teaching, preaching and pastoral care in order that the Senior Minister could be released for the tasks of “leadership, vision-building and disciple-making.” Surely the principal ways that ministers lead and build vision and make disciples is precisely through preaching, teaching and pastoral care? We must guard against devaluing these vital expressions of ministry or allowing other worthwhile activities to squeeze them out.

In *Pulpit and Pew* ministers reported spending an average of 10 hours a week in prayer and meditation and 4 hours on general reading not related to sermon preparation. Again, I am

encouraged. My own experience would probably divide that amount of time a bit more evenly between prayer and general study, but that same weekly total has remained constant same through the decades. *The Message* translates Rom 12.11 “Don’t burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame.” Continuing study and a commitment to prayer are vital if we are to give our best in preaching, teaching and pastoral care. Of course, different ministers bring differing gifts, skills and experience to the calling and comparing our lives with others has its limitations. I am certainly not suggesting that my own patterns are appropriate for everyone. But God calls each one of us to be the very best we can be in his service. The examples of other ministers may help us avoid the extremes of sloth and burn out, which are both just as dangerous.

11 LET US BE CONCERNED FOR OUR BROTHER AND SISTER MINISTERS ⁵⁸

Years ago, when I was a teenager, I was briefly into photography. I had an uncle who had a ‘dark room’ and taught me how to develop my own black and white photographs. He also showed me how attaching a yellow filter to the lens of my camera could bring out things of which you were not aware – clouds for instance suddenly would appear. I was a great fan of the yellow filter, until I put a colour film into my camera and discovered that suddenly everything was yellow!

When it comes to reading Scripture, all of us come with filters – filters which are the product of our context. Africans, for instance, find it highly significant that the first man to carry a cross for Jesus was an African – Simon of Cyrene (Matt 27.32). Similarly they love to read the story of another African, the Ethiopian chancellor of the exchequer whom Philip met on the road to Gaza (Acts 8.26-40).

Recently I found myself using another filter when reading Heb 10.24, 25 – the filter of ministry. Perhaps because of my father’s influence, I have always had a deep sense of responsibility for my fellow ministers. As a result I have never allowed a pastoral engagement to stop me attending ministers’ meetings. Long before the Baptist Union began to speak of ministers entering into a covenant with one another, I felt that the needs of my fellow ministers took precedence even over the needs of my own people.

So for a few moments let me encourage you to use this ministerial filter as we look at a Heb 10.24,25: “Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching”. Hebrews is not a letter addressed to ministers. But just imagine it were addressed to ministers – not just to

⁵⁸ Paul Beasley-Murray, March 2017.

young ministers straight out from college, but to ministers who had been around for a while, perhaps ministers who were hitting the mid-life blues and were tempted to throw in the towel. I freely confess that this is not an exercise in strict exegesis – but I dare to think that by extension such a reading may be justified.

1. **Let us think about (*katanoomen*) those of our brother and sister ministers who need our care.**

According to one commentator, Peter O'Brien, it involves 'directing the mind toward and reflecting on'.⁵⁹ Within the context of ministry, this means thinking about other ministers in the town or in the neighbourhood. Or it might mean thinking of those with whom we trained and who are now in other parts of the county. I wish to suggest that such a consideration of brothers and sisters in ministry leads to prayer. For over 45 years I have been a member of the Baptist Ministers Fellowship, a fellowship which describes itself as 'a national network of ministers committed to praying for one another'; in particular we were asked to pray for one another every Sunday morning. But Sunday is not the only day for praying – indeed, in my experience on a Sunday morning there is little space for reflective thinking and praying. Instead over the years I have developed a prayer diary in which I list the names of all those ministers for whom I feel some responsibility: the ministers of the church to which I now belong; the ministers of the church of which I was pastor for 21 years; I list too all the names of those who have served with me in ministry – three from Altrincham days; seven from Chelmsford days. In addition I list the names of all the Board members of Ministry Today UK and of the College of Baptist Ministers. Every week I think of these colleagues in ministry.

⁵⁹ Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Apollos, Nottingham 2010) 369

2. **Let us provoke one another.** The Greek noun (*paroxune*), from which we get our English word ‘paroxysm’ and which is present here, is a strong word full of emotion. It appears in only one other place in the New Testament. There in Acts 15.39 it is used of the ‘sharp disagreement’ which broke out between Paul and Barnabas when they could not agree on taking Mark with them on another missionary journey. The cognate verb (*paroxuno*) appears twice in the New Testament: in Acts 17.16 it is used to describe Paul’s exasperation – ‘his spirit was provoked’ (AV) – at the sight of so much idolatry in Athens, while in 1 Cor 13.4 it describes how love is not easily ‘provoked’ (NRSV). In all these instances the provocation concerned has a negative sense. However, here the word is used positively. It is about stirring up our colleagues for their good. So the REB translates: “We ought to see how each of us may best arouse others”. If we look at these words through a ministerial filter, then by extension we have the thought of provoking or arousing our brother and sister ministers to fulfil their calling. For me this was the motivation to start a weekly blog, *Church Matters*. First and foremost I wanted to stimulate my fellow ministers.
3. **Let us keep meeting together.** I know that in the original context this has to do with Sunday worship, but let’s switch filters and apply this to ministers meeting together. Over the years I have belonged to many groups for ministers – some Baptist and some ecumenical. Some have been great fun, others have been tedious, while yet others have been a forum for unhelpful bragging. When there is so much else to do, it is tempting to give them a miss, but the truth is that ‘collegiality’ should be part of our ministerial DNA. Even if we feel we are not benefitting from such meeting, nonetheless we owe it to our peers to be there. We have a ‘duty of care’ for one another. Just as in 1 Cor 12.25 where Paul in describing the church as a body speaks of the members having “the

same care for one another”, so ministers have a responsibility to care for their fellow ministers of the Gospel – and this in turn means turning up to ministers’ meetings, whatever.

4. **Let us encourage (*parakalountes*) one another.** The participle here is from the Greek word *parakaleo* from which the cognate noun *parakletos* is derived. This is the word used of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete (*parakletos*), in John’s account of the Upper Room. Literally it means ‘one who is called to the side of’. In the context of John 14-16 the underlying Greek word (*parakletos*) has been translated in a number of ways. In the AV, for instance, the Spirit is described as the ‘comforter’, in the sense of the one who strengthens us and makes us brave (the 17th century word comforter is derived from the Latin *fortis*, brave). In the REB and the NRSV the Spirit is described as the ‘advocate’, the one who speaks on another’s behalf and in their defence. In the RSV & NIV the Spirit is described as the ‘counsellor’, in the sense of the one who is there to give advice and act as our ‘consultant’. As for the GNB, there the Spirit is described as the ‘helper’, in the sense of the one who is there to help us in our weakness. To my mind the term ‘helper’ is the best of all the translations, because it is open to every nuance: the Holy Spirit can draw alongside to help us, giving us courage, defending us, advising us. We in turn, who are called to encourage one another – and by extension ministers who are called to encourage their peers - can help in all these ways too: we can give fresh courage to our peers, stand up for our peers, give advice to our peers, offering whatever help it is they need. As we all know, ministry can be tough – there are times when the church makes a lousy mother. How do we help and encourage one another in practical terms? Through a phone call or through an email – through the offer of a coffee or a meal.

We are called to be concerned for one another – not least for those who for one reason or another are struggling with life in general, but perhaps with ministry in particular. It may be that others are at fault, or it may be that they are at fault. Whatever, there is a need - perhaps, to tell them not only that we care for them and appreciate them, but that God loves them and cares for them even more. May God give us the grace, energy and commitment so to do.

12 CHILDREN IN THE CHURCH ⁶⁰

A regional minister recently spoke to ministers in training at one of our Baptist colleges. He said that unless we undertake ministry to children, we will oversee ageing and most likely, declining churches. For some students, this was a surprising assertion and I hope it caused an awakening to the opportunities and challenges good children's ministry brings.

A few years ago the Church of England published a report with the delightfully ambiguous title, *Children in the Way*. ⁶¹

Certainly, some see children as being 'in the way' in terms of being a distraction from the serious business of doing church, whilst it can also be seen that they have the potential to be 'in the Way' in terms of being followers themselves of Jesus, deserving of pastoral care and discipling, and indeed able to minister.

In my own church setting I think it would be fair to say that both views have been held and vocalised at certain points! Yet my experience is that good children's ministry as part of a ministry aimed at the whole family, not only spiritually nourishes the flock but also provides an attractive and fruitful means of reaching out to whole families. In all the churches I have ministered in I have seen the average age of the congregation fall dramatically as we have invested in children's ministry – and that has not been by older folks leaving us!

Yet this is not as common a pattern in the demography of our churches as we would desire. Too many are ageing and shrinking in terms of membership and even attendance. We continue to ask ourselves 'why'? There are clear pointers as we look back at changes in society over the last few decades. Amongst the casualties of social change was the Church. A study by Canon Dr Alan Billings, now retired from stipended

⁶⁰ Mike Thornton, April 2017.

⁶¹ *Children in the Way: New directions for the Church's Children* (Church House Publishing, London 2012).

Anglican ministry and currently South Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner, confirmed that younger women from the late 1950s found new liberation in education, employment, sexual behaviour and fashion and not only stopped going to church, where women had been the mainstay of congregations, but were less likely to induct the next generation into the faith and the church as they had their families.⁶² Callum Brown concluded that the loss of young women also led to an exodus of men from the church.⁶³ The consequent loss of children has affected and will continue to affect all subsequent generations.

Yet the tide is turning. Churches are adjusting and being more innovative in the way they engage children and families. Whilst the traditional Sunday School may be more a relic of the past, innovations such as Messy Church, holiday and after school clubs are gaining ground. Another important work is that exercised in schools, where meeting children's spiritual needs are, by law, still to be catered for. Here, hard pressed teaching staff are very grateful to those who will sensitively come into the school environment and address these spiritual needs.

A word of caution may need to be offered here. If we see children's ministry as merely a way to attract adults (parents, grandparents and carers), we will have missed the point and we will miss this particular boat. The quality of our nurturing of children's spirituality is critically important for the long-term benefit of the child, their family and the church.

In the Spring 2017 edition of *The Bible in Transmission* Dr Rebecca Nye opens a wider discussion on children's spirituality. She defines spirituality as 'God's ways of being with us, and our ways of being with God'. Founded on her years of work observing children and listening to their explanations of their own lives, she describes childhood as a 'highly blessed' stage of

⁶² Alan Billings, *Secular Lives, Sacred Hearts* (SPCK, London 2004) 10.

⁶³ Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (Routledge, London 2nd edition 2009) in which he also posits that the secularising of Christian Britain was not a long process beginning with the industrial revolution but commenced and developed rapidly in the 1960s.

life, offering evidence to suggest that significant experience of God is more common in childhood than in adult years. She identifies three spiritual needs in children: to be deeply listened to when they articulate their spiritual questions and experiences; to be respected; and to have space (in every sense) for spirituality.

Our churches are ideally situated to offer that 'space', but it takes time, energy and commitment to offer it to them. It will not happen by accident; we must be intentional in making room for our children to be spiritually nurtured. We cannot do that effectively in isolation; we do indeed need to be churches for all ages and we need to coordinate what we do with what families can also do in their homes and we, or others, can do in schools.

13 PASTORAL SUPERVISION ⁶⁴

I have been indebted to pastoral supervision from 2010–2014 in my then role as Head of Ministry for the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and before that throughout the nineteen-nineties when last in pastoral charge in Hertfordshire. When I began my current pastorate in Abingdon in 2015 I immediately resumed pastoral supervision with my existing supervisor, and have found his wisdom and understanding of incalculable worth. I do not know where I would be without it, which is one reason why I have taken the opportunity of half-time pastoral ministry to give me space to offer this ministry to others. I have two supervisees who I see occasionally (to one I offered more of a spiritual direction role when he held a senior chaplaincy post); two college tutors and three ministers who I see regularly, with another in the offing. In an informal way, I suppose I also offer this to my colleague at Abingdon, although there is a great deal of mutuality about that ministerial relationship.

I have offered some training in supervision at MTh level at Spurgeon's College, and to its placement supervisors on two occasions, so I have read quite widely in the area, as well as practicing it and receiving it. I am in a privileged position, I guess, to commend this widely to others, but I do so unashamedly. I am surprised at how others seem to manage without such support (or perhaps they do not manage?) and remind our ministerial community that in many other person-focused professions, supervision is mandatory. You cannot practise as a social worker, a counsellor or psychotherapist without it, and it is becoming more prevalent in medicine, too. What is it about ministry that seems to suggest that it is unnecessary for us? Perhaps it is the cost (it costs my church £250 a year to pay for my supervision, for which I am very grateful, but I would pay it myself if they were unwilling or unable to do so). Or maybe it is the expectations that surround

⁶⁴ Paul Goodliff, January 2017.

supervision which prevents it from being more widely accessed, or perhaps there is something about Baptist ministry that has an ingrained and bloody-minded independence about it, and remains stubbornly resistant to the idea of supervision.

Whichever it is, ministers are the poorer for it in their practice, even if they might be the poorer for it in their bank accounts!

I find it interesting that The Methodist Church Conference has recently affirmed its commitment to supervision for all of its ministers, and is currently embarked upon a programme of training first its senior clergy to offer it, then others, with the expectation that at least some supervision will be offered "in-house". Given the commitment to excellence that members of The College of Baptist Ministers embrace, I would hope that not only would some find pastoral supervision of enormous benefit, (as I write this I have just returned from my own supervision, and found this of great help in finding a way to hold a particularly complex pastoral situation at present) but some might even find ways of preparing themselves to offer this ministry to others through appropriate training. Courses that might be taken can be found at the APSE (Association of Pastoral Supervision and Education) website

<http://www.pastoralsupervision.org.uk/category/training/>

Perhaps some might believe that supervision is just for those who are not quite capable enough to exercise ministry without its helping hand. However, my experience is that it is precisely those who *are* capable of good ministry who seek it, knowing that it assists them in maintaining those high standards, while deepening self-awareness and pastoral reflection. This is of particular significance in these times when the move to a more dominant style of political leadership is so prevalent. We see this in Turkey's recent move from parliamentary to presidential "democracy" — but one step away from full-blown dictatorship, I suspect; the rise of hard right nationalism already in power in Hungary and Poland, and bidding for it in Germany and France; the President Trump phenomenon and not least, Putin's government in Russia. We even have an echo of it in the Conservative Party's election slogan "strong and stable government", with parts of the right-wing media in Britain

slavering at the prospect that Theresa May will "exterminate" the opposition (since when in a parliamentary democracy did we rejoice in moving to a one-party state, with opposition "crushed" under a landslide?). I believe that the Conservatives are fully entitled to seek the approval of the ballot box to continue to govern, but are not best served by an absence of any effective opposition.

All of this inevitably has an impact upon the styles of leadership that ministers adopt — either in imitation of strong leadership, or in an over-reaction to it. Supervision is one of those tools that help us stay true to appropriate leadership styles — appropriate, that is, to the service of the one who said "I have not come to be waited on, but to serve". Ministry that is either authoritarian (even if clothed in a velvet glove of pastoral concern) or which lacks any strength of conviction and leadership altogether, inevitably weakens the body of Christ. Getting that balance right is aided by good supervision. It sheds a light upon our blind spots (how easily enamoured can we become at the latest evangelistic 'technique' peddled by someone looking to make a name for themselves) and gives an objective sounding board for our own vision of the "good church life", while allowing us to reflect with another skilled practitioner upon our own pastoral challenges, and the way they interact with our own sense of self and stage of life.

My supervisor reminds me that at my stage of life, with retirement (by which I mean, the end of stipendiary ministry) no longer some distant prospect, and approaching the next big phase of life — post-work, post-power, (if not quite "sans everything"!) — one of the tasks is to accommodate to a smaller ego. I guess some might have seen me once as a 'big' person (even if not in physical stature), with a national Baptist role and wide, if somewhat ambiguous, influence, but now I must discover what it means to be a 'smaller' person, less influential, and certainly dismissive of any messiah-like complex I might once have had! Supervision helps me to see myself as, I think, God sees me, and, I hope, others too — and less like the fantasy figure that my vanity might once have constructed! Have I

whetted your appetite sufficiently to explore supervision for yourself? I hope so.

Further Reading

Jane Leach and Michael Paterson, *Pastoral Supervision. A Handbook* (SCM, London 2010)

Michael Paterson & Jessica Rose (eds.) *Enriching Ministry. Pastoral Supervision in Practice* (SCM, London 2014).

Peter Hawkins & Robin Shohet, *Supervision in the Helping Professions* (McGraw Hill/Open University, 4th ed 2014)

Paul Goodliff, *Shaped for Service. Ministerial Formation and Virtue Ethics* (Pickwick/Wipf & Stock, Eugene 2017) 262–269.

Young people are faced with many challenging behaviour problems in our world today. In June we hosted Croydon Churches Forum for a prayer fellowship in our new premises, Trinity Baptist Church, Oasis House, Croydon. The new Police Commissioner for the borough informed church leaders that from last year to present, Croydon had witnessed thirteen homicides involving young people. How does the church help the struggling young person to overcome his or her problems? In this newsletter, I have organised biblical counselling issues faced by young people in our churches, and offer useful scriptures to help them address their struggles. Whether you are a youth worker, counsellor, pastor or church leader this gives an insight on teen problems. I have included an appendix which provides biblical guidance for the struggling young person in twelve common problem areas.

Somewhere between childhood and maturity the bodies of teenagers experience dramatic changes as a result of puberty. With this acceleration of physical and emotional growth, young people become strangers to themselves. Achieving a sense of identity is the major developmental task of teenagers. The identity crisis is attributed to the pressure of peers leading to young people engaging in impulsive actions. They also seek opportunities to experiment with various behaviours. Young people at this stage do cry for connection through 'rave parties', social media and sexual immorality. Teenagers also seek connection because of relational pain, social isolation, increased loneliness, hurt, and hopelessness.

The Effective Counsellor

It is difficult to predict exactly how a specific young person will attempt to manage his or her problem. There are three ways young people contend with their struggles. They either hold

⁶⁵ Stephen Asibuo, July 2017.

them in, act them out, or work them through.⁶⁶ The single most important factor in effective counselling is the person of the counsellor. People are more likely to improve when their counsellors demonstrate the following traits: warmth, genuineness, empathy and active listening. Regardless of the technical knowledge of a counselor people's condition deteriorates without the above mentioned traits.

Selected topics for counseling young people

Anxiety is a constant fearful state, accompanied by a feeling of unrest, dread, or worry. The young person may not be aware of what is creating the feelings of fear and anxiety, which may may be a consequence of external circumstances, learned responses, physical well-being, or trauma. Many teenagers experience a sense of not belonging or a lack of purpose. The symptoms of anxiety include: restlessness, easily fatigued, irritability, muscle tension, difficulty falling or remaining asleep and difficulty concentrating. Major fears experienced by young people are fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of abandonment and fear of death or dying. [Note- The inherent changes and pressures of adolescence magnify these fears].

Scripture: Psalm 37:3-7; Phil 4:5-7; Prov 3:5-6; Deut 7:17-21; Psalm 91:3-6.

Depression is defined as feeling of dejection and hopelessness that lasts for more than two weeks. Most young people with depression will suffer from more than one episode. Teenage depression can affect a teen regardless of gender, social background, income level, race, or school or other achievements. Previous episodes of depression, experiencing trauma, family history of depression, depressed teenagers are at higher risk for: substance abuse, a smaller social circle, more likely to engage in risky behaviors, suicide.

⁶⁶ G. K. Olson, *Counselling Teenagers: The Complete Christian Guide to Understanding and helping Adolescents* (Group Books, Loveland, Colorado:1984).

The following are the **signs** that a counsellor has to look for in a young person: suicide threats, direct and indirect, obsession with death, dramatic change in personality or appearance, irrational, bizarre behaviour, overwhelming sense of guilt, shame, or rejection, significant drop in school performance, and giving away belongings. Once these signs are noted, counsellors are advised to do the following: take care of physical health; take time to examine why depression is present; refuse to isolate; challenge negative thoughts and beliefs; and address spiritual matters. Parents need to be counselled to watch for the signs; open up a dialogue; build a support network; display genuine love, affection, and praise.

Scriptures: Psalm 30:5, 11-12; Heb 4:15-16; Isaiah 41:10; and 43:1-3.

Dating. Unhealthy dating relationships include everything from emotional enmeshment, violence, abuse, to sexual intimacy. The reality is that teens need supervision. The availability of instant communication via social media worsens the situation. It is more common for the male youth to take the initiative. Young people must protect themselves and recognise that positive dating relationships involve trust, respect, mutual support, honesty and clear communication. Believers should date fellow believers. Establish specific standards. and seek counsel from couples who have healthy marriages. Determine to honour God in the relationship.

Scriptures: I Cor 13:4-8; Rom 12:9-10; 2 Cor 6:14.

Attitude. Young people can exhibit an “attitude problem”. Combinations of social and hormonal changes can lead to mood swings. An occasional negative attitude is normal for most teens. Teenagers are under enormous pressure. Parents need to be counselled to avoid panic; envision a positive future for their teen; spend time with their teen. Parents must also consider their own attitudes; seek to reduce stress in the home; communicate unconditional love; establish only the rules and discipline that will be enforced; teach teenagers about life; and be prepared for times of disappointment

Scriptures: Eph 6:4; Eph 6:1-2; Deut 6:4-9; Psalm 103:17-18.

God's Will. For the young person, discovering the will of God for a career path, marriage, and other major choices is a great challenge. If we are seeking to live a life that honours God, we can be certain that He will guide our decisions. Have confidence that God will direct. Maintain a growing personal relationship with God. God often uses the following to guide us: Scriptures, open doors of opportunity, counsel of mature people, and the Spirit's prompting. Advise young people to always consider both short and long-term implications of their options.

Scriptures: Jas 1:5-6; Rom 12:1-2; Jer 33:3; Luke 11:9-10.

Appendix: Biblical guidance for struggling young people

1. Anger Psalm 37:8; Prov 29:8,11; Eccl. 7:9.	2. Guilt Psalm 32:1, 5; Prov 28:13; 1 John 1:9.	3. Loneliness Psalm 145:18; Matt 28:20; John 14:18	4. Peer pressure Prov 24:21; Isaiah 51:7; 1 Pet 2:20
5. School work Psalm 37:5-6; Prov 3:13-14; Eph. 5:15-16.	6. Parental divorce 1 Pet 5:7; 2 Cor. 1:3-4	7. Obesity Psalm 139:14; Isaiah 64:8; Jas 1:18.	8. Pornography Prov. 2:25-27; Rom 6:13; Col. 3:5; Jas. 1:21
9. Eating disorders Gen. 1:27; Job 33:4; Isaiah 40:29; Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 5:10.	10. Grief Psalm 23:4; Psalm 34:15; Isaiah 25:8; Luke 6:21; 1 Pet 1:6-7	11. Internet or computer games addiction Psalm 141: 4; Eccl 12:14; Mark 9:43.	12. Drugs & alcohol Prov. 4:25-27; Matt. 26:41; Rom 13.:4; 1 Cor. 10:13; Jas. 1:13.

15 REMEMBRANCE ⁶⁷

We will remember them. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, on the TV and on the radio, in magazines and newspapers, in documentaries and at the cinema, at conferences and during weekend enactments, at the Cenotaph and before war memorials, in schools and of course in our churches: we will remember them. ⁶⁸

Remembrance Sunday is not far away. Annually, we remember them. The British do ‘remembering’. After all, we have a lot of history, though not all of it glorious. As I began to think about remembrance I soon realized that I (like everyone else) bring a load of baggage to it. Memory is notoriously selective: we choose what to remember and how to remember it. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the case of the First World War, which some see as a huge disaster in term of the vast and fruitless loss of life, while others are inclined to be more generous in their estimation of its significance. We need not be surprised by that: history has a way of dividing opinion, even among those who in other respects might be on the same side.

Remembering is political. How we conceive and narrate our past – whether nationally, locally or personally – has a direct impact on the polis, on how we live together today. It matters. Specifically, it matters whether we tend towards the narrative of shared memory and collective identity, or towards the narrative of struggle and conflict, of oppression and minorities. Certainly, we need to move to a model of inclusion rather than

⁶⁷ Mike Thornton, October 2017.

⁶⁸ Editor’s note. The allusion here is to Laurance Binyon’s poem, ‘For the Fallen, published in *The Times* on 21 September 1914:

“They must not grow old, as we are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them or the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

exclusion, of unity rather than division, though sometimes that needs an acknowledgement of past injury as well as past provision.

There is a lot of remembering in the Bible. The command to remember is fundamental, not only to God's people but to God himself. God is a God of covenant, and covenant is a form of self-binding that is made real in history. Following the flood God establishes a covenant with Noah, his descendants and, importantly, 'with every living creature that is with you'. This he promises to remember and never again let the waters become a flood that will destroy all life (Gen 9.10). Abraham is engaged in a similar way and God remembers his covenant with him in Ex 2.24, as does Moses when he appeals to God to overlook the wickedness of his people in Deut 9.27. Of course the greatest narrative of shared memory and collective identity in the Old Testament is the people of Israel remembering their slavery in Egypt and their rescue from Egypt (Deut 7-8).

This motif carries forward dramatically into the New Testament, where the act of remembrance is central to the life of the young church. The Lord's Supper or the Eucharist is the foundational act of remembrance – remembering Christ and his sacrifice for our salvation: 'do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22.19; 1 Cor 11.24). This remembrance of Christ gives new meaning and significance to God's promises and remembrance of Abraham, Moses and indeed David. To remember Christ in the Eucharist is to take this long-standing remembrance of God and turn it into something new.

Both Old and New Testament narratives take us on a journey of alienation, rescue and repeated, constant loving help. This is brought into sharp focus as God meets his people, all people, in the cross. As Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, Gentile Christians "are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" (Eph 2.19). In another respect, however, that simply makes them feel all the more strangers *on earth*. 1 Peter makes it clear that, whilst no longer being strangers to God, Christian believers remain "aliens" or "strangers" (NIV) in the

world (1 Pet 2.11), a claim that recurs throughout the epistle. This is a cohesive narrative and provides for a cohesive identity, but one based on being an outsider in receipt of hospitality and grace.

In this sense, the biblical narrative points us to a memory of vulnerability, of shared need, of the right kind of triumph that can allow us to develop an identity and celebrate a past that humanises us in a way that gives us a hope for the future built on actions and lessons past. In that way, we can be radically inclusive in our telling of the greater story. Translating that into our Acts of Remembrance come that November Sunday morning may help us avoid the pitfall of being radically divisive. Perhaps refocussing our remembrance on the Lord's Supper will give greater comfort and greater hope as we also 'remember them'.

16 PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS ⁶⁹

I have just received an email from a major DIY chain that announced (in early November, for crying out loud) that "Christmas is Here!" Already? I thought Christmas was in late-December, and we have not yet endured that hell on earth that is 'Black Friday'. But, you'll have been thinking about Christmas, at least from a planning point of view, for a while already, I guess.

It is customary for this November CBM Newsletter to offer some sparkling fresh ideas for your Christmas sermons, or a novel variation on the traditional carol service. At Abingdon Baptist Church we try to see the Christmas story from a different perspective each year, so for the two Christmases that I have been one of its two ministers, we have looked at the song of the angels and the star that guided the Magi. Filling the sanctuary with cardboard angels and stars was fun, and it was certainly better than a Christmas tree (although that appeared too, of course) but what to do for this year? My colleague suggested we view the story from the donkey's point of view (and I suggested why not 'the Christmas lobster' — for those who know the nativity play in the film *Love Actually*) but I think we might just settle for Jesus' parents. We hope it will be the final Christmas in the church sanctuary prior to our anticipated major refurbishment next year, so it will be memorable whatever character we choose. For Christmas Eve we are experimenting with a Christingle service, hoping to attract the parents from our Tots group, and there is always the pressure to make the carol service somehow 'new.' But as I prepared for some teaching at Spurgeon's College — Christian Spirituality for the MA/MTh students — I was brought up in my tracks. Why this urgent need to do something new? It is certainly the spirit of our age to always be on the look-out for a novel approach, and this has more to do with the acute

⁶⁹ Paul Goodliff, November 2017.

avoidance of boredom of our culture than any Gospel value, I fear. Researching and preparing for the lecture on Eastern Orthodox spirituality I was once again struck by how Orthodoxy reverses our addiction to the novel. For us the old is out, the new is good, but for the Orthodox, the old is good — it has stood the test of time, and the new is suspect.

So, let me encourage you to do three things this Christmas. First, prepare yourself for it by finding at least a day for some retreat-like withdrawal from the rush, the urgent and the shallowness of the modern Christmas. Instead do the “one thing” that was necessary and find space and time to sit at the Lord's feet during the Advent season and pray (see Luke 10.38-41). If we celebrated Advent properly (and it is most definitely NOT simply preparation for Christmas) then we might find Christmas takes on its true significance. This is not simply me being in 'grumpy-old-man' mode, but rather an appeal to find some antidote to the godlessness of our contemporary Christmas, with all of its sugar-coated avoidance of the Gospel message. If there were prophets at Jesus' naming in the Temple, then we certainly need a few today as we attempt to name our culture for the disaster that it has become. To be able to do so we need to withdraw from its allure, and find some silence amidst all the sugary noise, some solitude amidst all of the enforced communal fun and a bracing dose of penitential cobweb-clearing of the spiritual kind.

Second, give yourself a break and return to something old and familiar this Christmas. My guess is most will not notice that you explored Christmas from the perspective of Mary, or the Magi, in living memory, and you will be returning to the heart of the message, not searching for something 'new' to say. You might try replacing that staple of Christmas All-Age Worship, the children's 'show-and-tell' ("What did you get for Christmas?") with asking the adults and children alike what they have *given* this Christmas, or during its run up. "For God so loved the world that he gave...." says the writer of the Fourth Gospel, and with plenty of 'spoiler alerts' for children who have yet to give their gifts, why not turn the tables in a Gospel direction?

Thirdly, don't start Christmas too early in your Sunday programme. The Sunday before Christmas Day is quite early enough, and that allows Advent to be Advent. No carols before the Carol Service at least! I know that you'll have school events and other groups will want to get in early, and that will mean you can hardly be strict about no carols before Christmas, but let the Sunday services at least dance to the rhythm of the liturgical season. That means you can continue the Christmas celebrations through Epiphany, and give yourself and your congregation an opportunity to really think together about the incarnation. I suggest that neither the carol service, nor Christmas Day or the first Sunday in the New Year, are the time to teach about the incarnation in depth, but as we so often move on from Christmas so soon after Boxing Day (because we have been in full Christmas mood since the beginning of December!) where do you find the context to preach this vital doctrine if not after Christmas? I guess what I am appealing for is a temporal shift, to let Advent be Advent (and its penitential and 'stripped-down' spirit allowed to do its proper work) so that Christmas and Epiphany can be truly themselves. That new series of sermons on the minor prophets or the Letters of John can wait a week or two, surely.

All that I need to do then is to wish you a robust Advent, a blessed Christmas and the fullness of God's grace throughout the coming year.

17 HAVE WE ‘DUMBED DOWN’ OUR WORSHIP AND PREACHING? ⁷⁰

In my research into how Baptist ministers experience retirement, one of my discoveries was that just over a quarter of my respondents were no longer worshipping in a Baptist church. Instead, around two thirds of that number were worshipping in Anglican churches, and another third were worshipping in a Free or independent church. ⁷¹ This then inspired me to do a survey of those retired Baptist ministers now worshipping in an Anglican church. ⁷²

It is very much a ‘niche’ survey, complicated by the fact that nobody seems to know (or even care?) where retired Baptist ministers eventually make their spiritual home. I wrote to the Baptist Union, but received no reply. I wrote to the principals of Baptist colleges, and received in total one name. I wrote to some other well-connected individuals, but for the most part drew a blank. To complicate matters, GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) as interpreted by the Baptist Union and its associations means that I have no access to addresses of Baptist ministers. In the end, for the most part I have had to draw upon my own contacts.

I personally know of thirty-two retired Baptist ministers worshipping in Anglican churches. Of these, three are former principals of Baptist colleges, two are former presidents of the Baptist Union, two are former regional or association ministers, and several could be regarded as Baptist theologians. This is

⁷⁰ Paul Beasley-Murray, March 2019.

⁷¹ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Retirement Matters for Ministers: A report on a research project into how Baptist ministers experience retirement* (CBM, Chelmsford 2018)

⁷² Paul Beasley-Murray, *Entering New Territory. Why are retired Baptist ministers moving to Anglican churches? What are the underlying theological issues?* (CBM, Chelmsford 2019).

not to demean the others, whose faithfulness in ministry over many years I honour.

Of these thirty-two, twenty have filled in a fourteen-page questionnaire. Ideally, I would have liked all thirty-two to have filled in the questionnaire, but for the most part there are good reasons for this, which tend to be related to health issues. However, I have plenty of material to analyse – and to this I will be adding my own reflections.

In this letter I want to highlight one finding. Of the twenty who did fill in the questionnaire, five had PhDs in theology – with a further respondent having gained a PhD in another discipline prior to training for ministry. Of the twelve retired Baptist ministers worshipping in Anglican churches who did not complete a questionnaire, four had PhDs in theology, with another having a DMin. Putting the two together, around a third of retired Baptist ministers known to me had doctorates of one kind or another. Is that significant?

As most of you will know, I too have a PhD. Perhaps as a result I tend to be fairly laidback on being able to call myself a ‘doctor’ – for me it was simply an exercise in learning how to think critically. What’s more, I am conscious that a PhD in this country is simply a ‘junior’ doctorate – I have not attained the dizzy heights of being a Doctor of Divinity.

I am also very mindful of the dangers of today’s ‘false worship’ of the PhD. In the ‘old’ days there were many great theologians who never bothered with a PhD. At Cambridge the professor I most respected was C.F.D. (‘Charlie’) Moule, the then Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, who had only a MA in Classics. The same was true of my PhD supervisor at Manchester: F.F. (‘Fyvie’) Bruce, the John Ryland’s Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis, also only had a MA in Classics (albeit with a host of honorary DDs).

But with all these *caveats*, is it significant that some of our ‘brightest and best’ can no longer cope with being in a Baptist church? Is it true, as one of my respondents said, “the beloved Baptists have largely dispensed with sermons and theological

teaching and have opted for a trivial, repetitious and irrelevant service style”? I have little doubt that such comments would not be applicable to members of the College of Baptist Ministers, but I do wonder whether in many Baptist churches there has been considerable ‘dumbing down’ in terms of both worship and preaching. What do you think?

18 LABELS ARE DANGEROUS ⁷³

I do not like 'labels', for they can be misleading. In my own case, for instance, I have always been an 'Evangelical': as a young minister I was on the Council of the Evangelical Alliance, and over the years have been involved in many Evangelical bodies. Nonetheless, I dislike the implication that 'Evangelicals' alone are 'Gospel-centred' people: that is patently not the case. Indeed, there have been occasions when I have experienced more of the love of God outside, rather than inside, the Evangelical fold!

Although I was a co-founder of 'Mainstream – Baptists for life and growth' and later became Principal of Spurgeon's College, which has a world-wide reputation for its passionate evangelical faith, I have developed a particular aversion to distinguishing between Baptist 'evangelicals' and 'non-evangelicals'. I do not deny that there have been Baptist ministers who have been true theological liberals, but the rite of believers' baptism with its explicit call to repentance and faith ensures that the vast majority of men and women in Baptist ministry are 'evangelically-minded'.

Nor do I like those churches which call themselves 'Bible-believing' churches. There is a large independent church just outside Chelmsford which on its noticeboard declares 'We are a Bible-believing church'. I want to get out a large red felt pen and cross out the word 'Bible-believing' and replace it with 'Jesus-believing'!

Strangely, you may feel, one label I am happy to wear is 'Baptist'. In part this is because in using this term I am not demeaning any other group of Christians. In part, too, this is because the term sums up my ecclesiological convictions which have led me to become a Baptist minister. Do notice the plural use of the word 'convictions'. As members of the College will know, there is no one distinctive Baptist 'belief' – rather it is the

⁷³ Paul Beasley-Murray, May 2019.

combination of our beliefs which make Baptists Baptist. As I wrote in *Radical Believers*:

Although probably most people think of believers' baptism as the primary Baptist distinctive, Baptists are in fact not the only Christians to practise believers baptism - believers baptism is practised by Pentecostals, the 'new churches', and many other Christian groups. Another key Baptist distinctive is their concept of congregational church government - however, as the very term implies, this concept is shared too by Congregationalists (most of whom have now become part of the United Reformed Church) and by some other Christian churches too. Likewise, other important Baptists distinctives such as the priesthood of all believers or the separation of church and state, are not peculiar to Baptists, but are shared by many other Christians too....Perhaps Baptist distinctives can be likened to a set of genes, which because of their particular arrangement produce a family likeness wherever Baptists are to be found. ⁷⁴

I confess that I am concerned by the increasing number of churches in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain which do not have the word 'Baptist' in their name. Why not, I wonder? Is it that they are simply 'baptistic' rather than 'Baptist'? Is there a reluctance to own the 'full set' of Baptist beliefs? I understand the argument that in today's world the word 'Baptist' conveys very little to people with no Christian faith. But then I wonder whether the alternatives which are used by such churches are any more intelligible to the 'outsider'.

True, if we were starting from 'scratch', we might want to ensure that we had the word 'Christian' in our title. But we are where we are – and to brand ourselves a 'Baptist-Christian church' sounds odd and could imply that there are some Baptist churches which are not Christian. Perhaps General Mobutu, the

⁷⁴ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Radical Believers: The Baptist way of being the church* (Baptist Union of Great Britain, Didcot 2nd edition 2006) vii.

former President of what was then Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), was right when he ordered the various Protestant denominations to unite and become one 'church' - church noticeboards were hastily repainted, and underneath the overarching sign 'The Church of Christ in Zaire' were the words 'Baptist community' or 'Methodist community'!

What do you think?

19 WHERE DO YOU FIND YOUR SUPPORT ⁷⁵.

There is a heroic response that says, "Support? Who needs it? I have God in my life!" But that supposed heroism soon looks like foolishness and arrogance when the stresses of ministry threaten to overwhelm a minister's capacity for bearing the burden of others' emotions and spiritual needs. I was prompted to think about this again in a conversation around a meal table at a gathering of evangelical leaders last month. If a person does not have adequate support networks in ministry by the time they reach their late 40s, then there is a strong possibility that they will experience a psychological and spiritual crisis by the time they are in their 50s. That was the assessment of the leader of an agency providing supervision and counselling to pastors in the evangelical sector. It provoked some reflection on my part.

I did pretty well for support in pastoral ministry in my first two pastorates. At Lewin Road, I was the associate in a large team, and my senior colleague, Mike Wood, was a great support. He certainly did not over-manage me, and I stepped up to senior leadership on more than one occasion when he was on protracted sick leave (giving me valuable experience of leadership in a large London church), but I always knew that Mike 'had my back' (as I, his!). We were both members of a weekly lunch gathering in Mike's office, with three or four other close neighbours in Baptist ministry, and also a larger group of charismatic Baptists convened monthly by Norman Moss, the pastor of Queen's Road Baptist Church, Wimbledon. Both groups meant I avoided the worst of individualism and isolation in ministry.

In my second church, in Stevenage, I had a most supportive diaconate and eldership, but beyond that the group of three of us who had left Spurgeon's at the same time in the late 1980s (Geoff Colmer and Colin Norris, joined a decade later by Martin

⁷⁵ Paul Goodliff, March 2020.

Taylor) met regularly and provided honest and mutual support. We saw one another through the crises in pastoral ministry that might otherwise have caused us to crash and burn. These were the two friends with whom I worked in offering counselling training at St John's Nottingham Extension Studies, and subsequently, in 2010, the four of us co-founded the Order for Baptist Ministry (OBM), so worked together as well as enjoyed friendship together.⁷⁶ I was counselling as well, and a small supervision group in Ron Messenger's house in Saffron Walden was supportive, as was membership of the Board of the Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry, providing both friendship and an opportunity for regular reflection on practice.

On becoming The General Superintendent for the Baptist Union's Central Area, much of that support disappeared. The Superintendent's Board was wonderfully supportive, however, as a peer group, and to a degree that continued when I became Head of Ministry, attending the National Settlement Team (and then for seven years or so chairing it) but since I was no longer counselling, I had no professional supervision.

No surprise then that just before Christmas a couple of years into the senior role in the Union as Head of Ministry I almost crumbled! Juggling a few disciplinary cases at the time, I received a letter threatening legal action against me from a disgruntled church member whose campaign against his minister was not meeting with my unequivocal support. Rationally, it was nonsense, but it was the straw that broke my heroic back! I could not face colleagues for the Christmas lunch, and my supportive deputy, Viv O'Brien wisely asked my line manager to come and see me immediately. Richard sent me home with the requirement that I see my GP. I did, and a few days later returned to work, narrowly avoiding a bigger crisis. Out of that I sought out pastoral supervision for the many pastoral cases I would handle over the years, and I have seen Charles ever since, about seven times a year.

⁷⁶ See www.orderofbaptistministry.co.uk

That experience of being in pastoral supervision led me to see its enormous value, and I began to offer it to others as they sought me out, especially after I started my last pastorate at Abingdon and had more capacity to do so. Professional Pastoral Supervision has begun to be more widely offered, and I now teach a course at Spurgeon's College that trains others to become Pastoral Supervisors. Some denominations have made this compulsory for their ministers but for Baptists this remains an option — but one that I think most should seek out. Becoming good reflective practitioners of ministry through pastoral supervision helps keep us effective and safe.

Now that I hold national leadership for the ecumenical life of England as General Secretary of Churches Together in England, you might think that the need for pastoral supervision has passed, but nothing could be further from the truth. I value reflecting upon the demands of this role, especially as we negotiate a pathway through a crisis that might otherwise fragment the pilgrimage towards unity of fifty member-churches. Alongside a wonderfully supportive team of six of us on the CTE staff, and a great Board of Trustees, that small group of friends who have journeyed together now for thirty years since we first left Spurgeon's College, and with whom I now meet more infrequently but equally deeply in the context of The Order for Baptist Ministry, provide me with continuing support.

Pastoral supervision provides reflection upon my work, friendship supports my overall wellbeing, but it is the OBM cell of which I am a member that attends to my soul. The Order not only enables a structure to my daily devotional life, through the various Daily Offices of the Order, it gives me the small group to which I am accountable for my spiritual life. We meet every five weeks or so for breakfast, and the half a dozen members — all Baptist ministers from the north Oxford area — provide the context to ask the questions no one else asks: such as, where is God in my life, how is my prayer life, where am I engaged in personal mission, and how am I coping with the allure of power, influence and self-importance? My experience is that no one in the churches which I pastored dared to ask the pastor those

kinds of questions, and ministers' meetings (even in their most recent and much-improved iteration) rarely do so. The cell is where I voluntarily give others permission to ask the questions that will keep me attentive to God and personal discipleship.

So, where do you find your support? In the relentless and sometimes exhausting demands of ministry, the temptation is to give in to being too busy to be adequately supported. Where do you find the time for supervision and/or cell? How do you nurture friendships that last a lifetime? Well, you make them a priority, and discover that the reflection upon practice that they provide reduces the seeming urgency of some aspects of ministry, helps you see where to delegate to others, or simply allow people to be responsible for themselves, and find the energy and wisdom to be effective. Our culture — especially our Baptist ministerial culture — is a very driven one, and can be unforgiving. Finding the support you need to be properly attentive to others and to God might just be the antidote to frantic and driven activism that bedevils our ministerial life.

What will church life be like in the “new normal” which is emerging as the partial lockdown due to Covid19 continues? In the same way as workplaces and shops and transport and hospitality venues have changed, church life cannot just go back to the way it was before. This article will discuss what church might look like in coming days by considering the six features of the life of the Early Church we find in Acts 2.42-47. Some changes may only be temporary, imposed by constraints such as social distancing or reduced finances. Other changes may prove to be desirable and become permanent, and of course congregations will rightly differ in the ways they go forward.

Teaching

The lockdown has introduced very many Christians to new experiences of learning and inspiration using technology such as livestreaming and video conferencing. These will surely continue in the post-Covid church to make Bible teaching accessible to those who cannot easily leave their homes, not only for health reasons but equally because of childcare needs. Sermons will continue to be presented on YouTube or Facebook, as well as in person. Bible study groups can continue to meet on Zoom or Teams as well as in person. Helping disciples grow one-to-one will become even more important because that can happen easily over the phone or face to face even when larger groups cannot meet. Many Christians have discovered the joys of personal study using books or online resources and some have embraced a variety of patterns of personal devotions.

The first danger here lies in the variable quality of the online materials available. Many sites ranking highly on search engines come from non-Christian agencies. A preacher’s popularity is a poor guide to their reliability. The rise of the health, wealth and prosperity teachers, and the cults of celebrity, have already given ample warnings of these risks.

⁷⁷ Peter Thomas, August 2020.

Style may triumph over substance, especially in the eyes of new Christians and seekers. Church leaders will need to assume responsibility for providing their churches with good online content and also for guiding them through the maze of very mixed material available. Then there is the ever-present trap of consumer Christianity, where a smorgasbord of teaching simply reinforces individualism. Following Jesus must always be both personal and corporate.

Fellowship

In the time of lockdown, many Christians say they have missed the coffee and the cakes after the services. Most have come to a greater appreciation of the importance of fellowship in their lives and to their faith. The heart of the common life of the church is the relationships between Christians, “not meetings but friendships.” While people have not been allowed to meet face-to-face, friendships have usually been sustained by phone, WhatsApp or Messenger. Many churches and Christians have rediscovered the value of newsletters, sent out by email and even by post. Existing networks for mutual support and encouragement have been strengthened and new groups have been created. Many church members have stepped up and been providing all kinds of vital practical pastoral care to their neighbours and their communities, recognising that pastoral care is not “the care the pastor gives” but rather the mutual support and encouragement and practical help which every Christian gives to fellow-believers and to their neighbours. It is to be hoped that all this will continue to be a feature of the life of every church but it will be important to ensure that no members of the congregation are left out in the “new normal” especially taking care of those with frailty or disability or no access to technology.

Worship and the Breaking of Bread

The purpose of gathering together is not to escape from the “real world” by a time of “worshipping God” but rather to equip and sustain Christians so that we may all better worship and serve God in our daily lives. At their best, “virtual church” gatherings have not attempted simply to reproduce “in the

building” experiences of church for home consumption. They have often involved much greater participation by members of the congregation, either in advanced preparation of elements in pre-recorded services or at the time in livestreamed gatherings. These elements should surely continue. Sung worship has inevitably been different and many Christians have been discovering the benefits of less familiar elements such as set prayers or liturgies. Churches will continue to use technology to enable remote participation alongside those who are gathering in person. As long as social distancing is required some congregations will need to consider multiple services. Some churches may choose to use technology to weave together singing in the home with a message and prayers gathered in person and churches for whom singing in large packed congregations is a major feature may have to wait longer than most to resume their former patterns of worship. One exciting possibility lies in small groups including more than one household (as regulations permit) gathering in homes and participating remotely together while others gather in the building.

Unlike some other traditions, Baptist approaches to the Lord’s Supper have mostly find it acceptable to remember Christ through Bread and Cup remotely. We all long to meet together to share one loaf and one Cup again, but even then the pattern of pre-cut pieces of bread and individual communion cups is likely to become almost universal for non-conformists.

Prayers

Prayer is the heart of the individual believer’s relationship with God and of the life of any church. The first Christians were “constantly in prayer” (Acts 1:14). Online services and online prayer meetings have allowed some to participate who would not have been able to gather physically. Many Christians who had never done so before have valued simply praying with each other over the phone. (Matt 18.19-20) Many have also discovered set prayers and patterns of personal devotions sent by email or by post or found online. Most Christians would say that prayer has increased in importance in their everyday lives

during the lockdown and churches will want to nurture all these new contexts for prayer.

Signs and Wonders

The vitality of the post-Covid church will depend more than anything else on the openness of God's people to His Holy Spirit. During the lockdown Christians have been rediscovering that the church is not the building, nor the programme of events or activities, but the church is the people of God. Central to that identity as Christ's body, the household of faith and God's holy temple is the presence of God, the activity of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2.19-22). Going forward, churches must not be relying on human wisdom but instead seeking the guidance and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Mission

The spectacular growth of the Early Church was not due to programmes and projects but simply faithful witness in the face of persecution, not only by the apostles and church leaders preaching and proclaiming and debating but also by nameless individual believers "gossiping the gospel" wherever they went. While many of the mission "crossing places" formerly organised to serve the community remain closed, from toddler groups and pre-schools to cafés and drop-ins, churches will need to be creative in finding new ways to serve and bless and reach out to their neighbours. Outreach and evangelism and community service will not be able to be expressed as much in centralised events and projects. The focus will become more on individual Christians and small groups caring for their neighbours and talking about Jesus to people they know. Our principal witness to the world should be our transformed lives. "Evangelism is the overflow of our joyful faith".⁷⁸ Outreach should flow naturally from the spiritual vitality of each believer. So the church's role

⁷⁸ Lesslie Newbigin. Editor's note: See also Newbigin's *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (SPCK, London 1989) 116: "Mission begins with an explosion of joy.... The mission of the Church in the pages of the New Testament is more like the fallout from a vast explosion, a radioactive fallout which is not lethal but life-giving"!

will be much more to equip and support Christians in their service and witness in their workplaces, with their neighbours and with their families, by nurturing prayer, love, faith, holiness and discipleship.

The work of ministers and church leaders

The big picture is that the Covid lockdown has led to a drop in income in very many churches, often due to loss of rental income and fund-generating activities. Some strands of income may not return immediately, if at all, and some churches will find that they can no longer afford stipended ministry. There will be a reduction in opportunities for full-time ministers, and an increase in part-time or bi-vocational posts. Regularly preaching in “virtual church” may have prepared the way (both for ministers and for churches) for more ministers to lead and serve more than one congregation.

At the same time, ministers are likely to spend less time presenting to large groups or attending “crossing places” or initiating and running projects and events and “meetings”. The tasks of ministry may focus more on making disciples, teaching and praying with individuals and small groups and training lay-leaders to do the same. Many of these activities may be undertaken from home through technology rather than face-to-face, especially for ministers with underlying health conditions.

Probably depending partly on personality type, but also on age, some ministers will relish inventing new expressions of church and new ways of ministering. Others are no doubt already grieving the loss of patterns of ministry which they have lived for years or decades. Some could well already be feeling completely exhausted by all the new things they have had to do in the last few months and be dreading the prospect of all the challenging and draining work it will take to lead churches into the Post-Covid19 era.

So Where Next?

Some people may be thinking all this sounds difficult and scary and much too radical. Others will be saying there is nothing new here and it is not nearly radical enough. Each church and

minister will need to discuss and pray to find their own answers. In this we must all put our trust in the God *who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine* (Eph 3.21) for the exciting possibilities which lie before us.

21 GREAT REASONS FOR MEETING TOGETHER ONE-TO ONE IN A TIME OF COVID ⁷⁹

The people who have made the most impact on our Christian lives, who first helped us to faith and most helped us to grow along the way, are not usually a big-name speaker or the books or music of somebody we have never met. Many people would agree that for them a minister, a youth leader, a home group leader or close Christian friends were much more significant. And the times which have shaped our faith were not so much in crowds or even small groups, but the times which we spent with those precious individuals one-to-one. In this time of lockdown we have not been allowed to gather together in person in our churches or our home groups, and it may be a while before we can. But two households are now able to meet up. What better time to explore the rich blessings which come when Christians meet together one-to-one?

Jesus tells us to pray together: “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” (Matt 18.19-20) Here Jesus promises to be present when believers meet together in some special way in which He is not present when they are apart and alone. And he promises that God the Father will answer the prayers of believers who come together in agreement about what they are praying for, more than if they had prayed alone and separately. It is very good to pray together.

Dialogue teaches the parts monologue can’t teach: We learn all kinds of things much better by talking about them and by doing them with other people than just by reading or by listening to a preacher talking about them. Talking things through helps us understand the things we have heard or read and helps us think through decisions we are making and find

⁷⁹ Peter Thomas, July 2020.

ways through problems we face. Meeting one-to-one brings encouragement in difficult times and helps us keep going when we feel like giving up.

Things “better caught than taught”: There are many things in life which we learn by watching other people: the piano teacher, the driving instructor, the personal trainer. So also in the Christian life other individuals can inspire and encourage us by their passion in prayer, their boldness in evangelism, their commitment to holiness and their complete devotion to God. From their examples we learn skills, attitudes and character. We learn hospitality, patterns of prayer and devotional reading. We learn how to cope with life. We are fired by their wisdom, zeal and love. They are our role models. We catch their faith. As other people share their lives with us one-to-one, we learn from them how to share our own lives with other people. The best way to learn to see Christ in others is to develop a close relationship with a fellow Christian.

God gives us other Christians so we can practise His kind of love: We learn to love our enemies by practising loving our friends. God gives us other Christians so we can learn to love and accept and forgive. The discipline of making space for somebody else in our busy lives is good. Learning to really listen to them so that we will be better at listening to others. Practising helping others – learning to be Jesus to other people.

It is so simple. Just pick up the phone to a friend. Go on WhatsApp or Messenger or Zoom. Get together. Encourage each other. Pray for each other. The Christian life is meant to be shared.

22 FROM COPING TO RECOVERY OF THE POST-LOCKDOWN CHURCH ⁸⁰

Life as we know it changed in an instant. One Sunday in mid-March 2020 we were worshipping as normal, be it with hand sanitizers at each entry point and asking people to bring their own Bibles rather than use the church stock, but we met, worshipped, shared life and left the building. The next day I was writing to our church community telling them that we could no longer meet in a way that had been uninterrupted for 130 years on this site. For many that was the start of a shifting landscape of life that has developed over the last six months. There has been change, trauma, loss and grief experience by all in some measure; for some this has been great and for some small.

Yet undoubtedly this is a *Kairos* moment – a moment that provides both dangers and opportunity. Many worshipping communities have quickly moved to some form of online platform to provide ‘virtual’ meetings and services. One of my deacons commented that our church has advanced 10 years in 10 weeks. Perhaps he is right... Certainly it is a season where people have accessed church services where they have not crossed the threshold of our church building. Those watching our online services exceed the number who attended each week. My question is whether this is a sustainable form of worshipping community. Most churches I know are looking at ways of coming back for live, in-person, services. The gathering of the physical community. As yet, that can only be of limited scope. I have no doubt that the church landscape has changed for good. I suspect we will continue to provide some online service long after we have moved back to physical bodies meeting together in physical buildings.

As we plan to gather our communities, I don’t think it will be just a matter of providing services as we have done in recent

⁸⁰ Mike Thornton, October 2020.

years. For many the transition back to live services in person may accentuate the trauma of the last six months (and maybe a lot longer yet). I certainly felt, prior to going on holiday in August, that we had adjusted and coped with the radical change in our form of being church. On my return it felt like I had held my breath for six months and now needed to breath in the air of gathering for worship with my church family – but we were still limited in our ability to do so. I felt our live breath was in some way restricted, suffocating. I feel more bereft now than at any time since we ceased to meet in that way. I know I am not alone. Changes that we perceived as temporary are now stretching out for the foreseeable future. We have coped but our recovery and our planning for what comes next is at least as important, if not more so.

There is a need to acknowledge that we have coped during lockdown, we have adjusted to a new way of being church for a season but we need to reflect on what it will mean to gather again and what it will mean for our ongoing mission now that we have extended our reach courtesy of the internet. Whilst looking at mission opportunity, we need also to acknowledge the pastoral cost to our existing community. Some may have felt left behind, and we need to re-gather our flock so that all feel valued and included. I am sure we have tried our best to do that over these trying times, but some will feel more connected to existing church life than others.

We also need to acknowledge that many of us as pastors are feeling exhausted in our task of holding our communities in this difficult time and having to nimbly adapt to our changing environment. Re-gathering may be a very joyful time, but it may also take time for us all to recover from the trauma of this rapid transition. We must allow time for our community, and for ourselves to recover and be restored. When finally all restrictions are lifted perhaps a service to mark this moment, as a rite of passage, will be helpful. But so will the slow, loving, tender nurturing

23 TERMINATING MINISTRY – AN ISSUE WHICH HAS YET TO BE DEALT WITH ⁸¹

On 11 August 2005 *The Baptist Times* published an article entitled ‘Terminating Ministry’ in which I argued for the appointment of a “minister’s advocate” when relationships break down between a minister and the church. Fifteen years later the problem I exposed has yet to be resolved.

Let me quote from the first three paragraphs of my article:

Yet again another minister friend has bitten the dust. At a special church meeting a vote of confidence in the minister was put – and was lost. So with no further ado, and certainly without any expression of gratitude for past service, the minister was ‘booted out’.

What should we do when things go wrong and relationships break down between the minister and the church? Call in the regional minister? Yes, certainly. But regional ministers have limitations, because they have the care of both the church and of the minister – so when things go wrong, they are most likely to allow the interests of the church rather than of the minister to take precedence (see John 11.50). Along with the regional minister, it seems to me that there should be a minister’s “advocate” who can represent the minister’s interests. As another minister friend, who was voted out of office, admitted to me: toward the end of his ministry, the pressures upon him were such, that with hindsight he realises that some of his words and actions were unwise. Had there been someone standing alongside him, things could have been so different.

But the saga is not over once the minister has been ‘dumped’. In the first place, there the minister has needs which must be met. Here I have not in mind not the

⁸¹ Paul Beasley-Murray, November 2020. Also submitted to *The Baptist Times* for publication.

inevitable financial needs (which should in part be addressed by a just financial settlement), but the emotional and spiritual needs which arise from the inevitable pain and the confusion. All too often ministers in such situations are left bereft of all support. To my mind, neighbouring ministers have a real role to play, although ideally there should be some professional support in place to enable the minister concerned to work through the trauma of termination.

Sadly, I could have written penned that article yesterday. Ministers continue to ‘bite the dust’. Even in these last six months two of my friends have had their appointments terminated, and there are many more friends who in the intervening fifteen years have had the same experience. For those of my readers who think I just have the wrong kind of friends, let me draw upon my research report *Retirement Matters for Ministers* (College of Baptist Ministers 2018). There I told of how I conducted seventeen face-to-face interviews with retired Baptist ministers to learn something of their experience of retirement. Because I felt I needed time to ‘connect’ with each minister, I began by asking them to tell me about their experience of ministry. To my amazement, I discovered that almost each one of them had had at least one tough experience of ministry. To quote from the report:

“Drawing upon the literary style of Hebrews 11. I wrote: ‘By faith they set out in ministry not knowing where the journey would lead them – by faith they lived in homes not their own – by faith they offered up their wives and children in the service of God – by faith they climbed the mountains , but also plumbed the depths of human experience – by faith they preached the good news and lived out the life of the kingdom – by faith they saw their churches grow, but they also saw their churches decline – by faith they experienced the love of their people, and by faith they experienced rejection and misunderstanding.’ Listening to their stories, I was overwhelmed by a sense of

respect and admiration for these ministers who had known some of the highs, but also some of the lows in Christian ministry. I remember the day, when in the morning one minister had told me of how he had been effectively forced to resign from one church – and then in the afternoon listening to another minister tell me how he had been sacked from one church and then had to resign from another church. Neither of these men were in my judgment problem ministers – rather they had encountered problem churches – and all too often problem leaders. In the course of such ministries, many had been wounded – but in the words of the title of book written many years ago by Marjory Foyle, they had been ‘honourably wounded’. Sadly today these ‘heroes’ are unknown to most today – but thankfully they are ‘known to God’.”⁸²

Yes, relationships continue to break down between ministers and their churches. Not surprisingly, into such situations regional ministers are called in to help resolve the difficulties. However, although regional ministers carry a prime responsibility for the care of ministers, there are limits to what they can do. For when regional ministers are called into a troubled situation, they have to be there for both the church and the minister. Yet at times it is impossible for them to balance the conflicting responsibilities. The church may feel the regional minister is on the side of the minister, while the minister may believe the regional minister is on the side of the church. Not infrequently regional ministers side ultimately with the church for the simple reason that the survival of a church is more important than the survival of an individual. Hence my reference in my original article to the words of Caiaphas in John 11.50: “It is better for you to have one man die for the people than for the nation to perish”.

Ministers need a supportive friend whose sole purpose is to be there for them and to see that the minister is treated fairly. Yet

⁸² Paul Beasley-Murray, *Retirement Matters for Ministers* 16.

this does not normally happen. I think, for instance of a situation where relationships had broken down and as a result of all the ensuing tension the minister had to go on sick leave. Nonetheless, a meeting was called and his presence was demanded. On arriving he found that lined up against him were fifty people 'baying for his blood'. Nobody was there to sit with him, and certainly nobody was there to speak up for him.

This is not right. In most other working situations, where things have gone wrong and dismissal is threatened, a union official is called in to represent the employee to ensure that their member is treated fairly. The underlying principle here surely needs to become the norm in Baptist churches.

Furthermore, even where ministers are clearly in the wrong and admit their behaviour has been 'unbecoming', they still need someone to speak and act on their behalf, to ensure that they are fairly dealt with. We see that in our courts, for instance, where even the worst of criminals have a barrister to represent them. That is part of our country's 'justice' system.

My experience is that there are times when Baptist churches treat their minister unjustly. Churches take advantage of the fact that their minister is not an employee but an 'office holder', knowing that as a result ministers cannot sue a church for unfair dismissal, for in the eyes of the law God is their employer. Not surprisingly an increasing number of ministers have become members of the Faith Workers' Branch of Unite. But this is not an ideal solution – not least because when unions are involved the focus is on 'rights' rather than on helping a minister to leave in a dignified as well as a fair manner. Although there may be some exceptional circumstances when a minister has no other option, my own conviction is that for Christians to resort to the courts goes against Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 6.1-8.

What Baptist ministers need is not a trade union but a recognised association of ministers. independent of the Baptist Union, which will offer non-adversarial peer support for ministers in difficulties. Since 2014 there has been such a body, the College of Baptist Ministers. Unfortunately, the leadership

of the Baptist Union prefers not to recognise the College of Baptist Ministers, convinced that the regional ministers are best suited to represent the interests of ministers. But, however well-meaning they are, regional ministers inevitably are constrained by their circumstances.

In saying this, I am not seeking in any way to denigrate the role of regional ministers. Where there are difficulties between ministers and their churches, I agree that the regional minister should be their first port of call. Yet there often comes a time when ministers need a dedicated ‘advocate’. This is particularly true when ministers find themselves engaged in proceedings that may place them in a disciplinary situation with the Baptist Union. Similarly, when allegations relating to the safeguarding of children or other vulnerable persons are made and the Baptist Union has to stand apart from the accused, a friend outside the structures is needed to stand by them. In this latter respect I have two minister friends, who were found not to have been guilty of charges, yet who until they were cleared (and it took months) received no support of any kind from their regional minister.

However, I would not wish to give the impression that an ‘advocate’ is only needed when the charges are grave. ‘Advocates’ can play a role whenever there are difficulties between a minister and the church. Indeed, I am convinced that if external support were to be put in place at an early stage in a dispute, then some, if not many, problems could be resolved and ministries could be saved.

In conclusion: for the sake of fairness ministers need ‘advocates’ who will stand up for them and speak for them when they are in a dispute with their church. When relationships break down they need peers who will be allowed to stand by them and support them – whatever.

24 ENDING WELL: THE FINAL LETTER OF THE COLLEGE OF BAPTIST MINISTERS ⁸³

Following the meeting of the CBM Board on Thursday 19 November I am writing to inform you that we have made the decision to begin the process of closing down the College of Baptist Ministers.

As you can imagine, it has not been an easy decision to make. We began with such high hopes in 2013. Yet sadly the leadership of the Baptist Union was determined to block the development of the College, believing there was no place for an independent body concerned for the wellbeing of Baptist ministers. Nor were we helped by the impact of the Government's data protection regulations, which made 'direct marketing' impossible.

However, in this letter I want to strike a positive note. We have, for instance, been encouraged to see the way in which the Baptist Union has been implementing the *Ignite* recommendations, and in that regard we warmly welcome the plans announced this September for continuing ministerial development – a matter for which we ourselves had long campaigned. As a result, although we remain as convinced as ever for the need for ministers to be represented by an independent body when difficulties arise in the church, we feel that now was the time for us to bow out.

In the words of Frank Bauman, the author of *The Wizard of Oz*, "Everything has to come to an end, sometime". Or to quote 'the Teacher': "For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die" (Eccl 3.1-2). Yes, there was a time to launch the College of Baptist Ministers, and now is a time to close the College of Baptist Ministers.

⁸³ Paul Beasley-Murray, 20 November 2020.

Everything – including every Christian group or organisation – has a limited life. Over the last fifty years of Baptist ministry I have been involved in starting up three organisations. The first was ‘Mainstream: Baptists for life and growth’, which together with Douglas MacBain I cofounded in 1978: it had a powerful influence on the Baptist denomination in the late 1970s and 1980s, but eventually it petered out. The second was the Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry (later renamed Ministry Today UK), which together with some friends I founded in 1994: it published *Ministry Today*, at the time the only British interdenominational journal devoted to the practice of ministry, but that folded in 2018. Then, as you know, in 2013 along with my friend Paul Goodliff we launched the College of Baptist Ministry with a concern for the well-being of Baptist ministers, and that too will formally close next year.

Compared to beginnings endings are not easy. Beginnings are often marked by a sense of excitement, while a sense of loss and sadness often accompany endings. That is true of the College of Baptist Ministers, for we have not been able to achieve all that we had set out to do. But then, is that not true of life in general? When the day comes for us to retire, for instance, there is often a sense of sadness associated with not being able to complete all that we felt God had called us to do.

Endings are part and parcel of life. The important thing is that we recognise the time to move on. In the words of the Brazilian novelist, Paulo Coelho, “It is always important to know when something has reached its end. Closing circles, shutting doors, finishing chapters, it doesn’t matter what we call it; what matters is to leave in the past those moments in life that are over”. Ellen Goodman, an American Pulitzer prize winning columnist made a similar point when she wrote: “There’s a trick to the ‘graceful exit’. It begins with the vision to recognize when a job, a life stage or a relationship is over – and let it go. It means leaving what’s over without denying its validity or its past importance to our lives. It involves a sense of future, a belief that every exit line is an entry, that we are moving up, rather than out.”

As a College we want make what Goodman called a ‘graceful exit’. Rather than focus on the negatives, we want to follow Bing Crosby and “accentuate the positive”. The fact is that we do have plenty to celebrate. The monthly letters, for instance, which we sent out to our members have been much appreciated. The books we were able to publish along with the resources for pastoral care have, I believe, been significant. Over the years I have appreciated the regular opportunity to give an account of my ministry through using the CMD proforma which we developed.

As a Board we want to thank you, the members of the College, who believed in our vision and so took out a membership-subscription. As a token of our gratitude we want to send you a complimentary copy of *A College of Peers*, a ‘legacy’ volume of some 50,000 words in which we tell the story of the last seven years or so. However, the heart of *A College of Peers* consists of twenty-four of the letters we sent out to you. In addition, there are two longer ‘in memoriam’ pieces which I have written: the first on Ministry as Servant Leadership and the second on Worship seen through the lens of 1 & 2 Timothy. This is why in my previous letter I asked you to confirm with us your present address. All being well, the book will be with you by the end of February. If by chance you were to want a second copy for a friend, then please let me know by the end of December – the charge then would be £10 (including post and packing) for an additional volume! Thereupon our activities as a College cease, and all that then remains is for us to produce a final set of accounts for Companies House.

May God continue to bless you richly in your ministry

TWO FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON MINISTRY BY PAUL BEASLEY-MURRAY

1 LEADERSHIP IS ALWAYS SERVANT LEADERSHIP

As a tribute to the College of Baptist Ministers, I thought I would include part of a lecture I gave to a post-graduate seminar at Laidlaw College, Auckland, New Zealand in March 2020.

My theme is servant leadership, which surely is the essence of Christian Ministry. As a result I requested that on the cover of my latest book, *Fifty Lessons in Ministry: Reflections on Fifty Years of Ministry*,⁸⁴ there be a picture of a jug, a bowl, and a towel, which point to the Upper Room, where Jesus washed his disciples' feet and said "I have set you an example" (John 13.15). Jesus calls us to 'the ministry of the towel'. What is more, there never comes a stage when we put down the towel. For service, in the words of Stephen Cottrell, the Archbishop of York, is "the heart and the heartbeat of all ministry. Christ is one who serves – the one who serves us, who are his servants – and we best follow him and emulate him by serving others ourselves."⁸⁵



⁸⁴ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Fifty Years in Ministry: Reflections on Fifty Years of Ministry* (DLT, London 2020).

⁸⁵ Stephen Cottrell, *On Priesthood: Servants, Shepherds, Messengers, Sentinels and Stewards* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 2020) 43.

On a number of occasions Jesus emphasised the necessity of the servant role if a person would be a leader. Thus, when James and John asked if they might sit at his right and left hand in glory, Jesus replied: “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Mark 10.42; Matt 20.25-27; see also Luke 22.24-26).

Jesus defined leadership in terms of service, and in doing so turned upside down all previous preconceptions of leadership. As James Edwards commented: “At no place do the ethics of the kingdom of God clash more vigorously with the ethics of the world than in the matters of power and service. The ideas that Jesus presents regarding rule and service are combined in a way that finds no obvious precedent in either the Old Testament or Jewish tradition. In a decisive reversal of values, Jesus speaks of greatness in service rather than greatness of power, prestige and authority.... The preeminent virtue of God’s kingdom is not power, not even freedom, but service.... The pre-eminence of service in the kingdom of God grows out of Jesus’ teaching on love for one’s neighbour, for service is love made tangible.” ⁸⁶

Jesus went on: “Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (Mark 10.44; similarly Mark 9.35 & Luke 9.48). From the perspective of Jesus’ hearers this was a preposterous idea. To quote Edwards again: “The idea of a slave being first is as absurdly paradoxical as a camel going through the eye of a needle (v25) – and it probably induced smiles and shaking heads from Jesus’ audience. The desire for power and dominance focuses attention on self and this is love, for love by nature is focussed on others.” ⁸⁷

⁸⁶ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Apollos, Leicester 2002) 325.

⁸⁷ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* 325.

Frederick Bruner in his commentary on the parallel passage in Matt 20. 27 drew attention to the question of Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, 491E: 'How can anyone be happy when he is the slave of all?', and went on: "Jesus turns this aristocratic ideal on its head, and in one of cultural history's dramatic reversals he asks, in effect, 'How can anyone be happy unless one is the slave of everyone else?' Because culture so ceaselessly directs us in exactly the opposite direction, *up*, believers must pray almost daily for the wisdom and courage to go culturally *down*. But seeking to be a great 'downer' in all imaginative service and with all created and charismatic ambition is so right that it comes close to being Jesus' definition of a happy life." ⁸⁸

If we turn to Luke's account of the dispute that occurred between the disciples at the Last Supper, we find that Jesus has some very uncomfortable things to say about the love of power and place which still 'infects' many who lead Christ's church today. ⁸⁹

A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22.24-27)

This desire for power and place is found in the very term that Luke uses here for the "dispute" (v24) that broke out between the disciples. The Greek word *philoneikia* appears only here in the New Testament and literally it means 'love of victory, desire for glory'. That sums up what was going on that evening. James

⁸⁸ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 13-28* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, revised edition 1999) 333.

⁸⁹ An adaptation of a comment by Fred Craddock who likened the love of power and place to an "infectious disease" (*Luke*, Interpretation, Westminster John Knox, Louisville) 257.

Edwards commented: “There is perhaps no subject on which Scripture is less tolerant than on that of self-adulation. ‘The Lord Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and loft, for all that is exalted’ (Isaiah 2.12 NIV).”⁹⁰ Or as the GNB translates: “On that day the Lord Almighty will humble everyone who is powerful, everyone who is proud and conceited”.

Jesus interrupted the disciples’ vanity with a warning not to be like the world’s powerbrokers, who like to style themselves as ‘benefactors’ but are not. According to James Edwards, the term ‘benefactor’ (*euergetes*) is among the half-dozen most common epithets used of rulers and leaders occurring in monumental Greek inscriptions in the eastern half of the Roman Empire from the New Testament period to late antiquity. These ‘benefactors’ were “a widespread class of individuals of power, position, and means who celebrated themselves and were celebrated by others in public spaces”.⁹¹ They were the celebrity ‘do-gooders’ of the ancient world. According to Luke, they “are called” (*kalountai* – passive mood) or “call themselves” (*kalountai* – middle mood) benefactors.

“But not so with you” said Jesus. Literally, “not so you”. There is no verb present in the underlying Greek, with the result that Jesus’ words could be translated as an imperative (‘you are not to be like that’) or an indicative (‘you are not like that’). To quote Edwards again: “The rebuttal, in other words, identifies not simply a behaviour to be avoided, but an alternative way of life to be embraced”.⁹²

Jesus went on to question the very concept of greatness. From the world’s perspective, honoured guests at banquets are ‘great’. Indeed, we have the custom at weddings and at formal dinners of a ‘top’ table. But in the Kingdom of God the world’s values

⁹⁰ James Edwards, *Luke* 633.

⁹¹ Edwards, *Luke* 633.

⁹² Edwards, *Luke* 634.

are reversed: “I am among you as one who serves”. Is it significant that here Luke does not use a noun (*diakonos* – deacon/servant) but a verb (*diakoneo*)? Are we to infer that Jesus did not assume the title of a servant, but rather played the role of a servant? Francois Bovon commented that Luke “knows that there are inactive and incompetent servants: see Luke 12.45-46”).⁹³ Service is to be the hallmark of Christian leadership. As T.W. Manson memorably put it, “In the Kingdom of God service is not a stepping-stone to nobility: it is nobility, the only kind of nobility that is to be recognised”.⁹⁴

Finally, John Nolland drew attention to the context in which this dispute took place; “In the first instance the text is about how the members of the Apostolic band should relate to one another, and not about how they as the great ones and leaders should relate to the Christian community they are to lead”.⁹⁵ Here are perhaps uncomfortable words for ministers who are part of a multi-staff church and who can get into such a tizzy about status and title: assistant minister or associate minister or as much a minister as the ‘team leader’!

By contrast for Jesus service was the hallmark of his mission. As he said to his disciples “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10.45: see Matt 20.28). Again the comments of James Edwards are most insightful: “The life to which the gospel calls believers is not an ethical system but ‘the way of the Lord’ (1.3) of which Jesus is the pattern and incarnation. This model of ministry cannot come from the secular order, but only from the unique way of Jesus, which defies the logic of this world and its fascination with dominance, control, yields, results and outcomes. The key to the model both incarnated and

⁹³ Francois Bovon, *Hermeneia: Luke 3: A commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19.28-24.53* (Fortress, Minneapolis 2012) 74.

⁹⁴ T.W. Manson *The Church's Ministry* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1948) 27.

⁹⁵ John Nolland, *Luke 18.35-24.53* (Word, Waco, Texas 1993) 1065.

commanded by Jesus is in the verbs ‘to serve’ and ‘to give’. The reason why a servant is the most preeminent position in the kingdom of God is that the sole function of a servant is to give, and giving is the essence of God.”⁹⁶

Nowhere more clearly do we see Jesus as the Servant than when he washed his disciples' feet in the upper room (John 13.1-20). It is impossible to overemphasize the menial nature of this act. For the rabbis it was a task which could not be required of a Jewish male slave (Mekh.Exod 21.2.82a, based on Lev 25.39). Washing the feet of another person was seen as an undignified action, a job reserved for Gentile slaves, wives and children.

“The action of Jesus in removing his outer garment and tying a towel around him underscores the humiliation of his action; the Midrash on Gen 21.14 states that when Abraham sent Hagar away he gave her a bill of divorce and took her shawl and girded it around her loins, that people should know that she was a slave.”⁹⁷

We are so familiar with this incident that we do not always sense the degradation of the scene. Jesus, “knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God” (John 13.3), humbled himself beyond measure by taking upon himself the role of a slave as he washed his disciples' feet. In a very real sense this was a “scandalous” act.⁹⁸ Today's leaders would do well to heed Jesus' words: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13.15).

It may well be that the Apostle Peter had the incident of the footwashing in mind when, after giving instructions to the elders, he said to the church as a whole: “All of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another” (1 Pet 5.5). The Greek verb translated ‘clothe’ (*egkomboomai*) is

⁹⁶ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 326, 327.

⁹⁷ G.R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Word, Waco, Texas 1987) 233.

⁹⁸ So Rodney A. Whitacre, *John* (IVP, Leicester 1999) 329.

derived from the word *egkomboma*, which denoted the ‘apron’ or ‘overall’ which slaves fastened in front of their sleeveless vest to keep it clean. Some commentators believe that Peter may be hinting that they should imitate Jesus, who tied a towel around himself in order to wash his disciples feet.⁹⁹ As a result the GNB translates this verse: “All of you must put on the apron of humility, to serve one another”. This call to serve others includes leaders, who must also put others first; for the ‘humility’ of which Peter speaks is “an attitude which... thinks of the desires, needs, and ideas of others as more worthy than one’s own”.¹⁰⁰

The metaphor Peter employs here may well have yet even further significance for church leadership. For in the ancient world what people wore was a sign of their social position: “one’s garment announces what one is for another, not what one is in and for oneself”.¹⁰¹ In the light of this, wrote Joel Green, “Peter’s directive to everyone counters the possibility of blind submission to authority just as it sabotages all attempts to exercise authority on the basis of status”. That Peter would instruct everyone one (*pantes*), leaders included, “to wear the same garment, irrespective of its colour or quality or texture, is itself a startling negation of the social distinctions that among people in Roman antiquity would have been worn like uniforms in a parade”.¹⁰² Green noted that the word for ‘humility’

⁹⁹ So, for instance, J.N.D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (A.C. Black, London 1969) 206. J. Ramsey Michaels (*1 Peter*, Word, Waco, Texas 1988) was not convinced and pointed out that in John 15.3 another Greek word (*lention*) is used, but to my mind this does not rule out an allusion to the foot-washing.

¹⁰⁰ Wayne Grudem *1 Peter* (IVP, Leicester 1988) 194. The term ‘humility’ (*tapeinophrosune*) is defined in Paul’s introduction to the great Christ hymn of Philippians 2: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility (*tapeinophrosune*) regard others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Phil 2.3-4).

¹⁰¹ Klaus Berger, *Identity and Experience in the New Testament* (Fortress, Minneapolis 2003) 41.

¹⁰² Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2007) 170.

(*tapeinophrosune*) is related to the Greek word ‘to think’ (*phroneo*) and draws from this conclusion that “Peter thus concerns himself, and his audience, with a frame of mind or pattern of thinking that belongs to persons who have done with positioning themselves in the world’s social hierarchy in order to ensure that they are treated with appropriate esteem by their social underlings”.¹⁰³ Here we see again that leadership in the church has nothing to do with status, but everything to do with service.

Although the Apostle Paul does not refer to the incident in which Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, as Phil 2.1-11 shows so clearly, he was very much aware of the model of humble service which Jesus set us all. With regard to his understanding of servant leadership this comes to particular expression in 2 Cor 4.5: “For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves (*douloi*) for Jesus’ sake” (NRSV). Strangely most other English versions (e.g. GNB, NIV, REB & RSV) tone down Paul’s language by translating the phrase as “your servants for Jesus’ sake”. But Paul does not use the Greek word *diakonos*, servant, but *doulos*, slave. Elsewhere he speaks of himself being a ‘slave’ of Christ (Rom 1.1; Gal 1.10; Phil 1.1; see Titus 1.1 ‘slave of God’), but here he speaks of being a ‘slave’ of the church! A slave by definition has no rights; slaves belong totally to their masters, to whom they owe absolute obedience. In the context here, for Paul to describe himself and his fellow-workers as ‘slaves’ means, in the words of Arndt & Gingrich’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* they are “unconditionally obligated to serve them”;¹⁰⁴ or as Murray Harris put it, Paul envisaged his relationship to his fellow Christians “as unquestioning service for the benefit of the other, as the result of unconditional but voluntary surrender of

¹⁰³ Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* 170.

¹⁰⁴ William Arndt & Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 4th edition 1952).

all personal rights”.¹⁰⁵ Earlier in his letter, Paul had said: “We do not lord it (*kuriomen*) over your faith”, but instead are “workers with you” (2 Cor 1.24). But here in 2 Cor 4.5 Paul goes much further, and anticipates his declaration: “I will most gladly spend and be [utterly] spent for you” (2 Cor 12.15), where Paul effectively says that he is happy to give all that he has and is to his fellow Christians at Corinth.

This is amazingly extravagant language. As Ernest Best noted: “It is relatively easy to say ‘I am God’s slave’, but something in us rebels when we have to say ‘I am their slave’”.¹⁰⁶ It is not only in 2 Cor 4.5 that Paul uses the metaphor of slavery for ministry. The metaphor is also found in 1 Cor 9.19: “For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them”. But here the emphasis is perhaps a little different: it is more a matter of a giving up of rights (such as not being paid for ministry or being willing to adapt to different environments) than of total commitment. Where does this language come? Surely it can only come from Paul’s understanding of Jesus, who for our sakes “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (*doulos*).

This teaching on the importance of being a servant must not lead us to underplay the importance of leadership itself. Leadership, rightly understood, does not stand in opposition to service. Leadership can be an expression of service. If leadership is undertaken for the sake of others, rather than for the sake of personal ego, then such leadership is service in the cause of Christ.

The key to Christian leadership is servant-leadership. Servant-leadership focuses on the people to be cared for rather than just the job to be done. There is therefore a very real difference between servant-leaders and some high-powered executives. Servant-leaders cannot trample on people even in pursuit of the

¹⁰⁵ Murray Harris *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2005) 333.

¹⁰⁶ Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians*, (John Knox, Atlanta 1987) 39.

kingdom. Leaders may not be doormats - but neither may they use others as doormats. But for all these necessary caveats, servant leadership must still lead – it must not become an excuse for no leadership.¹⁰⁷ For that reason the suggestion has been made that we should speak of ‘leading servants’ rather than ‘servant-leaders’.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ John Drane, *After McDonaldization: Ministry and Christian Discipleship in an Age of Uncertainty* (Darton, Longman, Todd, London 2008) 106 commented: “‘Servant leadership’ often leads to a situation in which there is no effective leadership at all”.

¹⁰⁸ John Ortberg, formerly an associate pastor at Willow Creek Community Church, quoted by Eddie Gibbs & Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (British edition: IVP, Leicester 2001) 106. Gibbs and Coffey suggested that the emphasis on ‘servant leadership’ espoused by some pastors has more to do with their insecurity rather than with their humility.

2 CELEBRATING THE FAITH – CHRISTIAN WORSHIP THROUGH THE LENS OF 1 & 2 TIMOTHY

Worship is the *raison d'être* of the church. In the final analysis, the church doesn't exist to tell others the good news of Jesus Christ; nor does it exist to help the world to be a better place. The church exists for God. In the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever". What is true of men and women in general is even more true of the church. We are "a people for his praise" (Isaiah 43.21 RSV: also 1 Pet 2.5,9) – or as Eugene Peterson puts it, we are "a people custom-made to praise" (*The Message*).

Leading worship is one of the great privileges of ministry. Even in these days when it can seem strange and unnatural to lead a service of worship without active congregational participation, I believe that ministers, precisely because of their training, still have overall responsibility for the worship of the church.

Over the years I have had a great interest in the principles underlying Christian worship. One of my earliest books was *Faith and Festivity: A Guide for Today's Worship Leaders*, which was based on a course of lectures I gave to my students when I was Principal of Spurgeon's College, London.¹⁰⁹ This study, which looks at Christian worship through the lens of 1 & 2 Timothy, was initially devised as part of an intensive post-graduate course I taught at Laidlaw College, Auckland, New Zealand, in March 2020.

1. Let's worship God (1 Tim 1.17)

True worship is first and foremost doxological – at its heart worship is about giving God the glory (*doxa* is the Greek word for glory). Worship sings the praises of God. It celebrates the majesty of God. It declares the wonder of who God is. Or

¹⁰⁹ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Faith and Festivity: A Guide for Today's Worship Leaders* (Monarch, Eastbourne 1991).

perhaps a little more mundanely, in worship we proclaim God's worth. Indeed, this is the thrust of our English word 'worship', which is derived from the Saxon *weorthscipe*, from which later the word 'worthship' came.

In worship the focus is on God. It is not on the choir or the worship group, and most certainly not on the preacher or on any other personality. God is the celebrity, from start to finish of the worship. Let's therefore ensure that the physical arrangements of our churches reflect that focus upon God. It surely cannot be right for a worship group to be centre stage – God needs to be centre stage. For me one of the glories of Chelmsford Cathedral where I now worship is that there is a huge figure of the Ascended Reigning Christ with pierced hands and welcoming outstretched arms suspended above the nave. Not every church, of course, can afford such a magnificent sculpture – but at the very least could not there be a figure of the Risen Lord portrayed on a screen?

Worship is for God, and for God alone. It is a turning away from self and a gazing upon God in such a manner that adoration and praise, confession and penitence, dedication and commitment are our response. Once the welcome is over, worship proper must begin with God – the God who has revealed himself in Jesus; the God who raised Jesus from the dead, set him at his right hand, and pours out his Holy Spirit upon his church.

Have you noticed that both at the beginning and the end of Paul's First Letter to Timothy are marked by a 'doxology' (1 Tim 1.17 and 6.16): the doxologies have been described as "the theological bookends" which provide a framework for Paul's instructions to his junior partner.¹¹⁰ There is a further brief doxology in 2 Tim 4.18. However, my focus here is on the longest of the three: "To the King of all ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever.

¹¹⁰ Raymond F. Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus* (Westminster John Knox, Louisville 2002) 45.

Amen” (1 Tim 1.17) Or as Eugene Peterson puts it in his paraphrase, *The Message*:

Deep honour and bright glory to the King of All Time –
One God, Immortal, Invisible, ever and always. Oh, yes

Almost certainly Paul is not ‘ad-libbing’ here. Scholars suggest that he was quoting a doxology which Christians probably took over from the worship of the Jewish synagogue. That’s a thought: did you realise that Paul is into liturgy here? Indeed, as we shall discover, Paul in his letters often quotes early Christian hymns, creeds, and confessions of faith.

As it stands by itself, the cry of praise to God is not specifically Christian – there is no reference, for instance, to God’s amazing love in Jesus. But look at the context: there Paul writes of how “the grace of our Lord over-flowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ” (1.14). He quotes the “sure saying” that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1.15). It is the context which gives added depth to his outburst of praise. In the words of one commentator: “The terms of his praise size up the character of the God who has the capacity to make good on the stunning promise to save sinners for eternal life through Christ Jesus”.¹¹¹

God is described as “King of all ages”. He is beyond all time. He was there before time began and will be there when time is no more As Martin Luther graphically put it, “With one wink of His [God’s] eye He beholds the eyes and crowns of all kings in contempt. They are the kings of the hour.”¹¹²

Over against others who would have a claim on our lives, God’s superiority is celebrated in three special ways. First God is “immortal”: he is beyond the ravages of decay and death. Secondly, God is “invisible”: he is, said John Stott, “beyond the

¹¹¹ R.W. Wall, cited by Robert Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy & Titus* (Apollos, London 2018) 128.

¹¹² Martin Luther, cited by Robert Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy & Titus*, 128.

limits of every horizon”; ¹¹³ he is beyond, reason and beyond conception. Thirdly, God is “alone” (Greek: *monos*) in his splendour: Christians, like Jews, are ‘mono’-theists. God has no rivals; he is unique.

It is this amazing God who has provided the world with a “Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1.10). The resurrection is at the heart of the Christian faith. As Christians we do not believe in the immortality of the soul: rather through the victory that God gained over sin and death in his Son, we share in that immortal life which is God’s alone to give. I have little doubt that this thought was in Paul’s mind as he celebrated God’s ‘immortality’ in this opening doxology.

To God, therefore, “be honour and glory. Amen”. ‘Amen’ is a Hebrew word with a punch. In Christian worship today ‘Amen’ tends to be little more than a full-stop to a prayer. But, as Donald Coggan, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, makes clear, “Amen is a great word, strong and powerful”! ¹¹⁴ It is a word which enables worshippers to make it their own. ‘Yes, so be it!’ Indeed, the suggestion has been made that at this point, as the letter was being read out in church, the reader would have paused, to enable the listening congregation then to shout out their own Amen too. ¹¹⁵ So too, when we say ‘Amen’, when we sing our praises, when we proclaim God’s greatness, let us not mumble under our breath, but let us raise our voices and so give God the glory.

Almost three hundred years ago, this doxology became a means of worship for the young Jonathan Edwards, one of America’s great preachers and theologians. For in 1721, as a seventeen-year old, he was pondering these words of Paul. He wrote:

¹¹³ John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (IVP, Leicester 1996) 55.

¹¹⁴ Donald Coggan, *The Prayers of the New Testament* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1967) 41.

¹¹⁵ Joachim Jeremias, quoted by J.N.D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles: I & II Timothy, Titus* (Adam & Charles Black, London 1963) 56,

“As I read the words [1 Tim 1.17] there came into my soul, and as it were diffused throughout it, a sense of the glory of the divine being; a new sense quite different from anything I ever experienced before. Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapt up to God in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him.” ¹¹⁶

Hopefully in turn we too can make time to ponder and encounter afresh this God whose glory we can never fully declare.

2. Let's pray for others (1 Tim 2.1-4)

Many churches have given up on praying for others. As a minister of a large charismatic church said to me: “Praying for others is something we do in our small groups, Sundays are for worship and preaching”. I vividly remember visiting a vibrant church not far from Edinburgh: the service lasted two hours but it contained no prayers of intercession. The more contemporary the worship, the more likely it seems that prayers of intercession will be missing. By contrast the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 1.2-4).

In the first instance, notice that for Paul praying for others is a primary feature of Christian worship. “First of all”, he wrote (2 Tim 1.1). It could not be clearer. “The first thing I want you to do is pray” (*The Message*). As the context makes clear, Paul was

¹¹⁶ G. Claghorn (ed), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* vol 16: *Letters and Personal Writings* (Yale University Press, New Haven 1998) 792-793.

writing not about personal prayer in the privacy of our homes, but about corporate prayer when the church comes together (see 2.8,9). Praying for others is to be a regular part of Sunday worship.

Secondly, Paul expected Christian worship to include all sorts of prayers for others. In addition to prayers of thanksgiving there are to be “supplications, prayers, intercessions” (1 Tim 2.1) or as the GNB puts it “petitions, prayers, requests”. Attempts have been made to distinguish between the various kinds of prayers here, but it is generally agreed that Paul was piling up synonyms for praying for others, and not least for people outside the church. We should pray “for everyone” (1 Tim 2.1). Why? Because God's love encompasses everybody. As Paul says: “God desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2.4); “Christ Jesus... gave himself a ransom for all” (2.5,6a). God doesn't simply love his church - he loves his world. And so should we!

Yet strangely some wish to limit the scope of our prayers. Paul, it is suggested, was not encouraging prayer for people's general well-being. Rather his sole concern was to see people saved. To quote Philip Towner, a popular commentator:

“The church's prayer for all people is an essential aspect of its participation in the Great Commission. It is prayer that seeks the gospel's penetration into all parts of the world and every aspect of life. The closely related prayer for those whom God has placed in charge of governments finds its ultimate purpose too in the accomplishment of God's plan for salvation”.¹¹⁷

I find it difficult to believe that Paul would have wanted his words to have been interpreted in such a narrow way. Of course, he wanted everyone to be saved, but this was not his initial focus. Paul belonged to the Jewish Diaspora, which for centuries had taken seriously God's instructions to Jeremiah for the

¹¹⁷ Philip Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus* (IVP, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1994) 68.

exiles of his day to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and to pray to the Lord on its behalf” (Jer 29.7). Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount taught his disciples “to love your enemies and to pray for them” (Matt 5.44). To love is to pray. “Love”, said Dick France, “is not just a sentimental feeling, but an earnest desire for their good”.¹¹⁸ The intensity of our praying reveals the intensity of our loving.

The importance of praying for others cannot be overstated. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who died at the hands of Hitler wrote: “A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. He who denies his neighbour the service of praying for him denies him the service of a Christian”.¹¹⁹ Similarly Richard Foster said: “Intercession is a way of loving others.... People today desperately need the help that we can give them. Marriages are being shattered. Children are being destroyed. Individuals are living lives of quiet desperation, without purpose or future. And we can make a difference... if we will learn to pray on their behalf”.¹²⁰ Prayer is to be made for everyone – without special conditions attached. Dick Williams argued “The range of every congregation’s intercession must be as wide as the mass media’s coverage. Indeed, it should be wider.” His collection of prayers reflected that – it included prayers for entertainers, drop-outs, novelists, composers, psychiatrists, and even space travel.¹²¹

Thirdly, Paul urged specific prayer “for kings and all who are in high positions” (1 Tim 2.2). Amazingly, when Paul was writing those words to Timothy Nero was on the throne. Far from being a Christian, Nero was anti-Christian. Indeed, he ended up

¹¹⁸ Dick France, *Matthew* (IVP Leicester 1988) 128.

¹¹⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (SCM, London 1954) 66.

¹²⁰ Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the heart’s true home* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1992) 203.

¹²¹ Dick France, *Prayers for Today’s Church* (CPAS, London 1972) no page number.

persecuting and torturing Christians for their faith. Yet Paul enjoined prayer for him and for all others in positions of responsibility. In today's terms that means we need to pray for the leaders of our nation and of the world; for the CEOs of global corporations and for UN officials; for leaders of industry, NHS managers and decision-makers in education; for local government councillors and officials. For all who in one way or another have power to influence our lives.

Fourthly, leading on from prayers for those "in high position", Paul urged Timothy to pray that "we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim 2.2). I like Robert Yarborough's suggestion that Paul wanted "prayers at Ephesus to aim for social, political, and economic stability conducive to everyone's well-being, that of Christians included".

¹²² He went on:

"The international refugee situation that has persisted in the absence of such stability has been a tragic feature of the twenty-first century world. The desirability of social order in any century, Paul's and Timothy's included, needs no belabouring at the present time, when chaos and genocide make headlines with staggering frequency. People regularly risk their very lives to flee conditions under which 'peaceful and quiet life' has become impossible; the spectre of death in a leaky refugee boat is less feared than the insanity of disorder, insecurity, deprivation, and sometimes lethal intimidation." ¹²³

By contrast some attribute to Paul a narrow focus on the benefits of peace for the Christian community. "Peaceful conditions facilitate the spread of the gospel" wrote John Stott. ¹²⁴ Similarly, Philip Towner: "What is sought is the best conditions for expanding God's kingdom, not simply a peaceful

¹²² Robert Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Apollos, London 2018) 149.

¹²³ Yarborough, 149.

¹²⁴ John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (IVP, Leicester 1996) 61.

life".¹²⁵ Gordon Fee had a slightly different view and understood Paul to be concerned for the negative impact the false teachers were having on the community: "The concern here is not that Christians should have a life free from trouble or distress (which hardly fits the point of view of 2 Tim 1.8 and 3.12) but that they should live in such a way that 'no one will speak evil of the name of God and of our teaching' (6.1)".¹²⁶ I find neither interpretation attractive, for both run counter to Paul's concern "for everyone". The thrust of Paul's instructions for prayer is that we should pray first and foremost for others, and not just for ourselves. Prayers for others need to be broad ranging. My practice therefore has been to ask those leading the prayers of intercession to have three or four short prayers which focus on aspects relating to three main areas: the church (local or overseas), the nation (or local community), and the world.¹²⁷

Prayers of intercession should not be an optional extra. In praying for others, we are not simply obeying the command of Scripture, we are also reflecting the love of Christ. In this context John Stott drew attention to a report on the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility, in which a group of Evangelicals declared: "We resolve ourselves and call upon our churches, to take much more seriously the

¹²⁵ Philip Towner, 64.

¹²⁶ Gordon Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts, 2nd edition 1988) 63.

¹²⁷ My instructions included: (1) have a short introduction to each prayer (not more than two sentences) telling people what it is about; (2) remember that an opening sentence/promise from the Bible can set a helpful tone; (3) do not preach at people ('we pray that we may all give generously at the Gift Day') or one-sidedly ('we pray that Labour will win'); (4) use natural modern language, avoiding phrases you would never use in conversation (e.g. 'loved ones', 'afflicted'); (5) include thanks to prevent it becoming a shopping list; (6) mention people in need by name, but check that they have given their consent (cover yourself against the charge of leaving someone out by adding 'and others whom we name silently ourselves'); (7) feel free to leave silences for people to add their own requests, provided you explain what you are doing and then give time (leave at least thirty seconds); end each of your prayers with 'in Jesus name, Amen'.

period of intercession in public worship; to think in terms of ten or fifteen minutes rather than five; to invite lay people to share in leading, since they often have deep insight into the world's needs; and to focus our prayers both on the evangelization of the world... and on the quest for peace and justice in the world." ¹²⁸ Here indeed is food for thought!

3. Let's confess the faith (1 Tim 3.16)

At the first Baptist World Alliance Congress in 1905 the first President, Alexander Maclaren, asked the delegates to stand and say together the Apostles Creed. Today few Baptists could do the same. Strange as it may seem to our fellow Christians in the more liturgical churches, Baptists rarely confess their faith by saying together the Apostles Creed, let alone the Nicene Creed. Instead, Baptists have had a suspicion of creeds, perhaps in reaction to the way in which in the past subscription to the ancient creeds was required as a test for entry to many public offices. Yet the early Christians had no difficulties in confessing their faith. Neither should we today! As I have written:

“With the general demise of the singing of old hymns, in which the congregation used to confess its faith, I think there is a lot to be said for saying the Apostles Creed in Baptist churches. Creeds have a real place in public worship, for through the saying of the creeds we are not just saying what we believe, but also committing ourselves afresh to the one in whom we believe. It would be good too to bring into Baptist worship the great credal acclamation found in the Anglican Eucharistic liturgy: ‘Christ has died – Christ is risen – Christ will come again’.”¹²⁹

¹²⁸ *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment*, Lausanne Occasional Paper 21 (Paternoster, Carlisle 1982) 49.

¹²⁹ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Entering New Territory: Why are retired Baptist ministers moving to Anglican churches? What are the underlying theological issues?* (College of Baptist Ministers, Chelmsford 2019) 68, 69.

The earliest New Testament confession of faith is “Jesus is Lord” (Rom 10.9). With these words on their lips the first Christians were baptized – and later with these words on their lips many Christians were martyred. A longer and very early Christian confession of faith is found in 1 Cor 15.3-5, where Paul quotes a form of words, possibly taught him by Ananias as he was prepared for baptism, which focusses on the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Another significant early confession of faith is quoted by Paul in 1 Tim 3.16. Almost certainly this is either a hymn or a creed which was sung or recited in the worship of the early church. This may not be clear in our English versions, but it becomes very apparent in the original Greek.¹³⁰ We have here two couplets followed by a refrain, which ensures that each ‘verse’ ends on a note of triumph. Here six important affirmations are made about Jesus.

He was revealed in flesh,
Vindicated in spirit,
Seen by angels.
He was proclaimed among Gentiles,
Believed in throughout the world
Taken up in glory

1 *Jesus is God's Son*: “He was revealed in flesh”. Whereas we came into being when our parents made love, Jesus was already in being before he entered his mother's womb. Before time was, Jesus was. Yet, in a way which defies understanding, “He appeared in human form” (GNB). Here nothing is said about the purpose of his coming. However, in 2 Tim 1.10 Paul speaks of “the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel”. Left to our own devices, death would be the end of us. In the

¹³⁰ There is the deliberate assonance of the six third-person singular aorist passive verbs, each of which stands at the beginning of its respective line. Furthermore, with the exception of the third line, all the verbs are followed by the same preposition (*en*) and each line is rounded off by a noun.

words of the French philosopher Blaise Pascal: “The incarnation shows man the greatness of his misery by the greatness the remedy which he required”.¹³¹ Jesus came to save us from sin and death.

2 *Jesus rose from the dead:* “He was vindicated in spirit”. As far as his contemporaries were concerned, Jesus ended as a failure on a Cross. But they were proved wrong. God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, and in raising him from the dead by the power of his Spirit his claim to be God’s Son “was shown to be right” (GNB). The resurrection was the real moment of revelation when God’s initiative in the incarnation is at last seen to be vindicated.

3 *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth:* “Seen by angels”. The risen Lord became the ascended Lord. In ascending to his Father in glory he made known his victory over sin and death to the angelic powers. At the time of Jesus and the apostles the world was thought to be full of spirit powers, many of whom were hostile to God and to his purposes. To them Christ appeared after his resurrection in all his glory. In the New Testament we have a parallel in 1 Pet 3.19 : traditionally this has been understood of Jesus descending to the dead, but modern scholarship has established that “the spirits in prison” are not the dead, but rather captive angelic powers to whom the ascending Christ proclaimed his victory.¹³²

4 *Jesus is the Saviour of the world:* “Proclaimed among Gentiles”. From the very beginning Jesus has been good news

¹³¹ Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts*, Section VII.

¹³² This is supported by the fact that within the same context we find reference to such spirit powers (1 Pet 3.22), while within the General Epistles as a whole, Jude 6 and in particular 2 Pet 2.4 point in the same direction. A second-century parallel is also found in the Ascension of Isaiah (10.12ff; 11.23ff), where Jesus is seen by the angels to be the Lord only on his ascension. There may well be a similar reference in Eph 4.8 – “he made captivity itself a captive”. The idea is not far removed from the conclusion of the Christ-hymn of Phil 2.9-11, where the angelic powers bow the knee to the ascended Lord Jesus.

for all. The Jews of his day had been looking for a Messiah who would restore their nation to its former greatness, but Jesus broke the Messianic mould and came as the Saviour of the world. I find it significant that the day the church was born was the day when Luke tells us that good news was preached to men and women from "every nation under heaven" (Acts 2.5; see also 2.9-11). In the medieval wars of religion in France, the English soldiers used to call out, "The pope is French but Jesus Christ is English!" What rubbish. Jesus can never be the exclusive preserve of any one group, nation, or race: he is the Saviour of all.

5 *Jesus is the Saviour of those who believe:* "Believed in throughout the world". None of the great founders of the main world religions lived in so restricted area as Jesus. None lived for such a short time as Jesus. None died so young. Yet the influence of Jesus has been greater than any of them. Every fourth human being is a Christian. Jesus has not only been preached, he has also been "believed in". A little later in 1 Timothy Paul said: "We have our hope set on God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim 4.10). Faith is the catalyst which turns the potential into actuality. Salvation becomes a reality where men and women put their trust in Jesus as the Saviour of the world.

6 *Jesus shares in the Father's glory:* "Taken up in glory". Some have thought this affirmation out of place - for clearly the preaching and the believing took place Jesus was taken up in glory. However, the emphasis here is not so much on the ascension as a past event, but a reminder that even now Jesus shares in his Father's glory.¹³³ The Crucified and Risen Lord sits at God's right hand and enjoys a state of splendour beyond our imagining. Yet at the same time the Jesus who sits at God's right hand and shares in his Father's glory, is also the Crucified Jesus. I like to think that the scars are still there on his hands

¹³³ The Greek preposition (*en*) translated as 'in' does not denote movement - by contrast with Luke 24.26 where another preposition (*eis*) is used of Jesus entering 'into' his glory.

and in his side. Jesus has been one of us: he knows that life can be tough, and precisely because he has been through the mill, he is able to intercede for us at the right hand of God.

This hymn or confession of faith is not a developed creed compared to The Apostles Creed. The focus is very much on the triumph of the Risen, Ascended Lord. The Cross is not mentioned. In the words of Gordon Fee, “The first stanza sings Christ’s earthly ministry, concluding with a word of triumph and glorification. Similarly, the second stanza sings the ongoing ministry of Christ through his church, concluding again with the theme of glorification”.¹³⁴ Nonetheless, this confession of faith already embraces “major elements of the Christian kerygma”¹³⁵. It is an embryonic creed.

4 Let’s read the Scriptures (1 Tim 4.13)

Over the years I have discovered that the more ‘Bible-believing’ a non-liturgical church is, the less Scripture is likely to be read. Amazing as it may appear to my Anglican friends, I have known Baptist churches where the one Scripture reading is often limited to three or four Scripture verses. This, for instance, was regularly the case of morning ‘chapel’ at an international Baptist Seminary where I spent a year. I became so frustrated that when I was asked to take the morning chapel service, instead of reading just three or four verses and then preaching a sermon, I dispensed with the sermon and read the whole of Paul’s Letter to the Colossians. That caused a sensation – but as I pointed out, originally Paul’s shorter letters would most certainly have been read to a church in one sitting. The fact is that we need to read the Scriptures when we gather together in worship.

¹³⁴ Gordon Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts, 2nd edition 1998) 94.

¹³⁵ Thomas Oden, *First & Second Timothy & Titus* (Westminster Knox, Louisville, Kentucky 1989) 45.

We need to take seriously the charge of the Apostle Paul to Timothy: “Give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching” (1 Tim 4.13). In the original Greek the phrase ‘the public reading of scripture’ is just one word (*anagnosis*) which simply means reading out loud. This was the word that was used in the courts of the reading ‘out loud’ of wills and of petitions. It was also the word used in the Septuagint of the public reading of Scripture, as when the priests read from the law in Ezra’s day (Neh 8.8). Luke too uses the cognate verb when he tells of how Jesus stood up “to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him” (Luke 4.16,17).

The question arises: what ‘scripture’ was Paul charging Timothy to read? In so far as early church worship drew to a large extent upon the worship of the synagogue, the scripture would have included readings from the Law and the Prophets. However, in addition to the Old Testament ‘Bible’, letters and writings from the apostles would have been read at early Christian gatherings. Paul, for instance, wrote to the Thessalonians: “I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of them [literally, ‘all the brothers’]” (1 Thess 5.27: see also 1 Thess 5.27). He gave similar instructions to the church in Colossae: “When this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church in Laodicea, and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea” (Col 4.16: see also 2 Cor 4.7). Significantly the Book of Revelation opens with the words: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it” (Rev 1.3: see also Rev 22.18-19). As John Stott commented: “These are extraordinary instructions. They indicate that the apostles put their writings on a level with the Old Testament.”¹³⁶ At the same time, there would have been the telling of stories about Jesus: which were probably receiving written form around the time 1 Timothy was written.

¹³⁶ John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (IVP, Leicester 1996) 121.

By the time of Justin Martyr (AD 110-165) Christian worship always included two public scripture readings— one from the Old Testament, and one from the ‘memoirs of the apostles’: “On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the overseer verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.” ¹³⁷

So what principles can we learn from Paul’s First Letter to Timothy as also from the early Christian practice? At the very least, three or four verses of Scripture do not suffice for Sunday worship! Chris Ellis in a guide to Baptist worship wrote:

“It is a good rule of thumb that you should usually have somewhere between ten and twenty-five verses of Scripture read aloud, and that, if there is more than one reading, they should be connected in some thematic way which will make sense to, rather than distract, the congregation. Less than (very roughly) ten verses could easily be taken out of context and over twenty-five will be more than some congregations can cope with.” ¹³⁸

I would be much more ambitious. I would encourage churches to have at least two readings (for instance, Old Testament and New Testament, or Gospel and Epistle), and read at the very least twenty-five verses. If people bring Bibles or look at the Scriptures on a screen or on their phones, then their concentration span can easily be extended. My father was a great believer in reading the Scriptures in the context of a Sunday service. In his church in Cambridge he created quite a stir when over a series of six Sunday evenings he read through all 48 chapters of Ezekiel! Later I remember his excitement

¹³⁷ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Vol. 1, Ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2001), 186.

¹³⁸ Christopher Ellis, *Approaching God: A Guide for Worship Leaders & Worshippers* (Canterbury Press, Norwich 2009) 105

when the *New English Bible* first came out – with such a ‘modern’ and accessible version, he would often read several chapters from a Gospel before preaching to the congregation.

The scripture readings are then followed by what Paul calls ‘exhortation’ (NRSV) or ‘preaching’ (GNB/NIV) (*paraklesis*) and ‘teaching’ (*didaskalia*). We should probably not over-distinguish between the two activities: “it is hard to imagine teaching without leading the people to response, or preaching without providing a reasoned exposition of a text’s principles”.¹³⁹ In one way or another God’s Word needs to be expounded and applied (see also 2 Tim 3.16)

In Paul’s day, of course, many people could not read – nor could many afford to get hold of ‘books’ to read. This therefore made the “public reading of scripture” all the more important. Although we live in a day when general literacy can be taken for granted, and when the Bible can be bought relatively inexpensively, nonetheless we cannot assume that most Christians are regularly engaged in personal Bible reading. For although British churchgoers in a 2008 survey claimed to read their Bible every day, my experience as a pastor tells me that this is not the case. I am much more inclined to believe a 1997 Bible Society survey of regular churchgoers which found that 16% read something from the Bible every day; a further 9% read the Bible several times a week; 11% read something from the Bible about once a week; and 9% read the Bible about once a month. In other words in any given month the majority of churchgoers never read their Bible. Indeed, I sometimes wonder how many ministers read their Bible on a regular basis: for in a survey I conducted of over 300 Baptist ministers, some one in

¹³⁹ Philip Towner, 111. Significantly, there is no ‘and’ between the three Greek nouns (*anagnosis*, *paraklesis*, *didaskalia*). Robert Yarborough commented: “The wording of the original can be understood as pointing not so much to a sequence or progression as to three intertwined and perhaps inseparable activities. Reading Scripture without further comment (preaching, teaching) would be incomplete and perhaps confusing” (*The Letters to Timothy & Titus*, Apollos, London 2018) 250.

five (19%) said that they had no system of regular Bible reading.¹⁴⁰ All the more reason, therefore, for ‘the public reading of scripture’ within Christian worship!

5 Let’s nail our colours to the mast in baptism (1 Tim 6.12)

The term ‘*Nailing your colours to the mast*’ has its roots in the Battle of Camperdown, fought on 11 October 1797 between the British and Dutch ships as part of the French Revolutionary Wars. The British fleet was led by HMS Venerable, the flagship of Admiral Adam Duncan. Initially the battle did not go well for the English. The mainmast of Duncan’s vessel was struck and the admiral’s blue ensign (‘colours’) was brought down. Realising that this could be interpreted as a sign of surrender, Jack Crawford, a 22-year-old sailor, stepped forward. Despite being under intense gunfire, he climbed what was left of the mast and nailed the colours back to where they were visible to everybody. The act proved crucial in the battle and Duncan’s forces were eventually victorious. Crawford returned home to a hero’s welcome and was given a silver medal and a government pension of £30 per year!

Crawford had guts – and so too had Jesus, when at his trial he “in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession” (1 Tim 6.13). Had Jesus ‘played his cards right’, he could have provided Pilate with an excuse to set him free. But

¹⁴⁰ In response to the question ‘What scheme(s) are you currently using for your reading of the Bible?’, the following answers were received:

The Lectionary	13%
Printed Bible reading notes	19%
Online Bible notes/devotional thoughts	19%
Reading through a Bible book with a commentary	19%
Reading through a Bible book without a commentary or notes	36%
I don’t have a regular pattern of reading	19%

See Paul Beasley-Murray, ‘Ministers Reading Habits’, *Baptist Quarterly* 49 [1] (January 2018).

Jesus refused to back down, even when the odds were stacked unfairly against him. When Pilate asked, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ (John 18.33), Jesus did not deny that he was the Messiah, God’s Son. He stood his ground – in Paul’s words, he “made the good confession”. Or as we could say, he ‘nailed his colours to the mast’.

Furthermore, Timothy “made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim.6.12). Some have suggested that the reference here is Timothy’s general witness to Jesus ¹⁴¹ – but the past tense (Greek aorist) Paul used suggests that he had in mind a particular occasion. Others have suggested that the reference is to Timothy’s ‘ordination’, ¹⁴² - but there is no evidence that at that time the ‘ordinand’ had to make a solemn confession of faith in Jesus. Yet another suggestion is that the reference is to Timothy’s appearance before a magistrate in a court of law, but this could scarcely be described as a summons “to eternal life”. The most natural suggestion is that Paul was referring to Timothy’s baptism, for in the early church this was the moment when Christians confessed their faith “in the presence of many witnesses” and in so doing so sealed their “call to eternal life”. ¹⁴³ It is true that the word ‘baptism’ does not feature, but the parallelism between “you made the good confession” and “the eternal life to which you were called” shows that this confession was made by Timothy at the beginning of

¹⁴¹ See, for instance, Ronald Yarborough, 325.

¹⁴² See, for instance, Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians, Vol 1: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John* (Apollos, Nottingham 2006) 293 on the grounds that “Paul shows no interest in baptism”!

¹⁴³ See, for instance, J.N.D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles: 1 & II Timothy, Titus* (Adam & Charles Black, London 1963) 142: “From earliest times its (baptism’s) climax was a solemn affirmation of faith by the candidate, and Paul is almost certainly quoting such an affirmation, or an excerpt from one, when he writes (Rom 10.9), ‘If you confess [the verb he uses, Greek *homologeîn*, is the cognate of the noun *homologia* rendered “confession” here] with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved”. See also G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Macmillan, London 1962) 204-206.

his Christian life, and as a result the general scholarly consensus is that baptism is in view. In the early church baptism was the moment when new Christians confessed their faith for all to see. It was then that ‘they nailed their colours to the mast’.

Today, not just Baptist churches, but many other churches too (including Anglican churches who are increasingly welcoming people who have not been christened as a child but who have come to faith) are seeing people confessing their faith in baptism. Baptism is the moment when we ‘come out of the closet’ and confess Jesus for all to see.

Baptism is the time when we confess Jesus “in the presence of many witnesses”. I shall never forget one lady who asked me if she could be baptised privately, on a Sunday afternoon, when nobody else was around. But baptism is not a private act - it is a public act - and the more public the better. When I was minister of a local church, I used to encourage baptismal candidates to bring along as many friends and relatives as possible to their baptism. For baptism is the moment for nailing our colours to the mast. This is the moment for telling the world that we belong to Jesus

Strange as it may seem to some in other churches, in many Baptist churches people “make the good confession” three times on the day of their baptism.

- First, within the service but before they are baptised, candidates normally give a short testimony, when they speak of what Jesus means to them.
- Then, in the pool, they confess their faith a second time, when in response to the question “Do you profess repentance toward God and faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord?”, they say “I do”.
- Thirdly, they confess their faith in the actual act of baptism. For when in baptism “they are “buried with him [Christ] in baptism, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6.4), they are in effect saying as they go under the

water, ‘Yes Lord, you died for me’, and as they come up out of the water they are in effect saying ‘Yes Lord, you rose for me’. And in identifying themselves with the Lord who died and rose, they are in effect resolving to die to self and to live for Christ alone.

Not that Baptists have always understood Scripture aright. In the past at least, there has been a strange reluctance to accept that here in 1 Tim 6.12 Paul speaks of baptism as being the moment when we take hold of God’s gift of eternal life. Many Baptists prefer to see baptism as simply an act of obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28.19, 20). They prefer to understand baptism as an ‘ordinance’ of the church (something laid down Christ) rather than a ‘sacrament’ of the church (‘an outward sign of an inward grace’). They feel uncomfortable with Scriptures like Tit 3.5 (God “saved us... through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit”) and 1 Pet 3.21 (“Baptism.... now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience”). Clearly the mere act of being immersed (or sprinkled) does not save: it is the faith which is enacted in baptism which saves.

Although baptism was not a major issue when Paul was writing to Timothy, nonetheless he refers to baptism both here in 1 Tim 6.12 as also in 2 Tim 2.11-13. Baptism remains a great opportunity to ‘nail our colours to the mast’ and in this way proclaim that Jesus is Lord – Lord not just of our lives or indeed of his church, but also Lord of the world.

6 Let’s remember Jesus (2 Tim 2.8)

“Remember Jesus Christ”, wrote Paul to Timothy (2 Tim 2.8). The place we supremely remember Jesus is at the Lord’s Table. According to ‘the words of institution’ Jesus at the Last Supper broke bread and said “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me”. Later he took the cup of blessing and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11.24,24). Although in 2 Timothy – as indeed in the other ‘Pastoral Letters’ – there is no specific

reference to ‘the Lord’s Supper’ (1 Cor 11.20), nonetheless Paul’s charge to “remember Jesus” inevitably reminds us of Jesus’ command to remember him. Celebrating the Lord’s Supper is not an optional extra. It is at the very heart of Christian worship. It was central to the worshipping life of the churches in Corinth (1 Cor 11.8) and Troas (Acts 20.7). It was presumably central to the worship of the church in Ephesus. It should also be central in our worship today.

In the church where I worship – Chelmsford Cathedral – almost every service is eucharistic. The main 9.30 Sunday morning service always climaxes with a celebration of the Lord’s Supper – and for that I am grateful. However, in many Baptist and other independent churches, Communion is not the norm. It tends to be celebrated once a month, or even less often. Indeed, in some North American churches Communion can be a quarterly or even just an annual ‘event’ on Maundy Thursday. I cannot believe that Jesus asked his disciples to remember him ‘just now and again’. John Calvin regarded infrequent communion as “an invention of the devil”.¹⁴⁴ The French Reformed scholar, J.J. von Allmen, was of the decided opinion that “the absence of the Eucharist shows contempt for grace”.¹⁴⁵ Communion may not be right for a civic service or for a ‘seeker’ service, but otherwise it should surely be part of regular Sunday worship.

The Lord’s Supper is a meal ‘in memory’ of Jesus. However, it is far more than a mere memorial meal. For when we remember Jesus’ broken body and his out-poured life we do not just recall that he died for us – rather we experience afresh his death for us. The past becomes present. Here there is a very real parallel with the way in which Jews celebrate the Passover as a ‘memorial meal’ (Ex 12.14). “Each Jewish father (including those who lived generations and centuries after the fact) was to explain to his son that he celebrated the Passover Seder in the

¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately, I cannot find the source of this quotation.

¹⁴⁵ Jean-Jacques von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Power* (Lutterworth, London 1965) 15.

way he did ‘because of what the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt’ (*m. Pesachim* 10.5)”.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, as we Christians remember the death of Jesus, the past becomes present and we encounter Jesus. It is not that Jesus comes nearer to us at the Table, but that we come nearer to him. As we gather around his Table we become conscious of his presence with us. To quote Ralph Martin, a distinguished Baptist New Testament scholar of a former generation. “In remembrance of me’ is no bare historical reflection upon the Cross, but a recalling of the crucified and living Christ in such a way that He is present in all the fulness and reality of his saving power”.¹⁴⁷ Or in the words of an old communion hymn which Baptists used to sing:

“Here O my Lord, I see you face to face;
here faith can touch and handle things unseen;
here I will grasp with firmer hand your grace,
and all my helplessness upon you lean”.¹⁴⁸

However, Paul did not simply say “Remember Jesus Christ”, but “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead”. At this point the underlying Greek past tense is highly significant. Paul did not use a simple past tense (the Greek ‘aorist’) which refers to a one-off action in the past, but rather a past tense (the Greek ‘perfect’) which indicates a past event which relates to the present. Let me give an example of the difference between the two tenses. If I said ‘I married Caroline’ and used the simple past tense, it could mean that I had married Caroline, but it would not indicate that I was still married to her; she could be dead, or we could be divorced and both onto our second

¹⁴⁶ Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Apollos, Nottingham 2010) 551.

¹⁴⁷ See Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London, 2nd edition 1974) 126. Also R.P. Martin, *The Worship of God: Some theological, pastoral and practical reflections* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1982) 145 – 170.

¹⁴⁸ Horatius Bonar (1808-1809), *Baptist Praise and Worship* 436.

marriages. But if I said ‘I married Caroline’ and used the perfect tense, it would mean that I had married Caroline and remained married to her. It is this perfect tense which Paul used here. If Paul had used the simple past tense here, he would be saying “Remember Jesus, who on that third day God raised from the dead – full-stop”. It would not be clear that Jesus is still alive. However, instead Paul used the ‘perfect’ tense, which indicates a past event which spills over into the present. “Remember Jesus, whom God raised on the third day and who remains forever risen and is present in his resurrection power. Remember Jesus, Timothy, remember that he is with you now.”

The context gives added significance to Paul’s charge. Timothy was clearly finding life tough. Paul therefore had urged him to “share in suffering like a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2.3). Paul’s subsequent mention of “Jesus Christ, raised from the dead”, is a reminder that “even he had to walk the way of the cross and taste death before being exalted”.¹⁴⁹ Jesus is an example of victory after death and Timothy’s source of strength: “he who conquered death through resurrection will ‘strengthen you’ for your task and endurance”.¹⁵⁰ These words, although addressed in the first place to Timothy, have a message too for us. Notice also that at the very start of this section, Paul had said to Timothy “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 2.1). This translation is a little misleading, for the underlying Greek verb is passive, and not active. Literally Paul said: “Be strengthened” in the grace that the Risen Lord supplies. Timothy, there is no need to set your jaw and grit your teeth as if everything depends on you. Instead ‘take strength from the grace of God’ (REB) and remember that Jesus is risen from the dead. What a difference remembering Jesus can make. All the more reason, therefore, to ensure that Sunday by

¹⁴⁹ J.N.D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles: 1 & II Timothy, Titus* (Adam & Charles Black, London 1963) 177.

¹⁵⁰ Gordon Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts, 2nd ed. 1988) 246.

Sunday we do remember “Jesus Christ, raised from the dead”!

7 Let’s proclaim Jesus (2 Tim 4.1-2, 5)

Preaching has been at the heart of my ministry. My call to ministry was very much a call to preach. Like Jeremiah I felt I could do nothing else but preach: “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name’, then within there is something like burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (Jer 20.9). Not surprisingly therefore, when as Principal of Spurgeon’s College I was invited to preach at a service of ordination, I often turned to Paul’s charge to Timothy to “proclaim” Jesus:

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message, be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching... Do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully” (2 Tim 4.1-2, 5).

Although this was no ordination charge, for Timothy had already been set aside by Paul with the laying-on-of-hands (2 Tim 1.6), it was an equally ‘solemn’ charge (2 Tim 4.1). For Paul, conscious that his days were limited, was handing over the baton to his successor (see 2 Tim 4.6-8). Just as preaching was at the centre of Paul’s ministry (see 1 Cor 9.16: “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel”) so too it was to be at the centre of Timothy’s ministry.

From this charge we discover that preaching in the first instance is ‘proclamation’ (*kerugma*). The New Testament word for a preacher is a ‘herald’ (*kerux*). When Jesus began his ministry, he came as a ‘herald’ with good news from God (Mark 1.14 where the verb, *kerusso*, is used). It is the same word found here in 2 Tim 4.2: “proclaim (*keruxon*). the message” Preachers have a message to deliver: it is not their message, but God’s. As Ben Witherington has shown: “A herald in a city like Ephesus was a person who announced public auctions and sales, new taxes, the manumission of slaves, the beginning of public

games, the orders of kings, and the onset of religious ceremonies... He came later to be called the ‘town crier’. His role was simply that of announcer... The basic task of the herald was to publicly announce something to people who had not yet heard the news.”¹⁵¹

According to the NRSV & REB Timothy was to “proclaim the message”; similarly, the GNB says that he was to “preach the message”. Unfortunately the translation adopted by the NIV (as also the old RSV) is a little misleading: for the charge “preach the word” has led some to conclude that Timothy was to preach “the Word of God as found in Scripture”.¹⁵² However, although the Greek word used (*logos*) literally means ‘word’, the reference is not to Scripture but to the “message” that preachers to proclaim; the news they have to share. For Christian preachers the news is about Jesus. Indeed, the other word frequently used in the New Testament for preaching is ‘to share good news’ (*euaggelizo*). I find it significant that when Paul restates his charge to Timothy, he says “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim 4.5). The ‘message’ or good news that preachers have to proclaim is Jesus, crucified and risen.

To reiterate: preachers are messengers.¹⁵³ God doesn’t call preachers to be entertainers, who keep their congregations amused with their witty anecdotes; nor does he call them to political commentators, reflecting on the latest developments in Parliament. Preachers are called to be ‘sound out’ the good news.

¹⁵¹ Ben Witherington III, *Letters & Homilies for Hellenized Christians, Vol 1: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy & 1-3 John* (Apollos, Nottingham, 2006) 135.

¹⁵² So Thomas Oden, *First & Second Timothy & Titus* (Westminster John Knox, Louisville, Kentucky 1989) 135.

¹⁵³ I increasingly prefer the term ‘message’ to ‘sermon’, ‘address’, or ‘homily’ because it brings to sharper focus the purpose of a sermon, address, or homily. Interestingly the NRSV uses the term ‘message’ for Paul’s preaching: so we read of “the message (literally, word, *logos*) of the cross” in 1 Cor 1.18; and “the message (‘word’) of reconciliation” in 2 Cor 5.19).

Secondly, preachers are to “be persistent, whether the time is favourable or unfavourable”. According to the standard New Testament Greek-English lexicon the word translated as ‘persistent’ (*ephistemi*) has here the meaning of ‘being ready’, ‘being on hand’.¹⁵⁴ If that is so, then Paul is telling Timothy to be always available. In the words of Thomas Oden: “There is no forty-hour week for attesting the truth. It is a work that is fitting for any hour, any day, not merely in a service of worship, but in the marketplace and home, not merely in freedom but in chains, not merely in comfort and security but precisely while facing death”.¹⁵⁵ According to Ben Witherington, Timothy “is to get on with it and not let circumstances determine whether he does it or not”.¹⁵⁶

It is possible that the underlying Greek word also has the connotation of urgency (so RSV “be urgent”; REB “press it home in season and out of season”). There is a difference between announcing the Good News of Jesus and announcing, say, that the next train to London will be leaving in five minutes. It’s a nuisance failing to hear a station announcement, but at least there will always be another train. But missing out on the Good News of Jesus can lead to tragedy. The Gospel is a matter of life and death; people’s eternal destiny is at stake. Opportunities to share the Good News need to be seized, however inconvenient it may be to the preacher.

Thirdly, preachers are to “convince, rebuke and encourage”. There is no one approach to Gospel preaching, for people have different needs. It has often been said that the function of the preacher is to disturb the comfortable and to comfort the disturbed. Paul outlines a three-fold approach.

¹⁵⁴ William F. Arndt & F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament & other Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge 1957)

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Oden, *First & Second Timothy & Titus*, 136.

¹⁵⁶ Ben Witherington III, *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 2 Timothy & 1-3 John*, 365.

1. An appeal to the reason. The word “convince” (*elengcho*) can have the positive connotation of convincing people of the truth as it is in Jesus. An examination of Acts makes it clear that Paul in his evangelistic activity took the mind seriously.¹⁵⁷ For example, at Thessalonica Paul went to the synagogue where “he argued... from the scriptures, explaining and proving”, so that eventually some were “persuaded” (Acts 17.2-3); at Athens “he argued in the synagogues.... and also in the marketplace” (Acts 17.17); at Corinth “every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince them” (Acts 18.4); and at Ephesus he “argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus” (Acts 19.9). If this is what Paul had in mind when writing to Timothy, then this means that preachers are to engage in the task of Christian apologetics.¹⁵⁸
2. An appeal to the conscience. The word “rebuke” incorporates a call to repentance. Those whose lifestyles are clearly contrary to God’s laws, need to be told that God would have them live differently. Sermons are not always to be an enjoyable experience. In this regard some words of the Stoic Epictetus are perhaps apposite: “The philosopher’s lecture is a surgery: when you go away you ought to have felt not pleasure, but pain”!
3. An appeal to the heart. The word “encourage” (*parakaleo*) from which the term Paraclete is derived, is a reminder that in any congregation there are the lonely and the fearful, who need to know that God is there for them –

¹⁵⁷ See John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (IVP, London 2nd edition 2015) 97-119 where a whole chapter is devoted to ‘dialogue’.

¹⁵⁸ It is true that the underlying Greek word (*elegcho*) can have the negative sense of ‘refute’. In so far as Paul was warning Timothy to be on his guard against false teachers, Robert Yarborough translated the verb as “correct” and commented: “Pastoral preaching must often help people stay on their desired path by addressing errant tendencies”.

and that there is nothing in this world or the next which can separate them from his love.¹⁵⁹

Fourthly, preaching is also to include teaching: “Proclaim the message... with the utmost patience in teaching” or as the NIV puts it “Preach the word ... with careful instruction”. Many years ago C.H Dodd, published an influential little book in which he distinguished between preaching/proclamation (*kerugma*) and teaching (*didache*): unbelievers need to hear the good news, and believers need to be taught the faith.¹⁶⁰

However, the distinction is not always clear cut: unbelievers need to be taught some of the basics of the Christian faith, before they can begin to respond: they need to know to whom and to what they are committing themselves. In turn believers also need to be reminded of God’s amazing love for them in Jesus.

“Patience”, however is to characterise the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. Patience is required because, as the next two verses indicate, not everybody will respond positively. Furthermore, even those who do respond positively, often need time to work out the implications of Christian believing for them. John Stott commented: “We must never resort to the use of human pressure techniques, or attempt to contrive a decision. Our responsibility is to be faithful in preaching the word; the

¹⁵⁹ *Parakaleo* literally means to ‘draw alongside’. It is the verb from which the noun Paraclete is derived – in John 13-16 Jesus described how the Holy Spirit draws alongside believers to ‘help’ them. However, it can also have the sense ‘exhort’. J.N.D Kelly 206 preferred the rendering ‘exhort’: Timothy was to “urge his flock to repentance and perseverance”. Philip Towner 204 believed that the reference is to “a very practical kind of exhortation... which urges practical life-style responses. It is the proclamation of Scripture that says, ‘This is what it says; let’s do it’.” Robert Yarborough 437 commented: “Timothy’s preaching should be suffused with heartfelt, affirmational appeal”.

¹⁶⁰ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1936).

results of the proclamation are the responsibility of the Holy Spirit”.¹⁶¹

After a lifetime of preaching, I still believe that preaching is central to Christian ministry. In the often-quoted words of Peter Forsyth: “With preaching Christianity stands or falls, because it is the declaration of a gospel. Without the faithful proclaiming of Christ in the power of the Spirit. the Church could never have survived.”¹⁶² All the more reason, therefore to “proclaim Christ” today!

¹⁶¹ John Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy: Guard the Gospel* (IVP, London 1973) 108.

¹⁶² P.T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (Independent Press, London 1907), 1.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS BY THE COLLEGE

Happy Ever After? Paul Beasley-Murray (CBM 2017)

A marriage preparation course.

A Loved One Dies Paul Beasley-Murray (CBM 2017)

Help after a bereavement.

Ministry Today UK 1994-2018 (CBM 2018)

Eight legacy volumes of 512 articles from the former journal, *Ministry Today*, providing both a general index and a thematic index – it remains a ‘cornucopia of pastoral wisdom and insight’.

Retirement Matters for Ministers: a report on a research project into how Baptist ministers experience retirement

Paul Beasley-Murray (CBM 2018)

Entering New Territory. Why are retired Baptist ministers moving to Anglican churches? What are the underlying theological issues? Paul Beasley-Murray (CBM 2019)

www.collegeofbaptistministers.com