

LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE CHURCH

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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, (see 1 Cor 4.1-4; Gal 1.10; Hebs 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 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, pastor 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. Minister 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.