



The Baptist Ministers' Journal

April 2005

Vol 290
ISSN 0968 - 2406

Editor: HAZEL SHERMAN

Contents

Editorial 2

Defend Christendom or
Welcome the Stranger? Chris Ruddle 3

Beyond Local Church Ministry Colin Cartwright 7

How to stop going on losing teenagers -
one contribution Anthony Thacker 15

Being a Lectionary-Led Congregation Donald Schmidt .. 21

Holidays 2005 19

Marriage: Change and Decay? John Hough 23

Review Section John Houseago 26

Of Interest to You Peter Dwyer 29

The Baptist Ministers' Journal is the journal of
the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship.

Details of the Fellowship can be found
on the inside back cover

'The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily
reflect those of the Editorial Board'

Editorial

Relational, structural and organisational elements are inseparable in church life as in any cultural sphere. Specific explorations concerning ministers moving from local pastorate, changes in Sunday worship patterns pertinent not only to 'keeping teenagers' but also to enhancing the life of the whole congregation, and some thoughts about trends and styles in marriage are part of the mix in this issue. Like it or not one of the features of Christian ministry is to engage with people who live in varying patterns of relationship. Unless we live in a ghetto or a mono-cultural enclave, such variety will not be restricted to the 'un-churched' or non-churchgoers but will increasingly be found not only in those on the fringe of Christian congregations but also amongst those who are drawn to make their spiritual home there.

From time to time ministers are encouraged to offer reflections stemming from a period of sabbatical study for publication in this Journal. It is one good way of offering the fruits of such a time for other to share in too. During my time as editor so far it has been good to publish, on average, one such article in each issue, and that is something that I hope to continue. This is not a Journal of Sabbatical Reports, but we are grateful to those who are willing to do further work on sabbatical reports to bring them into the shape of an article. Colin Cartwright's piece in this edition stems from his sabbatical completed towards the end of last year. Whilst the statistics have doubtless shifted slightly in 2004-5, it still makes for thoughtful reading. Space did not permit its printing in full, and amongst his recommendations were factors that are already being explored in some areas.

As a local pastor, though, it occurs to me that we may sometimes rush too readily to 'recommending' changes from the centre in terms of pastoral care for ministers without taking fuller account of

our responsibility to care for one another. There was a time when members of this fellowship undertook the discipline of remembering one another in prayer each Sunday morning. Perhaps some still do, but I suspect it may be those who are nearing retirement after considerable years' service, or who, in retirement, keep the good habits of a lifetime. Others may only have heard of this feature of the BMF as a distant memory, if at all. To renew such a habit can only be a good thing, but could be even better if we busy ones (working away at the coal face, etc etc – whatever metaphor you like!) were to let that moment of prayer cut into our busyness at some other point in the week, too, to make a phone call, send an e-mail or write a note (without expectation or pressure for reply!), simply sometimes to contact a colleague in ministry with a straightforward "How are you?/Thinking of you". Not rocket science, but it may work wonders for a sense of health and purpose in ministry generally as well as helping those whom we call to serve as Regional Ministers meet massive expectations with inadequate resources. **dmj**

Defend Christendom or Welcome the Stranger?

Chris Ruddle, Folkestone Baptist Church, prompts thought on Christian response to immigration issues.

On the 20th November 2004 the Daily Telegraph printed an editorial about the views of Cardinal Ratzinger. It relayed, and seemed to endorse, the thought that

"A falling birthrate is altering the ethnic composition of Europe, as Muslim immigration transforms the ancient heartlands of Christendom. Churches are emptying as Christian culture is threatened by an aggressive secularism, even an intolerant one."

The article cites two cases. Rocco Buttiglione, forced to stand down because his orthodox Catholic views were seen as incompatible with an EU portfolio including justice for homosexuals and a Swedish protestant pastor imprisoned for a month for preaching against homosexuality. Our culture is under threat and, the editorial asks, would Ratzinger agree to ecumenical compromise *"for the sake of a united Christian front against secularism and jihad?"*¹

Here we see a link between the protection of Christian culture and a fight against not just secularism but Islam. It is a link picked up by the Conservative Christian Fellowship.² What I find interesting in this instance is that the view of homosexuality in the Muslim world would be more in line with Christian orthodoxy than the secular world. However, that is an aside. The real issue is the linking of the protection of Christian culture and the invasion of Europe by Islam: i.e. - immigration. What concerns me is that 'Christian culture' vs. Islam is being used as a metaphor for White vs. Asian. My fears were heightened at a Christian conference I recently attended. It was the conference of a highly respected evangelical para-church organization. In one seminar, with around 30 people in attendance, the case of Ezra's protection of

the racial purity of the people of Israel was applied to Britain today, and nobody other than myself seemed to have a problem with this.

I sense that the media is taking an interest in the idea of Christian heritage and culture. I see in this no attempt to engage with the gospel of Jesus Christ in a meaningful way. Contrariwise, my fear is that the need of government to protect the icons of Christian culture will be used as one of the reasons to limit immigration. Thus, any Christians engaged in immigration issues will be more reticent in speaking out in case they are helping Muslim immigrants to take over Europe.

In addressing this issue, I have two questions to pose before going on to the meat of a biblical reflection.

1. Immigrants & faith

Are all immigrants Muslim? No - many immigrants are Christians. As far as I can ascertain, the government does not publish a breakdown of immigrants and asylum seekers by religion. There is a breakdown of nationality, but this does not tell the whole story. While 6 out of the top 10 applicant countries are predominantly Muslim³, many refugees are fleeing religious or ethnic persecution by a dominant culture. My own (albeit

anecdotal) experience has been of growth through contact with Christians from Zimbabwe, the Punjab and the Czech Republic. An assumption is made that most immigrants are Muslim. If it could be shown that this is not the case, the argument for protecting Christendom from a tide of Islam stops before it has started.

2. Do we have a Christian culture?

The signs are that we live in a post-Christian culture. In a post-modern world we may still have the icons of a nativity scene and a crucifix but there is little knowledge of the content of the Christian story and no understanding of how our laws were formed in relation to Christian faith. A very small percentage of children attend church on a Sunday⁴. In such circumstances, how can a culture be deemed Christian. How do you define Christian culture if not by a commitment to Christian values, beliefs and practices?

3. Scripture

Finally, and by no means of least importance, the scriptures have a great deal to say on the issue of immigration. I will not here go into the many texts which talk of the value and blessing of all peoples in God's sight. From Creation & the Noahic covenant through to Revelation it is plain to see that God is not and never has been an Englishman but values all peoples whom he has created in his image.

It should be noted that for the nation of Israel, all immigrants would be of a different religion. From the beginning of God's covenant with Abraham & his descendants, the whole point of their 'special relationship' was to be a sign to those round about.

*Through you I will bless all the nations.*⁵

The history of the people of Israel shows a vast amount of immigration and asylum - for political and economic reasons. We

can list among the famous immigrants Cain, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph's family, Moses, Naomi, David, Elijah & the exiles in Babylon⁶. And we see through many of these men and women of faith that people who are not descendants of Abraham enter into the blood line of the Israelites. This is not seen as being a problem apart from when the exiles return in Ezra 10, rediscovering old texts, possibly Exodus 34:11-16 or Deuteronomy 7:1-6. In both of these places the purpose of not intermarrying is to keep the people and their offspring faithful to Yahweh. The land and the ethnic group are here linked with the faith.

The question is, can you then extrapolate from the nation of Israel 2,500 years ago to the UK today? Are we a Christian nation in the same way as they were God's people? Are we called to keep the nation as a model of Christendom to the world? To me, the answer is plain - no.

When Jesus was speaking to the woman at the well he made it quite clear that his new covenant would no longer be based on nationhood or geographical location.

*Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the time will come when people will not worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem... But the time is coming and is already here, when by the power of God's Spirit people will worship the Father as he really is, offering him the true worship he wants."*⁷

The witness to the grace of God in the world is no longer a nation or an ethnic group, but those who are part of the Body of Christ. 'May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me', Jesus prays. This is a gathered community of believers, with the glory of God and faith in Christ uniting them in loving witness, not

the colour of their skin or their geographical location. The relationship between the early church and the state ranged from uneasy tolerance through to outright hostility. At no point in the New Testament is church confused with the state and at no point is it thought a desirable position to work towards. Quite the opposite. The book of 1 Peter is a categorical spelling out of the position. The church is a nation - a special, holy one at that. It is a royal priesthood, a people set apart and belonging to God,

*"... chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who has called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light."*⁸

As with the Abrahamic covenant the purpose of being set apart is to show the world what it is to be God's people. However, unlike the covenants of the Old Testament this is not done by settling down as a nation state somewhere.

*"I appeal to you, my friends, as strangers and refugees in the world!"*⁹

We do not belong anywhere in this world. There is no such thing as Christendom. So, if there is no such thing as Christendom in the Bible, how can there be a biblical requirement to defend it? There cannot and there is not. The only rules that still apply in the New Testament with regard to foreigners are those which say 'welcome the stranger and provide food for the alien amongst you¹⁰, for you do not know if you entertain angels unawares'¹¹. Where Jesus says 'when you clothed and fed the stranger, you clothed and fed me'¹².

There is one New Testament verse that bears some analysis. It is the occasion of Paul's speech to the Areopagus. Here Paul seems to advocate the separation of ethnic groups - for the sake of the promotion of the gospel!

*"From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him ..."*¹³

This verse has been used to suggest that ethnic groups should stay where God has put them. However, all this verse actually says is that God is in control of all people. The emphasis is actually upon our common humanity as descendants of Adam & God's closeness to us, whatever ethnic group we belong to¹⁴. This affirms the common thread in Paul's writing that in Christ, the ethnic boundaries which previously divided us are broken down by the cross¹⁵.

A post-script from Baptist history

I add one note which is more to do with the history of our denomination based on a specifically non-conformist reading of scripture. Early Baptists suffered under a system of government that tried to enforce Anglicanism. Those who disagreed were often compelled to flee from England. Early Baptists thought that government should have no part in the religious decisions of the people. As each person was responsible for their response to the gospel message it was not the role of the state to impose religion. This was a view held most strongly by those notorious asylum seekers, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys¹⁶.

*"A ruler's power must be limited to temporal matters, since a confusion with spiritual issues has resulted in much suffering. To use the temporal power to destroy false churches was contrary to the Gospel ... Since each person has competence before God in religious matters, it is a fundamental requirement that everyone shall have liberty to seek this truth in his or her own way."*¹⁷

I hold passionately to the truth of the

Gospel of Jesus Christ, that he alone is the path to reach God and that his death and resurrection are solely sufficient for salvation. However, this does not mean I want to see persecution of those who think differently. To use religion to exclude others is wrong. As Gamaliel said, in effect: The Truth Will Out. If the gospel message is God's revealed truth then it has nothing to fear from other man made religions. To use the defence of Christendom as a reason to restrict immigration goes against all Baptist principles of the liberty of conscience.

My conclusions are these:

- + The concept of Christendom is not biblical. To defend it, therefore, has no grounds in scripture.
- + To limit immigration on the grounds of protecting Christian culture is not a biblical idea. Such a policy goes against biblical imperatives to welcome the stranger and makes Christianity look racist.
- + Conversion is in the hands of the Holy Spirit of God and he will convert Europe if it is in his will - whatever the level of immigration.
- + Conversion is assisted by the witness of the people of God. Living by the biblical principle of Welcoming the Stranger is more likely to show the grace of God that a reactionary defence of a non-existent Christendom.
- + Use of the excellent "Welcoming the Stranger" pack produced by the Baptist Union should be encouraged - to reflect with congregations on our attitudes to and interactions with immigrants and asylum seekers (but look to the Refugee Council website for up to date statistics and information on the law.)
- + Those leading worship should explicitly preach against 'Defending Christendom' and for 'Welcoming the Stranger'.

Bibliography

Brierley, P., "Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers", Christian Research, 2002.

Elliot, J., "A Home for the Homeless : A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter. Its Situation and Strategy", SCM Press Ltd., 1982.

Hayden, Roger, "English Baptists - History and Heritage", Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1990.

Johnstone, P. & Mandryk, J., "Operation World", Paternoster Lifestyle, 2001.

White, B.R., " The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century", Baptist Historical Society, 1996.

Williams, David, J., "New International Biblical Commentary - Acts", Paternoster Press, 1995. **[bmj]**

Footnotes

¹ Daily Telegraph Website <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml?xml=/opinion/2004/11/20/dl2002.xml&sSheet=/opinion/2004/11/20/ixoplead.html> (14 December 2004)

² Conservative Christian Fellowship Website (14 December 2004)

³ Home Office Website Top ten countries for 3rd quarter of 2004 are : Iran, China, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Iraq, Pakistan, Eritrea, India, Afghanistan, Sudan. (21 January 2005). Cross-referenced for religious dominance with Operation World, 2001 edition. Eg: While Sudan is predominantly Muslim, many of the refugees are from the non-Muslim Darfur region.

⁴ English Church Attendance Survey shows half the numbers of under-15s in church on a Sunday compared to 20 years ago. If statistics are accurate this is set to drop to less than 3 percent by 2016. Information gleaned from "Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers", pages 3-4.

⁵ Genesis 12:3

⁶ Cain - Genesis 4:12, Abraham - Genesis 12:10-20, Jacob - Genesis 27. Joseph's family - Genesis 47:27 , Moses flees from Egypt after killing Egyptian - standing up for justice against a slave who is being beaten hard, Ruth's Mother-in-Law Naomi - Ruth ch 1, David - 1 Samuel 21 & 1 Samuel 27, Elijah -1 Kings 19, Exile in Babylon - Psalm 137:1-4

⁷ John 4:21 & 23

⁸ 1 Peter 2:9

⁹ 1 Peter 2:11. See "A home for the homeless" by John Elliott for a fuller exposition of 1 Peter as a counter-cultural letter.

¹⁰ Leviticus 19:9-10

¹¹ Hebrews 13:2

¹² Matthew 25:31-46

¹³ Acts 17:26-27a

¹⁴ See NIB Commentary on Acts - DJ Williams.

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:11-16. Galatians 3:26-29

¹⁶ Both escaped to exile in Amsterdam in 1608. (B.R. White. Page 18)

¹⁷ Roger Hayden, "English Baptists - History and Heritage", page 115. Summary of Smyth's *Confession of Faith* and Helwys' *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*.

Beyond Local Church Ministry

Colin Cartwright, Trinity Baptist Church, Chesham. A study exploring the factors relating to why ministers, between 1994 and 2003, have been leaving local churches for other forms of ministry or 'secular' employment.

Introduction

Towards the end of the year 2000, I was called to lead a Baptist church in Buckinghamshire. During the previous year, when I had been seeking to move to a different pastorate, I had discovered that there were roughly twice as many ministers looking for a new church as there were churches without ministers. By the time I had been at my new church for only 2 years, I discovered that the situation was reversed: by 2002 there were twice as many churches looking for ministers as there were ministers looking for churches.

I am sure there must be constant fluctuations in this particular ratio of 'seeking ministers' and 'vacant' churches. Equally, I am not sure whether the imbalance I described in 2002 is continuing. But whatever is the case, I was intrigued by what appeared to be such a sudden turn-around. At the same time, I was coming across more stories of ministers leaving local church ministry for a whole variety of reasons.

A Wider Background

This was the immediate context in which I decided to pursue a short sabbatical study on the phenomenon of ministers journeying beyond local ministry - either to

Baptist Ministers' Journal April 2005

some other form of paid Christian ministry or to 'secular' employment.

It quickly became apparent to me that, while there seemed to be no shortage of books and papers about clergy stress and the problems of church ministry, there seemed to be a paucity of specific research concerning ministry breakdown within the Free Churches particularly. Nigel Coles' dissertation, completed in 1999, is a notable exception to this. His individual research, 'An Investigation into the Casualties of Free Church Ministry, 1946-1995 (with special reference to the Baptists)' provides a very valuable and detailed insight into the phenomenon of ministry breakdown.

There seemed no need for me to add to Coles' very thorough research, except perhaps to provide a shorter, much less detailed up-date of this research.

Scope and Method of Research

In order to make it manageable, this research was focussed solely on Baptist ministers in the last 10 years (1994-2003). I deliberately chose to study both those who had left paid Christian ministry entirely and those who had moved from local church ministry to other forms of Christian ministry (e.g. sector ministries,

regional Baptist ministry, Christian agencies, Christian communities). The reason for this approach, was partly prompted by Coles' comment that, "Many pastors leave one church for another as a result of circumstances similar to many who leave pastoral ministry altogether" (p. 181). Similarly, it could be argued that the factors behind ministers leaving local churches for other forms of ministry may sometimes be very similar to the factors which cause ministers to leave Christian ministry entirely. However, I would be the first to say that this is far from being universally true.

In summary, the subject of this research project includes both those who have gone beyond local church ministry during the last 10 years and a separate, but related, purely statistical study of those Newly Accredited Ministers (NAMs) who have been called to local church ministry in the last decade. The reason for this latter, statistical study was partly to try to ascertain if there were as yet any discernible effects from the newly established compulsory mentoring system, introduced in the year 2000 by the Baptist Union, to enable more support for those new to ministry.

Details of the Questionnaire

During the latter part of 2004 I sent out 22 questionnaires to people who I knew had moved on from local church ministry and received 11 in response.

Four came from those who were no longer in paid Christian ministry, most of whom were no longer on the BU accredited list. This is, of course, a very small sample, which cannot be made to represent the whole picture.

Responses to the Questionnaire:

Question 1 - How would you describe the nature of your call to Christian ministry? (i.e. not how

were you called but what did you feel you were being called to do?)

One of the striking aspects of these responses to this question was the prevalence of the mention of 'evangelism'. It is interesting to conjecture whether this aspect of a minister's role would be identified so readily and given such a priority by the majority of local churches.

Question 2 - When you were first called, do you remember whether you viewed this as a 'call for life'? Has your thinking changed?

Seven out of the eleven replied 'yes' to the first question here, while three effectively said 'no' and one could not remember whether they viewed their call to ministry as a 'call for life'. In response to the second part of the question, four said that their thinking on this subject had changed, two stated that their thinking had not changed and the rest either did not comment or already had a more qualified understanding of the call to ministry.

Among those who originally did not see this call as for life, there were comments like: "*My call to follow Jesus is for life. My call to ministry was for as long as it was relevant and practical*". Someone else wrote: "*Not necessarily specific to pastoral ministry but as a call to serve it is a call for life*".

Those whose thinking had changed from believing the call to ministry was a call for life commented:

- I now appreciate the context of calling does change.
- For some (local church ministry) can be for a season.
- I (now) don't believe in a call for life but a call to use your gifts however and whenever as circumstances arise.
- I now realise that circumstances can make ministry impossible in some cases.

This would seem to reinforce the findings of Question 1, that there is a wide variety of understanding about Christian ministry among those called initially to local church ministry. To a certain extent this is only to be expected. However, perhaps one of the difficulties with local church ministry within Baptist churches, is that Baptist identity itself, and therefore Baptist ministry, is not as clearly defined as it might be.

The Baptist Union Council decided in 2002 to change from the Accredited List of Ministers to the Register of Covenanted persons Accredited for Ministry, in order to include Youth Specialists and Evangelists. While this important shift towards recognising a range of accredited ministries is welcome, it still leaves open many more general questions about ministry, some of which Coles lists in his dissertation (p. 175).

One pertinent avenue of enquiry would be for churches, ministers and the Ministry Department itself, to explore what exactly are church members' and ministers' understandings of ministry. This would help to identify areas where there are significant disparities in understanding and expectations. It would certainly appear that, while Baptist churches' ecclesiology is arguably too individualistic, many churches' thinking about ministry is not individual enough.

Question 3 - Of the expectations you had when you were called, which were fulfilled and which were not fulfilled?

The responses to this question understandably produced a very mixed picture of local church ministry. What is significant here is that for many of those answering the question, the very real sense of fulfilment in some areas became clearly outweighed by those expectations which were not being fulfilled. Coles notes from his research that, 'unmatched

expectations' was identified as being significant, by a much higher proportion of those who had been in Baptist ministry than those who had served in other denominations (p.148). Over half, compared to a quarter of non-Baptists. This result led Coles to wonder whether there is, within the Baptist system, a greater potential for mis-matches between churches and ministers.

Finally, these responses might lead us to generally question the effectiveness of the current settlement system. Of course, the settlement system is often a convenient 'mental piñata' for both ministers and churches alike. But perhaps it is finally time to consider reforming the existing settlement arrangements, or to at least to fully discuss exploring alternatives?.

Question 4 - How long were you in local church ministry?

The responses ranged from 4 years to 17 years. The average period of time before there was a move beyond local church ministry, for these 11 ministers at least, was 11 years.

This compares with Coles' 1946-1995 research (relating solely to those who left paid Christian ministry) which showed an average of 13.7 years (p. 86). My statistically small sample means that it is impossible to read too much into these results. Further research needs to be done, but there does seem to be anecdotal evidence to support the view that being over 10 years in ministry is a significant milestone. A higher proportion of ministers seem to move beyond local church ministry after 10 years. It may be the case that this is a psychological landmark in the minds of some ministers. Equally, it may be that there is a cumulative process in the effects of stress upon a local church minister.

What is impossible to take into account with all these simple figures is the effect of transitions from one church to another. Coles

comments that, "the percentage of those leaving ministry during their first full-time ministry is not as high as some might have expected". From Coles' sample, 25% left Christian ministry during or immediately after their first pastorate (p. 141).

For many ministers, moving from the first to the second church, or even from the second to the third church, can be a particularly difficult time, for a whole variety of reasons. Ministers may not experience the same enthusiasm and impetus they had when they started training and began full-time ministry at their first church. Adjusting to ministry in a completely different context demands a steep learning curve, often in a situation where any previous support and friendships have been lost. These are often the moves that can cause the greatest disruption, especially where the minister has a spouse, or children, or both. This is a factor which showed up clearly in some of the responses.

Question 5 - What lessons can you draw from your experience (personally/for training colleges/for local churches/ for Association team leaders/for the Ministry Department/ for the BU overall)?

There was plenty of food for thought here for everyone involved in local church ministry. Unfortunately, it is not possible to reproduce the responses to these questions here.

Significant Factors in Moving on from Local Church Ministry:

Respondents were asked to indicate, from a list of given factors, which were significant in them moving beyond local church ministry; first by numbering the three most significant factors in order of importance and by ticking any other factors involved.

Below is simply the number of ticks to

each of the individual factors listed:

- 6 - Conflict
- 5 - Personal crisis
- 4 - Called to a different form of ministry
- 4 - Lack of pastoral support
- 4 - Health issues (self or family member)
- 4 - Other (2 - marriage breakdown, 2 - re. their children's educational needs)
- 3 - Disillusionment with church/local church ministry
- 1 - Finance
- 1 - Pressure on spouse
- 1 - Unable to get a call
- 1 - Loss of faith

A slightly more nuanced picture emerges once consideration of which factors were identified as most significant:

- Three identified disillusionment with local church / church ministry as the factor of greatest importance for them.
- Two identified the calling to another form of ministry as most important (indeed one identified this as the only factor influencing their move).
- Two identified a 'personal crisis' as the most important factor.
- One identified health issues (of self or family member) as the most significant factor.
- One identified conflict as the most important factor.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that for many of those moving on from local ministry, disillusionment and marital difficulties figure prominently. Nearly half of the respondents mention marriage breakdown or particular pressures on the marriage (4 out of 10 - one of the respondents is single). Conflict within churches of some form or other, seems to have a high profile in causing this disillusionment for many ministers. Isolation or a perceived lack of pastoral

support does appear to play a significant part, at least in the experience of those who leave Christian ministry completely. Loss of faith does not figure highly, which, along with the other results, strongly echoes Coles' findings.

One observation that can clearly be drawn from these responses is this: for some, their calling into other forms of Christian ministry, beyond the local church, is a very positive experience; for others, a negative experience of local church ministry is partly, or wholly, responsible for their moving on.

A Short Survey of Newly Accredited Ministers (1993-2003)

	Total enrolments	Deletions from list	Other ministries (at 2003/4)
1993	56	7	4
1994	78	11	10
1995	65	5	7
1996	67	6	8
1997	56	4	6
1998	55	3	2
1999	58	5	3
2000	44	2	1
2001	47	-	2
2002	55	1	-
2003	53	1	-

It is generally harder to ascertain whether someone has moved on to another form of ministry, compared to determining whether someone has left paid Christian ministry entirely. Therefore, the figures in the third column are more tentative, because they are largely based on the announcements in the back of the Baptist Ministers' Journal (1999-2004).

From these figures, it is possible to identify immediately that, the highest 'attrition rate' is among those who enrolled ten years ago, in 1993 and 1994. Given a straight comparison with more recent

years, there might be some grounds for confirming the suggestion that 10 years in ministry is a significant milestone. Ultimately though, one can only speculate as to why there should be such a comparatively high proportion who have left Christian ministry from those enrolled in 1993 (over 12%) and 1994 (14%). Not only that, when combined with the proportion of those enrolled in 1994, who have entered other ministries (13%), this does seem like a particularly high rate of people moving beyond local church ministry. It may simply be an anomaly, but it is an interesting one, given that in 1995, the overall proportion of those on the accredited list who were in some form of Christian ministry other than local church ministry, was itself only 14% (Coles, p. 177).

More generally, however, these figures would appear to be encouraging, when compared with Coles' findings from earlier decades. Coles found that around 25% of ministers left Christian ministry during or immediately subsequent to their first local church ministry (p. 141). Given that 10 years is likely to be longer than most, if not all, first ministries these days, the above figures for 1993 and 1994 compare very favourably to Coles' earlier findings. Not only that, but the 'attrition rate' out of Christian ministry in the first five years would appear to have declined significantly. Whereas 9% and 8% of those who enrolled in 1994 and 1993 respectively, left Christian ministry in the first five years, this level of movement away from local church ministry has not been replicated in more recent years. Between 1995 and 1999, those leaving local church ministry entirely within the first five years has hovered between 2% and 4%.

Due to the immediacy of these results and the small figures involved, it has proved difficult to draw any conclusions regarding any perceived effect of the

introduction of the compulsory mentoring system for NAMs in the last three years. However, here is a simple comparison between the last three sets of three years' enrolments (these figures only take into account those who were enrolled and moved beyond local church ministry within each three year period):

1995-1997 - 2 out of 188 did not continue in Christian ministry

1998-2000 - 3 out of 157 did not continue in Christian ministry

2001-2003 - all 155 are continuing in Christian ministry (as at Dec 2004).

There does seem to be a movement in the right direction, but it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions from these results. The efficacy or otherwise of compulsory early mentoring will only truly be demonstrated over a much longer period.

Reflections

Coles quotes some surprising statistics from the Victorian era. He discovered that, "in the last two decades of Victoria's reign... almost one in five new ministers quit within 5 years of starting" (p. 73), virtually the same rate he discerned in 1946-1995. Not only that, Coles concluded that there was no discernible trend of increasing numbers leaving Christian ministry towards the end of this period. My research would seem to indicate that, particularly considering those who have been in local church ministry no longer than 10 years, the attrition rate does actually seem to be declining. Of course, the situation may not feel anything like as rosy for those who have been engaged in ministry over 10 years, or indeed for those who have left local church feeling disillusioned.

As Coles states, a detailed study comparing rates of those leaving pastoral ministry with other 'vocational' professions (for example, teaching, nursing, social

work) has yet to be conducted (p. 162). This would be an interesting comparative study, partly because other professions, akin to local church ministry, have seen a significant increase in bureaucracy and paperwork within the last decade. However, it would appear that the attrition rate from local church ministry is lower than from some of these other professions. Not only that, despite appearances to the contrary, this rate does not seem to be dramatically increasing.

Furthermore, it should not go without comment that in recent years, measures have already been taken to provide ministers with extra support. The compulsory provision of mentors for newly-accredited ministers is a welcome development, as is the umbrella counselling service for ministers and their families and the 'refresher courses' offered by the Ministry Department each five years for those in Christian ministry. These three developments in themselves should help to make ministers feel less isolated and help to establish healthy disciplines of support and accountability.

There is indeed some cause for encouragement here. However, this should not give rise to complacency, as the stories from this study clearly demonstrate. For many of those who took part in this study, these developments either came too late or did not help, even though they were available.

I am also conscious that some of those who took part in this study would want to ask more searching questions about the institutional structures of many Baptist churches and also about the changing nature of ministry within a post-modern society. They would question whether suggesting further steps towards making improvements in supporting ministers is adequate, if not entirely cosmetic. I have some sympathy with these views, but the

questions they are raising fall beyond the scope of this short research project. Suffice it to say that, within each generation, there are legitimate questions raised about whether the church is introducing the changes necessary to engage an ever-changing cultural context with the age-old and ever-new good news of Jesus Christ.

Not surprisingly, there continue to be unresolved questions. One of these is how does one account for the disparity that exists between those who consider leaving and those who actually leave local church ministry? Can this disparity be explained by arguing that there are various levels to 'considering' leaving the ministry; or that the disparity shows just how committed Christian leaders are; or that this is evidence of God's faithfulness in providing the grace to continue facing very difficult situations?.

There is however, an equally possible explanation. Is it possible that a significant proportion of ministers continue in local church ministry simply because they feel they have no viable alternative? How much has the incidence of ministers leaving local church ministry in the last decade been artificially suppressed by the significant increases in house prices, which have made it increasingly difficult for first-time buyers to get into the housing market? Is it the case that there are many ministers leading churches today who are close to burn-out, but stay on because they cannot get out of the 'housing trap' of accommodation that is tied to their work? The more overt phenomenon of ministers moving on from local church ministry could possibly be matched by a more hidden phenomenon of disillusioned ministers forced, by a combination of circumstances, to stay in their present position.

It was interesting to note that two out of the 11 who returned the questionnaire, mentioned putting the needs of their

children before the necessity of finding a calling at whatever cost. How much is this a relatively new phenomenon? Would ministers from previous generations been more likely to give less weight to this consideration of the children's education and family stability? As one respondent put it, "Your family is your first church". However, it could mean that those ministers unsettled in their current situation may actually have one less option than before. Previously a minister in this situation could have looked at moving to another church, but for those concerned about family stability there are, in most cases, only two realistic options: either find a different form of ministry locally or leave Christian ministry altogether.

Conclusion

This research would seem to indicate that, within Baptist churches at least, there is a declining proportion of people moving on from local church ministry in the early years. There is, however, a continuing issue of how to maintain longevity in local church ministry. This research seems to confirm that the demands of this form of Christian service do appear to have a cumulative effect. The experience of ministerial breakdown remains a disturbingly all too frequent occurrence.

Whatever else can be deduced from this research, it is obvious that there are many issues to consider and several potential steps that might be taken to provide more pastoral support for ministers. Perhaps the most significant observation that could be made, from these results and from the comments above, is that those coming into the ministry might benefit from input regarding relational skills on two fronts:

Firstly, perhaps ministerial candidates or probationary ministers might undergo some kind of marriage course (or singleness

course for those not married), which would deal with the particular pressures of Christian ministry in these situations. Coles reflected that his discovery of the increased incidence of marital problems for those in the ministry, 'was one of the most significant findings of this piece of research' (p.105).

Secondly, considering that conflict is both such a prevalent issue in local church ministry and one that ministers do not seem to be adequately prepared for, perhaps conflict transformation training should be routinely provided for those preparing for ministry. The course run by 'Bridge Builders' at the London Mennonite Centre, for example, is one that a number of ministers have already benefited from and would recommend to others.

I continue to be convinced that, while local church ministry offers unique and important opportunities and freedoms, it can equally present a uniquely difficult challenge. I understand what Eugene Peterson is saying when he comments that, "It is no more difficult to pursue the pastoral vocation than any other" (*Under the Unpredictable Plant* p. 4). However, from my own experience and from the results of this research, I continue to feel that local church ministry can produce a unique complex of demands and pressures upon one person (and their family, if they have any) which are unlikely to be reproduced in quite the same way in other work situations. **bmj**

A prayer for 'public life' in a season of General Election and new Government:

Lord God, in our prayers for our country, we remember especially the men and women who powerfully influence the life of society:

those who fashion our politics,

those who frame and administer our laws,

those who mould public opinion through the press, radio and television,

those who write what many read.

May all such recognise their responsibility to you and to the nation,

that people may be influenced for what is good, not evil;

for what is true, not false;

for the glory of your name.

(Frank Colquhoun)

How to stop going on losing teenagers – one contribution

Anthony Thacker, Oadby Baptist Church, shares some thoughts on 'work in progress'.

This is "one contribution" not a panacea! But we have experienced both the problem, and are now experiencing what looks like a useful part of the solution. So I offer these thoughts and reflections on our experience in the hope that they might prove useful.

The problem

The problem which we have experienced here in the church where I have now been minister for over 20 years, Oadby Baptist Church, on the edge of Leicester, has been the fate of teenagers after they move from Children's Church to the adult congregation: the shift from a principally interactive discussion-based context to the worship-based experience of adult church. This problem remains whether worship is very traditional or ultra-charismatic – or shades between: the vital shift is from inter-active peer-group discussion to adult worship. So I suspect our experience is common.

This "promotion" from children's to adult church shares the difficulty of other transitions in church life – from conversion through an *Alpha* group into regular church life, for example, with which there are significant similarities. (We have made some modest progress on that recurring challenge, too, which also involves the question of moving from an inter-active, discussion-based context to Sunday worship and house groups. But that is another theme.)

More precisely, the problem has been that, at whatever age teenagers are "promoted" from Children's Church to adult worship, there has been a struggle to adapt, and not enough have succeeded. (Hence the reference in the title to "losing teenagers".) This process has contributed

to our losing a significant number of older teenagers over the last fifteen years.

Why has this been a problem in the recent past, when it was not a problem back in the 1960s and 70s when I was a teenager? Maybe it has taken me too long to recognise this, but the penny has dropped: way back then, we used to have something called the "Evening Service"! Technically, of course, we still do. I say "of course", but many churches have dropped their evening services altogether, and the great majority of those that have kept an evening service find that far fewer people attend it than attend the morning service. In our case, currently, about seven times as many people attend morning worship as turn up for evening services. However, 30-40 years ago, morning and evening congregations were often about equal in adult attendance.

The effect of this on the teenagers has been that, in most churches, the numbers have dropped below critical mass, and teenagers in the evening service are now the exception rather than the norm. Of course, churches with a strong student ministry and some other churches with a strong, distinct and vibrant ministry can buck the trend. But as the norm for churches in this country, including Baptist churches, I believe this conclusion is hard to dispute.

The effect of an evening service, where it is normal for teenagers to attend, is that

teenagers, as they emerge into personal faith and commitment opt into adult worship at a time that suits *them*, while continuing in peer groups concurrent with morning worship. The transition to adult worship was previously achieved far more smoothly, because teens were opting in at the stage when they felt ready for it. The loss of the evening service as an experience for the majority of teenagers as they emerge from Children's Church to adult church has removed this helpful transitional element. Churches then face a stark choice. Either allowing their teens to have no experience of adult worship before they go to college, after which they will face the double problems of discovering a new fellowship and adapting to adult worship, and in most cases fail to adapt, or else require them to switch from peer groups in Children's Church to adult worship 'cold turkey' at some officially stipulated stage before they reach 18, with the problems of adapting mentioned.

The solution – or at least part of it

In 2001 we started a new experiment. In part, this arose for me personally on the back of presenting a sermon based on a book I had written (*A Closer Look at Science Fiction*), and referred to in the "conclusion" in the last chapter of that book.¹ I took the leap of using the new data projection technology. This included PowerPoint captions, plus photo-images on the slides, interspersed with video clips (Captain Kirk meets the god Apollo, etc.), to illustrate the various points. A more modest use of this technology became part of this package for teenage integration. But the key idea was to develop what we refer to as a "split service" and/or a "split sermon".

In short, the service order is re-shaped. Having experimented with having children in at the start or else at the close of morning worship, we had long settled with

family worship at the start of the service. On the fourth Sunday of the month, however, when the pre-teenage children leave, the teenagers (13+) stay for the next phase of worship. This enables them to be introduced to two things. The songs or hymns they will experience can be deeper and more stretching than those typically experienced during the family worship time. Secondly, they will experience a short sermon. The intention is that about half or just over half of the usual preaching time (i.e., 10-15 minutes, instead of 20-25 minutes, here) will be taken up with this shorter sermon that the teenagers stay in for. After that, during a song or hymn that follows, they go out to share in a discussion group led by their usual leaders, but following up the issues raised by the sermon.

Adult worship then continues, usually with a second preaching slot, and other elements of worship enabling response to God.

At first, I took up themes deliberately designed to work for a follow-on discussion context, but it became quickly apparent that this was not necessary. So instead of doing a monthly series as at the start (with deliberately provocative themes like 'Genesis and Creation', Exodus and Freedom', 'Genetic Engineering', Homosexuality', etc), we now continue with the regular series taken up on the other Sundays (on Philippians, Acts, '40 Days of Purpose' and so on).

So what happened? The discussion groups have worked, and this approach has enabled our current generation of teenagers to experience a half-way house between the purely interactive peer group experience of what here used to be called "Senior Lazars" but now is dubbed "24/7", and the very different worship-and-preaching experience of congregational worship. Over the last year or so, our older

THE BAPTIST INSURANCE COMPANY PLC.

Beaufort House, Brunswick Road, Gloucester, GL1 1JZ

Tel: 0845 0702223

‘Lift up your eyes and look to the Heavens’

During the course of a year numerous claims arise for damage to church buildings resulting from problems which the church themselves may not have been aware until it was too late. I know I have mentioned it before but gutters and drainpipes are a notorious source of damage which can go unnoticed for some time before discovery.

Our Surveying team was re-equipped recently with safety helmets, protective clothing and other useful “all weather” items. Within the pile of kit issued to each Surveyor, was found a pair of binoculars - small, inexpensive ones but rubber coated and quite durable.

The Team was somewhat sceptical as to whether these would be of real help in normal work, but were prepared to “give them a go”.

It proved amazing what could be seen when looking at a Church roof through binoculars - particularly areas that cannot be easily viewed from the ground in normal circumstances.

One Surveyor mentioned that he had not really noticed any poor features on a particular rural Church roof, but when trying out this new piece of kit, he noticed that some of the guttering had grass/vegetation peeping over the edge. It turned out that the Church gutters had not been inspected or cleaned out for many years. The grass had taken hold in a bed of leaves and compost that was effectively renewed each Autumn when leaves collected in the gutters and rotted down. A family of mice had even made a down-pipe hopper their home!

It may be well worth seeing if a pair of binoculars is available from within the Church membership, and each Spring examine more closely the condition of roof coverings, gutters and down-pipes - it certainly saves a crick in the neck and may help prevent blockages and leaks in your rainwater goods or roofing.

If left untended, these simple to rectify problems invariably lead to much more expensive structural repairs.

Yours Sincerely

Alf Green ACII
ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

teenagers have now been increasingly choosing to opt in to adult worship. Many have just switched to adult worship every Sunday, some chose to opt back in to the discussion groups on that fourth Sunday, while others mix and match. But it seems clear that all will have adapted to the experience of adult worship by the time they are ready to move to college. As this switch is no longer usually likely to involve opting in to evening services, it has had to be achieved within morning worship, and I suggest that this split sermon approach provides a useful part of the solution.

Other effects

Ever since the youth revolution of the 60s, whenever a new trend for teenagers comes in, an increasing number of adults will look at it and say, "We want that, too!" Not for nothing is an increasingly vogue title for retired people "re-cycled teenagers". So it was only a matter of time before some of the adult congregation suggested they liked the idea of moving into a discussion group after a shorter sermon. One of those suggesting this was also prepared to offer the solution, i.e., to lead such a discussion group. So we took the risk of announcing we were going to put on such a group, not knowing whether a few or a huge proportion of the congregation would take this up! As it happened, this worked well too. Typically about 10-12 of our adults opt in to such a group (out of approaching 100 adults). This has its own benefits.

There are a number of other implications of this strategy – i.e.0 factors involved in making it work. One is providing both group leaders with a copy of the text of the forthcoming sermon – or at least of the key issues you are likely to raise. A challenge of another deadline!

More troubling for some readers might be the thought of using data projection technology. Is this necessary for this idea?

I believe it has helped in the success of this approach – particularly with each new group of 13-year-olds, and especially the lads. Just as they're in danger of drifting off, the next caption pulls them back. Coupled with the discussion group reinforcing reflection on the short sermon, they quickly adapt positively. So I have striven to ensure we have the technology for these services (even though we have not yet bought a system, and have needed to borrow a projector each time).

As for data projection generally, some love it, others don't (as with all innovations). This is not simply age-related. We have found that the use of a larger and clearer font, coupled with a light text on a dark background (we use yellow against navy blue) is popular with many of our elderly and visually impaired members; most of whom can dispense with our "Large Print " books (used for songs projected from acetates), and read the screen directly. Those less keen on this technology miss being able to reflect on the text after the words of hymns and songs have been sung. Here, we have not thought this technology should be used in every service - or none. We use it monthly and on special occasions when it is clearly beneficial. When we have our own projector and system, we will use this better projection for songs, but not for all sermons, etc.

But I must not hide the fact that this has required a considerable amount of extra work for me, as well as the development of new skills for the technical team (who usually relish that challenge anyway!). However, this work can be reduced by the use of the new increasingly useful software packages that have all the songs already typed up, for example. And for me, the prize of successfully integrating our teenagers in adult church life is worth the effort.

More difficult has been the second

mini-sermon slot, and the whole principle of dividing up the preaching time into two sections. Not every theme divides neatly into two halves. And even with those that do, some congregation members struggle more than others to switch back in to listening in sermon mode twice in one service. So we are beginning to experiment further with the part of worship that follows the departure of teenagers and the adult discussion group. This "contribution" is not

a panacea, therefore, and certainly is not a simple one-off change with no other consequences. To attempt it, is to embark on a learning curve. But that should be no bad thing. *Ecclesia semper reformanda.*

bmj

¹ Anthony Thacker: *A Closer Look at Science Fiction* (Kingsway, 2001), pp.325-329.

Holidays 2005

SPAIN: COSTA BLANCA - CALPE

Well furnished and equipped self-catering two bedroomed ground floor garden apartment in a quiet area, with communal pool. Five minutes by car from beach and shops. Available for both winter (short or long let) and summer. For further details and brochure contact Peter Storey 07973 489412

GLOUCESTERSHIRE: STOW-ON-THE WOLD

Comfortable fully furnished self-catering bungalow, five minutes walk from the centre of Stow but in quiet location.

Ideal for touring Cotswolds. Sleeps 4 (1 double 1 twin beds). French window from sitting room leads to quiet secluded garden. Available all year round. More details and price on application from Mrs J Parnell 01608 684380

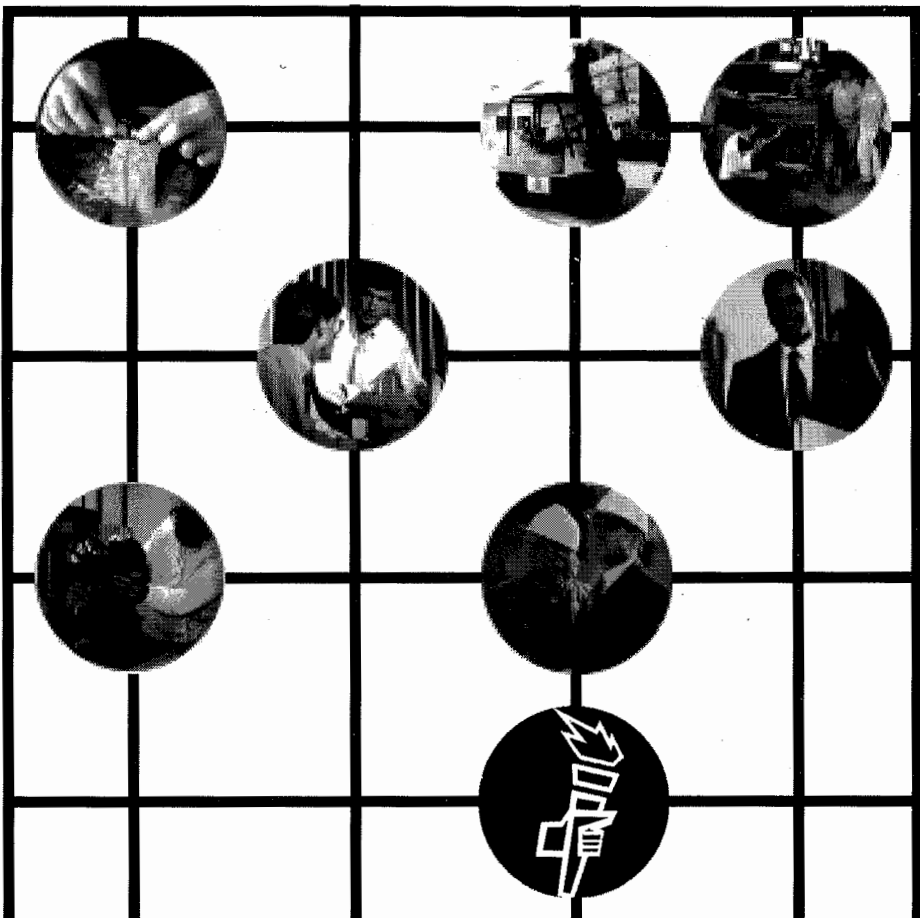
CORNWALL

Pretty converted Cornish cottage, sleeps 6, situated on wild and romantic Bodmin Moor! Lovely relaxing rural village setting, but within easy distance of countless Cornish attractions. Contact Hilary Conabeer

der@hconabeer.freeserve.co.uk or 07976 626225 for details.

BWA Congress - Reminder

Please remember that you are invited to an international reception on Friday 29th July 5.00 – 6.30 p.m. at the Birmingham City Council Banqueting Suite. The Baptist Ministers' Fellowship is arranging and hosting this event, which is an opportunity to show hospitality and share fellowship with colleagues in ministry. There will be space for a maximum of 450 people.



**Men –
network your
life skills and
expertise
through the
Baptist Men's
Movement**

*For further information contact
Clifford Challinor, Secretary BMM
Engine House Cottage, Pontesford,
Shrewsbury, SY5 0UQ
Telephone/Fax 01743 790377
Email cchallinor3@supanet.com*

*Visit our website at
www.baptistmen.org.uk*

*Baptist Men's Movement
(Registered charity no 250344)*

Being a Lectionary-Led Congregation

Donald Schmidt is minister at Waiola United Church of Christ (Congregationalist) in Lahaina, Hawaii, and has previously served churches in Quebec, New York, Vermont. He is on the editorial team of *Seasons of the Spirit*. The full text of this article first appeared in *Congregational Life, Seasons of the Spirit*.¹ Used by permission.

“Structure ignites spontaneity.”

Author and Violinist Stephen Nachmanovitch.

A good piece of music is fluid, changing, living, dynamic. There is a score to follow, but the real “life” of a piece of music comes from the playing, from the act of taking mere notes on a page and making them sing, harmonize, and move the soul.

The Christian church has a variety of structures to guide what it does. While some structures can at times stifle, the best ones ignite spontaneity. The lectionary can be just such a structure – a wondrous tool that, rather than confining congregational life, can spark it to greater and richer depths, capturing the beat of the church year and moving in response to that spiritual music, allowing individuals to be changed by the notes and to help rewrite the score for others.

What?

From the earliest days of Christianity, some churches have followed a lectionary for their worship.

However the revision of the Roman lectionary during Vatican II inspired a renewed interest in lectionary usage by a variety of denominations. The *Common Lectionary*, developed in 1980, was quickly embraced by many churches. This led to the *Revised Common Lectionary* in 1993 which has found its way into worship books, hymnals, and church calendars throughout the English-speaking world. Using four scripture readings per week, this lectionary provided for the reading of a large portion of

the Bible over a three-year cycle.

This “rediscovering” of the Bible in worship led to a desire for educational materials that would link with worship, resulting in a number of lectionary-based curricula, such as *The Inviting Word* and *The Whole People of God*. As churches have danced with the rhythm of the church year and lectionary in their worship and education, it seems only logical to go one further step. The new curriculum resource, *Seasons of the Spirit*, achieves this by using the lectionary as a guide for all of congregational life.

Why?

The seasons and turnings of the church year, which guide the readings in the lectionary, engage spirituality in a number of different ways. Because the lectionary is an art form that allows for a patterned and intentional encounter with the Bible, parish life can become more biblically grounded. Rather than simply doing things in certain ways and at certain times because “that’s what we have always done,” the lectionary encourages us to ponder things anew throughout the year.

Instead of getting caught in ruts of our own making, this process of letting the Bible lead and guide us can open new pathways. Old familiar stories blend with new insights and contexts to transform understanding and vision. Within the rhythms of the church year and the “musical score” that is the lectionary, there

is ample opportunity for the Spirit to lead in a new and holy dance.

In addition, the lectionary is both ecumenical and international, meaning that churches around the world, of many denominations and traditions, are exploring the same scriptures each week. This allows great opportunities for resources and activities to stretch beyond the walls of an individual congregation.

How?

Each season of the church year has its own focus, and within each season the scripture readings support and build on that theme. In Advent, for example, the mood of anticipation and hope is enhanced by readings from the Hebrew prophets and gospel readings about what it means now that God has become flesh and lived among us. Church activities focus on preparing ourselves for a new birthing of God within our lives, which we will celebrate in the short season of Christmas. The season after Epiphany celebrates the beginnings of Jesus' earthly ministry. It provides stories of people being called to ministry and shows how they responded. This in turn gives us a great opportunity to explore our own calls to ministry and to examine how our congregation might better invite and equip people to live out their ministries.

Lenten readings invite us to examine ourselves – to look within our individual and communal hearts to better understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Some churches take a break from regular “business” in this season and concentrate on spiritual growth and development through extra worship and learning opportunities.

Easter is a joyous celebration of fifty days – a time to sing and shout that Jesus is risen! In this season, readings from the Hebrew Scriptures are replaced with

stories from the book of Acts, and so it is a splendid opportunity to explore the life of the early church, and learn from their activities, mistakes, and adventures.

Following the festival of Pentecost we enter a long period of time – usually about half a year – which some churches call “Ordinary Time.” Stories of Jesus' teaching and healing, set against sweeping sagas of Hebrew history and prophetic readings, remind us how God is with us in the everyday moments of our lives. We might choose to live out the journey of the Hebrew people in Exodus and contrast that with our own ministries of liberation and empowerment. Readings from the prophets might inspire us to explore how to be more prophetic in our own world. Parables of the reign or empire of God challenge us to engage in ministries that help bring that into existence.

Remember that the lectionary is not a rigid, lifeless thing. To use the analogy of a musical score once again, it provides a strong melody. But we may wish to harmonize it, or to veer away from the tune from time to time. Individual churches, local needs, denominational heritage, and current events may call us to move at times from the lectionary's readings. The most beautiful music has individuality and personality.

Throughout the year the Bible readings suggested by the lectionary provide many opportunities to celebrate, to learn, to grow, to do – to be the body of Christ. The Spirit of God invites us to dance our way through life in whatever form that might take for us. The musical score of the Revised Common Lectionary can open us to new and exciting ways to live out that dance. **Dmj**

¹ *Seasons of the Spirit* is a lectionary-based worship and education resource for all ages. Sample material and other essays can be found on the website www.spiritseasons.com

Marriage: Change and Decay?

John Hough from Eastbourne makes this contribution recognising a number of provocative themes within current debate. It is not intended as a finished consideration of any of the issues, but as aspects in continuing conversation.

The pastoral and professional experience of John and Rosa Elliston in Darlington, perceptively detailed in *BMJ* July 2004, pointed again to long-standing issues about marriage trends. Media preoccupation with this year's royal wedding arrangements has fuelled the debate.

Some trends are well-known and documented: the proportion of marriages solemnised in the context of Christian worship is falling; there is a measure of disregard about the institution of marriage; cohabitation without marriage is more acceptable, and the proportion of children being reared outside marriage is rising; marriage breakdown and subsequent separation and divorce is common; the number of children of school age who lack one parent, usually a father-figure, has grown, and sexual relations before marriage, teenage pregnancy and abortion is increasing.

Although marriage and divorce statistics remain of value and interest, it is the elusive quality of loving stable relationships within marriage rather than statistics that offer true and lasting significance.

'Christian Marriage'

The solemnisation and dissolution of marriage rests legally with the civil authority. Christian attitudes towards the dissolution of marriage are varied and complex. The Church proclaims the purposes of marriage and the Christian ideal of marriage as lifelong, exclusive, loving covenant ordained by God, sealed by vows made as part of an act of Christian worship (in some traditions, of Holy

Communion). In practice, attitudes towards divorce vary from complete disapproval to ready availability of marriage in church for divorced persons. Few ministers or clergy, however, would unquestioningly consent to remarry divorcees or conduct a service of blessing in church following a civil marriage without prior charitable confidential consultation with the partners concerned, some admission of failure, assurances of forgiveness and a determination to make by God's grace a fresh start

It is unlikely that the recent Anglican decision to invest local clergy with discretionary powers (in accordance with guidelines approved by the General Synod) to permit a 'church wedding' for one or both divorced partners from a former marriage will appreciably affect the divorce rate, though it may lead to an increase in the number of church weddings and the privilege of pastoral counselling. The guidelines might involve enquiring whether the new marriage may be a cause of hostile public comment or scandal: would it be tantamount to consecrating an old infidelity if the present relationship is a direct cause of the breakdown of the previous marriage?

There apparently remains sufficient unease in the Church of England and perhaps in other Christian communions as well as in the community at large for Prince Charles and Mrs Parker Bowles to decide or be advised not to remarry in a church ceremony.

Is 'Church' or 'marriage' the issue?

Is the proportion of engaged couples who

seek marriage (or remarriage) in church diminishing because many have lost or never had any realistic contact with church, or because they shrink from its teaching on marriage as a lifelong commitment?

In a Register Office marriage I witnessed fairly recently, the short ceremony attended by a small group of witnesses and guests was conducted in a dignified, companionable way on one side of a cheerfully decorated room. The marriage certificate was signed and witnessed a few steps away from the ceremonial area on the other side of the room. It was quiet, brief and intimate. But the promises came as a surprise: the bride and groom were not invited to make the traditional pledge of exclusive faithfulness to each other "till death parts us", but "for as long as our marriage lasts".

Pastors, counsellors, social practitioners and commentators recognise complex factors militating against the stability of marriage and its quality as a social institution. Higher expectations and demands of the marriage relationship as an equal partnership is a recognition of the changing role and status of men and women in society in relation to each other, and in particular of the greater security and economic independence of many women outside marriage. But worthy expectations can engender bigger strain and disappointment. Cultural change and social and professional mobility may weaken intimate family relationships, along with peer pressure to adopt more relaxed attitudes towards marriage and divorce.

The prevalence of short-term professional contracts and planning and occupational uncertainty spill over into marriage and family patterns; expansion of higher education and vocational opportunity bring their own pressures; ambivalent attitudes are evident towards

commitment in many spheres including home and family life.

These factors are a mixture of good and bad. It seems that the current legislation has led to a higher divorce rate and liberalisation of social attitudes to divorce. But cynicism may be as misplaced as complacency. There may be no diminution in the proportion of happy, stable, marriage partnerships in our society now compared with recent generations, although this can only be a matter of speculation. The debate in the 'sixties' that led to divorce reform legislation, and in which Christian opinion shared and in some ways took a leading part, was underpinned by strong moral humane considerations. Former divorce procedures, often protracted, expensive and repugnant, and based upon proof of specified matrimonial offences (including insanity as a so-called 'offence') were clearly intolerable. Instances of breakdown where there had been no criminal offence sometimes provoked desperate resource to adultery or violence. Current legislation is criticised because it provides for a spouse to be divorced against his or her will. But divorce still seems largely preferable to long-term separation even though some partners may still find enforced divorce morally objectionable and refuse to marry again.

In the context of our hugely complex and highly mobile society and the overall social, moral and economic climate, one nervously wonders whether young persons in their twenties and even early thirties can reasonably be expected to make vows of lifelong, exclusive faithfulness in a marriage covenant. Current longevity trends may require partnerships to endure through all the changing scenes of life for fifty, sixty or more years.

I suspect that my grandparents' marriages which took place towards the end of the nineteenth century and which

persisted until death were not particularly satisfactory ones: the number of marriage relationships that simply hung together with limited expectations of equality and depth was probably high in Victorian times. But for partners then to have sought greater freedom and happiness by divorce would have been unthinkable legally, socially and financially. Nonetheless, despite the growing preference for later marriage, perhaps following cohabitation, and the current rates of divorce or separation, marriage as a social goal and institution seems to have lost none of its popularity. It may even be that divorce is often sought as a licence to remarry, and a second or third marriage has been compared to a re-reading of a novel - an altogether different experience, though not necessarily a less fulfilling and happy one than a first marriage.

Change not decay?

There seems little evidence that an experience of short or long term cohabitation or sexual experience outside marriage leads to greater subsequent marital happiness and stability. But this is not the same as saying that it damages the institution of marriage. It would be interesting to know, though an unwarrantable invasion of personal privacy, why some partners, an increasing number it seems, live together for longer or shorter periods, and in some instances happily raise children, without marrying. And what factors weigh with them in deciding in due time to marry or not or to separate? Is marriage hype and expense a significant consideration?

Clergy and ministers conscientiously offer preparation courses to engaged couples. This may be less needed and heeded than formerly. Might local

congregational programmes be better employed in bolstering Christian education and pastoral care for young parents and their families? Complex changing marriage and lifestyles find us pensive. But taken as a whole they should not spell marriage doom and despondency.

A further observation notes the varied forms and qualities of publicly recognised relationship that age, temperament and circumstances offer. Celibate men and women, whether by choice or not, and not living in any form of sexual relationship, deserve respect and equal social status with married persons. It is arguable that too many persons attempt marriage, worthily or not. One suspects that an increasing tendency to choose to delay marriage suggests that the status of single persons, particularly that of women, has been rising. (If current trends continue, by 2011 48% of men and 46% of women will be married. By 2031 46% of men and 40% of women will have never married).

The Civil Partnership Bill comes into force at the end of 2005, enabling Register Offices to solemnise same-sex 'marriages'. There can be little indication yet of the potential value or popularity of such official recognition and its social consequences. It has received scant sympathy and widespread condemnation in many church circles. In time Christian attitudes may mellow as has happened over divorce and the remarriage of divorced persons in church. Presently, though, much prejudice persists towards homosexual persons, many of whom, like many heterosexuals, never or scarcely ever engage in any form of sexual practice. **bmj**

Book Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

Mentoring - The Promise of Relational Leadership, **Walter C Wright, Paternoster** 2004, ISBN 1-84227-293-4, pp. 160, £7.99

There are many more questions than answers in this book. Given that Walter Wright says that, 'The value of this book will be directly proportional to the number of questions that remain outstanding when you put it down' (p. xxxi), then this book certainly is valuable. While it felt like several different presentations lumped into one book and suffered from repetition, it is nevertheless a good introduction to mentoring. It is a thin volume, but its thorough notes and index invite further reading.

Some people may find the North American back-slapping and some of the terminology annoying. But there can be no doubting the passion of this author to see leaders growing and helping to develop other leaders. I found that the personal stories and the direct invitations to reflect on your own journey served to root what could have been simply theoretical. The timeline exercise was a revelation for me.

The later chapters were most helpful and dealt with the following: how to go about looking for mentors; what to look for in potential mentorees; five mentoring models (gardener, advisor, manager, coach, resource); exploring the tensions of leadership.

Those already mentoring could probably learn from this book. Those wanting to know more could probably start here. Perhaps the best recommendation of this book is that it enabled me to reflect on my current situation and made me start an earnest search for new mentors. It seems

fitting to end this review with two of Wright's questions: 'What do you need to learn next?' (p. 141); 'To whom are you roped as you develop your leadership potential?' (144).

**Colin Cartwright, Trinity Church,
Chesham**

Christians and Muslims – pressures and potential in a post 9/11 world.

Peter G. Riddell, IVP 2004 pp 254
£12.99p

This *is* a book that every Pastor should read. Clichés apart, this book really is somewhere in that category. It is the product of the 2003 London Lectures in Contemporary Christianity given by Peter Riddell, Professor of Islamic Studies at the London School of Theology. At its heart is the conviction that the C21st world will be characterised by three competing globalisation ideologies: 'We may well be on the threshold of a clash of globalisations, with Islamic globalisation in its multiple forms posing an increasing challenge to the western-driven form of globalisation that has dominated world trends for several generations. In turn, Christian global outreach will add another element to a potentially three-way rivalry.'

In making this case Riddell explores 'the rich tapestry of both Christianity and Islam' with consummate skill. Drawing extensively on the sacred texts and writings of both faith communities he annotates references to TV programmes, newspaper cuttings and radio broadcasts too. Books are no longer all we have for research.

His book is divided into three parts. *Islam and the West* explores exclusivist,

inclusivist and pluralist Islamic responses. Examples are given both of Islamophobia and of the prejudices among some Muslims themselves. Accounts of Islamic racism are set against those of Muslims as victims.

The Church Responds analyses WCC, Roman Catholic and World Evangelical Alliance perspectives on Islam. Views as diverse as those of Cragg, Prince Charles, George Carey, Newbigin and John Paul II are considered. Carey is quoted to great effect here: "During my time as archbishop, this was my constant refrain – that the welcome we have given to Muslims in the West, with the accompanying freedom to worship freely and build their mosques, should be reciprocated in Muslim lands." And if you think that is simplistic, read this book.

Finally, *Asking Questions and Seeking Answers* raises a number of key questions. Do we realise the contempt our divisions in Christianity, over e.g. our denominations or human sexuality, give rise to among many Muslims? Why is the right to convert from Islam almost impossible in several nations? Will Islam ever open up the life of its revered prophet and scriptures to the kind of critical reflection Jesus and the gospels have experienced for at least 150 years now? Will the UK really, as David Pawson has claimed, be largely Islamic by the middle of the C21st? No is the reasoned and pragmatic answer from Riddell to this latter question.

The book ends with an appeal for integrity and honesty in our dialogue and debates: in the end both faiths cannot be right about Jesus Christ. Crucially. The world's Islamic faith communities are - often - as diverse as some Christian ones. Different kinds of dialogue with different kinds of Muslims must replace naïve blanket approaches. This is an important

book. To understand our still so new century better, read it and pray.

Michael I Bochenski, Dagnal St, St Albans

A Fitting End – making the most of a funeral, **Hugh James**, Canterbury Press, 2004 ISBN 1 85311 602 5, 179 pp, £12.99

Hugh James' experience as a Parish Priest is reflected in this book, which arises from research done for a higher degree on funeral theology, custom and practice. This is not a book of liturgical material, but does include in the three appendices a selection of helpful internet sites, contact numbers for support organisations and liturgical resources.

James invites us to reflect on such underlying issues and questions as: What is death? What is a funeral? Whose funeral is it? As he does so, he examines the social and theological changes through history that have altered how we perceive death and the liturgical language we use within the funeral service.

He discusses how the agendas of various institutions and organisations affect the funeral. He refers particularly to changes in government legislation regarding the disposal of bodies, changes in the undertaking profession, the church, society and the family. He considers the impact on public expectations of social influences such as the changing role of women, the impact of AIDS, ecological and environmental concerns, and the mass media, the consequences of increasing Americanisation, and issues of language and culture in our multicultural environment.

James identifies the challenges posed by "difficult" funerals. Feuding families, suicide, murder, death of a child and

domestic violence fall under his scrutiny. He addresses the need for adequate support networks to combat the pastoral demands of funerals on ministers.

When I did my first funeral, I was acutely aware that my college training in no way prepared me for the reality and responsibility involved. I found the book interesting and challenging, and wish I could have read it while at college. I strongly recommend it to anyone who officiates at funerals.

**Kath Lawson, Vale Baptist Church,
Todmorden**

New Testament Theology; Many Witnesses, One Gospel. **I. H. Marshall.** Inter Varsity Press, 2004. £24.99

Howard Marshall, still an Honorary Professor at Aberdeen, remains Britain's best-known evangelical New Testament scholar. In this book he defends the discipline of biblical theology and then distils his years of reading and reflection into a series of chapters, usually one on each of the relevant documents. So, rather than take the principle themes of the New Testament as a whole and discuss them, Marshall considers the books one at a time and then compares them with the others of the same genre or by the same author. Thus, in Part Two, after Part One's description and justification of the enterprise, we get chapters on each of the synoptic gospels and Acts followed by a discussion of their theology as a whole. Part Three offers a similar approach to the writings of Paul concluding with a chapter on the theology of his letters and another on Paul, the synoptics and Acts. Part Four discusses the Johannine writings and Part Five covers the rest (Hebrews, James, Peter and Jude). The conclusion is a helpful essay on Diversity and Unity in the New Testament. If there is a guiding idea, it is

that all these documents are best understood as the missionary writings of the primitive church.

The book ends with a statement that claims to be "a summary of theological teaching that is essentially shared by the New Testament writers." (Page 726). Its salient elements are: the main theme, that of redemption accomplished by the saving act of God in Christ; the Jewish framework of the thought, including an apocalyptic understanding of history and the acceptance of the authority of the Old Testament, in which this theme is given expression; and the missionary context, including the church (the community of mission), in which the documents were written. Thus Marshall claims to find a far greater range of agreement than that discerned by Dunn in his *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*. However, Marshall acknowledges that while some parts of his summary enjoy multiple attestation, others have less explicit support. The core would be shared by all the writers but this need not mean that they all saw things in the same way. For Marshall the diversity is real but does not constitute contradiction or even significant difference.

The book is mainly intended for students and non-specialists. None of the discussions are long enough to explore and defend radically new insights and ideas. The chapters are solid, reliable and orthodox but are not the stuff to make the spirit soar. The book might be useful to consult for a discussion the themes that might need addressing when you plan to preach from a particular book. It is also interesting for its robust defence of the idea of the discipline of New Testament theology: a helpful counterbalance to the views of some of its more strident critics.

Steve Finamore, Westbury-on-Trym