

Baxter asks whether our calling does not make us shrink and tremble. After all, 'holy calling cannot save a holy man'.

Richard Baxter lived in days very different from our own and he thought in ways that are not immediately ours. *The Reformed Pastor* is dated but not, I think, out of date. Here is set forth a noble expression of Christian ministry. Its nobility centres on the great vision of God in Christ who inspires, calls and saves. In a generation shaped more by secular cultural desires, uncertain in moral and religious values, Richard Baxter's challenge will come to many ministers as a rush of cold living water. It may take the breath away, but it will leave you cleaner, more alert and eager for the tasks which God appoints.

Now retired, **Rev Dr Brian Haymes** pastored churches in Bristol, Exeter and London, and was Principal of both the Northern Baptist College as also Bristol Baptist College.

WHY CLERGY ARE LEAVING THE CHURCH

By Rowland Croucher

There are 10,000 ex-pastors in Australia; about the same number as those serving in parishes of all denominations. For three years John Mark Ministries has offered counselling and encouragement to many of them and their spouses, and has initiated a major research project to find out why so many leave what for most was intended to be a life-long calling.

'Is it still fun?'⁵ For the majority who left parish ministry, whether by choice, or because their ministry was prematurely terminated, the answer to this question is 'no'. After nine years

⁵ This question is raised by Ben Campbell Johnson, *Pastoral Spirituality* (Westminster. 1988)10.

pastoring one said, 'I was sick and tired of having a joyless ministry'. Pastoral ministry, commenced with high ideals and expectations, had caused stress, a lessening of self-confidence, and a sense of powerlessness in more than 50% of the 243 ex-parish pastors who have so far responded to an exhaustive 100-item questionnaire. (The number of respondents represents about one in 40 of all Australian ex-pastors.) And yet many would identify with another who wrote My "sense of call" remained; [I] felt guilty that I could not fulfil my calling.'

The questionnaire focused on 41 issues which had arisen in extensive anecdotal research - ranging from strength of call, spouse/family, seminary training, encouragement, relationships with others, conflict, theological factors etc. Respondents were asked to circle a number from one to five assessing the importance of each of these variables. If they wished, explanatory notes could be added. Then they were asked to make comments about 'presenting' vs. underlying factors, attitudes to ministry, help received during transition etc. The third section asked them to list the five most *significant* issues, in order of importance. Finally we asked for 35 personal items of biodata so that we could correlate variables such as age, year ordained, length of time in pastoral ministry, number of churches served, present occupation and involvement in the life of the church now, etc.

About 20% of the respondents freely chose to move to another career (within a denominational or para-church organisation, or to a 'secular' position). Twenty-six per cent of respondents use the term 'ministry' for whatever they are currently doing (including some in 'secular' vocations). Fifteen percent have no remunerative employment; 47% are in 'secular' employment; 33% work for a church or Christian organization.

A quarter left without the hurt, conflict, loss of health, or boredom that characterized the majority. When asked 'How did you feel when you left?' words like 'relief' (26%), 'devastated' (11 %) or 'excited' (10% - mainly from those moving to another closely-related vocation) were mentioned. How do you feel now? Twenty-five percent said 'content/settled, but 28% still had mild-to-strongly negative feelings, even, in some cases, many years later.

One in five (22%) said they got no help from anyone (apart from the spouse) in the exiting process. Only 28% received 'pastoral' support, from a colleague, counsellor or denominational appointee.

Only a few could say, 'I had enjoyed a total of [15] years of parish ministry and I felt ready for a new challenge', or saw the move into another ministry-area as the natural next step because of the gifts and the expertise they possessed. Many more would identify with a comment like, 'I was "burnt-out". God gave me a way out - I was tired of fighting unproductive battles'.

About 7% indicated they were not worshipping anywhere, and a further 33% were not using their ministry gifts in any way in the local congregation. One ex-pastor who left for health reasons in mid-life said, 'To move from "core involvement" to the perimeter is a big enough transition. Finding oneself unable to make it into even the outer fellowship circle can be a painful experience'.

Some ex-pastors who have not returned questionnaire had said the whole exercise would be too painful. Some who did begin the exercise could not complete it.

So why do they leave? Here we sometimes note the most *significant* - designated as 'most important' by respondents - or the most *commonly mentioned* factors.

CONFLICT

The most *significant* reason for half of the sample leaving parish ministry was conflict. This conflict may be with colleagues, lay leaders, members of the congregation, or denominational leaders. Conflict with local church leaders (lay and other pastors) is significant for one quarter of all respondents, and difficult relationships with denominational leaders for over 20%. Over a third of the 70 Baptists cited conflict with the congregation and/or its leaders (generally lay, but also with colleagues) as the key factor in their leaving. For the 37 Anglicans unhelpful relationships with their denominational leaders were more significant.

One ex-pastor feeling a lack of support from all areas said that the key reason for his leaving was 'local church politics... [I was] not permitted to pursue decisions approved by the congregation'. Another who had conflict with colleagues said, '[I had] a growing awareness of the need for a change to enable a return of energy, enthusiasm and vision'.

When this is combined with the fact that half of the ex-pastors surveyed have felt a lack of support/encouragement in the

pastorate, this raises serious questions about the quality of support systems for pastors in many of our churches. Ex-pastors often have intense feelings of failure, anger, a sense of betrayal (by others, and sometimes by God), resentment and guilt. These can take many years for them and their families to work through to a point of healing.

SPOUSE/FAMILY ISSUES

Spouse/family issues are often significant in the decision to leave the pastorate. Problems in the marriage relationship are mentioned specifically by 13.5% of respondents, 10% of spouses have had problems accepting the lifestyle, and 16% mention family problems. Factor analysis shows a definite clustering around issues relating to spouse, family, housing, finance and mobility. These factors considered together would appear to be important for about a third of those who decide to leave the pastorate. A regular response in the questionnaires is the felt need 'to spend more time with my wife and family'.

Adultery on the part of the pastor is THE reason for leaving for some of our respondents. This often occurs when the pastoral ministry has apparently been progressing effectively. One perceptive ex-pastor for whom adultery and the subsequent breakdown of his marriage had been the key issue said, 'The inability of the church to deal with my situation, the closing off from expression/ acknowledgement of issues relating to sexuality and lack of opportunity for support/ examination or reflection to help me was significant'. Churches may need better ways of responding with appropriate care in these situations. (Most Australian commentators with some experience of counselling pastors would agree that at least 15% of practising clergy have had serious, inappropriate sexual relationships with someone other than their spouse. Our research is not yet capable of putting a percentage figure on this issue, as the 'self-select' nature of the sample is less likely to represent this group adequately).

The significance of spouse/family/sexuality issues appears to differ across the denominations, and may well be accentuated by conflict in the parish. More analysis is needed to gain a clearer understanding of the interrelationships here.

'SELF' AND HEALTH

These two issues recur as very significant factors. 'Self, including a loss of self-confidence, inability to cope, and awareness of weaknesses, is the most common reason, overall, for leaving. Health factors (often associated with stress/burnout) comprise the third most common reason given (after self and conflict with local church leaders).

It would be very wrong to assume that the third of pastors who acknowledge self as a factor in their decision were unsuited to the pastoral ministry. Many ex-pastors (about 40%) claim to have good self-knowledge, and have learnt through their experience. One ex-pastor said, 'Some of my inter-personal skills needed attention', and many have sought counselling help to look at themselves.

Often conflict and the lack of encouragement experienced in the pastorate, compounded self, health and marriage/family issues. Many found that as the conflict continued unabated, there was a loss of self-confidence. The stress began to affect the health and relationships of the pastor, and this combination resulted in the decision that pastoral ministry was no longer tenable. For some, this decision led them to take 'time out' for either a sabbatical and/or further study. But only 4% of all respondents have returned to the pastorate.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

These findings point to the need to make changes in several aspects of the pastor's relationship to his or her calling. First, the notion of 'call' to pastoral ministry needs to be re-examined. Most denominations are exploring better selection procedures. More relevant training in theological seminaries for the rigours of pastoral leadership in a TV age is needed. Denominations should be investigating the provision of more adequate pastoral support systems. And no pastor who leaves parish ministry should feel that he/she is utterly alone, as is sometimes now the case: provision of counselling services to assist should be available to those who require such help.

The analysis of returned questionnaires continues. But there is a need for a larger sample. While there are hints of different factors operating across the denominations, the sample size in most denominations (except Baptists and perhaps Anglicans) is too small at this stage. If you are an ex-pastor (and now in some other ministry or secular employment) your help would be appreciated.

Questionnaires may be obtained from Rev-Dr Rowland Croucher, 7 Bangor Court, Heathmont, Victoria, Australia 3135..

After pastoring Baptist churches both in Australia and Canada, and then serving with World Vision (Australia) in the area of leadership enhancement, **Rev Dr Rowland Croucher** founded John Mark ministries to pioneer research and establish ministry support structures for clergy: see johnmark.net.au

Why Clergy are leaving the Church – An English Response

Paul Beasley-Murray

As many ex-pastors in Australia as those serving in parishes of all denominations! The thought is mind-boggling. The question immediately arises: is massive ministerial fall-out a specifically Australian phenomenon, or is it also to be found here in the UK?

The simple answer is: nobody knows. Perhaps Peter Brierley and his Christian Research Association should come to our aid. Some preliminary research which I have undertaken does indicate that a large number of British ministers fail to continue in Christian ministry. More than 25% of ministerial students, who in the period 1955-1985 graduated from Spurgeon's College (and there is no reason to think that Spurgeon's is exceptional in this respect), going on to be ordained and inducted into Baptist churches, are no longer in any form of Christian ministry. That figure will presumably become even higher with the passage of time. Indeed, my gut feeling is that the overall figure for ministers in general is probably a good deal higher - certainly the majority of my theological college contemporaries are no longer in ministry.

It is true that changes in career are not peculiar to Christian ministry. But there is one crucial difference between other