

role to play. But we also need help to grow and develop in our understanding and practice of ministry: here such bodies as the RBIM have much to offer. For the church's sake - let alone for our own - we cannot afford to stand still. If our churches are to be on the move, we too must be on the move. This is the secret of the effective long-term pastorate.

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THE LONG-TERM PASTORATE - SOME REFLECTIONS

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These personal reflections were stimulated by the previous article. My own ministerial experience has included eighteen years in two ecumenical teams, and both New Town and Inner City ministries.

First, the length of our ministry will be affected by the **size of the church**. Small churches can seem like corvettes (see *The Cruel Sea*) - small ships which shudder with every wave; you feel every wind of change and upset. Large churches are like oil tankers, very slow to change, but disputes in one part of the church or in one congregation do not have repercussions everywhere else. An experienced pastor said, 'you cannot be a minister to a church with less than fifty members, only the chaplain to a matriarchy or patriarchy'. A small church can demand not only more time but also a greater variety of skills than a larger one. It is noticeable that the Salvation Army have a huge drop-out rate as they move their young officers from small corps to small corps with too little support, every two years.

Second, the **support we receive** both within and beyond the local church can make a real difference to our staying. Encouragement, perhaps crucially from outside, can affect whether we stay and

grow, or shrink and leave, particularly in a church which has been through difficulties, or is not very large. For Anglicans, curacies of four to five years or two shorter curacies provide valuable learning experience. Borough Deans, Archdeacons, Bishops, plus work consultants and spiritual directors, can all play a part in our development. At different times my Methodist and Baptist chairmen have been very supportive.

Third, each area we serve will have **different needs**. In a new town people are used to change and a minister may feel s/he has done what s/he can in six or seven years. On the other hand, new area congregations value long ministries when so much else is changing. In well-established communities, development is slow and the minister may need to stay at least ten years to see real growth.

Fourth, we can so easily underestimate our **role in the wider community**. If we see ministry in terms of geographical areas rather than in simple congregational terms, then a long ministry can be important to the local community. I remember when I was leaving after ten years in a parish one woman said, 'your congregation will soon get used to a new vicar, they see him every week (she was optimistic about church going!) but it's taken me ten years to meet you and now you are leaving'. A long community focused ministry provides growing links with local agencies, the town or city hall, community leaders and local politicians. Baptisms, marriages, and funerals and their follow ups can all be encouraged by people getting to know us over many years.

Fifth, **male and female** ministerial leadership can make all the difference not only to health and long-term welfare of our churches but also to our own fulfilment. Anglicans are only just discovering this.

Sixth, **working in teams with more than one church** can be a vital element in encouraging our growth and our commitment to ministry. I have been fortunate in having always worked in teams of at least three ministers. These have been Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and URC but also non-stipendiary ministers and ministers in secular employment. Their friendship and encouragement, the time to reflect together, to support each other critically, and the opportunity to develop gifts across congregations, can all be crucial for our development and provide the stimulus for many years' work.

Seventh, **renewable licences and an enabling assessment process**, seen by some as a threat, can provide a structure for responsible ministerial development. Regular responsible feedback, the possibilities for in-service training, and counselling, help us resist the temptation to move for a change, encouraging us to stay for growth. The Methodist system has a clear consultation process between minister and circuit and this continues at regular intervals.

Eighth, we need to recognise the creative tension between **ministry and management**. The kind of ministry we exercise will reflect the size as well as the needs of the local church. Churches of different sizes need different approaches to leadership. Have we the flexibility to learn new management skills for growth and at the same time relinquish the pastoral closeness that we may find so nurturing in a church where we can relate to everyone personally?

Ninth, '**Are you and your family happy here?**' is a familiar question. Our honest answer will depend on many factors. How our children, our partners, we ourselves, relate to the local community will affect our own fulfilment. People pick up how strongly we identify with the needs of the local community as well as the local congregation, particularly in inner city areas. This will enhance or undermine our sense of calling. For our children to grow up in one or two churches and communities will mean a great deal to them.

Tenth, so much depends on our **personal development**. Longer pastorates will be effective only to the degree that ministers are growing and developing, both spiritually and personally. As a colleague said, 'after five years you have exhausted all your tricks and then you get down to real ministry'. If we stay and grow there is far more chance that the people we serve will stay and grow too, both numerically and spiritually.

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