

Editorial

Paul Beasley-Murray

What do you mean by "a successful ministry"?, a middle-aged woman asked me sharply. At that time her husband was struggling with a dwindling congregation and a rot-infested building on the edge of the inner city. In spite of being a wonderfully caring pastor and a magnificently stimulating preacher, he was having a tough time leading his church through a period of major sociological changes. And here was I, a brash theological student, thoughtlessly referring to another minister in leafy well-heeled suburbia as having a 'successful ministry'. I deserved the challenge.

This incident came to mind as I read through this second issue of *Ministry Today*. Ministry can be tough. Nobody, for instance, can read Tim Marks' reflections on 'Rediscovering the Ministry' without sensing the pain and the frustration. As I know from my visit to his home, the village in which Tim lives is idyllic to the eye; and yet, from a spiritual perspective, the situation is as tough as the toughest inner city parish.

But then, ministry has always been tough. In this respect Ralph Martin's article on 'Paul's Ministry and Ours' is a salutary reminder. 2 Cor 4 is one of those chapters which ministers would do well to read and read again. The treasure of the gospel has always been entrusted to 'clay jars' (2 Cor 4:7). Weakness and frailty are built into ministry.

Significantly Kevin Yelverton in his mid-ministry reflections also quotes 2 Cor 4:7, save he refreshingly applies the imagery to the congregation as distinct from the pastor. Don't let's write off our people. In spite of all their warts, God is at work in their lives! What is more, in spite of all our warts, God is at work in our lives too. 'The Primacy of Grace' is, hopefully, the experience of us all.

From a very different perspective Martin Robinson challenges us with 'The Mission Field on our Doorstep'. But even in an article concerned with church growth, the theme of frailty is present. For as Martin points out, 'successful' church growth is not dependent upon powerful churches. The pioneering churches of the first

century were full of the same human frailties to be found today. Similarly today's vibrant churches of the two-thirds world are, from a Western perspective, 'powerless', and yet it is precisely there that we find a powerful model for mission.

Human frailties feature too in Morgan Derham's insightful contribution on 'Counselling in a Christian Context'. 'Holiness' as distinct from 'wholeness' is the aim of the Christian pastor-there's food for thought!

One final comment; let me remind readers that we are always happy to receive articles (between 500 and 3000 words) relating to the practice of ministry

THE MISSION FIELD ON OUR DOORSTEP

By Martin Robinson

We are now approaching the closing years of our twentieth century. This simple chronological fact has stimulated a great deal of thinking about the progress of the church and its mission over the last 100 years. At just the same point of time, 100 years ago, our forebears were engaged in a similar process of reflection. As they looked back on their century (the 19th), they were able to see the effects of the first 100 years of the modern missionary movement around the world. They knew that the church had seen enormous growth, both numerical and in percentage terms. The percentage of the world's population claiming to be Christian had grown from 10% to 33 % in that single century. Naturally, they began to wonder what the 20th might bring.

Their reflections, hopes and dreams came to a climax at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910. There, mission-minded church leaders began to talk in terms of 'completing the task of mission' during the 20th century. The phrase 'winning the world to Christ in our generation' became the watchword for the Conference. The conference developed some strategies Europe is now for accomplishing this task. The nature of these strategies can