

EDITORIAL – FIVE YEARS YOUNG

Paul Beasley-Murray

Five years ago, on 21 March 1994, the Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry was formally launched in the Council Chamber of the Free Church Federal Council in London's Tavistock Square. In our press release of that day we boldly stated:

"The RBIM does not pretend to offer a universal panacea to all the problems of ministry. However, in what is often a very lonely occupation, RBIM is setting out to offer help and support to Christian leaders....

"We are convinced that by encouraging creativity, vision and excellence in ministry the RBIM will be of benefit to: ministers, who will continue to develop and thereby find personal fulfilment and enrichment; churches which will be led with greater effectiveness and which will enjoy the fruits of a more positive ministry; the wider church, which will reap a greater investment from its resources as a result of improved ministerial morale and a reduced ministerial fall-out".

Although the RBIM has a long way to go before it begins truly to fulfil its ambitious potential, we dare to believe that in a modest way we have already begun to have an impact on the lives of ministers and other church leaders, and in this way on the lives of churches too.

From the very beginning RBIM has sought to be interdenominational, and in this we were helped by our informal association with the Bible Society. Although our Council of Reference has always been representative of all the main-line churches, the Roman Catholics apart, the Board initially reflected the Baptist origins of RBIM. Fortunately, the Board is now a little more representative of our constituency - true the Board still includes four Baptists, but we also have three Anglicans and one Methodist. Hopefully in the coming years we will become more truly representative of the churches in Britain.

Another change relates to our statement of purpose. Initially we sought to emphasise we were in the business of promoting 'excellence' in ministry. However, it became clear that for some the

word 'excellence' posed a threat, whereas for others for whom survival was the name of the game 'excellence' seemed a luxury. Without wishing to do away with the concept of excellence, we realised we needed to become more "user-friendly" and so have reworded our aim to bring out the twin-fact that we wish ministers both to survive and to thrive in ministry. Our new aim therefore is expressed as follows *"To provide a supportive resource for all in Christian leadership so that they may survive, grow, develop and become more effective in the ministry to which Christ has called them"*.

Over the last five years we have run a wide range of conferences in which we have dealt with such topics as "how to survive as a pastor"; "conflict, spirituality and egotism"; "surviving stress", "Gospel and truth in a fragmented society"; "spiritual direction"; "ministry and the work place"; "from maintenance to mission"; and "hatching, matching, and despatching". We have also run seminars on abuse, pressure points in ministry, pastoral care in a post-modern age, and power in the church. Numbers vary greatly - from around a dozen to forty people. Clearly the more people the better - however, the smaller conferences, being the most interactive, have sometimes proved the more fruitful.

Probably our chief achievement has been the production of *Ministry Today*. Every year three issues have appeared. The size of the issues has increased. Initially 54 pages in length, the journal now has a minimum of 64 pages - and yet the price remains the same! We have been fortunate in our contributors, who have not only covered a wide range of subjects, but have done so at a consistently high level. From feedback, we know that many have appreciated the large number of book reviews we have managed to include. *Ministry Today* remains a very special journal!

What of the future? Our present membership should enable RBIM to survive well into the new millennium. However, as Chairman of the Board I am not content with RBIM surviving - I wish to see it become an increasingly growing and thriving organisation. Unfortunately, there are still many who are not aware of our existence. It is at this point we need the help of our members. Frankly, we have not got the funds to market ourselves in the way that other Christian organisations are able to do. We depend on our members to make RBIM known to others. Will you help us? What a difference it would make if every member were to add

another member! To sweeten the pill of membership, we have not only maintained the same membership fee over the past five years but have also introduced the special value-for-money offer of a three-year subscription for only £35.

Yes, I firmly believe that churches will be the richer when ministers and other church leaders become members of RBIM.

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MINISTRY TODAY - A REFLECTION

Brian E Beck

Recently I was involved in a discussion of the anxiety levels of ordinands. While fully sure of their vocation many, it seemed, were very nervous about what they were getting into. Memory distorts the past, but I do not recall such an atmosphere before my own ordination, forty-odd years ago. Were we more naïve? Certainly, on average, we were younger than today's ordinands, but that only makes the phenomenon, if true, all the more remarkable. One would expect those bordering on middle age, with all their experience behind them, to be more confident. But I suspect that, if I were now to be among their number, I would share their uncertainty. Ministry today, it seems to me, is a more demanding business than once it was, for a variety of reasons.

Pastoral ministry has always made demands. The cure of souls, to use the traditional phrase, is no light matter. It calls for sensitivity to others, an ability to 'read people', theological insight and, above all, the pastor's own commitment as a disciple of Jesus Christ. That has always been the case, but over the years additional demands have accumulated.

Take for example the increasingly intrusive nature of secular legislation. Even if he or she is fortunate enough to be surrounded