

# EDITORIAL – THE TASK OF THE CHURCH IS TO KISS FROGS

## Paul Beasley-Murray

I collect frogs. Not real frogs - they unnerve me. No, pretend frogs. I have frogs made of stone, frogs made of plastic, frogs made of metal, frogs made of material, and so the list goes on. To entertain little children entering my church office I have a *Little Frog Book* which features a large rubber frog which squeaks every time it is pushed. In my office I have a frog door-step, a frog bookmark, frog pictures. You name it, I've got it. People in the 'know' help me with my frog collection. Sometimes they give me little frogs. At other times they send me froggy cards. Why, even in the last week I've received two such froggy cards.

It probably all sounds very strange. Certainly some ten-year old children looking around my church office the other day found it all a little puzzling. 'Why on earth does our minister have all these frogs decorating his room?'. There is, however, a very simple explanation. These frogs remind me of my calling, and indeed, not just my calling, but the calling of the church. My task - our task - is to kiss frogs.

Has the penny begun to drop? If not, let me explain what I have in mind a little more clearly by developing my froggy theme, courtesy of a parable I came across years ago in a book on small groups by the Australian John Mallison:

"Have you ever felt like a frog? You know the type of thing I mean - stone cold, clammy, ugly, drooping, green, lifeless - all by yourself in the middle of a pond! I have! And I've met plenty of others. We have one in our house nearly every morning. The only thing missing is the pond!

The frog blues (or should I say greens) come when

- you want to be bright, especially first thing in the morning, and you can't;
- you want to share, but are selfish;
- you want to feel thankful, but feel resentment;
- you want to be honest with others, but keep wearing a mask;
- you want to be somebody, but feel a nobody;

- you want to care, but the required effort makes you indifferent;
- you want to make friends, but will they?

If we are honest we have probably all sat on that lily pad in the middle of the pond. Often we have sat there for ages, too frightened or disgusted to jump off and swim. Maybe you're still on that lily pond, floating around and around, all froggy like, fed up and lonely.

Others we meet come across as frogs. They are so hard to love. Their personality doesn't attract others to them. They are either slow, shy, withdrawn and negative, or they are dominant, autocratic, forcing their opinions on others. Cold, unattractive frogs. You feel repulsed by them and want to ignore or throw a rock at them.

A parable might help. Once upon a time there was a frog. He was really a handsome prince under the nasty spell of a wicked witch. Only the kiss of a beautiful maiden could save him. So there he sat, an un-kissed prince of his lilypond kingdom. But (you've guessed it!) one day a beautiful maiden saw him, was overcome with pity, grabbed him and kissed him. Bingo! In a moment of time he stood transformed before her, a handsome prince. And you can guess the finish!

SO WHAT is the task of the church? To KISS FROGS of course!"

In my experience churches are full of frogs - those "cold, clammy, ugly, drooping, green, lifeless" things. If I am honest I have met people in churches whom I would never choose to be friends. Some have come over as the weirdest of odd-balls, while others can appear to be downright repulsive. And yet my experience is that once I begin to put my mind to loving these seemingly unlovely characters, I discover that they are no longer as unlovable as they first appeared.

So when I've had a bad afternoon visiting or sat through a difficult meeting, I retire to my office and see my frogs - and I remember that my task, as indeed the task of the church, is to kiss frogs. Frog-kissing isn't easy, but it can sometimes prove very rewarding. And by the way, a Biblical justification for frog-kissing is found in the words of Jesus: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13.34-35).