

# Editorial – Retirement? Not yet!

## Paul Beasley-Murray

I've just informed my church that I have no intention of retiring next Spring when I shall be 65 years of age, but rather have the strength, energy, and desire to continue to lead the church until I am 70. And the church members, God bless them, are delighted! When you are enjoying life and are fulfilled in ministry and have dreams of doing yet more for God, why step down just to receive a pension? The words of Robert Browning come to mind:

“Grow old along with me  
The best is yet to be” (Ben Ezra)

I feel sorry for some of my peers in ministry who are counting the number of Sundays to retirement. For them ministry has lost its sparkle - maybe they need to become part of *Ministry Today* and gain the stimulus not just to survive, but to thrive again in ministry. If I am honest, I do not have the energy I had when I was first ordained in my mid-twenties. I do get tired if I work a twelve hour day; there are times when I need to have ‘forty winks’ before going out again of an evening. But I delight in ministry - every day I thank God for calling me into ministry. It is that delight and that joy which re-energise me to serve him.

And any rate, why retire when my wife has no intention of retiring? If I am not careful, I will end up doing the dishes three times a day, instead of twice a day! I find it of interest that few of my wife's coroner colleagues retire at 65 - most much prefer to go on until they are 70. They enjoy the challenge of their jobs, even though (more than some ministers) they are on duty 24/7.

### **My rôle in the final years of ministry**

My vision for the remaining six or so years of my ministry is that they will be the most fruitful and most joyous of years. However, if these hopes are to be fulfilled, then in my current role as Senior Minister of Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, I need to give attention to the following five tasks:

I need to continue to be the Leader - implementing strategy, communicating vision, and embodying the church's core values.

I need to continue to be the Preacher. Although there are others who share in this task, I believe that God has called and gifted me to play a special role in expounding his Word, Sunday by Sunday.

I need to continue to be the Pastor. One of the privileges and joys of a long ministry is to be able to be alongside many families as they go through the life cycle of birth, marriage and death. Indeed, I dare to believe that my very longevity in my present pastorate (15+ years) is a special gift I have to offer.

I need to continue to be the 'Patron' (in the restaurant sense of the term - i.e. 'mine host'), welcoming newcomers and integrating them into the fellowship. If our church is to grow, then effective assimilation is vital.

I need to continue to be the Team Builder, giving particular attention to my leadership team as in the next year it undergoes radical re-structuring with a view to the team becoming more efficient in managing the vision of the church.

As readers will note, I have left out some key areas of ministry. I have, for instance, said nothing about evangelism and nurture. However, the fact is that I cannot do everything, and I am therefore more than happy to delegate these key tasks to others.

### **My hopes for myself over the next 6 years**

There is more to life than church - even if one works 60 hours a week, there are always more than 100 hours left! If I am going to remain effective in ministry, then I need to continue to grow and develop myself. Over the next six years I want to:

- Grow in Christ
- Keep physically fit
- Enjoy life with Caroline
- Strengthen family relationships
- Broaden friendships
- Support fellow ministers
- Develop my culinary skills
- Expand my horizons

### **What if...?**

What if my health or other circumstances were to change? What if my vision, my drive, my energy to fulfil my call, were to wane? I am mindful of the truth expressed by Malcolm Muggeridge: "Few

men of action have been able to make a graceful exit at the appropriate time". I do not want to cling to office, whatever. My children, let alone my wife, have never been slow in coming forward as far as constructive criticism is concerned. My decision to continue in ministry is not written in stone - as at any time in the past, I am always at liberty to give the church due notice and leave. But in the meantime, like Caleb, I have mountains to climb. Now is not the time to find my rocking chair!

## Life After Death

### Ian Gregory

*Retired Congregational minister and founder of Agnostics OK*

More people read the 'family announcements' page in our local paper than any other part, including the racing results and houses for sale. It is the deaths we are all looking for. About 20 a day, noted in small print, and in jargon as taught in the Funeral Directors' training school.

The word 're-united' often occurs in these announcements, in accordance with a general belief that the deceased have been welcomed into heaven. News reports of tragic death frequently say that a friend or relative departed soul is now 'looking down' with approval and support. This popular belief is widely expressed, but there is little teaching from theologians and church leaders, about a subject on which they might be expected to have something positive to say. Is it true? Can life beyond death be asserted with confidence? Have we anything believable to say about it to the bereaved, and all those who contemplate their own demise with anxiety: or at least interest; that is most of us?

Christians tend to be nervous about the 'after life' because it sounds as if they are moving into spiritualism. It is assumed that our faith bans even the mildest speculation about what happens to people when they die. Evangelists point to the 'sin of divination' as when King Saul consults the 'witch of Endor' to call up the prophet Samuel after his death (1 Sam 28), and Paul warns us against 'witchcraft' in Gal 5.20. But we cannot manage our lives on the basis of religious rules by which ancient priests maintained power