

woman sat up in bed, astonished. “How do you know that tune?” she asked. My mother was confused. It had just come to her mind. The tune was one the sick woman’s late husband always whistled when he came home from his work. He had been ‘dead’ for years. Neither of the women had been thinking of him at the time. Of course, such events ‘prove’ nothing, but they serve to indicate there are ‘more things in heaven and earth than this world dreams of’.

I am offering a five-session course on *Life Beyond Death* this autumn based on an excellent book of that name by an Anglican academic called Vernon White.²¹² It examines the case for belief with sensible caution. It is, White says, a subject on which the church has lost its nerve, and which should be put back on the agenda. The Quaker Meeting house is an ideal location for the course, and we are using it for ‘agnostics and lapsed believers’ who say they are nervous about going into overtly church premises. The local paper is carrying a news item about it, and the local funeral directors have been given a ‘flier’ to hand out to the bereaved at their discretion. The course will centre on each of four chapters in Vernon White’s book:

1. The persistence of the transcendent;
2. The crisis of death and the credibility of theism;
3. Meanings of resurrection;
4. Living truthfully with hope.

The fifth session will be for de-briefing and discussion. The group - Agnostics OK - will then move to monthly sessions about the nature of other faith systems.

Supervision In The Local Church: Some Preliminary Thoughts

Paul Beasley-Murray

For 28 years I have been a pastor in charge of a local church. For most of that time I have ‘done my own thing’, without any real regard to others in the church. True, for the last 15 years I have

²¹² Vernon White *Life Beyond Death* (DLT, London 2006).

enjoyed an annual ‘appraisal’²¹³; but for most of that time I have not had to give a regular account of my ministry to anybody. I have never experienced formal ‘supervision’.

For the first seven years or so of my ministry I was a solo pastor, but after those seven years I began to have ‘staff’. My first member of staff was a pastoral assistant, then I had an ‘assistant’ minister. In addition I enjoyed the services of three young ‘interns’. Since moving to my present church I have had ‘assistants’ and ‘associates’²¹⁴. Currently I have a staff team made up of four ministers (including myself), an ‘intern’, a half-time children’s worker, and three support staff. Over the years I have almost always enjoyed good relationships with my staff. I would have said that I have managed my staff well - and yet, it has not until the last couple of years that, at the prompting of my lay leaders, I have begun to engage in meaningful ‘supervision’.

It is therefore within the context of being still very much a ‘learner’ that I offer this article, which first explores the issue of supervision within a staff team, which is my current situation, and then explores the possibility of supervision within solo ministry.

Supervision in a staff team

One of the key roles of senior pastors is exercising oversight of the members of their staff team. This is an essential part of being a senior pastor. For, to my way of thinking, the position of senior pastor is one of role, and not of status. The senior pastor is the ‘team leader’²¹⁵ and as such has oversight of the staff who form the church staff team. The purpose of this oversight is to ensure that the team members are clear about their role in implementing the vision and strategy of the church, to give them encouragement

²¹³ I tend to use to use the terms ‘appraisal’ and ‘review’ interchangeably. However, a distinction has been made between an ‘appraisal’, which is a review of past performance and is often related to pay and promotion, and a ministerial ‘review’ which is future orientated and looking at development needs. In a church setting, where ministers receive ‘stipends’, appraisals are not linked to pay. However, any ministerial review must include some evaluation of past performance.

²¹⁴ In Baptist churches ‘assistant’ ministers are akin to Anglican curates, and come to the church straight from theological college: although they have been ordained, as ‘newly accredited ministers’ of the Baptist Union of Great Britain they have to serve a probationary period of three years if they were trained in a Baptist college, and four years if they were in another theological institution. ‘Associate’ ministers have already served their probationary period.

²¹⁵ In some Baptist churches ‘team leader’ is used as the title for the senior pastor.

and support in that role, and to hold them accountable for implementing the vision and the agreed strategy. Technically, this oversight is known as ‘supervision’. Supervision has long been a reality of life in many other professions. However, supervision is relatively new in church life, not least because the development of staff teams is relatively new.

Supervision is not always welcome in the life of a larger church. In the first place, the responsibility of oversight is not always welcomed by senior pastors. Regular ‘supervision’ is time-consuming, especially where there are perhaps several members of staff - the temptation is simply to allow colleagues to get on with the job. But colleagues will not always get on with the tasks which are required of them. It is not that they are lazy, but that they may be side-tracked, with the result that they end up putting time and effort into activities which are not part of the church’s agreed agenda. This sometimes is why team members are not keen on supervision, for supervision holds them accountable for their ministry. Accountability is not welcome to those of an independent spirit! However, accountability is intrinsic to ministry. In the words of an Anglican report: “Clergy can never consider themselves in private practice. All are under authority and accountable to one another as independent members of the body of Christ”.²¹⁶ That accountability involves more than the acceptance of a ‘common rule of life’: it needs to be expressed in supervision.

Supervision, rightly handled, can, however, be a very positive experience. Supervision is about providing support and encouragement to colleagues. Supervision provides an opportunity for senior pastors to take an informed interest in the ministry of their colleagues - to give recognition and praise where it is due.

It is important to emphasise that supervision is not about micro-management. It is not about telling others what to do. To use supervision as an opportunity to tell others how to do their work is to stifle creativity. Supervision is not about control, but rather is an encouragement to others to own and take responsibility for their role. Susan Beaumont points out that “the appropriate object

²¹⁶ *Ministerial Review: Its Purpose and Practice* (ABM Ministry Paper No.6) quoted with approval in *Servants and Shepherds: Developments in the Theology and Practice of Ministerial Review* (ABM Ministry Paper No.19 Paragraph 25)

of supervision is a verb, not a noun”²¹⁷. A person is a noun - their work is a verb. “What is being supervised is the performance of the staff member as he or she works toward identified outcomes” ²¹⁸.

Supervision is about encouraging individual team members to learn from their experience. In the context of the church, such learning can be very practical and can concern the nuts and bolts of church life. On the other hand, the learning can involve theological reflection on church life.

Supervision involves reviewing the past. In the first instance an opportunity is given to staff to report back on actions they have taken in the light of their previous meeting, and to review what they have achieved both in terms of those actions, as indeed of other actions taken. Second, this review of the past gives an opportunity to staff to give an account of what they have learned since the past meeting. Such learning might be formal or informal. It might involve what they have learned from attending a course or reading a book, or it might involve what they have learned about people or indeed about God as a result of their ministry. Supervision in a church context is an opportunity for theological reflection.

The review of the past should also include the question: “What new partnerships have you made?” Ministry is not a solo act, but is about developing relationships and strengthening partnerships with others, both within and without the church.

Supervision is also about the future. It gives an opportunity for staff to share their plans for the immediate future, what their primary goals will be over the next few weeks.

Supervision involves preparation on the part of staff members. It is they who in the first instance provide the agenda for the meeting. Ideally they come with written notes for the senior pastor, in which they outline their reflections on the past and their hopes for the future. Such preparation takes time, but it makes the supervision session so much more worthwhile. It is also helpful if there could be a written note of the outcomes of the supervision session. This could be the responsibility of the person being supervised; on the other hand Rendle and Beaumont suggest that

²¹⁷ Gil Rendle & Susan Beaumont, *When Moses meets Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations* (Alban, Herndon, Virginia, 2007) 93.

²¹⁸ *When Moses meets Aaron* 94.

the senior pastor “drafts a brief (one page) written response memo within 48 hours, noting issues of agreement from the conversation, as well as topics that should be revisited in the subsequent performance management conversation”²¹⁹.

Where there are good relationships between senior pastors and their staff, in any given week there will be frequent opportunity for informal personal conversation and reporting back. However, such conversation is not supervision. Supervision involves a degree of formality. Supervision is probably best conducted on a monthly basis.

Senior pastors need supervision too!

Senior pastors are not exempt from accountability. Accountability is an essential part of all ministry. In the Church of England, for instance, such ministers are accountable to the bishop. Working in a Baptist church, I am accountable ultimately to the ‘church meeting’²²⁰ through our sixteen-strong ‘leadership team’²²¹. I am in the first place accountable to a small ‘support and personnel group’ which meets with me on a monthly basis. As part of my accountability, I normally submit to this group a weekly written report, which includes my diary for the coming week. In addition I have recently agreed that every four months I will prepare for our leadership team a written account of how I have sought to implement the agreed vision and strategy of the church. As an experiment I have also agreed to participate every six months in a performance management review!

Supervision where there is no staff team

In my book *Power for God’s Sake: The use and abuse of power in the local church*²²², which was based on a survey of 141 ministers and 112 church ‘officials’, I looked at the issue of ministerial accountability, and concluded: “Generally speaking, accountability appears to be a myth. Ministers by and large have few restrictions placed upon them. Put crudely, provided they ‘pay the rent’ by conducting the services and by visiting some of the key members of

²¹⁹ *When Moses meets Aaron* 102

²²⁰ In a Baptist church the ‘church meeting’ is made up of all the members of the church who gather together regularly to ‘discern the mind of Christ’.

²²¹ Our ‘leadership team’ is made up of twelve ‘deacons’ and the four ministers.

²²² Paul Beasley-Murray, *Power for God’s Sake: Power and Abuse in the Local Church* (Paternoster, Carlisle 1998).

the church, they can often get away with 'blue murder' if they wish... This lack of accountability is tantamount to an abuse of power".²²³ I discovered that 77% of ministers had no formal job description. Although 36% of ministers claimed to undergo regular appraisal, in fact only 18% underwent annual appraisal. For the most part ministers are on their own as far as their job is concerned. I do not believe that this is at all healthy, either for the church or indeed for the minister.

In *Power for God's Sake*, I advocated the use of external supports such as 'supervisors', therapists, spiritual directors, and work consultants. However, at that stage in my thinking I only applied the term 'supervision' to counselling. I wrote: "In the counselling profession people are not recognised as qualified nor are they allowed to work with 'clients' unless they are in supervision. Yet ministers are able to counsel people haphazardly. Although supervision is no guarantee that abuse of one kind or another will not take place, it does provide regular opportunities for carers to reflect on their handling of their 'clients'. In turn this enables them to become more aware, both of themselves and also of the dynamics of the relationship involved. Where there is supervision, the risks of abuse are lessened."²²⁴

The supervision which I now advocate is much broader than the supervision I earlier advocated - and includes all of a minister's work. I believe that for the well-being of both the church and the individual, supervision in terms of exercising oversight over a person's ministry has much to commend it. Such oversight should not be regarded as controlling, but rather as a form of support.

How might supervision work within traditional solo ministry? It could take the form of a monthly meeting with one of the church's lay leaders, in which there was reflection on the past month and a looking forward to the next month. Alternatively, a monthly meeting could take place with an outside 'consultant' or with a senior minister from a neighbouring church, who might act as a 'mentor'. It might be possible for 'peers' to supervise one another. To gain the most of such supervision, it would need to involve more than the opening of a diary and a casual chat. It would involve a degree of formality, in which the minister addressed the kind of

²²³ *Power for God's Sake* 57,58

²²⁴ *Power for God's Sake* 61

questions which have been suggested for a meeting between a staff member and the senior minister. It would assume that the church had drawn up a job description for the minister and had agreed a series of objectives within the context of a church development plan. Ministry is more than a round of activities such as preaching, visiting, counselling, and representing the church in the community. Ministry involves leading a church forward in its ministry and mission, which in turn necessitates an agreed direction together with an agreed use of resources. Leadership involves management, and management entails strategies and objectives. Supervision is there to ensure that ministers are not just busily engaged, but effectively engaged too.

Supervision is about being a good steward of one's call. It is not to be regarded as a 'stick', but rather as a 'carrot' - it provides an opportunity to break out of that isolation which so many solo ministers experience. It promotes good ministry.

Supervision has a biblical basis

To some ministers supervision, along with appraisal and ministerial review, is theologically anathema. They argue that first and foremost they are accountable to God, and not to their people. There is support for this position from the New Testament. For instance, the writer to the Hebrews makes it clear that leaders of the flock of God are accountable to the Lord (Hebs 13.17). Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, emphasises that he is the first place a servant of God, and not of men (Gal 1.10: see also 1 Cor 4.2,5). In Eph 4.11, it is Christ who 'gives' pastor-teachers to his church, which in turn means that it is from Christ that pastor-teachers derive their authority, and it is to Christ that they owe their allegiance. But this is not the whole story. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, depicts leaders being accountable to the church which has recognised their calling and set them apart for service (Acts 13.1-3; 14.27). Paul's image of the church as the body of Christ makes it clear that individual members exercise their own roles, but for the good of all (1 Cor 12.12-26), which in turn implies "accountability to one another for exercising our part for the good of the whole"²²⁵. The teaching of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel would

²²⁵ See the section entitled 'Gift and Responsibility' in *Ministerial Review: Its Purpose and Practice* (ABM Ministry Paper No.6)

suggest that, at least in questions of church discipline, ultimate authority lies with the church (Matt 18.15-20).

The exercise of one's God-given ministry independent of the church and its authority has no place in Scripture. I sometimes wonder whether those who argue for the ministry's independency are using theology as a smoke screen for their sense of insecurity.

A Baptist at the 2008 Lambeth Conference

Paul Beasley-Murray

I have just returned from six exhausting days at the Lambeth Conference. It was 'full on' from morning to night. I confess that I never made Morning Prayer at 6.30 a.m., but along with most of the bishops I was present at the 7.15 a.m. Eucharist, and from then on there was no stopping. Breakfast was immediately followed by Bible study, which was then immediately followed by 'indaba' groups. Most afternoons and evening were packed with meetings, where attendance was not compulsory, but nonetheless desirable. The conference was tiring not just because of the number of hours one was working, but because of the intensity of many of the sessions. Unlike Spring Harvest or the Baptist Assembly, this was not a 'jolly' - this was hard work.

I went to the Lambeth Conference to represent the Baptist World Alliance for the second week of its proceedings (Geoff Colmer had been there for the first week). There were over twenty ecumenical guests: an Australian Seventh Day Adventist from the USA, an English Salvation Army officer from Denmark, a Scottish representative of the Reformed Churches from the USA, a member of the Uniting Church of Australia representing the Methodists, and also representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, and other churches too. We were a motley crew, who were made most welcome by our Anglican friends. Like all the bishops and their spouses we went around with purple bands round our necks - with the result that I was constantly addressed as 'bishop' by the stewards! Some bishops were surprised to discover that I was not in some form of trans-local ministry: however, I delighted to inform them that in Baptist