

Pastoral Care Today

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I have in front of me a copy of *Pastoral Care Today: Practice, Problems and Priorities in Churches Today* (CWR, Farnham, Surrey, 2000), an interim report from a survey, initiated by CWR/Waverley Christian counselling in association with the Evangelical Alliance, and conducted by the Centre for Ministry Studies, University of Wales, Bangor. The analysis of the responses of the first 754 pastors who completed the survey make for instructive, and at times fascinating, reading.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, only 5% of pastors in the survey are female. This confirms my suspicion that there is a clear bias in evangelical churches against women in ministry, even although women clearly out-number men in the congregation. On the other hand, in a survey some four years ago of ministers subscribing to *Ministry Today*, an even lower percentage (3%) were women!

Only 2% of pastors are divorced, while only 3% are single. The report makes the interesting comment that "the low number of divorced pastors raises questions about the churches' pastoral responsibility to those pastors who experience marriage break-up. Many seem to disappear both from ministry and from the churches' pastoral concern".

Only 36% of pastors have a degree in theology - 53% have no university qualification in theology. As many as one in five have received no formal or recognised training for their pastoral ministry. I find this deeply disturbing. It would appear that many evangelical churches give little importance to the training of the mind for Christian ministry. By contrast the majority of these pastors are charismatically committed - only 22% do not speak 'in tongues'. This reflects the way in which the Evangelical Alliance has become identified with the charismatic movement.

The size of congregations varied. Some 17% were pastoring churches with less than 50 people, but 25% were pastoring churches with more than 200 people in the congregation. Does this reflect the fact that evangelical churches tend to be numerically strong churches?

Two out of every five pastors feel overwhelmed by pastoral care demands, and over half have considered leaving the ministry. The

report comments: "The fact that 53% of pastors have considered leaving the ministry should be a matter of considerable concern, given the view that many others may already have left". Comparatively few pastors appear to be provided with the appropriate professional support to maintain the delivery of effective pastoral care. The majority of pastors (64%) said that their spouses were the main source of their pastoral care. This in turn raises the question: what happens when both the pastor and his/her spouse are in need of pastoral care?

The following needs were identified as the six key pastoral issues facing pastors today: stress (66%), marriage guidance (62%), bereavement (56%), unforgiveness (54%), loneliness (49%) and depression (49%). Second tier pastoral issues were identified as following: single-parent families (37%), debt (37%), conducting funerals (37%), marriage preparation (36%), dying (436%), family counselling (34%), terminal illness (33%), visiting hospitals (32%) and divorce (32%). Low priority pastoral issues included victims of bullies (9%), eating disorders (8%), abortion (7%), rape victims (3%) and abuse of the elderly (2%). The report comments: "These figures suggest that pastors may not be listening carefully enough to some of the issues of pastoral concern which are of growing importance in today's society".

In terms of ministry priorities, the pastors in the survey wanted, above all, to be preachers of the word and people of prayer. Interestingly, in a list of eight priorities, the task of leading public worship came last, while being a visitor or manager did not feature at all!

LOST SOULS: WHAT DO WE THINK WE ARE?

Rowan Williams

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One of the problems that we face these days when we try to communicate what faith is about might be expressed in these terms: we are trying to change the content without changing the style. That is to say, we can treat what we have to say about the