

## EDITORIAL – Working with Seniors

### Paul Beasley-Murray

My church is doing a great work amongst ‘seniors’. Among other things we run, on a monthly basis, two luncheon clubs, a session on Christian basics, followed by a lunch entitled ‘Food for Thought’, and a Sunday afternoon ‘seeker’ service. I would think that we must be in touch with some 200 ‘seniors’. But increasingly the ‘seniors’ who come to us are elderly, if not ‘frail-aged’ - walking sticks and Zimmer-frames abound! We need to reach the active ‘retirees’. With that in mind I wrote the following ‘memo’:

“People attending pre-retirement courses are encouraged to develop a positive image of the next period of life. ‘Retirement - the adventure begins!’ Unfortunately the term ‘seniors ministry’ evokes an image of ‘age’ and ‘passivity’ - it is as if the retired are there to be ‘served’, rather than to be up and doing themselves. Maybe we need to do away with the term ‘seniors ministry’ - indeed, maybe we need to do away with the term ‘seniors’. If we are to attract the ‘younger retired’, then we must develop a more outgoing and demanding programme of activities. The needs of the ‘younger retired’ are not the same as those of the ‘frail aged’. The younger retired want to

1. **Socialise.** One of the good things of being retired is that we have ‘permission to play’. Having ‘fun’ together, however, can involve more than board games or a gentle round of golf! The newly retired now have time to go out together and do things they have never done before.
2. **Use their minds.** Another of the good things of being retired is that we can engage in learning opportunities without having to sit exams! Now is the time to use our minds. Now is the time to read and think - to listen and learn.
3. **Grow spiritually.** Yet another good thing of being retired is that we now have time to study God’s Word, to develop our prayer life, and to explore new and unfamiliar paths of spirituality.
4. **Serve God.** Retirement is a great opportunity to use one’s energy, experience, and creativity to do something significant for God. Although the church offers avenues for service through its various organisations, many of the newly retired

are looking for 'projects' either in the local community or in the third world".

## **Losing a Staff Member - A Case Study**

### **Anonymous**

I have just lost a staff member, who for the sake of anonymity I shall call Peter. Peter has resigned - and resigned in the sense that he has nowhere else to go. It is a desperately sad business - sad for Peter, sad for the church, and sad for me.

My sadness is mixed with a great sense of relief. However, I am fully aware that nobody is a winner in such a situation. Not only Peter has been damaged, but so too has the church, and so too have I. Here I have in mind not simply damage in terms of reputation, but also damage in terms of mission: so many hours have been spent and so much energy and effort have been expended on resolving the situation, and in so doing we have lost a good deal of our focus on mission.

Without going into detail, the resignation centres around a difference of understanding of ministry. No sooner had we invited Peter to join our staff team than I received an e-mail stating: "I do not see myself as a member of your staff but, as by the grace of God, a minister of this church. I am a fellow minister, a colleague... I find the concept of 'being managed' inappropriate". For the last two to three years, this has been the issue. With the greatest of difficulty Peter accepted a job specification, monthly supervision, and annual appraisal - in the end he rejected them all.

With hindsight Peter should never have come to us. He should have remained a solo priest. But he had made shipwreck of his last parish, and so he was grateful to find a 'haven' with us. And to be fair, we were grateful to receive him. He came to us prepared to work half-time for relatively little money, because his spouse is a high-flyer and earns well, he said he did not want to be paid the going rate for the job. Furthermore, in some respects he has done very well and has been much appreciated by many in the church. It is therefore all the more sad that we have lost him.