F E L L O W W O R K E R S

Discussion papers for the Church Committee

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Contents

Preface

We call them different names, and give them slightly different powers—the Anglicans have a parish council, the Presbyterians a committee of management, and the Baptists a diaconate.

Church committees play a vital role in the spread of the gospel in our society. They make many of the nuts-and-bolts decisions affecting ministry in the local congregation, and usually with very little outside support or input. Committee members are often keen to support the pastor (and his team) but sometimes are not sure where to start.

Fellow Workers fills this gap with a set of informative, relevant discussion papers for the church committee. We hope that these papers will serve as a stimulus for thinking through where your church is heading and how you might more effectively proclaim Christ and build up his people. They are by no means the last word on the various topics. They are *discussion papers* and we expect that you will disagree with some things and agree with others.

How to use *Fellow Workers*

We have imagined that *Fellow Workers* will be used something like this:

- The committee decides how frequently they are going to use the material: every meeting, every second meeting, or whatever. You might prefer to get together for a weekend or a day and work through the papers. You may decide to purchase a set out of church funds.

- Each member of the committee reads through their own copy of *Fellow Workers* before the meeting. We have deliberately left wide margins so that notes, questions, exclamation marks, and other jottings can be made as you go along. There is also a Personal Observations box at the end of each paper to write down any ideas that come to mind.

- At the meeting, one member starts the discussion by giving a three-minute summary of the contents of the paper, plus perhaps a further three-minute critique. There are two boxes at the end of each paper in which to record points that come up in the discussion, plus any suggestions or decisions for Action.

1
Fellow Workers in the Gospel

How do you feel when church committee night comes around again? Do you recoil from the trauma of yet another monthly meeting? Do feelings of guilt well up over the jobs you promised to do but haven't yet started? Do you face the prospect of another congregational brawl, with the usual factions engaging in their divisive disputes? Or do you look forward to a fun night of Christian fellowship that goes too late and is regretted the next morning as you stagger out of bed to work?

Of course, we all long for the ideal church committee, where the truth is spoken in love, and where we can reason together without contention or prejudice. We dream of a committee where wise and rational decisions advance the cause of Christ, where the members can all express their opinions and be taken seriously, and where a common frame of mind is reached and godly decisions are made.

Very often, however, the reality is far different. Some of us endure strife-torn committees, where the least agenda item requires international diplomacy, and where much blood and many words are spilt before any progress is made. Then again, we are equally discouraged by a church committee that functions as no more than a rubber stamp, with a couple of powerful personalities expressing their views, and the rest of the group falling into line.

Is it possible to produce an ideal committee? Before we look at some ways in which we might improve our church committee, or at least our contribution to it, we need to remember that our problems may be fundamentally spiritual. "…Discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions…"—this description of all too many church committees comes from the list of "acts of the sinful nature" in Galatians 5. There are certainly no mechanical or artificial means to over-

come these problems—they can only be mastered by "keeping in step with the Spirit". Every member needs to be touched by God's Spirit, so that they might be godly in all areas of life, including the church committee. The state of our church committee is indicative of the response to the gospel of the whole congregation.

Keeping the spiritual dimension in mind, how can we improve the operation of our church committees?

Who are we?

We need to start by working out who we are and what we're trying to do? What is our function or task? How should we operate? What is our relationship to the pastor/s and to the congregation?

Legally
Each of our denominations has rules that apply to church committees, and the above questions can be answered, at one level, by recourse to the law book. However, establishing our rights and duties like this is the first step towards antagonism. Appealing to the 'rules' tends to be the response of the insecure personality, and far from promoting 'speaking the truth in love', leads more usually to pitched constitutional battle.

Sometimes, in the context of conflict, we need to know where we stand legally and fight for the truth on that basis—and so committee members should know what the legal structure is. However, thinking of ourselves *primarily* in these terms establishes the committee on the basis of power, status and vested interest. This is disastrous for our godliness.

Biblically
Where do we fit in terms of the Bible? Are we the deacons of Acts 6? Or are we the elders described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1? People, and denominations, have reached different conclusions. The New Testament is vague on the precise structures of church government. Clearly, elders existed who were responsible for ruling 'the household'. Somehow these elders were assisted by deacons, whose task is ill-defined. We are not even sure if the deacons of Acts 6 were the deacons of 1 Timothy 3. 1 Timothy 5:17 confuses things further by implying that not all elders were involved in preaching and teaching. In terms of a standard system of church government, the New Testament does not have a lot to say. It is sufficiently vague for us to be free to set our own agenda.

Another factor in establishing the identity of the church committee is whether we are elected or appointed. An elected committee represents the congregation, and may or may not be gifted for leadership, planning or teaching. It has the confidence and goodwill of the congregation, and so is very useful for monitoring the finances and for representing congregational opinion on particular issues. However, as a decision-making body it may not be effective—it will most likely represent too many viewpoints expressed by people not gifted to sift through them. Sometimes people are elected whose spiritual grasp is limited, or who are even unconverted. Congregational elections tend to favour popular or winsome personalities and omit the Jeremiahs and Ezekiels who may be closer to God's mind.

This is not to say that those who are appointed will always be godly and wise. But the composition of the committee—the ratio of elected to appointed members—will affect its self-perception and method of operation.

These three areas, then—our legal status, the Bible's pattern, and the method of constituting the committee—tell us little in answer to our question 'Who are we?'. We will do better to see ourselves as *fellow workers in the gospel*. As fellow workers we can labour together to further the gospel in whatever way we see fit, to bring glory to Christ and salvation to mankind. If we see ourselves primarily as fellow workers in the same cause, the priorities and methods we adopt will be based on a common commitment to the gospel, rather than on legal enactment or traditional structures. This attitude of heart will enable our church committees to move much closer to the ideal.

What should we do?

As fellow workers in the gospel, we must work to spread the gospel and build up God's people. We may use a variety of gifts that God has given us, and we may exercise a diversity of ministries, but our goals will be the same.

The chief elements of this gospel work are the ministries of *prayer* and *the word*. This is the pattern of the apostles in Acts 6, who delegated the work of "waiting on tables" so that they could give their attention "to prayer and the ministry of the word". (This is also reflected in the distinction between speaking and serving in 1 Peter 4:11.) 'Waiting on tables' did not mean that the seven deacons could not minister the word as well—the powerful word-ministry of Stephen is described in the very

same chapter. However, 'waiting on tables' in order to liberate others for prayer and the ministry of the word is a marvellous example of using our diverse gifts for the common good.

We should therefore concentrate on the ministries of word and prayer. In so doing, we will fulfil our aims of seeing the gospel spread and God's people built up. Whether this involves us in praying and teaching, or in maintaining the buildings in which others pray and teach, we need to work together in the following ways.

1 Encourage prayer and the ministry of the word.

Prayer and word-ministry are at the heart of gospel work. They must be at the top of our agenda. They must be the chief criteria in our decision making. Sometimes this will entail direct decisions such as granting the minister study leave, or employing more people to minister. At other times the decisions will be more indirect—how to invest our money, budget priorities, or the architecture of our buildings. Whatever the decision, the question foremost in our minds must be: "Will this facilitate the ministries of prayer and word?" Although this is not the only consideration in our decision-making it is the most important one.

- Should we add extra rooms to the minister's residence?
- How much should we contribute to his superannuation scheme?
- Should we increase the budget allocation for flowers in the church building?

These questions, and many others like them, need to be resolved according to whether they will contribute to the ministries of prayer and the word, or be a distraction.

2 Remove unnecessary detail

Church committees are notorious for getting bogged down in detail and trivia while important principles and decisions receive scant attention. (Perhaps a suitable text is Matthew 23:24). This is a result of our failure to delegate. We should appoint/elect appropriate people to make these trivial decisions and have the confidence and goodwill to accept their decisions—even if we might not agree. If the matter is trivial, what does it matter?.

Another way forward is to reorganize our agenda so that the important matters occur in the early part of the evening. (For a discussion of agenda-setting, see paper 2.) We also need to spend plenty of time sharing our vision rather than always discussing the details of how we are going to fulfil it. Often we disagree about the details because we haven't developed a

shared vision. Our debates over concrete issues can often be resolved by addressing the more profound issues of where we are heading and why.

3 Avoid division

While it is important that we discuss things carefully and that all the relevant facts and opinions are aired, it is unhelpful to conclude every discussion with a vote. Division is the inevitable result. It is common for parties to develop within the church committee and for issues to be decided along these lines, rather than on the basis of reason and wisdom. The rationale for decision-making becomes: "Because I voted with you on the last issue, I'm quite likely to vote with you again."

Reaching decisions by majority rule creates an alienated minority. This minority might be willing to live with the majority decision, but they will continue to doubt its wisdom. And each subsequent decision based on this one will reinforce the difference of opinion. Finishing each discussion with a vote creates an adversarial system that inhibits free expression and the exploration of possibilities.

It is important to look for common ground, and to think laterally to come up with new unifying solutions. Divisiveness and party spirit are works of our sinful nature, and they undermine our role as fellow workers in the gospel. Our unity as a church committee is indicative of our unity as a congregation—the extent to which we are committed to the same goals and ideals. It is important that we do all that we can to maintain this unity, even at the expense of making a decision tonight, and especially at the expense of making the decision 'my way'. (The issue of 'consensus decision making' will be discussed further in paper 3.)

4 Invest *in* ministry

People, rather than buildings, minister the gospel. People must therefore be the focus of our investment. We must look for people who are soundly converted and well-trained in the truths of the gospel, whose lives demonstrate the godliness that the gospel brings, and whose ministry is already acceptable to others. We must not invest in property or structures ahead of these people.

We also should not limit our investment in people to money. If there is any way in which we can encourage and spur them on in their work, or free them from distractions from their task, or recruit others to help them, we should do it. If we short-change those involved in ministry, and treat them shoddily, we only succeed in inhibiting the work of the gospel—this is hardly being good fellow workers.

When the minister is treated in a stingy and mean-spirited fashion he is discouraged from the work of the gospel. When he receives generosity and positive warmth, he is encouraged to plough on, and is freed from the worries and anxieties of the world. The amount of money we pay the minister is, in one sense, irrelevant—but the spirit in which it is paid is vital. Treating the minister kindly and thoughtfully offers him great encouragement. He feels that the church committee are on his side, that they regard him as a good investment and that they want to do everything they can to encourage him.

Conversely, the cycle of negativity is fatal to effective ministry. If a particular minister feels that his church committee is not behind him and does not value his work, he will approach each meeting defensively, perhaps resorting to wielding authority to get his way. This reinforces the committee's attitude, the warfare intensifies, and the minister is eaten up by bitterness. His ministry to the whole congregation inevitably suffers, and this further confirms the committee's dissatisfaction with him. In this situation, everybody loses—the minister, the committee and the work of the gospel.

5 Invest *for* ministry

We need to provide resources for ministers to do their work effectively in our world. Money is needed for printing, advertising, literature, amplifiers, buildings, and so on. Investing in these areas is not an end in itself, but a means for furthering our common goal of ministry. However, when we lose sight of the end, and focus on the means, investment in people usually suffers.

We need to consider the relationship of structures to people. Having established a set of structures within our church (eg. Sunday School, Youth Group, Ladies Fellowship, Home Groups…) we tend to want to maintain them at all cost. We rarely ask ourselves: "Are these structures still fulfilling the role for which they were established? Are they meeting the congregational needs *now*?" And we rarely look for better ways to meet those needs.

As a result, we invest money, people and resources into maintaining structures that are no longer useful. When the Youth Worker leaves, we simply employ another one, rather than stopping to consider whether we really need a Youth Worker at the moment—perhaps the money would be better spent employing a Children's Worker, or an Evangelist. Another approach is to look at the people who are available, see where their gifts lie and create a structure around them. We tend to lock ourselves into existing structures that must be serviced.

In other words, we must invest in *growth* rather than *maintenance*. Of course we must maintain and care for our existing congregation, but focusing on growth actually helps us to do this. If we are moving forward together, committed to the common goal of reaching more people with the gospel of Jesus, we are less tempted to fight and bicker over insignificant matters. If, instead, we decide to stay where we are (and not grow) division often results—people become committed to maintaining their own niche within the congregation.

Too many full-time ministers spend too much time worrying about finances, buildings and administration. Often they are psychologically incapable of delegating these tasks. The church committee needs to take responsibility for some of these areas, and help insecure ministers to let them go. The success of this process will depend on the degree of trust that has been built.

If the committee members do not see themselves as 'fellow workers in the gospel', it is hard for the minister to let go of the financial reins. If he feels that the committee does not share a priority for investing in people and seeing the gospel go forward, he is reluctant to trust them with control of the finances. A committee that accepts responsibility for raising money for the work of the gospel can serve the cause enormously by liberating the word / prayer ministers from the anxiety of money matters.

The treasurer should be responsible for more than keeping the books and paying the bills. He, along with the other committee members, should be responsible for raising the money, and setting new goals before the congregation.

6 Liberate word/prayer ministers

If someone is delegated a task, they should be responsible for it, and should be in control of how it gets done. This may sound self-evident, but it is not always apparent in church committees.

For example, in the end, the church committee cannot tell the minister how to do his job. It is his job, and he has to make his decisions—he bears responsibility for the work with which he has been entrusted. In the same way, if we cannot trust a committee member to perform a particular task, we shouldn't ask him/her to do it. If the person is capable and trustworthy, then we should leave him to get on with the job in his own way, without complaint.

Committees that have to monitor every task that everyone is doing become bogged down in detail. Allowing people to

7 Doing a task equals responsibility for a task

do their job their own way is a vote of confidence in the committee members. It increases people's commitment to the committee and its decisions, their willingness to take on jobs, and their sense of being fellow workers in the gospel.

8 The work should extend to the whole church

We, the church committee, should be the ones to mobilize the resources of our congregation rather than leaving everything to the pastor. We often think that there is no-one 'out there' to help us do a particular job, or that maybe the pastor knows somebody. As committee members, we should take initiative to include the congregation in the work that we're doing on their behalf.

We also need to be examples to the congregation. We may have particular responsibilities, but we are all responsible for the ongoing health of the congregation. We should not only be an example of godly behaviour, but should be the first to take action to help our brothers and sisters. If a window needs to be opened, or the microphone needs to be turned up, we should be the first to jump in and get it done. We shouldn't wait for the next monthly meeting in order to complain.

Another key element is prayer. Because we participate in meetings where information is shared about the whole ministry of the church, we have a particular responsibility to pray. In our prayerful support of the work of the congregation, we should speak to people engaged in different ministries, assuring them of our prayers and asking them how our prayers have been answered. The quiet chat to the Sunday school teacher, or youth leader, or beach mission member, is an important part of being fellow-workers in the gospel. We may not be the people who stand out the front, but if we are to share in the privilege of the work of the gospel, then our prayerful interest is called for. As we show such interest, we become models for a congregation working together in the work of the gospel.

Conclusion

When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Philippians he was particularly concerned about unity. The key passage occurs in Chapter 2, where Paul challenges the Philippian Christians to have the same mind as Christ, who saw humility and other-person-centredness as the way to glory.

That mind of Christ, which is not concerned to push our own barrow, but which counts others more worthy of honour than ourselves, is at the heart of working together in the gospel.

When each committee member is so concerned for the spread of the gospel and the building up of the church that they are willing to subordinate their own interests and status to this end, then our committees will be a pleasure to attend. We will never agree on everything, and we will have to work hard to listen to each other and to weigh the issues. But we will be working at this together, with the common goal of seeing the gospel taught to believers and unbelievers alike, so that Jesus might be glorified.

Personal observations
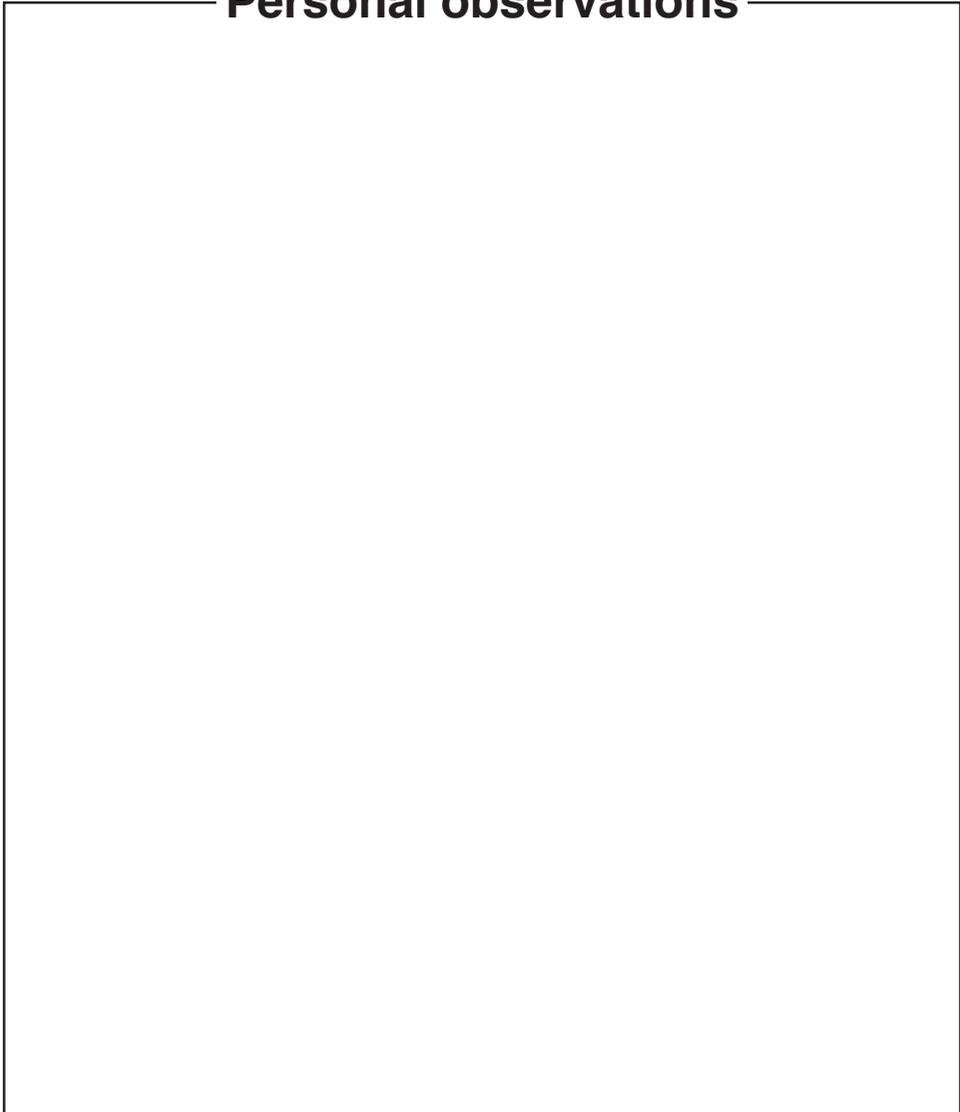
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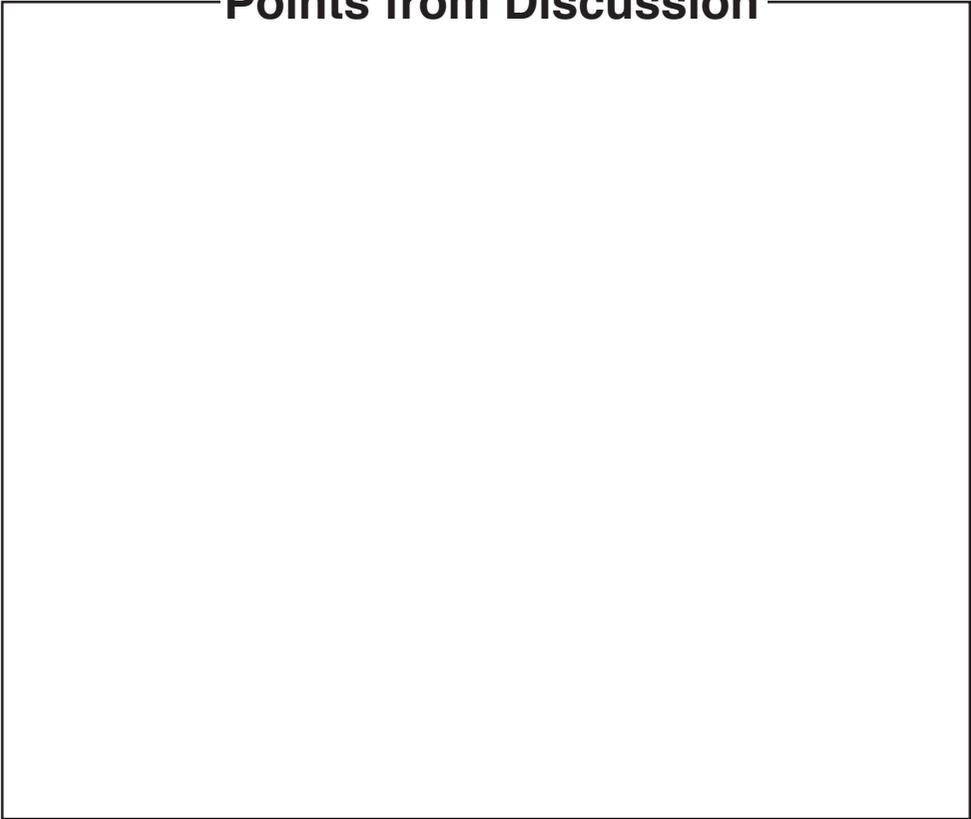
Action

2
Business Arising from the Past

Accurate minute-taking is vital to the smooth running of any committee. Good minutes not only record the rationale behind decisions but how they are to be implemented and by whom. Distributing these minutes soon after the meeting reminds members of jobs they need to do.

Unfortunately, however, minutes often dominate the agenda of the church committee. We have all been in committee meetings where the evening consisted of nothing more than going over last month's minutes. The minutes are checked at length to ensure that they record what actually happened last month, and what little time is left is devoted to 'business arising'. This is an extreme case, but even in less extreme cases, the damage can be significant.

Preoccupied with the Past

The average church committee agenda runs something like this:

1. Open in prayer
2. Accept apologies
3. Confirmation of minutes
4. Business arising from minutes
5. Finances
6. The evening is already gone!

Prayer and apologies usually take only a few minutes, and confirmation of the minutes can be speeded up by members taking their queries to the secretary before the meeting (this presupposes that the minutes are circulated after each meeting). 'Business arising' is the one that really slows us down. This is where we look at last month's decisions—at best, to receive a progress report from those responsible for any action; at worst,

to regurgitate the whole discussion. This sets an irrational agenda for the meeting. The trivial details arising from last month's decisions receive pride of place at the top of the agenda, while important new matters are placed at the bottom. Instead of the church committee acting to forge new policies and directions for the congregation, it becomes a reporting committee, concerned more with the details of past decisions.

'Business arising' discussions follow a number of predictable patterns. When asked how their particular action is progressing, keen members of the committee report it all in excruciating detail. Alternatively, members embarrassed by their failure to do anything give long-winded explanations as to why nothing is turning out. Before long, other members are commenting on how things are proceeding, and giving advice on this detail or that. The meeting is already waist-deep and sinking fast.

It *is* important that we keep each other up to mark in fulfilling our responsibilities—otherwise jobs tend not to get done, and decision making becomes a waste of time. However, decision making does not happen if we spend all our time talking about the details of work already in hand. Forward-planning doesn't occur if we are pre-occupied with the past.

The Finance Report

The finances warrant a high place on the agenda. If they are relegated too far down they receive less attention than they deserve. However, finances, too, are notorious for dominating the agenda in an unhelpful way. They can become the basis for every decision.

As with 'business arising', financial reports are prone to nitpicking and squabbling about minutiae. There is a negative anxiety in the breast of most church committee members when dealing with large sums of church money. After a few people have questioned the treasurer, he begins to get a little tense and defensive, and before long, half the committee have their calculators out to check each other's arithmetic. This is not discussion about important financial matters or strategy, but finding out if the treasurer can add up.

It is far better to have a sub-committee go through the details of the treasurer's report prior to the meeting. They can sort out any difficulties and report to the monthly meeting that the treasurer's report is accurate. At the monthly meeting, the treasurer only needs to present a summary statement, giving the

overall position, highlighting the salient points, and suggesting trends for the future. This gives a solid basis for other decisions we might need to make. Certainly, we should all receive the financial information—but we do not need to spend valuable committee time talking about arithmetic.

The Priorities

Working on policy, reporting on how the ministry is going, and sharing congregational goals and visions—these are all more important than finances. These matters should be high on the agenda, coming right at the beginning of the meeting, after the confirmation of minutes.

Policy Discussion

It is not necessary for every policy discussion to end in a motion, or a concrete decision. Often it is helpful simply to allocate, say, half an hour to discussing some aspect of the congregational life: our missionary commitment, staffing plans, evangelistic strategy, youth/children's programme, the place of music, property development, and so on.   To assist in the discussion, different members of the committee (including the pastor) could present papers on these subjects. These papers can be circulated before the meeting (perhaps with the minutes) so that members can be thinking about the issues.

Ending every policy discussion with a vote is not helpful. It raises the heat, and tends to inhibit members' contributions and lateral thinking. Once a policy **decision** is made, and a motion passed, people can feel locked into a pattern that may or may not be appropriate in the future. A general discussion, on the other hand, can lead to some consensus on the matter, or at least expose the areas of disagreement.

Ministry Report

A ministry report is a helpful way of informing committee members about the variety of ministries taking place around the congregation. It enables the committee to be kept up to date, especially in those areas where they themselves are not involved. The report can be presented by the pastor, or different members of the congregation.

For example, a report one month from the Sunday School Superintendent could not only help the committee know what is happening in that area but give them a basis for decisions relating to children's ministry: How much money should go towards it? Are our buildings adequate for the purpose? How could they be improved? Are there new Sunday School materi-

als that we should buy? The visit by the Sunday School Superintendent may prove very useful when it comes to budget time (perhaps three or six months later).

Giving half an hour each meeting to this kind of report helps the committee keep in touch with the ministry as a whole. It helps them hold the whole work together, seeing the different parts and the contribution each makes to the whole—this is vital when decisions have to be made about spending priorities. It also builds that sense of being fellow workers in the gospel, for it highlights the varied nature of the ministry, and the different parts we each play.

This can also be a useful time for the pastor to give his impressions of how the work is progressing, of areas of growth and / or decline, of new groups we are starting to reach, and new strategies that are beginning to take shape.

Vision sharing

It is very worthwhile to spend some time, on a regular basis, talking together about where the whole show is going. What are our priorities and emphases? What is our overall strategy? Sharing a common vision eliminates much haggling over detail. Very often our disagreements stem from a lack of shared vision. As we talk in the abstract, and dream with each other about the future, our commitment to the common cause is increased and we are less likely to be divided by unimportant matters.

Having started the evening with policy/ministry/vision-sharing discussions, particular decisions (and their financial implications) become much simpler. There will always be hard decisions, but their relative significance becomes clearer when we have a shared view of the whole. Having talked in abstract terms about the ministry we have a better idea of how different committee members think, and how any one decision will affect the whole diverse operation.

Prayer and Bible Study

This 'policy-centred' approach also assists us when we pray together as a committee. Having discussed the ministry in a wide-ranging, open-ended manner, committee members feel more ready to lead in prayer. With different aspects of the congregational life and the decisions we need to make fresh in our minds, asking for God's help and wisdom becomes much more meaningful.

Some committees like to include Bible study on their agenda, and if it is to be included it should come right at the beginning. While it is important to place the committee's deliberations under God's Word (and a Bible study at least

symbolizes this) there are problems attached. The study can become formalized, especially when the passage has little relevance to the night's discussion. If the passage *is* relevant, some members can feel that the Bible is being used to have a go at them. On the agenda suggested in this article it would be better to refer to the Bible in the context of policy/ministry/vision discussions as appropriate. On some issues, the policy paper presented to the committee would have significant Bible content.

Summing up

- Immediately following each monthly meeting, minutes are circulated, drawing special attention to actions to be taken.
- A week before the next meeting, the agenda is sent accompanied by, at the very least, the topic of policy discussion scheduled for that month. Preferably, a one or two page policy discussion paper and/or ministry report should also be included, along with details of the current financial position.
- During the week prior to the meeting, a sub-committee meets to examine the financial statements and check their accuracy so that at the committee meeting the treasurer need only present a summary of what is happening.
- At the church committee meeting the agenda could be something like this:

  1 Open in prayer
  2 Apologies
  3 Confirmation of minutes
  4 Policy discussion
  5 Ministry report
  6 Finances
  7 Decisions arising out of items 4-6
  8 Prayer time (this should be set at a fixed time)
  9 Progress reports on matters already in hand
  10 Time and place of next meeting

This sort of agenda will not solve all the problems of our church committees. However, it will give the more important matters their proper place at the top of the agenda, and prompt us to discuss the big issues of the present and future, instead of the trivial details of the past.

General observations
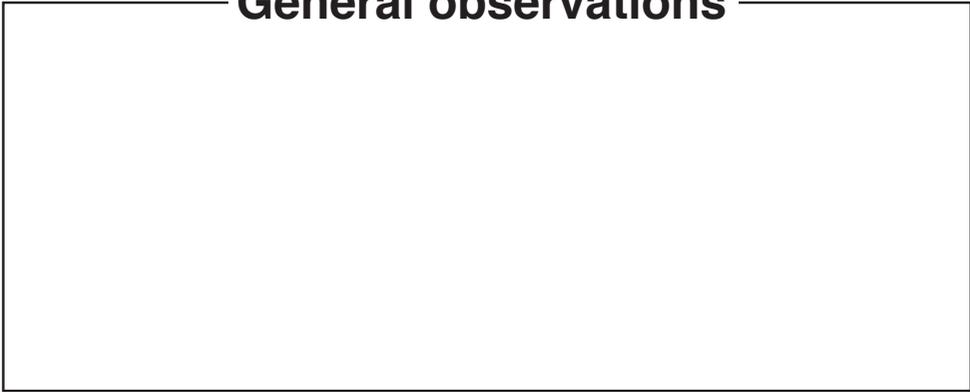
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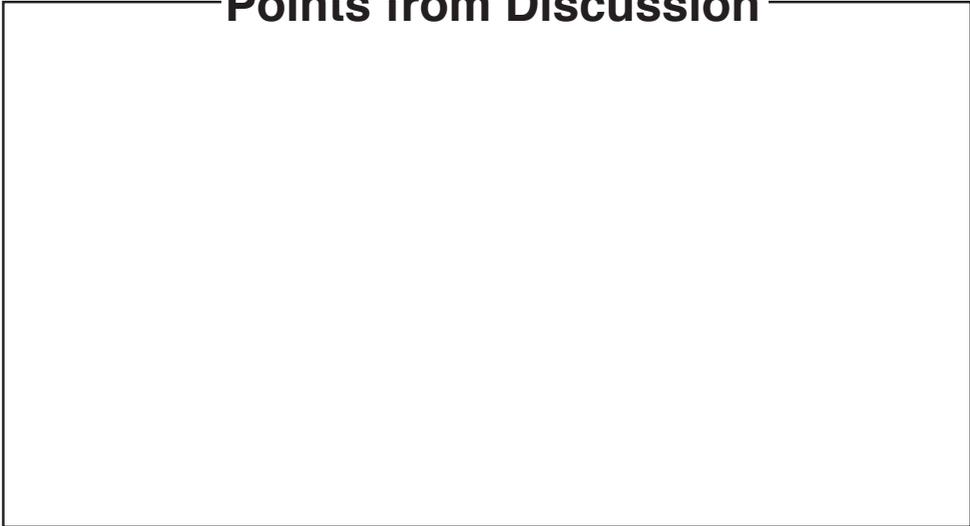
Action

3
Effective Decision Making

Whatever else the church committee does, it must make decisions. But how? What model of decision making should we use? And how will it work in our church committee?

The most common decision making model in church committees (and within our society generally) is Westminster Parliamentary Democracy. This is only one model, and is neither intrinsically Christian, nor necessarily efficient. There are other models we could use, each of which have advantages and disadvantages, and each of which are useful in different decision making contexts. Some of these models are more conducive to godliness than others.

In this paper we will look at three models, evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, and suggest how they might be used in making decisions in church committees.

Three Decision Making Models

The Single Leader

The Single Leader Model is an obvious and well-practised method—one person makes the decision and the rest put up with it. It's a little hard to arrive at the right description for this kind of decision maker, as most of the terms are somewhat negative in connotation: tyrant, dictator, despot, king, ruler, lord.

However, the model does have considerable advantages. The chief of these is time-saving. In situations where it is more important that the job is *done* than that everybody gets to express their opinion, the Single Leader Model works well.

When the particular job is small or of no great consequence, it is far better to leave the decision to a single person. There is nothing to be lost if the decision is a bad one, and much

to be gained in time and energy saved. Also, it is preferable to give the person doing a job the responsibility to see it through, without having the rest of the committee peeping over his or her shoulder.

The Single Leader Model is not as ungodly as the terms 'tyrant' or 'despot' suggest. To ask one of our brothers to take a decision on our behalf is a great expression of confidence in that person, and an indication of our basic unity in the gospel. It is also a challenge to our godliness to submit to the decision of someone else.

However, the Single Leader Model has real difficulties. Mistakes will be made, and sometimes the cost of those mistakes is too great to rest on the decision of an individual. Because of people's sinfulness, giving them power is always dangerous. This is compounded by the tendency for good decision makers to be given more and more decisions to make.

Groups that are lead by this model have great potential for becoming alienated. Their ideas are not considered and their commitment to a particular proposal is not asked for. Unless the Single Leader is a gifted and hard-working manipulator, who can cajole the group into going his way, the group will rarely become 'involved'; they will not follow.

Of course, whenever money is involved, no one person should be given responsibility.   Our love of money runs too deep—we should not be trusted. Church finances must be maintained honestly, and be seen to be maintained honestly.

Majority Rule   Majority Rule is the most common form of decision making in our democratic society, and has been commonly adopted by Christians. There are tremendous advantages to this system.

It is an effective way of resolving tensions within a group, provided that the individual members are committed to accepting the majority verdict. It seems to convey a sense of justice— "I had my say, we voted, and I'll abide by the decision of the majority." As with the Single Leader Model, having to submit to the decision of others (in this case, the majority) does our godliness no harm.

We hardly need to spell out the advantages of the democratic decision making model. It is taken for granted in our society. However, therein lies its danger, for the Majority Rule Model is not necessarily a Christian model, and we tend to use it far too often.

Majority Rule has a number of serious disadvantages. It has the appearance of justice, but upon what basis?   In a

democracy, justice is determined by the will of the majority, not by what is right and true.

Democracy tends to be divisive. By its very nature, opposing sides or parties are created. Motions are put forward, and people are asked to speak for and against, rather than looking comprehensively at the issue from a position of neutrality. The key to 'winning' is persuasion, and this gives the clever debater or charismatic personality the upper hand. The object soon becomes to win friends rather than search for the truth.

By its very nature democracy creates a divided community. When we commence a church committee discussion knowing that it will end in a vote, we have assumed, from the very beginning, that division is to be the outcome. In this, we are little different from the world.

Majority Rule also tends to create a dissatisfied minority. In an ideal democracy, where issues are considered dispassionately and arguments are weighed on their merits, there is at least an appearance of justice.

In the real world, however, some groups are consistently outvoted, and their interests ignored. In church life, these people become a disgruntled faction, murmuring together about the cruelty of it all. A church on this path is on the way to deep division.

Even when Majority Rule is operating well, and factional politics has not reared its head, it can be a slow and inefficient method. Not only can democratic decision making take a long time, but it tends to avoid hard decisions. When everybody's viewpoint is being represented equally, it is difficult to make those tough decisions that disadvantage some individuals but are in the interests of the whole congregation. The Single Leader can make these decisions, because he can survey the whole scene and keep his eye on the overall goals of the congregation.

Consensus

At the other end of the spectrum from the Single Leader Model is the Consensus Model. Here the aim is to get everybody to agree, either by persuasion, or by compromise. 100% agreement may not always be possible in this model, but 95% agreement could still be classed as consensus (a kind of modified democracy).

The advantage of this method for our unity as a church committee is obvious. If we are in agreement about where we should be heading, then there is no need for a Single Leader to whip up enthusiasm for his latest plan. As mentioned earlier, setting our visions and goals together, and sorting out how we are going to reach them, is of tremendous value for the commit-

tee and for the whole congregation.

Consensus decision making is also more likely to produce original and creative solutions to a problem. Where a Single Leader or Majority is making the decision, the line of least resistance is usually followed. But when we are committed to consensus, it forces us to think laterally, to search for alternative solutions.

Of course, the Consensus Model also has its disadvantages. Decision making can take an inordinately long time, especially if there is a small, stubborn group within the committee. This group is capable of holding up the progress of the whole congregation, especially if, in their ungodliness, they are unwilling to submit to others or negotiate a way forward. The other side of this coin is that people can be pressured to agree because they are "holding up progress", when they might have genuine reservations about a particular decision.

In some ways, consensus government seems idealistic, as it is based on a diverse group of people seeing a problem in the same way. In practical terms, consensus decision making can be hard to organize. It is sometimes hard to know when consensus has been reached, and as the night wears on, and minds become tired, we can long for the clean, clearcut certainty of the vote.

The right method for the right decision

Each of these decision making models is open to us as Christians. Each of them can be used or abused within the church committee.

Some methods are more appropriate for one kind of decision than for another. In small, unimportant matters where mistakes will not be costly and time is precious, the Single Leader Model is by far the best. Too often we spend valuable committee time discussing matters that could have been left to an individual, especially an individual who is expert in that particular area.

The Consensus Model is the one we should aim for wherever possible, for it allows us to maintain the unity of the congregation. It lifts our eyes from winning this particular debate, to deciding what is best for everyone. However, it is too time consuming to be used for every issue. And it cannot be utilized in congregations where division already exists. For the big issues of congregational life—like where we are headed, what our priorities are, and so on—consensus must be looked for wherever possible.

In the context of division within the church, and with complex decisions that have to be made quickly, Majority Rule is the best way forward. It should perhaps be thought of as a last resort, where an important decision cannot be postponed and consensus is not apparent.

How to make decisions

By the Single Leader

The key to decision making using the Single Leader Model is obviously choosing the right leader. Select the wrong leader and disaster is the result. The church committee (hopefully by consensus) must have confidence in the person to whom a job or decision is delegated. This involves being aware of the cost if a mistake is made. If that cost is too high, and the committee is not willing to bear it, the decision should not be delegated. Having appointed a Single Leader for some decision, it is important that the committee then maintains full support for that Leader.

By Majority Rule

With the Majority Rule Model, the motion needs to be carefully explained to the whole council. We must ascertain that all the members have understood what we are voting about and what the consequences are. Clarificatory discussions are crucial to good voting.

It is perhaps impossible to eliminate all 'party spirit' from the human psyche, but we can do what we can to minimize its effects within our committee. Even a small thing like encouraging people not to sit in the same seats every month can help break up potential factions. The committee should be challenged to vote on the issue at hand rather than with their friends. More mature committee members can aid this process by setting an example of impartiality and sound reason. If they can acknowledge, or even emphasize, good points that are made that do not support their own case, it adds to the sense of unity and fellowship.

After the inevitable division has been made, it is supremely important for the pastor or committee chairman to take time to *maintain* the defeated minority, and cement their continued fellowship. Wherever possible, the majority must be encouraged to bend and shape their plans to accommodate the minority. The more concessions that can be made, the less chance there is for hurt and serious congregational division.

When a particularly heated or difficult discussion has been resolved by a vote, there should be a 'cooling off' time before another issue is put to the vote. We don't want to reinforce division within the committee by immediately making

another difficult Majority Rule decision.

The very existence of Majority Rule decisions within our congregation means that the pastor and elders have work to do. Their aim must be to have the church committee united on the important issues. They have work to do, therefore, behind the scenes, building unity of purpose and a common set of priorities. As they do this, the number of Majority Rule decisions will gradually diminish.
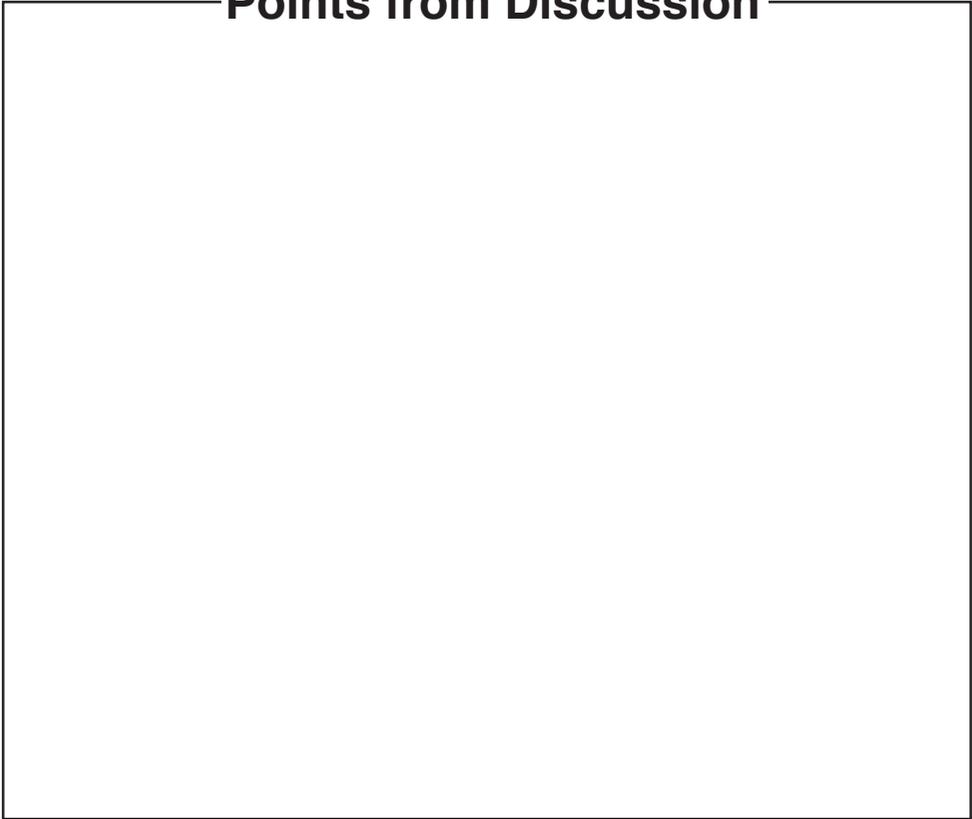
By Consensus

The way to Consensus decision making, then, is pastoral—it means uniting the congregation in one mind in the gospel. When the church has a single, clear vision of the truth of the gospel and its implications for the congregation, the Consensus Model becomes a smooth and efficient norm.

Personal observations
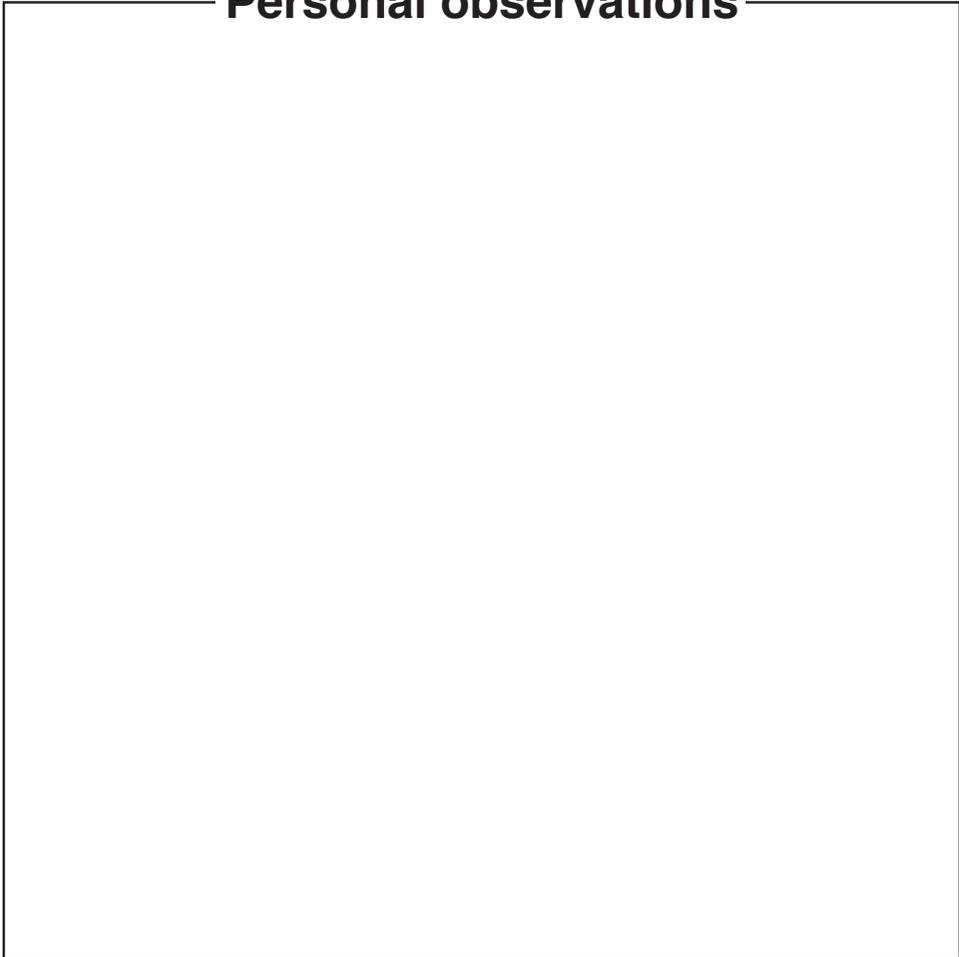
Points from Discussion

Action

Other notes

4
How to Employ Christian Workers

Whom should we appoint? Where's the money coming from? What precisely should they do? Where's the money coming from? Where's the money coming from?

These are the questions that float to the surface when church committees discuss employing church staff. Different churches have different mechanisms for doing this, but the principles are the same across the board.

In this paper, we will look at 15 principles that should undergird employing Christian workers for the ministry of the gospel.

1
People are more important than positions

The gospel is spread by God speaking his word through his people to the world. Finding people who are gifted and willing to do this work is far more important than filling 'positions'. (And there are always positions waiting to be filled.) It is far better to construct a ministry around the gifts a person has been given, than to embark on the frustrating exercise of fitting a square Christian into a round hole.

This form of appointment is difficult for some people to cope with, especially those with tidy, bureaucratic minds. When we find someone who is gifted for ministry we should encourage them to use and develop their gifts to the maximum, even if it doesn't fit into our present structures. This will give the congregation a much greater return for their investment, than in forcing our new staffmember to plug a hole in the organization.

When we start with a vacant position and appoint someone to fill it, there is often a dissatisfaction on both sides. The person who is willing and available to do the job may not be quite suited to it, and becomes frustrated that he/she is not able to develop other more promising areas. The church is also frustrated that the job is not being done properly.

We need to assess the vacant position carefully. Has the

situation changed? Do we still need a youth worker? Would we do better to employ a geriatric worker now that our suburb has grown old?

2
No work is better than bad work

There are many occasions in which a job can be left undone without doing any great damage. Indeed, we are all prone to a degree of spiritual megalomania and believe that our job (or the vacancy that we are trying to fill) is indispensable.

When things are done wrongly, it can take years to recover. It is better to appoint no-one than to appoint the wrong person in desperation. We are asking for trouble when we employ someone whose Christian life is not solidly established or whose theology is shaky, simply because they are willing to do the job and there is no-one else.

It is better to bumble along inefficiently than to take on someone in whom we lack confidence.

3
Share the vision not the organization

No ministry can proceed without a basic unity amongst its workers. The essence of this unity is a shared vision of what we are trying to achieve. We won't achieve unity by carefully defining our structural relationships and areas of responsibility, or even (dare we say it) by all signing the doctrinal basis.

Unity is achieved by talking with employees (and prospective employees) about our whole vision for the ministry; about our priorities, and dreams, and norms, and the theological basis for these. Team unity and co-operation flow from commitment to a common set of goals.

4
Christian character is more important than 'charisma'

All Christians are charismatic, for all are given gifts by God. However, the foremost basis of employment must be someone's character as a Christian, not his 'charisma'. The extroverted, highly gifted individual is an attractive proposition, and we tend to overlook his deficiencies as a Christian.

When Paul directs his young proteges Timothy and Titus to appoint elders and deacons in the churches under their care, he challenges them to do so on the basis of godliness and Christian character. Lives that reflect a true understanding of the gospel are essential for the work of the gospel.

Part of this Christian 'character' is a right Christian understanding. "The elder", says Paul to Titus, "must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9)

All too often, people are employed who do not have this thorough understanding of the gospel. Part of the common

vision (point 3, above) is a common understanding of the gospel. Disagreement about the gospel obviously leads to disagreement about priorities and methods in ministry. It doesn't matter whether the employee is going to work in the church office or as the church social worker—if they are employed by the congregation they need to share the congregation's understanding of the gospel, so that they can work hard to reach the same goals in harmony and unity.

5 Employ mostly from within the church

This is a case of the conventional wisdom holding true: better the devil you know than the devil you don't know. It is hard to evaluate outsiders as suitable candidates for our ministry, not least because they always appear more attractive than people we know well. However, they are rarely as committed to the congregational goals and priorities as someone from within the congregation. Even if the outsider's understanding and commitment are thoroughly acceptable, it still takes some time for them to absorb the 'culture' and shape of ministry that the rest of the staff and congregation already share.

Sometimes, of course, a congregation can benefit from the fresh ideas of someone from outside. But when we make such an appointment we must bear in mind the cost of having to adjust our way of doing things, at least to some extent.

People who are already committed members of our church fit much more easily onto the staff.

6 Encourage diversity

We should not look for replicas of the pastor when employing Christian workers. The cloned 'mini-pastor' does nothing to encourage the diversity of gifts that God has so richly bestowed on his people.

We should look for people who have a passion for the gospel, and encourage them to develop their gifts for ministry. An evangelist, a teacher, an administrator, a secretary, a small groups co-ordinator—these are just some of the gifts that can contribute to the overall ministry of the congregation and increase the effectiveness of the pastor.

7 Personal relationships are important

Within church life, especially urban church life, personal relationships are becoming increasingly important for growth. Staff who come from within the congregation already have a network of relationships, and this maximizes their effectiveness—it is an investment in growth. Correspondingly, employing them long-term, rather than as a stop-gap, promotes this growth still further.

Personal relationships are equally important when it

comes to interaction within the staff team. Not all personalities 'click' with one another. However, it is important that those who are going to work together for the congregation share a genuine admiration and friendship. Harmony between the staff flows on to the congregation—and so does disharmony and dislike.

8 Appointments *increase* work

One of the appealing things about employing more staff is that it will reduce everybody's workload. "If only we had that extra worker, we could share the jobs round and everybody would be a little less pressured." This is a fundamental mistake.

Employing more staff *increases* the work of ministry. Pastors must abandon the illusion that employing an assistant will somehow reduce their load and make life a little easier. Any new worker (whether a pastoral assistant or a secretary) will require training, supervision and co-ordination, not to mention vision-sharing and building team relationships. The time saved starts to whittle away. Moreover, any pastor who has the drive to employ an assistant will use whatever spare time he has to initiate those projects he has been trying to get to for years. And with the extra energy and skills provided by additional workers, new plans and programmes will spring up to take advantage of these new resources.

All this is great. Employing an additional worker (if you employ the right person) will increase the efficiency and output of the whole ministry. But the workload will not diminish. It will quickly expand to fill the available time—and more.

9 Lay vs Professional

One of the dangers of appointing additional staff is that it can decrease lay ministry. We need to be careful that the paid staff do not take over jobs that congregation members are doing quite adequately. Before long, the congregation is sitting back watching the paid ministry team do all the work.

The appointment of extra staff should increase the work of the gospel in the congregation, not decrease it. This will happen when the ministry team do the work that the lay people are unable to do.

One way of increasing lay ministry is to employ someone to do the menial, house-keeping type of jobs that need doing around every congregation. By freeing our members from mowing the lawns, cleaning the building, printing the weekly bulletins and so on, they can have time to be involved in more strategic gospel work. Employing this kind of worker can be a very worthwhile investment. One person can liberate many others to get out amongst their friends and share the great news of Jesus.

10 Money follows workers

Where's the money coming from? This is almost always the most worrying question for any church committee. Even when the committee is behind the idea of appointing an additional worker and the right person has been agreed upon, the vexed question of finances often prevents any progress.

Our natural tendency is to want to have the money available before we think of appointing any additional workers. We enter 'public service mode' and look for a grant from some central funding system. The idea of appointing someone before we have the money to pay them is nerve-racking, to say the least.

However, money doesn't precede staffworkers—it follows them. Staffworkers, if they are the right person in the right job, generate income. They expand the work of the congregation, bringing in new members and increasing the commitment of existing members. A good staffworker will, over time, pay for himself. But he must be the right person doing the right job. The wrong person doing the wrong job will generate no income and lead the congregation to bankruptcy or to having to cease his employment. It must be remembered that even with a good staffworker, there will be a time-lag before the money comes in, and this brings us to another critical point.

A crucial factor in planning for an increased staff is the choice of financially strategic ministries. The time-lag for some ministries is longer than for others. Working amongst Turkish Muslims, for example, seems to be much slower and more difficult than working amongst the Chinese community. If the church wishes to embark on a ministry that may take a long time to build up, then this is the time to look for some kind of grant to help the congregation cope with the delay in financial return. (More of grants below.)

However, for most ministries, if there is no financial return in a couple of years it is advisable for the church committee to look again at the whole scheme.

Making these kinds of judgements is sometimes difficult and requires a degree of risk-taking. We should take the entrepreneurial businessman as our model, rather than the public servant.

11 Grants stifle growth

At first glance, the idea of receiving a grant to employ an additional worker seems a marvellous opportunity for growth. But you get nothing for nothing in this world, and accepting a grant has its costs.

The 'grant mentality' is dangerous for our whole ministry. It always looks to other people to provide the resources for the work we want to undertake. This mentality doesn't look for

growth as the result of hard labour under God, but in the benevolence of a central organization. It also removes some of the helpful pressure on congregation members to contribute to the work of the gospel.

However, sometimes a grant can be a useful 'starter' for a difficult, long-term ministry. The best kind of grant is one that tapers over time (80% of the salary in the first year, 60% in the second year and so on). By increasing our financial responsibility over time, such a grant encourages us to work hard at making the ministry financially viable. Unless it is a particularly unusual ministry, if it hasn't made progress in the first five years then the whole venture needs to be reviewed.

12 Who makes the appointment?

The importance of good personal relationships within the staff team necessitates the involvement of the senior pastor in the appointment process. When the church committee alone makes the decision, and the staff team is landed with a new worker, there is potential for tension and division.

However, leaving it entirely to the senior pastor is also unwise, for the congregation can easily lack confidence in someone whose appointment has been imposed on them. This is revealed, of course, in a lack of financial response to the appointment.

On balance, a combination of these two is best. The staff team makes a recommendation to the church committee, which makes a decision based on the state of the finances and their assessment of the church's ability to cope with an increase.

13 If you buy a dog, don't bother barking

One of the problems of team ministries is that, often, the senior pastor employs people and then does their job for them.

Unless we believe in the diversity of gifts that God has given, and are willing to freely delegate on that basis, there is no point employing additional staff. How many junior ministry staff have been frustrated by the unwillingness of senior staff to 'let go' and let them get on with the job?

The senior pastor is not the only one who needs to adapt to the arrival of a new staffmember. The congregation also needs to change. It is easy for a congregation to be committed to the *idea* of growth, but the cost of growth can be too high for some to bear. Every member wants to maintain a good personal relationship with the senior pastor. But as the congregation grows and the staff increases, the nature of the senior pastor's ministry will change. He won't be able to conduct all the weddings, funerals and baptisms. He won't be able to visit all the members. In time, he may not even know all their names. Delegation is an issue for

the whole congregation to come to terms with as the staff grows.

The larger the staff team (and therefore the church budget), the easier it is to increase staff numbers. One more or one less worker out of a team of twelve, while still costing the same as the others, makes a relatively small impact on the whole year's finances. The jump from one to two staffmembers, on the other hand, may involve increasing the church budget by 50-60% in one year.

Many churches do not ever get solidly planted because they cannot cope with employing their first full-time pastor. Many others remain static at 100-200 members because they are unable (or unwilling) to take the next leap. It is easier to remain a small, happy community, with everyone knowing the pastor and the pastor knowing everyone. "Yes, we believe in church growth, but it can't happen here."

These first and second appointments, then, are crucial for the long-term future of the congregation. We must choose the right people for the job. An error of judgement at this stage is hard to rectify.

It is also strategically wise to make the first appointments in areas that will bring the fastest financial return. Naturally, we wish to reach all people with the gospel of Jesus, regardless of their age, race, or socio-economic status. But we must not confuse our desire to reach all people with the strategy or intermediate steps for getting there.

For example, ministries among junior teenagers, down-and-outs, homosexuals and Muslims are all important—very important, because God wants to see people from all these groups saved. However, these groups will not give financial return as quickly as ministries among young adults or business-men. Youth workers bring financial return by making the church more attractive to families, rather than by young people contributing money to the church.

To reach the groups that are our particular focus may take one or two or five or ten workers. The sky, in one sense, is the limit. However, if the *first* worker is employed in a 'slow-return' ministry, it will take a long time before we can even consider appointing a second or a third. If we start by employing people in 'fast-return' ministries, we will be able to employ the second or third workers much more quickly. Indeed, if we grow the economic base large enough we can even afford to carry some totally non-economic work.

These judgements are very hard to make and they must be accompanied by a commitment to reach *all* people, lest we be

14
The first appointments are hardest

ensnared into ministering only to the wealthy. What we are saying is this: There is some strategic advantage in *starting* with 'fast return' ministries in order to achieve the overall goal of reaching *all* people with the gospel. This is not a theological priority—that needs to be clear. It is a pragmatic point, along the lines of good business sense.

The alternative is to minister to a tiny community who are constantly oppressed by the demand for more money.

**15
Stepping up
staffworkers**

Part-time Christian work is another way of increasing the size of our staff team. It may cost nearly $40,000 to house and employ a full-time Christian worker, and this may represent 60-70% of a small congregation's total budget.

If someone can be found to work part-time, the increase is obviously smaller (say, $20,000) and easier to cope with. Naturally, you get what you pay for. Things will not grow as fast and staff relationships are always more difficult to maintain. Most part-timers find the tension between their church work and their secular employment hard to cope with. However, as their ministry grows and is appreciated by the congregation, the money to pay their wage will increase.

If the part-timer's outside employment is such that he can gradually increase from one day's church work per week to six, the incremental change in the church's budget will hardly be noticed. To grow the second member of a staff team, this method is perhaps the easiest for the congregation to cope with—but it's not so easy for the worker!

Personal observations
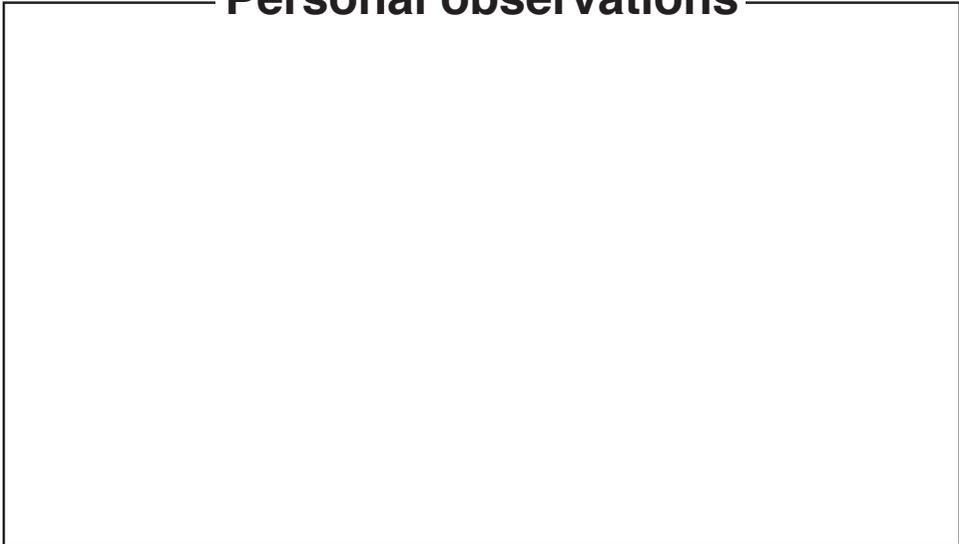
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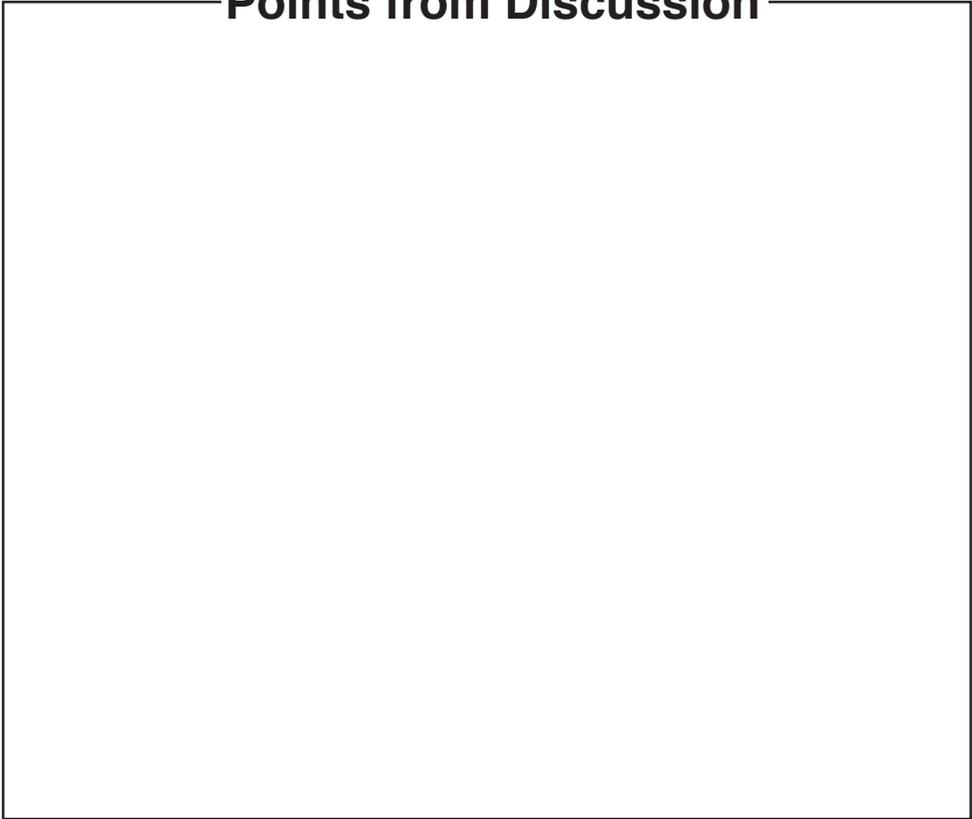
Action

Other notes

5
Who Pastors the Pastor?

In any church, the minister of the gospel also needs to *receive* the ministry of the gospel. Like the rest of the congregation, he is sinful and in need of encouragement and rebuke. He needs to grow in holiness and love of the brothers.

We neglect the spiritual care of the pastor to our cost. A spiritually bankrupt pastor has no resources with which to do his job—the job of encouraging and leading his flock.

But whose responsibility is it? Who should pastor the pastor?

(NB: throughout this paper, we will use the word 'pastor' to refer to the person placed in charge of a congregation—the minister, teaching elder, rector, or whatever else you might call him.)

Unbiblical Responses

There are two wrong responses to the problem: one is to rely on other 'professional' pastors for encouragement; the other is to rely on denominational officials.

Depending on other pastors to encourage *your* pastor creates an elite class that is inconsistent with Scripture. Of course, it is natural that people who have trained for the ministry together, or who have been associated in some way in the past, should turn to each other for advice and encouragement. But for a congregation to unload the spiritual care of their pastor onto his fellow professionals is extremely unwise. It places him in a different class, as if something more substantial than the application of the Word of God to his life is required. If the pastor does not confess his sins to, and receive encouragement from, his 'laymen', an unbiblical hierarchy is created.

Building this hierarchy along denominational lines is

even more unbiblical. Moderators and Presidents and Bishops are not in the New Testament at all! If we give the denominational officials the job of 'ministering to the minister', we not only set up a pattern that is quite foreign to the New Testament, but we are left with a further unresolved question—who ministers to the bishops? If you say, "Cardinals", you are only a short step away from having a pope. If you say, "other bishops", you have fallen into the error in the previous paragraph.

To think that denominational officials will meet the spiritual needs of pastors is not only unbiblical—it is impractical as well. In most denominations there are far too few officials to even begin to do the job. And it would cost us far too much to employ extra people to do it. The average pastor can look after a congregation of about 150. He speaks to them all at least once each week (during the church meeting) and catches up with all of them personally at regular intervals. He can share informal times with them, get to know them, and be in a position to offer encouragement and fellowship.

A denominational official, sitting in an office in the city, has no hope of conducting this sort of ministry to the ministers allegedly in his care. There are few opportunities to meet together, and even fewer chances for informal chats.

Both of these responses fail to take account of some significant New Testament themes: the priesthood of all believers, our equal standing before God, our equal humility before the Word, and our equal partnership in ministry. The congregation must minister to itself. One or two members of that congregation may be freed from normal employment to work full-time to serve the members, but they never cease to be members of the congregation, which is the body of Christ. The church members must love and serve each other. Why should one or two members be exempt?

Whatever associations we might have outside our churches, and whatever encouragement or help we might receive from these, the focus of our ministry should be our church.

So who pastors the pastor?

"Confess your sins to one another" says James in the fifth chapter of his letter, and it is an old Protestant joke to say, "But we can't find the Rev. One Another anywhere!".

All the same, it is sad that we have forgotten our Protestant heritage and no longer regard the pastor as being as much in need of rebuke and encouragement as the rest of us. We have

lost sight of the New Testament model of mutual ministry. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2).

The congregation should pastor their pastor. This is not only in keeping with the emphasis of the New Testament, but is far more practical. The congregation is in the best position to care for their pastor. In the web of personal relationships between a pastor and the members of his congregation, there is ample opportunity for sharing spiritual things, for encouragement and for rebuke. The congregation will be aware of their pastor's shortcomings and will be able to help him through them in a way that no outsider could.

If the pastor is not open to receive this ministry from his congregation, they will also tend to be closed to his ministry to them. A pastor who is open with his congregation and who is ready to expose his weaknesses and receive care, will encourage the same attitude among his congregation. As in all things, the pastor serves as a model. If he is self-sufficient and seemingly beyond the need for normal fellowship and encouragement, then that is the goal towards which his congregation will strive. They will try to become as self-sufficient and closed as their pastor.

It is worth noting the words Paul uses with his junior pastor, Timothy. "Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your *progress*." The pastor is not required to have 'arrived'. Like all Christians, he is on a journey, and like all Christians, he is required to make progress. The pastor who gives the impression that he has 'arrived' is a discouragement for Christian growth. He might think that he is providing a godly model, but he is actually providing a very unhelpful model, one that is open to the charge of hypocrisy. He must model godly *progress*. He must listen to the Word of God, take it to heart and change his life. This is the model for the congregation to follow.

Obstacles

The Pastor

We have already hinted that the pastor himself can prevent his own spiritual nurture. Too many pastors lock themselves away, spiritually speaking, by being unable or unwilling to receive the ministry of others. Many pastors are used to switching into 'ministry mode' whenever they are with mem-

bers of their congregation. They feel so responsible for everyone else that they lose the ability to talk to their people as equals and receive help from them.

Those who carry the Word of God to others can easily fall into the trap of always teaching it, but never listening to it. It is not even enough for the pastor to apply the Word privately as he prepares his sermon. He must be ready to do so publicly as he interacts with members of the congregation, and to listen to God's word no matter who is speaking it—for "from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise" (Ps. 8:2).

Many pastors find it almost impossible to receive the ministry of others because of their own insecurity. They may be unsure about their role or their ability to carry it out, and they become defensive. The pastor may feel that if he reveals too much of himself, he may be seen as a weak leader, and lose control. As a result, he holds it all in and discourages others from taking the initiative. The pastor caught in this trap will rarely be aware of the spiritual corner into which he has painted himself.

Pastors are encouraged along this path by the whinging and criticism that they so often bear. Everybody knows how to run the church, and the constant griping tends to drive the pastor back into his shell. He protects himself by refraining from any kind of interaction at this level.

Another problem for the pastor is the sheer number of people who might minister to him. He is known by all, and his foibles and shortcomings are seen by all, and members usually feel they have the right to comment on them—mostly to each other, but sometimes to the pastor himself.

Finally, the pastor can also fall victim to the tyrannous expectations of church life. Many of these expectations are all the more impossible because they are unstated. There are many expectations that a pastor may feel he should live up to— expectations dictated by society, or his denominational tradition, or his predecessor at the church. There may be expectations about how much work he does each week, or how he runs his family, or the clothes he wears, or the car/s he drives, or the hobbies he pursues.

Once a pastor accepts the mantle of these expectations, and fails to meet them (as he inevitably will) he begins to hide. His guilt becomes a barrier between him and his congregation. He will not open up to them and allow them to minister to him, for fear that they will see his 'double life'.

The Congregation   Congregations, for their part, are frequently reluctant to approach the pastor to help him in his walk with God. To a

certain extent, this reluctance is born out of an appropriate reverence for those who have been placed over us in the Lord.

However, it is more usually the result of an inappropriate elevation of the pastor onto some super-spiritual pedestal. Many congregations regard their pastor as a breed apart, rather than as a fellow heir of the kingdom, who is as much in need of care and spiritual nurture as all of us.

A further problem is that many congregations have swallowed an hierarchical, institutional view of ministry, and so leave the care of the pastor to the bishops and moderators of the denomination. It is sad that we Evangelicals, who like to affirm the priesthood of all believers and the importance of 'every-member-ministry', have sold our birthright on this issue. We need to return to our roots.

But perhaps the chief reason for congregations failing to pastor their pastors is that they don't know how. Even if the congregation is willing and the pastor is open, it is still hard to work out how to do it effectively. Here are some clues.

Some clues

Not everyone must do the same thing all at once. If a pastor has a particular fault, the last thing he needs is for the whole congregation, one by one, to take him aside and tell him in earnest tones about his need to repent. The congregation needs to be sensitive, and to ensure that someone is ministering to the pastor on this point, without him being overwhelmed. Those who exercise leadership within the congregation—the elders, deacons, churchwardens, or whatever—must surely be the ones to see that this happens. **1**

We shouldn't define ministry too narrowly. While pastors do need to receive personal encouragement about their spiritual lives, there are other kinds of ministry that can be just as helpful. The warm greeting, the short letter, prayerful support, the gift of food, baby-sitting, a phone call on his birthday—there are many things that a congregation can do to encourage and help their pastor in his task. Unfortunately, these small, casual encouragements can go unnoticed, both by the pastor when he feels that no-one cares for him, and by the congregation when they feel guilty at their lack of care. **2**

Pastoring the pastor does not necessarily mean having deep and meaningful conversations with him. There is a time for this, just as there is in relationships among congregation mem-

bers, but it is not the norm. Informally sharing a passage of Scripture that we have found helpful, or asking questions about some aspect of the sermon, or sharing a book with him that we have found beneficial—there are endless ways we can pastor the pastor.

3   We do not always have to be negative. There is a time for discussing problems and sins, and for rebuking and correcting. But there is also a time for encouragement, and congratulation, and positive feedback. Pastors find tremendous encouragement in seeing their people grow in understanding and holiness. To share with him ways in which this is happening is a great ministry to him—it spurs him on in the arduous work of the gospel.

When he does something helpful or encouraging, we should not hold back in telling him so. The polite "Good sermon this morning" does *some* good, but is fairly conventional and almost mandatory. To mention a particular point of the sermon and how you found it helpful will do any preacher's heart good.

4   We must minister in relationship over time. Serving and caring for our pastors takes time. It is important that we develop a relationship with our pastor that God can use for mutual encouragement over time. It will not be possible for every member to have this relationship, especially in a large congregation, but the members of the church committee, at the very least, should have some ongoing relationship with the pastor. As we develop this relationship, we will have the opportunity of speaking the quiet word of encouragement and rebuke.

5   We need to listen as well as speak. Pastors need someone to listen to the troubles that inevitably accompany gospel ministry. The person who can listen and understand the pastor's struggles will be the one who can offer a genuine and timely word of encouragement in the future. This person will also, no doubt, be the one to whom the pastor turns in times of personal trouble. He or she will also be the one who can enquire about the pastor's personal life. Pastors cannot cope with every member of the congregation asking him about his quiet times. It soon becomes a tedious, not to say legalistic, charade. However, most pastors are never asked about their quiet times.

If the pastor can develop this kind of empathetic relationship with one or two or five or ten members of his congregation, there will be ample opportunity, over time, for the pastor to be pastored.

An urgent need

For too many pastors, the work of the gospel is a lonely and frustrating battle. They feel isolated and unloved, and become resentful of their congregation, who are quick to return the favour by grumbling and counting the years until he retires.

Spending time pastoring the pastor is a valuable investment. The congregation, and particularly the congregation's leaders, must take responsibility for the spiritual health and vitality of their own pastor. We must not leave it to other pastors or to distant denominational officials, but prayerfully shoulder the responsibility ourselves.

Personal observations
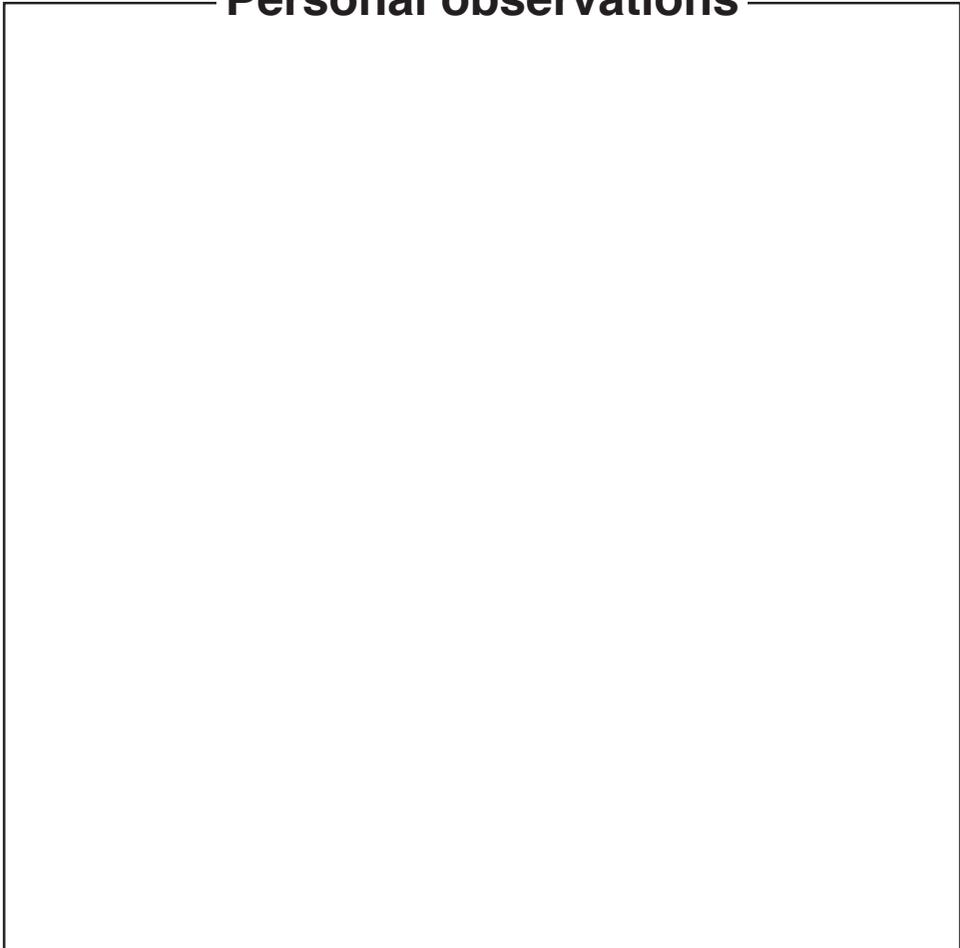
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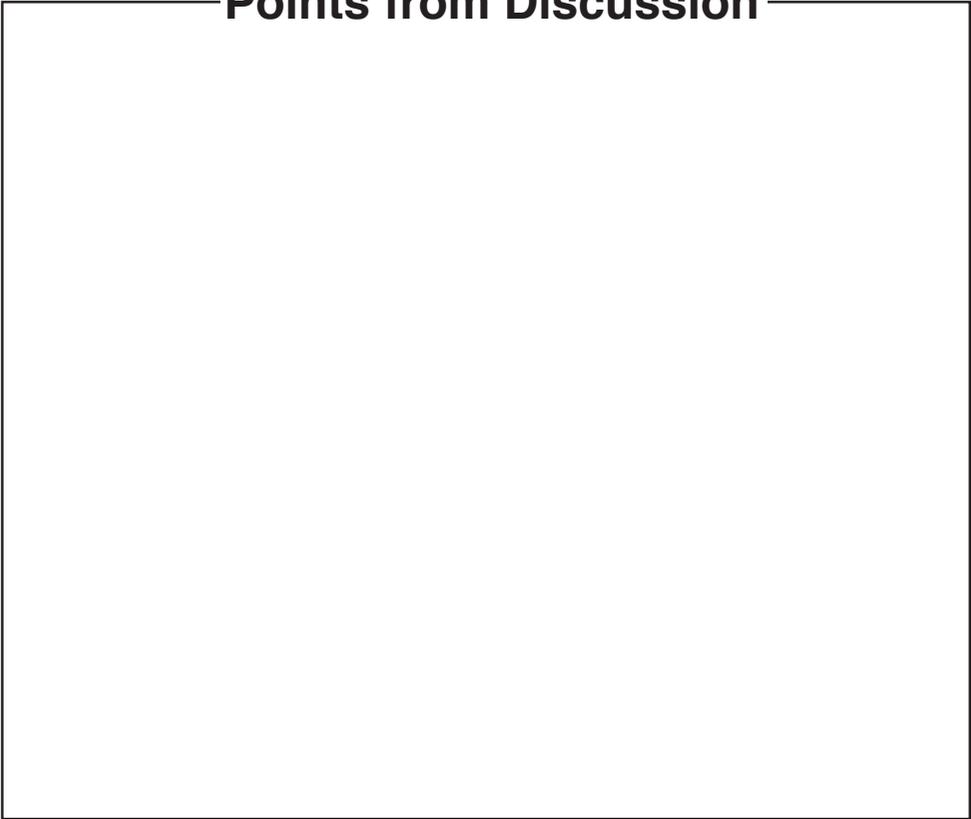
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6
Promoting Evangelism

I feel guilty about evangelism. I am spurred into hyper-activity. I try hard, but no-one is converted. In fact, hardly anyone even comes to the meeting. I fail. I feel guilty about evangelism. I am spurred into hyperactivity...

This treadmill of evangelistic guilt and hyperactivity characterizes many churches. As time goes on, the enthusiasm becomes hard to maintain. The congregation limps from mission to mission, and a few people are converted along the way—praise God. But the sense of failure is still there, and in this vulnerable state we are susceptible to the Latest Technique. We grasp at this course or that, hoping that we will hit upon the secret of successful church evangelism. We search in vain. What is the answer?

This paper will not reveal another Latest Technique. Rather, as a basis for discussion, we will sketch a long-term plan for fostering evangelism within your congregation.

Who is Going to Lead?

The necessity of strong leadership has been a recurring theme in our look at the work of the church committee. In evangelism, it is no different.

The pastor and the church committee must take the initiative in congregational evangelism, not only through the decisions that are taken in the committee room, but by personal and corporate example.

The pastor, for example, must not abrogate his responsibility by always using an outside speaker to do evangelistic preaching. Itinerant evangelists are good and useful, but a congregation must also see their own pastor as a keen evangelist. The pastor must set the tone.

The same can be said of the church committee. We may like to see ourselves as the 'back room boys' who keep things running and provide the environment in which others can evangelize. But it must go further. If we are not personally committed to evangelism then we have no hope of encouraging others to be involved.

If we are not committed to evangelism and willing to pay the price for doing it, there is little point reading further.

A total package

There is no single technique or trick to promote evangelism within your congregation. The need is for an integrated package that stems from the commitment mentioned above.

Devising and implementing this package will take time and effort and will eat into the resources of the pastor, the church committee and the whole congregation. The kind of package that will be outlined in this paper cannot be tacked on to an already packed church agenda. It must shape the church agenda. We need to be willing to cut and shape our whole ministry because of our deep commitment to winning others for Christ.

A total commitment to a complete package—anything less will soon see us back on the treadmill. What is this package?

It has five components:
- prayer
- teaching
- training
- structures and strategy
- cost

1 Prayer

If there is a trick to promoting evangelism, it is evangelistic prayer. The real trick is getting the congregation to actually do it! Our lack of prayer is behind the hyperactivity that characterizes so much of our evangelism.

Prayer focuses the mind on God's supernatural work of drawing people to himself. It helps us remember the lostness of our friends and family, and motivates us to look for opportunities during each day. There are three areas in which we can foster evangelistic prayer in our congregation.

Firstly, we should maintain a strong evangelistic element in our public petitions. There is usually not much time devoted to prayer in our public meetings, and we need to ensure that what we do pray for reflects our priorities. If our prayers focus

on wise government, justice in the land, the sick, the bereaved, and so on, we are saying things about our priorities as a church.

If we wish to promote evangelism as a high congregational priority, we need to include a strong evangelistic element in our public prayers. We can thank God for those who have been converted. We can pray for forthcoming events, for those we know who are engaged in evangelism, for the godliness of the whole congregation in looking for opportunities to share the gospel. Of course, this is not to say that we should not pray for the sick—it is a question of emphasis.

Secondly, since it is hard to pray for non-Christians by name in a public meeting, smaller prayer groups can be useful. Many churches are discovering the effectiveness of evangelistic prayer partnerships of, say, three people, who meet regularly to pray for their non-Christian friends. Each member brings three names to the group—that's nine non-Christians being prayed for every week. This kind of prayer 'triplet' (or trio, or triad, or troika) keeps motivation strong, and builds an evangelistic mindset amongst those involved. And it is exciting and tremendously encouraging for groups to see God honouring their prayer as people on their list come to know Christ.

Thirdly, some churches have found it helpful to provide some mechanical means for members to write down and regularly pray for their own non-Christian contacts. A bookmark can be a good way of doing this. Moreover, when people find it hard to list many non-Christian friends, it highlights their need to get out of the ghetto and mix with non-Christians.

The first and fundamental step towards being an evangelizing church is to get the congregation praying.

2 Teaching

The quality and direction of a church's Bible teaching has a strong influence on evangelism. Teachers who spend a lot of time on the grey areas of Christianity tend to discourage evangelism. This is not to say that we shouldn't discuss the hard issues, and admit our ignorance where appropriate.

All the same, evangelism flourishes in an environment where people are aware of the cutting edge of the gospel. Evangelism is all about calling people to repent and to be transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. A teacher who is reluctant to preach this black and white gospel undermines the congregation's desire to see their friends saved. When the in/out, right/wrong, heaven/hell distinctions are not made—or are not made often or clearly—the sense of urgency and purpose fades from our evangelism.

In our teaching, we must face up to the hard issues of

eschatology and judgement. The love of God is almost meaning-less without understanding his wrath, and we must not shrink from proclaiming it. We must not play down mankind's plight, for it was this plight that moved the Father to send his Son to die.

The congregation must see clearly that the gospel is an offensive message that will divide people at certain key points. If they are going to take the risk to talk to their friends about God, they need to understand how their friends might react, and why. They also need to understand which issues are black and white, and which are shades of grey, so that they can call their friends to repentance in the areas of black and white.

3 Training

There are many excellent methods available today for training Christians in evangelism. Usually, however, too much faith is placed in them. Training courses are asked to do too much. They are expected to motivate and teach people as well as train them for the task. This is a false expectation. Prayer and good teaching are the only things that will deliver motivation for evangelism. A training course harnesses that motivation and channels it in the right direction, but we must not expect the course to do it all.

Given that the motivation is there, all Christians should receive some training in evangelism. At the very least, all Christians should know the facts of the gospel and be able to explain them simply to someone else. Every member of our congregation should know how to lead someone to Christ if the opportunity arises. Courses such as *2 Ways to Live* from St Matthias Press, or *Evangelism Explosion*, or *Christianity Explained*, are good vehicles for this kind of training.

Most Christians are also capable of being trained to follow up new Christians. Effective follow-up requires little more than love and setting a godly example (little more!), and we should train as many of our people as possible in the rudiments of this. Material such as the *Just for Starters* Bible studies and the *Personal Follow-up Training Course* from St Matthias Press provide a helpful structure for follow-up.

In implementing some form of evangelism training we need to be aware of the different gifts present in the congrega-tion. Some people are good at making non-Christian friends and hauling them along to church. These people should be encour-aged to use their gift. We should free them from other Christian responsibilities and roles so that they can get out amongst their friends and gather them in.

Others are particularly good at understanding where people are 'at' and explaining the gospel in terms that they can

understand. We should encourage this kind of person to latch onto interested non-Christians at church and work through the gospel with them, perhaps using some form of evangelistic Bible study (like *Investigating Christianity* or *Tough Questions* from St Matthias Press—this is beginning to sound like one long commercial!).

A key aspect in all this training is *practice*. Evangelism is a practical skill, and you can't learn it without doing it. There has to be some place in our training for getting out and having a go at evangelism, perhaps in a context outside the congregation. Beach missions (and the like) are great for this, but sometimes we need to develop our own methods. We can take on Scripture teaching in the local school, or visit door-to-door in our suburb, or chat to individuals about the gospel at a shopping centre. All these opportunities are themselves 'evangelism', but their goal is training in evangelism.

4 Structures and Strategy

Whatever programs or directions we devise for our congregational evangelism, they are doomed to fail without Prayer, Teaching and Training. Structures or strategies will not work unless individual members are geared to utilize them.

The Billy Graham Crusades of 1968 and 1979 are interesting illustrations of this. Many churches in Sydney felt that both of these mass evangelistic structures did not work. Some churches, however, who were motivated and already evangelizing, benefited considerably and experienced significant growth.

There are two basic models of evangelism: outreach and church growth.

The Outreach Model has the world 'out there' as its focus. Members reach out and tell non-Christians the gospel on their own turf: in the workplace, in sporting clubs, through social events, in universities and hospitals, in particular professions, and so on. People who are converted through this model might not join the church of the person who led them to Christ—they might join in their local area—but the important thing is that they have been reached and saved.

The Church Growth Model focuses much more on the congregation and on gathering people in to hear God's word and come to faith. Obviously, this method tends to build our own congregation's numbers more effectively.

Either model is appropriate, and we may end up with a combination of the two. But we need to work out what we are doing and why. If we decide to concentrate on the Church Growth Model and on the local area as our 'catchment', we need to recognize that we will reach mainly children, old people,

young people, and non-working women. These are the people who 'live' in the local area. Men, and working women, tend to live at work, and this is one reason why, historically, we have not been good at evangelizing men. We have used the wrong model for them.

If we take the Church Growth Model seriously, we need to take steps to make our church 'user-friendly', and we will discuss this further in our final paper.

5 Cost

For most Evangelicals, evangelism has a status akin to motherhood, apple pie and prayer. It is something that we cannot oppose.

However, evangelism requires a total commitment on the part of the church committee and the congregation. Without this commitment, and a corresponding willingness to change, evangelism will wither on the vine in our churches.

Sacrifices are necessary if we want to promote evangelism. We need to make changes to our public meetings to render them more 'accessible' to newcomers. We need to be ready to accept less of the pastor's time because he is now doing more evangelism. Perhaps we will run fewer church activities so that people will have time to mix with their peers and share the gospel with them. We will pay the personal cost of taking risks with our friends and challenging them about their attitude to Christ. There will be opposition and hostility. We will all have to bear the cross.

But this should not surprise us. Saving others has always involved bearing a cross.

Personal observations

Points from Discussion
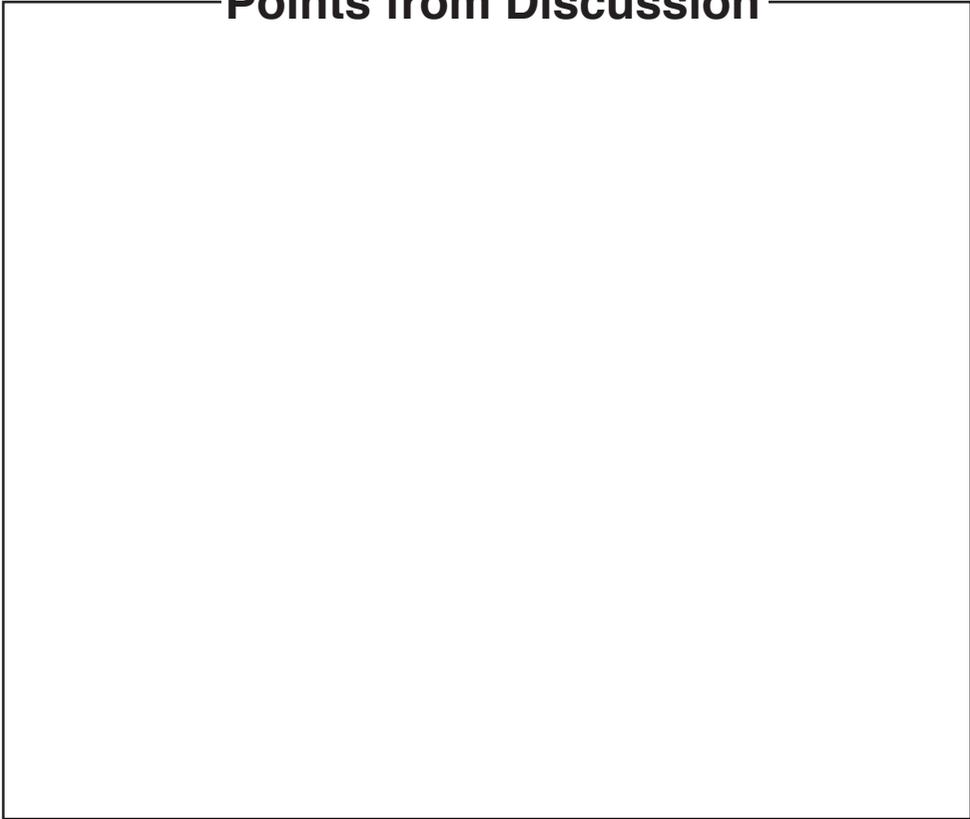
Action

7
The User-friendly Church

In the past five years, a revolution has taken place in the computer industry. Before the fateful year of 1984, those souls adventurous enough to own a computer used to struggle to make their beloved machines understand them. They'd have to type something like: "A/:*exec.bac.later/C@RUOK" just to get the computer to acknowledge their existence. Actually getting anything done was considerably more complex.

The archetypal personal computer user was bearded, wore cords and desert boots, and had trouble relating to ordinary human beings. His stunted emotional state was commonly attributed to having to relate to his computer, whose demeanour could only be described as particularly 'unfriendly'.

Then along came the Apple Macintosh, a fruity little machine in both name and nature. Billed as 'the computer for the rest of us', the Macintosh popularized the idea of the 'user-friendly' computer. Here was a machine that a technical no-hoper (ie. most of us) could master with relative ease: no tricky commands to remember, and no hostile colon blinking at the top of an otherwise blank screen. Everything was visual, intuitive and straightforward—and the new word for it was 'user-friendly'.

This 'user-friendly' way of doing things has since become standard, and Apple's rivals have been quick to jump on the bandwagon.

This is a powerful metaphor for our church life. There is an increasing awareness that churches need to present a 'user-friendly interface' to the world. We can no longer afford to shroud our activities in complex language and incomprehensible practices—indeed, we never could.

It is no caricature to say that most churches are still living B.M. (Before Macintosh). To the insider—to the technically aware—everything seems fine. But to the outsider, it is all a mystery, and on the rare occasions that he does visit, he finds it

threatening and quite definitely 'user-UNfriendly'.

"But our church IS friendly"

Most Christians will retort: "But our church IS friendly. I've got lots of friends at church, and we all get on very well."

What they mean, of course, is that it is friendly FOR THEM. The core members of most churches enjoy mutual friendship. They get on well together, go on camps and conferences together, even visit each other in their homes. They share a wealth of memories and experiences.

But this is the wrong group to ask. If we want to assess the 'user-friendliness' of our church we need to ask the newcomers and visitors—those on the fringe of the congregation trying to 'get in'. Perhaps we should also ask those who have given up trying to get in and have left!

This is the mark of the friendly church: when a complete stranger with little or no knowledge of Christianity comes to one of its meetings, he feels welcomed and included. He can understand what is going on, and feels encouraged to come again. Before long he feels like this is *his* church.

How many of our churches really are user-friendly? They might be full of 'friendly' people, but unless the newcomer feels the offer of this friendship, the church is not 'friendly'.

It is no use protesting that he "wasn't interested in the gospel" or that he "wasn't our kind of person". We must *interest* him in the gospel and *become* his kind of person.

The truth is that, deep down, many of us don't want our churches to grow. Church growth threatens our established friendships and ways of doing things. If we commit ourselves to becoming a 'user-friendly' church, we can kiss our cosy, stable fellowship goodbye. However, this is what we must do if we are to live out the implications of the gospel.

The Theology of Friendliness

God is personal. Or to use the more usual convoluted Christian grammar: our God is a personal God. He is not a force. He is a triune being, enjoying relationship within himself from all eternity. God speaks; he listens; he loves and laughs and grieves.

This personal God takes the initiative to establish a relationship with his rebellious creatures. Though he is powerful

and awesome beyond description, in the gospel we hear of how he took steps to become our Friend, to dwell with us, to reconcile us to himself. In the gospel, the curtain that once separated us from God has been torn in two.

These themes reverberate throughout the New Testament, and we are all no doubt familiar with them. The implications of these ideas extend to our relationships with each other. God has made peace not only between man and God, but also between man and man. He has demolished the dividing wall of hostility (between Jew and Gentile) and created one new mankind, at peace with God through the cross (Ephesians 2:11-22). In the gospel, all the old barriers are broken down: now there is to be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

The gospel stems from the friendly, outgoing character of God. God takes the initiative to reach out to his enemies, and he has commanded us to do the same: to go out into all the world and make disciples, welcoming *everyone* into the joyful fellowship of God's people. God's character and his worldwide plan mean that Christians are obliged to be outward-looking and to welcome in the outsider; in other words, to be 'user-friendly'.

This is reflected in the appointment of elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1—the exemplary elder must be *hospitable*. The same is said of the congregation member (see 1 Peter 4:9 and Romans 12:13). Hebrews 13:2 even offers the tantalizing promise that, in so doing, we might entertain angels unawares!

The unfriendly church—the church that is not too interested in welcoming the outsider—is deeply inconsistent with the gospel.

Re-programming for a user-friendly church

What, then, is to be done? As with many problems, we must start with our *attitude*. No set of techniques or programs will make our church friendly to the outsider if our heart is not in it. We need a deep commitment to the Friendly God and a willingness to put ourselves out and take the initiative.

However, given that our attitude is right, what practical steps can we take. They might include the following.

1
Learning about friendliness

One of the greatest barriers to making a church more 'user-friendly' is convincing the members that there is a problem! Many Christians are quite blind to the effect of their actions (or inaction) on the outsider.

Visiting another church is a worthwhile way of getting a feel for what it's like to be an outsider. Go anonymously—alone or with a friend—and pay attention to every detail as you arrive and participate in the meeting. How do you feel? Welcomed? Awkward? Unsure where to sit or what to do? What impressions do you receive? In other words, put yourself in the place of an outsider and observe the kinds of things that affect whether your visit is remembered as a positive or negative experience.

When you return to your own church the next week, compare it with what you found when you went visiting. When you arrive, what do you find? Do you walk into an old dimly lit building, with a pile of miscellaneous lost property in the corner and a jumble of pamphlets and photos all over an antique table? Are you greeted with a wan smile, given a tatty collection of books and left to find a seat? Are you about the only one there (because you're three minutes early) except for the musicians, who are tuning up and trying to squeeze in a last minute run through?

Before we get too depressed, let's follow more closely the chronology of a newcomer arriving at our church.

2
The door

First impressions are powerful, and a wave of impressions greets the newcomer before he has even reached the door. Is it a welcoming building? Is it hard to find? What's the parking like and how have the grounds been kept? If the meeting is at night, is there adequate external lighting? All these things build impressions.

If the newcomer makes it inside, what is he greeted with? For we regulars, the particular arrangement of pews and/or chairs is comfortable and reassuring. But what impression does it give to the outsider?

Have you ever noticed that newcomers almost always sit at the back? Why is this? Partly, it is so that they can keep control. At the back of a meeting, you aren't taken by surprise when everyone suddenly kneels or stands up or starts shaking each others' hands. You can avoid humiliation. It is also because the back seat is the first one they can find, and not knowing where to sit, they are only too glad to grab it.

This is where good ushering comes in. It is vital. A good usher is a priceless asset for the would-be 'user-friendly' church. He is outgoing and friendly. He makes the newcomer feel at

ease, politely shows him to a good seat, and introduces him to someone sitting nearby. If there are people in your congregation with these gifts, they need to be given every encouragement to use them. More importantly, they need to train others to do the job alongside them.

The newcomer has negotiated the door and the meeting begins. He notices that for some strange reason everyone keeps referring to the 'service'—"Welcome to the service...We'll begin our service with hymn number 3...". Perhaps it's like taking your car in for a 'service', he thinks. Maybe all these people are here for their regular 'service'—most of them look like they need it.

By what criteria will our newcomer judge the 'service'? By the truthfulness of the content? Probably not. Those rare individuals who are actually concerned about 'truth' will stay at a truthful church regardless of how unfriendly it might seem. You needn't worry too much about those who love truth.

No, the average newcomer will have two quite different and more self-centred factors in mind: *Is it enjoyable?* and *Is it relevant?* The newcomer is interested in whether this place he has stumbled into will meet any of his needs or longings. And he won't bother staying to find out if he finds it boring, irritating or embarrassing.

There is much that we can do to make it easier for newcomers to fit into our meetings. We can start by acknowledging their presence—even personally if that is appropriate—and by reassuring them that they are very welcome. Many churches have leaflets or packages especially for newcomers and make a big thing about handing them out during the meeting. Some churches even give all the newcomers a round of applause. This may be going too far—it may embarrass the newcomer—but it is better than indifference.

Having publicly asked the newcomers to feel right at home, we need to deliver the goods during the rest of the meeting. We need to avoid jargon or technical language. If a technical term is unavoidable, we should apologize for it and explain its meaning.

Our books and handouts must be clear and straightforward. One church I visited handed out four books plus a bulletin sheet (prayer book, hymn book, psalm book and chorus book). What hope has the newcomer got of selecting which book we're using let alone finding his place?! However, even if we hand out only one or two books, it is usually difficult for the outsider to find the place and keep up.

3
The meeting

Overhead transparencies are a good solution if your building can accommodate them. Another possibility is to gather all the information required for the meeting into one leaflet/handout. This is perhaps the best method of all, but requires extra planning and printing. However, for the church committed to welcoming the newcomer, this investment is worthwhile.

4 After the meeting

To make our church 'user-friendly', the first thing we must do after the meeting is keep the minister away from the door. The time-honoured ritual of the ministerial handshake-at-the-door is exactly the wrong way to welcome newcomers, because it encourages them to leave quickly (with the dubious compensation of pressing some sanctified flesh).

Keeping people inside the building for morning tea/supper encourages interaction. We should encourage the congregation to be on the lookout for unfamiliar faces and to outdo each other in being the first to welcome them personally, get them a cup of coffee, and have a chat.

It is also good for the pastor to welcome newcomers personally, but this will involve the congregation being willing to 'relinquish' him for this purpose. Some congregations have a special newcomers Morning Tea with the pastor once a month, where these personal introductions can be done all at once. All the same, we need to beware of giving the impression that the pastor is somehow different from the rest of us, and that he is the only person really worth getting to know.

Whoever chats to the newcomer over coffee, they need to have one particular detail always in the back of their minds—obtaining the newcomer's name and address.

5 Follow-up

It is important to *communicate* our friendliness to the outsider. One effective way to do this is to follow up their visit immediately with a letter of welcome.

This presupposes that we have obtained the person's address, and there are a number of ways to do this. Some churches have a visitor's book; others have a card that is handed to all newcomers as they enter or is placed on every seat; others rely on members talking to the newcomer and getting his name and address personally; and some use a combination of these.

Whatever the method, any follow-up is dependent on getting the name and address. This must be a priority.

The letter need not say much—simply that it was a pleasure to have their company and that they should feel no hesitation in contacting us for any help and further

information…and so on. It should be sent as soon as possible. After a visit on Sunday, the newcomer should receive the letter no later than Wednesday. Strike while the iron is hot.

The letter can even mention that someone from the congregation will pop in to say hello personally in the next few days. This kind of visit is very impressive for the newcomer. It shows very clearly that you want them to become part of your group—you are keen to include them.

The personal visit also allows for an individual 'diagnosis' of the newcomer's needs and spiritual state. The member who visits can suggest ways in which this particular person could fit into the congregation—which groups might be best, and so on. And it very often leads to opportunities for evangelism.

When the newcomer comes to church the second time—having been so impressed by your friendliness—the member who visited the newcomer should be responsible for following it through. He should sit with the newcomer, introduce him to other members, and tell him about forthcoming social activities or conferences.

Even when the process of personal friendliness is working well, there still may be some structural barriers to 'user-friendliness'. Even with good ushering, welcoming and follow-up, a newcomer can still hang around on the edges of a congregation for 12–18 months without being sure whether he really 'belongs'. The potential problem areas are threefold.

**6
Structural
changes**

Firstly, we need to ensure that our small group structures can cope with the arrival of newcomers. Integrating the newcomer into a small group of some sort is, in most cases, a crucial step in the person becoming part of the congregation. However, if all the congregation's groups are well-established, it is difficult for the outsider to fit in. With shared jokes and experiences and norms of behaviour, the established Bible Study Group does not cope well with new members, especially if they are also new to the church.

One solution is to re-form all the congregation's small groups each year, so that everyone starts on the same footing. Another solution is to start special 'newcomers' groups every few months which are aimed specifically at the needs of newcomers. The solution you choose will depend largely on how many newcomers you have coming through the doors.

Secondly, we should look at our program of conferences and social activities with a view to integrating newcomers. Taking a group of newcomers away for a weekend with some

established members does wonders for their sense of 'belonging'. Even if only 10-15 people are involved, the effect is still powerful. Suppers and dinners are also helpful ways to introduce newcomers to more people.

Thirdly, we need to analyse our system of membership. Especially with the older denominations, membership of the congregation is usually loose and ill-defined. This has a number of advantages, but one of its main disadvantages relates to the newcomer.

It can be difficult for outsiders to know if they are members or not. A newcomer can drift along for 18 months or longer without developing a perception that he is a committed member of the congregation. With increasing numbers of people changing churches across traditional denominational boundaries, this is becoming more of a problem.

A simple, non-legalistic method of declaring one's membership of the congregation can be a helpful remedy to the confusion. It might involve nothing more than signing a form which declares that you are a Christian and that you want to belong to this congregation. New 'members' could then be welcomed publicly, and a useful norm could be established—that people in this place *decide* that they want to be a member, and commit themselves to it.

Some care needs to be taken that this doesn't lead to elitism, or to newcomers feeling unwelcome. That would defeat the point entirely. We need to reiterate—and often—that newcomers are very welcome at our gatherings.

Leadership

Who is responsible for the 'user-friendliness' of our congregation? Certainly not the newcomer. It is up to the congregation and its leaders to take action in this area.

As such, it should be a high priority for the church committee. It might be worth setting up a task force to investigate the current state of your church's friendliness and to recommend and implement action.
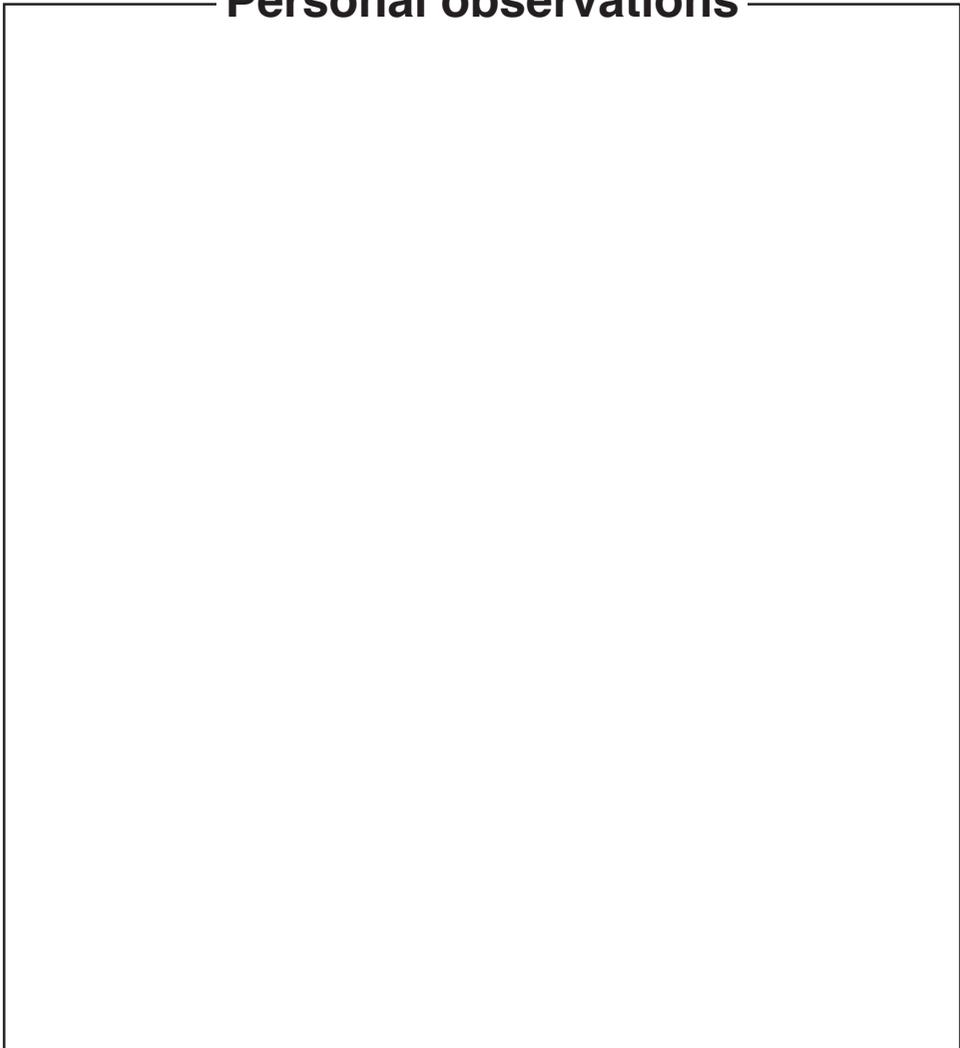
What might these actions be? Perhaps it will involve the Property Sub-committee embarking on a program to make the building more comfortable and welcoming. Perhaps a group of specialist ushers needs to be recruited and trained. Perhaps the pastoral team needs to work out with the secretary how letters can be quickly and efficiently despatched. Perhaps the Home Group Co-ordinator needs to assess the current arrangements

and plan for a structure that will integrate newcomers more effectively.
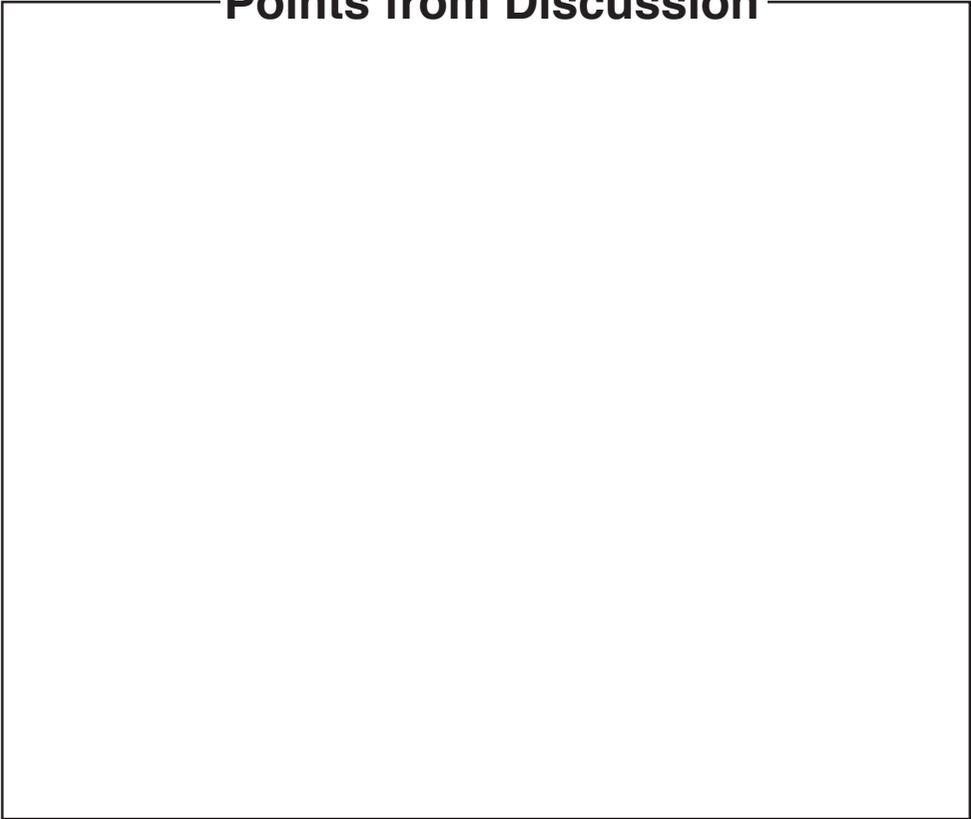
However friendly your congregation might be, it is important that action is taken. We must break the bonds of apathy and gear our church towards welcoming the outsider. User-friendly churches don't just 'happen'. They aren't a result of a number of particularly friendly people belonging to a congregation. Friendly churches are born and nurtured in the context of a deep commitment to the Friendly God, who was prepared to pay the cost to reach out to us.

Are we prepared to pay this cost to welcome the outsider?

Personal observations

Points from Discussion

Action