

LEADING TEAMS IN LARGER CHURCHES

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INTRODUCTION

1. My experience of ministry and teams

I write as a senior minister of a larger Baptist church. This may be seen as a limitation by those who lead churches of a different tradition. However, my intention is to draw out principles and good practice for all who minister in larger churches of whatever denomination.

Ordained in 1970 as a missionary, I spent the next two years teaching New Testament and Greek in the Protestant Theological Faculty of what became the National University of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). Theoretically I was part of a team, but in fact each faculty member did their own thing. We were not a team.

In 1973 I was called to be the minister of Altrincham Baptist Church, Cheshire, then a declining church with just 83 members. In thirteen years of ministry there I had the joy of seeing the church quadruple in size to 320 members. After seven years on my own, I worked first with a middle-aged female pastoral associate, and then with an assistant minister straight from theological college. I also had a series of four ‘interns’, two of whom have ended up in significant positions in Christian ministry. This was not, however, my only experience of teams – during that period I had the privilege of working with a ‘dream-team’ of outstanding lay leaders who enabled me to grow and develop in my understanding of ministry.

In 1986 I was called to be Principal of Spurgeon’s College, then a declining Baptist theological college, running a large deficit. Over the next six years I was able to double the student enrolment, increase the teaching members of the staff by one third, and put the college in the black. I ended up leading a fairly large staff: yet, if the truth be told, to a large extent the teaching staff were mostly rugged individualists each pursuing their own career path. We were not a team.

In 1993 I was called to a large traditional Baptist church in Chelmsford. As a result of transfer growth caused by the expansion of the town, by 1982 its membership had risen to 582; by the time I arrived there was a paper membership of 400 members. Partly as a result of radical roll revision and partly as a result of dissatisfaction with changes I introduced, over the next seven years our membership went down to 250. At the turn of the century we experienced spiritual renewal as a result of a building project, and what had been a dysfunctional inward-looking church became a loving and outward looking church. Today we are a vibrant seven-day-a-week town-centre church, with a committed membership of some 354 members, with a fringe twice that number, and with some 25,000 different people going through our premises every year.

Spearheading the mission and ministry of the church are the ministers together with the other members of the *staff ministry team*.¹ To a large extent this staff ministry team is

¹ At Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford, initially there were just two full-time ministers and a part-time church administrator; today the team is almost treble that that size. At the time of writing the current ministry team is made up of three ordained ministers: the youth minister and I are full time; and the associate minister, works four days a week. Also part of the ministry team is a half-time paid community outreach worker (i.e. ‘evangelist’) and a half-time volunteer children’s worker; a half-time volunteer who

responsible for the operational life of the church – and it is this team which forms the focus of this booklet. However, there are other teams as well, which also play a significant part in the life of the church. For instance:

The *leadership team*, meets monthly and is made up of the ministers and lay leaders known as ‘deacons’ (equivalent to ‘elders’ in other churches) who provide direction to the church: of the current nine lay leaders two are ‘church officers’: viz. the ‘senior deacon’ (who in other Baptist churches is often called the ‘church secretary’) and the ‘church treasurer’, who in some ways are akin to the ‘church wardens’ in an Anglican church or ‘church stewards’ in a Methodist church. As far as the Charity Commission is concerned, the ministers and deacons are the ‘trustees’ of the church.

Twelve *task teams* responsible for overseeing and developing clearly defined areas of the church’s mission.

The ‘*church meeting*’, made up of committed members of the church, meets five times a year, and is the body to which ultimately the ministers, ‘deacons’, and all teams are accountable. In Baptist parlance, the church meeting “is the occasion when as individuals and as a community, we submit ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and stand under the judgment of God that we may know the mind of Christ”.² The church meeting is responsible for key issues such as the doctrine of the church, the adoption of the annual budget, and major policy relating to the church’s mission and ministry. It calls ministers and appoints deacons. In many Baptist churches the church meeting admits people to membership, but – as is the case with most larger Baptist churches – at Chelmsford the admission of members has been delegated to the leadership team. Whether or not the church meeting is a ‘team’ is a moot point. I, however, see my task as the senior minister to weld together what may appear initially to be a motley crew, each doing his or her thing for Christ, into a team, with a common vision and a common task.³ Although this ‘congregational’ system of church government, is very different from the ‘episcopalianism’ of the Church of England and the ‘connexionalism’ of Methodism, some analogies can be drawn with ‘Parochial Church Councils’⁴ and local Methodist church councils⁵.

leads our pastoral team and who also serves as my P/A; the theologically trained wife of our associate minister works one day a week helping with our worship as also with seniors; a paid seniors community outreach worker, who works ten hours a week during term-time; and two unpaid interns who work ten hours a week (one is responsible for youth administration, and the other for sound and vision). With the exception of the intern for sound and vision, all seven attend the weekly staff team meeting and all receive monthly supervision. In addition we have a full-time church centre administrator and a full-time church centre steward, and a half-time church administrator.

² The Baptist Union’s 1948 *Statement of the Church*: see Paul Beasley-Murray, *Radical Believers: The Baptist way of being the church* (Baptist Union of GB, Didcot, 2nd edition 2006) 77-95.

³ See Paul Beasley-Murray, *Dynamic Leadership* (MARC, Eastbourne 1990) 93-113

⁴ See *Church Representation Rules* (Church House Publishing 2006).

⁵ In Methodism decision-making involves not just the local church, but the circuit, the district, and the national ‘Conference’.

2. God is not in the business of cloning!

Every individual is unique; and what is true of individuals is also true of individual churches. Every church has its own individual character, and its own particular mission to fulfil. This does not mean that churches cannot learn from one another. Over the years I have greatly benefited from seeing how other churches operate, and subsequently adapting the insights gained to my own church. But do notice, there is all the difference in the world between ‘adapting’ and ‘adopting’. To ‘adopt’ an idea from another church fails to recognise the unique character of each church. Each church has its own special calling to be church. We can learn from one another, provided we do not slavishly imitate.

In this booklet I refer a good deal to the way in which we do things in Chelmsford. In no way am I pretending this to be *the* way. In a constantly changing situation we are constantly learning how to do things better. However, because there is so little material published in this country about teams in larger churches, I am daring to ‘put my head on the block’ by offering a model. It is not a model to be followed – but rather a model to help other larger churches to think through what it means to be team, and in due course develop their own model.

1. SEVEN UNDERLYING CONVICTIONS

1. *Leadership is a noble calling*

Paul wrote to Timothy that whoever aspires to be a “church leader” desires an excellent work” (1 Tim 3.1 GNB) – leadership is “a noble task” (NRSV). In the New Testament leadership is depicted as one of the gifts of the Spirit⁶. Not to exercise leadership is therefore to quench the Spirit! Leadership rightly understood does not stand in opposition to service, but is an expression of service.

The key to Christian leadership is servant-leadership which has as its model Jesus.⁷ Servant-leadership focuses on the people to be cared for rather than just the job to be done. There is therefore a very real difference between the servant-leader and the high-powered executive. The servant-leader cannot trample on people in pursuit of personal advancement – nor even in pursuit of the kingdom. Leaders may not be doormats – but neither may they use others as doormats.

Christian leadership always leaves people free to accept or not to accept its direction. It can never force others to do something over which they are unhappy. There is a difference between leadership and ‘lordship’.⁸

2. *Leaders need to lead*

“Leadership is the key priority in the churches of today. Preaching is important, worship is important, pastoral care, evangelism and social action – all these things must come high on the agenda. But uppermost comes leadership”.⁹ It was with these words that some years ago I began my first book on leadership entitled *Dynamic Leadership*. Leadership is at the heart of the pastoral task. Indeed, I have argued that “leadership is the distinguishing concept between the ordained ministry of the church and the general ministry of the church”.¹⁰ If we follow the New Testament’s principles of ministry, ordination is not an initiation into priesthood; nor is it a setting aside of a person to ‘the ministry of word and sacrament’; rather is it a recognition of a God-given call to lead his people.¹¹

While leadership is crucial to churches of any size, it is essential for larger churches if they are to develop and grow. Baptist churches, for instance, may be congregationally governed, but they need to be ‘ministry-led’. In particular, ministers of larger churches need to be visionary leaders. Alas, that is not always the case. George Barna, an American church researcher, in a survey of over 1000 senior American pastors found that “fewer than 4% of all senior pastors were able to communicate a clear vision for

⁶ See Rom 12.8 and 1 Cor 12.8. The concept of leadership is also present in Eph 4.12, for in the ancient world the word ‘pastor’ or ‘shepherd’ was often used as a synonym for a ‘leader’ or king’.

⁷ See Mark 10.42-44; Matt 20.25-27; also Luke 22.24-26 and John 13.15

⁸ See 1 Pet 5.2-3

⁹ *Dynamic Leadership* 9

¹⁰ Paul Beasley-Murray, ‘The ministry of all and the leadership of all’ 161 in *Anyone for Ordination?* (Marc, Tunbridge Wells 1993) edited by Paul Beasley-Murray.

¹¹ *Anyone for Ordination?* 167

their ministry".¹² It is important to state that by "vision" Barna did not mean some general mission statement, such as "to evangelize the lost" or "to be God's agents of change in a world that needs to be transformed by his love, compassion and grace". Rather Barna was referring to "a detailed sense of why God wants a church to exist in the community and how it is unique in comparison". In this sense "vision" is equivalent to *God's particular plan for a church*. Barna went on: "Why is the Church struggling in America? Because we do not have visionary leaders championing the cause. Is the problem that pastors today are incapable of being visionary leaders or that they have not invested themselves sufficiently in the process to grasp God's vision for their church?"

Ministers of larger churches need to be encouraged by their churches to exercise bold visionary leadership. Where such leadership is given, churches can be more effective in fulfilling their mission. In the words of Paul Borden, who as the Chief Executive of American Baptist Churches of the West doubled the number of growing churches in his care from 37% to 74%, wrote: "God expects those who are given gifts, talents, skills and a call, to lead with excellence. This means that leaders must be given broad authority to take strong leadership roles over areas for which they are responsible. Those same leaders should also expect to provide specific, measurable, behavioural, and tangible goals relating to outcomes and then be held accountable for these goals. However, in the pursuit of these goals leaders should be given wide latitude, flexibility, and protection by those to whom the leader is accountable. Leaders also need the freedom to fail so they be willing to risk. Obviously, too much failure indicates a lack of wisdom and leadership. On the other hand, without risk and failure the organization is doomed to eventual decline and death".¹³

3. *Leaders are accountable*

Leadership always brings with it accountability. The fact is that responsibility with authority creates authoritarianism. This is a common structure in independent churches, where the pastor runs the church is not answerable to anyone. This may be effective, but it is not safe. Without accountability too often things go wrong.

Although in some church structures this accountability may involve trans-local figures such as bishops and moderators, I believe that ministers should be accountable to their local churches. In Baptist churches ministers are ultimately accountable to their 'church meetings'; however, the reality is that such accountability often has little 'bite'. For accountability to have meaning, ministers need to have to give account of their ministry to a 'board' or 'eldership' or 'diaconate' who can ensure that their leadership is in line with the agreed mission of the church.

The fact is that the concepts of authority, responsibility and leadership must be held together. To quote Paul Borden again: "Any individual who is given a specific

¹² George Barna, *Today's Pastors* (Regal Books, Ventura, California 1993) 118.

¹³ *Hit the Bull's Eye. How denominations can aim the congregation at the mission field* (Abingdon Press, Nashville) 127

responsibility must be given adequate authority to accomplish the task. That individual must then be held accountable to ascertain that the responsibility has been fulfilled".¹⁴

Rightly understood, such accountability should not be viewed as a restriction of ministry, but as an encouragement to ministry. Over the years I have been blessed with lay-leaders, who have contributed greatly to my ministry by holding me to account – not in a negative way, but in a positive way. Time and again I have proved the truth of the proverb that ‘Iron sharpens iron’.¹⁵ I am a better leader precisely because I am accountable.

What does all this mean in practice? Currently for me this means that once a term I prepare a paper for my ‘deacons’ in which I give an account of the last three months of my ministry in the light of the objectives we have agreed. In the context of our monthly leadership team we then talk through the paper. I find it a most affirming and stimulating exercise.

4. God is in the business of teams

Ministers are not to lead on their own. This principle is derived from the New Testament, where a plurality of leadership was the norm in church life. In the words of Colin Brown, “It would seem to be the case, that if there was to be a church at all in the New Testament, it needed at least two ministers”.¹⁶

Team leadership is not only Scriptural, it also has great advantages. In *Dynamic Leadership* I wrote:

- “Leaders are able to complement one another, for no one has all the gifts necessary for an all-round ministry. Members of a leadership team can build up one another’s strengths and compensate for one another’s weaknesses
- Leaders are able to encourage one another. Leadership can be a lonely business, but where leadership is shared, there support can be derived. Members of a leadership team can identify one another’s gifts and encourage each other and develop and use them
- Leaders are able to be accountable to one another. It is not good either for the individual or the local church if a leader is not in a position to receive correction when things go wrong. Members of a leadership team should be able to speak the truth in love to one another, and so learn from failure and be the stronger for the future”¹⁷

¹⁴ *Hit the Bull’s Eye* 127. Paul Borden, together with his colleague John Kaiser, has in fact adapted to Baptist life the so-called ‘Carver’ model of governance: see John Carver, *Boards That Make A Difference* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2nd edition 1997). See too www.carvergovernance.com

¹⁵ See Proverbs 27.17

¹⁶ Colin Brown, ‘New Testament Patterns of Ministry’ in *Ministry in the Seventies* (Falcon, London 1970 edited by Clive Porterhouse) 19. Similarly James Lawrence, *Growing Leaders* (CPAS/BRF, Oxford 2004) 233-234.

¹⁷ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Dynamic Leadership* 39-40. These advantages also have a Biblical basis: see, for example, 1 Cor 12.12-21 (‘one body with many members’); Ecclesiastes 4.9-12 (‘two are better than word’); and Ephesians 4.15 (‘speaking the truth in love’).

At that stage the model I had in mind was of a solo minister working with a group of lay leaders to form a leadership team. Although in this booklet I have in mind ministers working with staff teams, the principles remain the same! Indeed, in a staff team there are additional advantages: a staff team offers the opportunity for training, especially for those for whom it is their first experience of ministry; it also offers the opportunity of specialism, whereby members are able to work to their strengths, rather than having to exercise an ‘all-round’ ministry.

Precisely because I believe that God is in the business of teams, I find it sad that so relatively few ministers want to work in teams – unless they are the team leader! Unfortunately our theological colleges essentially train ‘prima donnas’. Unlike the United States, where ‘career’ associates are common, in the UK there are not many ministers genuinely happy to play ‘second fiddle’.¹⁸ Indeed, sometimes ‘associate’ ministers are associate minister by default – they have perhaps had a bad experience of ministry and no longer want to have the buck stop with them, or they have become tired and feel they have not the energy to run a church on their own. I find this hard to reconcile with the God who is in the business of teams.

5. Church size affects the pattern of ministry

There are four different sizes of church, each of which displays a different pattern of ministry:

A small or ‘family-sized’ church has under 50 people in attendance at worship on a Sunday. According to the English Church Census of 2005 some 49% of all English churches came into this category. With the continued decline of churchgoing, most English churches are now small churches. Many small churches do not have an ordained minister – or if they do, then the minister is often shared with other churches too.

The ‘pastoral’ church has around 50-150 active members. It is an eminently ‘manageable’ size of church. But once the congregation grows beyond 150, that moment the effectiveness of most ministers is seriously decreased. In a survey of 350 English churches Alan Wilkinson and I discovered that “A full-time pastor could cope with the demands of a growing church with a membership of under 150. But beyond that point, the strain and limitations begin to have an adverse effect on the potential for growth of the church”¹⁹.

The ‘programme’ church typically has 150-350 active members. Here the primary attraction is less the minister and more the church’s programmes. People often begin to attend such churches because of the activities run for children or for young people or for young adults. Churches of this size tend to have a second member of staff – in non-Anglican churches in Britain this second member is often a youth minister or worker.

¹⁸ According to an Anglican colleague, because in many circles associates are easiest to cut when money gets tight, this is a vulnerable and uncertain option to pursue.

¹⁹ See Paul Beasley-Murray & Alan Wilkinson, *Turning the Tide: An assessment of Baptist Church Growth in England* (Bible Society, London 1981) 57

Finally, there is the ‘corporate church’, with over 350 active members. Such churches have staff teams – ministry staff and office support staff. When members are in hospital, it is almost taken for granted that they will be visited by the curate or assistant minister, rather than by the vicar or senior minister. In the larger corporate churches the senior minister will not know the names of all the church members. The key distinction between a corporate church and a programme church lies in the quality of what is offered on a Sunday. Excellence is the mark of not just the preacher, but also of the musicians, the sound team, the welcomers, and indeed all who take part in the worship service. There are different graduations among these corporate churches – a mega church with 1000 or more members is a very different animal from a church with 500 members. However, within the British scene there is little reason to refine these distinctions.²⁰

In the light of these four different types of church size, which is a large church? Some would define a large church as a church with over 300 in worship: in which case some 6% of all English churches fall into this category. If, however, we define a large church as a church with over 400 at worship, then only 4% of churches may be described as large – and many of these churches would be Roman Catholic churches. According to Peter Brierley 1% (150) of Anglican churches and 2% of Baptist churches have 350 or more attending on a Sunday. These 200 churches respectively accounted for no less than 10% of all Anglican and 13% of all Baptist churchgoers in 2005.²¹

My concern in this booklet is not with large churches, but with ‘larger’ churches. The Baptist Union of Great Britain recently defined a ‘larger’ church as a church with more than 230 members²². In a denomination where half the churches have 40 or less people in worship on a Sunday, this may make sense. On the other hand, there are massive differences between a church with 230 in Sunday worship, and a church with 450 in Sunday worship. Furthermore, those differences do not simply relate to Sunday worship – they relate too to ministerial staffing.

My working definition of a typical ‘larger’ church is that it is a ‘programme’ church which is in the process of becoming a ‘corporate’ church.²³ Part of this process relates to the development of church staff. No longer content with a ‘vicar and a curate’, the church is actively seeking to develop its staff team, both ministerial and administrative. A ‘larger’ church is therefore likely to have at least 250 people in worship on a Sunday.

²⁰ See Roy Oswald, ‘How to minister effectively in family, pastoral, program and corporate sized churches’ 31-46 in *Size Transitions in Congregations* (Alban Institute, Virginia 2001) edited by Beth Ann Gaede

²¹ Peter Brierley, ‘Pulling out of the Nosedive’ *Ministry Today* 38 (Winter 2006) 10-11

²² In 2007 the Baptist Union formed a network of ‘larger churches’, which involved taking the largest 70 churches, which went down to churches with about 230 members.

²³ In some contexts, of course, it may not be right or indeed feasible for a programme church to become a corporate church. Some would argue that once a church gets to 280 it should be thinking about ‘planting’ or ‘grafting’ rather than getting any bigger itself. Personally, I believe that there is a place for larger churches – indeed, Peter Brierley in his research has shown that the larger the church, the more likely it is to attract worshippers. For a ‘defence’ of the larger church see Paul Beasley-Murray, “‘Honey pots’: a response’ *Baptist Ministers’ Journal* 304 (Oct 2009) 12-17

6. Staff teams are vital for a church's growth and development

As we have already noted, a church with an active membership of around 150 tends to be the limit of one person's effective ministry, and is unlikely to continue to grow if the staff team is not expanded. This was my experience in Altrincham:

“As our church approached the 150 mark the growth process began to slow down...Our experience had finally exposed my own limitations in trying to contain all the pastoral needs of the fellowship. I had been trying to cope physically, intellectually and sociologically with an every-widening range of activities. I felt like the circus juggler with an ever-growing row of spinning plates on bamboo poles. As each new plate is added, there is the danger that the other plates will crash down behind him”²⁴

The question arises, at what stage should one appoint the next member of staff? Unfortunately there has been little research undertaken in the UK on this subject, and so at this point I shall have to draw upon the American experience.

Some years ago Peter Wagner, the eminent American church growth consultant, stated: “The rule of thumb... is that you would have a program staff person (plus backup personnel such as secretaries) for each 100 active members.”²⁵ More recently Bill Easum, an American Methodist church consultant, wrote that churches should aim to “have the equivalent of one full-time paid ‘program person’ for every hundred people in worship (including children, even if they are not in worship)”²⁶ On that basis our church in Chelmsford, with the equivalent of just over four full-time ‘programme’ staff, is par for the course.

Gary McIntosh, another American church consultant, believes that financially this is more than most churches can afford and argues that a realistic ratio of staff to worship attendance is 1: 150. According to McIntosh

- Each effective staff person tends to build a ministry that involves 125-150 people. For example, a senior pastor is capable of serving a church of about 150 worshippers
- The addition of a second pastoral staff person does not double the productive capability of ministry. There is always some overlap of persons who are involved with both pastors' spheres of ministry. Due to this overlap, a second pastor potentially increases the overall productivity of the staff by approx 80% beyond that of a solo pastor
- When a third pastor is added to the staff, there is yet further overlap. The third full-time staff member potentially increases the staff productivity another 75% beyond that of the original two pastors on a staff
- A church desiring to grow to the next level should add a new staff person *before* reaching the projected growth level. It is the addition of the next staff person that helps a church grow to the next level.²⁷

²⁴ *Turning the Tide*, 58

²⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Leading your church to growth* (Regal Books, California, 1984) 212.

²⁶ Bill Easum, *The Complete Ministry Audit* (Abingdon, Nashville 2006) 117.

²⁷ Gary L. McIntosh, *Staff Your Church for Growth: Building team ministry in the 21st century* (Baker, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2000) 39-42.

Of course, numbers of staff alone are not sufficient. What is needed is quality as well as quantity. Peter Wagner made three suggestions:

- “The program staff should be a team made up of persons whose abilities complement one another rather than overlap...When all members of the staff are working in their areas of giftedness you can expect maximum harmony, job satisfaction, and effectiveness of ministry
- Recruit new staff on the basis of devotion to the senior pastor
- Be sure the new staff members heartily buy into the philosophy of ministry of the church... This should not be just intellectual consent, but a heartfelt conviction. When they join the staff they should feel like they are joining a cause”²⁸

Bill Hybels speaks of the three ‘Cs’ of team selection: “character, competence, chemistry (with me and with the rest of the team)”²⁹. Character and competence can in part be judged by references – chemistry, however, can only be experienced. For that reason before I ever bring a name to my leadership team, I first meet with the candidate and then invite members of the staff team to come out with us for lunch. We need to know that we can get on together.

For me it is important that the prospective member is a self-starter, ideally full of ideas. As American pastor Donald Schaeffer put it: “When building my staff, I have always sought to hire wild horses that had to be tamed rather than tame horses that had to be prodded”.³⁰

What kind of staff does one add? What should be their responsibilities? Gary McIntosh distinguishes between the priorities of finding people (evangelism), keeping people (assimilation) and celebrating with people (worship), from educating people (education), overseeing people (church administration) and caring for people (pastoral care). He argues that although all six priorities are necessary to provide a supportive environment for church growth, a growing church will place a higher priority on the first three.³¹ By contrast Easum argues that the best order in which to bring staff on board is (1) worship leader; (2) lay mobilizer; and (3) outreach (evangelism). “Do not make the mistake of most churches”, he writes, “and make your first hire a youth director. Start with worship and succeeding hiring will be more affordable”.

Much of my time as senior minister is taken up with church administration and pastoral care – however, one of my key roles is that of assimilation. My associate minister has a particular responsibility for young adults and has a heart for evangelism. My half-time community outreach worker (‘evangelist’) is concerned for the non-churched. The other members of the staff team also have an evangelistic side to their ministry. It could be argued that as a team we are therefore somewhat unbalanced. The church as a whole, however, has an ‘all-round’ ministry. We are deeply committed both to social

²⁸ Wagner, *Leading Your Church To Growth* 213, 214.

²⁹ Bill Hybels, , *Courageous Leadership* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2002) 81.

³⁰ Donald Schaeffer, Pastor of Grace Church, a Christian & Missionary Alliance church in Cleveland, Ohio, which grew from 58 to 1,663 under the leadership of Donald Schaeffer and subsequently of his son Jonathan. Quoted by Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How To Make The Leap* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2005) 104

³¹ McIntosh, *Staff Your Church for Growth* 26

action and to social service – but none of this is led by members of our staff team. Our priority at the moment as staff is to ‘find’ and ‘keep’ people.

Within an Anglican context the process of adding staff is different. Although clergy are most commonly appointed by parishes as a result of open advertising, curates are generally placed by the bishop in parishes where it is deemed that they will have a good general training for ministry, as distinct from fulfilling particular roles. It is only occasionally that large, wealthy churches come to an arrangement with the diocese to appoint and fund a curate themselves. Furthermore, many team ministries work within a multi-parish benefice, and in such situations the work of the clergy is not normally defined by their role, but rather by their clearly defined geographical area.

7. Staff teams come in various shapes and sizes

Although the previous paragraph has focussed on paid ordained staff, the reality is that the staff teams come in various shapes and sizes. In many churches, and not least larger churches, there is a significant interplay of ordained and lay, paid and unpaid, and full-time and part-time members of staff.

For instance, such are the demands for clergy in the Church of England that an Anglican church will count itself fortunate to have a stipendiary minister and a curate. However, in the Church of England non-stipendiary clergy play a very significant role – some non-stipendiary clergy in busy employment may be able to offer ministry only two Sundays a month and perhaps one evening a week, but newly retired clergy can be working almost full-time.

Many larger churches, both Anglican and non-Anglican, are able to employ their own lay staff in a wide variety of roles: for instance, as church administrators and church book-keepers, family and children’s workers, youth and pastoral specialists, bereavement and debt counsellors.

In an Anglican multi-parish benefice, the staff team are responsible for more than one church – indeed, often they are responsible for a group of churches. Such a team could be made up of a team rector with one or more team vicars, together perhaps with a curate, a paid youth worker, a parish office secretary – and possibly several unpaid staff too.³²

In a recent survey of churches with over 350 people in Sunday worship Peter Brierley discovered that the average large church has 3.0 ordained staff, comprising 2.6 paid and 0.4 unpaid (such as retired ministers). The average number of paid non-ordained ministry staff in a larger church is 3.7, consisting of 3.2 paid and 0.5 unpaid. The average number of admin staff employed by larger churches is 2.8 per church, made up of 2.4 paid and 0.4 unpaid.³³

³² Some question the degree of genuine collaboration when a team is made up of paid and unpaid staff. My experience is that the key to collaboration lies in the drawing up of appropriate contracts, where expectations are clearly set out, not just in what is expected of the ‘volunteers’, but also what is expected in terms of the support and supervision offered by the team leader.

³³ Peter Brierley, *The Significance of Larger Churches* (Brierley Consultancy, Tonbridge 2009) 18

There is more than one way for teams to operate. The important thing, however, is that leaders develop teams. According to Chris Edmondson: “If the Church in England is going to recover its nerve, and rediscover its calling in the twenty-first century, it will be by means of people with a vision and understanding of being team leaders and team builders”.³⁴

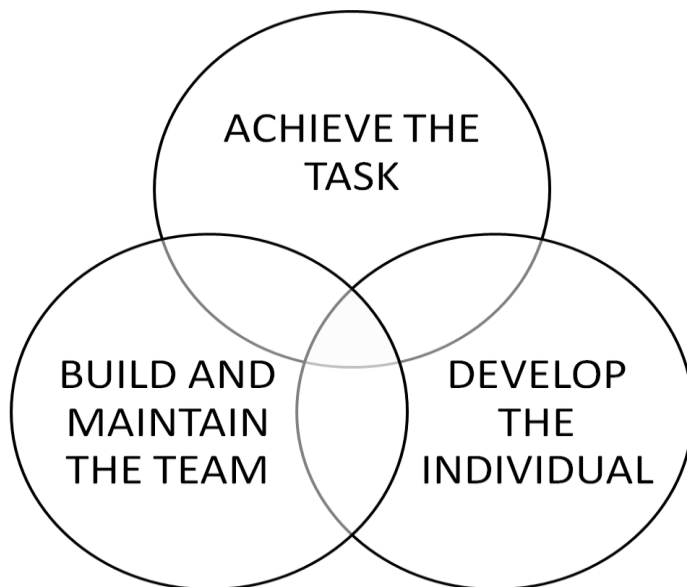
³⁴ Chris Edmondson, ‘Leadership and teamwork’ 110 in *The Vicar’s Guide: Life and ministry in the parish* (Church House Publishing, London 2005) edited by David Ison. Another guide to team-work in Anglican churches is offered by Robin Greenwood in *The Ministry Team Handbook* (SPCK, London 1984).

2. TEAM LEADERSHIP

1. What is leadership?

Andrew Le Peau, in his book *Paths of Leadership*, quoted a number of great leaders of the past. Harry Truman, for instance, once said, ‘A leader is a person who has the ability to get others to do what they don’t want to do, and to like it. Mahatma Ghandi identified tenacity as the key element: ‘To put up with misrepresentation and to stick to one’s guns come what may – this is the essence of leadership’. Hannibal, as he contemplated crossing the Alps, typified this attitude: ‘I will find a way or make one’. Other definitions include Napoleon, who believed a leader is ‘a dealer in hope’; while the ancient Chinese philosopher, Lao-tse, said, ‘A leader is best when people barely know he exists’. Andrew Le Peau himself defined leadership as ‘any influence any person has on an individual or group to meet its needs or goals for the glory of God’³⁵.

The definition which I have found most helpful is that advocated by John Adair, an Anglican layman and a distinguished management guru, who defined the good leader as one who ‘works as a senior partner with other members to achieve the task, build the team, and meet individual needs’.³⁶ To illustrate the relation of these three functions Adair developed a three circles model:



He commented: “The three circle-diagram suggests that the task, group and individual needs are always interacting upon each other. The circles overlap but they do not always sit on top of each other. In other words, there is always some degree of tension between them. Many of an individual’s needs – such as the need to achieve and the social need for human companionship – are met in part by participating in working groups. But he can also run the danger of being exploited in the interests of the task and

³⁵ Andrew Le Peau, *Paths of Leadership* (Scripture Union, London 1984) 9-10.

³⁶ John Adair, *Effective Leadership* (Pan Business/Management, London 1985) 51.

dominated by the group in ways that trespass upon his personal freedom and integrity'³⁷.

Adair went on to argue that each of the circles must be seen in relation to the other two. Thus, if a group fails in its task, this will intensify the disintegrative tendencies present in the group and diminish the satisfaction of individual needs. If there is a lack of unity or harmonious relationships in the group, this will affect performance on the job and also individual needs. If individuals feel frustrated and unhappy, they will not make their maximum contribution to either the common task or the life of the group.

Translated into language associated with the church, Adair's model provides helpful insights. Clearly, in a Christian frame of reference, the task is *the mission* of the church. This mission can be interpreted in large general terms relating to the overall implementation of the Great Commission. However, within the context of a local church the mission needs to be interpreted in more specific terms, relating to the particular mission of that church at a given time. One of the roles of leadership is to define that task, and to keep the team focussed on the task. *The team*, of which Adair speaks, can be interpreted in various ways: the term can be applied to the church as a whole, on the basis that all God's people are called to play their part in the ministry and mission of the church; the term can also be applied to church's team of lay leaders, as they seek to manage the mission and ministry of the church; however, it particularly applies to a group of church staff, who have been called to work with the senior leader in implementing the vision of the church. As for *the individuals*, it is helpful to be reminded that members of the staff team are individuals, all of whom have needs, and not least the need to grow and develop, both as persons and as professionals.

In my role as the 'senior partner', I have to 'balance' these three aspects of leadership: I have to keep my colleagues, both as individuals and as a team, focussed on its mission; I have to continually work at team building; and I have to ensure that the individuals needs of my team are being met.

Perhaps because of the person that I am, I have found the first of these tasks the most difficult. It is one thing to vision-cast and goal-set; it is another thing to ensure that the team are ever mindful of the vision of the church, and of the goals we have set. Although staff may happily agree to the overall direction of the church, it is easy for them to become side-tracked into activities which do not contribute to the agreed mission of the church. Together with my lay leaders, one of my key roles as the 'senior partner' is to hold my staff accountable to the goals we have set ourselves.

A second key role is to build and maintain the team. Just as relationships in a marriage have to be worked at, so too do relationships in a team. All too often team relationships break down. According Harold Westing, "It is rare to find one out of four multiple staffs working in love and harmony. Many team members merely tolerate each other. They resemble married couples living together like singles who have no commitment, common goals, or sense of sharing. They simply share the same house"³⁸. Sadly what is true in the States, is true too of the UK. Relationships need to be worked upon. Along with the weekly team business meeting, there need to be opportunities for staff to

³⁷ Adair 38

³⁸ Harold J. Westing, *Church Staff Handbook: How to build an effective ministry team* (Kregel, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2nd edition 1997) 13.

relax together and have fun together. Staff need not become ‘buddies’ of one another – but they do need to be friends.

My third key role is to help staff develop. This is particularly true of colleagues who have come straight from theological college. Along with their church work, they have also books to read and projects to complete. My task as the senior partner is to help them have a good experience of ministry, so that they are ready then to take on a church of their own. However, it is not simply the younger staff who need to be developed. The learning process never stops. Everybody is on a journey, and as senior minister I am there to encourage people on that journey.

2. A leader’s authority

My authority as leader with regard to my team is spelt out very clearly in their terms of appointment. Although accountable to the church meeting through the leadership team, in the first place they are accountable to me. I am their line manager. I am their ‘team leader’ and they are members of ‘my’ team. However, the reality is that my authority is not built on a written statement outlining the ‘position’ of people within the team, but rather is built on relationships. Leaders therefore need to make time to cultivate relationships with members of the team. Certainly leadership patterned on the ‘servant-king’ can never be coercive. In the words of John Goldingay, “The authority of leaders is not based on their position in a structure but on the fact [if it be fact] that they embody true Christian living [i.e. service] and bring the true Christian message, which will be known by its content and not merely by its origin”.³⁹ Or to put it even more simply: it is by the kind of people that they are that leaders begin to gain the trust of their team – as indeed of the church. Authority is rooted not in what we say, but in who we are.

What is true of my relationship with my teams, is even more true of my relationship with my church. In a Baptist setting no minister has security of tenure – let alone the ‘freehold’ of office. In human terms the authority which I exercise has been delegated to me by the church meeting, which is free to withdraw that authority from me. This does not mean that I am then reduced to fulfilling the whims of the church – as the senior minister I have been called to lead the church. It means that I need to exercise my leadership in such a way that the church is happy to ‘own’ my leadership.

As ‘team leader’ I naturally ‘preside’ at all meetings of my staff team, as indeed at meetings of the leadership team and church meeting. Although I am aware that team leaders elsewhere prefer for others to ‘chair’ such meetings, I see this as very much part of my role as leader. As a result, when presiding at a meeting, I do not see myself as just the ‘chair’ whose task it is to keep order and ensure that there is ‘fair play’; I am exercising my gift of ‘helmsmanship’ (see 1 Cor 12.28) as I steer the meetings. Leadership is not about ‘lordship’ (see Mark 10.42-44), but it is about having the hand on the tiller, allowing the various teams in the church to respond to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹ John Goldingay, *Authority and Ministry* (Grove Booklets, Bramcote, Nottingham 1976) 23.

3. A leader's job profile

My model of leadership is in part reflected in my 'job profile', which was drawn up by my senior deacon together with myself:

- As senior minister my special responsibility is 'developing and implementing strategy, communicating vision, and embodying the church's core values'.
- With the other ministers of the church my job purpose is 'To excite fresh hope and faith in God, encouraging God's people to embrace others with love of another kind, enabling individuals to change and to grow, and empowering the church for witness and service' and 'To implement the mission policy of the church'

My principal accountabilities are

1. To increase the spiritual maturity of the fellowship through expounding God's Word, Sunday by Sunday in preaching and teaching.
2. To lead worship creatively.
3. To encourage the fellowship to greater missionary/evangelistic outreach.
4. To provide visionary leadership.
5. To provide pastoral care to those who have particular needs and in times of crisis, including being alongside families as they go through the life cycle of birth, marriage, and death, as well as the spiritual development of the 'strong'.
6. To develop and enable others to lead the fellowship and contribute to the mission and purpose of the church.
7. To be involved with other churches and to represent our church to the wider world.
8. To be responsible for the development of the staff ministry team.
9. To take the lead in welcoming newcomers to church and integrating them into the fellowship.
10. To take a lead in the management of change as this affects the ministry team and administrative staff, the leadership team and the pastoral team.
11. Although ultimately accountable to the church meeting through the leadership team, in the first place be accountable to the support and personnel group of the leadership team.
12. Every four months to prepare for the leadership team a written account of the way in which he has sought to implement the agreed vision and strategy of the church.
13. Every six months to participate in the performance management review process, setting goals for the forthcoming year at the meeting to be held in the spring of each year with representatives of the deacons.
14. To carry out such other duties which, may reasonably be required from time to time!

This list of responsibilities is not only peculiar to my situation, but also reflects my role as minister of a 'gathered' church. In the context of an established church with its civic responsibilities, the duties of Anglican ministers toward the wider community can be very different with regard to rites of passage (baptisms, weddings and funerals), festival

services (e.g. Christmas) and civic occasions (e.g. Remembrance Sunday).⁴⁰ But however the role of the senior minister is defined, the important thing is that it is defined. Without clear definition, team leadership becomes impossible.⁴¹

4. An alternative job profile

If the above profile does not appeal, then perhaps the following more theological profile might please more:

1. My first responsibility is to be an 'exemplary pilgrim' to my fellow church members. Although of necessity my very humanity means that I will always fall short of the mark, nonetheless the way in which I live and cope with the ups and downs of life must be a spur as also an encouragement to others in their walk with Christ. Something of the spirit of Jesus must be discernible in me. This will mean that in the first instance I must 'keep watch' over my own spiritual life (see Acts 20.28), which in turn entails a commitment to develop my personal relationship with God. On the basis that none of us are called to live the Christian life alone, it also means that I need others to "keep watch" over me, which in turn entails an openness and willingness on my part to receive encouragement, and if necessary correction, from others. Needless to say, my commitment to a disciplined 'rule' of prayer is a prerequisite for all that I seek to do in the church. My leadership, my preaching, my conduct of worship, my pastoral care - all these activities must in the first place be rooted in prayer, so that my ministry, on the one hand is responsive to the Lord's leading, and on the other hand is exercised in the Lord's strength.
2. My second responsibility is to be an 'effective leader' of the church and thereby enable the church to fulfil her God-given calling. Such leadership in the first place involves developing a vision for the way in which the church lives its life together. The values, beliefs, style and culture of the church are dependent upon the kind of leadership that is exercised. Effective leadership must be pastorally sensitive. This in turn requires that as senior minister I seek to live in tune with my people, setting a pace that is appropriate to them, while at the same time encouraging them to fulfil their God-given potential. Effective leadership needs also to be shared leadership. In the first place leadership needs to be shared with my fellow ministers. Leadership needs also shared with the deacons, as also with the various task-oriented teams and activity leaders. This in turn means that an important aspect of my leadership is to encourage and empower others to serve with me in leadership. Effective leadership involves managing the organisational side of the church's life, recognising that good management entails responsible delegation and regular review of people and systems. As

⁴⁰ Gathered churches can also see themselves having a role toward the wider community (see my seventh responsibility of representing the church to the community), but whereas Anglicans tend to act as 'chaplains' to the community and its leaders, non-conformists see themselves as wanting to be 'critical friends' to 'the powers that be' (e.g. the borough council and the county council).

⁴¹ For an Anglican job-specification see John Truscott, 'The Minister's role in larger churches' (Training Note 6, revised 2009) available at www.john-truscott.co.uk.

senior minister this in particular requires working closely with the Church Administrator and the Senior Deacon.

3. My third responsibility as 'missionary strategist' is closely related with that of being an effective leader, save that as missionary strategist the world as distinct from the church is primarily in view. My task as a missionary strategist involves working with other leaders to constantly define and clarify the church's mission and resultant strategy. In turn this vision of the church's mission needs to be shared regularly with the church as a whole, as also with everybody seeking membership with us. The task also involves building and welding together the church as a team with a view to enabling it to be an effective mission force. Along with others I need to ever be seeking to mobilise the church for mission.
4. My fourth responsibility is to be a 'charismatic preacher': i.e. a preacher whose sermons prove to be a vehicle for God's Spirit to touch and transform the lives of individuals as also the corporate life of the church! Wow! Here is a challenge not simply to teach God's Word, but to act as a prophet and an evangelist at one and the same time. Ideally Sunday mornings - as indeed Sunday evenings - will be occasions which people will not want to miss, for they will be coming eagerly and expectantly to hear what God is wanting to say! In so far as the preaching role includes the teaching role, it also means that I am responsible for encouraging the spiritual growth and development of the church: e.g. through Sunday sermons, Wednesday fellowship groups, and baptismal/church membership classes.
5. My fifth responsibility is to be a 'creative liturgist', who through the regular Sunday worship as also through occasional pastoral offices enables God's people not only to celebrate their faith, but also discover resources in God for daily living. This will mean along with my ministerial colleagues as well as with others I will work at preparing for Sunday worship - through devising orders of service which give shape and direction to the worship; through choosing hymns and songs which reflect the various needs, ages and cultures present within the congregation; through ensuring that the language and content of the prayers is imaginative and stretching with a view to enriching and broadening the church's prayer-life; and through giving opportunities to others to contribute to worship. It will also mean that along with my colleagues I will be responsible for the conducting of weddings and funerals, and will also continue to look for opportunities to develop new rites of passage.
6. My sixth responsibility is to be the 'senior caregiver' responsible for the pastoral oversight of the church. This is a multi-faceted task, for it involves not only caring for the "weak" and for those going through the various crises of life, but also promoting the spiritual development of the "strong". As senior minister of the church I need to know all those in my pastoral charge. Along with general visiting, this also entails being alongside people undergoing significant change in their lives: e.g. at the point of birth, death, redundancy, divorce. I also see a special responsibility toward my fellow leaders. However, if the full-range of pastoral opportunities are to be

seized, then pastoral responsibilities must be shared. This will entail: supporting the Pastoral Team in their work; encouraging leaders of care groups; helping the church to view fellowship groups as growth groups; & sharing marriage preparation with suitably gifted people in the church

7. As one who has now been engaged in Christian ministry for many years and who has had the opportunity to read and reflect on pastoral practice, I find myself in the position of being able to serve others as a 'pastoral consultant and/or theologian'. In the first place I seek to discharge this role by sharing my insights and expertise within the church. In particular I see myself as having a role in the ongoing training of ministerial colleagues. Where required, my services are also available to others. In the second place I seek to discharge this role by exercising a wider ministry beyond the church to other ministers and churches. In the third place I seek to discharge this role by developing and maintaining effective relationships with the ministers of other churches in the town, the ministers of other Baptist churches further afield and various external organisations as determined from time to time.⁴²

5. Task teams at Chelmsford

Although I am the team leader, every member of my staff is a team leader too. As a church we are committed to the concept of task teams. In total we have twelve task teams responsible for overseeing and developing clearly defined areas of the church's mission. Members of these teams are not expected to do all the work themselves, but to empower and encourage others.

Five basic teams reflect our church's five key purposes: the worship team, the pastoral team, the evangelism team, the nurture and prayer team, and the social action team. Three teams have a focus on particular ages: the children's ministry team, the youth ministry team, and the seniors' ministry team. Four 'hub' teams support the church in fulfilling its key purposes: the communications team, the facilities team, the finance team, and the church centre management team.

This model of task teams works well in churches of any size. In smaller churches there would, of course, be fewer teams. For instance, when I first developed this model of team ministry, I was minister of a church with some 180 committed members. I set up five teams: pastoral, evangelism, nurture, development, and social action. Each of these five teams were accountable to my lay leadership team – with most of them being led by a member of that lay leadership team.⁴³

⁴² See Paul Beasley-Murray, *A Call To Excellence: An Essential Guide to Christian Leadership* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1995)

⁴³ See Paul Beasley-Murray, *Turning the Tide* (Bible Society, London 1981) 75-83

6. Staff members and teams

Most of my task-oriented teams are led by staff members. It is their task to set the agenda and in this way to spearhead the mission of the church. Staff members are called to be team players – not just in relation to their membership of the staff team, but also in relation to their membership of the various task teams in the church. Far from stunting the ministry of other members of the church, they are equipping and encouraging church members in their various ministries (see Eph 4.16).

Our church has become a ‘ministry’ or staff team led church. To a large extent the ministers and other staff members are responsible for the operational life of the church. Needless to say, staff need to be accountable to the wider church. A key role of my lay leaders (‘the deacons’) is to hold the staff to account for the way in which they define and implement the agreed vision and strategy of the church. Indeed, in our context these lay leaders together the minister (or ministers) form the ‘trustees’ who in charity law are legally responsible for the church and its finances.⁴⁴

Although in an Anglican context ministers are ultimately accountable to the bishop, I would argue that good practice should encourage ministers to give an account of their ministry to their PCC and their church wardens, whatever the legal niceties might be. A Church Annual Meeting also provides an opportunity for the ministers and PCC to give an account of their work in the past year.

7. Teams need to be manageable

What is the ideal size of a team? According to David Cormack. ‘Two’s a company, three’s a team, and more than fifteen’s a crowd’.⁴⁵ The fact is that the larger a group, the more relationships need to be formed. It has been estimated that “members of a group of six have 15 relationships with which they must interact as a group. A group of eight persons has 28 potential relationships; a group of 10 has 45; a group of 15 has 105; and a group of 20 has the staggering possibility of 190 relationships”.⁴⁶ Research in group dynamics suggests that eight members may in fact be the optimum figure for the size of a team. I find it significant that although our Lord chose twelve apostles, the church of Jerusalem limited the number of those elected as ‘deacons’ to seven (see Acts 6.1-7). In my experience teams of seven or eight are the most effective way of team working.

What is true of teams in general, is also true of leadership teams in particular. At one stage in my present church our rules allowed for the provision of 15 deacons + the ministers of the church. Not only was the number unmanageable, I then and made it even more unmanageable by inviting our church administrator to attend, as also our children’s worker and an intern. The leadership team became completely unwieldy!

My current leadership team is now a little smaller and is made up of ten deacons and four members of staff. However, I would love to make it even smaller and reduce it to

⁴⁴ See John Truscott, ‘Should the Staff lead the church?’ (Training Note 50, 2008) available at www.john-truscott.co.uk

⁴⁵ David Cormack, *Team Spirit* (Marc, Bromley 1987) 20.

⁴⁶ Howard Clinebell, *Growth Groups* (Nashville, Abingdon 2nd edition 1977) 20-21.

six deacons and the senior minister. Allowing only the senior minister to belong to the leadership team would be a radical step in an English Baptist setting – certainly the model constitution for a Baptist church recommended by the Baptist Union assumes that all ministers along with the deacons are managing trustees of the church. However, in a larger church this leads to teams becoming unwieldy, and is unnecessary if the ‘board’ of the church is not to lead the church, but to hold staff accountable for their leadership.⁴⁷ Teams need to be manageable!

⁴⁷ I find it interesting that in New Zealand the recommended number for leadership team in a Baptist church (sometimes called a ‘board’ or an ‘eldership’) is three to five people. Even in the largest Australian Baptist churches, the leadership team is never more than seven people.

3. TEAM RELATIONSHIPS

1. *Relationships are at the heart of a team*

A team is not a collection of individuals, but a group of people who are committed to working together to achieve a common task. In sporting terms, for instance, a team is a set of players who are committed to working together in order to win a particular game or match. Football teams don't win a match without team-work – without team members passing the ball to one another. This team-work, however, is always with a purpose – the team want to score goals, they want to win!

In this respect James Lawrence contrasts groups with teams:

- Groups focus on individual results; teams focus on team results, for they have a common purpose
- Groups focus on individual effort, on independence; teams focus on interdependence
- Groups talk about 'contribution'; teams talk about 'co-operation'
- Groups focus on individual accountability, teams have a sense of mutual accountability
- Groups focus on collective results (1+1 = 2; whereas teams focus on synergistic results (1+1 = 3,4,20)
- In a group if one fails, s/he fails; in a team if one fails, all fail.⁴⁸

Team ministry is about commitment to one another and to a common purpose. Team ministry is about working together; it's about achieving a common goal. Sadly, not every ministerial team functions as a team. As Geoffrey Cornell, an experienced Methodist minister, once noted: "Ministers are not naturally collaborative. Their call to ministry is invariably rooted in a personal experience, marking them out for a distinctive vocation. Their role models, even biblical ones, are often 'lone rangers'"⁴⁹.

To create a ministry team involves real commitment to work together as distinct from separately. For a team to be a team, team members can't go around 'doing their own thing', each intent on fulfilling their particular ministry without recourse to one another. That may be the way in which barristers operate, working together from a common base (a 'set of chambers'), having the services of the same clerk, but in fact each independently pursuing their own career. A ministry team, however, is very different. It involves a commitment to work together with a view to fulfilling a common purpose. The common purpose means more than simply 'serving Christ' or 'glorifying God'. It involves the acceptance of clearly stated common goals, adopting common strategies and common priorities with a view to achieving the mission of the church. It involves far more than simply sharing information or even of just facing the same direction – it involves a shared passion for and a shared commitment to an agreed vision for the church.

⁴⁸ James Lawrence, *Growing Leaders* 242.

⁴⁹ Geoffrey Cornell, 'Leading a Team' 151 in *How To Become a Creative Church Leader* (Canterbury Press, Norwich 2008) edited by John Nelson

Secondly, it involves commitment to one another, in the sense that the welfare of the team and its members becomes paramount. Bill Hybels quotes his then 23-year old son Todd: “It’s more than just working with other people, its doing life *deeply* with one another as we serve together”⁵⁰

In this respect I like George Barna’s definition of a leadership team: “A leadership team... is a small group of leaders who possess complementary gifts and skills. They are committed to one another’s growth and success and hold themselves mutually accountable. Together they lead a larger group of people toward a common vision, specific performance goals, and a plan of action”.⁵¹

2. *Team covenants*

As an expression of our commitment to one another as church staff, we initially adopted the following statement:

As a team we are called to model the kind of relationships that ideally should characterize the life of the church: i.e. as a team our life together should be characterized by 'one-anotherness'. We are called to fulfil the Biblical injunctions to love one another (John 13.34), to pray for one another (James 5.16), to honour one another (Rom 12.10), to care for one another (1 Cor 12.25), to encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11), to speak the truth in love to one another (Eph 4.15), and at all times to forgive one another (Col 3.13).

However, there is more to team-work than 'one-anotherness'. If a team is to work effectively, then a certain 'discipline' of relationships needs to be maintained. As a result we developed the following team covenant:

- **Mutual care.** We will model the kind of relationships that ideally should characterise the life of the church in general. We will love one another, pray for one another, honour one another, care for one another, encourage one another, speak the truth in love to one another, and at all times forgive one another. We will be there for one another, come hell or high water.
- **Communication.** We will keep one another informed of what we are doing – and of what we are hoping of doing. We will therefore come to our team meetings ready to share. .
- **Openness.** We will be to open with one another. There may be times when the ministers will not be free to be open with the rest of the team, however, there is no place for ministers to keep secrets from one another. A confidence does not necessarily mean that we cannot share information with one another. .
- **Honesty.** In our thoughts and our feelings we will be honest with one another. If something has upset us, then we will surface it, recognizing that ‘Today's niggle could be tomorrow's resentment, and next week's breakdown’.

⁵⁰ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids 2002) 74

⁵¹ George Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership* (Water Brook Press, Colorado, 2001) 24. The one draw-back of this definition is that it does not relate leadership to the given structures of any institution.

- Loyalty. Outside our team meeting, we will always stand up for one another. While none of us is perfect, and there will be times when we make a mess of things, we will resist the temptation of criticising one another to other members. The place for criticism is either one-to-one or in the team meeting.
- Positivity. In our relationships with one another – and indeed with the rest of the church – we will always exude a positive spirit. We will shun negative talking and thinking. We will instead affirm one another and will speak well of one another.
- Excellence: We will never be satisfied with the second-best. In our desire for excellence we will foster a healthy dissatisfaction with the way things are and will always strive for better.
- Faith: We will strengthen one another's hope and faith in God, and we will foster each other's passion for Christ. We will be bold in the way we develop our various ministries – and where there are failures, we will help one another to learn and then to use the failure as a stepping board for fresh advances.

Every time we appoint new members of staff, I always ensure that I read through this covenant with, high-lighting and expanding upon the various disciplines.

A somewhat different team covenant was adopted by Julian Reindorp, the former Vicar of Richmond, for use by his team. Based on a document drawn up by the board of directors of one of Britain's leading commercial companies, it reads:

I promise to: -

- Publicly communicate and support the decision of the team
- Stay focused on the desired result even when problems occur
- Speak up when I dissent
- To do what I say I am going to do (no blinking)
- To support my team colleagues, especially when I see them struggling
- To be ruthless about prioritization
- To keep meeting discipline
- To be ready to take risks, challenge conventional wisdom and learn from each other
- Listen to everyone's point of view
- Seek solutions, not problems
- Let others speak once before speaking twice
- Recognise praising others on achievement

For those who find this too 'secular' in nature, then the model for ministry teams developed by George Cladis may appeal, which draws upon the Trinity described by the 7th century Gk theologian, John of Damascus as '*perichoresis*' (literally, 'a circle dance'). He writes:

“A perichoretic image of the Trinity is that of the three persons of God in constant movement in a circle that implies intimacy, equality, unity yet distinction, and love. The perichoretic model of God calls into question the traditional hierarchies of power, control, and domination that have formed the basis for church leadership in the past”.

He goes on to list “the seven attributes that church leadership teams will strive for in healthy ministry”: viz.

1. The Covenanting Team – our covenants with one another should seek to resemble the love of God – Father, Son and Spirit – in holy fellowship
2. The Visionary Team – a clear sense of divine mission – they sense that their work has ultimate meaning, they sense that are proceeding to do something highly significant
3. The Culture-Creating Team – a culture of love
4. The Collaborative Team – There is no competition among the persons of God
5. The Trusting Team – In a world that thrives on betrayal and deceit, a culture of trust created by a trusting team is a wonderful source of healing and ministry in the church
6. The Empowering Team – these teams reinforce the concept that there is no such thing as a passive Christian; all of us are called to mission and ministry
7. The Learning Team – Their learning, both spiritual and practical, becomes a narrative of growth that can help other teams and churches grow spiritually and become more effective communities of ministry⁵²

3. Relationship difficulties are inevitable, but not insuperable

Just as in marriage, so in church life in general, and in church teams in particular, there are bound to be times when misunderstandings occur and relationships become difficult. In the words of John Blattner: “It seems to be an immutable fact that wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name, sooner or later there are going to be people problems. This is just as true among leaders as among other folks. We needn’t be surprised. Galatians 5.20-21 makes it clear that discord, jealousy, ambition, dissension, factionalism, and all the rest are part of the fallen human nature that pastoral leaders share with everyone else. Occasional problems among leaders are inevitable, given what leaders are made of”.⁵³

However, although difficulties are inevitable, they need not be insuperable. In a survey of team ministry within Baptist churches, the following eleven points were made time and again in the responses of the 125 senior ministers and their associates as to how senior ministers should handle their staff:

1. **Communication.** Senior ministers must keep their colleagues informed and vice versa. According to one associate, this is the potential weak area in team ministry.
2. **Openness:** ‘Be open – share everything’
3. **Trust.** “The senior minister must be willing to give up responsibility”. “Define areas of responsibility and give freedom within that responsibility – even if your associate does not do it your way”

⁵² George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church – how pastors and church staffs can grow together into a powerful fellowship of leaders* (Jossey-Bass/Wiley, San Francisco 1999) 4ff.

⁵³ John C. Blattner, *Pastoral Renewal* (February 1987).

4. **Accountability.** Responsible delegation involves some kind of reporting back
5. **Respect.** “Respect your colleague’s calling, training, personality and gifts”. “Learn how to creatively use the emerging gifts and talents of the associate”
6. **Self-awareness.** “Recognise both your weaknesses and limitations and also those of your colleague”
7. **Patience.** “Don’t expect too high too soon – the relationship has to grow gradually”
8. **Encouragement.** “Constant re-affirming and appreciation” are needed.
9. **Frankness.** “Be honest with gentleness” wrote one associate
10. **Loyalty.** “Never let people play off one against the other” “Do not publicly overrule any decision associates make in their area of responsibility”
11. **Determination to make the relationship work.** Get to know them as persons not just as colleagues. One wise and experienced minister liked the relationship between senior ministers and associates to a marriage: “Within this relationship there is love, mutual trust, encouragement, and a determination to work harmoniously together”.⁵⁴

Relationships don’t just happen. They have to be worked upon.

4. Team relationships are helped by working together

From almost the beginning of my ministry I have worked in a church office. Working from church increases efficiency, and helps to develop a more discipline approach to work. It provides accessibility: popping one’s head around the door of the minister’s office, is so much easier than knocking on the door of the minister’s home. Furthermore, it frees up home to be home. Yes, of course, I am always available at home in times of emergency – whatever the day, whatever the time, but I am not available for routine pastoral demands. The Anglican situation, where the ‘parsonage’ is specifically intended and (in newer houses) specifically designed to provide a place of work, to my mind is highly unfortunate.

In the context of teams, sharing the same office base, whether it be on church premises or in a large parsonage, helps team relationships. Working from the same base fosters collegiality. I don’t just meet with my staff at the formal Monday morning team meeting. Almost every day I meet with them on an informal basis. We drop into one another’s offices for a coffee and reflect together on the latest pastoral challenge. We work together so much better precisely because we work from the same base.

In addition to the right accommodation, tools of the trade are necessary. Every staff member is provided with a phone as also with a computer. The church ensures that all our computers are constantly upgraded with the latest soft-ware: all are linked to the

⁵⁴ Paul Beasley-Murray, ‘Dynamic Duos’, *Today* (Feb 1987) 7-11; *Dynamic Leadership* 52-54.

internet, and all are compatible with every other computer in the church. In this way hot-desking becomes possible.

Staff are important, and we seek to value them by ensuring that they have a conducive environment in which to work.

5. *Walking the way of Christ together*

Every ministry team is in the first instance made up of disciples of the Lord Jesus. As team leader I have a responsibility to encourage my team in their walk with the Lord, whether they be ordained or non-ordained, and as a result will often ask in the context of a supervision how people's prayer life is developing.

In a recent article Chris Ellis, the minister of West Bridgford Baptist Church, lists seven Christian practices "which have long marked the serious disciple but which we might see as having particular relevance for an intentional approach to a ministerial way of being": viz. worship, waiting on God, Sabbath keeping, reading Scripture, prayer, spiritual direction, and what he terms 'giving attention to the grace of God'. He ends his article by calling for a 'common rule of life' for ministers.⁵⁵ What is true of ministers in general, should, I believe, also be true for church teams, whatever their composition .

I encourage my staff (most of whom are not ordained ministers) to use the lectionary, so that together we can be reading the same Scriptures together – and with a view to encouraging the use of the lectionary I always select one of the passages for the day when we have church meetings, leadership team meetings, prayer meetings and the like. At our Away days we always spend the first part of the morning focussing on the lectionary readings for the day, and asking ourselves what God is saying to us as individuals, and indeed to us as a team.

6. *The weekly staff meeting*

The weekly ministry team meeting is the key meeting of the week. It is the one time in the week when everybody is present. We hold our staff meeting on a Monday morning. With Sunday and all the pastoral encounters still fresh in mind, this is the ideal time to share news and to look to the week ahead.

Monday mornings begin with a short prayer meeting, to which the support staff and indeed anybody else who is around in church is invited. Together we thank God for the week that is past, and ask God's blessing on the week ahead. It is a time when we can share personal concerns and pray for one another.

Once a month after the prayer meeting we have 'Cake Monday', when the support staff join with the ministry team for coffee and cake. Always a fun occasion, it is important

⁵⁵ 'Being a minister: spirituality and the pastor' 55-70 in *Challenging to change: dialogues with a radical Baptist theologian. Essays presented to Nigel G. Wright on his sixtieth birthday* (Spurgeon's College, London 2009) edited by Pieter J. Lallemann.

for two reasons: first, it gives us an opportunity to express our appreciation to the support staff; secondly, it gives the support staff an opportunity to express any concerns that they may have with the rest of the team.

With the exception of ‘Cake Monday’, the ministry team gathers at 10 o’clock for the weekly team meeting. The meeting begins with the handing out of a lengthy agenda. I am a great believer in preparing agendas, and the more detailed the better. Sometimes my agendas are three or four sides in length.

The agenda takes the following basic format:

1. Reflections on the weekend, and in particular upon the Sunday services. The chief purpose of the ‘post mortem’ is to see how we can do better – if we want to give God our very best, then there never comes a stage when we can feel fully satisfied with our performance. Even sermons come under scrutiny! This is the time for appreciation, but also a time for positive criticism.
2. Newcomers: their names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Their responses such as ‘Please tell me more about Alpha’ or ‘Please give information about small groups’; as also their comments on the welcome card, which encourages them to tell us what they first noticed, what they liked best, and what they disliked! To encourage newcomers to fill in the welcome card, I promise to give a specially inscribed pen to every person who fills in the card and returns it to me.
3. Those to whom the church flowers were sent (with a view to encouraging them or congratulating them or assuring them of our prayers)
4. Next weekend. Although the preachers and their topics are already known, this is when we confirm such details as to who else will be involved in the services.
5. Pastoral news. Much of the news typed out on the agenda is for information only and is not discussed – occasionally we will spend time reflecting on the needs of individuals.
6. My engagements for the week – I believe in being open with my staff.
7. My concerns as team leader. This is the time for testing new ideas, sharing plans, and getting feedback from the team.
8. Concerns others wish to raise. Sometimes we can deal with the matters there and then – sometimes we agree to delay an issue until the next meeting.

We try to limit the team meeting to an hour. Save in the most exceptional of circumstances, we will always be over by noon. The chief purpose of the team meeting is for the team to share news and encourage/communicate with one another.

7. *Other team meetings*

At the monthly leadership team my task as team leader is to provide a full agenda in good time before the meeting, so that we make the most of our allotted three hours together. Not infrequently I produce agendas of nine A4 sides in length, with items clearly marked 'for information' or 'for decision'.

In-between these monthly meetings I meet with my two 'church officers' as a 'Personnel, Support and Management' (PSM) group. The PSM deals with 'nuts and bolts' issues (e.g. extra office accommodation, an emergency management plan, data protection, minutes of the various task teams), personnel matters relating to staff (e.g. grievance procedures, appraisal dates, composition of task-oriented teams) and also offers 'support' to me by providing me with a forum to raise issues which are of particular personal concern to me. I draw up the agendas and put together all the supporting documentation: this is time-demanding, but enables us to make the most of our hour or so together. Most Mondays I meet for half-an-hour with my 'senior deacon', a London commuter, who comes into my office on his way back home from work. I also keep in touch with my church officers through regular e-mail communication – which includes sending them a copy of my staff meeting agenda.

Finally, there are the meetings of the task teams, and indeed a host of other 'team' meetings too. There is no way in which I can be present at all these meetings. I can – and do – feed them with information, and they in turn send me their minutes.

4. OVERSEEING TEAMS

1. *Team supervision*

One of my key roles is exercising oversight of staff team members. The purpose of this oversight is to ensure that the team members are clear about their role in implementing the vision and strategy of the church, to give them encouragement and support in that role, and to hold them accountable for implementing the vision and the agreed strategy. Technically, this oversight is known as ‘supervision’.⁵⁶

Supervision is not always welcome in the life of a larger church. In the first place, the responsibility of oversight is not always welcomed by senior ministers. Regular ‘supervision’ is time-consuming, especially where there are several members of staff – the temptation is to allow colleagues to get on with the job. But the reality is that colleagues will not always get on with the tasks required of them. It is not that they are lazy, but rather that they may be side-tracked and end up putting time and effort into activities which are not part of the church’s agreed agenda. Indeed, this sometimes is precisely why team members are not keen on supervision – for supervision holds them accountable for their ministry. Such accountability is not welcome to those of an independent spirit! However, accountability is intrinsic to ministry. In the words of one Anglican report: “Clergy can never consider themselves in private practice. All are under authority and accountable to one another as independent members of the body of Christ”⁵⁷. That accountability involves more than the acceptance of a ‘common rule of life’: it needs to be expressed in supervision.

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

Supervision is not about micro-management. To use supervision as an opportunity to tell others how to do their work is to stifle creativity. Supervision is not about control – but rather is an encouragement to others to own and take responsibility for their role. Susan Beaumont points out that “the appropriate object of supervision is a verb, not a noun”⁵⁸. A person is a noun – their work is a verb. “What is being supervised is the performance of the staff member as he or she works toward identified outcomes”⁵⁹.

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

⁵⁶ For more detailed discussion, see *Skills for Collaborative Ministry* (SPCK, London 2008) by Sally Nash, Jo Pimlott, and Paul Nash.

⁵⁷ *Ministerial Review: Its Purpose and Practice* (ABM Ministry Paper No.6) quoted with approved in *Servants and Shepherds: Developments in the Theology and Practice of Ministerial Review* (ABM Ministry Paper No.19 Paragraph 25)

⁵⁸ Gil Rendle & Susan Beaumont, *When Moses meets Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations* (Alban Institute, Herndon, Virginia, 2007) 93

⁵⁹ *When Moses meets Aaron* 94

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

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

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

Supervision involves preparation on the part of staff members, who in the first instance provide the agenda for the meeting. Ideally they come with written notes for the senior minister, in which they outline their reflections on the past and their hopes for the future. It is also helpful if there is a written note of the outcomes of the supervision session – I make this the responsibility of the person being supervised, although Rendle and Beaumont suggest that the senior minister “drafts a brief (one page) written response memo within 48 hours, noting issues of agreement from the conversation, as well as topics that should be revisited in the subsequent performance management conversation”⁶⁰.

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

2. Supervision has a Biblical basis!

To some ministers supervision is theologically anathema. They argue that first and foremost they are accountable to God, and not to their people. There is, of course, much support for this position from the New Testament. For instance, the writer to the Hebrews makes it clear that leaders of the flock of God are accountable to the Lord (Heb 13.17). Paul in his letter to the Galatians emphasises that he is the first place a servant of God, and not of men (Gal 1.10: see also 1 Cor 4.2,5). In Eph 4.11 it is Christ who ‘gives’ pastor-teachers to his church, which in turn means that it is from Christ that pastor-teachers derive their authority, and it is to Christ that they owe their allegiance.

But this is not the whole story. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles depicts leaders being accountable to the church which has recognised their calling and set them apart for service (Acts 13.1-3; 14.27). Paul’s image of the church as the body of Christ makes it clear that individual members exercise their own roles, but for the good of all (1 Cor

⁶⁰ *When Moses meets Aaron* 102

12.12-26), which in turn implies “accountability to one another for exercising our part for the good of the whole”⁶¹. The teaching of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel would suggest that, at least in questions of church discipline, ultimate authority lies with the church (Matt 18.15-20).

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

3. *Annual reviews*

All the members of the team undergo an annual review – sometimes known as ‘appraisal’. My review is conducted by an outside ministerial facilitator working together with two senior lay leaders. The reviews of the other members of staff are led by myself together with the help of one of these senior lay leaders.

The process of review for Anglican clergy is different. There the mandatory annual review is normally conducted by senior staff or by an appointed lay person within the wider diocese. However, where there is more than one ordained minister serving in a large church or in a team, there review is normally an entirely local matter within the parish.⁶²

Over the years we have developed the following format for the annual review:

- A review of the past year. What, with God’s help, did you achieve? What has encouraged you? What has frustrated you? What could you perhaps have done better? For us an annual review is not just about assessing performance in terms of agreed objectives, it is also a tool for pastoral care.
- A review of the past year’s training and development: what courses attended, books read
- A setting of key ministry objectives for the coming year. These objectives have to be agreed with and then linked with the church’s priorities
- A setting of development plans for the coming year. How do you hope to develop as a person and as a professional? What, if any, are your long-term goals?

Team reviews give an opportunity to affirm staff and to say "well done"; to review previously set objectives and set future goals; to provide a safe environment for discussing problems and, where necessary, to express dissatisfaction; to identify training needs; and if appropriate to rewrite the job description with new emphases. It is important to emphasise that first and foremost appraisal is intended to be a positive process. If appraisal involves criticism, then it is constructive criticism with the well-being of the individual as well as the well-being of the organisation in mind.

⁶¹ See the section entitled ‘Gift and Responsibility’ in *Ministerial Review: Its Purpose and Practice* (ABM Ministry Paper No.6)

⁶² For Anglican perspectives on appraisal, see *Appointed For Growth: A Handbook of Ministry Development and Appraisal* (Mowbray, London 1994) edited by Kevin Eastell. Also *Employed by God? Theological and Practical Implications of the new Church of England Clergy Terms of Service Legislation* (Grove, Cambridge).

A theological foundation for appraisal is provided by the United Methodist Church of America:

"Evaluation is natural to the human experience. Evaluation is one of God's ways of bringing the history of the past into dialogue with the hope for the future. Without confession of sin there is no reconciliation; without the counting of blessings there is no thanksgiving; without the acknowledgement of accomplishments there is no celebration; without awareness of potential there is no hope; without hope there is no desire for growth; without desire for growth the past will dwarf the future. We are called into new growth and new ministries by taking a realistic and hopeful look at what we have been and what we can still become. Surrounded by God's grace and the crowd of witnesses in the faith, we can look at our past unafraid and from its insights eagerly face the future with new possibilities" ⁶³.

Unfortunately some ministers feel threatened by the prospect of appraisal. Believing themselves primarily accountable to God, they do not want to have to give account of their ministry to another. But if the word "love" is changed to "accountable" in 1 John 4.20 we find "We cannot be accountable to God whom we have not seen, if we are not willing to be accountable to our brother and sister, whom we have seen" ⁶⁴! The fact is that appraisals, properly handled, are a positive experience and to be welcomed with open arms!

4. Team facilitation

One of drawbacks of the model that I have described is that the team's well-being can become over-reliant upon the team leader. There are times when the team could benefit from outside insights. Although the annual review of the team leader is an occasion for talking through issues with someone outside of the local church, there can be limits to the usefulness of that occasion – particularly where the team leader is resistant to the views being expressed.

Some teams therefore appoint a team facilitator. In my own particular situation we have invited an experienced minister, who has had many years experience of leading and developing a larger church, to act as a consultant both to the ministry team as also to the wider leadership team. In the course of a year he will spend a number of days with us, including leading a weekend away for all leaders, both those serving on the ministry team, and those serving on the wider leadership team.

⁶³ From a pamphlet prepared by the Division of Ordained Ministry of the United Methodist Church, quoted by Jill M. Hudson, *Evaluating Ministry: Principles & Processes for Clergy & Congregations* (Alban Institute, Washington D.C., 1992) 7.

⁶⁴ Likewise from the Division of Ordained Ministry of the United Methodist Church.

ONE OF LIFE'S GREAT PRIVILEGES

For me working together with others as a senior partner to achieve the task, build and maintain the team, and develop individuals, is one of life's great privileges.

True, it has not always been 'sweetness and light'. Over the years there have been relationship problems. But such problems are inevitable, given that all of us are human. In the wise words of John Blattner, "Wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, sooner or later there are going to be people problems".⁶⁵ But with God's grace problems can be dealt with and overcome. Certainly my overall experience of team work has been extremely positive. I thank God for all the strong relationships I have enjoyed over the years.

To work with others in a growing vibrant community is a rare privilege. For this I thank God.

⁶⁵ John Blattner, *Pastoral Renewal* February 1987

APPENDICES

1. *A leadership team check list*

1. To what extent are we ‘servant-leaders’?
2. How do we complement one another?
3. How can we best encourage one another
4. How might we better hold one another to account?
5. Where does our church fit on the church size scale?
6. Where on the church scale do we want our church to be in five years time?
7. What is the present size and mix of our church staff?
8. What should be our priorities in terms of adding extra staff?
9. In the present financial climate, how might we expand the mix of our staff?
10. How can we better work together as paid and unpaid staff?
11. What is the particular mission God has given our church?
12. How can we better build a sense of team?
13. How can we ensure individuals within the team are developed?
14. What should be the key roles of our team leader?
15. To what extent is the exercise of authority an issue in the church?
16. To what extent do our church teams enable us to exercise an all-round ministry?
17. How might we encourage teams to work better?
18. How satisfied are we with our accommodation and our ‘tools of the trade’?
19. What might be an appropriate team covenant for us?
20. What would be the advantages of having a common team ‘rule’?
21. How can our weekly staff meetings be improved?
22. How might we improve the way we operate team supervision?
23. How helpful do we find our annual reviews?
24. How practical might it be to appoint a team facilitator?
25. What is the most helpful insight or idea you found in reading this booklet?

2. *Large is also beautiful*

Like many other ministers of larger churches, I am saddened by the lack of understanding so often shown by others in smaller churches. Influenced perhaps by E.F. Schumacher, the mantra seems to be that ‘small’, and only small, ‘is beautiful’.⁶⁶ For instance, not so long ago Tim Chester and Steve Timmis wrote: “It is actually not that difficult to create a large congregation. Paul tells us how. You give people what will ‘suit their own desires’ and say ‘what their itching ears want to hear’ (2 Tim 4.3). Entertain the congregation each Sunday with a good performance. Do not focus on the depth of their sins, nor the cost of cross-centered discipleship. Whatever you do, do not challenge the idolatrous desires of their hearts. Instead offer them sermons on how to realize those desires and find success in life. Or better still, tell amusing stories which excite them with a vague sense of optimism. That is one way to grow a church”.⁶⁷ They go on to say, “Obviously most large evangelical churches remain faithful to the gospel. Large does not equal unfaithful”. However, the impression is given that small

⁶⁶ See E.F. Schumacher, *Small is beautiful. Economics as if people mattered* (1978).

⁶⁷ Tim Chester & Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A radical reshaping around gospel and community* (IVP, Nottingham 2007) 187.

is more likely to be faithful – for in their opinion meaningful community is only possible in the larger church.

Similarly Roy Dorey in a recent article on ‘Honey pot churches’ has implied that larger churches, which he equates with churches with a membership in excess of 200, do not “take mission seriously” – as if their size breeds complacency. Indeed, he stated that “It feels good to be part of a crowd on a Sunday, as it reinforces our view that we are not such a minority”. He argued that “churches which receive the larger congregations tend to be cut off from their own community”, and have “no real links with the people who live around”. Furthermore, larger churches “encourage attendance on the ‘consumer pattern’.... Those who attend such churches are in danger of being ‘takers’ and not ‘givers’”. Larger churches are, he says, ‘honey pot’ churches, which draw people as a result of “good teaching, specialised teaching, particular forms of worship, feeling comfortable, culturally at home, a crowd attracting a crowd”.⁶⁸

I find such criticisms most unfair – and indeed demeaning of the ministry of ministers in larger churches. I believe that ‘large’ can also be ‘beautiful’. As a result, I wrote the following response to Roy Dorey’s article:

“At the outset let me make it clear that in my response I am not seeking to say that larger churches are necessary ‘better’ than smaller churches, they are simply different. I believe that there is a place for both small and larger churches. Yes, some members of larger churches can be complacent and inward-looking – but on the other hand, some members of smaller churches can lack vision and can define success simply in terms of keeping the doors of the church open for another year. As one colleague said to me: “If we take the words of Jesus seriously when he said that he would build his church, we would never be satisfied with ‘small’ church”. But nor for that matter can larger churches ever be satisfied with their size – for by comparison with the thousands who not darken the door of any church, every church is ‘small’. All of us remain, as Roy Dorey rightly reminds us, a small minority.

Why do larger churches attract people? At a recent meeting of ministers of larger Baptist churches we identified the following factors distinguishing our churches from others:

1. Larger churches give a warm welcome. Time and again people visiting larger churches comment on the warmth of the welcome they receive. At first sight this might seem strange. One might think that visitors in a larger church would get lost in the crowd and would perhaps not receive much of a welcome, whereas in a smaller church visitors would be immediately noticeable and would therefore be much more welcome. However, the reality is that most larger churches go to great efforts to ensure that visitors are made welcome. Larger churches tend to have welcome teams, who are keen to learn the names of newcomers, and ready to show people to their seats and in so doing perhaps introduce them to others in the church. Some larger churches even give gifts to newcomers. There is a professionalism behind the welcome not always found in a smaller church. Please note: I am not saying that small churches do not

⁶⁸ Roy Dorey, ‘Minorities and honey pot churches’, *Baptist Ministers’ Journal* 301 (Jan/Feb 2009) 8-10.

welcome others – but simply that larger churches tend to ensure there is always a welcome.

2. Larger churches can provide anonymity for people seeking a haven. The experience of larger churches is that they often attract Christians who have been hurt or bruised as a result of church ‘fights’. Larger churches also tend to attract people who have been ‘burnt out’ and are exhausted as a result of having to take on too much responsibility in a smaller church. Larger churches provide space for people to recover from bad experiences in smaller churches. Being a ‘passenger’ can be part of a healing process. Please note: I am not saying that it is just smaller churches which wound people. Sadly church fights can also take place in larger churches.
3. Larger churches are more seeker-friendly, in the sense that non-Christians do not feel as conspicuous. It is much more difficult for a non-Christian to try out a small church. Please note: I am not saying that large crowds are a necessity for effective evangelism. Many a larger church runs Alpha courses less people in the average sized ‘small’ church: however, what helps in that smaller context is that the majority of people are not church people.
4. Larger churches tend to be positive places. People in larger churches often feel good about their church, their pastor, and their activities. As a result of their good experience of church, they are happy to tell their friends about their church. People look forward to coming to church – church is a great place to be. Not surprisingly people are attracted to such churches. Please note: I am not saying that small churches by contrast are negative places. However, the fact is that sometimes smaller churches can be marked by a sense of tiredness, routine, and sometimes failure. It can be tough being a member of a smaller church.
5. The worship and preaching of larger churches is attractive, not only because of the quality of the ‘performance’, but also by the vibrancy of spirit. In an age when people are media-savvy, this is important. It is so much easier for worship in the larger church to become a ‘celebration’. Please note: I am not saying that there are no vibrant small churches. Nor am I saying that the Spirit is only present when crowds of people flock to worship. Isaiah’s encounter with God in his Temple was probably a very personal and individual experience.
6. Larger churches offer something for everybody. Small churches, for instance, are often unable to run a full programme for children and young people; they are also unlikely to have activities for young singles. Large churches are also able to offer a range of worship styles. All this is attractive to many.

Not everybody, of course, is attracted to a larger church. There are many people who prefer the intimacy of a smaller church – they like to be the sense of ‘family’ which comes from everybody knowing one another. Difficulties, however, arise for the smaller church when it seeks to be a ‘large church write small’. Instead of smaller churches seeking to be ‘all things to all men’, they probably need to do just one or two things well. To put it in ‘shopping’ terms, there is a place for the small ‘boutique’ as well as for the larger ‘supermarket’.

Roy Dorey seems to assume that it is wrong for Christians to pass other churches in order to worship at a larger church. But why is it wrong? The simple fact is that some people prefer life in a small church, and others prefer life in a larger church.

In terms of Christian mission, there is a lot to be said for the larger church. As Peter Brierley has shown, larger churches tend to be growing churches – the larger the church, the more likely it is to attract worshippers. Roy Dorey is wrong to suggest that it is more difficult to invite neighbours to church if a church is not local. The fact is that people are happy to travel to shop and to commute – so why should they not be happy to travel go to church? During the week, for instance, people come from miles around to the centre of Chelmsford to catch the train, to work in the University or in the County Council offices, to shop, watch the cricket etc – so why not drive to church on a Sunday, or get the bus on a weekday? If you have something good to offer, people will make the effort to come. Indeed, we have to turn away people from our Toddlers group and from our seniors lunches. It's not distance, but parking, which puts people off.

Roy Dorey is also wrong to suggest that people who travel to larger churches do not have a community to serve. The community is different. The 'parish' may no longer be a neighbourhood – instead the 'parish' may be the town as a whole. Indeed, one can argue that the larger church can be more effective as salt and light in the world than the smaller church. The leaders of the Borough Council or indeed the County Council are more likely to take notice of the concerns of a larger church, than a smaller church.

Life in a smaller church can be demanding, but so too can life be demanding in a larger church. Roy Dorey speaks of the difficulties some smaller churches find in getting a competent treasurer – but it can be just as difficult finding somebody to act as treasurer in a larger church, and all the more so because the finances of a larger church are so much more complex and time-consuming. Yes, in a larger church there are many more volunteers – but many more volunteers are needed. The fact that people may choose to pass other churches to attend another church does not mean that they all simply become 'pew fodder'. True, in a larger church there is perhaps a greater proportion of 'passengers' – but sometimes this is not a bad thing. Sometimes people need to be 'passengers'. Furthermore, we need to remember that there is a wider world in which people can serve God, not least the world of work – some of the apparent 'passengers' are in fact busily serving God in their places of work.

So in conclusion, there is a place for the larger church. The fact that people often come to a larger church as a result of surfing the web is not to be condemned as a feature of modern consumerism – very often they search the web because of a need. As larger churches we are glad to meet those needs. Our sadness is that smaller churches all too often fail to recognise the validity and worthwhile nature of our ministry.”⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Paul Beasley-Murray, 'Honey pots': A response', *Baptist Ministers' Journal* 304 (October 2009) 12-17.