



resourcing the church
for spiritual vitality

Denominational Ministry Strategy for the Presbyterian Church in New South Wales

A paper prepared in response to GANSW BB 2006, Min. 24(4)
Part II

Preamble

In 2006 the General Assembly instructed the Ministry and Mission Committee to:
develop a comprehensive 5-10 year ministry strategy, addressing (without limitation) such issues as:

- *models for the growth, where possible, of ministry teams*
- *models for ministry where a vacancy appears prolonged*
- *models for recruitment and deployment to such diverse ministry situations*
- *models for re-assessment of charge/presbytery resources to facilitate ministry*
- *models for strategic church-planting/ministry-planting in the light of these issues*

The Committee responded to that instruction in a report to the Assembly when it met in 2008. No objections were received by the Committee to the direction of that initial report or to proposals contained within it. This paper, therefore, builds upon the earlier report and emphasizes the need for the Church to be intentional and effective in three primary areas, prayer, proclamation, and pastoring.

Introduction

Because the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, the mission of the Presbyterian Church is to “take the Gospel to people of all ethnic and cultural groupings”.¹

As it pursues this mission in NSW, the Church longs to see each of its congregations having the will and the ability to grow and then to plant new congregations directly or indirectly.² That will bring about a multiplication of “cross-shaped communities” marked by inspiring worship, enthusiastic service, effective evangelism and measurable growth in Christ-likeness.³ The expression of these qualities will vary from place to place according to local circumstances, and this variability defies definition by the Assembly. What can be achieved at a denominational level is to recognise and emphasize the strategic priorities that underlie all others for the church: prayer, proclamation and pastoring. It is in these areas that the denomination, by the adoption of a clear approach to ministry, may help presbyteries and sessions to establish goals and strategies applicable to, and appropriate in, their own situation. This paper proceeds on that basis

Prayer

The church is never truly the church when it fails to rely on Jesus. He said, “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Whenever, therefore, we try to live and act without total reliance on him, we act like any other human organisation and enjoy no spiritual empowerment. We then

¹ See Article 5 of the Articles of Agreement in *Constitution, Procedure and Practice of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia*

² “Towards a Denominational Ministry Strategy”, a discussion paper submitted to the Assembly by the Ministry and Commission Committee in 2008.

³ Paper presented to the Assembly by the Vision and Mission Committee in 2004.

receive non-answers concordant with our non-prayers. We find that we have not because we ask not (James 4:2).

When prayer is made a priority, a greater sense of anticipation is enjoyed by God's people, a greater sense of awe is experienced when God demonstrates his blessing and a greater willingness exists to recognise the divine origin of those blessings so that glory and praise redound to him. God's people become more humble, more hopeful and more bold so that they serve him with deeper devotion and increased joy.

It is of pivotal importance, then, that in all our congregations, members be taught to pray privately and publicly, that they be organised into groups for prayer and that they be expected to pray orally and audibly in terms that other people may understand. If the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, those who would be disciple-makers today must also teach their people to pray. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the early church was not just that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, nor even consistent fellowship and sacramental observances, but that they prayed with the result that "everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles" (Acts 2:42-43). Such were their prayers that prison doors flew open, the lame walked, the dead were raised to life, the believers shared their possessions with joy, and they were sustained through persecution.

Our people need to be taught how to pray and what to pray. For many, hearing their own voice in prayer is unnerving and threatening. They need help. The church needs help. And those who would be leaders in God's church must provide it.

The Presbyterian Church must be known not just as a fellowship, but a prayer fellowship where the Bible is rightly taught and prayer is an "offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies."⁴

Prayers like that – "for things agreeable to God's will" – will see him answer the Assembly's desire for growth of the church in general (including growth in the number and effectiveness of ministry teams), the recruitment of God-appointed servants to proclaim his word and pastor his people (thus minimising the number of pastoral vacancies and their duration), and the willingness of congregations and their members to re-assess their resources to facilitate ministry in their own area and to share their resources with other congregations for the growth of existing works and the establishment of new congregations.

Prayer must, of course, be part of the regular and ongoing experience of every one of God's people. But prayer must not only be the private activity of individuals. Congregations must be organised to pray together. Since that sort of praying so easily slips from congregational agendas, presbyteries have an opportunity, here, to exercise their concern for the welfare of congregations (and demonstrate their supervisory responsibility) by providing leadership and encouragement that will strengthen congregational practices in prayer and even monitor them.⁵ In doing so, presbyteries may give evidence of their own commitment to organised corporate prayer by conducting regular and public prayer meetings for the work of the gospel within their bounds.

This is the heart of the Church's response to God and it is appropriate that the Assembly, too, as the governing authority, should set an example in this area and direct God's people to fulfil their responsibilities towards him in this way.

⁴ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q.98

⁵ The Code II 5.02 – "Among its responsibilities the presbytery shall:

(a) supervise all matters relating to doctrine, discipline and order in the congregations and all their associations and societies, within its boundaries."

Proclamation

Proclamation means, simply, declaring what God has done in Jesus with a call for all people to respond to him with repentance and faith. Proclamation of the Biblical message must be made to all people. People who are not yet believers need to hear the message so that they might put their trust in Jesus. People who are already believers need to hear the message so that the church will enjoy unity in which all its members grow up into Christ and become mature (Eph. 4:13). The goal of the church's proclaiming work is that the church might be edified and expanded.

Edification

Church members are obligated to build up one another in their most holy faith (Jude 20) and to use their many gifts enthusiastically (Rom. 12:6-8) to promote the common good of all members so that the church as a whole, and each congregation within it, will be attractive to outsiders. Pastor-teachers are to help people recognise, develop and deploy their gifts and so "prepare God's people for their works of service" (Eph. 4:12).

Disciplined engagement with the things of God is not innate to the human being. As a result of the fall, we are self-consumed and intrinsically bent to avoid God and disengage from his purposes. If this is to be overcome, we need to add to our prayers the promotion of intentional training – the making not just of believers but disciples – people who are fundamentally committed to living their lives in Christ's service so that they develop and deploy their gifts for him.

In the development of their members, congregations must establish a training culture where people are exposed to appropriate ministries with an expanding level of experience. It cannot be acceptable, in the church, that 80% of the work be done by 20% of the members. The Bible anticipates every-member ministry and it is incumbent on each session that it make this expectation clear, inculcating God-honouring enthusiasm for service, and engaging people effectively.

The skills needed for a range of ministries ought to be analysed and documented, and people should be developed so that their skills can be deployed. Moreover, with some ministries needing more highly developed skills, congregations should have a pathway in ministry so that people may be recruited and prepared for increasing responsibilities, having previously trained others to take their place in service.

This work of upbuilding, or edification, is neither individualistic nor theoretical. It is a practical, corporate responsibility. Individuals should be growing in grace and demonstrating that through works of service. Congregations, likewise, should be growing in grace and demonstrating that through a healthy ability to improve the welfare of other congregations and, with them, to plant and develop new churches.

Intentionality: If edification is important (and it is!), it must be intentional. There must be a deliberate determination on the part of church leaders never to be content with maintenance ministry but to be constantly looking for developmental opportunities and planning ahead to lead their churches forward to effective service of the Lord Jesus – and that cannot be separated from disciple-making.

Taking a church forward requires a realistic assessment of where it is at the moment. It cannot be done with guesswork!

Objectivity: There are now several commercially available tools for exploring congregational vitality, of which the most prominent are the National Church Life Survey and Natural Church Development. The NCLS is readily accessible, based in Australia and cheap. Churches ought to use it. It is conducted nationally on a five-yearly timetable but may also be taken annually or at other times suitable to individual churches. It is an excellent tool for exploring not just the state of a congregation, but its progress over time. If, for some reason, church leaders choose not to use one

of these tools, they ought to be committed to reviewing the welfare and progress of the congregation objectively and realistically on an annual basis and taking whatever action is necessary to move it to where it ought to be. It is not necessary to address every possible growth area at once. Substantial improvements in the upbuilding of a congregation can occur if the leadership focuses on only the most obvious growth area(s) and implements strategies for addressing those initially. Congregations, like any other healthy organisation, should regularly take stock of their status and progress and make plans for intentional development.

Humility: Fundamental to the development of congregations is humility before God as his servants, not his instructors. Servants wait upon the master's word and ask for his direction. In churches, this involves faithful attention to the teaching of the Bible and active participation in prayer. We believe that God's word is heard in three ways: by listening attentively to Bible readings and sermons, participating actively in small group Bible studies, and reflecting privately on personal reading of the Bible. Corresponding to these three areas of activity, God's will is sought in public prayer (prayer offered during church services), group prayer, and personal prayer. Each of these is indispensable to congregational development and church leaders (especially ministers) are, therefore, duty-bound to emphasize these responsibilities of church members, to provide opportunities for their fulfilment, promote resources to assist participants according to the degree of their personal development, and actively to urge and encourage church members in these primary areas.

There can be no congregational edification where there is no personal edification, so each member's growth in grace must be carefully cultivated. Traditionally this was the primary duty of elders. They assisted the minister by visiting from house to house and catechising their people. Throughout the twentieth century, this expectation was allowed to fail and, in many places, the edification of God's people was assumed rather than assisted. Small group Bible study was abandoned for most of that time and, more often than not, elders' visits (if they happened) were little more than social engagements. In recent decades, with the recovery of the Church's Biblical foundations, small groups have been re-established in many churches and the responsibility for promoting the edification of members has devolved to the leaders of those groups. In some places, elders themselves have rediscovered and acted upon their own responsibility for God's people. Both of these trends should be encouraged and promoted, particularly in the light of the ample supply of good Bible study material now available for small groups. In addition, the Westminster documents retain real value for encouraging and edifying God's servants. The Westminster Shorter Catechism is being reproduced in modern English by the Christian Education Committee of the General Assembly of Australia, not just as a booklet, but in the form of memory cards with each card bearing the question, the answer and the primary Biblical reference. People who use these cards will, as a minimum, be committing Scripture to memory and elders (or small group leaders) could readily use this tool as they undertake their visits. In addition, the Directory for Public Worship and the Directory for Family Worship have great value in guiding the prayers of God's people and encouraging a discipline in prayer and a breadth of focus that has been lost for too long. Most of our public prayer (and one might also suspect our private prayer) has become narrowed to a few small areas (largely focused on healing) to the impoverishment of our people's spiritual life. Leaders, and especially ministers, would do well to consult these Directories for guidance and encouragement.

In order to maximise its effectiveness, the Presbyterian Church must help its members to experience and express genuine joy and confidence in the knowledge and service of Jesus. The challenge before us is not just to glorify God but to enjoy him. To this end, ministers and elders must consider any congregational impediments to these privileges. For too long, Presbyterians held that "religion was a private matter" and considered it impolite to discuss their relationship with God and their experience of his goodness. The love of God was generalised to the point that it lacked particularity. Since all Christians are appointed to bear witness to Jesus, it is imperative that they be able to give voice to their own experience of God's goodness and their confidence in the goodness and certainty of God's plans for his world.

Expansion

God is not content to have his church internally focused so that it does not move out and do good for the world. To refuse to look with compassion on the world is to betray our status as his image-bearers. And to refuse to proclaim his good news for the world is to deny our status as his witnesses.

A major point of the Babel narrative is that people determined to defy God and no longer “fill the earth and subdue it”. Having found a comfortable location, they “settled there” in order to “make a name for [themselves] and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:1-9). Dissatisfied, God “came down” to see the fruits of their rebellion and upended their plans so that they were, in fact, scattered – “over all the earth” (v.8) and “over the face of the whole earth” (v.9). God has an expansive vision for his image-bearers and particularly those whom he has called into covenant relationship with himself.

Although he gathered his people as one assembly around Sinai and later caused his name to be represented at Mt Zion, that, too, was part of an expansive strategy explained by Micah in these terms: “Many nations will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Micah 4:2). When, centuries later, Jesus himself came to Jerusalem, he found a nation centred on a city with all the trappings of developed religion but with no external focus. In spite of the fact that God’s plans for his temple had a large area specifically designated for “the nations” to which non-Jews were entitled to come, they had been excluded from God’s mercy as their space was taken over by merchants. Jesus’ response was parabolic. He overturned their trading tables, condemned them for preventing the temple from serving as a “house of prayer for all nations”, and expelled them from the temple precincts. This action was not alone. Jesus preceded the cleansing of the temple with the blighting of the fruitless fig-tree, explaining his actions the next day by calling the disciples to concentrated faith that, by prayer, would effect mighty changes in them and the world around them (Mark 11:12-26).

Undeniably, God has an expansive agenda for his church so that the proclamation of his word can never be merely for the benefit of believers, much as they need continually to hear it. God’s word must be proclaimed to “the nations”, beginning – in every locality – with believers who impact their neighbours for Christ, and spreading progressively through communities, states and nations so that the whole world might know and enjoy God’s love.

Congregations which do not embrace God’s expansive agenda must be acknowledged as failing. We cannot equivocate on that fact. Conversion growth must be pursued with anticipation even in situations where local populations may be declining. Where conversion growth is not being pursued, corrective action must be taken deliberately and decisively. While it is true that the result of gospel proclamation ultimately rests in the hand of God since it is his work alone that brings people to salvation, that fact cannot be used as an excuse for a lack of expansionary activity by congregations or the denomination as a whole. ***Belief in the priority of grace is seen in the Scriptures as a stimulus to engagement with, not disengagement from, evangelism and discipleship*** (1 Cor. 3:6), and a Biblical commitment to the sovereignty of God should not act as an excuse for spiritual unfruitfulness. In the ordinary course of events, healthy congregations should see people being transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God’s Son. For that not to happen is, ordinarily, a symptom of dis-ease which ought to be investigated and corrected by sessions and presbyteries as they exercise spiritual supervision over the congregations committed to their care. Neglect of that supervisory obligation is an act of disobedience, for it denies the mutual bearing of burdens by which we “fulfil the law of love” (Gal. 6:2).

This is the genius of the Presbyterian Church. Our congregations are not isolated, independent and autonomous as are those of other denominations. Neither are our ministers and elders. We recognise, from Scripture, an obligation to maintain mutual accountability through personal relationships and a graded system of church councils by all of which we are required to “spur one

another on towards love and good works” (Heb. 10:24). That ought to drive us not just to expect church growth by conversions, but to engage vigorously in church planting.⁶

This is not a challenge that can be addressed by the denomination acting on its own. The challenge of church planting is, fundamentally, a challenge for congregations. The denomination’s role is to facilitate the development of congregations with sufficient strength and passion that, acting in partnership with others (and with denominational resources) they may “seed” the formation of new congregations – i.e. that they may develop and empower church planting pastors and help them form “launch teams” to initiate new works.

J. Allen Thompson, a world leader in the theory and practice of church planting, has identified “Seven Seasons of Church Growth and Multiplication” as follows:

1. Preparing - Preparing to Plant the Church (Seed)
2. Gathering - Gathering a Worshiping Community (Seedling)
3. Developing - Developing Gospel-Centered Ministries (Young Plant)
4. Mentoring - Mentoring Gospel-Centered Leaders (Young Tree)
5. Growing - Leading church to growth & planting (Fruit Bearing Tree)
6. Locating - Establishing a community presence (Deepening Roots)
7. Multiplying – Establishing a church multiplication movement (Multiply Fruitful Trees)

While Thompson’s “seven seasons” identify what should be happening in the church plant, in general terms the impetus to plant a new congregation in a specific area may begin in several different ways relating to the particular project, personnel, publicity, provision, property and process in view. Apart from obedience to God that results in the desire to see new churches established, no one original cause adequately describes the initial action required to start a new congregation. “Project” relates to the identification of a particular point of need or opportunity for which a church should be planted. It includes an articulated vision of the potential ministry which will be sufficient for the proposal to be assessed by ASAP, the church planting assessment panel maintained by the Ministry and Mission Committee. “Personnel” relates to the identification of a suitable church planting pastor and the formation of a launch team committed to a new ministry under the leadership of that pastor. “Publicity” is that activity by which people are informed about, and enthused with, the vision for the new church plant and are engaged to pray for the new work, offer financial partnership, or even join the launch team. “Prayer” needs no explanation in light of all that has been written above. “Provision” expresses the need to consider the financial requirements of the new church and to plan adequately for its material support either through one sponsoring congregation or a consortium of people and other congregations who will join as partners in this ministry. “Property” needs must be defined, either in terms of borrowed, rented or church-owned facilities. And in all of this, care must be taken about the “Process” by which the new congregation will be established so that its personnel and their activities are adequately insured, its properties (if any) appropriately protected, and its general existence and operations are recognised within the courts and committees of the Church.

Whether, then, we consider the starting points of church planting, or the “seasons” experienced in effective church planting, there must be an absolute intentionality about the goal of planting churches. Not only should new congregations be spawned, but each new congregation should become known for its strong “gospel-centred” ministries in which its members are carefully and systematically trained so that they will be equipped, in time, to form new church planting nuclei and go out to plant successive generations of churches.

This has not been typical of Presbyterian thinking about church planting where the goal has been simply, to colonise an identified area as an end in itself. The real goal, however, ought to be to catalyse a movement by which new congregations reproduce themselves progressively.

⁶ For a comprehensive report on church planting, readers are referred to the website of the Ministry and Mission Committee (www.mm.pcns.org.au) or to the church planting page of that website (www.churchplanting.pcns.org.au).

For this to happen, we need to review the way we think about church ministries and church staffing.

In terms of staffing, if the goal is simply to maintain what exists, then perhaps the majority of congregations may be well-served with just one pastor. But if we are going to engage, train and deploy people who will pioneer new works, churches in areas with the potential for church planting should be encouraged to develop paid ministry teams in which junior members are being mentored towards church planting ministries and expected, within 2 or 3 years to gather a launch team committed to ministering with them in a new situation and then move out to start a new congregation which will, in its turn, start further congregations.⁷

In terms of church ministries, we ought not to think that all congregations should be uniform in size and comparable in the range of ministries they offer, nor that they should have only one morning or one evening congregation. We ought, instead, to encourage able congregations to expand in numbers and in their range of ministries so that they may nurture not only prospective church planting pastors, but new launch teams. Small congregations cannot afford to have half their members leave to start a new church. The effect on the sending church may be to cripple it. For that reason, sending churches need to grow to a size where 30 members (or thereabouts) can leave without causing the work they have left to stumble. That requires sending churches to be larger. And if they are larger they will have (or should have) a larger range of ministries by which to attract new members and in which to train the members of a launch team for ministry in the church plant.⁸

It is significant that in 1914 – at the start of the most vigorous period of church planting in the history of the NSW church – the Home Mission Committee of the General Assembly of Australia reported to the GAA on the expansive work being done in this state and informed the Assembly that the policy of the NSW Committee “is in favour of doing extension work by supplying assistants to settled Ministers, who undertake to open up new centres, rather than by prematurely dividing charges. Experience has proved that new charges formed under the care of an experienced Minister are much more easily brought to the point of settlement than places worked under home missionaries apart from a responsible Minister.”⁹ It is not clear why or when this policy was abandoned but while it was in place it proved to be most effective.

Our thinking about staffing and ministries needs to change, therefore, to enhance the potential for planting new churches. So does our thinking about money.

Churches that are not in a position to plant new congregations – perhaps because of geographic isolation – should look for opportunities to assist stronger congregations prayerfully and financially towards that goal. This is not just a different way of thinking, it’s a reversal of that time-worn approach by which stronger congregations have been expected to uphold weaker congregations but have not seen a return on their investment.

It is possible for churches to be supported for too long so that they lose sight of the need to contribute to the greater good of the whole church and slumber away, dependent on others, even as they decline. Support of weaker churches ought to be a child endowment, not an old-age pension. It ought to be aimed at their intentional growth, not merely their prolonged existence. To this end, churches that are temporarily vacant, ought to be encouraged to contribute towards church planting ministries a substantial part of the income that would otherwise provide the stipend. This would have the symbiotic benefit of engaging the vacant church in the ministries of

⁷ As an alternative, the junior minister could be prepared to take over leadership of the existing congregation with the senior minister moving out as the church planting pastor. The issue is not which pastor goes, but the recognition that team ministries provide an incomparable opportunity for mentoring and that such teams ought to be expected to reproduce by responsible, peaceable and intentional cell-division.

⁸ Financial considerations relevant to team ministries appear as an appendix to this report.

⁹ GAA BB 1914, p.126

the new congregation while also giving the members an incentive not to cut back on their giving as so frequently happens in a vacancy.

Pastoring God's People

Without prayer, the church cannot be the body God intended. Without proclamation, the church cannot do the work that God intended. Without pastoring its members, the church cannot show the love that God intended to sustain and bless his children. That is the final matter to which this paper will now turn.

Any responsible ministry strategy for the Presbyterian Church must ensure that those who come to faith in Christ are not only edified in that faith but also supported compassionately so that the burdens of life are borne in company and do not overwhelm them. If Jesus cared enough for his disciples that he prayed that their faith should not fail them (Luke 22:32), the members of his body should show at least that much concern. The care to be shown to widows and orphans in Israel and to "widows who are really in need" in the church (1 Tim. 5:3) demonstrates an organisational concern for people in misfortune, as does the command to the redeemed thief who must now labour in order to "have something to share with those in need" (Eph. 4:28). Beyond any doubt, the list of New Testament commands to reciprocal ministry within the body of Christ shows that care for one another is a defining characteristic of the Christian life. As Jesus said, "by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35).

Pastoral ministry provides a relational framework in which we may bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of love (Gal. 6:2). It creates a loving, secure environment in which God's people may be practically supported and be taught, rebuked, corrected and trained in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16) while those ensnared by sin may be gently restored (Gal. 6:1).

Pastoral ministry is not the exclusive domain of the stipended minister. It is a privilege given to all Christians and an obligation placed on all. In this, as in so many other areas of church life, it is the duty of ministers to lead by example and, in that leadership, to engage, train and deploy others for this important work. Ministers can't be expected to do all of the pastoral ministry, but they can be expected to ensure that it is done, and done effectively, throughout the congregation.

As believers experience such a compassionate community, they will be sensitized to the needs of people who are not yet part of the congregation. Pastoral ministry may then flow to outsiders in redemptive mercy ministry which will be well-spoken of by all and – as a by-product to a work that is good in itself – also enhance the congregation's reputation and incline others to consider its message of a God who is so rich in mercy that he made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins.

Sadly, some churches have focused on works of kindness and have subordinated Christ's message. Others have focused on the call to salvation as if it were the church's whole message and have neglected deeds of mercy. The two must go together and be allowed, as God intended, to complement one another so that proclamation is reflected in pastoral ministry and pastoral ministry results in proclamation – all encompassed in deliberate, focused prayer.

Conclusion

Attention to matters outlined above will have several benefits for the church. It will encourage the growth of ministry teams, reduce the length and impact of pastoral vacancies, facilitate the recruitment and deployment of personnel to diverse ministry situations, encourage the ongoing re-assessment of the potential of congregations and presbyteries to expand their ministries (either alone or in partnership with others), and give focus to the need for church planting and respond effectively to it.

Ministry teams

Many models may be advanced for the growth of ministry teams – indeed, there are more models than may conveniently be summarised. The purposes for which a team ministry might be established include the expansion of existing ministries, or the development of new ministries. Improvements may be desired, for example, in a congregation's ministry to children and young people, students, seniors, mothers of toddlers, men and women, couples and singles, people of non-English speaking background, etc. These purposes are as diverse as the congregations in which they exist. Equally diverse is the composition of ministry teams which may be of mixed gender and ages, focus on widely different aspects of a congregation's total ministry, and involve people who may be paid or unpaid and serve on a full-time or part-time basis. Whatever model is employed, it must be preceded by an analysis of the ministry opportunities available to the particular congregation having regard to its ministry goals, its financial and material resources, and the personnel who are available within the congregation or who might be engaged from beyond the congregation. Sessions when considering the potential to expand or enhance ministries ought to consider each of the preceding matters, taking care to document its findings and decisions appropriately so that when a new ministry is established (or an existing ministry redefined) and when personnel are engaged to pursue that ministry, the expectations of all parties are clear and agreed, being expressed in an effective job description.¹⁰

Whatever the purpose or the composition of a ministry team, the Scripture affirms that a teams-based approach to life generally accomplishes more than one that is individually-based (Ecclesiastes 4:9). The government of Presbyterian churches is conciliar in its essence, not centred on individual authority, and that ought to flow into a reaffirmation of the valid and valued contributions available from many people whose skill and good-will should be carefully harnessed for the growth of God's kingdom, in accord with Ephesians 4:11-13.

Congregations considering expanding their range of ministries or their ministry team would do well to seek consultancy services from the Ministry and Mission Committee. Its consultancy team is specifically trained, among other things, to review existing ministry structures and facilitate considerations of alternative structures by Sessions with whom this responsibility ultimately lies.

Prolonged vacancies

The best response the Church may make to the impact of pastoral vacancies is to cultivate and equip a wide range of people for increasing responsibility within congregations so that, in a vacancy, the burden on (interim-) moderators might be minimised and the ministry potential of God's people might be maximised, whether their ministries consist in organising or participating in prayer, proclamation or pastoral care.

Within our Presbyterian system where ministers, ordinarily, are called by, not appointed to, the pastoral office, vacancies must be expected and their value should be recognised. Not only do vacancies provide a mechanism for ministers to move from place to place according to their experience, their skill, and their personal and family needs, vacancies also provide congregations with the opportunity to reflect together on their organisational learning to date and how they might like to develop their usefulness to God during the next incumbency. This process should not be rushed.

Again, through its consultancy team, the Ministry and Mission Committee has developed the potential to offer substantial help to congregations that will engage the membership, inform the leadership and facilitate a healthy closure of the preceding ministry and a harmonious approach to future ministry.

¹⁰ The Ministry and Mission Committee is well-positioned to help congregations clarify their expectations and define them in a way that will enhance ministries and prevent them from struggling or even failing unnecessarily. Requests for help are welcomed, and addressed promptly.

The Committee is also engaging more personnel for service as home missionaries who may be available to provide relief in prolonged vacancies.

Sadly, very few ministers have considered themselves suited to the demands of intentional transition ministry (ITM). This is greatly regretted because the agenda of the ITM process is clear, progressive and health-giving, providing a foundation for effective ministry to the successor. The Committee would welcome inquiries from ministers who might consider undertaking the required training with funding provided by the Committee.

It has sometimes been suggested that, during vacancies, responsibility for congregations might devolve to an elder nominated by the Session. The Ministry and Mission Committee cannot support that proposal, being convinced that, particularly during vacancies, congregations need more care from their presbyteries, not less, and that this care is most appropriately provided by ministers, both in view of their theological education, their pastoral experience, and their understanding of the rules and procedures of the Church. That said, the Committee would also express concern at the minimalist approach reportedly adopted by some interim-moderators who limit their involvement to the chairing of meetings of the selection committee and have no evident engagement with the other aspects of the congregation's life or leadership. Such behaviour provides opportunity for latent conflicts within congregations to surface in a manner which is sometimes uncontrolled and unproductive, generating division, distrust and disharmony that leads to people withdrawing from congregational life rather than offering their services more generously during the vacancy. This is considered to be a very unhealthy model that presbyteries should take care to discourage.

Recruitment and re-assessment

The Assembly's instruction to the Ministry and Mission Committee in 2006 required the consideration of models for recruitment and deployment to diverse ministry situations, and for the re-assessment of charge/presbytery resources to facilitate ministry.

The Committee considers these matters to have been adequately addressed in its report to the Assembly in 2008.

The Committee thanks the Assembly for the assignment entrusted to it. The work has been demanding but satisfying and we trust that it will inform, inspire and encourage the Church to rise up to seize and fulfil the opportunities that God graciously continues to set before us.

Jeff Read, Convener

Appendix

Determining the cost of a ministry team

Because the circumstances of individual congregations vary so widely, it is meaningless to model “generic” situations. The tables below, however, are abbreviations of more comprehensive tables maintained by the Ministry and Mission Department and these allow congregations, when considering the engagement of additional staff, to determine their projected ministry costs accurately. With the assistance of the Department, this process also helps to clarify the ministry expectations that a congregation might have in relation to particular staff members and the ministry team as a whole.

<i>Remuneration scenarios - - Ordained Minister - 2011</i>	100% Stip	75% Stip	60% Stip	50% Stip	40% Stip	33% Stip
Stipend (gross)	45,434.00	34,075.50	27,260.40	22,717.00	18,173.60	14,993.22
Salary (taxed)	31,803.80	23,852.85	19,082.28	15,901.90	12,721.52	10,495.25
Fringe Benefits (Salary Sacrifice)	13,630.20	10,222.65	8,178.12	6,815.10	5,452.08	4,497.97
Fringe Benefits (Travel)	9,177.00	6,882.75	5,506.20	4,588.50	3,670.80	3,028.41
Fringe Benefits (Accommodation)	21,000.00	15,750.00	12,600.00	10,500.00	8,400.00	6,930.00
Superannuation (SGC @ 9%)	4,089.06	3,066.80	2,453.44	2,044.53	1,635.62	1,349.39
Superannuation (Additional Employer Cont @ 6%)	2,726.04	2,044.53	1,635.62	1,363.02	1,090.42	899.59
LSL (1.6% * FTE gross Stipend)	726.94	726.94	726.94	726.94	726.94	726.94
Workers Comp (2.03% * [gross + Housing])	1,348.61	1,011.46	809.17	674.31	539.44	445.04
Accident & Illness Insurance (flat rate)	325.00	325.00	325.00	325.00	325.00	325.00
Technology Allowance	400.00	300.00	240.00	200.00	160.00	132.00
Total	85,226.65	64,182.98	51,556.77	43,139.30	34,721.83	28,829.60

<i>Remuneration scenarios - - Home Missionary - 2011</i>	100% Sal	75% Sal	60% Sal	50% Sal	40% Sal	33% Sal
Salary (gross)	41,801.00	31,350.75	25,080.60	20,900.50	16,720.40	12,535.71
Salary (taxed)	29,260.70	21,945.53	17,556.42	14,630.35	11,704.28	8,775.00
Fringe Benefits (Salary Sacrifice)	12,540.30	9,405.23	7,524.18	6,270.15	5,016.12	3,760.71
Fringe Benefits (Travel)	9,177.00	6,882.75	5,506.20	4,588.50	3,670.80	4,352.37
Fringe Benefits (Accommodation)	21,000.00	15,750.00	12,600.00	10,500.00	8,400.00	4,950.00
Superannuation (SGC @ 9%)	3,762.09	2,821.57	2,257.25	1,881.05	1,504.84	1,128.21
Superannuation (Additional Employer Cont @ 6%)	2,508.06	1,881.05	1,504.84	1,254.03	1,003.22	752.14
LSL (1.6% * FTE gross salary)	668.82	668.82	668.82	668.82	668.82	668.82
Workers Comp (2.03% * [gross + Housing])	1,274.86	956.15	764.92	637.43	509.94	354.96
Accident & Illness Insurance (flat rate)	325.00	325.00	325.00	325.00	325.00	325.00
Technology Allowance	400.00	300.00	240.00	200.00	160.00	132.00
<i>Rebate 100% LSL paid by M&M (HMS ONLY)</i>	-668.82	-668.82	-668.82	-668.82	-668.82	-668.82
<i>Rebate 50% Supn paid by M&M (HMS ONLY)</i>	-3,135.08	-2,351.31	-1,881.05	-1,567.54	-1,254.03	-940.18
Total	77,112.94	57,915.95	46,397.76	38,718.97	31,040.17	23,590.22

Home mission stations: In home mission stations, the Ministry and Mission Committee meets the cost of the Long Service Leave Assessment and half of the Employer’s Contribution towards superannuation. It is unlikely (though not impossible) that the Committee would maintain a team ministry in a home mission station.

Pastoral Assistance: Where a congregation forms a ministry team with a view to planting a new congregation, the additional team member/s (after the lead minister) will probably be engaged as Pastoral Assistants (supervised). Where such additional team members are not (yet?) ordained ministers or persons appointed by the Ministry and Mission Committee, the provisions for home missionaries may provide guidance concerning an appropriate level of remuneration.

Contractual clarity: The engagement of additional staff should be undertaken with the highest degree of clarity about the terms of that engagement and associated expectations. The Ministry and Mission Department will gladly assist congregations in the development of clear terms of appointment and appropriate job descriptions.