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From the start of the ministry to the end

Congregational Studies
Conference 2018



From the start of the ministry to the end

**Dominic Stockford,
Richard Underwood,
Peter Beale**

**Congregational Studies Conference
Papers 2018**

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Many old Congregational writings can be found on the internet, particularly at www.quintapress.com/PDF_Books.html

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The papers are printed in the order in which they were given at the Conference; as usual the contributor is entirely responsible for the views expressed in his papers.



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Foreword

The Congregational Studies Conference was established in 1981 under the chairmanship of Derek Swann (1926–2007) with encouragement from the EFCC General Secretary Alan Tovey (1942–2002). Derek was succeeded as Chairman by John Semper in 2000 and then I succeeded John in 2010.

At that first Conference, held in the Lloyd-Jones room of Westminster Chapel, there were three lectures: Alan Tovey spoke about Robert Browne, a proto-Congregationalist who wrote the book *Reformation without tarrying for Anie* in which he argued that churches should not wait for the state to give permission to reform; Derek Swann spoke on the church meeting, the most important attribute of Congregationalism; and Peter Seccombe told us about John Angell James, one of the greatest of Congregationalism's ministers in the 19th century. And so the Conference has proceeded, looking at important Congregational principles and people, seeking to not just learn about them but to identify lasting principles and lessons for today. I first attended in 1984 and remember vividly Gordon Booth's paper on the Hymn Writers of Congregationalism, showing us some of the Memorial Hall portraits and demonstrating to us the old method of 'lining out' for a congregation to sing a hymn without hymn-books.

In recent years the numbers attending the Conference have declined and it has become harder to find people prepared to speak on suitable subjects. After discussing the future of the Conference for several years EFCC has decided that this year would be the last.

It was with a sense of sadness that it had come to an end when we met at Wesley's Chapel. But we were served up with some excellent material that left us wanting for more. Many churches suffer from a lack of a regular pastor. Dominic Stockford showed us the importance of each church having one and how to go about finding one, exposing some of the pitfalls to avoid. Richard Underwood gave us some very practical advice on caring for our ministers so that they avoid burnout and continue to be effective in pastoring the church. Finally Peter Beale gave us the benefit of his experience as a retired minister to discuss when a minister should retire, who should decide when he should retire, and what he should do in retirement. Altogether it was a very profitable day. Those unable to attend will be able to benefit from these

printed versions of the papers or from the recordings available from the EFCC Office.

Though the Conference has come to an end it is my hope that ministers and members of Congregational churches will not cease considering the principles of Congregationalism and its history. It is a common feature of the modern world that the public at large are ignorant of history and think it is of no value. The many papers given at this Conference since 1981 show this to be a wrong understanding of history. There is still much wisdom to be gained from these past papers and I would encourage people to make use of these also, whether it be reading the printed versions (as with this year's, available from the EFCC Office) or the recordings from 1989 onwards (with the exception of the 1999 Conference—for some reasons those are missing). Consideration is being given to gathering the more important papers that deal with Congregational principles into a single volume.

Though the Conference has now come to an end it does not mean that the opportunity to gather together for fellowship has ceased. There are regular regional meetings around the country taking place. EFCC has also given some thoughts to the use of the internet to broadcast lectures. This may (or may not) be the way of the future.

So at the end it is my hope, and I know the hope of everyone who has ever contributed to the Conference over the years, that it will lead to a greater knowledge of God, a greater love and zeal for him, to greater godliness among his people, a greater spread of the gospel, and that in all things the name of Jesus Christ might be glorified.

Dr Digby L. James

Quinta Church, Weston Rhyn

Calling a minister

The Alan Tovey Memorial Lecture

Dominic Stockford

At one point a version of the title for this talk that passed before my eyes also contained the question ‘Can we afford it?’ Given that I believe the simple answer to that is that no congregation can afford *not* to have at least one minister, spiritually speaking, I won’t be spending any further time on that question. This is something which I believe both flows from what we are shown in the Old and New Testaments, as well as being something which flows from the practical need to have a minister a pastor, an under-shepherd, and the regular preaching and care-giving he can offer who is known to the congregation, who knows the congregation, and who is indeed a genuine part of that congregation. Anyone can take a funeral service, for instance, but only someone who really knows and understands the congregation member and their faith can do it with the dual passion for the Lord, and for you, that such a solemn moment in life should have.

Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds ...

So says the Book of Proverbs (Proverbs 27:23) reminding us that the task of an under-shepherd of the people of God is a significant one, which requires knowledge of those who have been entrusted to their care.

There is another way of thinking about this. Recently, in preparing a sermon on ‘thy will be done’ I came across a story about a woman watching a shepherd and his sheep dog, working in harmony to bring a flock into the pen. The point of it was to illustrate the way that the dog simply and obediently followed his master’s will to achieve his master’s end. But it did occur to me that the pastor of a local congregation ought to be very much like that sheepdog—allowing the teaching and the guidance of God, through Scripture, to direct him in his task of guiding Christ’s flock into Christ’s pen. In some ways I prefer that image to the one of the ‘under-shepherd’ which can be so abused by some. The Church is God’s flock and God himself is their shepherd—as the Psalmist calls out

Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever (Psalm 28:9).

The pastor should be directed by God in the work he undertakes, following every nuance and gesture of God's Word in fulfilling his work—just as the sheepdog not only follows the direction of the shepherd, but also knows the wilful nature of the sheep, which one will run this way, which one will stand still, and so on.

A minister, at least one minister, whose time is specifically allocated to a congregation, even if it be a small one, can do things for them that even the most well-meaning of itinerant visiting preachers can never do. And as well as that he will be part of their church family—after all, he doesn't merely *lead* the worship on the Lord's Day, he also *joins* them in worshipping. He doesn't merely help them to grow in *their* faith as he teaches, he will also grow in *his* faith alongside them. He doesn't merely help them to rejoice in *their* sorrowing and mourning, he joins them in it! If he may not seem to do some of those things in public, and there are many reasons why he may not cry at the moment that they cry, you can be sure that he does them in private. I hope.

Richard will later be speaking further about the 'how's' that are involved in affording and practically supporting a minister, but I will underline this first point again, I do not believe that, *spiritually*, a congregation can afford *not* to have a minister. And God reminds us of that in the way that he formed the New Testament congregational structures, as well as in the promises that he constantly makes to us throughout Scripture.

I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding (Jeremiah 3:15).

That might be a bit simplistic of course. Because having said all this, there will be inevitable moments when a congregation finds itself without a minister. Sometimes a congregation has, in God's sovereignty, become so small that it can no longer support the work or the life of a pastor. Sometimes a congregation behaves so badly no-one will go there to be their pastor! Sometimes a minister leaves for pastures new, following a call to other work. Sometimes, sadly, a congregation and its minister part company because they simply don't work together any more. Sometimes a minister retires. And sometimes a minister goes to glory. There are even some occasions, such as back in 1863 in Teddington, when a congregation is founded from those who have

left other, unfaithful, congregations, and they realise that they need to call someone to be their minister. I am sure someone will have another reason that I have missed—but it is an inevitable moment in the life of every congregation when their senior pastor, or more probably their *only* pastor, is no longer with them and they are without that support and guidance.

Some of these necessary changes in life are sad moments, which means that they will be times when no-one really feels like having to do the hard work of looking for a new minister. And it is hard work. Let no-one think that the calling of a pastor should ever be undertaken lightly. Their role is leading and guiding in the Lord, and their responsibility is to faithfully:

... preach the word; [and] be ready in season and out of season; [Ready for what? Ready to use that word to] reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Timothy 4:2).

This means that the search for such a faithful person, who will be prepared to persevere in that work, often-times with stubbornness, often-times with compassion, but always with sincerity, has to be taken seriously. Such a task, pastoring and preaching the Gospel, is the greatest responsibility that God gives to any man:

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness (James 3:1).

Other occasions when a congregation is looking for a new pastor will be times when pain within the previous relationship means that no-one in a congregation feels like exposing themselves to what might, just possibly, be a whole load more of the same. But there will of course be times when the passage from one minister to the next is part of the natural order we have in western society of aging and retiring and stepping down and moving away. Even those moments can be difficult—but they are rather different, and often more difficult for the pastor stepping away and letting go the responsibility, than for the congregation. I believe Peter may well speak about that later on.

What?

Although all these different moments will feel very different to the various congregations, and although some will engage in the task of looking for a new minister with gusto, whilst others won't look

forward to the task at all, there is one thing that remains the same for all congregations looking for a minister. The simple question which they need to address before they start the search:

**What do we expect from a minister?
What do we think he is to do?**

This needs to be asked, and answered. No matter how well the congregation thinks it is going, or how badly, this is a key question that needs to be reconsidered on every occasion a new pastor is being called. There may prove to be differences in thoughts between members, and that needs addressing before looking can begin. How can you look for anything, whatever it may be, if you don't know why you are looking, or what you are looking for?

Further, if the congregation have not approached the Bible to answer the question they'll set themselves in train for a whole world of difficulties. And if they haven't asked the question at all then, as a body, what on earth can any congregation think it is doing when they are looking for a new minister?

Agreeing an answer to this question as a congregation has to be the first step in seeking a new minister. And it is a step that should not, must not, be side-lined or ignored. A congregation cannot possibly make assumptions that everyone in the congregation understands anything about the role of a minister, or that they will be able to put aside their own feelings and allow the biblical teaching to direct them. Even if a congregation is in the blessed position where there is someone amongst their number who will be the perfect person to step in and take the congregation forward under Christ, it is still absolutely vital to follow a process of submitting themselves to the Bible, to its teaching, and to its authority.

In my humble view the answer to this question is not difficult, and should not be difficult to demonstrate from Scripture. In the Acts of the Apostles we are given one specific and clear instruction, which is relayed to us in the narrative about the actions of those men. We hear the disciples say:

It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables (Acts 6:2).

Task one, therefore, is clear. The preaching of the Word of God. Any congregation who seeks a minister to build them up in God,

CALLING A MINISTER

through Christ, must be looking for a man who can preach God's Word faithfully as well as with perseverance and courage. I don't say that, the disciples say that. And it is repeated by Paul when he speaks to Titus:

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it (Titus 5:9).

Until the congregation is agreed that they are fed not by bread and water but by every word that comes from the mouth of God they will not see the need to look for such a man (... and please note, I didn't say they have to be a 'great' preacher—nor does the Bible. It says that they should be a 'faithful' preacher). If the congregation don't see that being fed from the Word of God is of primary importance then there are probably insurmountable issues anyway.

Task two has already been mentioned, in the earlier quotation from Jeremiah. A minister is to be a shepherd, or rather, an under-shepherd, or even, as I said a sheepdog! It is his task to look after the flock that God has given him responsibility for. And that is not merely a spiritual responsibility but also one which has practical matters relating to it. Anyone called to be a minister should be willing and able to visit members of the congregation (question: if your church is in a village how will he get to outlying areas if he doesn't drive?); he should also be able to get on with members of the congregation, as well as with people generally (if he can't talk to people for whatever reason, how can he guide them, encourage them, teach them and point them to the Lord?).

... shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you (1 Peter 5:2).

I posit that these two matters are surely the heart of the minister's work—but unless the elders and the congregation are agreed on them then a congregation's search for a minister will be, at best, fraught. And don't assume that people will automatically agree with these things. People sometimes reject the most obvious and clearest of matters—I was told recently about a lady who has apparently attended a bible-teaching church for decades, and who began the discussion on seeking a pastor by stating, out of the blue, that as 'election' doesn't appear in the Bible it shouldn't be something a new man would speak about ...

Define the minister's role *before* the congregation goes seeking for one.

Where?

Then, having ensured that, as far as possible, the congregation is of a similar mind about the role a minister is required to fill, there is one other question to address before you get into more practical matters.

‘Where are you calling him to?’

That is to say, is the congregation calling someone to minister in a team, or is the congregation calling someone who will work as a single minister? The answer to this will make a massive difference to the kind of man they are looking for.

The lone minister needs to be someone who is independently resourceful, who is good at coping alone, and who has some competence in most of the whole variety of tasks a minister has to do. He has to be ready to put his hand to everything that takes place within the congregation, and he must be someone who is prepared to do so. From visiting, to preaching, to funerals, to weddings, to painting bookcases, to organising church refurbishments, to sweeping the front path and serving cups of tea. He has to be someone ready and willing, and reasonably able to do them all.

The minister called to work within a team, even if it is only a team of two, may be quite capable of that, but they also need to be able to work well with others, and does not need to be strong in one area if they are making up a team in which the other member has the particular strength that balances their weakness. Admittedly, all ministers need to be able to work ‘with people’, because that is the nub of the vocation. However, working with members of a congregation and with voluntary and unpaid elders is a very different thing to working together with a fellow minister. Some larger American congregations have a split between ‘preaching elders’ and ‘pastoral elders’. Both will do both tasks, but some will have a greater emphasis on the formal ‘church side’ of congregational events, such as the preaching and teaching. Whereas others will have more emphasis on the pastoral elements such as counselling, visiting and outreach.

Depending which situation a congregation is calling someone to minister in, there is therefore a need to think differently about the men you speak to, and in the way you approach your search for them, and even in the way you interview them.

Specifics. Some ‘Nos’

I am going to continue with a few pointers which I believe are ways *not* to go. As with much of this what I say may seem obvious to many people—but they are matters which cannot be forgotten.

1. Don’t decide that you, the congregation, are looking for ‘God’s man’. That immediately implies a search for some form of superhuman super-spiritual perfect person. The congregation will never find the right person if they end up looking for a perfect person. *God could, but you can’t*. And if the search a congregation undertakes is for such a man, if their path leads them to look for someone that they all, as the congregation, think to be perfect, then be warned. They’ll probably never appoint anyone, and if they do, some will constantly be disappointed. Because of course we are mere men, and there will never be such a person. Setting off with that plan in mind will lead to nowhere, because they’ll be seeking a perfection that we, men, don’t have. Look to the Bible, look to the ‘choosing of men’ that we see there. Remember that David was the ‘runt of the litter’ in the eyes of men. Yet God chose him and made him the greatest king that God’s people ever had.

2. Don’t set up a ‘search committee’. I know some will find this challenging. However, most congregations these days have elders, a number of them, and finding a new minister *should be part of their responsibility*. They have been given the responsibility, week by week, of looking after the spiritual growth of that congregation, and they’re supposed to be spiritually mature and theologically aware. If they aren’t, why are they appointed as elders? Yes, by all means, wholeheartedly I encourage congregations to place the responsibility on all the people of the congregation to make the final decision, but the elders should nominate to the wider congregation, for their response, the individual they finally settle on.

That presents other issues. For instance, if for whatever reason a congregation only have one elder, he *will* need to be given the responsibility of setting up a small group of those who have some reasonable level of spiritual maturity. The same is probably the case if there are only two elders. Although in the unlikely event that there is no-one of this ability to help him then frankly a congregation has to trust the one or two elders they have. And at this point I must add that, ‘of course’ (some might not think this, but I am persuaded it is right, both from seeing it happen, as well as from seeing it not happen)

in the case of a minister retiring, or moving on in good relationship, a congregation should sincerely seek to involve them in the process as well. They have trusted him with the leadership of their congregation for however long it may have been, and with their spiritual growth for however long it may have been, so therefore it seems obvious that they should entrust him with *some* of the responsibility to help in finding his successor—though not in making the final decision.

3. Do not discount the possibility that there is someone within the congregation who is able to step into the minister's role. In a larger congregation, with a number of people assisting in the preaching ministry, this seems to be an obvious place to look, yet too many discount it or don't even think of it. But why should someone from your own church family not step into the role as leader?

There is a challenge to be faced here. Especially in those cases where you may have what the Anglicans would call a 'curate', and we might call an 'assistant minister'. Not to look at them seriously asks questions why the congregation appointed them to that role. Yes, if they have only been with the congregation for a few months then clearly they may not be ready, but if they have been with a congregation for a couple of years or more then what is the issue?

In such cases I would tend to think there has to be a *very* good reason *not* to appoint them to the 'senior minister's' role. But if there were such a reason it would make me wonder what the congregation was thinking when they appointed them to the assistant's role. It may be a big challenge and a big step up for them to take on the position, but if an assistant minister is thought unable to step into the shoes of the senior minister, then what happens if he has to because the senior minister falls ill?

Do look within—it is a great way to grow, so long as the congregation looks as honestly at that person and their strengths and weaknesses as they do at someone coming from outside.

4. Don't run to an outside body to make decisions for the congregation. No matter how wonderful such bodies as EFCC are, and they are, seriously, they should hold no more than an assisting role in this process. However well they know the congregation they don't know it *that* well. Nor, because they are not members of the congregation, should the congregation pass over to them the responsibility that is theirs for making the decision. I see no reason why a small congregation with few members may not ask them to provide someone suitable to act in a non-voting chairman's role

during discussion. Nor can I see why such a body may not be asked for suggestions—after all, they will probably know who may be available and willing to consider becoming their minister, and know that rather better than a very small congregation itself. By all means listen to their advice, but he will be the congregation’s pastor, not the minister to whichever body you turn to for assistance. They won’t have to live with him in the way that a congregation will.

5. Don’t allow the appointment process time to drag on. It can be very tempting to leave the search process open-ended. But that allows for faint hearts to win the day each time a moment of choice comes along. Yes, any appointment of a new minister is inevitably a step of faith, and can therefore seem risky. But having no set time in which to make a clear and certain decision is neither fair on any men you may have spoken with, nor does it help in actually making a decision.

... inevitably that needs to lead to

6. Don’t appoint someone simply because there is no-one else. A congregation does not *have* to appoint a man simply because he is the best of those that have come their way. If he isn’t the right fit it isn’t fair on him, nor is it wise for the congregation, to appoint him.

7. Don’t keep several men hanging on at once. One congregation I know chose to interview several men, five in total, and kept them all hanging on until they made the final decision. That kept five men in suspense when in fact there were three that they had discounted straight away, but had ‘held onto just in case’—but remember my previous point. Why did they do that? They weren’t the right men, so they weren’t the right men.

Personally I would prefer, if a congregation is looking outside itself, that they look through the various candidates they are presented with, get on with interviewing him as soon as practically possible, and make a decision about him.

8. Don’t get into a beauty contest scenario where one prospective minister is compared with another. The congregation I just mentioned finally voted between the two, 5 voted for one man and 7 for the other. So even then they managed to leave themselves undecided! The one thing they did do was to agree before that vote that this was it—so they did get to appoint someone. One of the five told me that they realised later that they had voted wrongly. In a beauty contest scenario that is inevitable.

9. Don't skimp the interview and avoid tough questions. Do interview properly, with sensible theological questions. Do refer to doctrine not merely to practice. Do refer to family and what such a move might mean for them. Do refer to long term plans and what the individual thinks may happen in their future. Fair questions, not catch-out ones, but tough questions. The congregation should ensure that the man being interviewed has a chance to ask questions; to spend time with the congregation (a couple of days if possible); to preach to them at the very least once, preferably more; to spend time in the area; to know clearly what is offered in terms of house and remuneration; and to get a proper and non-formal sense of the people that make up the congregation. If that is done the congregation will also gain a better sense of the man they are looking at. And yes, the man's Christian character *does* matter. In the congregation's final reckoning both his preaching *and* the man's Christian character should be taken into account. If you don't have time to get to know something about his Christian character, and the congregation doesn't have time to get to know something of this too, a hole will be left gaping in the process.

Do send the candidate/s under consideration an information pack containing key information such as the Trust Deed (do you know what your Trust Deed actually says?); the congregation's doctrinal position on key issues such as baptism; housing and school information; pay information; local area information.

10. Don't go poaching. In one talk Mark Dever (I think) speaks of a small visiting delegation who had turned up at a church to listen to a man preach that they wished to poach—they thought they were there incognito until someone who had discovered their purpose introduced them to the whole congregation during the service, and told everyone their purpose there. Is it right to seek to take a pastor from another congregation who has not indicated his interest? I find that a very difficult thing to agree with.

11. Don't imagine that a congregation doesn't already have a whole heap of contacts in terms of finding a new minister. I cringe when I see advertisements for ministers in newspapers. I don't think it should be necessary, or terribly helpful. Smaller congregations will have had, probably, several visiting preachers over the years. So there's a start for them when looking—even if none of them is the man, they will know other men, and so on. Members may know ministers from elsewhere, from other places they have been, from previous congregation they may have been in, even when they've been on holiday. They may have family

elsewhere at other congregations who may have ideas. Each contact can bring new contacts, and the net can be spread far and wide simply through personal contacts, and even within a small congregation. And, as I said before, a link with a body such as EFCC means that they can be approached for suggestions if necessary. Do let people know that a minister is being sought—responses will come.

12. The congregation is not appointing the candidate's wife. No matter how much she may get involved, this is her choice—and whilst there would be a serious issue were she not a Christian, she is not to be taken into account except in what effect such a move may have on her. You should not expect 'two workers for the price of one', nor should you turn away a man because he is not married.

13. And of course, pray. But don't just pray about the process, and about those from the congregation taking part in it—pray also for those who may apply, and pray for those who are coming for interview, and pray for them before the interview.

14. Don't think for one moment that I've covered every base. There are all sorts of matters which I will have missed—and every single search for a new minister will have its own unique issues which arise. Do refer, therefore, to a useful assist such as the EFCC's own 'Calling a Minister' booklet—but remember that it isn't the only way to do it.

Lastly

... and by no means leastly. Remember that God is Sovereign. Even if an appointment is made which falls apart within months, that is part of His Sovereign plan. Seeking to understand quite why something like that has taken place is perfectly reasonable—but it happened under God's sovereignty. So he had a purpose in it.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

No matter how difficult it may sometimes be to see it, no matter how difficult it can sometimes be to understand it, if a congregation has entered the process with sincerity, with prayer, and following Biblical guidance, the man whom God sends is always the right man.



Trevecca College



College Farm (a private residence)

A (very) brief history of Trevecca College

Digby L. James

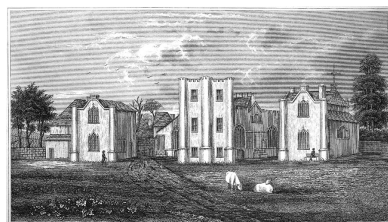
In 1768 six students were ejected from St Edmund Hall for the crime of ‘holding Methodistical tenets, and taking upon them to pray, read, and expound the Scriptures, and singing hymns in private houses’, or, as one wit said ‘having too much religion’.¹

Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, had been having thoughts of starting a preachers’ training college. This gave here the impetus to set one up. She chose to lease a property in Trevecca (also spelt Trevecka and Trefeca), close to Howell Harris’s home south of Talgarth (about a mile from the centre of Talgarth along the B4560). The intention was to train preachers for the Church of England ministry. But the Anglican authorities were suspicious of men trained at the college and few were actually ordained. Instead they became ministers of Nonconformist causes, especially after the secession of the Countess from the Church of England in 1782 over her Spa Fields Chapel.

It is often thought that the current Coleg Trefeca (Trevecca College), the training college of the Presbyterian Church of Wales



*St Edmund Hall, Oxford
(from college website)*



CALVINISTIC METHODIST COLLEGE, TREVECCA



Coleg Trefeca/Trevecca College from 1842

1. Geoffrey F. Nuttall, ‘The Significance of Trevecca College’ in *Studies in English Dissent* (Weston Rhyn: Quinta Press, 2002), pp. 283–303.

(formerly the Calvinistic Methodist Church) is the college that the Countess established. Coleg Trefeca is based at Howell Harris's former home and was not established as a college until 1842, the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church not having seceded from the Church of England until 1811.

The actual location is a quarter of a mile north of Coleg Treveca on the opposite side of the road, as can be seen by comparing the illustration and photograph on page 18 with those on page 19. It was opened on 24 August 1768 with a sermon preached by George Whitefield.

The College was concerned less with academic subjects and more with training men to be preachers of the gospel. Students were sent around Wales and England to preach, often in the Countess's own chapels. Its first president was John Fletcher, vicar of Madeley. He never resided there and resigned in 1771. This was because the Countess required staff and student to renounce the teaching of John Wesley, his Arminianism and teaching of entire sanctification.



Cheshunt College, Cheshunt
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Cintra House, Cambridge
(© Verbcatcher, *Wikimedia Commons*)

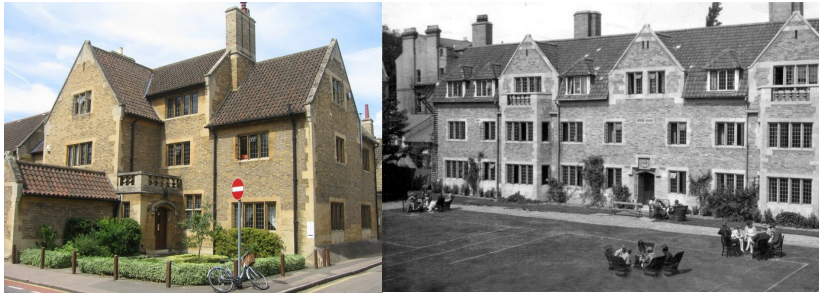
The Countess's College was funded by her and it was thought that after her death it would be unviable.² In 1787 the Apostolic Society was established at Spa Fields Chapel to raise support for the College when the Countess died, which she did in 1791. In order to place the College on a better financial footing, it was decided to move the College to a site nearer to London and so it was moved to Cheshunt in Hertfordshire. Increasingly students on completion of their courses entered the ministry of Congregational churches. The building was used until 1906 when the College moved again, this time to Cambridge. The Cheshunt property was then used by the Church of England and was known as the Bishops' College until that closed

2. <https://dissacad.english.qmul.ac.uk/sampler.php?detail=achist&histid=22&acadid=154> accessed 21 March 2018.

A (VERY) BRIEF HISTORY OF TREVECCA COLLEGE

in 1968. It is now part of the offices of Broxbourne Council and is sometimes used as a wedding venue.

In 1906 the College moved into Cintra House, Cambridge. Seeing the size of the building it is possible that only part of the property was used by the College. In 1909 it moved again, this time to Bateman Street in Cambridge where new buildings were constructed and opened in 1915. It continued here until 1967. With the union of the by now Congegational Church of England and Wales (the change from Congregational Union of England and Wales took place the previous year) with the Presbyterian Church of England the decision was taken to merge Cheshunt College with Westminster College. The buildings in Bateman Street were sold and are now the provincial Grand Lodge of the Freemasons.



Former Cheshunt College, Bateman Street, Cambridge

Photo on left © Sebastian Ballard, CC BY-SA 2.0

For a number of years there was a Cheshunt Institute of Reformed Studies which had an EFCC representative, but that has now ceased. Apart from the Countess's Library and some artefacts all



Westminster College, Cambridge

(© Tadmouri, CC BY-SA 2.0)

that now remains is the Cheshunt Foundation. This funds sabbaticals for Congregational/URC ministers for one term at Westminster College.³

3. See <http://www.westminster.cam.ac.uk/rcl/study-sabbatical/sabbaticals> (accessed 21 March 2018)

Caring for our Pastors

Richard Underwood

A Vital Subject

The care of our pastors and their families is a vital subject in today's climate where the spiritual temperature of our churches is low and the work of the gospel tough.

George Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury put it like this ...

Churches die when leaders die. Churches die from the top downwards. Show me a growing church and you will show me a visionary leadership. It is leaders who make growth. When you have spiritual leaders—men of prayer, women of prayer—imaginative, alert, intelligent—there we have growth.

The Apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy has much to teach us about keeping leader's gospel faithfulness front and centre of church life. Having outlined the qualities required of elders in Chapter 3, Paul goes on in Chapter 4 to urge Timothy to model these qualities in his own life. At the end of the passage, he concludes like this:

Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

The New Testament never encourages us to look on our pastors as a class apart but it does help us to realise that the health of our pastors will impact the health of our churches. Evangelistically-minded pastors will lead evangelistically-minded churches. Prayerless pastors will lead prayerless churches.

Seen in this light, we realise that we're addressing both a gospel issue and a deeply personal issue.

Common Failures in Ministry

Paul's letters to Timothy and our own experience teach us that the three most common causes of ministry failure are:

- doctrinal;
- moral; and
- relational

The point for us to take on board is that many of the ensuing car-wrecks are avoidable.

2014 FIEC Pastoral Well-Being Survey

In 2014, the FIEC conducted a well-being survey amongst the members of its Pastors' Network. In many ways, the results were startling but not surprising...

- 5% said the survey was too painful to complete;
- a quarter felt overworked;
- one in six described themselves as "struggling"; and
- more than half had families who questioned the pressure ministry placed on them.

In terms of spiritual support...

- more than half had not had a sabbatical in more than seven years; and
- a huge majority of pastors describe their prayer life as dutiful, disappointing or non-existent.

In terms of training support...

- only a third feel they had been trained for ministry well or very well; and
- nearly a quarter were finding it hard to effect change.

In terms of financial support...

- 50% of churches did not contribute to a pastor's pension; and
- nearly a third of pastors had no jointly agreed terms and conditions of employment.

In terms of emotional support, 50% said they lacked a friend to help them recharge.

It's worth pausing to consider the impact of these results on the health of our churches and the progress of the Lord Jesus' gospel.

What makes ministry so difficult?

We might consider the pastors' calling to be the closest thing to heaven on earth, so it's worth asking the question—what makes pastoral ministry so difficult? Without doubt, there are many tasks that are more demanding in many ways, but pastoral ministry does pose some unique challenges and some unique dangers.

The challenges of ministry

These include:

- lack of boundaries between church/family and home/work;
- the only tools of our trade are spiritual—prayer and the word; and
- the 'job' is never done and yet we often have little to show for what we do.

The dangers of ministry

Paul Tripp has helped us in this regard by pointing out the dangers of:

- confusing our ministry with our identity;
- confusing knowing the Bible well with loving the Lord Jesus well; and
- confusing God's blessing on our ministry with his smile on our lives.

Contours of a Healthy Life

It may help to identify three dimensions to a healthy life...

- spiritual—our relationship with the Lord Jesus and his people;
- physical—the care of our bodies; and
- emotional—the nourishment of our 'inner' lives.

Its important to address all three dimensions, including our emotional life which we ignore at our peril.

Soul Care

1 Timothy 4:16 is a verse well-known amongst pastors, but we often render it—incorrectly—like this ...

Watch your doctrine and life closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

I grew up in a world that set great store by doctrinal correctness. Whilst we must never be content with less than that, we need to note that Paul's emphasis is different ...

Watch your *life* and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

In other words, Paul prioritises character over gifting. Likeness to Christ is the overriding prerequisite of ministry which is why Paul urges his young disciple to...

Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress (1 Timothy 4:15).

How would people be able to spot my progress, I wonder.

Physical Self-Care

Another verse we often mis-read is 1 Timothy 4:8...

... physical training is of some value.

Without doubt, Paul's emphasis is on godliness, but why not take his words at face value? Physical training is unquestionably of *some* value.

What does physical training look like in practice? Here are three obvious tips ...

- pursue a healthy diet;
- take plenty of exercise;

and

- go to bed early

Barriers to Godliness

We could enumerate many, but let me touch on three.

Tiredness

The effects of tiredness include ...

- low tolerance leading to anger and loss of patience;
- low energy levels which make us neglectful and self-focused; and
- low resistance which leaves us off-guard and vulnerable to temptation

Over-busyness

According to Kevin deYoung, over-busyness has at least three consequences. It...

- ruins our joy;
- robs our hearts; and
- covers the rot in our souls

Loneliness

Friendship is like food; we need it to survive. Without it, loneliness can lead to...

- social and emotional isolation;
- moral vulnerability; and
- anxiety and depression

Isolation quickly becomes the breeding-ground for all kinds of complexes and neuroses.

The Pastor's Home-Life

I grew up with a perspective that was understandable but grievously mistaken and very dangerous. It went like this—you put God first followed by ministry and then marriage. It would be much more healthy and, I think, more biblical to see *ministry* and *marriages* as spheres in which we express our love for *God*. We put God first by serving our churches faithfully and loving our wives sacrificially.

I've discovered—thanks to God's kindness and my dear wife's patience—that marriage has been one of those crucibles in which he has forged my character. How often have I dishonoured God by failing to love my wife lots and manage my family well?

It's no surprise, then, that leaders flourish where their home-life flourishes. So, if we're married, here are a few pertinent questions for pastors to ponder ...

- do we have a theology of family life which leads us to honour and respect our wife and children?
- do we create the right expectations of ministry in our marriages?
- do we trade-off church against home and wind up sacrificing our families on the altar of our ministries?

Burnout

I experienced burn-out in 2000; I remember well what it feels like. Why did it happen? Here are two contrasting perspectives that I found equally helpful ...

- *God gave me the gospel and a horse. I've killed the horse and now I can no longer preach the gospel* (Robert Murray McCheyne);

and

- *Pastors are busy because they're lazy* (Eugene Peterson)

Why do we burn out? Not because we're pastors but because we're human with God-created needs exacerbated by sinful attitudes.

Common features of burnout include ...

- a sense of being drained emotionally;
- a loss of perspective—every problem feels overwhelming;
- cynicism and feelings of resentment towards others;
- a lack of satisfaction and fulfilment in ministry;
- increased irritability; and
- irresponsible risk-taking.

Do you recognise any of the above—either in yourself or in a pastor you know?

Recovering the Sabbath

The debates about the ongoing significance of keeping Sunday as the Sabbath have caused some of us to over-react. As a result, we've thrown out the baby with the bathwater.

Take a moment to reflect on the following biblical data ...

- Genesis 2:2—the Sabbath and the heart of God. The One who created me invented rest;
- Exodus 20:8–11— the Sabbath and creation. I am created for more than work;
- Deuteronomy 5:12–15—the Sabbath and redemption. I am not a slave; and
- Matthew 11:28–29—the Sabbath and the Lord Jesus. I find my rest in doing life with him.

Were we to suggest to an Old Testament Israelite that we'd freed ourselves from the Sabbath and, apart from concluding that we were deeply godless, he'd think we were mad. He'd be right!

So, let's come back where we started ...

Soul Care is a Vital Subject

It's a personal priority. From my experience of burn-out, I learned that self-care was my responsibility; no-one else's. My burn-out was my fault. And therefore looking after myself was not a luxury; it was a necessity. Seeking out friends to support me was not a sign of weakness; it was a sign of wisdom.

Having said that, caring for our pastors is both a gospel necessity and a whole church responsibility. So ...

How can we help our Churches help our Pastors?

As a first step, we need to recover the importance of Paul's injunction in 1 Timothy 5:17–20 ...

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

What flows from this suggests that what Paul embraces includes financial support. Keeping our pastors poor and praying that God will keep them humble is a gospel outrage.

So, what does it mean to honour our pastor? Here are a few dos and don'ts, but not in that order ...

Don't ...

- idolise him;
- criticise him;
- avoid him; or

- forget he's just like you – human.

Do ...

- provide for him—financially ... practically ... emotionally
- pray for him;
- show an interest in him; and above all
- work with him.

If we don't ever ask the question about how we're honouring our pastors, we're probably not.

To help its member-churches, FIEC in association with Living Leadership has published a Code of Best Practice covering the following aspects of the relationship between churches and their pastors:

- a model covenant of care;
- model terms and conditions of service;
- personal support and ministry development;
- communication and consultation; and
- a model procedure for resolving disputes

The Code doesn't provide all the answers but is designed to help churches and pastors ask the right questions. Copies are available from pn@fiec.org.uk.

Healthy Pastors and Mission

We said at the outset that caring for our pastors was a gospel issue. So, how does it impact our mission to take the gospel to the communities where we work, worship and witness?

It helps to remember that perhaps as many as 97% of the people around us are unsaved. They don't recognise that the Lord Jesus is God's chosen King. They remain unforgiven. And they are hopelessly unprepared for judgement to come. We owe it to them and to the God who cares about them to promote a church culture that reflects his gospel and bears a good testimony to the world around us.

It has been said that our unconverted friends and contacts will assume that if they become Christians, they will become like us. If that is true, how attractive is our witness if what they see are church leaders who are tired, dispirited, resentful and one step short of a nervous breakdown? May God give us the grace to model human flourishing—to demonstrate as well as to declare the gospel.

The Minister in Retirement

Peter J. Beale

A few years ago Eric Alexander came to speak at the Westminster Conference, having rushed down from another engagement in Scotland. ‘I’ve come to the conclusion’, he said, ‘that retirement is a job for a younger man!’ That is something which many of us who have ‘retired’ (in inverted commas) would re-echo, and indeed we are grateful for it, if it means that we are able to continue to serve the Lord, albeit in a different way from previously. My qualification for speaking on this subject now is that I am a minister in retirement, and to my surprise find that I have been so for nearly fifteen years. By way of introduction let me sketch out my personal situation.

I came to the conclusion that with the state retirement age being 65, that would be an appropriate time for me to retire from the pastorate at Bulford so that a younger man could take over. I was thankful for good health, but aware that there was inevitably a gradual reduction in my vigour and energy, and I felt it was better to lay down the pastorate then rather than continue to a point where I might be more of a burden than a blessing to the church. So a few years beforehand I prepared the church, telling them of my intention. I was certainly not thinking in terms of sitting back and doing nothing, but rather that as the Lord gave strength I could continue to serve him in different ways. That was in 2003, and since then the Lord has indeed given strength. Six months before I retired my dear wife Thelma went to be with the Lord, but we had already planned that on retirement we would leave Bulford and move to the Midlands, nearer to our three girls. An important factor was to be part of a good church, ideally within EFCC, and I knew Roger Davies and the church at Bulkington.

Since then I have been able to be a support to the church in Bulkington and its pastor, first Roger Davies and now Peter Mackenzie. I have continued to preach—in my first year of retirement I was out preaching on thirty-seven Sundays, but realized that this was detrimental to my commitment to the local church, and now it is probably about once a month. For several years I have served as ‘Candidates’ Secretary’ for EFCC, which means that I am an *ex officio* member of the committee until they or I decide it is time to call it a

day, and also as secretary to this conference which is now coming to an end. And of course until a few years ago I edited *Congregational Concern*. The Lord in his kindness led Lucy and me together, and we have been married for over twelve years and enabled to serve the Lord together, helping in the young people's work at Bulkington and in 2011 being greatly privileged to work for five months as missionaries in Namibia. We are both so grateful for the strength and opportunity he has given us, and pray that in strength or in the weakness which will inevitably come as the years pass, we might continue to serve him until he takes us to be with him.

1. Retirement in the Bible

We should always turn first to the Word of God, but having said that, there is really not a lot said about retirement—the general impression is that you soldiered on until you died. In the case of spiritual leaders, however, there is one reference, in Numbers 8:25 where it is said of the Levites: 'And from the age of fifty years they shall withdraw from the duty of the service and serve no more.' Being a Levite did of course involve a great deal of physical hard labour carting the Tabernacle from place to place, so that may explain the early retirement policy in their case. But Moses was eighty when he started his major ministry, 120 years old when he died. It is significant that 'His eye was undimmed, and his vigour unabated' (Deuteronomy 34:7b). Similarly with Joshua, he described himself as 'old and well advanced in years' before he died at the age of 110, and it is evident from his charge to Israel's leaders in Joshua 23 and 24 that he had all his wits about him and was fit to lead the people, even if physically he was probably less active. In the case of David, we are told that when his time to die drew near (1 Kings 2) he passed on the kingship to Solomon. At this point in history the average lifespan had declined from the days of the patriarchs, and when he died at the age of seventy it is described as 'a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour' (1 Chronicles 29:28).

When we turn to the New Testament, again there is little indication of retirement from the ministry other than through death—the apostle John was still preaching in exile in Patmos probably around the age of ninety. The apostles received the great commission from the Lord, but there was no 'great decommission'!

2. Retirement of ministers in the past

When it came to it, retirement was for many just not a practical possibility, whether for the minister or for anyone else. There was generally no pension or other provision for those who no longer worked, and the minister and his family would probably have no home other than the manse, rectory or similar. The beginning of the modern state pension was the Old Age Pensions Act 1908, that provided 5s. 0d (£0.25) a week for those over seventy whose annual means did not exceed £31 10s. However, some were able to contemplate retirement, and I will just mention one notable example, Rev. Andrew Reed, Congregational minister in Stepney and great philanthropist, known as ‘The Orphan’s Friend.’ In his early seventies he became increasingly infirm, and in his biography of Reed, *The Greatest is Charity*, Ian Shaw tells us how ‘he sought to focus his remaining energies on the establishment of the Hospital for Incurables, and also on his preaching work: “My days are few; I will lose no opportunity for preaching the gospel.”’¹ Eventually he had to give up preaching, his voice being too weak, and on 21 July 1861, having preached in the morning, in the evening his text was 2 Corinthians 5:19, ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.’

Ian Shaw writes:

For the last time he preached the same age-old gospel he had proclaimed for the previous fifty years. The effort was huge. Overwhelmed with weakness, he brought the sermon to a close before he had finished all he intended to say, and he had to be helped in the short walk back to the vestry. Reed knew his life’s preaching work was done, and he told the deacons he would formally resign from the pastorate on the 27th November, his [74th] birthday and the anniversary of his induction.²

So ‘On 27 November 1861, the church celebrated the golden jubilee of his induction as minister, and his retirement, but he was too ill to attend.’ He died a few months later, on 24th February 1862.

3. Retirement as an opportunity

In an article ‘Is retirement biblical?’ the Southern Baptist O.S. Hawkins has some wise words to say:

And yet, nowhere do we read in the Bible where the Christian minister is

1. Ian D. Shaw, *The Greatest is Charity* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2005), p. 366.

2. *Ibid*, p. 367.

to 'retire' from his calling or his service to Christ and the church. While it is true that most of us must retire 'vocationally' from church service, this does not necessitate our retiring from Christian ministry. Consider:

- John, the beloved apostle, was over 90 and still preaching and writing while exiled on Patmos.
- Polycarp, the pastor of the Smyrna church, testified at his martyrdom as the flames consumed his body, saying he had served Christ for 'eighty and six years.'

The real issue at hand is not what to do in your retirement years but instead to motivate you to make ready for that season of life so you will have the financial freedom to serve Christ in new and expanding opportunities, even after your 'vocational' retirement. No minister of the Gospel should think about 'retiring' but instead should put the focus on 'retooling' for the most productive years of life and ministry, which could potentially take place during those 'retirement' years.

Does retooling, rather than retirement, appeal to you? Maybe you dream of serving a church that can't afford a pastor of its own. Maybe it's moving to the inner city and meeting the immense physical and spiritual needs there. Maybe it's serving on mission around this globe. Those are all within the realm of possibility—if you prepare. The wise minister recognizes that preparing for retirement is not a sprint. It's more like a marathon.³

4. When should he go, and who decides?

Our own Graham Brown, who went to be with the Lord recently, has some useful words of wisdom which are available on the EFCC website. 'Remember you will be retiring, not expiring,' he says.

In one of my former churches, I had a member who criticised me at a members' meeting for introducing a pension scheme for the Pastor on the grounds that it showed a lack of faith that God would provide. The irony of the situation, which was lost on the individual concerned, was that he worked for British Telecom and had a final salary pension scheme ...

When we retire, we merely give up the work we were once doing but there is still plenty of other work that needs to be done ...

3. <https://theologicalmatters.com/2014/07/09/is-retirement-biblical/>

THE MINISTER IN RETIREMENT

However, retirement for a Minister is very different from almost any other occupation. Not only will you be retiring but you will also be leaving a congregation who have relied on you for their spiritual guidance and perhaps many other subjects as well. As a Congregational Minister you do not have a set retirement age, indeed it is now illegal to set one and I would suggest it is for you and your own congregation to decide when it right for you to retire. The worst thing is for you to suddenly announce one Sunday that you will be retiring in a month, or three months' time, or whatever the period of notice is and this is the first time that anyone has any inkling of your thoughts. It is right and proper for you to discuss this with your Elders and/or Deacons first and then to announce it to the Church membership. By taking these people into your confidence, you will be able to retire knowing that you have done your best for them and prepared them for the next phase in the Church's life. In fact, the longer the notice period you can give them the better. It will allow you to prepare them through sermons and to give the Church a period of reflection on the kind of person they next want as their Minister. There is no way that you can be replaced simply because we all have our own strengths and weaknesses and each Church will be in a different stage of growth. It is not like an ordinary job when someone gives in their notice, a company advertises for your replacement, interviews take place and the next person is selected, all in a relatively short period of time ...

Your first thoughts may be to find a new home near to where you currently live but is that right? The Methodist Church, I know, have a policy that anyone retiring must move away from the area where you ministered ... Their reasoning is very sound and that is to ensure that a retiring minister cannot become the focal point for dissent within a Church by remaining within the same congregation. It doesn't help you as the former Minister and it certainly does not help the new Minister.⁴

Really when it comes to it the man himself has ultimately to decide, unless of course he has lost his mental capacity to do so, which can lead to a tragic situation. If he is married he will do so in consultation with his wife, and if he is wise he will listen to counsel from trusted friends in the ministry and beyond, and he will be sensitive to the needs and wishes of the congregation which he serves. Unlike the Church of England vicar with his 'parson's freehold' (though in many cases this no longer exists) he does not have a guaranteed position for life, and the

4. <http://www.efcc.org.uk>, Advice: Retirement Advice. Accessed 21 March 2018.

church will have rules in place to dismiss him by a vote of the members, but it is very sad indeed when it comes to that. He may, like myself, determine that a particular age is the right one to retire; or he may feel it right to continue well beyond that; or a decline in physical health or mental capacity may effectively make the decision for him. In some churches it may be possible and good for a younger man to be called as assistant or co-pastor to serve with the pastor for a few years with a view to succeeding him—this has recently happened at Emmanuel Church in Salisbury where Rev. Malcolm Watts has been pastor for over forty years. Whatever the circumstances, it is good to have a farewell service marking the conclusion of his ministry, looking back with thanksgiving for the Lord's goodness over the years.

And then having retired, what should he do? As we have heard, the Methodist authorities require a minister to move away from where he was ministering, and the reasons given are valid ones. Similarly I believe that the Church of England Pensions Board will not countenance providing retirement accommodation near to a minister's last parish. Of course there will be considerable ties binding him to where he is, particularly if he has been ministering in one place for twenty years or more, and this is the only place where he really feels 'at home'. But he will no longer be the pastor, and in due course it is hoped that a new pastor will be in place; so should he still be there, or move away?

Undoubtedly we can think of examples where the retiring pastor does stay, and it works out all right. A great friend of mine going back to student days when he was vicar of St Paul's Cambridge was Rev. Herbert Carson, who after seceding from the Church of England served in London and Northern Ireland before becoming pastor at Knighton Evangelical Church in Leicester. He and his wife remained in the church after retirement, and as far as I am aware this arrangement caused no problems. But it is something which requires great grace and sensitivity on the part of both the retiring minister and his successor. The man who has retired is no longer in the same way in a position of leadership, and as Prof. F.F. Bruce put it, 'It takes more grace than tongue can tell, To play the second fiddle well.' The next pastor will have his own ways and idiosyncrasies, and it is only too easy for the retired man, in any case prone to move in a 'grumpy old man' direction, to show his irritation at things which are done differently, from the way the new man announces the hymns to when in the service the notices are given. Far more importantly, there is a danger of a 1 Corinthians 3 situation, where one says 'I follow old Pastor X', and

another 'I follow new Pastor Y'—Paul describes this as being 'merely human' and it is a hindrance to the Gospel and does great damage to the local church. For these reasons it is, I believe, almost always best to move away.

5. Supporting and using the retired minister

In giving this paper I am aware that I am trying to address several different categories: the minister (and where married his wife) contemplating retirement, the church officer or member whose pastor is (or should be!) considering retirement, the minister who is retired (and again his wife if he has one), the minister, church officers and members of a church to which a pastor moves following retirement. So forgive me if these closing comments are somewhat disjointed, and I hope that nonetheless they will give folk in all of these categories food for thought.

It is well-established that retirement, not only from the ministry but from any occupation, can be very traumatic, and in some ways akin to bereavement. After a lifetime when we have had a recognized role and position, responsibilities and routines, suddenly these have gone. And if this is true of the minister, it is often equally true of his wife. Whether electing to stay in the same church where they have served, or moving to another church, they can feel themselves to be in uncharted territory. This requires serious thought and action on the part of the retired minister, and sympathy and support on the part of the pastor and congregation.

Speaking for the retiring minister, what we must not do is nothing. It may well be that at the conclusion of a ministry, with all the emotional upheaval combined often with the physically and mentally tiring business of moving house—I remember Cyril Aston coming to help me with clearing the manse at Bulford, I should never have managed without him—a break is needed, but the Lord has created us and equipped us to be active. We need to ask where we can be useful in the local church and in support of the pastor, making it as clear as we can that we want to be a help and not a threat. And in the local church we need to be content with our place, not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, not itching to take up a pastoral role and still less being critical of the pastor and church. We need to take other opportunities, perhaps in preaching in other churches where there is a need. We need to maintain our own spiritual

walk, continuing to feed upon the Word of God both in our private reading and in being blessed by the pulpit ministry in our church, and to pray. If we are married, we need to take advantage of retirement to spend time together in a way which was perhaps not possible during the pastoral ministry with all its demands. And we need to look after our own bodies, being active as long as we can, not spending all our time either in the study or in front of the television—having a dog is a great help in this, as well as providing a good way of meeting other folk and conversing with them.

And in all this, the local church needs to support and encourage the retired minister. When he arrives on the scene, be sensitive to the fact that he has been through a traumatic time. He may not know many people—be hospitable, invite him round for a meal. Think how you can make use of him—if you are the pastor, consider that he has probably had much more experience in the ministry than you, and take advantage of that. Think of his coming among you as a blessing and not a threat—pray for him that this might always continue to be the case, because Satan will always be looking for the opportunity to sow discord and dissatisfaction in the church. And as he gets older and less able, continue to support and encourage him. And of course all these things apply to his wife as well!

Conclusion

Let me conclude by quoting words of wisdom from the nonagenarian Jim Packer, who remarked that even John Wesley said that at eighty-five ‘the only sign of deterioration that he could see in himself was that he could not run as fast as he used to ...’,⁵ an encouragement and a challenge to us all as we approach what David Winter calls ‘the departure lounge’.

This biblical expectation and, indeed, promise of ripeness growing and service of others continuing as we age with God is the substance of the last-lap image of our closing years, in which we finish our course. Runners in a distance race, like jockeys in a horse race, always try to keep something in reserve for a final sprint. And my contention is going to be that, so far as our bodily health allows, we should aim to be found running the last lap of the race of our Christian life, as we would say, flat out. The final sprint, so I urge, should be a sprint indeed.

5. J.I. Packer, *Finishing our course with joy* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2014), p?

‘Live each day as if thy last’ is a wise word from a hymn written in 1674 by Thomas Ken. The older we get, the more needful its wisdom becomes, and if we have not already taken it to heart, we should do so now. When we unpack Ken’s admonition, three thoughts emerge.

First, live for God one day at a time. Whatever long-term plans we may have, we need to get into the habit of planning each day’s business in advance, either first thing each morning or (better, I think) the day before. Glorifying God should be our constant goal, and to that end we need to acquire the further habit of reviewing before God as each day closes how far we have done as we planned, or whether and why and how far we changed the plan to fit new circumstances and fresh insights, and in any case how far we did the best we could for our God, and how far we fell short of doing that. Surely it is increasingly important that we be doing this as we approach the end of life and the prospect of giving an account of ourselves to God.

Second, live in the present moment. Get into the way of practising God’s presence—more specifically, Christ’s presence, according to his promise to be with us always (Matthew 28:20)—and cultivate the divine companionship. This, too, is an important and, I suspect, widely neglected spiritual discipline nowadays, and its importance also would seem to grow as we near life’s end.

Daydreaming and indulgence of nostalgia are unhappy habits, making for unrealism and discontent. Like all bad habits, they tighten their grip on us until we set ourselves against them and, with God’s help, break them. Elderly retirees are prone to find that a disciplined breaking of them is an increasingly necessary task in life’s last lap, in which steady looking ahead in each present moment becomes a bigger and bigger factor in inner spiritual health.

Third, live ready to go when Christ comes for you. Jesus’s words to the faithful eleven are in fact a promise to all his faithful disciples in every age:

‘In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (John 14:2–3)¹

1. Ibid. pp. 21–24.

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