

Questionnaires may be obtained from Rev-Dr Rowland Croucher, 7 Bangor Court, Heathmont, Victoria, Australia 3135..

After pastoring Baptist churches both in Australia and Canada, and then serving with World Vision (Australia) in the area of leadership enhancement, **Rev Dr Rowland Croucher** founded John Mark ministries to pioneer research and establish ministry support structures for clergy: see johnmark.net.au

Why Clergy are leaving the Church – An English Response

Paul Beasley-Murray

As many ex-pastors in Australia as those serving in parishes of all denominations! The thought is mind-boggling. The question immediately arises: is massive ministerial fall-out a specifically Australian phenomenon, or is it also to be found here in the UK?

The simple answer is: nobody knows. Perhaps Peter Brierley and his Christian Research Association should come to our aid. Some preliminary research which I have undertaken does indicate that a large number of British ministers fail to continue in Christian ministry. More than 25% of ministerial students, who in the period 1955-1985 graduated from Spurgeon's College (and there is no reason to think that Spurgeon's is exceptional in this respect), going on to be ordained and inducted into Baptist churches, are no longer in any form of Christian ministry. That figure will presumably become even higher with the passage of time. Indeed, my gut feeling is that the overall figure for ministers in general is probably a good deal higher - certainly the majority of my theological college contemporaries are no longer in ministry.

It is true that changes in career are not peculiar to Christian ministry. But there is one crucial difference between other

occupations and professions and the ministry: a minister is deemed to be 'called' in ways that others are not. The key question that occupies ministerial selection boards in every denomination is that of call: is this person truly 'called' of God? So although many people do change careers midstream, any major fall-out in ministry is unacceptable simply on theological grounds.

Another issue of concern is finance, the current cost of training a student for ministry being around £15-20,000. My own chief concern is not so much finance, but the intolerable pain which often lies behind these statistics - pain suffered by pastors and their families, as well as by churches.

What is to be done? Rowland Croucher urges in the first place that we re-examine the notion of the 'call' to ministry, and I certainly agree. In some circles at least, far too great an emphasis is put on subjective feelings of call as distinct from objective criteria relating to giftedness and self-awareness. I am sure we need to become far more professional and rigorous in our selection procedures - for instance, little attention is generally given to the formative childhood years, and most selectors have little if any training in even basic psychology.

Secondly, he. advocates more relevant training. Here again there is undoubtedly room for improvement, although there is now a welcome shift from theological education 'per se' to ministerial formation. It seems to me, however, that primary ministerial formation at our colleges will always be limited, whatever the quality of courses. What is needed is ongoing church-based training where reality and not theory holds sway. Learning must be combined with praxis

The third area of need identified by Rowland Croucher is more adequate pastoral support systems. In this respect I would like to commend the idea of regular ministry appraisals. In what is an unusually lonely situation (unlike most professionals, they do not normally work as part of a 'peer' team), ministers would benefit from the stimulus of regular appraisal, in which they could give account of themselves and their ministry, and be helped to set fresh goals for themselves and their ministry. Such an appraisal system could provide preventative pastoral care, with a skilled consultant picking up difficulties at an early stage, before any real crisis develops.

One final comment. The intention of the RBIM is to offer support and encouragement to pastors in their practice of ministry. Our hope is that through this journal and our conferences and consultations, ministers will be helped not only to survive the crises, but to enjoy the challenges of ministry today.