

EDITORIAL - EXPERIMENTATION

Paul Beasley-Murray

No church can stand still - or if it does, then it dies. For constant change is the essence of life. One of the challenging roles for any church leader, therefore, is to be a change-agent, helping the local church to adapt to the ever-changing culture around us.

In seeking to bring around change, I have often found it helpful to use the language of experimentation. Time and again, when I have sought to introduce a change to church life, I have proposed that for a period of time we experiment with doing things differently, on the clear understanding that if that particular experiment does not work, then we have the freedom to revert to where we were or to try a different approach.

Sometimes the experiment proves to be a success. At other times the experiment proves to be a failure. I confess that I find the former easier to handle than the latter! Yet failure is a necessary part of the learning process - indeed, it is sometimes only through failing that we find the way to succeed. In this respect I am encouraged by some words from Charles Swindoll: "Great accomplishments are often attempted but only occasionally reached. Those who reach them are usually those who missed many times before. Failures are only temporary tests to prepare us for permanent triumphs."

Experimentation with the evening service

As I write my own church - at my urging - has agreed to conduct an experiment with our evening services. The motivation for this experiment is that, although we still have a reasonable evening congregation, the truth is that over the years our numbers at the evening service have been declining. A change is called for.

One option is to follow the example of many other churches and abandon the evening service altogether. It would make life easier for me - there would be much fewer sermons to prepare! I am tempted to say that it would make life easier for my people! On the other hand, there is no doubt that those who currently attend our evening services want to be there.

There was a time when I felt very strongly that attendance twice on a Sunday was part of one's Christian commitment. Any

Christian worth his or her salt was a 'twicer'! But life has changed, and my expectations have had to change. Life has changed, in the sense that for many life has become much more pressurised. Indeed, some are so stressed out by their work, that I am lucky to see them once on a Sunday - if that! Furthermore, today most households have two full-time workers, with the result that Saturday tends to be the day when chores are done, and Sunday for good reason has become the day for the family, whether it means staying at home with the children or going off for the day to see the wider family. 'Twicers' now are those who attend church twice a month. The church is now never gathered together on one Sunday. So in many ways it makes good sense to dispense with the evening service.

However, although there is no Biblical reason for a church to have services both morning and evening, we feel it right to retain an evening service, for the following reasons: (i) increasingly there will be people who cannot make a Sunday morning service (not only do some people have to work on a Sunday, but many young people are involved in sports or cultural activities on a Sunday morning); (ii) young people and singles generally prefer an evening service (especially when they have been 'out on the town' the night before), not least when there are events following the service; and (iii) as a town-centre church we have an opportunity to offer something to people from other churches who no longer have an evening service.

But what kind of shape should our evening service take? There is no sense in the evening service simply duplicating the morning service. In the light of the present post-modern pick-and-mix age in which we live, we have agreed to conduct an experiment whereby each of the four evening services of the month has its own special focus or flavour.

So for the next month - and if that proves successful, for the following six months - we intend to adopt the following pattern. On the first Sunday of the month the evening service will take the form of a praise evening in which the celebration of the Lord's Supper will be central.

On the second Sunday of the month the evening service will be more seeker-friendly. Although not a seeker service in the Willow Creek style, we will make use of drama, the sermons will be illustrated by video clips, and hopefully there will be special music.

Already the third Sunday is devoted to specialist interests - in the afternoon we have Outlook, a 45 minute event for older people, which is followed by a full English tea, while in the evening we have Synergy, a noisy and hi-tech rave-style service for teenagers.

On the fourth Sunday of the month the focus will be on work, with people from various walks of life reflecting on the issues facing them at work, with Biblical reflection (i.e. the sermon) to follow.

It will be certainly different from the sermon series which characterise our present form of evening service. If the truth be told, I myself am happiest preparing and preaching traditional expository sermons - the new format feels much more challenging. But maybe I need to be jolted out of my comfort zone!

Whether or not this experiment will prove to be successful in attracting more people to the evening service I do not know. We may well fail. Yet, along with William Arthur Ward, I am convinced that the “the greatest failure is the failure to try.”

SECRETS IN THE FAMILY - MINISTRY TO SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Sue Clements-Jewery

Introduction

Sexual abuse is an emotive and disturbing subject. Church culture on the whole struggles to deal sensitively and openly with issues of a sexual nature and understanding of the issues surrounding abuse is often very limited. ‘It couldn’t happen here’ is all too often the attitude.

We live in a society where child protection issues are rarely out of the news and rightly so. In the last ten years the various Christian denominations have begun to recognise the necessity of putting in place policies to ensure that all children involved in the life of the churches are safe from potential abuse.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ For a list of denominational policies on child protection, see Margaret Kennedy, *The courage to tell* (CTBI, 1999) 102.