

## Editorial – Encourage your Minister

### Paul Beasley-Murray

In *Double Cream* (Monarch 1988), an anthology of Christian witticism collected by Stephen Gaukroger and Nick Mercer, there is a wonderful piece on the results of encouraging one's minister:-

It may be that you don't like your church's minister. Well, here is a tested prescription by which you can get rid of him (or her):

1. Look at him straight in the eye when he's preaching, and maybe say 'Amen' occasionally. He'll preach himself to death in a short time.
2. Start paying him whatever he's worth. Having been on starvation wages for years, he'll promptly eat himself to death.
3. Shake hands with him and tell him he's doing a good job. He'll work himself to death.
4. Rededicate your own life to God and ask the minister to give you some church work to do.
5. If all else fails, this one is certain to succeed: get your congregation to unite in prayer for him. He'll soon be so effective that some larger church will take him off your hands.

I smiled when I read this piece – and yet there is an 'edge' to it as well. In a British setting at least, encouragement of ministers is often sorely lacking. Unlike our American cousins, who seem always quick to affirm and praise, our default position as Brits is to tend to major on negative criticism.

I say this in a context where I am blessed with much kindness. Recently I was unwell and the doctor signed me off for a week – people are still asking me how I am. My fellow leaders are incredibly supportive – and church meetings are positive occasions. I am in a good place: to quote the Psalmist "the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places" (Ps 16.6). I almost feel guilty that life is so good. Yet the truth is that my people could improve their game as far as encouraging their ministers is concerned.

Yesterday one of my colleagues commented that when we preach 'at home' – as distinct from being a guest preacher elsewhere – words of appreciation are far and few between. Last Sunday morning only one person thanked me for my sermon – and she is one of those people who always thanks me, Sunday by Sunday.

So how can churches better encourage their ministers? Thom Rainer, Dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, offered six suggestions:

1. Let your pastor know specifically how you learned something from his sermon;
2. Help your pastor have a date night with his wife. Give him a gift certificate to a favourite restaurant;
3. Confront one of the pastor's perpetual critics. It's not the critics who bother him as do the members who are unwilling and fearful of standing up to the critics;
4. Give him a book he would love to have;
5. Speak publicly on behalf of the pastor;
6. Pray for your pastor. In one of the churches I served, someone organized an intercessory prayer team on my behalf. Each of the nearly 100 church members committed to pray for me at a specific time of day for five minutes;

The 'Jolly Blogger', after consulting with some 50 other blogging pastors, offered a different list:

1. Take your own spiritual growth seriously. 'Nice sermon pastor' and 'you're a good pastor' are wonderful to hear, but what we really want to hear is that you are growing in your walk with Christ;
2. Give your best to the church, not your leftovers. Many pastors notice that when push comes to shove, it is almost always the church that gets the shove;
3. Remind our pastor you are for him. There are few people out there who are out to get the pastor. One negative person often carries more weight than ten positive people;
4. Find out his 'love language'. For some it may be words of encouragement. Others may be encouraged if you subscribe to a magazine for him, or take him on a fishing trip;
5. Allow the pastor to have a life outside of church. Respect your pastor's day off. Encourage your pastor to take all his vacation. Keep social situations social;
6. Take good care of your pastor's wife and kids;
7. Pay him a fair salary. Make sure he has the same opportunities you have in terms of housing, retirement and health benefits;
8. Pray for him;

Ministers are human beings like anybody else. They have feelings, and they need encouragement!

## Church – Where Everyone Knows Your Name

Revd Dr Clive Jarvis

### Quality Matters

We live in an age when people, even Christian people, are less likely to be tolerant, polite, or hold back for the sake of others. However, this is also an age when people are far more discerning and far more likely to make their feelings known. This means we are less likely to get away with mediocrity and that the quality of what we do is more and more important.

George Barna identifies five qualities he believes need to be present in a church if it is to attain its goal of quality ministry.<sup>1</sup> The church must teach with **integrity**. It must recognise the need for **excellence** and strive to provide it. There must be **consistency** in the message the church projects to members and visitors. Those in leadership must have lives that give **credibility** to their ministries. Finally the church must be there for people when needed and so prove **reliable**.

Bast is also clear that the worship service is a key element in determining whether a visitor responds positively to their experience.<sup>2</sup> For the unchurched visitor with no experience of church worship or whose experience is from many years previously, what matters is the sense that what they are experiencing is ‘real,’ authentic and full of integrity. The churched visitor may well be assessing their visit according to what they know and are used to and they may miss the more vital questions of authenticity. Within that, there is space in the life of our churches for all varieties and styles of worship.

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<sup>1</sup> George Barna, *User Friendly Churches: What Christians need to know about the churches people love to go to*, (Regal, Ventura CA 1991) 62.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Bast, *Attracting New Members* (Church Growth Press, Monrovia CA, 1988) 66.