

EDITORIAL – DOING THE WORK OF AN EVANGELIST

Paul Beasley-Murray

Like any other minister, I always have a thousand and one things to do. It is always a dilemma to know what to delegate and what to do oneself. It is a particular temptation to delegate the work of evangelism to others. Indeed, at one stage this is exactly what I did. But then I realised that I was failing to live up to my calling, for the truth is that a key aspect of the pastoral calling is seeking the 'lost' (see John 10.16). I believe it is significant that when Paul wrote to Timothy, he urged him to "do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully" (2 Tim 4.5).

As part of my commitment to the evangelistic activity of the church, I am involved in running an Alpha-style course every term. It is hard work, not least because we made the decision to do the teaching ourselves. An unexpected side-effect of the minister (or in our case, ministers) taking most of the presentations is that this encourages those attending the course to consider coming to church!

Although we have borrowed ideas from other courses, much of the material we use is our own. Indeed, we have structured the course to make it as seeker-friendly as possible. Many similar programmes assume that people are much closer to faith than our 'punters' are, so we have included a session on the existence of God, since some of our people don't know whether to believe in God or not. We also have three sessions on Jesus, the first on his life and his claim to be the Son of God, the second on his death, and the third on his resurrection. We have been careful to include sessions on how we can be sure of our faith, as also on the Bible, prayer and the church, but have not include sessions on resisting evil, witnessing, guidance and healing, for these really belong to a Christian discipleship course.

Unlike an Alpha course, we don't go away together for a weekend. Our experience is that this is too costly a commitment in terms of both time and money. We still try to go away - the morning course spends a day together, while the evening course spends a Friday evening and a Saturday together. Although, like Alpha, we focus on the work of the Spirit, we prefer to use the slogan 'Time out with God' as the all-encompassing phrase. Furthermore, as the basis for our discussions, we do three or four Bible studies

together: The New Birth (John 3), Finding God as Father (Romans 8), The Coming of the Spirit (Acts 2), and the Transforming Power of the Spirit' (John 7.37-39).

Of the three courses we run each year, two are evening courses, and one is a morning course. The evening course involves a good evening meal (with wine!) and runs from 6.30 - 9.30pm. With the needs of mothers with children in mind the morning course is shorter. We begin just before 10.00am with coffee and cakes, and finish at 11.30am. Interestingly those without children (and this term that is most people) then go to our church-run café and have lunch together, where they carry on talking about the course.

There is no running away from it: courses like these are time-consuming. And yet it is incredibly exciting to be able to talk about the Christian faith with people who are really searching for God. It really is wonderfully rewarding to see people gradually coming to faith. Surely, this is a key element of the pastoral calling. For this reason I would encourage every minister to fulfil the task of an evangelist. If Alpha is not your cup of tea, then find something else more appropriate such as Emmaus, the Y course, or Just Looking . Whatever course is chosen, what counts is that we adopt the theological college goalkeeper's motto as our own - by all means save some (1 Cor 9.22).

CHRISTENDOM, CLERICALISM & CHURCH

Kevin Ward

It is not hard to find theologians and sociologists who warn that the crisis confronting institutional religion in western countries like New Zealand and the UK is massive, if not terminal. One of the most colourful comes from an Anglican church leader in describing the plight of his own denomination: "Not only has the fat lady sung but the cleaners have left, the security guards have turned out the lights and locked the doors, and the wrecking ball waits outside for tomorrow's demolition work. But even so, a few men and women in purple shirts... still huddle together in the now dark stalls, chatting excitedly of all the great operas they are going to stage."