

## **WHO CARES FOR THE PASTORS?**

David Bartlett (Illawarra Pastors' Network)

Last year, a survey was carried out by Dr Ian Hay, a lecturer in education at Brisbane's Griffith University, of 142 Anglican clergy in southern Queensland.

A report in the Sydney Morning Herald on October 5, 1995, says the survey shows *"most members of the Anglican clergy are so stressed from the demands of their calling that they either feel burnout or are bordering on burnout. The survey, commissioned to identify the extent of stress in the clergy and recommend possible remedies, also found that feelings of loneliness, isolation and tiredness were common."* The report went on to say that 16% of the clergy were frustrated in accomplishing tasks; 14% felt alone and isolated; 14% experienced guilt feelings; 10% were cynical about parishioners; 7% were withdrawn from parishioners; and 5% were unenthusiastic about their job.

A psychologist in the Illawarra area, doing research for a doctorate on the subject of clergy stress, has been very much aware that many ministers here in the region of the Illawarra are feeling similar pressures.

Rowland Croucher, of John Mark Ministries, says *"There are 10,000 ex-pastors in Australia. Yes - 10,000! About the same number as those serving as parish clergy. Some denominations have seen more pastors resign from parish ministry than stay: the attrition rate is among the highest of all professions."* (from John Mark Ministries brochure).

Archbishop Harry Goodhew has written *"The amount of stress in the community at large is intense for many reasons. The pace of life and the pressure that arises from widespread questioning of traditional institutions add to those upon a clergy family. Ministers and pastors of churches feel the stress of a questioning public and an articulate and demanding church membership. That pressure extends to spouse and family. Some need to leave. Those in leadership positions recognise the urgent need to offer support and pastoral encouragement to active clergy as well as those who decide to pursue another vocation."*

Barry Chant, President, Tabor College, says *"In my opinion, the work of Christian ministry is the toughest job on earth"*.

### **How are pastors to be better cared for?**

#### **1. Better training:**

Some of the problem with pastoral care of pastors stems back to the processes of training for the ministry. In many colleges the emphasis is on an academic approach to the process, with no real emphasis on spiritual formation. The training process is often that of "filling up" so that the pastor can then "pour it out" to the congregation.

A number of theological colleges are now implementing a process of spiritual formation into their courses, where students not only take in material in lecture situations, but spend time regularly, on an individual basis, as well as in small groups, with a spiritual director, looking at their own personal spiritual development and the integration of what is being learned in the classroom into practical ministry situations. (An example of this development is seen in the Church of Christ Theological College programme – a programme implemented after it was realised that 50% of their former students were no longer in ministry within five years of graduation from theological college).

Internship programmes are also being instituted to help people make the transition from college to church ministry.

In all the training process, hopefully better models are beginning to be given to new ministers as to what ministry is about.

## **2. Personal Care:**

It is important for pastors to care of themselves – not selfishly, but wisely, with a view to maximising their ministry over a long period.

Maintaining one's own spiritual life is of supreme importance. It is too easy to become a 'professional' and neglect one's own walk with the Lord. A pastor needs to maintain a daily devotional and prayer life. A day alone with the Lord each month is a good discipline – put it into the diary. Take a week a year out just for reflection and prayer. It's all part of the work of pastoring.

A book worth reading is Eugene Peterson's book *"Working the Angles - The Shape of Pastoral Integrity"* Eerdmans 1991. Peterson call pastors back to the three pastoral acts that determine the shape of everything else (the 'angles') - praying, reading the Scripture, and giving spiritual direction. *"The three areas constitute acts of attention: prayer is an act in which I bring myself to attention before God; reading Scripture is an act of attending to God in His speech and action across two millennia in Israel and Christ; spiritual direction is an act of giving attention to what God is doing in the person who happens to be before me at any given moment."*

Things such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle with good diet and exercise, some outside interests etc. are all important. And a pastor needs to take adequate Sabbaths, making sure he has a day off each week, as well as regular holidays etc.

## **3. Local Church:**

The local church should be a place where all the members are cared for, including the pastor! That's not always easy, as church people often seem to think the pastor doesn't have any needs other than financial ones, and should be able to live the perfect life since he is called by God to such a position.

Pastors and ministers are often part of the problem here, in that they are often too proud to admit they have needs, or think that by admitting they have needs they will in some way be letting the congregation down. The pastor needs to foster mutual caring in the congregation (and accept it!).

In addition, pastoral leaders need to develop a plurality of leadership, taking into account the different gifts and abilities of other leaders in the church, and together, as a team, seek to develop the ministries of all the people in the congregation.

#### **4. Denominational support:**

Many denominations, even those with autonomous forms of government, are seeing the need to have special resource people set aside for the ministry of pastoring pastors. In addition, a number of denominations are implementing a programme of retreat groups, where a relatively small group of pastors covenant to meet together for a week once a year over a period of three to five years for an intensive prayer and sharing time. This develops relationships of trust and care, in which the pastors can then have a freedom to contact each other for prayer and support between the yearly retreats.

#### **5. Regional support:**

Traditionally, **Ministers' Fraternal**s have been the place to meet ministers of other denominations within a region. Sadly, such Fraternal's have often become business meetings where some things that have to be done on a combined basis, e.g. plan scripture in schools, are discussed. The real caring and support that could occur - should occur - often does not happen.

Increasingly, across the world, however, ministers are seeing the need to develop more caring and supportive relationships. **Pastors networks** are developing, sometimes across denominational lines, with some common interest or commitment. It is also becoming increasingly apparent that pastors and leaders in an area need to come together in unity to pray and have an influence on the regions or cities. Such meetings develop the sense of unity across the church of a region and have a spiritual impact on the area, as well as providing ministers with a deep sense of brotherhood and support. **Pastors Prayer Summits**, where ministers get together for an intense three or four days of prayer, simply waiting on the Lord together, are becoming increasingly significant in the life of the church and among the church leaders. The regional church, going beyond barriers of denominations, is becoming increasingly important to the fulfillment of the church's mandate to bring the gospel to all the people groups. At the same time, it has the by-product of bringing about an increasing sense of support and care for those ministers who come together in unity under the Chief Shepherd.

#### **6. Specialist Support Services:**

A number of people who have seen a great need among pastors have set up organisations to bring some aid to people in pastoral ministry.

John Mark Ministries, with the Rev Rowland Croucher and the Rev Les Scarborough, is committed to the renewal of churches and the encouragement of its ministers through such things as leadership enhancement; supporting and encouraging ex-pastors; consulting; counseling; leading pastors' renewal retreats; as well as mentoring and equipping.

Within the Anglican Church, Archdeacon Paul Perrini has the role of overseeing ordination and ministry development. This role includes developing an integrated selection and training strategy. He says that he wants to see "a process which enables ministers to maintain their joy and competence in what is a demanding and, at times, threatening role."

Kel Willis, of Christian Growth Ministries, in addition to his teaching ministry, spends time mentoring young pastors, counseling pastors in times of difficulty, as well as holding regular pastors support groups in different geographical areas (one being held regularly in the Bulli area).

Ross Kingham, of Barnabas Ministries, is based in Canberra, and has a similar ministry to ministers.

The writer, under the banner of Illawarra Pastors' Network, seeks to:

1. come along side the pastors of the area through personal contact, offering the possibility of a listening ear and a praying partner (from someone not within the normal denominational structures, and, therefore, a non-threatening perspective);
2. be a link among pastors/ministers (shepherds) encouraging the development of relationships between pastors in the area and across the region, especially across denominational lines, through personal contact, as well as through the monthly newsletter, "The Illawarra Pastors' Link"; and
3. be part of the process of assisting pastors/ministers of the region catch a wider vision of what the Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church, is wanting to do in this region.

Clearly, there is a need for pastors/ministers to be adequately cared for. Christian leaders have a significant part to play in the development of the church and the carrying out of its purposes in the world. God is raising up ministries and programmes to help pastors to be better cared for. But it also means that we, as pastors/ministers need to be humble enough and open enough to admit our needs and to reach out and seek help. The sad thing is that often pastors leave situations to go on for such a long time without seeking help, that when they do eventually do something, they are so hurt and the congregations are so hurt that it is very difficult for the ministers to continue in ministry.

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Prepared by David Bartlett, Illawarra Pastors' Network, August 1996

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