



Guide to Pastoral Practice and Ministry

Guidelines for those who are called to Baptist Ministry.

GUIDE TO PASTORAL PRACTICE AND MINISTRY

Baptist Union of Great Britain

Introduction

All that follows recognises that we are a people of grace and compassion, and where expectations seem prescriptive, perhaps, it should be borne in mind that these guidelines are simply that: guidance, not a rule-book. However, if their value is not to be eroded, they should be taken seriously as guidance for the manner of life and practice that is expected of Baptist ministers, especially in the context of those exercising local pastoral charge of a congregation. As affirmed by the Ministry Executive Committee and commended to Baptist Union Council, they do reflect a consensus about the character of Baptist ministry.

In recognising a 'call' to ministry and facilitating a process leading to 'accreditation' of that ministry, the wider Baptist community rests legitimate, often demanding, expectations on those so called and accredited. At the core of all such expectations is something that is well described as 'exemplary' or 'representative' discipleship, or a commitment to 'vocational holiness'. The character of that discipleship is undergirded by the Code of Ethics.

In ministry there is necessarily a distinction between the professional and the private spheres of life, but the boundary between them should be porous, for the private and hidden areas of life suffuse the professional with either grace or corrosion. Effective ministry cannot be maintained where the gap between the personal and the public life becomes too great. Vocational holiness is indispensable for a public ministry that honours Christ.

This necessarily entails the minister in high levels of voluntary accountability, to self and to others, and touches the whole of life, well beyond the exercise of particular public ministries. Phrases like 'a life of transparent integrity' or 'a moderate, hospitable and peaceable lifestyle' sum up much that Baptists rightly expect of those they accredit and, as such, a calling to ministry will impact almost every aspect of life, not least uses of power and financial and sexual conduct.

In matters of leadership, the work of ministry will normally be oriented towards 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'. As such, ministers of the gospel will not be found feeding prejudice. Ministers will set their faces against the abuse of power by themselves and by others, seeking to expose bullying and other inappropriate techniques for manipulating those for whom they have a duty of care.

In their offering of pastoral leadership to a local congregation, ministers will have a special role in shaping the vision and corporate life of the church, and should do so both by leadership and as an 'example to the flock' of love, grace, integrity and courage.

1. Personal Discipline and Integrity

Ministry of this kind demands high levels of self-awareness and commitment, appropriate in all Christian discipleship:

- commitment to a personal rule of life, prayer and the reading of Scripture so as to maintain those disciplines that engender spiritual growth and personal faithfulness to Christ.
- commitment to personal truthfulness, based in continual and open self-examination and reflection;

- commitment to the equal and proper treatment of all people, with special attention to issues of confidentiality;
- commitment to rigorous disciplines of self-management in regard to all sexual relationships, especially relationships to children, young people and vulnerable adults, as set out fully in 'Safe to Grow' and guidelines for working with vulnerable adults;
- commitment to financial integrity: taking care to exercise transparent good practice, and avoiding every occasion in which ministry might be 'bought' by others who would seek inappropriate dependency; [e.g. ministers need to exercise caution when being offered extravagant gifts from church members, such as the offer of a car. These should be given instead to the church for the use of the minister];
- commitment to engagement with the wider world, and to maintain a sustained awareness of the society and culture within which ministry is exercised, aware of the larger political and social forces that shape society;
- commitment to live in such a way as provides an example of godly living, and thus giving no cause for others to stumble, and modelling good practice. For example, this might be caused by inadequate attention to personal health, physical and mental as well as spiritual, inappropriate addictions, serious loss of work/life balance, or other forms of immoderate lifestyle. [e.g. a minister will want to ensure that their own consumption of alcohol or tendency to compensatory eating does not adversely affect the discipleship of others or weaken their own ability to fulfil their discipleship];
- commitment to avoidance of any behaviours that might be described as bullying of others, such as wielding undue influence in the pursuit of personal gain. In general others should be treated with gentleness and generosity of spirit. [Anger can be used as a powerful and abusive weapon. The Scriptures say 'be angry but do not sin', and the uncontrolled loss of temper with others is to be avoided.];
- commitment to the avoidance of those besetting sins of ministry: cynicism, grumbling, gossiping and party spirit. Instead, a careful listening to others should take priority over hasty or prejudicial judgments;
- Ministers should take all due care in being accountable for their life and ministry, using for instance, peer supervision, cell groups or other contexts in which honesty and support can be offered and received. It is folly to think that ministry can be adequately offered by those who deliberately live in an isolated manner.

2. Training and Development

Such ministry will also demand a commitment to on-going training and personal development, so as to sustain a reasonable level of competency. This does not entail an expectation of omni-competency, but rather an acute sense of personal limitations and how to draw on the competencies of others in order to exercise an appropriate ministry of oversight. Habits of continuing study and development, forged in ministry training and probationary period (NAMs study), should continue to inform ministry throughout its ensuing practice. Utilising the tools for continuing professional support (such as spiritual direction, peer supervision, guided self-appraisal or ministers' clusters) is strongly encouraged. Formation involves spiritual, intellectual, emotional and relational development, and all aspects should be developed as ministry unfolds.

3. Personal Relationships

Recognising that ministers' personal circumstances vary widely, the commitments of ministry will put a burden on significant others: their immediate circle of family and friends. It is neither appropriate that these relationships always take second place to other professional relationships, nor should they always take precedence. This will lead to difficult decisions: for example, when news of the death of a deacon comes in the midst of a family party. The

nurturing of strong family bonds and friendships is part of what it is to be 'an example to the flock', and their neglect is not a sign of professional effectiveness nor personal sacrifice.

4. Availability

The minister does not work set hours as an employee, but is called as 'a way of life' to shepherd the flock of Christ. This does not mean that they are required to work beyond what is reasonable to expect, but flexibility and availability are principles of pastoral leadership. Personal and family circumstances are a vital part of the balance of priorities that a minister must negotiate with those amongst whom they exercise pastoral leadership. In general, the minister should expect to be contactable outside of normal office hours, (and *in extremis*, at any hour,) whilst the church should respect the expectation of a day per week free from all routine ministry.

5. Conduct of Worship

The minister has overall responsibility for the conduct of public worship. They would be expected to participate regularly in the leadership of church services and while gifts will vary, especially in musical ability, it is the minister's oversight of this aspect of the church's life that is expected, rather than their sole delivery of all aspects of the service. Attention should be given therefore, to growth in competency in leading worship (as distinct from the musicianship required of competent worship song leaders) and where this is delegated to others, care should be taken in assessing the competency of those who share in this task of ministry, attending to their development and guidance where necessary. Often the minister will be the 'resident theologian' in the congregation, and her or his understanding plays a significant role in the shaping of public worship.

- Normally this responsibility will be shared with others, who bring their own gifts of musicality and preaching in the service of Christ. The minister's role is to ensure that the proper balance of worship is fostered, to include prayers of confession, praise and intercession, the reading of Scripture, the proclamation of the word and appropriate musical elements. Not every element is expected to be present in every service.
- Normally it will be the minister's responsibility to preside at the Lord's Table (although not exclusively so), conduct baptisms and infant dedications, and be responsible for marriages and funerals.

6. Mission

It is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to participate in mission and the minister will lead in this by example, encouraging every member of the church to engage in holistic mission in ways appropriate to their gifts and circumstances. Where people show potential leadership skills in such activities, the minister will find ways of helping them to hone and develop those skills.

The minister will show concern for the mission of other local Baptist churches through offering practical help where possible, including participation in Association mission projects and Home Mission funded initiatives.

The minister will engage with "men and women of goodwill" in the surrounding community so that the church is seen to be working towards the harmony, justice and wellbeing of that community. They will work with chaplains and volunteers to improve the availability of access to prayer and pastoral care for people who are not part of a regular congregation.

Where a new Church plant or initiative is envisaged, the minister will first make efforts to consult with other churches that are either already present in the area or have an interest in it, and where possible, work together with them, following the Baptist Union's good practice guidelines for church planting.

The minister will make efforts to engage with people of other cultures and faiths both in the local community and more widely through encouraging prayer and concern for BMS World Mission workers and others involved in global mission.

7. Pastoral Care

The overall responsibility for the pastoral care of the flock lies with the minister, although it is unlikely that they will be solely responsible for its delivery. In consultation with the church, an agreed pastoral strategy will indicate what is expected of the minister. Often this will include the visitation of the dying and bereaved and those seriously ill at home or in hospital and the house-bound, although in congregations over a certain size, this will of necessity be shared with other pastors. The regularity with which church members are routinely visited in their homes is also a matter of negotiation. [While it might be appropriate to regularly visit every member in a congregation of under 50 members, this would be unwise in a congregation of 500. In the latter case, oversight of a pastoral care team ensures the delivery of this dimension of pastoral care]

Attention should be paid to proper boundaries, and the effective delivery of pastoral care will pay due attention to all safeguarding requirements. It is normally inappropriate to conduct visits at times or in locations that might be viewed as compromising to the integrity of the ministry (late at night, for instance, or in isolated settings), although it is occasionally unavoidable in a time of crisis.

It is normally good practice to maintain strict confidentiality regarding matters of sensitive pastoral information. However, there is no absolute right to confidentiality. Safeguarding legislation will always require that where the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults is threatened, appropriate action should be taken to disclose harmful action (see Safe to Grow etc for more details). Also, where the life of a person is threatened absolute confidentiality cannot be assured, for instance in a real risk of suicide due to mental health disorders, or where others safety is threatened. Ministers, when married, should negotiate with those with whom they share leadership, and the Church Meeting, whether they share pastoral information with their spouse. Some may choose to maintain strict confidentiality that excludes their spouse, while others might expect to be able to share more widely with their husband or wife. When assuring others of confidentiality, it should be clear which practice is adopted, and where necessary ministers should adapt their normal practice to unusual circumstances.

8. Unity

The minister is a representative and embodiment of the unity of the church, both locally and in wider spheres. They must engage in their leadership responsibilities in co-operative rather than competitive ways, fostering the unity of the whole Church of which they are a minister. In particular the ministries of both men and women, those of ethnically diverse backgrounds and both young and old should be honoured rather than excluded.

- Ministers have a special role in the leadership of Church Meetings, although this does not require them to necessarily chair such meetings if more suitable people are available. Ministers, as every church member, are subject to the will of Christ discerned by the gathered church, and have a special role in safeguarding that congregational policy.

- Attention should be paid to participation in the wider councils of the Baptist Union, including Association and Union Assemblies.
- The promotion of mission, locally through co-operation with other churches, nationally through Home Mission and internationally through BMS World Mission and other agencies, is an expectation upon all Baptist ministers. Attention should be given to the promotion of the financial needs of BUGB, BMS World Mission and the Union's theological colleges in the life of the churches served. Ministers are key gatekeepers to the churches' responsibilities to support the wider Baptist bodies (Union, Association and Colleges) and it is expected that they will play a leading role in supporting the policies of churches to appropriately and generously support them.
- Wherever possible, a respectful ecumenism with those who are fellow Christians should be pursued.
- It is expected that ministers will be respectful of fellow ministers, especially those who are Baptist ministers. This is especially important where women ministers are concerned, so that whatever the personal convictions about women in ministry, the policy of the Baptist Union to affirm women's ministry should guide relations between ministers, accepting and supporting others in ministry, and those who are testing their vocation to ministry, regardless of gender, race or age.
- Respecting people of good will and working with them for the good of all is expected, and avoiding those prejudices that fracture society and bring the name of Christ into disrepute.
- When a minister moves to a new pastorate or retires from stipendiary ministry it is expected that they will leave that church and sever all professional ties with it, referring any requests or enquiries to the new minister or moderator. In general, a minister in retirement should not live in the immediate area of past pastorates, except by clear welcome of those involved. There may be occasional circumstances that would require divergence from this expectation (for instance where the retirement locality is governed by the need for personal support from family); but routinely, removal from the locality is a general requirement of retirement. Where a retired minister remains in the locality and continues their membership in the church from which they have retired, it is expected that a schedule of protocols be agreed between the minister, the leadership of the church and their successor as pastor of the church. This would include agreements about responding to requests to take funerals and weddings, or other pastoral duties such as the visiting of sick or elderly church members.

9. Language and Communication

- Care should be taken in the use of language, avoiding that which brings ministry or the gospel into disrepute.
- Ministers are expected not to speak ill of other leaders or ministers in public settings.
- Attention should be given to the appropriate media through which to communicate, with special care in the use of new electronic media.

In all of these attempts to express ministerial practice as a code of behaviour or a guide to good practice there is recognition, on the one hand, that other professions have also enshrined their aspirations for good practice in similar codes (and the wider culture expects no less from the profession of ministry than it does from those of the law or medicine), and, on the other, that such codification is deeply embedded in a technocratic and bureaucratising culture of modernity. Ultimately, these codes can only express what a community of faith, the Baptists in BUGB, believe about ministry and expect of its ministers. It cannot ensure that such practices are fully complied with or followed with heartfelt and enthusiastic assent. It is the task of churches, associations, colleges, the Union and ministers themselves to shape ministry according to the pattern of Christ, which we believe is enshrined in this guide. This will always be in dependence upon the grace of God and the enabling power of the Spirit.

In the place of self-protection and self-justification, the shape of ministry which most fully follows in the way of Christ, paying attention to his command to take up a cross and follow him, is one of intentional vulnerability, costly sacrifice, unexpected joy and faithful discipleship. This guide understands the call to ministry in those terms. Ministry is not simply a job like any other, one profession amongst many (although it is hard work, and should be undertaken with a proper professionalism) but rather it is a way of life that seeks to serve out of love for God and his people.

As practices of ministry are learned and the minister's life patterned after the example of Christ and others, then the virtues we have identified become embedded in the minister's life and practice. It is like learning a craft at the feet of a skilled practitioner, as the work is done, so the values of those practitioners are adopted, or incarnated. The formation and subsequent practice of ministry is both the gaining of understanding and skill, and also the forming of a life of character and virtue that is appropriate to Christian discipleship.

These practices and virtues are also enshrined in the ordination and induction vows that express in a significant moment the intention to live after this pattern of life. In promises to 'live a life of holiness and prayer', to 'care for the people of God', or to 'make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'¹ the way of life offered in this guide is expressed in promise and prayer. God give us the grace so to live.

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¹ *Gathering for Worship*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press and BUGB, 2005) pp.124-5

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