

The Ministerial Working Week

The motivation behind General Assembly 2010 Resolution 11 was twofold.

First was the UK government's concern for ministers of religion and whether they should be regarded as employees rather than office holders. Following on from their investigation and consultation was the requirement that churches and other faith bodies sought to relate to their office holders with the same concern as employers are required to give to their employees.

Government departments are naturally looking at those whom they consider are 'paid' for their work. (Any arguments we might want to make about the difference between stipend and salary are not persuasive in this arena.) In that context the resolution set out what was a reasonable amount of 'work' to do over an extended period for those in stipendiary service.

Second, and probably more important for us, was the need to highlight various issues regarding the relationship between ministers and pastorates.

In many churches ministers and others are regularly teaching about a good work/life balance. The resolution was intended to support that discussion and encourage ministers to model good behaviour and avoid burning themselves out.

Additionally we need to take note of the changed demographics of many of our churches and recognise that, in comparison with a few decades ago, there are far fewer younger adults in our church and younger ministers need to be given space to interact with a peer group which may well not be part of the church(es) they serve. This is not to abdicate responsibility for assisting the church to engage in mission with the missing age groups, but giving ministers permission not to spend the whole of their waking lives interacting with the people who have called them is something we may sometimes need to articulate.

All of this is against the background of the debate about what is ministry and what is not? What about the balance between doing and being? Where does 'call' fit into all of this? Into that mix add the many other valid questions that have been part of the discussion, when this topic has been raised during the past couple of years, in a church where many full-time (and part-time) ministers in stipendiary service are serving multi-church pastorates with the associated managing of varied expectations.

Here ministers in non-stipendiary service and lay members of the church contribute to the context, as they offer service as Junior Church leaders, Pilots officers, Lay Preachers, House Group leaders, etc., on top of the demands of their 'day job' thereby increasing the 'working week' (whether paid or not) beyond an average of 40 hours.

What the resolution on the ministerial working week sought to do was to lay down a marker as to what a reasonable working week is for a full-time stipendiary minister, in which to address the duties and responsibilities which are fundamental to their call to a particular pastorate. Beyond that they should approach the rest of the week in the way that other church members would, balancing family and friend commitments (that will vary throughout life), giving Christian service in another sphere of life (e.g. Samaritans, uniformed organisations, missionary activities that do not form part of the life of the pastorate to which they have been called), or further work in the local church if that is the minister's conviction, as it will be for many.

10th November 2010