

DP 5.08 Pastors as Ghetto Blasters -Creating the Evangelistic Pastor

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There is a common perception that clergy/full-time ministers have little significant contact with people in the community and therefore few evangelistic opportunities. They are seen as out of touch with secular society, and the day-to-day life of the common man.

The proposed solution often is to encourage the best evangelists to stay in the workplace rather than be drawn into theological training and church ministry, where they will retreat into their ghetto. This kind of thinking has appeared in The Briefing over recent months (see Andrew Reid's articles in Briefings #265/6 & #267, as well as letters published in #268 and #269).

It is true that ministers struggle with the tension of being heralds of the gospel but being out of touch with those who need to hear. There are many different reasons for this, which I will not try to analyse here. However, it is also true that Christian people in the workplace should make much more of their opportunities to make friends for Christ. This has to be a key strategy for reaching our work-obsessed world. But that is another matter, too. I wish, in this article, to change our tune on what the full-time, employed, minister should be doing.

Ghetto Blasting

Instead of seeing full-time ministry as an impediment to the task of evangelism, let me suggest another perspective. Why not work at the problem from the other end and get our ministers out of the ghetto? Our ministers should be out there in the community, meeting ordinary people, making friends, preaching Christ publicly and personally and leading people into the kingdom.

My role as Chaplain to the NSW Cricket squad has got me thinking about ministers and evangelism. It has been sobering to be down in the dressing room at the Sydney Cricket Ground trying to connect with these guys who are 25 years younger than me, living for cricket, irreligious and the rest. The first day I was there, Greg Matthews introduced me to the team saying, "Charlie (nick names are one step toward belonging, so that pleased me), we're not a very religious bunch, so you'll have to make your own mark on the men."

I love cricket, but I've lived life with Christians. I even played cricket with Christians. So I'm not a natural when it comes to hanging around a sweaty dressing room. I'm often uptight and it shows. I'm a strange appendage to the squad, and like other hangers-on, no one quite knows why I am there.

I thought about Greg's comment. How could I leave a mark on these men? All I have done is show an interest. In all sorts of ways I have got through to them that they and their families are important to me. I want them to know that, unlike the cricket industry, they can count on me long-term. As their trust grows, there are times to introduce Christ.

Tips for leaving the Ghetto

Here are some observations and suggestions for evangelistic pastors.

1. Ministers already are out in the community and see a wide range of people regularly, often over many years: neighbours, school parents, school teachers, local politicians, chemists, doctors, barbers, service station attendants, accountants. These contacts do give ministers a feel for the 'real world', as well as recurring evangelistic opportunities.
2. Ministers are expected to talk about religion and they can hardly avoid it. "What work do you do?" "I'm the minister of the church around the corner. If there is any way we can ever help you or your family..." Ministers should go through a pack of business cards (with church service details) pretty quickly.
3. Ministers could become defacto community chaplains. We hear of good and bad things happening to people all the time, both directly and indirectly through the media. The minister should be the first one to congratulate the sports star or send flowers to the grieving parent. Expressions of love will mark us out as Christ's disciples and over time our genuine concern might create some rapport.
4. Maybe we need to reinvent the chaplaincy model of ministry with evangelism in mind. Ministers could offer to be chaplains to local councils, government agencies, corporations, schools, shopping complexes, casinos, pubs, sports organisations...
5. Ministers should have a specific evangelistic patch which gets them relating effectively to a group in the community. It could be the golf club, the local school council, the high school, or any community group. By being a bona fide member, the minister stays in touch with the non-Christian world, builds friendships and experiments with evangelistic strategies.
6. If ministers intend to train their flock in leading others to Christ, modelling this way of life is crucial. It is a little rich to expect church members to bring friends to evangelistic events if we are not making those contacts ourselves.
7. We must not play down the opportunities created by people coming to the minister, just because the minister wasn't out there bringing them in. Birth, marriage, sickness, bereavement, financial crisis, can all provide great opportunities for loving, skilful pastors to evangelise. That's what we should call it—pastoral evangelism. It means long-term contact and friendship beyond formal meetings in the pastor's study.
8. There are marvellous opportunities for evangelistic teamwork, according to gifts. Some church members will have friends who are interested in the gospel, but may themselves find it difficult to explain, teach and answer questions. The evangelistic pastor can meet these inquirers in a discussion group or personally, through the introduction of the faithful friend.
9. There is an immediate implication for the church in all of this. What do you want your minister to be doing? What are your expectations of him? You will have to free him from roles that take him out of the front line—property manager and developer, business manager, leader of every club and society, denominational committees and the like. Make sure he is sticking with the main game! Even important ministry roles such as youth pastor, Scripture teacher, Sunday School superintendent and hospital visitor should often

be passed on to qualified members.

There is another approach altogether to workplace evangelism. Instead of gifted evangelists staying for 20 years in their jobs, and possibly exhausting their evangelistic opportunities, they could be trained and sent out as full-time missionaries to their industry. In recent years, we have seen such ministries established in the fields of medicine, commerce, the visual arts, the performing arts, and the media. These full-time evangelists have a rapport with people from their industry and have the theological and strategic training to gather up many Christians in the workplace to reach out to colleagues. We need to evaluate the whole training process for our ministers to ensure that they become effective evangelistic pastors. We need a generation of ministers who are out there in the trenches, shoulder to shoulder with their fellow soldiers, joined together in the battle for souls. No longer are we able to open up the church door and expect people to turn up dutifully once a week. The evangelistic minister must build an evangelistic church. Can a church or minister not be evangelistic?