

# Special Working Group on Models of the Ministry

This report was circulated to the GA at its assembly in 2016 and the report and proposals were passed. It is being circulated in accordance to its own proposal and for wider consideration by Presbyteries and Sessions.

This report is the joint work of the Ministry Committee and the Mission and Discipleship Committees of General Assembly. The Joint Committee was appointed by the General Assembly in 2012. Several meetings were held (the latest ones, on 29 October 2014, 27 August 2015 and 20 April 2016) in which representatives from across the denomination participated. As these meetings progressed, in-depth discussions also took place in the Ministry Committee and Mission & Discipleship Committee meetings.

## 1. We realised that there are broader issues.

As we began to discuss the matters that were delegated to us by the Assembly, it became evident that these matters were but a part of a much bigger conversation that needs to take place. It is a conversation that brings us back to core issues with regard to Church, Mission, Ministry and the challenges of the present time and context.

The Ad-hoc committee does not presume to have the answers to these big matters, but we present our report to the Assembly, in the humble hope that these ideas will take root in our hearts and become an ongoing conversation that brings us closer to God's intended purpose for us; that we would remember that the God who is on mission to the world has a Church that God would take into the world.

### 1.1. We believe that there is an urgency about this moment.

The age of Christendom (where Christianity and its principles were prominent, if not central to society) is drawing to an end and the church is moving into an age where everything is changing and that people are “doing life” differently. Here are just a few examples.

- Sundays have changed – they are no longer “church days” but leisure, shopping and entertainment days.
- Social networks are no longer family and neighbourhood (face to face and geographical) but are becoming electronic (virtual and global).
- Values have changed and people are asking different questions of life and they are finding their answers in many places other than the church.
- Even here in Africa where we have a mixture of rural, industrial and commercialised contexts, the pervasiveness of technology and the internet means that young people in a rural context can have access to the latest trends through internet cafes and smartphones.
- The church no longer enjoys a favoured or privileged position in society any more and has to earn credibility and the right to speak.

Furthermore, within the church itself, we are facing a crisis of infertility. We are not planting new churches or making converts. Our growth is mainly transfer growth and the existing model of buying a piece of land, putting up a sanctuary and waiting for people to come, is not affordable and it isn't working.

There is also a crisis of affordability – there are many congregations that cannot afford the luxury of a full-time paid minister. Some can barely afford to pay assessments.

### 1.2. We need to recognise the Giftedness of the Congregation.

Ephesians 4 describes the church as the “body of Christ” that “builds itself up *as each part does its work.*” 1 Peter 2 reminds us that Church is made up of “*living stones*” and that we are all being built “*into a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...*”

Our meeting has benefited from the insights gleaned from Missional Congregations Project which has exposed us to the research involving authors like Alan Hirsch, Phyllis Tickle, Malan Nel, Nelus Niemand, David Bosch and Doug Pagitt who have all articulated the vital truth that congregations are not the audience who come to watch the minister perform on the church stage, but that congregants are on the stage of the theatre of life sharing their gifts and talents and it is the world and the God of Mission who are in the audience.

Alan Hirsch writes about the New Testament Church and, more recently, the Chinese Church that both grew phenomenally without the luxury of seminary trained leaders and pastors because of the “Apostolic DNA” that is in each believer. In each faith community that is formed, the gifts that are needed emerge from congregation “as each part does its work.”

When a minister leaves, retires or passes away, we pronounce the congregation “vacant”. But is it really “vacant”? Has God's gift-giving Holy Spirit left? Was only the minister doing all the ministering? Should she/he have been doing everything?

In Ephesians 4:12, Paul explains that the work of the “pastor/teacher” is to “prepare all God’s people for the work of ministry in order to build up the Body of Christ.” The task of ministry is the responsibility of the whole congregation. The responsibility of the minister is to “equip” or “train” people for ministry.

Thus according to Eph. 4:12, where God’s people are gathered and the Holy Spirit is present, such a congregation should never be termed as “vacant”. If a minister is not present, then the congregation can be said to “have a vacancy”.

The committee noted that the introduction of the Order of Lay Ministries was an important step in realising, affirming and enabling the whole of the body of Christ in ministry.

### 1.3. We need to acknowledge that the role of the minister has changed.

The committee acknowledged that the role of the ordained minister has been over-estimated in many facets of our denominational life. Ephesians 4:11 describes gifts of ministry given for the building up of the body of Christ.

Hirsch and other authors list the following five (or four if you believe the last two go together) gifts as follows:

Apostle: Entrepreneur

Prophet: Questioner – Disrupter/Disturber of the Status Quo.

Evangelist: Recruiter

Shepherd: Listener

Teacher: Articulator

*(These are often abbreviated APEST or APEPT (substituting Pastor for Shepherd))*

With the exception of Shepherd-Pastor (which has received most of the attention) these ministry gifts have been largely ignored by the mainline church. Recent examples of church growth and a careful examination of the yeast-like growth of the church in China reveals that the roles of the Apostle/Entrepreneur/Pioneer, the Prophet/Disrupter and the Evangelist/Recruiter play a significant part in the vibrant growth of this part of the church.

Doug Pagitt talks about the changes that the church has experienced in Western Society over the last two centuries (Note the changing role of the minister):

- Agrarian Age: Little Church on the Prairie. People lived simple self-built and self-contained lives. Afraid of the earth – drought, famine, pestilence and wild animals. Tied to the land and tied to each other. Parish model church. The church in town. Simple building, gathering place. Minister was a the *officiator/blessor* at all life's key events, and the pastoral role was central.
- Industrial Age: The captains of industry dominate. Industry and Factory. Mass production. Replicable. Innovation. Telephone, Radio, etc. Church remained a gathering place especially for those seeking identity. Looked like factories, steeples like smokestacks, replicated and franchised. Minister was the *teacher*, producing good Presbyterians, Baptists, etc
- Information Age: Move to the suburbs. Cosmopolitan mix. Away from homogeneous towns and city ghettos. A rise in literacy. Minister valued for his knowledge (as a specialist). Drive to understand. Knowledge becomes the currency. Churches added the education wing. Sunday school for adults. Minister is the *CEO*. The big campus megachurch is born. Courses central. Processes and steps.
- Inventive Age: No idea what's coming next. Tech takes us to unimagined places. On-line learning etc. Optimism, Collaboration, Inclusive, Usefulness, Advancement, Not afraid of the earth but afraid for the earth, all around meaning, ownership of life, authority doesn't come from position, money or knowledge but from relationships. Value open-source. Smaller churches that give connection. *Communitas*. Co-operatives. They seek a community where they can have a presence. Creativity, Participation, Invitation, Networks, Contextual. Minister is not pastor, teacher or CEO but *creative facilitator*. (Equipping the Saints) Needs the entrepreneurial gifts.

There is a balance to be kept here:

On the one hand Paul describes Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists and Shepherd-Teachers as gifts given by the Spirit to “prepare God's people for works of service” which implies the role of facilitator, “empoweror” and “unleasher.” We are reminded that one of the key tasks of ministry is to teach and equip and to hand ministry over to the people of God. This will mean handing over authority and responsibility. On the other hand, we have

Jesus commissioning Peter to be a shepherd of the flock (feeding and taking care of sheep and lambs) and commissions Paul to be an evangelist and church planter (apostle) to the Gentiles. These “commissions” had a sense of career or vocation to them and became a life-focus.

Furthermore, on the one hand the New Testament Church doesn't have full-time paid ministers but, on the other hand, we also must consider the appointment of deacons so that the apostles could maintain their specific focus in Acts 8.

Historically we've leaned towards the minister-does-everything model. The committee agreed that the role of ministers needed to shift to towards “equipping and unleashing the saints in ministry.” This would constitute a paradigm shift around who does the ministry – from the minister to the congregation.

#### **1.4. Church Planting has Changed.**

In the past we relied on an attractional model of church growth. We built buildings, staffed them with competent preachers and CEO's, and waited for the people to come. This model is becoming less and less feasible and successful. By examining “Fresh Expressions” in the UK, the “1001 new worshipping communities” project in the Presbyterian Church USA and the rapid growth of informal house church movements (as described by Alan Hirsch), we learn that church growth needs to be incarnational, inclusive and individualised to the community being reached. There is no recipe, no one-size-fits-all. Our pastor-teacher-CEO ministers may not be the ones who are best equipped to spearhead these new church-plants which are really relationship-centred rather than programme and presentation driven.

### **2. Some Recommendations arising from the Big Issues.**

Out of these “broader issues” the ad-hoc committee would make the following recommendations:

#### **2.1. Implications for Training of Ministers.**

Having considered this important shift in thinking about the role of the ministers, there are important considerations for the selection, training and shaping of our ministers in the future:

We need to recognise that

1. The “desired outcome” for selection and training needs to be reviewed.  
The “end product” for ministerial training can no longer be the “parish-priest-who-does-everything” or the “minister as CEO.” Instead we need to emphasise the facilitation-empowering role of ministers who will be mentors and “unleashers” who give ministry back to the congregation to “release” the gifts already present in members.
2. We want to be looking for people with Ephesians 4 gifts of Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists.  
We have emphasised the Pastor-Teacher role, not realising that these gifts are better suited to a “maintenance” or institutional Church rather than a missional one. To become more missional we need the other gifts too.
3. We may have to adopt a more flexible selection process.  
The previous point makes this clear. We will need to be willing to select people who have already planted churches and have not followed the typical pathway into ministry. The Ministry Committee is already working along these lines by changing the focus of the conference from “Selection” to “Discernment”. This will enable other gifts also to be discerned.
4. We will have to become more open to a variety of training pathways.  
We have typically favoured a classical theological education, preparing candidates for a teaching-pastoral ministry. We need to consider training that prepares people for pioneering, entrepreneurship, team-building and mentoring.
5. We will need to be willing to select part-time (or bi-vocational) candidates who are employed for less than 40 hours a week and who are employed elsewhere (in a secular work). This will be driven by affordability (congregations not able to pay a full time Stipend) but also by the fact that some of the people who seek to enter our ministry may already be running a congregation or a church plant.

#### **2.2. Implications for the work of the Ministry**

Part-time, tent-making or bi-vocational ministry is not a concession or an exception.

There are various reasons for this:

- In church planting settings, a church-planter may use his/her “day job” as the entry-point to a forming community

- When we move away from the minister-does-everything model – it may not always be necessary or desirable to have a full-time minister. It may even stifle growth.
  - Full-time paid positions are not always viable in church plant settings. We do not have grants that will facilitate a full-time stipend in these situations.
  - Some contexts simply cannot afford a full-time paid minister.
1. This means that we will need to legitimise and de-stigmatise part-time ministry.  
A part-time minister is not a second-class minister or less committed to the church. There will always be the risk that part-time minister can be burnt out by the simultaneous demands of career and church. There is always the concern around divided loyalties. Family life may suffer when a part-time minister is stretched between career and church. There may also be conflicts of interests. But these concerns should not prevent a move in this direction. We need to recognise that this is already happening: there are already a number of our ministers who are chaplains and also serve local congregations as Interim Moderators. We need to get our thinking clear around parameters, guidelines and principles.
  2. The provisions of our Manual of Faith and Order need to be reviewed. The rules currently in force in the manual are not currently being applied – the regulations will need to be simplified, clarified, publicised and applied.

### **2.3. We need to collect some more information**

Although there is a lot to learn from movements like “Fresh Expressions” and “1001 new worshipping communities”, the ad-hoc committee is very aware that the lessons learned cannot simply be imported in to a Southern African context. There is a great deal to learn about church planting done by CDE's in Zambia and Zimbabwe. A survey of the “grassroots” situations across our denomination is needed but the ad hoc committee is concerned (due to past experience) about weak responses to “paper surveys”.

The Mission and Discipleship Committee will be having a consultations with Presbytery M&D conveners in 2016/17. This opportunity will be used to conduct an in-depth listening exercise to get a clear picture of the situation on the ground.

### **2.4. Reviewing and Re-branding our CDE's.**

In our discussions, we noted that our “Church Development Evangelists” (CDE) represent the pioneering-apostolic-evangelistic aspects of the Church's life. As far as CDE's go, there have been some resounding successes and some difficult challenges.

The ad-hoc committee recognises that our CDE's could be a crucial part of establishing new worshipping communities. A re-branding does not necessarily mean a different name, but rather that we revisit, re-think and re-publicise the very important role that the CDE could play.

The Mission & Discipleship Committee will review the Manual regulations around CDEs and also explore any potential integration with the Order of Lay Ministries (OLM).

The Mission & Discipleship Committee will also work clarify and promote the role of CDEs in church planting.

### **2.5. Interim Ministry**

There is a great need for Interim Ministry and not just Interim Moderators. When congregations are without a full-time minister, there is a unique opportunity to encourage greater lay-involvement and clarify the mission and vision of the congregation. This could move a congregation from maintenance to mission and prevent the perpetuation of the idea that a congregation is “vacant” (in the sense of helpless) without a minister. Eddie Germiquet has written a useful article in this regard and there is an Interim Ministry Course run by the Centre of Contextual Ministry at Pretoria University.

The UPCSA needs to acknowledge the unique opportunity that a vacancy provides and encourage Presbyteries and Ministers to learn and develop skills in the area of Interim Ministry.

## **3. Conclusion.**

This report has raised big and important issues. As was stated at the outset, the ad-hoc committee does not pretend to have all the answers. This report calls us to reflect deeply and prayerfully and to begin to do things differently. The ad-hoc committee offers some proposals as a way-forward but acknowledges there is much more to think about.

## PROPOSALS:

1. The General Assembly receives the report.
2. The General Assembly notes that the Church and its members find ourselves in a time of great change and encourages members to resist the temptation to cling to “old ways” when careful and prayerful thought is needed as we move into the future.
3. The General Assembly encourages Presbyteries to have “think-tank/brainstorm” days with this report as a catalyst. (The Missional Congregations Project is also available as a resource and a catalyst for these discussions).
4. The General Assembly recognises the need to think differently about ministry in three areas:
  - Ephesians 4 – The ministry gifts (APEST) and the call to “build up the Saints”;
  - Ministry as facilitation and releasing gifts already in the congregation;
  - The need for a bi-vocational approach.
5. The General Assembly instructs the Ministry Committee to
  1. revise the passage into the ministry of Word and Sacraments, with greater emphasis on the Apostolic and Evangelistic gifts;
  2. revise the content and shape of training for the ministry with a view of moving towards shaping ministers as facilitators;
  3. exercise greater flexibility around bi-vocational ministry; and
  4. Exercise greater flexibility around the admission of people who have already planted churches into the ministry.
6. The Assembly instructs the Ministry and Faith and Order (Manual) Committees to revise the Manual regulations around part-time ministry so that bi-Vocational ministry becomes recognised in the UPCSA, and allows the Ministry Committee to exercise reasonable latitude in the above-mentioned matters until the envisaged Manual amendments can be made.
7. The Assembly notes that the Mission & Discipleship Committee will conduct a “deep listening exercise” when it gathers Presbytery M&D conveners in 2016/17.
8. The Assembly notes the importance of Interim Ministry and encourages Presbytery to view ministerial vacancies in congregations as opportunities for Interim Ministry.
9. The Assembly sends this report with its attachments to all Sessions/Church Councils and to all Presbyteries for study.
10. The committee invites ministers (especially retired ministers) to consider making themselves available for Interim Ministry training and deployment.
11. The Assembly discharges the committee with thanks.

## Questions for Discussion in Persbytery and Session Focus Groups.

1. “The times they are a-changing”.  
Have you experienced the kind of changes described in 1.1 in your congregation and community?  
Describe the impact of these to the group.
2. “Congregations can become out-of-sync with their communities” – Discuss.
3. Are crises of affordability and infertility looming or already present in your context? Discuss.
4. Is there an adequate appreciation of people's giftedness in your setting?  
Would a ministerial vacancy in your congregation be a crisis?
5. When you look at Doug Pagitt's “five ages” in 1.3 above, which role does your congregation expect of the minister? Which role does your minister see him/herself in?
6. What are your thoughts about planting new churches? What thoughts does 1.4. of the report bring to mind?
7. What thoughts and comments do you have about the recommendations around Ministerial Training in 2.1?

8. What about Bi-Vocational Ministers?  
Are they a second-class minister? A compromise due to finances?
9. With regard to Interim Ministry, what are the skills and concepts that an Interim person should nurture in a congregation going through a ministerial vacancy?

### Further Questions for Presbytery to give feedback to Mission and Discipleship.

1. Does your group agree in general terms with the findings in 1.1-4 of the report?  
If “yes”, then please list the three thoughts from this section of the report that were most significant to your group.  
If “no”, then please suggest briefly where you think we missing the path.
2. As far as the recommendations go (2.1-5)  
Are these realistic?  
Are there any you disagree with?  
Is there anything we've missed?
3. The report is about changing mindsets and assumptions – its goal is to get people thinking and talking. What impact has this report had on your group?
4. Is there any feedback your committee would like to bring to the MaD Committee's attention?

Please email your responses to these last four questions to  
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