

# Think Training

Encouraging and promoting the training of God's people for ministry

Issue 6 Autumn 2007

**Welcome** to another Training Bulletin!

This issue is devoted to the question of God's leading and guiding of men into pastoral ministry, often referred to as 'The Call'. The language of 'The Call' and the ideas behind it are the subject of some debate and difference between us, and therefore probably some measure of confusion.

We do not expect to clear everything up in this one Bulletin! We have just three articles in this issue, and are conscious that we have only 'scratched the surface' of the subject, and will need to return to it in future Bulletins. But we do want to stimulate wholesome thought and encourage a fresh look at both 'The Call' and the question of how men can and should enter pastoral ministry and church leadership. It is an immensely practical and pressing issue, since we are all aware of many churches without leadership. And if we are serious about seeing existing churches grow and new churches planted, then we need to do much more than supply what is lacking today. We need to multiply leaders. But we need good leadership, well qualified Biblically to fulfil all the demands of such a great spiritual responsibility. And we need God-appointed leadership (see Acts 20:28). So how can this happen reliably but urgently?

Included in this issue are three quite different articles.

The first entitled 'Call Confusion', by **John Stevens** (City Evangelical Church, Birmingham) considers the language we use to describe our spiritual experience, including 'The Call'.

Then **Christopher Ash** (Director of the Cornhill Training Course) offers his own perspective, entitled 'Clarifying the Call'.

Finally we have a longer article from **Stuart Olyott** (based on his Paper at the Affinity Conference in 2006) about how a fictitious 'John Jones' from 'Ordinary Evangelical Church' might arrive as a pastor at 'Average Chapel'. (Stuart Olyott is Pastoral Director of the Evangelical Movement of Wales.)

We are grateful to all these men for the work they have done to help us think through this subject. Maybe this subject is more controversial than many, and I am sure not everyone will agree with what has been written. Perhaps you will want to point us to other material or other views or even write something yourself.

Responses are genuinely welcome, either to the article's author (email or website addresses are at the end of each article) or to me. Although there are many other important issues in Training, I am sure we will want to revisit this one from time to time!

Finally a word of gratitude to the members of the new FIEC Training Team, under whose auspices this Bulletin is published. Since the new Team was established earlier this year we have said goodbye to **John Gillespie**, whose wise contributions we shall miss greatly.

The present Team consists of **Paul Mallard (Chair), Martyn Hallett (Vice-Chair), Ray Evans, Marcus Honeysett, John Stevens and Richard Underwood.**

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# ‘Call Confusion’: Evaluating the Language We Use to Describe our Spiritual Experience

One of the greatest challenges facing independent churches is a shortage of potential pastors for the future. Recent work undertaken by Affinity has indicated that a major reason for this is a high degree of confusion on the part of those who might be gifted for pastoral leadership as to the nature of the “call” to ministry (see the ‘Generation Next’ survey at [www.generationnext.org.uk](http://www.generationnext.org.uk) ). It is well known that there is a division between conservative evangelicals as to the necessity of a particular experience of “calling” to ministry. At one end of the spectrum those who stand in the tradition of Lloyd-Jones suggest that a man *must* have some kind of mystical overwhelming experience of compulsion to be a preacher. At the other end are those who suggest that no such experience is required, but that men with appropriate gifts, character and desire, which have been tested and recognised by the wider church, should be encouraged to make a wisdom decision as to whether they should serve in pastoral ministry. Those at the extremes of this spectrum have a tendency to judge each other. Those demanding an overwhelming mystic experience may regard those who do not as unspiritual rationalists, and those who think it is a matter of pure wisdom may regard those who demand a mystical experience as imposing an extra-biblical requirement for ministry that leaves many capable men dithering on the sidelines because they are not convinced that they have been called by God.

## Polarisation?

The contention of this brief article is that this polarisation is unhelpful and is preventing the identification of pastors for the future. In seeking to mediate between these extremes we ought at least to recognise that we tend to describe our spiritual experiences in ways that accord with our own personalities, temperaments and cultural expectations. As such we should be cautious before we judge and condemn others merely for the language that they use to describe their experiences, and especially before we demand that people have a *particular* experience before they are considered suitable for pastoral ministry. As Tim Keller noted at the EMA this year, people of a Reformed background tend to experience “hunches” whereas those from a more charismatic background experience tend to receive “words.” The experiences of both may be essentially the same, but the way that the experience is articulated, labelled and understood is very different.

## An illustration

Another example might be the way in which people come to marry. Some speak of their decision to marry as a consequence of an experience that convinced them that their future spouse was “the one”. Others come to a

more gradual and carefully reasoned conclusion that they are compatible and well suited to marry, coupled with the readiness to make the requisite commitment to each other. Where Christians have such apparently divergent experiences there are two possibilities. Either the experiences are essentially different, but are both ways in which God works to bring about his sovereign purposes (namely the marriage of two specific individuals to each other), or the two experiences are essentially the same, but are articulated and explained in different ways. The important point is that whichever of these analyses is correct, there is no reason to judge those who describe their experiences differently, provided that the outcome is that the married couple are faithfully fulfilling their duty by loving and serving each other as mandated for Christian husbands and wives.

## A ‘straw man’?

The same might be true of our differing attitudes to the “call”. The antithesis between the different ends of the spectrum in contemporary evangelicalism is at least in part a ‘straw man’. I have never yet come across an individual who has gone into pastoral ministry simply on the basis of a cold and calculating rational decision to do so. As human beings we have not been made to reach decisions in this way, and the biblical concept of wisdom cannot be confined to a detached and unemotional reason. Wisdom requires the involvement of the whole person. Even where there is a culture in which the “call” is conceived as a wisdom decision to use the gifts God has given in full-time pastoral ministry, the individual invariably has some compelling personal sense that this is what he *ought* to be doing before God (1 Timothy 3:1), a conviction which has endured through a process of assessment, testing in ministry opportunity, and training. Is it not at least possible that, in Christian cultures that demand a more mystical experience, this same sense of personal conviction is interpreted as the “call”? And that in both cases we may gladly attribute this personal conviction to the gracious inward work of the Holy Spirit?

## Personal experience

The way in which we explain our subjective personal experiences to others is largely determined by our sub-culture and the terminology it has adopted to speak of our experiences. We name our experiences through the grid of authorised labels for them, available to us according to our sub-culture. A person in a culture in which a mystical experience is expected is therefore more likely to interpret their experience of personal conviction in this way. This does not automatically mean that it is a qualitatively different experience from that of the person who believes that, in the light of their gifts, character and personal ambition, they should serve in pastoral ministry. However even if these are qualitatively different experiences, we have no right to insist on a particular experience as a prerequisite to ministry, unless God himself mandates us to do so in his word.

### **Biblical grounds?**

In my opinion the Bible gives us little, if any, ground to *insist* on the requirement of a mystical “call” experience as a prerequisite for church leadership. This is not to say that God cannot work in this way, but rather that we should not demand that he does so before considering a person for pastoral ministry. It seems to me that the New Testament treats the office of elder (which is synonymous with that of the pastor-teacher: (see Acts 20:17 & 28 and 1 Peter 5:1-3) as essentially different from that of prophet or apostle. The elders of local churches were not appointed to office directly by revelation of God. They appear to have been appointed to office on the basis of their gifts, character, reputation, competence, strong desire and willingness to serve the church. Senior leaders in the wider church (sometimes the apostles, but also men like Titus and Timothy who were not themselves apostles) were given the responsibility of identifying and appointing suitable men to these roles. There is therefore no justification for applying the “call” accounts of the great Old Testament prophets, such as Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, or of their New Testament apostolic equivalents such as Paul, to that of gospel ministers in pastoral leadership. Nowhere in the New Testament are we told that elders are appointed to office because they have received a “call”, nor that there is to be any distinction between the “call” of elders and of a “pastor” since these are two terms for the same office.

### **Labelling experience**

This is not to say that it is unimportant how we label the experience of a conviction to serve in pastoral ministry, as the different approaches have a practical impact on the willingness of men to consider ministry as a potential option.

Thus, where the culture demands a mystical experience of “call”, men who feel some measure of personal conviction, desire or ambition to serve in pastoral ministry may fail to put themselves forward for assessment and consideration because they feel that they lack the degree of experience expected. Such a culture is also less likely to encourage potentially suitable men even to begin to consider the possibility of ministry, because the strong sense of “call” is demanded as a prerequisite of consideration. It also means that pastors are likely to be less proactive in approaching men in their congregations who might be suitably gifted to consider the possibility of full-time ministry, or to provide opportunities for men to test out their gifts in advance of an experience of a “call”. The inner personal conviction to serve in ministry often seems to be a consequence of exercising gifts within the church and receiving encouragement from the church.

On the other hand, where a church culture sees the call to ministry as merely a wisdom decision to use one’s gifts in pastoral leadership, there is a danger that men

will put themselves forward for pastoral ministry for reasons of mere personal ambition, especially where the church culture highly values the office of Pastor or Bible teacher, or out of a sense of guilt, believing that they could help to meet an evident need in the church. However these potential dangers can and should be minimised by the rigorous testing of the gifts, character, competency and desires of potential candidates to serve in full-time ministry.

### **Conclusion**

If we are to meet the urgent need to raise up the next generation of pastors to serve the church, we need to be actively identifying and encouraging suitably gifted men to consider ministry. I think that it is counterproductive to insist that any particular experience of “call” is a *necessity*, and we ought to be careful to make sure that we are not demanding more of suitably gifted and willing men than God himself does. We need to remember that Christ provides all the leaders that are necessary for his church (Ephesians 4:11-13) and that we bear the responsibility of identifying, encouraging, training, appointing and deploying those that he has given. Our confusion over the nature of the “call,” and the expectation that those who are set apart for full time pastoral leadership must have a particular experience, may be in danger of causing us to miss those whom Christ has given to us to build up the body.

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## **Clarifying the Call**

In summer 2005 a survey, conducted by *Generation Next*, of 400 men either in or considering word ministry showed significant confusion about what constituted a ‘call’. This is a practical and important question: how do I know that Christ has called me to “prayer and the ministry of the word”?

Rather than start with ourselves, let us begin with Jesus. Jesus has promised to build his church (Matthew 16:18). He has died for her and been raised. As the ascended conqueror he distributes his victory gifts to his people (Ephesians 4:7f), in order that his church shall be built up (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:5). Every gift is needed, and no Christian is to despise any gift (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). But ‘word’ gifts have a special place, because they equip the people of God for their ministries (Ephesians 4:11-15).

The most important principle to bear in mind is stewardship. When the Lord Jesus has given us a gift, we must use it to build his church (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:7). On the last day, the Lord Jesus will

ask us, “What use did you make of the gifts I gave you?” So the question is not, “What do I want to do?” but rather, “What am I *gifted* to do?” We often want to do what we ought not to do, and we shy away from doing what we ought to do.

There is little in the New Testament about the feelings or desires of the people set apart for word ministry. When Paul speaks of those who aspire to be pastors (1 Timothy 3:1) he does not make it clear whether the candidates coming forward in Ephesus were to be encouraged or discouraged in their desire. Probably a bit of both. Some want to do this from wrong motives, perhaps a love of power or prominence, or a love of money. Others don’t want to do it because it is hard. We cannot trust our desires.

Rather than asking what we want, we need to ask what gifts we have been given. So the question is not, ‘How do I discern whether I am called?’ but rather ‘How may I discern what gifts have I been given?’ The answer may be summed up in three statements.

## **A. Try it and others will tell you!**

All believers are called to ministry. We are to throw ourselves wholeheartedly into doing what needs to be done. I am not to expect some prior revelation of my gifts, like a Bank notification of a new PIN number, the envelope arriving secretly from heaven, so that I alone can scratch the paper to reveal my unique gift. Instead, I am to be an active servant.

And as I serve, so the fellowships in which I serve will see what I am gifted at and what I am no good at. The latter experience may be painful, but is usually a part of the process. I remember with some pain having to lead the singing at a school assembly unaccompanied (because the pianist was absent); it became rapidly evident this was not my gift! We do not want ‘prima donnas’ who will not volunteer to help, because ‘this is not my gift’. Rather we want servants who will have a go. So, if you are asked to help in some form of Christian service, say yes if you possibly can. Have a go. And as you do, your brothers and sisters will tell you what you are gifted at and what you are not. They will help us “think with sober judgement” about ourselves (Romans 12:3).

So if you have opportunities to teach the bible, to lead a bible study, to give a talk at a summer venture, preach in church, have a go. Ask a mature Christian to listen critically and to give you (in love!) some honest feedback. Not to crush you (if you did badly) or flatter you (if you did well), but to help you see whether you have in bud a gift for bible teaching.

Incidentally, let us beware of replacing ‘gifts’ with ‘strategy’ in our thinking. We love to plan our lives, to ask *and answer* the question, “Where will I be of most

use to Christ?” It is a fine question. But only the Lord knows the answer.

## **B. Church leaders will tell you**

Leaders will recognise our gifts better than we will. They watch our character, listen to our teaching, see how we relate to others and respond under pressure. This is why the responsibility for the leaders of the future lies with the leaders of the present. Leaders appointed elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). When Timothy was set apart it was because they recognised his gifting (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). And then Timothy in his turn is to look out for faithful people to whom he can entrust the message (2 Timothy 2:2).

As Christian leaders seek the next generation of ministers of the word, they will look for four qualities.

### **1. A Godly Character**

They will look first for men and women of godly character. “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. *Therefore* an overseer must be...” (1 Timothy 3:1ff). The logic of the ‘therefore’ is that because this is a noble task, godliness is vital. The ‘checklists’ in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are overwhelmingly moral. Others will judge this better than us. For if we think we are godly, it is a sure sign we are not. Often, their judgement will need to overcome our own reluctance (cf. James 3:1-12).

### **2. A Clear Gospel**

Allied with godly character they will look for a clear and tenacious grasp of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. We must have a clear grasp of this message. But it is not enough to understand it. To be a pastor, we must hold to it tenaciously, be willing not only to teach it positively but also to correct those who teach in error (Titus 1:9). We must be prepared to face opposition and suffer for the name of the Lord Jesus (2 Timothy 1:1-2:13).

### **3. The Ability to Teach**

Twice in the pastoral letters one quality is mentioned that stands out from the rest: the ability to teach (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:24). The other qualities listed ought to be true of every Christian. But not this one. A godly believer may not have this ability. And yet without this ability it is disastrous for someone to enter pastoral ministry. For this is the ministry of the word, and therefore suitable only for those who can understand and handle words.

### **4. A Love for People**

Lastly, they will look for a love for people. For teaching is more than explanation. No teacher will be heard unless he loves the people he teaches. Paul speaks of the ability to teach in the context of a teacher who is gentle when provoked, prayerful when opposed, and driven by a

longing to win his hearers back to God (2 Timothy 2:14-26). Without this love for people, the clearest and cleverest bible scholar in the world is not able to teach.

### C. Don't expect instant answers

We live in a very hurried culture and want the answer now. But gifts and character for Christian ministry are to be tested over time. A church leader who lays hands on someone in haste will often have to repent at leisure (1 Timothy 5:22).

One of the most encouraging developments in the UK in recent years has been the growth of 'testing paths' by which Christians can, as it were, dip their toes in the waters of word ministry so that together we may gradually discern whether or not this is their gift. I see this week by week in the Cornhill Training Course and 9:38 apprenticeship schemes also have this advantage. If you think Christ may have gifted you for this word ministry, pursue one of these 'toes in the water' options if you can.

And then, if leaders affirm your gifts and character as suitable for the ministry of the word, and you are willing to do it, go for it. You may not want to do it, as you might want to go on a Caribbean holiday; but you must be willing to do it (1 Peter 5:2).

### Conclusion: you are free to decide!

Finally, remember that the decision is yours before Christ. You must neither let yourself be pressured into pastoral ministry by pushy leaders nor dissuaded by worldly motives. Pray for purity of heart. Listen to wise leaders who know you. And then decide. It is before your own Master you stand or fall; and he is able to make you stand. The rest of us will not sit in judgement upon your decision. No principles in this article will make your decision for you. You decide; and as you decide, the Lord Jesus Christ is building his church. The glory will be his alone.

This article is an abridged version of Chapter 11 in the 9:38 volume *Workers for the Harvest Field*. **Christopher Ash** is Director of the Cornhill Training Course ([www.proctrust.org.uk](http://www.proctrust.org.uk)) and a member of the 9:38 Executive Committee ([www.ninethirtyeight.org](http://www.ninethirtyeight.org)).

## The Man and his Church

*In this article, Stuart Olyott traces the process by which a man in an independent evangelical church may in practice enter the pastoral ministry, from the perspective of the man himself and the church of which he is a member. His aim is to see how this process might be improved. The article has a clear focus on the role of the local church, but includes as a starting point – in section (a) – an equally clear statement of the place of a God-given conviction – an “inward call” – which must then be tested.*

*This is an abridged version of part of a paper given at an **Affinity** Conference in February 2006, entitled 'The Call'.*

### 'John Jones' of 'Ordinary Evangelical Church'

I am going to tell you the story of **John Jones** and **Ordinary Evangelical Church**. Or perhaps, rather, this church should be called Out-of-the-Ordinary Evangelical Church! Why? Because it is a thoroughly Evangelical, theologically literate church with a clear idea about what a call to the ministry is, how such 'called' men are discovered, and what a local church's responsibility is to them. How many of us in pastoral ministry today would have loved to have come from such a church!

#### (a) John Jones is assessed

Like every member of his church, John Jones knows that the Lord calls *men* to the ministry, and that 4 things are true of *every one* of them:

1. A desire born of right motives (1 Tim.3:1).
2. An exemplary Christian character (1 Tim.3:1-7).
3. Aptitude in teaching the Word of God (1 Tim.3:2b).
4. A door into ministry opened by God's providence.

As the *desire* for this work burns inside him, at first he is unsure whether his desire is to spend only some of his time, or all of it, on this work; but the desire gets stronger and will not go away. He prays about it, which makes the flame burn brighter still. It burns brightest of all when he listens to preaching.

True, a sense of defilement makes him wonder if such a great sinner as himself could ever engage in such holy work, but a sense of God's mercy conquers this, and the fire then burns brighter still.

Then, at last, John can say that he has an unmistakable, unshakeable conviction that the Lord wants him to serve Him in the pastoral ministry, and that he should spend the whole of his life, and all of his time, in this calling. He feels shut up to this. No other course of action seems open to him. He feels that he would incur guilt if he did not proceed to this work.

And – wonderfully - being in the church he is, John Jones knows what to do! He knows his call must be tested, and that this testing must not be by-passed. He knows that to proceed entirely on the basis of an inward call is very dangerous indeed – for him as an individual – and could be disastrous for the church of Christ. Besides, he reasons, when the going gets tough and the enemy of souls contests his call, he will need to know that that call was heard by other ears than his own. When disappointments and discouragements set in, he will need to be able to fall back on the *certain* knowledge that he is the Lord's servant, who has not thrust *himself* into this work.

So he asks to see his pastor and tells him all about it. The pastor warns him that both undue haste and undue slowness must be avoided, for the sake of the churches and of the individual concerned. He suggests that the first step should be that he meet up with *all* the elders.

This happens, and in a prayerful, spiritual but blunt manner, they put him through his paces! They examine his *desire*, his *character* and his *gifts*.

### 1. They talk to him about his desire

What are his motives? Is he moved by a desire to be noticed? Does he just like talking about theology? Or does he want to spend his life helping people, and the Christian ministry seems a good way of doing that? Is he attracted by the thought of countless hours studying the Word of God – or simply by the thought of a studious life? Or is there a love of power that drives him?

Does he understand exactly what he is desiring? – a life spent in prayer and the ministry of the Word; where he will never be a private person again; where he will be always looked up to as an example of life and belief – and where, therefore, a higher standard of piety and integrity will be expected of him? A life where the Lord will hold him accountable for the spiritual health of a congregation? Where he will make *any* sacrifice for the sake of the *sheep* – without so much as thought for himself – no, not ever!!

They examine him very closely, almost mercilessly, on these points – until they are satisfied he is properly motivated by a concern for God's glory, the good of His church, and the salvation of the lost – that he has set his heart on this.

### 2. They give him an assessment of his character.

The elders of his church are well able to do this, because they know the flock very well. They know John well, and his relationships with others, inside and outside the church. John has got to meet *all* the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5. Many are rejected at this point – because of a

weakness in marriage or a 'short fuse', poor commitment or poor devotional habits. It is our *duty* to keep such men out of ministry until all is well. They will be unable to evaluate themselves, because of the deceitfulness of the human heart.

Is he really a Christ-like man? In particular, does he have that wonderful marriage of holy compassion and bold moral courage that are found perfectly in the Lord he claims to serve – coupled with an undying servant spirit?

### 3. They give him an evaluation of his gifts

– aware that what they are looking for is *latent* gift, not fully-developed. But they can *easily* answer the question as to whether he has *aptitude* – because they do not believe the teaching gift is restricted to eldership, and because part of church life is a system to *discover* latent gifts. There are numerous opportunities in church life for these gifts to be tested (inter-active Bible study, a short word at a prayer meeting, children's addresses, young people's meetings, homes for elderly, leading various meetings, times of testimony). The church also has a programme of leadership training (a monthly class) for young men of the church, which John has been attending for some time now, and where they have seen him in action.

They know that aptitude to teach is not the same as knowledge. They *must* not let John proceed unless it is *obvious* to them that he has some ability to explain, illustrate and apply the Bible – some obvious power to gather and interest and hold people as he explains the Word of God.

Does he also have some latent leadership skills? – for example, can he analyse situations objectively? Is he a people person? Does he inspire confidence? Or is the truth, rather, that he just likes preaching, and doesn't really like getting too close to people at all (which would disqualify him).

### (b) John is recognised

Having met with the elders, more than once, John is told that *as far as they can judge humanly* his desire for ministry is well founded, and the Head of Church seems to be raising him up for pastoral ministry.

They agree to express this conviction to the church members next time they meet for business – for their prayers, and because it will soon be clear that John is being taken under the elders' wing in a special way, and they want to avoid misunderstanding. They agree to meet up with John again soon, to discuss the next steps.

Meanwhile, the elders are also spending time with another man in the church, George, whose life and gifting have drawn him to their attention. They want to ask him whether he has ever thought about the Lord's

work – perhaps he is too bashful to approach them or too modest to think *he* could be a future pastor, or has simply never been pushed to make this a matter of prayer. For these elders are good men, and know that there are as many Georges in our churches as there are Johns, and are anxious to help both, for God's call to men to give their lives in shepherding and teaching His people comes in a variety of ways. Their advice to George will be different from John's, but none the less significant in preparing him to serve the Lord.

### (c) John is encouraged

True to their word, the elders meet up with John again. They talk to him over a period of time about his personal walk with God - his prayer-life and study of the Word. They suggest helpful books on prayer and set him to adopt a systematic study of the Word within his reach which will move him to study the *whole* Bible. They set him a programme of reading, covering all the necessary disciplines at a basic level. They give him *more* opportunity to preach, teach him a method of self-evaluation, and provide feedback based on that method – for preaching 'at home' as well as 'away'.

John is not yet a church officer, so they invite him on an *occasional* basis to come to elders and deacons meetings – to listen in. The Pastor meets with him afterwards for explanations and feedback; he invites John to accompany him here and there to meetings and events which might help him for the future, and talks with him about them afterwards.

As time goes on John becomes aware that he needs *more* than what he is getting from the elders and local church. So the elders sit down with him to work out together the best way for him, *John*, to prepare for the future – because *all* are becoming increasingly conscious that the Lord is indeed propelling this man into pastoral ministry.

They talk honestly to John about his strengths and weaknesses. How can he maintain and develop his strengths? What can be done about his weaknesses?

Because of John's particular strengths and weaknesses, they come to the conclusion that although he does not need a degree, he should nevertheless go for residential study - a course of 2 years would be about right, as long as could select modules in a number of areas that they felt he particularly needed.

So the first contact with the seminary is not through John, but through his Pastor, explaining to the Principal what they feel about John's training needs. John then applies, and, after the appropriate interview, goes off to seminary.

How is he able to afford it? Because, early on, the elders had recommended that he put away money regularly, in case seminary one day proved to be the route. In addition, the church agrees to fund the rest (although John's friends & family help quite a bit).

### (d) John is supported through training

While John is in full-time training, the elders maintain close contact and ensure that others in the church do the same. And when John has settled in a church in his adopted town, the elders write to its leadership, putting them fully in the picture.

The highlight of each term, for John, is his Pastor's visit to the seminary. He would come in the morning, attend chapel, and then spend some time with the Principal, finding out through him how John was shaping up in life and gifting and study. He spends time with John, enquiring after his walk with God, and generally pastoring him.

Each vacation John meets with the elders to put them in the picture about his studies and progress – and increasingly to talk and pray with them about his future. He has opportunity to preach in his local church, with appropriate feedback.

This pattern continues through the two years of John's residential studies. And as he goes into his second year the realisation grows that, come June, John will be out of seminary and ready to consider a pastorate (either as the sole pastor, or as an associate or assistant).

Although nobody knows it yet, it is to be a sole pastorate - and that pastorate is to be at **Average Chapel** – which brings us to the final part of our story.

### (e) John is recognised and called

Because of their Pastor's preaching on the Parable of the Talents in Matt 25:14-30, the elders of the church do not believe that the call to the ministry is primarily something *geographical* – our prime responsibility is not to be in any particular *place*, but to exercise our Christ-given *talents*.

They know, however, that when John Jones finishes his residential study, he will have to minister *somewhere!* They do not think this should be at Ordinary Evangelical Church, because its pastoral needs were already being well met, and because John's particular talents, they felt, could be better used elsewhere.

Although they believe John should have the liberty to put out his own feelers, they do not think that it is *John's* responsibility to find a suitable sphere of ministry – nor

is it the *seminary's* (which exists only as a servant of the churches, but has no ecclesiastical authority in and of itself), although they feel that it should be free to pass on John's name to any churches that might make enquiries of the seminary.

And so it is that the elders draw up a profile of John, and send it to him for his approval (spiritual history, doctrinal position, strengths and weaknesses, his own burdens, eldership recommendation). When all are agreed, it is sent round the circles of churches fellowshiped with most easily. The Pastor also takes copies to fraternal and ministers' conferences, and makes everything about John known as widely as possible.

With such a clear eldership recommendation, it is not long before a number of churches make approaches, and John and his elders go through each one of them together. Most ask him to preach – some ask him to come and meet church officers, with 'no obligation'. One of these that takes the second form of action is a certain **Average Chapel**.

When John meets up with the officers of Average Chapel, they have a frank discussion and a sustained time of prayer, asking that the Lord's will might be clear. It is a good time of fellowship. They feel drawn to each other and, although not a perfect fit, he seems to be what they are looking for, and what the church needs – and John, in turn, is happy with the spiritual note, the doctrinal position and constitution, and terms of reference of ministry among them.

He gives a full report on his visit to his elders, who counsel him to treat seriously any further approach that Average Chapel might make.

The church officers are very soon in touch again and invite John to spend a Sunday with them, to get the feel of the fellowship and to meet up with the officers over tea, all of which John duly reports to his eldership.

Because the compatibility between John and Average Chapel is obvious (but not total, nonetheless), he is invited to go and preach there – the officers of Average Chapel at this point telling their members about John, and what they know from previous meetings.

Then follow a couple of Sundays, mid-week meetings, meetings with church officers, and a Sunday afternoon tea-cum-question-time with members.

Very quickly, the officers of Average Chapel tell their members that they are recommending that John Jones should be called to the pastorate. They answer questions on him at a church meeting and spell out terms of reference under which he would come. Then, later, the church gives its voice on the proposal, the requisite 2/3 majority is obtained and a call issued.

This too, like everything else, John shares with his own elders, before formally accepting the call.

*In the remainder of his paper, which perhaps we can come back to in the Bulletin on another occasion, Stuart develops the way in which 'John' is ordained and inducted, supported in his ministry, and then after a number of years is led to move on to another situation where he can serve the Lord even more effectively with his particular gifts and experience.*

#### **He then concludes:**

Why have I told you the story of John Jones, Ordinary Evangelical Church, and Average Chapel? Did it all seem a bit idealistic to you? Were you tempted (as I suggested) to call Ordinary Evangelical Church *Extraordinary* Evangelical Church? Or to call Average Chapel *Anything-but-Average* Chapel?

My question is simply this: Does it *have* to be like that? Is it *right* that the situation should remain like that? Shouldn't the ordinary Evangelical Church and the average chapel *really* be like those in our story?

Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things" (2 Tim.2:7).

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