

## Editorial

The *Journal of Contemporary Ministry* was created to fill a gap in the discussion of research on Christian ministry. But what is Christian ministry? One of the things we have learned by going down this road was the sheer breadth of expressions of Christian ministry. When I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, everyone knew what ministry looked like. The minister was a somewhat serious man (always a man) who had felt called by God to devote his life to parish work and gone to a residential theological college to be trained. He and his wife and children (unless he was a Roman Catholic priest) lived in a house owned by the local congregation that he served (called a rectory, vicarage, presbytery or manse) and he spent his time presiding over Christian rituals, visiting his parishioners, preaching to them, marrying them, baptizing their babies, sometimes fighting with them and eventually conducting their funerals. People were “hatched, matched and dispatched.” The recent TV series *Father Brown* represents this era well from a Catholic perspective. The parishioners, on the other hand, donated money to keep the local church going, restrained the excesses of the minister, kept him poor, maintained the parish house at a very basic level (if at all), maintained the church building (flower rosters were big if my memory is accurate!), took minimal part in the liturgy, grumbled about the minister and his wife, complained loudly when they weren’t visited enough, put up with preaching that was often not very inspiring and hoped to outlast him in any disputes that might arise because he would be moved on before too long. Ministers were often stretched to breaking point, particularly if they had to serve more than one congregation, and their wives felt misused and their kids often rebelled against the straitjacket imposed by congregational expectations.

This image of ministry has almost disappeared in Australia. Ministers may be male or female. Ministers’ wives or husbands have their own lives to lead and do not accept being unpaid assistants. Many ministers no longer live next to the church building but instead are living in their own homes paying off mortgages like everyone else. It is expected that “lay” people will share the work of the ministry and often there are multiple ministers in a congregation. The concept of the solo minister who slaved for long hours to maintain the parish has been replaced by a range of models: the minister as team leader, the minister as CEO, the minister as entertainer, the minister as prophet, the minister as inspirational leader, and so on. Ministry training has also changed. Live-in theological colleges are disappearing. The academic level of ministry training is increasing. But in the Pentecostal world, many ministers still have little or no formal training and often view such formal training with suspicion.

Ministry is becoming more complex as society itself is evolving. Local congregations are often aging but may be less homogeneous with multiple ethnicities and people with a range of life-styles, many of them quite different to the monochrome congregations of the 50s and 60s. There are single parents, divorcees, older single people and even gays to be catered to. Many people training for ministry have no intention of becoming traditional parish priests. They may become chaplains or counsellors in hospitals, schools or even sports teams. They may specialize in ministering to youth,

children, single adults, the poor or the elderly or become specialist music ministers. They may return to a “secular” job where their ministry consists largely of supporting and encouraging their peers. A few even serve God in politics. And lots of “lay” people see themselves as just as much in ministry as “ordained” people.

In other words, “contemporary ministry” may mean many different things and this is reflected in the articles we are publishing in this issue of the journal.

Last year, we began a custom of reprinting the **key note addresses** from the annual research conference held here in Melbourne. So we are pleased to present the two addresses by **Professor Amos Yong** (Fuller Theological Seminary, USA) from last year’s conference on “The Holy Spirit and a Post-Mission World.” Amos explores the New and Old Testament literature through a bifocal lens of pneumatology and missiology with some refreshing and stimulating outcomes. Amos’ arguments challenge some traditional ways of reading our sacred texts and some traditional ways of viewing ministry and mission. You will find these talks very interesting.

We always publish **four peer-reviewed articles** and the topics in this issue reflect something of the breadth that is Christian ministry today.

**Dr Philip Hughes**, a research fellow with Alphacrucis College based in Melbourne and the chief researcher for the Christian Research Association of Australia for many years, reports on some interesting research about how Christians help others compared to people of no or different faiths. If all Christians are in ministry, how active are they in terms of activity within and outside their local churches? While Christians clearly donate their time somewhat sacrificially to the church, their other helping involvement is not radically different to others in society. So where does that leave “the fruit of the Spirit”? How can it be measured and stimulated?

**Dr Nigel Pegram**, a lecturer at Alphacrucis College in Perth, investigates a key aspect of good pastoral ministry, Emotional Intelligence. Is this a character quality, maybe like the fruit of the Spirit, or a personality trait, or a skill that can be learned? How emotionally intelligent is the average Christian minister? The problem is that the research in this field is very thin and often not well focused. Nigel makes some good suggestions about improving this research so that ministers can have a clearer picture of their capabilities in this area and even improve them.

Earlier in this editorial, I mentioned changes in how ministers are trained. Over the past century we have seen significant changes in such training. In the Pentecostal sphere there has been an ongoing debate about how much training ministers need and what form it should take. **Daniel Aryeh**, a lecturer at Perez University College in Winneba, Ghana and Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana, where he is also a PhD candidate, discusses a particular set of issues that affect Pentecostalism in Africa, especially prophet-led movements that often train future prophetic leaders through a kind of apprenticeship. While some of the details are very specific to that region, the issues will be recognisable to anyone familiar with Pentecostalism and Daniel’s conclusions are worth pondering.

**Dr Shirley Baskett** was the first and only doctoral graduate from Harvest Bible College. Her DMin thesis was about “Pastoral Care of Same-Sex Attracted People in ‘Welcoming but not Affirming’ Churches.” Shirley draws on this research in her article, which considers the options for same-sex-attracted Christians attending churches that

welcome everyone but do not approve of active homosexual sex. Is it realistic to expect these Christians to change into something they're not and get married to someone of the opposite sex? Or is it fair to expect them to live in life-long celibacy? What kind of support should they expect from their local church? And what role is there for para-church groups led by former gays?

Another feature of this journal is a **pastoral reflection** with a less rigorous academic note. **Dr U-Wen Low** is a faculty member at Alphacrucis College in Melbourne, but was previously a youth pastor with CityLife Church, one of Melbourne's largest Pentecostal churches. In his reflection, he considers the features of the Millennial generation as a fellow Millennial and how contemporary churches can best reach and serve younger people.

We also regularly include an outstanding **student essay**. **Margaret Perry** is completing her MA and her essay was written for a subject in the Harvest Bible College MA degree called "Developing Leaders in a Cross-Cultural Context." In this essay, Marg investigates the ministry of the apostle Paul in comparison with two contemporary mission ministries with some interesting results.

**Something new in this issue:** We are inviting shorter scholarly contributions in the form of "**Research Notes**." These will not be fully developed and peer-reviewed articles but a more preliminary and brief report on current research related to contemporary ministry. Dr Philip Hughes has contributed a short article that supplements his article on the Fruit of the Spirit.

Finally, there are thirteen excellent **book reviews**, including one on Shane Clifton's *Crippled Grace*, and a list of the **most recent theses** in the field of contemporary ministry from all over the world.

Now discerning readers will have noticed the frequent mention of **Alphacrucis College** in the introductions to articles above. Alphacrucis College is the oldest and largest Pentecostal ministry training institution in Australia, having commenced in 1948. Alphacrucis is training Christians for a range of ministry possibilities, not just local church leadership but education, counselling and even business. The college has an audacious goal of becoming a global Christian university and now has campuses in every Australian state and New Zealand. On December 1 last year, Harvest Bible College (the initiating college for this journal) entered into a merger with Alphacrucis, creating an even larger force for ministry training with the goal of "educating Christians to change the world." So the *Journal of Contemporary Ministry* will now be under the oversight of Alphacrucis College. This exciting development will, we hope, increase the readership and influence of this journal.

In conclusion, I want to thank the other members of the editorial team for this journal: Kerrie Stevens, the journal manager and Dr Clayton Coombs, the book review editor. I also want to thank Dr Astrid Staley who has acted as proof-reader and editor until recently and Allanah Lauder who transcribed Prof Amos Yong's lectures from the recordings.

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