

Editorial

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This is a challenging time in the life of the Church. Ministering in the face of decline not only tests the strength of personal faith and vocation, but also the institutional Church's leadership and its understanding of its mission. There is a pressing need for the Church to act decisively in response to the speed of change in our culture and society. As we bemoan the quietening of the Church's voice and the relentless reviews of the deployment of its limited resources, what should shape our response? In this issue two themes emerge. First, three papers reflect on ministerial formation and ordained ministry. How do we prepare and form our future church leaders to respond to these challenges? What should be included in ministerial formation and what model of ordained ministry are we called to inhabit? The two papers remaining examine ministry to the poor and to children, both of which are essential in the work of growing the Kingdom and the *Missio Dei*.

Peter Hatton, in *Wisdom's Feast: Proverbs as a Resource for Theological Education*, describes how the current time has an 'atmosphere of supposed scarcity' and reflects on how 'perceptions of scarcity can be self-reinforcing'. He offers the book of Proverbs as a source of implied pedagogy and sustenance in this time of famine. What follows is a compelling exploration of a pedagogy rooted in relationship and modelled on *host: guest* rather than *instructor: passive recipient*. Drawing on the character of wisdom in Proverbs, he exhorts the acquisition of wisdom and character formation and places them firmly at the centre of enterprise of theological education.

Ministry and History: A survey of Over 300 Religious Practitioners by John Tomlinson questions the place of History in ministry. The survey probed ordained religious practitioners from five denominations about their interest in both general and religious history, and how it related to their professional lives. Part of the survey investigated History as part of ministerial training. Denominational history is taught in a considerable number of courses, but it appears that the relationship between History and Theology and how this impacts on understandings of the nature and form of ministry is woefully absent from these programmes. The perceived relevance of History to pastoral care, mission, education and worship was also examined, with History emerging as having most relevance for worship. The paper presents a convincing argument for the importance of History in Theological Education and in the ministry of the contemporary Church, not least because it

‘shows how the Church is capable of living faithfully in every human context: giving tangible hope for the present and the future’.

The theme of ordained ministry is central to Tom Stuckey’s paper *Repairing Altars of Sacrifice*. It is written in a Methodist context, but it resonates with the plight of all of our denominations. He suggests that the ordained should adopt the kenotic model of Paul as opposed to the power model of Elijah. The place of memory and acknowledging the wisdom of the past is explored as an important stimulus for ‘the prophetic imagination and release of possibility’ -- back to History! He commends the memories of our ‘grey-headed congregations’ as a ‘grass root source of prophetic revelation’ which also bear a witness to the sustaining power of faith. An important task in ministry is listening to these stories and keeping them alive.

Methodism is under scrutiny in Michael Hirst’s research on the location of ministry in Methodism with respect to the poverty. It examines the extent to which Methodism’s prioritising of the poor intersects with the geography of its local presence. Drawing on the cross-sectional and longitudinal data on the distribution of Methodist personnel and agencies, *Poverty, Place and Presence: Positioning Methodism in England, 2001 to 2011* finds no evidence that Methodist presence is more prominent in the most deprived communities. The paper goes on to question how the Methodist Church can redress this, in order to fulfil these values and expectations, and be faithful to a core element in its original mission.

The priority of effective ministry to society’s poorest with stretched resources often competes with ministering to children and young people who are representatives of the Church’s future. In ‘*Let the little children come to me; do not stop them*’, Trudie Morris develops the idea of co-curating the Eucharist with children. How might placing children at the centre of Eucharist worship be an expression of the Kingdom of God? In this revelatory and challenging paper which utilises the concept of co-curation and a pilgrim model for discipleship, she draws on rich resources to present a case for a movement from an adult centric view of the worshipping community to one in which children are welcomed as active participants in intergenerational liturgical worship.

The range of topics and research methods in this issue is encouraging. It highlights the aspirations of this journal to bring to the attention of a wide readership academic research that is relevant to those who minister in Jesus’s name, and who wish to enrich and develop the life of the Church.