

## BOOK REVIEW

by

**Tom Stuckey**

Local church life is undergoing radical change because of the shortage of ministers, lack of money and the number of buildings with tiny tired congregations. Increasingly churches are being grouped together and congregations are seeing less and less of the ordained. Can churches grow and flourish in such a changing landscape? The author believes they can.

Malcolm Grundy is a consultant, writer and trainer within the Church of England. In his book **Multi-Congregation Ministry; Theology and practice in a changing church** (Canterbury Press 2015, £18.04) he not only draws on his own wide experience of multi-parish ministry but looks to models of change management in the secular world of merging organisations.

The opening chapters describe the challenges which today's ministers and church leaders face; the resistance and bewilderment of congregations, the difficulties of communication, of exercising oversight, of congregational memory and identity. Although his main focus is the Church of England from chapter three onwards his perspective becomes more ecumenical. Chapters four and five are packed with theoretical and practical models useful to us Methodists seeing that we too are struggling with similar issues.

Chapter four, headed 'multi-congregational leadership', draws on the writings of management gurus like C.Handy, J.Adair, M.Belbin, S.Pickard, and theologians like A.Dulles, P.Rudge, S.Sykes, R.Greenwood, W.Carr, K Lamdin, S.Croft with a few Anglican bishops thrown in. Grundy shows how *episcopate* can be developed and exercised under the three categories of 'organic', 'directional' and 'authoritative' and explores corresponding images for churches and leadership models for the ordained.

Chapter five titled 'watching over with integrity' is similarly illuminating while his brilliant section on the 'default face of oversight' should be compulsory reading for every Methodist minister. He quotes Michael Adie, a retired diocesan bishop who says 'that it is only in retirement that we are able to observe the need for cohesiveness in reflection on ministry'. As a retired person myself I totally agree with this. Adie laments that ministers who are actually

doing the job now often fail ‘to keep the dots joined up’ because of the pressures they are under.

Grundy says ‘The sense of isolation, the temptation to self-aggrandizement, the gradual reliance of solutions which have worked in previous posts, the reluctance to appoint creative and challenging staff’ become the default positions in the life of a busy minister.

My one complaint about the book is his failure to draw on the insights of Methodism. Our ecclesiology already has an understanding of *episcopate* which he seems to be searching after. I therefore wish Grundy had consulted a few more Methodists, nevertheless I do commend this book because it contains important lessons for us. I must add however that I am not convinced that ‘multi-congregation ministry’ is necessarily the answer for every situation. God’s Spirit has a habit of surfacing and surprising us not only in the creation of the new but in the restoration and regeneration of the old.

Grundy concludes that the generations-old culture of individualism which has pervaded clerical life is coming to an end. Local congregations and clergy are having to move on from their previous individual local identity to new understandings of shared belonging and reciprocal caring. When multi-congregational ministries work well the author believes that they can become real ‘landscapes of transcendent culture’.

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(562 words)