

Colin Hunter

This paper is a response to, or more accurately a continuation of, Vol. 18 No. 2 of Ministry Society and Theology in which issues of power and trust were addressed, particularly as those issues related to clergy malfeasance. It traces the development over the last decade of concerns about, and responses to, professional development and professional standards for pastoral leaders within the Baptist Union of Victoria (BUV). The BUV uses the rubric of 'pastoral leader' rather than 'minister' in its handbook in recognition of the changes in congregational leadership that have occurred in that time span. Many congregations now include not only ordained clergy in their list of pastoral leaders, but youth pastors and leaders, childrens' pastors and workers, community workers and counsellors. The official lists also include health and welfare chaplains, school chaplains and chaplains in the defence forces whose vocational association is outside of a local congregation. So the structures of professional standards and professional development within the BUV must encompass ordained and non-ordained, part time and full time, as well as pastoral leaders with varying levels of theological education and ministry formation.

Background

I describe professional standards and professional development as one partner in the 'odd couple' in Baptist ecclesiology. The other partner is the historical commitment of Baptists to a congregational form of church polity based on the principles of the priesthood of all believers and freedom of individual conscience. The autonomy of the local church to appoint its own pastoral leaders is intrinsic to this understanding of how the church should function, which means that local congregations are not obliged to appoint pastoral leaders formed and ordained through the denominational theological college. In its most unfortunate expressions this has bred a culture of individualism, isolationism and anti-intellectualism which has been resistant to the imposition of creeds, codes or standards by the association of churches. Nevertheless from the early days of the Baptist movement in the 16th Century there has been a desire to associate with churches holding similar theological positions in a manner that honours the independence of the local church in matters of faith and governance. Something of the struggle between autonomy and association is evident in an agreement between Regular and Separate Baptist churches in the USA¹ in the late 18th Century:

To prevent the confession of faith usurping a tyrannical power over the conscience of any, we do not mean that every person is bound to the strict observance of every thing contained; yet that it holds forth the essential truths of the gospel and that the doctrine of salvation by Christ and free

¹ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987). p. 233.

unmerited grace alone, ought to be believed by every Christian and maintained by every minister of the gospel.

One might have expected the introduction of a centralised system of accountability that requires pastors to be reaccredited, and may require signed compliance with a code of ethics, would meet with some resistance in a Baptist context, yet this has not generally been the case in Victoria. Both the professional development process and Code of Ethics have been introduced and developed with widespread consultations with pastoral leaders and congregational members. Many lay professionals have readily recognised the merit of both processes because they have been subject to similar regulation in their own professional disciplines. This may partially explain the ready acceptance of what might otherwise have been interpreted as an attempt to limit the autonomy of the local church. Pastors are also aware that there are functions that take place at the denominational level that cannot be undertaken by the local church, and are therefore legitimately subject to some form of centralised regulation, e.g.:

1. ordination, which is a function of the BUV (unlike the practice in the UK where pastors are ordained in and by the local church with representation from the Baptist Union of Great Britain).
2. licencing marriage celebrants.
3. insurance cover for liability in the event that a complaint against a pastor involves a financial settlement in favour of the complainant.
4. commendation to the union of churches of ordained and non-ordained pastors who have participated in the PDP/professional standards processes.

2 and 3 come with particular conditions determined by the regulatory body or provider (e.g one of the major reforms to the Marriage Celebrants Program is a requirement that all marriage celebrants registered by the Commonwealth undertake a minimum of five hours of ongoing professional development each year)².

So the introduction of two initiatives relating to the professionalism of ministry has occurred at a time when the social and political climate calls for greater accountability and compliance with standards and codes of practice. This might have been interpreted as the church compromising its historic stance on the separation of church and state (another strongly held Baptist distinctive) were it not for the circumstances that I shall describe that led to the introduction of both processes.

Professional Development

In 1992 the then General Superintendent of the BUV, Rev John Simpson, wrote:

We have a developing crisis within the ranks of our ministerial leadership. This is not to suggest that pastors are alone in causing the difficulties. In many situations they are caught in

² Cited on the *Marriage Celebrants* website:
<http://www.ag.gov.au/agd/WWW/familylawHome.nsf/Page/RWPE87B2DFBE5F9E889CA256DEA000D47A6>

complex circumstances often beyond their control. In others they may unwittingly or otherwise exacerbate matters. The problems which are occurring are also highlighting the urgent need for us as a denomination to take a variety of initiatives to address the issues³

Simpson was writing from his observation of pastoral leaders within the BUV:

- whose ministries terminated unhappily.
- who were unable to receive a call to another church.
- who did not participate in denominational or ecumenical networks.
- who experienced relationship difficulties with their partners.

Simpson's concerns led to the establishment of a Ministry Review Task Force (MRTF) in 1996. The task force met for four years and initiated questionnaires, facilitated focus groups, researched ministry formation practices and produced a report with recommendations for ministerial formation and continuing education in ministry which was adopted by the BUV Assembly in 2000⁴. The brief of the MRTF was to evaluate the pastoral selection, formation and placement processes, to investigate ways of increasing ministerial accountability and ways of maintaining stronger links with non-ordained pastors, and to suggest ways of caring for pastors in pain. A major outcome of the MRTF was the establishment of a five-yearly process of reaccreditation for all church leaders who were identified in the BUV Year Book as 'Ordained and Accredited' or 'Recognised Pastoral Leaders'⁵. This process has come to be known as the 'PDP⁶ Process' and requires accredited pastors to attend a professional development seminar, complete a professional development plan and a personal development plan, and enlist a 'PDP companion' to whom the pastor makes her/himself accountable for compliance with the goals established in their PDP. The process is described in more detail below.

I was appointed part time coordinator of the PDP process in 2000 to develop guidelines⁷ and oversee the management of the seminars and reaccreditations. Administrative assistance was provided by the BUV to maintain a data base of pastoral leaders, communicate with them at various stages in the process, and retain secure and confidential records. From the outset my intention was to develop a process that would provide pastoral support for people in ministry, encourage their professional growth through continuing education, and promote healthy practices in self care and spiritual care. The issue of accountability was addressed in two ways; I would review every PDP prior to the pastor's reaccreditation, and each person was required to have a PDP companion who would meet with them three or four times per year to review their PDP.

³ John Simpson, "Ministry Perspective #2," (Melbourne: Baptist Union of Victoria, 1992).

⁴ Geoffrey Pound, "Ministry Review Task Force Report," (Melbourne: The Baptist Union of Victoria, 2000).

⁵ Because of the congregational form of church government in which local congregations are autonomous in the selection of their pastoral leaders, not all pastors in the BUV are ordained, nor have all been through the standard process of formation and theological education.

⁶ An acronym for 'Personal Development Plan' later expanded to include 'Professional Development Plan'.

⁷ Colin Hunter, "Personal Development Plan Guidelines," (Melbourne: Baptist Union of Victoria, 2004).

It was expected that, from receipt of the letter of invitation to reaccreditation at an Assembly, the process would take several months to complete and so a period of twelve months was determined as the 'period of grace'. If, after a year had passed and there was no indication that a pastor intended to comply with the process (and there were no extenuating circumstances), her/his name could be transferred to the 'Unofficial' list in the BUV Year Book. The implications of such a step for practical issues such as marriage licences and insurance cover are yet to be determined.

Under the present arrangements a pastoral leader (and this rubric can cover health and welfare chaplains, school chaplains, defence force chaplains, youth pastors, children's pastors and other categories recognised by the BUV) would typically follow these steps to reaccreditation:

- Receive the letter of invitation and the accompanying guidelines.
- Partially develop the personal and professional aspects of the PDP⁸ in conversation with partner, mentor, supervisor and/or spiritual director.
- Attend a PDP seminar.
- Identify and enlist a PDP companion (a person of their choice to whom they will be accountable for compliance with the PDP).
- Refine the PDP and submit a copy signed by her/himself and the PDP companion to the co-ordinator.
- Attend an Assembly to be recognised and reaccredited.

In 2003 I conducted a review of the PDP process by questionnaire. 70% of those who had completed the process responded. The responses to the process were overwhelmingly positive with 97% of the respondents indicating that the process had been helpful or very helpful. 66% indicated it had helped them achieve greater balance between the personal and professional spheres of life, and the same percentage indicated it had helped them improve their performance in their vocation. 83% indicated that the PDP companion was crucial to maximising the benefit of the process. Anecdotally it seems to have contributed to a changing culture of ministry within the denomination, in that many more pastoral leaders expect to be involved in supervision, mentoring or spiritual direction than would formerly have been the case. Many more are committed to protecting family time, engaging in quiet days and spiritual retreats than would have been the case a generation ago (my perceptions are supported by comments from pastors approaching retirement).

The PDP process is a work-in-progress. It has been critiqued as a minimalist response to the need for professional development and accountability (e.g. how can one plan five years ahead when even the present seems overwhelming?) The effectiveness of the process depends to a large degree on the commitment and application of the pastoral leader and the support and encouragement s/he receives from the local

⁸ More recently the PDP forms have been separated into 'Personal Development Plan' and 'Professional Development Plan' in response to legitimate concerns that the BUV has no right to enquire into pastors' personal matters. Only the 'Professional Development Plan' is returned to the BUV, the Personal Development Plan is for the benefit of the pastor and shared only with the PDP companion.

congregation. Another legitimate criticism is that it focuses on planning rather than compliance, however the intention has been from the beginning that, following the first five-year cycle, the process would include a review of the previous PDP period and a declaration of compliance with its intent, as well as planning for the future.

Professional Standards

During Simpson's superintendency, details emerged about instances of the sexual abuse of women and children by a small number of high profile Baptist pastors (some deceased) and this added a new dimension to the concerns raised in Ministry Perspective #2. It is fair to say that the revelations shocked the denomination and its pastoral leaders and led to close attention being paid to the issues of professional ethics and professional standards. The focus of the PDP process had been on the wellbeing of pastors and on healthy ministry practices; the professional standards focus was now on the protection of individuals and churches from misconduct by pastors and the establishment of procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse.

The response of the Director of Ministries (formerly the General Superintendent) in 2004, Rev Alan Marr, was to establish a Professional Standards Group (PSG) to deal with specific allegations of abuse, including sexual and other forms of abuse, and to develop policies and processes for educating pastoral leaders and congregations in professional standards and boundaries and determining appropriate disciplinary measures in substantiated instances of abuse. This initiative was prompted by the inordinate amount of time and emotional energy Marr was spending on complaints against pastoral leaders.

The PSG would provide oversight of all processes relating to:

- complaints of misconduct against pastoral leaders.
- educating pastoral leaders and congregations about professional standards.

The early focus of the PSG was towards building a knowledge base from which sound policy decisions could be made. Some of the group attended the 'Sexual Misconduct in the Church' conference in Canberra in March 2004 attended by representatives of Christian denominations including Greek Orthodox, Society of Friends, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Uniting Church in Australia and Churches of Christ. Through the conference and subsequent conversations with church leaders, the PSG was able to draw on the experience of other denominations, in particular the Uniting Church in Australia, the Churches of Christ and the Anglican Church.

Since its inception the PSG has:

- received complaints.
- appointed and arranged education for members of panels to deal with specific complaints.
- developed procedures for the panels to ensure that complainants, respondents and congregations receive justice and are pastorally supported⁹.

⁹ "Sexual Misconduct by Pastors: Complaint Procedures," (Melbourne: Baptist Union of Victoria, 2003).

- consulted with the BUV legal advisers to ensure that the processes are sound according to law.
- arranged for a group with theological and legal expertise to develop a draft Code of Ethics.

At the time of writing, the draft code was being workshopped with a number of regional focus groups prior to its adoption at Assembly.

Whilst all of the above may seem a somewhat clinical response designed as much to protect the institution and minimise liability as to deliver justice to complainants and respondents, no one should doubt the emotional cost to every person connected to each allegation of abuse; to the complainant, the respondent, their families and friends, to their colleagues, denominational officials and to the members of the PSG and the panels. It would be difficult to overestimate the levels of hurt to individuals and congregations through broken relationships and trust that has resulted from misconduct by pastoral leaders and from mischievous allegations, thankfully a rare occurrence.

So what images of God and what understandings of humankind underpin this approach to professional standards? The first that comes to mind is the concept of covenant, e.g. the covenant relationship between God and Israel expressed in terms of 'statutes and ordinances': He declared to you his covenant, which he charged you to observe, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them on two stone tablets. And the LORD charged me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy (Deut. 4:13,14). Covenant language is also reflected in the institution of the eucharist (Luke 22:20) and in the farewell discourse in John's gospel: If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you (John 15:10, 12).

The implication of covenant is, 'If you then I ...', i.e. obligations and privileges intersect for the mutual benefit of the parties to the covenant. These obligations and privileges express the outworking of a relationship determined by God's commitment to the people and God's call to a similar commitment by the people. Even when discipline is seen to be necessary, this is a manifestation of the continuing relationship. Covenant thus implies that there are transcendent values which define humankind (e.g. the prohibitions against murder and covetousness) gathered up under the umbrella commandments to love God and neighbour. However the values need to be redefined in each generation and context; e.g. 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous' ... Matt. 5: 43-45. A code of ethics might well be seen as the covenant document which provides a framework for a relationship between a pastoral leader and a faith community for this time and this milieu, a code that must nevertheless function in a climate of trust and integrity.

Jeremiah and Paul recognised the potential for a covenant code to become a new legalism which could kill the spirit of a relationship (Jer. 31: 31-33 and 2 Cor. 3:5-7). An institutionalised code or requirement for compliance must be implemented in a manner that is perfectly clear in its intent, but is also experienced by the covenant parties as grace and gospel. In the best of all worlds none of this would be necessary and the promise of the Lord that 'I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts' (Jer. 31:33) would be sufficient to regulate the relationships between the community and its pastoral leaders. History and contemporary experience indicate that the eschaton has not yet arrived and a written code is still a necessity. The 'odd couple' of professionalism and the priesthood of all believers point to both the brokenness of the human condition and the possibility that faith communities can respond creatively to the imperative to rediscover and redefine their relationships in an ever changing world.

Code of Ethics

A question that needs to be addressed is whether the approaches being taken by the BUV to address instances of misconduct are appropriate, adequate and likely to achieve the desired outcomes of creating a church culture that is safe for all. There is a prevailing attitude in the literature that abuse, and particularly sexual abuse, is more about power than about sexuality¹⁰. Some would argue that it is principally about power¹¹ and patriarchy¹², although Marie Fortune and Stanley Grenz make distinctions between three types of abusers¹³, each driven by different motivations:

1. predators, who are serial abusers and are 'manipulative, coercing and controlling'.
2. wanderers, who are not coercive, but have 'difficulty maintaining boundaries in relationships and attempt to meet private needs in public arenas'.
3. lovers, who develop romantic infatuations towards a parishioner without having the need either to control or fulfil unmet needs.

In each instance, however, power is abused whether or not the abuser recognises the fact, and healing can only begin when the abused person has their experience validated by the institution (and preferably the abuser) as abuse. It is not uncommon for the abuser to fail to recognise that the relationship was not equal and that s/he had abused, albeit unwittingly, the power inherent in the pastoral position.

The Code of Ethics is the primary preventive measure proposed by the PSG. Codes of ethics do not themselves prevent abuses of power and position; the Whethams point out, rightly in my opinion, the fallacy that

¹⁰ Paul & Libby Whetham, *Hard to Be Holy: Unravelling the Roles and Relationships of Church Leaders* (Adelaide: Open Book Publishers, 2000). p. 48

¹¹ Muriel Porter, *Sex, Power and the Clergy* (South Yarra: Hardie Grant Books, 2003). Porter argues, 'All sexual abuse is primarily about power.' (p.113)

¹² Marie M Fortune and James N. Poling, *Sexual Abuse by Clergy: A Crisis for the Church* (Decatur: Journal of Pastoral Care Publications Inc, 1994). p. 59.

¹³ Cited in Joe E Trull and James E Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004). pp. 167f.

'good ethics is just a matter of enforcing adequate rules'¹⁴. Rather it is about the development of qualities of character alert to inappropriate and potentially destructive behaviours. Nevertheless a professional code can provide a description of acceptable standards of behaviour that are agreed and accepted by one's peers in ministry and approved by the denomination.¹⁵ In the grey areas of pastoral relationships, particularly in relation to finances, sexuality and relationships with colleagues, a code can clarify what is meant by 'appropriate' behaviour¹⁶. The Draft Code of Ethics is in two parts; the code which contains brief statements of ethical requirements, and a companion which expands on these statements and explains the intent in greater detail. For example, part of the section of the draft code dealing with finances reads¹⁷:

9. Pastoral Leaders must maintain integrity and exercise faithful stewardship in managing finances.

Pastoral Leaders:

9.3 should not charge church members for pastoral services.

The code companion sub clause reads¹⁸:

9.3.1 Pastoral Leaders must obtain the support of the church body employing them before accepting remuneration beyond that agreed in their Statement of Understanding.

9.3.2 Where Pastoral Leaders receive fees or honoraria for ministry activities conducted within the usual bounds of their work, these should be passed on to the Church.

9.3.3 Pastoral Leaders should not normally accept fees or honoraria for weddings and funerals from church members.

This interpretation of the code has stimulated vigorous discussion and varieties of opinion in workshops in which the draft code has been scrutinised by pastors and 'road tested' using a variety of case studies. Some pastoral leaders, especially those in part time appointments, rely on fees from weddings and funerals to supplement their income and this indicates the difficulty of developing a 'one size fits all' ethical standard. The code response to this dilemma is to have three categories:

1. mandatory (must) clauses which are incumbent on all pastoral leaders (e.g. 4. Pastoral Leaders must refrain from any form of conduct that exploits another for their own advantage or the advantage of a third person). These clauses might be said to 'define the moral necessities' of ministry¹⁹.

¹⁴ Whetham, *Hard to Be Holy*. p. 53.

¹⁵ See Trull and Carter, *Ministerial Ethics*. 'The Purposes of a Ministerial Code'. pp. 195ff.

¹⁶ Garth Blake, "Faithfulness in Service: The Development of a National Code of Conduct of the Anglican Church of Australia," *Ministry Society and Theology* 18, no. 2 (2004). According to Blake, 'There was no alternative model of which we were aware that would enable a clear expression of appropriate standards for ordained and lay leaders in the church'. This would mirror the experience of the PSG.

¹⁷ Marita Munro (Ed.), "Code of Ethics and Companion of Ethics," (Melbourne: Baptist Union of Victoria, 2004). p. 3.

¹⁸ Munro, "Code of Ethics", p. 7.

¹⁹ Trull and Carter, *Ministerial Ethics*. p. 197.

2. advisable (should) clauses which are strongly encouraged (e.g. 6.1 Pastoral Leaders should maintain professional standards of knowledge and skill in areas of ministry relevant to their context.)
3. aspirational (desirable) clauses which would be a hoped for outcome but which may not be achievable in all circumstances (e.g. 7.3.1 It is desirable for Pastoral Leaders to establish viable work patterns that include weekly time (Sabbath) away from pastoral responsibilities and regular scheduled holiday breaks and/or annual leave.)

A few pastoral leaders have asserted that the introduction of a code could become a new legalism. The fear is that this could lead to a lessening of trust, rather than an increase of trust, in pastoral leaders (the implication being that they need a code of ethics because they can't be trusted). In response I would suggest that a code of ethics indicates the denomination's acknowledgement that pastoral malfeasance has occurred in the past and can occur in the future. A code of ethics from this viewpoint provides some definition for pastors and congregations about what is meant by 'appropriate' behaviour.

Indeed there have been previous attempts to produce a code of ethics by the BUV. In 1982 the then General Superintendent, Rev Tony Cupit, produced a booklet²⁰ which was in essence a code of ethics published as 'a guide to the professional standards and ethics of the Baptist minister today'. The booklet was introduced without the broad consultation that has occurred with the current draft code and therefore had less impact on pastors and congregations than is likely when the new code is introduced. In 2003 Rev Dr Rowland Croucher was commissioned by the BUV to develop a draft code²¹ and this provided one of the source documents for the current proposed code.

Clearly the Code of Ethics and the professional development process within the BUV are works in progress. One of the critical issues in this developing process, as an expression of Baptist and indeed Christian community, is whether the processes provide not only the prevention of improper behaviour and abuses of the kind already experienced, but also for the restoration of relationships and the life of the community. If these processes are indeed an outworking of a covenant community, then it is essential that we not only seek to prevent abuse and address it openly and firmly when it occurs. We must also avoid a new legalism and the kinds of consequences that exclude some people without opportunity for restoration (this concern applies to both victims and perpetrators). Victims must receive justice and the genuine acknowledgement of what has occurred. Perpetrators must be offered a course of discipline and education, the intention of which expresses a continuing relationship rather than exclusion, and therefore the potential for restoration within the community. If these at times seem mutually exclusive, even naïve, objectives, this is simply a reflection of the complexity of human

²⁰ Tony Cupit, *Above Reproach, the Ministerial Vocation: A Guide to the Professional Standards and Ethics of the Baptist Minister Today* (Hawthorn: Baptist Union of Victoria, 1982).

²¹ Rowland Croucher, "Professional Standards and Code of Ethics for Pastors," (Melbourne: Baptist Union of Victoria, 2004).

relationships and the difficulty of achieving true Christian community in a broken world.

Conclusion

The Baptist Union of Victoria has been confronted with the need to wrestle with the phenomena of clergy burnout and malfeasance, phenomena which some researchers consider to be related, at least in some instances. The responses of professional development and professional standards emerged independently, and yet they may well constitute a unified approach to the wellbeing of pastoral leaders and faith communities within the BUV. The 'odd couple' may become the means of new life for our churches and their pastoral leaders. May it be so.

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