

City Boy – Thoughts of a student, trainee, city boy doing part-time, lay ministry in a rural parish



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As you read this you need to know that I have been doing this ministry for too short a time to really know whether or not what I am doing is effective. However, the ministry model I am seeking to employ is as old as the very hills that I am working before, well nearly.

Being limited to half-time by my Theological studies I have had to determine from the start to do the bare essentials. These have been prayer, preaching and people. I have been greatly helped by being given oversight of churches that have historically had to fend for themselves through LSM (Local Shared Ministry). The parishioners organize the service, set things up, ring round for helpers and do a fair bit of pastoral care. This has not stopped nor have I discouraged it.

My timetable is:

Sunday morning - Church - and all that involves
Wednesday - All day - visiting people,
Late afternoon - Bible study,
Evening - visiting/meetings
Monday - Friday - 2+ hours a day sermon preparation and prayer

My strategy has been simple, most things about me are! I visit every regular attender of church as a priority, first the vestry, then the rest. Then those who have visited the church irregularly. As I visit I ask if there are others that would appreciate a visit. I also just knock on the doors of the next farm on the road or the next house on the street, local schools (usually with cake!) and local shops.

I ask out about their history, family (both seem to have a major impact on their vocation) and their experience of church. I talk about my own history and family, they need to know me as much as I them. I also try to talk about Jesus rather than church, ask what they think of him and whether we as a church are effective.

I have found the churches keen to engage with the next generation or two (they are often their children/grandchildren). Rural folk are often warm. Even though the church has aged the warmth of welcome and over generous morning teas puts guests of all ages at ease.

My sermons I keep to 15 minutes (my previous ministry as a children's and youth worker is

invaluable here). I seek to teach faithfully, succinctly and passionately about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from the text of the subscribed lectionary passage. I have found you can still do short systematic series through Bible books – the Gospel of Mark this year. My hope is that all will come to recognize the authority of scripture and how it leads us to salvation in Christ and that through this we will learn to love God and our neighbor.

Bible study has been extraordinary. The 5-10 people that attend show great enthusiasm as they wrestle with the context bringing clarity to the Bible's teaching. They marvel at the way it points to Jesus and the depth of love that we see in him for us even as we come to understand the depth of our own failure before him. I hope to start more studies and train leaders next.

I try and pray each week for every individual, I pray for revival in the communities we engage with and that people will hunger to grow in their knowledge and love of Christ. I also pray wholeheartedly for myself – it would be very easy to ride the present wave of enthusiasm. I am very thankful to God for the way he's equipped me for this role. I am also mindful of the damage I could cause. These people show a lot of trust in me as I preach, listen, talk and pray with them. Please pray that I would always direct their trust to Christ and away from me. My own personal godliness is key and as I visit, sit on tractors, move irrigators and stake out fences I know I need to do that in a way that commends Christ too.

I have heaps to learn as I come to understand these wonderful folk better. My love and anxiety for them grows each week. Many have preconceived ideas about church. I need to encourage them in their faith, hope and love so that this alone would motivate their good works. I would appreciate your prayers in this too.