



A Model for Ministry Apprenticeships in GPCNZ

Background

1. In recent years local churches and denominations have attempted to find ways of better identifying, encouraging, preparing and testing people for gospel ministry. Historical approaches have tended to be institutionalized, non-relational, and have failed to take a whole-of-life approach. Potential gospel workers have often felt confronted with a vast gulf between their emerging desire to devote their lives to gospel service and the processes (machinery) by which they do so within a church or denomination.
2. A successful approach to overcoming this problem has emerged based on a ministry apprenticeship concept. This entails a prospective gospel worker being associated with an experienced gospel minister in a structured programme integrating spiritual development, ministry experience and biblical teaching for a period time. In the course of this “apprenticeship” both the apprentice and the experienced practitioner, along with the local church oversight body, are better able to assess the suitability of a person for ministry and, if appropriate, facilitate progress toward more specialized training or ministry involvement.
3. This paper proposes a ministry apprenticeship model for GPCNZ churches consistent with its pastoral and governmental structures.

The Concept

1. The ministry apprenticeship scheme is specifically focused on identifying, encouraging, and providing initial training for people called to gospel service. It aims to provide a framework within which people considering a future in gospel service might gain exposure to its practice, disciplines and requirements within a local church setting, and in the process, test their suitability for such a form of Christian service. It is based on the person(s) concerned being associated with an existing gospel worker within the church in a structured programme of personal development, theological training, and ministry activity.
2. The terms “gospel service” and “gospel worker” are used to refer to a broad range of gospel-related ministries and roles. The ministry apprentice scheme contemplates people engaged in such activities as ministries of evangelism among children, youth or university students, school, hospital or prison chaplaincy, regular pastoral ministry, short- and long-term missionary service, or involvement in other agencies where the central goal is to proclaim Christ and see people grow to maturity in him. As such, “gospel service” is an activity open to both men and women.
3. The “apprenticeship” idea is based on the concept of prospective gospel workers (apprentices) working alongside experienced practitioners (pastors, mentors, coaches etc.) who not only share their knowledge and skills, but also their lives and ministries. It mirrors the kind of relationship evident between Moses and Joshua (Ex. 24:13; 33:11; Num. 11:28), Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 19:21), Jesus and his disciples (Mk 3:13-15), and Paul and his co-workers, particularly Timothy (Acts 16:3; Phil. 2:22; 2 Tim. 3:10). In each case, prospective gospel workers/leaders were associated closely with mature practitioners, sharing with them in the various experiences of life and ministry, and in the process, being equipped and proving their suitability for ministry themselves.
4. The goal of such apprenticeships is to facilitate “the passing on of the baton” of gospel service to another generation of proven men and women. Paul’s second letter to Timothy

highlights the need not only to “follow” and “guard” the “pattern of sound words” received from Jesus and the apostles – the “good deposit” given into our care – but also and to “entrust it to other faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 1:13, 14; 2:2). Apprenticeships are a means of identifying such faithful custodians and future teachers of the gospel through a process of practical training and “on-the-job” testing. In doing so, they also provide a “stepping stone” to more formalized and/or specialized training.

5. Apprenticeships require a substantial time commitment – generally 1-2 years – to learning, growing and serving alongside an experienced gospel worker. In some cases this will be a full-time engagement, but more commonly, part-time. Apprentices may choose to support themselves through part-time employment, or may be supported by their local churches or by other means.
6. First-hand exposure to gospel service in an apprenticeship provides an invaluable context for both the apprentice and the experienced teacher/guide/coach – along with any other body of oversight – to assess suitability for ministry. It allows the apprentice to experience the realities of gospel work and appreciate its demands and requirements, enabling them to better assess their spiritual gifts and sense of call to such a ministry. At the same time, it provides those guiding, teaching and overseeing them a substantial basis for affirming or otherwise their suitability. At the conclusion of an apprenticeship, an apprentice might (i) advance to further training, (ii) engage in active gospel service, or (iii) return to full employment better equipped for other ministries within the body of Christ.

Practicalities

1. Identifying apprentices

- Apprentices will usually be members of local church who give evidence of appropriate gifts and an internal sense of calling to gospel service. In some cases the initiative to become involved in an apprenticeship will come from the person themselves; in other cases it may come from the church oversight (Session) or from experienced ministry leaders in the congregation who recognize particular abilities in the person concerned.
- In some situations apprentices may be actively solicited from other local churches – much in the way the Apostle Paul enlisted Timothy to his missionary band in Lystra (Acts 16:1-3). Wherever this occurs it will always be done in consultation with the local church leadership and have their approval and endorsement.
- However the process toward apprenticeship begins, it will always entail thorough familiarization with the nature, purposes and requirements of apprenticeships, require formal endorsement by the church leadership, and involve public recognition by the congregation.

2. Training apprentices

- Apprenticeships occur within the context of the local church. Apprentices are intimately associated with an experienced gospel worker within the church, and engage with them in a range of life, learning and ministry related activities.
- Usually the gospel worker concerned will be the pastor of the church or some other member of the pastoral team of the congregation. They will be responsible for the implementation of the apprenticeship relationship, but will do so under the general oversight of the church leadership (Session).
- The precise form the apprenticeship programme takes will necessarily vary from one situation to another, depending on the gifts of the experienced gospel worker involved and the particular circumstances of both the apprentice and the local church. The principle of practical exposure to ministry in the context of a close personal relationship and mentoring is more critical to the concept than a fixed curriculum and stereotyped programme.

- All apprenticeships, however, will include three areas of focused attention: personal growth (Christian character and conviction), ministry experience (competence in Christian ministry), and theological awareness (knowledge and understanding). These three areas of competence will be explored and developed through a variety of means including reading, formal classes and courses, informal discussions, ministry activities, shared recreational and devotional activities etc.
- Apprenticeships are viewed as preliminary to more structured courses of study in theological institutions or Bible colleges. In some cases they may include course work from such institutions, but the gaining of qualifications from such institutions is not the primary purpose of the apprenticeship programme.

3. Evaluating apprentices

- A major purpose in the apprenticeship programme is to allow a person's call to gospel ministry to be tested – both by the person concerned and by the leadership of the local church. While apprenticeships are not the only way in which such a call may be discerned, they do provide a structured approach that greatly facilitates this process.
- The process of discernment and evaluation is one that takes place in an ongoing way. If at any point it becomes clear to any of the parties involved – the apprentice, the ministry leader, or the church leadership – that the apprentice is not suited to gospel service, the apprenticeship can be terminated. Usually, however, the evaluation will occur at the end of the apprenticeship.
- The evaluation concerned regards whether the apprentice is suited to gospel service and ready to pursue whatever further training might be required. The apprentice, the ministry leader and the church oversight will all be involved in this final assessment.

4. Beyond apprenticeship

- Apprenticeships are not viewed as *primary* but *preliminary* ministry training programmes. Through exposure to gospel service and an experienced gospel worker (the apprenticeship trainer or coach), prospective gospel workers have opportunity to test their suitability for such a calling. Some will proceed to more formal ministry training – such as that offered by theological and Bible institutes – some take up full-time or part-time ministry opportunities either within the congregation or with other organizations and agencies. Others still will return to regular employment in vocations to which they are more suited, and to active involvement in appropriate church ministries.
- Those wishing to proceed to training for gospel ministry as pastors (or teaching elders) within GPCNZ will follow procedures outlined in the Book of Church Order that relate to becoming Candidates for Gospel Ministry (Chapter 18).

Conclusion

1. The concern underlying this proposal is to see a continuing stream of people emerging from local churches who are equipped to proclaim the gospel in a variety of contexts. It is based on the conviction that this is best achieved through a process providing interested people opportunity to experience the practice and requirements of gospel service within a close relationship with an experienced gospel worker under the overall oversight of the local church leadership.
2. It provides a structured approach for interested people to pursue on their own initiative, and a vehicle that existing gospel workers and church leaderships may employ to encourage interest in gospel service.