

Ordination Statement of Robin Ellis

My personal journey and ministry experience

It is ironic that I should be pursuing ordination while serving at an inner city church in the midst of a community that struggles with things like poverty, drugs and violence. This is the kind of community I came from, and at one time it was what I was trying to escape.

I grew up in Scotland in the sixties and early seventies, on a working class housing estate that was best known for the violent gang that operated out of it. My father was a merchant seaman, which meant I saw him for a few weeks every couple of years, and by the time I was 16 I was essentially living alone. My sister had moved away from home, my father was at sea and my mother was in and out of psychiatric hospitals for dementia associated with Parkinson's disease. It was at this time that I first heard the gospel. I had joined the Air Cadets as a first step towards a possible career in the Royal Air Force, and some of the other cadets invited me out to a Christian coffee house that ran in the basement of a downtown store on Friday and Saturday nights. It was there that I heard the gospel and began what would become a lifelong study of the Bible. Over the course of my last two years of high school I moved from being a skeptic to being a believer. Conversion, for me, was the realization that the gospel made sense and demanded a response. When I was 17 I committed myself to following Christ and joined the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland where my friends from Air Cadets attended.

My mother died that same year, and I went into a tailspin. I failed my first year at university, dropped out and began working as a draftsman for an electronics company. I struggled to find my way alone in the world; or almost alone. The church became the family I had never had and supported me through the next few years as I left my home town and moved to the big city of Edinburgh. In fact, wherever I went, the Lord put the church in my path to care for me; even when, in 1977 at the age of 20, I left Scotland to travel Europe and found myself alone and broke in Amsterdam.

The Netherlands, and Amsterdam in particular, is a special place for me. I began working at the Christian Youth Hostel Ebenhaezer and experienced for the first time what intentional Christian community could be. Everybody else on the staff team was there because they wanted to serve in ministry. I was there because I had run out of money; but over the next year or so God used that community to change my life. First as they supported me through the death of my father in early 1978, then to challenge me and shape me to the point where, in January 1979, I enrolled in a School of Evangelism with Youth With A Mission (YWAM) in the Dutch countryside outside Amsterdam.

For the next three years I lived in an intentional Christian community, an experience that continues to shape my philosophy of ministry. After the three month school we went on outreach to Italy for three months, then back to Amsterdam for a summer of ministry before I joined YWAM staff as part of a creative ministries team. Another member of that team was a young woman from Hamilton named Marilyn. At first we couldn't stand each other but, like all the best romantic comedies, that eventually changed and we married in Amsterdam in June 1981. In February 1981 God had spoken to each of us separately and called us to serve in the Muslim world. As a result, our wedding service expressly included a commitment to serve in cross-cultural ministry together. That call would shape our lives for the next 20 years.

The first consequence was that, after our first year of marriage, we moved from the Netherlands to Hamilton for six years to grow deep roots into a church here; this was Delta Tabernacle (later to become Paramount Drive Alliance Church.) It was during this time that I was baptized as a testimony of my faith. During that time I also worked for a driving school and studied at Mohawk

to gain the Canadian equivalent of my Scottish qualifications as a draftsman, eventually working for a small electronics firm. I also qualified to teach English as a Second Language, studied Islam, worked with ministries to Muslims in the Toronto area, and spent 2½ years with Student Mission Advance (SMA), a ministry that mobilized students onto the mission field. After a further year in England at a missionary training college (All Nations Christian College) we arrived in Pakistan in September 1989 to work with Afghan refugees, once again as members of YWAM.

The next 12 years were devoted to serving that refugee community in diverse ways; running development projects, leading Bible studies, setting up computer networks, translating the Jesus film, publishing books, assisting in the planting of churches, producing radio programmes, the list goes on. Studying and teaching the Bible in an alien context is a great privilege. I lived in the midst of the largest tribal society in the world, people who would have felt perfectly at home in the early books of the Old Testament; and the experience of the fledgling Afghan church (less than 500 people worldwide in 1989) threw light on what it might have been like for the communities Paul wrote to. But those years were also hard. By early 2001 I was burned out. My journal for that period reflects a struggle with depression and discouragement as I tried desperately to hold on long enough to make a good exit. The entry for 20 February 2001 sums up how I felt as I looked towards returning to Canada, "I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty." (Ruth1:21)

Yet, when 9/11 came shortly after our arrival in Canada, we ached to be back in Pakistan, even as our Canadian family and friends congratulated us on our good fortune to be "home." I was still responsible for a number of YWAMers on the field even while I was in Canada, so I spent long hours on the phone and internet processing with people in the line of fire, including some who were wounded in the bombing of a church in Pakistan. In some ways we never left Asia but, try as we might, we simply couldn't get visas to return. Finally, in July 2002, the Lord told me very clearly to let it go and stay in Canada. In August I applied and was accepted to attend McMaster Divinity School.

Pursuing my M.Div. was a renewing experience for me, since God has always ministered to me through study. However, as a late arrival, the school had to scramble to find a placement for me and ended up placing me at Wentworth. God was in that, as he has been in everything as I have walked with him through these last years. Wentworth was more than a student placement. Despite my early conviction that my future was not in congregational ministry, I have found myself called to Wentworth. The people here have embraced me and my family, and given us space to heal and to minister.

It is in the context of my calling to Wentworth that I have come to pursue ordination with the BCOQ. Although I have been in "full-time ministry" for most of the last 30 years I have never pursued ordination because the mission had its own systems of recognition and accountability for those in ministry. Now, however, God has called me from serving the people of Afghanistan to serving the people of Hamilton, particularly those who live around Wentworth and Cannon. He has placed me into a particular congregation with a particular history in a particular community of faith. I believe it is important that anyone in any position of leadership be accountable to the community that they serve and so, as a servant of this congregation, I submit myself to the process of examination by my brothers and sisters.

Key ideas that shape my ministry

In what follows I have deliberately sought to avoid technical theological terms, choosing rather to explain myself in what I hope is something like everyday English.

God

Everything starts with God.

This includes the Bible, whose first words are “In the beginning, God...”¹ God is the creator of everything that exists. We know this intuitively and from our observation of the universe around us,² but God has not left us to our own devices to figure out who he is. He has revealed himself to us through his interactions with a community of people as recorded in the Bible.

Through these interactions we learn that God cares about the world and about the creatures he has created.³ It also tells us that God is a being capable of relationships, in fact that he values relationships very highly. In the Old Testament God calls Abraham his friend.⁴ In the New Testament Jesus calls those who follow him his friends.⁵ Other words the Bible uses of God reflect this focus on relationships. He is “Lord” (used more than any other word in the Old or New Testaments for God) i.e. someone who is to be treated with respect and who has authority in the lives of his people. He is King,⁶ Judge,⁷ and Shepherd⁸ of his people. He is Father, in the Old Testament⁹ as well as the New Testament.¹⁰ He is the Redeemer¹¹ or Saviour¹² who rescues those in difficulty.

We learn that when God is asked to describe himself he doesn’t start with his power. He starts with his character, which might be best described as “absolutely faithful.” In Exodus 3 Moses asks God his name and gets a pledge of God’s reliability.¹³ In Exodus 33:18 he asks to see God’s glory and is given a statement of God’s faithfulness.¹⁴ This is good because, while we may not be able to comprehend how God holds the universe together and guides it on its course, we can understand how, as a person, he is faithful and keeps his promises.

Although the majority of terms used in the Bible are masculine, God is not male. Genesis makes it clear that both maleness and femaleness are rooted in God.¹⁵ The Bible also uses female images to speak of God. God is depicted as a mother who gives birth to Israel,¹⁶ as a midwife¹⁷

¹ Gen 1:1

² Rom 1:20, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

³ Ps 104:1-35

⁴ Is 41:8, “But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend...”

⁵ John 15:15 “...I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

⁶ Ps. 95:3, “For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.” (also Matt. 5:35)

⁷ Gen. 18:25, “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” John 8:50, “I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.”

⁸ Ps 23, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.”

⁹ Deut. 32:6, “Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?”

¹⁰ Matt. 6:9, “Our Father in heaven...”

¹¹ Ps. 19:14, “O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer”

¹² Is. 43:3, “For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour” Luke 1:47, “my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”

¹³ Ex 3:14, “God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.””

¹⁴ Ex 34:6-7, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

¹⁵ Gen 1:27, “So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

¹⁶ Deut. 32:18, “you forgot the God who gave you birth.”

and, in the New Testament, Jesus uses the image of God as a mother hen gathering her chicks.¹⁸

The importance that God places on relationships becomes more understandable in the New Testament as it becomes clear that there are relationships *within* God. In some mysterious way, the one creator God exists as three Persons that we know as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁹ The word we use for this in Christian theology is “Trinity,” and it has a profound influence on how we understand God and our relation to him. Because there was already relationship within God before creation, we realize that God actually doesn’t need us in any way. Thus the creation of humanity and the universe around us is an act of pure grace, the spilling over of the self-giving love that flows constantly between the members of the Trinity. Because there is both unity and diversity within God, there is space for unity and diversity within his creation and especially amongst those who reflect his image most, namely human beings. And because ultimate reality (God) is personal, persons are of ultimate value over every other created thing.

Creation

God made a good creation, but it has been twisted by sin.

“God... made the world and everything in it”²⁰ and he declared it all to be “good.”²¹ As a result, the world is diverse, beautiful, and valuable. We are made to relate to God as his creatures,²² to each other as equals²³ and to creation as God’s stewards of a precious gift.²⁴

Unfortunately, like Adam and Eve, we have all turned away from this model. We have turned against God,²⁵ become alienated from each other²⁶ and from creation.²⁷ Furthermore, our sin does not just affect us as individuals. Scripture makes it clear that it has a much wider impact²⁸ so that God’s good creation has been deeply twisted by our sin. As a result we live in the grip of a profound tension. We are wonderful beings with great value and potential who live in a rich creation, but we are also deeply flawed and in need of someone who will rescue us and restore us and creation to our intended purpose. This is the problem that God has moved to remedy.

Mission

God’s response to his broken and hurting creation is mission.

Genesis 1-11 paints a picture of steady decline as humanity follows the path of rebellion against God. There is a promise in Gen 3:15 that God will move at some time in the future to undo the evil let loose in the world,²⁹ but it isn’t until Gen 12:1-3 that we see the beginnings of God’s

¹⁷ Ps. 22:9, “Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother’s breast.”

¹⁸ Matt. 23:37, “how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...”

¹⁹ Matt 28:19; “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (also 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2)

²⁰ Acts 17:24, “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth...”

²¹ Gen 1:4,10,12,18,21,25

²² Gen. 1:27, “So God created man in his own image”

²³ Gen. 2:21-22, “So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.”

²⁴ Gen. 2:15, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”

²⁵ Gen. 3:7, “Then the man and his wife... hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”

²⁶ Gen. 3:12, “The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.””

²⁷ Gen. 3:18, “It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.”

²⁸ Lev 18:25; “Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.”

²⁹ Gen 3:15, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

mission into the world to restore his rule and, in the process, redeem humanity and restore creation.³⁰

God began small, with one man and his wife, and out of that couple he grew a nation that he called to be his people in the world.³¹ Through his words to that people and his actions on their behalf³² God both taught us about himself and pointed forward to the time when he would act decisively to deal with evil.³³

God's mission into the world became focussed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. The second person of the Trinity, who has existed from eternity,³⁴ and who upholds all of creation³⁵ was sent into the world,³⁶ took on humanity, was born, lived and died as a man, then rose again from the dead, also as a man, and ascended into heaven.³⁷ He did this, not just as a model, someone whose pattern of life we can follow, but as our representative, someone who lived and died in our place.³⁸ In Jesus we see, up close and personal, just what God is like.³⁹ We see that God reaches out in love to those in need. We see that he is opposed to injustice,⁴⁰ sickness and suffering.⁴¹ And we see that he is willing to sacrifice himself in order to restore God's rule over creation and win us back to himself.⁴²

Just as sin first came into the world through rebellion against God, each one of us has turned away from God and we cannot be restored to him by our own efforts.⁴³ There is a gulf between God and us, like that between two warring nations. We need a saviour, someone who will step into the gap on our behalf and restore us to God.⁴⁴ As the God-man, who can represent both sides of the conflict, Jesus is that someone. He came and lived a perfect life and died a criminal's death, even though he was the only person to ever walk the earth who did not need to die. God has chosen to accept Jesus' sacrifice as standing for everyone who puts their trust in him.⁴⁵ By identifying with him in his death we are also raised to new life with him in his

³⁰ Gen 12:1-3, "The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.""

³¹ Gen 15:5, "He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be.""

³² Ex 12; 2 Chron 36:22,23

³³ Is 53:4-6, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

³⁴ John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

³⁵ Col. 1:17, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

³⁶ John 20:21, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

³⁷ Phil. 2:5-11

³⁸ Col. 1:22, "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."

³⁹ Col. 2:9, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form"

⁴⁰ Luke 19:46, ""It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'""

⁴¹ Matt. 4:24, "News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them."

⁴² Rom. 5:10, "when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son"

⁴³ Rom. 3:10-11, ""There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God."

⁴⁴ Rom. 5:8, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

⁴⁵ Rom. 6:23; "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (1 Tim 4:10)

resurrection,⁴⁶ a new life submitted to Jesus' lordship and empowered by the Holy Spirit to join with God in his mission into the world.⁴⁷

The Church

God's mission has always been embodied in a community of people.

Through Jesus' death and resurrection we are restored to relationship with God and enlisted into his mission into the world; but we do not do that alone. God has always worked through a community of people. In the Old Testament that community was made up primarily of those who were descended from Abraham, but also included those who chose to submit themselves⁴⁸ to the covenant that God had first made with Abraham, then expanded on mount Sinai;⁴⁹ a covenant in which God is the good and just king of his people.

Just as Jesus has brought about a new covenant⁵⁰ through his death and resurrection, so he has brought to birth a new community. The church is the community of the King⁵¹ and the sign of his kingdom, gathered together around Jesus, baptised into his death and resurrection⁵² and sent out into the world in mission in the power of the Spirit.⁵³ Jesus gathered a community of followers around himself, shared his life with them and sent them out in ministry.⁵⁴ That ministry has been passed on to the church⁵⁵ and is as narrow as calling individuals to turn to Jesus in personal repentance and as broad as seeing the rule of God impact all areas of society and all ethnic groups.⁵⁶ To accomplish this mission requires that the community of God be an effective tool in the hand of the Spirit to form Christian personhood and character. It is also essential that the church be visible and be seen to reflect the image of God. Just as Jesus came to show us what God is like, by carrying out actions like teaching, healing and delivering, so the church needs to live out its faith in the midst of society and earn the right to speak of the reason for our hope.⁵⁷

The church is God's primary channel for blessing and changing the world for the good, for proclaiming the kingdom and living out its reality; but this can only happen through the work of the Holy Spirit within the community. Before he left his disciples, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to strengthen, guide and teach them.⁵⁸ The Holy Spirit speaks to believers to teach them and guide them.⁵⁹ It is the Holy Spirit who initiates and directs mission.⁶⁰ It is through the Holy Spirit that believers experience the life of Christ.⁶¹ The Spirit indwells believers as

⁴⁶ Col 3:1, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above"

⁴⁷ 2 Cor. 5:5; "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."

⁴⁸ e.g. Ruth 1:16, "Your people will be my people and your God my God."

⁴⁹ Ex 20ff

⁵⁰ Luke 22:20, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

⁵¹ 1 Pet 2:9, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."

⁵² Col. 2:12, "having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God"

⁵³ John 20:21-22, "Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

⁵⁴ Matt 10

⁵⁵ Matt 28:18-19, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations"

⁵⁶ Rev 7:9; "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."

⁵⁷ 1 Peter 3:15, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

⁵⁸ John 16:13, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth."

⁵⁹ Luke 12:12, "the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

⁶⁰ Acts 8:29, 39; 10:19; 13:2, etc.

⁶¹ Rom. 8:16, "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

individuals,⁶² enabling them to understand and interpret scripture,⁶³ to live lives worthy of their Lord,⁶⁴ and empowering them for ministry.⁶⁵ The Spirit also indwells the church as a community, giving wisdom and insight to all,⁶⁶ and directing the community in the way they should go in service to the Lord.⁶⁷

Scripture

Scripture tells the story of God's mission into the world.

All that we have said about God, creation and mission is rooted in scripture. The Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, are God's revelation to us of his character, his acts and his will,⁶⁸ coming to us as the result of God's interactions with people in history.⁶⁹ Although people wrote the words of scripture in their own language and style, God was fully involved in the process of their writing so we can truly say that he is their ultimate author.⁷⁰ This is what Paul means in 2 Tim 3:16 when he says that scripture is "god-breathed." As a result the scriptures are fully trustworthy, the final authority for what we can and cannot say about God, and for how we should live, worship and serve him.⁷¹ It is because scripture is God's word that it has power to effect real change in lives,⁷² to enable believers to withstand temptation,⁷³ and to direct their ways.⁷⁴

The Future

As God's mission people we are called to live today in the light of His future.

The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what the future holds but it does give us pictures of what God has in store for us. It tells us that Jesus will return to establish a new heaven and a new earth,⁷⁵ different from the old ones but related to them, perhaps in some way parallel to how we will ourselves be changed.^{76,77} It tells us that all that is good from human society will be brought into the new world,⁷⁸ but that evil will be kept out.⁷⁹ It also tells us that, in the end, God will set all

⁶² Acts 6:3, "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom."

⁶³ John 14:26, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

⁶⁴ Rom 8:13, "For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live"

⁶⁵ Acts 6:8, "Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people."

⁶⁶ Acts 6:3, "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom."

⁶⁷ Acts 13:2, "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

⁶⁸ Ps 119:89-91, "Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures. Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you."

⁶⁹ Heb. 1:1, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways"

⁷⁰ Acts 4:25, "You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David"

⁷¹ 2 Tim 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness"

⁷² Heb 4:12, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

⁷³ Eph 6:17, "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

⁷⁴ Ps 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

⁷⁵ Rev. 21:1, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away"

⁷⁶ 1 Cor 15:42-43, "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power..."

⁷⁷ Rom 8:20-22 "...in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

⁷⁸ Rev 21:24, "The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it."

⁷⁹ Rev 21:27, "Nothing impure will ever enter it..."

things to rights, injustice will be overcome and “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.”⁸⁰ This knowledge allows us to look to the future with hope and encouragement⁸¹ and to invest our efforts in living today in light of the future, allowing our vision to be shaped by the way things will be after Jesus returns at the end of all things to wrap up history as we know it, deal finally with evil and establish a new world.

Role of the pastor

My understanding of pastoring is shaped by my conviction that, in both the Testaments, pastoring is a way of speaking about leadership.^{82,83,84} Biblical leadership is shaped by Jesus’ description of his own ministry as servanthood,⁸⁵ and with a call to leadership comes responsibility for those under your care; a responsibility to strengthen the weak, heal the sick and bind up the injured, to bring back the strays and search for the lost, to be gentle and kind with those you lead.⁸⁶ Pastors are called to serve the church by faithfully proclaiming the gospel,⁸⁷ so that those under their care grow into maturity.⁸⁸ But it doesn’t end there. Since God’s people embody his mission into the world, those in pastoral leadership are also called to lead the congregation out into the world in ministry. Pastors are therefore called to serve the church by leading and equipping believers to live out their own callings and ministries as servants of God.⁸⁹

Difficulties and achievements in ministry to date

Since I have been in ministry for close to 30 years it would take a whole other document to list the difficulties and achievements. Having said that, looking back, some of my greatest difficulties have been when I have invested heavily in a person only to see them either turn away from the faith or in some way abuse my trust. I can’t say I was surprised by this. One of my early mentors told me, “when you engage in ministry you stick your neck out, and there are some who will try to chop off your head.” However, it still hurts when it happens. Other difficulties in ministry have come from being responsible for people who are daily in harm’s way, and my own tendency to overwork and burn out, both of which are mentioned in my life journey above.

It is hard to talk about achievements in ministry without being in danger of stealing God’s glory; however, God has graciously allowed me to be involved in some significant works. Two important images for me from my time in Asia are a thread and a doorstep. Beginning in 1994 God used me to bring together a talented team of Afghan believers to produce radio programmes and print media for Afghanistan. God showed me that my role in that process was like the thread you dangle in a solution to grow crystals. It is the crystal, the Afghan ministry team, that is the point, but without the thread it would never have formed. Likewise, in 1999 God

⁸⁰ Rev 21:4

⁸¹ 1 Thess. 4:13-18

⁸² Acts 20:28, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Shepherd the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”

⁸³ 1 Pet 5:2, “shepherd God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers”

⁸⁴ John 21:16, “Jesus said, “Take care of (lit. “shepherd”) my sheep.””

⁸⁵ Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve”

⁸⁶ Based on Ezek 34:1-6.

⁸⁷ 2 Cor 4:5, “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.”

⁸⁸ Col 1:28, “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.”

⁸⁹ Eph 4:11, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service”

called me to be a doorstep; to hold the door open in Pakistan and Afghanistan for YWAMers to come in and be released into ministry. Many in ministry in the region today came in through that door. From a strategic point of view, I believe my greatest single impact was when I served as the overall project director for the translation and dubbing of the film “Jesus” into Afghan Persian. God has used that tool powerfully to reach many Afghans with the gospel.

Also, over the last 20 or so years, God has consistently used me to mentor and release others into ministry, whether here in Canada through SMA, with YWAMers and Afghan leaders in Asia, or through contact with students since I began to minister at Wentworth. Perhaps the most rewarding aspect of ministry for me, personally, is God’s gift to me of a teaching ministry where I can open up scripture each week and make it accessible and understandable to others, and in the process see his church built up.

Vision for self and the church

I have always said that my role as a leader is, “to make space for, and equip, people to succeed in their God-given callings; to celebrate them when they succeed; and to catch them when they fail.” That continues to be my vision for my life. It doesn’t matter whether a person’s calling is as a mother or a mechanic, a teacher or a technician; my responsibility is to equip them to live out that calling in service to God and so to make a difference for God’s kingdom in the lives of those around them.

The church is an incredibly precious thing. Bought with the blood of Christ, it is God’s chosen instrument not only for reaching the world with the gospel,⁹⁰ but also for displaying his wisdom to the whole universe.⁹¹ As such we are called to be a counter-cultural community that lives out our commitment to God through service to one another and to those around us. My vision for Wentworth Baptist Church is that together we will continue learning what that means for the community of faith that meets at the corner of Wentworth and Cannon. That together we can be the hands and feet of Jesus into our community and see it transformed by the good news that Jesus is Lord.

⁹⁰ Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹¹ Eph 3:10, “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms”