A
Preachers’ Picnic
Summary

Up to 4 local preachers: Intimacy
All part of workshop

Meet for lunch: ‘Break bread’ (Acts 2:46)

Last Friday of month: Friday – ready for Sun
Last suits the calendar

1.00 - 3.00 pm: Two hours
Stopping for lunch anyway

1.00 -1.30 pm: Eat together.

1.30 – 1.50 pm: News - family, church, self
Pray for one another.

1.50 – 2.00 pm: Coffee

2.00 – 3.00 pm: Work shop on next Sunday
5 mins sermon outline
10 mins discussion
Each in turn – 4 x15

3.00 pm: Disperse
Preface

The *Preachers’ Picnic* was developed around the preaching workshop concept that has been used to such benefit for some time by Dick Lucas and the Proclamation Trust.

Several groups of ministers have been meeting monthly in Glasgow over several years, for fellowship, prayer and to share the Word of God together. They have found it to be a great benefit in the often isolating and sometimes discouraging experience of Parish ministry.

From this experience, the model described here as *A Preachers’ Picnic* has been put together.

It is offered to the Church in the hope that those who minister the Word among her might be encouraged and instructed by others, for the good of their congregations and the blessing of the hard-pressed preachers!

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Torrance
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Introduction

The practice of ministers meeting together round the Word to sharpen their preaching and to enjoy fellowship together is not new. It has been used to good effect in times of reformation in the church in the past.

At the end of the 4th Century when Augustine came to Hippo, he lived in a community. It was known as a ‘societas fratrum’, (a society of brothers). The benefit of this was mutual learning and encouragement in their ministries.

In Geneva, in the 16th Century, Calvin used to meet regularly on Fridays with those who were leaders in the ministry of the Word. One of them would, by prior arrangement, give an exposition of a passage of the Bible. The floor would then be open to the company to contribute questions, observations and remarks, with discussion and dialogue following.

In 17th Century England, the Puritans had what were known as ‘Prophecyings’ (sic) or ‘Exercises’. Their preachers used to take the opportunity provided by market days, as people from all over the area would gather in the market town. About noon a senior preacher, by arrangement, would give an open-air sermon to the public. The other preachers and their apprentices would join the crowd. At its conclusion they would meet together in small groups, have a meal and discuss the sermon they had just heard.

In the reformed church in Scotland, in the earliest days of the 17th Century, the main function of Presbytery was to encourage and support ministers in all the duties of ministry, particularly preaching. There would be regular gatherings where ministers
would meet together and share their preaching plans for the future. At least once a year many Presbyteries required their ministers to preach at one of these gatherings and comment would be made as to style and content.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century ministers usually preached from an ‘ordinary’. This was a passage of Scripture, or an entire book, which would form the basis of the preaching from Sunday to Sunday, sometimes lasting a year. Presbytery visitations would often enquire regarding ‘the ordinary’. If there was none, the minister could be subject to rebuke.

Such gatherings and accountability among those who preach the Word of God are rare today. As leaders struggle together to address the problems facing the church, such fellowship may be crucial, for the Word of God will reform the church not through structures, but through relationships.
The Need

The early church devoted itself ‘to the Apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread/eating together and to prayer’ (Acts 2:42). These, one might conclude, are the essential ingredients of a healthy diet for members of any church. It is one of the main tasks of the church leader to ensure that the life of their church is so ordered that their congregation is well fed, with a balanced diet of these basic activities.

Ironically, the very church leaders who work to ensure their people’s needs are met often go without themselves. Fraternals or conferences can help, but they are often too impersonal to do much to enable the close fellowship and friendship that everyone needs.

As far as the ministry of the Word is concerned the situation is similar. The preaching of the Word to others is at the heart of a leader’s work. However, opportunities to be fed and taught by others on a regular basis may be few and far between: the odd conference, the occasional tape and ‘pot luck’ on Sundays during vacation, is often the extent of it.

Furthermore there is little accountability in what the leader actually preaches. Feedback is usually restricted to a passing comment at the door on the way out. At best the preacher may receive a pleasant remark about enjoyment derived from the service. At worst it may be a disgruntled broadside about the tune of the last hymn! Seldom is there objective, constructive input about what has been drawn from the Word and about how it has been applied to the lives of today’s hearers.

Any possible opportunities that might help meet these needs for the hard pressed church leaders are usually either time
consuming, costly or both (!) They are therefore often ignored for fear that yet another commitment might be the ‘straw that breaks the camel’s back’.

The Preachers’ Picnic is a means of addressing some of these issues. It is a model for a gathering of ministers of the Word with the intention of:

1) encouraging one another in the ministry of the Word
2) enjoying fellowship together
3) providing prayerful support for one another

*without adding to busy schedules!*
The Model

A Preachers’ Picnic involves 2-4 people and generally takes place on a Friday from 1:00 - 2:45 pm. The format is:

1.00 – 1.30  Lunch
A light meal and a chance to catch up. Each participant might be asked in turn to share what is happening at home and in the church.

1.30 – 1.50  Prayer
An opportunity to share individual concerns and to pray for one another about the issues raised.

1.50 -2.00  Coffee could be served at this point

2.00 – 3.00  Preaching workshop
A time to share the outline of a sermon and receive input and encouragement from others.

3.00  Disperse
The formal part finishes punctually, allowing those with appointments to leave. Others may choose to linger and talk.

If there are too many people for a single group, it helps:

- to have a central time keeper. (Keeping preachers in order is like trying to herd cats!)
- to eat lunch sitting in the same groups as will go on to pray and discuss together.
Prayer

Our human insecurities as ministers of the Gospel mean that as we share together, when it is . . .

1) . . . our turn,

we tend to share our ‘successes’, such as they may be (!) for we don’t want our colleagues to think ill of us. This shows fundamental flaws in our thinking! (We are acting as though we determine where God is at work and His work depends on us.)

While of course our faithfulness is vital, we believe God is sovereign and that the Spirit ‘blows where it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going’ (John 3:8)

2) . . . others’ turn,

their successes make us feel inadequate. While we know we should rejoice with them, what they share often makes us feel inadequate; far from inspiring us, we allow it to condemn us!

Therefore, in a Preachers’ Picnic, when we are sharing with one another prior to prayer, we don’t share our successes. (For these, all we need is prayer to minimalise our misplaced pride!) Rather it is more helpful if we share the places where it’s sore and we are struggling, or where we feel genuinely (!) inadequate. So, when we prepare to pray, we might share along the lines of:

   a) Personal
   How you are doing? eg physically, mentally, emotionally etc

   b) Family
   The stresses and strains of ‘normal family life’

   c) Ministry
   The concerns of your local church life

Once all have had an opportunity to share with others what is on their hearts, the group might pray for one another.
The Preaching Workshop

At the centre of the time together is a ‘preaching workshop’: -

The Format

a) Each person in the group gives an outline of a sermon they are yet to preach. These would each last about *five minutes* and focus on the text – what we understand the Bible is saying and how we will encourage our church to apply it.

b) Following each presentation of a passage, a general discussion takes place asking questions, offering some input, and giving constructive criticism. This would last for about *ten minutes*.

(If it is early in the week and there has been no time for preparation, another format might be beneficial.

1) The person leading might introduce the passage that he will next preach on (2 mins)
2) The passage is read
3) The whole group then goes through it drawing up a list of questions on the passage – whether you know the answer to it or not. *(No answers will be entertained!* – this would distract from opening out the whole passage)

The Benefit

Though at first this has seemed a daunting prospect to everyone, it has proved both enjoyable and of great benefit to all who participate. It gives the preachers the opportunity to sharpen their handling of the Word, making them accountable for their conclusions. At the same time, it enables the others who listen to receive the ministry of the Word from another.
Guidelines for the Workshop

Time is short but much can be achieved if we approach the sharing round the Word together in a disciplined way.

To do this, we want to concentrate on:

1) the meaning of the text (the source of our authority) and
2) its impact on our lives (the application).

The following may be helpful to make best use of the time:

A. The Preparation

It is good to keep in mind before the workshop that the goal is to convey the main lesson of the passage and ‘show the working’ behind the sermon. To do this, it may be helpful to extract and write down the following information from the sermon.

1) The Context

Explain the relevant situation of the text in the surrounding passages and in the wider story of the Bible.

2) The Lesson

In a short sentence give the main thrust / lesson of the passage:

“Here God shows us that ….”

Explain from the passage how you are led to this conclusion.

3) The Heart

Identify a ‘text’ - a key verse (or verses) in the passage - the part of the text round which the rest might be said to hinge and which encapsulates the message of the passage.

Explain your reasoning for choosing it and show, briefly, how it relates to the rest of the passage.

4) The Application /
4) The Application
Give an indication of what the passage shows about:
   a) God
      i) His nature and character
      ii) His grace
      iii) Jesus and his salvation
   b) The people then
      How did God want the people then to respond?
   c) Us today
      Give some examples of what you hope your hearers of today might do or think in response.

B. The Presentation
   1) 5 mins – the first preacher gives an outline exposition of their text, simply working through the four issues listed in ‘preparation’.
   2) 10 mins - the others present share observations, questions, encouragements, etc.
   3) Repeat from 1) with another preacher

C. Do’s and don’ts.
   1) Do
      a) State briefly the context in which the word will be given:
         i) the people who will hear it
         ii) the situation they are in
         iii) the place, if in a sequence of sermons
      b) Read the passage, if short, or key excerpts, if longer.
      c) Work through the above order of - context, lesson, heart and application.

   2) Don’t
      a) Give a mini / précised sermon.
      b) Include introduction or illustrations (unless time allows)
      c) Take more than 5 minutes in total.
      d) Waffle unless you have to!
The Practical Reasoning

1 The Timing of a Preachers’ Picnic

a) Fridays (i.e. late in the week) –
Needs less preparation; a Sunday sermon - or at least the outline - will generally be ready by this stage.

b) Lunchtime –
The meeting need not be at the expense of other things. It is restricted to lunchtime, when work stops anyway. This leaves the afternoon free for other things.

c) Two hours –
If it is well structured, and the time is used in a disciplined manner, much can be achieved.

d) Monthly - to give the participants regular contact

e) Last of the month –
The advantage of this is: Last Friday in August covers the end of the summer and the beginning of the session; last in November is before the Christmas rush; last in March is before the schools’ Easter break; last in June is before the summer holiday break.

2 The Size of a Preachers’ Picnic

a) Participation
Within the time allocated, only 3 or 4 people will get the opportunity to bring their word.

b) Sharing
With a small number in the group, people are generally more willing to offer their opinions during discussions and are also more open to sharing personal concerns when it comes to prayer for one another.
c) Larger group
Though the optimum size may be 3 or 4 people, it may be that 2 or more groups might like to meet at the same time. In such a circumstance, a ‘concertina’ arrangement of the larger gathering and its smaller groups might be beneficial.

The advantage of a small group is identity, intimacy and accountability. The large gathering, however, may provide contact and encouragement from other ministers.

It is possible to get the benefit of both by mixing them together. Here is an example of meeting as a larger group one month out of three:

a) In August several groups might meet at one time and place and participants may be mixed up.

b) In September and October the groups meet separately, at times to suit their own convenience. (This flexibility is an advantage in busy schedules.)

c) In November, groups might again meet together and mix before the Christmas rush!

3 Adaptations

a) Team ministry

Where there is a ‘Team ministry’, and the team meets weekly, the model might be adapted as a basis for the gathering.

In this case, it might be appropriate if only one person contributed in the preaching workshop each week; that would leave more time for the discussion of necessary other business, but still involve everyone in the ministry of the Word monthly.
b) Ministry of those retired from the parish

In many cases ministers work flat out up to the moment they retire from the parish. At a stroke, they move house, the phone stops, and there is no pressure to prepare a word for Sunday!

In days gone by we put on our slippers, lit our pipe and ‘fell off our perch’ at 70. The situation is very different at the moment. Ministers may indeed retire at 65, but while they may not want the burden of being in charge of a parish, there is a wealth of ministry experience to be used for the benefit of the church for 15 or 20 years!

This may be in the context of assisting in the ministry of a home church, acting as an Interim Moderator for Presbytery, providing holiday pastoral cover etc. etc.

Whatever the way they continue to be involved in ministry, it would be hugely beneficial to many who retire from front line pressure to be included in a fellowship of parish ministers as they seek God for ways he might continue to use them in the future.

While not all are in a position or would like to share the Word in a workshop, they would themselves benefit from the ministry of others and the opportunity for prayer, both given and received.
The Potential

As well as being an encouragement to those involved, the Preachers’ Picnic provides a way of including others and so broadening the fellowship. It thus looks *inward*, ministering to the needs of those involved, and *outward* to others who might also share the benefit of the fellowship together. It may also provide an opportunity to learn from others with different views and to share with those who might not have our own interests or background.

If a group grows beyond 5 people, it will become too large. At this point, fewer will be able to bring a word, thus changing the dynamics of the group. The logical solution is then to divide and leave space for others to come in. Obviously, such a move needs to be done in a sensitive way. The same tension – between building strong relationships and making room for others – will exist here as occurs in other Church groups, at all levels.

The ‘cost’ to the participant of including others in the group is the prospect of disrupting what is comfortable and familiar. However, the ‘blessing’ of it would be that promised by Jesus to all those who forgo things for the sake of the Kingdom (Luke 18:29). If we, in this way, look outward to the needs of others, God will meet our own.

In the past, the reviving power of God has been transmitted in the church through the medium of relationships. Perhaps such prayerful, outward-looking fellowship around God’s Word, as is encouraged in a Preachers’ Picnic might be a vital ingredient of the means that God uses in reforming His Church today.
**Starting a Preachers’ Picnic**

The following are some practical thoughts that may be of help if you are considering starting one:

**The First Meeting**

1. Start small and build. Identify one or two who may be interested in the idea and meet for lunch.
2. After lunch, take time to share and pray together.
3. Try out the workshop format.
4. If people are willing to continue, agree a time to meet again.

**A Co-Ordinator**

If you continue, then decide on a co-ordinator. Even in a very small group it is helpful if one specific person is responsible for making arrangements. If not, the danger is everyone holds back and nothing is done. The Co-ordinator’s role could include:

1. To arrange Meetings.
2. To be a Time-keeper! Time is short and unless someone is responsible for proceedings and keeps an eye on the clock, all things will not be done in an orderly manner!
3. To Initiate. To guard against introspection, it may be good if someone is willing to raise regularly the issue of whom else might be included in the fellowship.
The Material

We are glad for anyone to use this model.

This booklet is copyright but may be downloaded for personal use, see below. Printed copies of it are also available.

If you are going to start a Preachers’ Picnic, please let us know in Torrance for our mutual encouragement. If you would like help with it, please contact us.

The addresses of the Church Office are on the back cover.

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“The Word of God will reform the church not through its structures but through relationships”