

TENT MAKER
MINISTRY
REVISITED

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Preface

1. Evolution of the Stipendiary Ministry
2. Resurfacing of the Non Stipendiary Ministry
3. The perspectives of Stakeholders
4. Some Reflections

TENT MAKER MINISTRY – SOME REFLECTIONS

Tentmaker ministry, Non Stipendiary Ministry (NSM) , Self Supporting Ministry (SSM), Ministers in Secular Employment (MSE), Part time/Volunteer/Worker priests are some of the evolved (not in any order) terms used for clergy and church workers who are not financed by the Diocese or the Church they belong to. In a jovial spirit the last three terms probably do not denote the best intentions of the ministry as all ministers are in fact full time, volunteered and certainly working priests! The two best references for anyone interested in this concept of NSM will be **J M M Francis & L J Francis (ed), Tentmaking: Perspectives on Self-Supporting Ministry** (1998) and **John Fuller & Patrick Vaughan, Working for the Kingdom: Story of Ministers in Secular Employment** (1986). The Church of England website <https://www.churchofengland.org> and a search on ‘Ministers in Secular Employment’ as well as a doctoral thesis by the same **Patrick H. Vaughan, Non-stipendiary ministry in the Church of England: a history of the development of an idea** (1987) also

invites the reader to define, categorize and understand the concept and the practice behind this idea. Other than these sources many diocesan websites of the United Kingdom proposes several interesting insights into this ministerial undertaking.

We may not be totally wrong if to state that the ministry we find in Biblical Tradition is largely non stipendiary owing to the fact that the 'one' who were to finance ministry the 'Church' in its recognized and organized state came much later than in the New Testament church. St Paul who is the actual 'tentmaker' after whom the ministry has taken its name (Acts 18 & 20, Rom 15, 1 Cor 9, Gal 6, 2 Thess 3 are some of the general contexts, St Paul's uses to justify, strengthen and further his argument for a non stipendiary ministry. According to the website given above, there were just under eight thousand stipendiary ministers and just over four thousand non stipendiary ministers in the Church of England by 2015. According to the 'Church Times' and Ministry statistics of the same website over the last

decade a fifty percent rise on NSM has been visible while a decline in the traditional has been experienced.

While this being the case elsewhere there has been trends of a diminished capacity in Sri Lanka as well on NSM and given below are just three short points of each of Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats that a NSM might entail in our context.

Strengths – The first would be the presence of a minister who would not be a financial commitment to the church. The second would be that such ministers will attempt to bring in some of the expertise that they possess in secular employment which is valuable to the ministry at most times. Thirdly there is a certain direct witness that is made by these ministers who are trained as clergy but who perform their secular tasks in a ‘non robed’ capacity. To explain this, all Christians should witness but a deviation of an ordained in a secular setup.

Weaknesses – The obvious constraint of time available is the first weakness, as managing two worlds can be time consuming. This may impact the church work he or she

undertakes and hence a shortness of availability on the side of the ministry. Secondly there is a question of 'calling' but the need of a training that may elude the minister, who may have not received a theological stress. Thirdly there is a toll felt on the individual as well when having to work at different levels while combining family, study, finances etc.

Opportunities- The most crucial opportunity there is would be a certain attraction that this ministry poses to committed candidates which probably explains the frequent knocks on the door. Secondly there can always be found a suitable ministry within the church; the parish ministry being one, an individual's capacity can be utilized in varied manner. Thirdly there is a certain uniqueness a person who also strives in the secular world can bring into discussion and transformations needed when juxtaposed in a spiritual realm.

Threats – The foremost threat that has been identified is a question of the inevitable 'two master theory' as careers need to progress the person could be caught up

between the two worlds. A second one which could be suspected is the Church not having enough control over the minister and sometimes a lethargic commitment that could arise. And thirdly looking at it from the ministers' point of view they may feel a certain 'second citizen' aura creeping over them bypassing their work ethic and contribution.

These being the author's opinions but with considerable take from dialogues, from within the Church, the readers are most welcome to disagree or agree with same. Going forward it might be effective to have wider discussion on this ministry with evaluations done on the journey so far. In the Sri lankan context however the ministry itself falls on the backdrop of the traditional setup which makes it difficult for a NSM to be unique. The understanding of the congregations contribute to this as it is a newer concept and such a ministry is not in use in other religious traditions probably barring Islam. Owing to the recognition of the ministry elsewhere, it might be worthwhile to adapt and contextualize the ministry within the ministerial framework. R Abeyasinghe Sep 18

1. EVOLUTION OF THE STIPENDIARY MINISTRY

It might be quite an intriguing way to begin this reflection with the theme given above as it is more of an opposition on the established and the settled power. But as we do go on perhaps this would become more clear. We are of course not insisting that one of the above is superior in any manner but rather a very nonchalant presence of each.

In the Biblical tradition quite as far as even the epistles the form of a church in its established form does not exist. There is a plethora of churches that appear as well as a church that makes decisions, finances travel and even proposes amendments to mission. However we still are unable to trace the early church in the Bible and especially the new testament to the church we see and know today. Hence we are also confronted with the notion of a church which is not Biblical to some extent. The early church was wherever the congregation was

present and it was possibly led into witnessing through a medium of leadership. Apart from these we are unable to outline any other effective measure of ministry.

However as the church herself suffered persecution and was exonerated over the years leading to the upholding of its place in the time of the empire, we see a radical change in the conceptual ideology of the church. We can even call it the time of the 'industrialization' of the ministry. It is not the infusion of money in ministry as it could have happened at any time but rather the time where it became an occupation or the need at least surfaced for it.

Of course few may doubt the fact that the apostles who followed our Lord and dispersed to corners of the earth made their living. It is possible that the church was by that time based upon good will and there were more and more individuals who funded mission. This is actually present even in the time of Jesus where he was hosted, invited and presented before the masses. However this

does not necessarily fall into the category of a church that sponsors persons in ministry.

We might have to keep going back into times where the industry of the ministry took place and where finance became a centralized mission aspect. However we dawn on an important fact early in this book as it was not all about finance alone. It was also about authority. The mission in the New Testament is never seen to be maneuvered by an outside entity but rather by the characters themselves. We never hear of the church or believers asking the missionaries to behave in a certain manner.

Therefore the church following the new testament times was one of power which had two faces; one was the funding of mission and the indirect monopoly that was kept on the mission. We might even go in time to the imperialistic time where the countries of dominance made sure that more and more wealth was included in the mission to these countries but with it they made certain that the missionaries had a say on the matters that were most pertinent to them.

The history of the stipendiary ministry at the time of the unification of Europe through religion is an interesting case. We must dig deeper into actually how the stipendiary ministry came about in the Church considering the fact that the apostolic succession of the way of the apostles was very much free range.

After the initial introduction it is important for us to understand how the stipendiary ministry took root. At the time of Constantine we must remember that religion was indeed becoming an important matter. If it was not lucrative it was certainly important. There was a certain influx of ministers that was needed to protect the new movement or the new ideology. While it dealt with issues that are not related with other ministries, it also had with it a massive backing of power and security. While this was certain in Europe where taxes are still paid to maintain the Church, it is a bit strange to know how this became the same in Asian or African countries. Perhaps the aura of clergy and the respect that was paid even to non Christian ministers and to a great extent

than the west would have been assisted in making sure that there was some sort of backing that equaled the first premise.

We also find that for most parts the composition of clergy in the first centuries are not of holy men but powerful dignitaries drawn only from the noble families and who wielded a lot of wealth, the wealth of the dioceses and the monasteries. The Bishops and the higher ups were even more powerful in structures and it was natural to see that when the reformation began it was coordinated around the power of the Church.

We might question then what was in fact the marks of the stipendiary ministry. It was a ministry closely knit with the authority. The mystics and the holy men were for most part outcast. Even in today's Roman context we see that much of obedience is needed for the clergy to be part of the Church. This is possibly the most binding principle. This seeped also into Anglican and other denominations where stipendiary ministry exists. In one way this is a must. The organization needs all faces

turning to its side rather than away from it as it will disturb the apple cart.

Secondly we must concentrate on the fact that the stipend did become a salary. This becomes even more pertinent in the contexts where a non celibate priest was concerned . This eventually led to the longing between the person and the Church to be much more dependent as it was effective for the whole family.

Thirdly the relationship between the minister and the Church was also related to be on employee terms. While using the secular language here does conflict with the real nature of ministry, it is inevitable to know that there is a certain deal of employee related matters that are now in play even in ministerial positions. We can give medical, insurance, compensation, provident fund and such matters that makes it difficult to take each aspect as not binding on the other.

2. THE RISE OF THE NON STIPENDIARY MINISTRY

After our discourse on the nature of the stipendiary ministry we are called to ask the question as to why we are now considering the nature of the non stipendiary ministry. The fact that such exists now as a new matter itself is good enough question to study this further. There is also the dilemma of a minister who would like to assist the ministry part time and to how the arrangement can be. There is also the question of an independent minister and how he or she will impact the church from the view point of the church.

Of course this all goes into understanding the real issues which are now hampering the ministry. The research might show that new entrants to ministry are at a low. Possibly at a most significant lowest in the history of the ministry. There have been an renewed interest amongst some denominations from time to time which goes to show very little in terms of any improvement. The problems for this can be multifactorial in the least but at

times it is with the trend of the times. The reality as it is stands we must only contend with the fact that much of what has made this happen is going to continue and hence step in to renew interest in the non stipendiary ministry.

In the same manner we also see how there has been a renewed interest in the working ministry. Of men and women interested in working in secular employment and also doing something for the church. The church has somehow recognized this and hence this is present now. We must of course leave out the Roman church in this regard as there is no non stipendiary ministry in it. This is present in the Anglican church for most parts but it is explored in other churches as well.

Surprisingly ministers in secular employment are present in Islam, Hinduism and Judaism. This makes us realize that this is a common phenomenon and probably a historical one as well. However we must now engage in the Christian and specifically the Anglican perspective now. There is a certain awe we must also have for the

Anglican church as much as it is flexible this innovation has been made. However that does not mean that critique should not be leveled at any innovation and we must likewise adhere.

However we are now in a situation to evaluate how the non stipendiary ministry has taken shape. We find minister self employment in varied occupations most commonly in education. We also find ministers who are retired and into ministry . While these will enable a better understanding of the subject we must dwell more on how the Church views these issues and how the minister themselves in them.

From the point of the minister in non stipendiary capacity, there is a commitment which is in fact a great commitment. Knowing well that most of the ministers re stipendiary and have a full time overview it is initially a big fence to climb when trying to balance two worlds. The next would be of finance as more a minister earns in secular employment he or she must also utilize it in church work. The third issue would be the energy and

toll it takes on a person. Since it is understood that two authorities are now converging on him or her. We will discuss this further in the next.

At most times the NSM minister under question would have been selected based on almost any criteria that an ordinary minister would be selected for. This would range from health to character, piety to background from engagement in work to personal calling. For the non stipendiary minister the difference would of course be that he or she should have acquired some work in which he or she supports himself or herself. This also goes without saying how much time she or he has decided to spend in ministry. Sometimes it is for a service sometimes its for a day. Sometimes in the eastern context part time is always a full time. It would be cruel not to go for ministry in a dire situation when called for.

In the Church of England we find many set processes to make sure that ordinands in NSM are trained and capable enough to make sure they can cope with the work capacities. There is also another fact that we must

consider in that the work allocated to that person will only be in a half measure rather than a full allocation of duty. There is also the chance that such a person will be positively ostracized in terms of the commitment they have made. To explain this a bit further, this is the distance that might arise from clergy who feel that they are fully dedicated in service and those who feel that for some other matter the world may also be needing their service in a literal manner. This might lead the former to feel a bit more conservative in effort as well as in mission.

Most non-stipendiary ministers who engage in secular ministries are by the virtue of their own right have been qualified to do so in that profession. To give an example, the teacher who becomes a NSM would have been trained or qualified to fulfill the duties a normal teacher would have. This could be the combination of education, composure and training. This will qualify him or her to bring these skills into the church arena. This will assist the church greatly in fields that are usually required to have high competence.

There is also the argument that when people are pressed for time they may do a better job in a short period. This can be for the argument of the NSM and we might need to analyze it further to propose any comments. However there is the case that for any clergy some sort of evaluation is needed so that their ministry is more fruitful. It is hoped that NSM are also maintained in service so that they are effectively working.

3. PERSPECTIVES OF STAKEHOLDERS

Perspectives of the Church

We might think this is possibly the most important perspective. However the insistence of same is also polarizing one's thought on same. To explain it further if we believe that the Church is central to the NSM then we also say that in the Church we may experience the fullness of the calling for the ministry in this world. Or simply outside that church there is no ministry. However if we are more concerned of ministry stressed from the Church we are also able to understand how well a ministry such as NSM can fit in. It is inevitable that the clergy class of the first order might have more of a say in the matters. There could be discrimination that could make it rather unpleasant to the separate class but we are being biased in this observational. We will give below some consideration that the Church might have with regard to this issue.

The Church should be in charge of all affairs as long as it bears the name of the visible dispensation of Christian values in the world. This is easy to understand when we look at any other institution. For an example a Bank should have sole authority to work out its own matters how many contexts they belong in. In that manner the Church owes a duty to make sure that all of what it performs need to be authorized by its own rules and regulations. If they feel unable to perform with streamlined ministry like NSM it must be valid.

On the other hand it is also a bit of an issue to see NSM who get torn between worlds. Finally they get paid for their enterprise in the secular world. In that regard they need to be aware that most of the NSM might not be able to have the time to attend to the many needs of their pastorates. As time itself is a main issue in this ministry of religion we must be mindful of such reason.

Another issue that might crop up from time to time will be that the ministers might also cite the difference of capacity in service and be lax in activities. This can also

be a bias topic as we need to be aware of the mentalities of the persons as well. If they feel that if most of the congregations are indifferent to them this will lead into situation of the need for recognition but of less of it. While these are some of the matters that might be in the Church perspectives we must be aware of many others as well.

Perspectives of the minister

The minister we must concede would either be a pious person who really want to assist or rather a heavyweight in the field who want impress. There could also be the person who has got interested in the idea but has a hard time foregoing the talent, training and finance that he or she has gotten used to.

While we assume that he or she will be referred to a training programme such will also enable the sharpening of skills. On the other hand we assume that a non stipendiary minister who undergo some sort of training would excel at same. Why we cannot specifically categorize what kind of training that is it is possibly

something to do with the practicalities of ministry. It would surely include training on worship , preaching, traditions of the church and some theology. We must of course be mindful of the fact that the average non stipendiary minister is in fact a skilled and a trained person. It one way this person could easily understand the text target. But also on the other hand the minister would not be able to comprehend the two worlds situation and would need more time to settle into any sort of academia or training related to this religious world. But if the specific training to be given is understood such would not be a talking point.

The minister would also be under impression of the assistance of the church in the work to be done. While he or she has to give more than the other ministers in finance they would also be able to receive the same backing as other ministers. Therefore the minister would want some sort of support other than the allowances which have become mandatory. This can be for the support towards career development or towards

maintenance. It is not uncommon to see that most NSM finally becoming stipendiary in the time to come.

Another matter we must consider from the perspective of the minister is his or her ability to soothe the two worlds. On one side we have congregation which maybe needing a pastor to resolve many matters and the on the other a family, study, work, personal life etc. And then another could also come the time when he or she loses it with both parties. This may either send the minister spiraling towards one corner or lose both sides.

One other issue before we end this section would be how the spirituality of a person such as this will be tuned. Being in the secular world for almost a week and then pushed towards the sacred, the immersion experience cannot be far from being different. This spiritual crises might also be present for all other as well as the ministers since no one except monastic could be expected to be in the sacred arena at all times. However this is the minister that we are looking at and his or her

aura would diminish or augment the already weakened spiritualities of the congregations.

The perspectives of the Mission

What will the congregation need from a minister and will the congregations be able to understand the minister? This is possibly the most important question that we need to ask. Mission as we know it is multi faceted and there really is no space or cap that can be put on identifying what really is an effective mission.

In a way more the merrier would be a better interpretation of the ordeal as we would need more people to take part in ministry and this is very Biblical. More boots n the ground will also project a fuller staff even though they could be part time or whichever manner they determine to be.

Secondly we also need to see how well the ministry would function when a minster with secular vocations engage in same. In some way he or she would be able to handle it the same manner any minister but with lesser

time implications. But also we have to give into the fact that when a situation is arisen it is very much a matter on the mind and till the ministry gets accomplished it will linger on. Having differently able ministers will also prove a chance for them to give their view on the ministry and would possibly enrich it.

Thirdly we must agree that mission is something that the Church engages in rather than personnel. If NSM has worked in times when there is crisis like in modern times and the benefits are good there cannot be any reason as to why such cannot be done. The nature of the of itself is developed when such innovation takes place.

In mission we are not so concerned by leadership and the bearing that might have on same in this matter will not disturb us. But will the mission also require full time persons to carry forward the mission as vital. This would probably be a talking point we need to assess as we carry on this argument . A full minister would naturally be inclined to state his or her intentions of being able to

take up leadership undertaking at the top when this can become diminished for other persons.

Development of the calling

While we have titled this in this manner it is rather a continuation from the above on the perspective of God in a light. God's gives the calling as we all understand that the Church with its traditions an uniqueness ordains them. NSM could also fall in this debacle as the Church may never disown the NSM but treat it rather as a subservient post owing to many shortfalls. The Church would want to have a hold on matters as we have reviewed earlier.

In that regard there is always the opportunity and as the Church has such also grown and matured over the year in some light to recognize that ministry also becomes valid. This has been successful to the extent that it is now a trend in its making and experimental.

5. SOME REFLECTIONS

The presence of this ministry in other religions specify that an exclusive priestly class is not the only solution to maintaining an order. But on the other hand as a religion survives as human construct the stakeholders do need that class to preserve it else the tarnishing might take place.

The NSM is nothing new in fact, it is Biblical in some regards and practical in other regards. The full stipendiary minister might have a larger charge and varying responsibilities which are natural and ethical in some regards. However all must realize that God's work is taking precedence over the style of ministry.

As for the NSM it is a juggle and a technical one at that. He or she needs the whole team which is the family, church, parish and work to be on one page. Less this will be a failure. In the local context we hear many stories of success. Possibly owing to the fact that most of the ordinands in this ministry have carefully crafted the path

they are taking and in fact have been able to tread carefully. At time the congregations might be amazed at the fact that such service rendered by a NSM can be on par with what is presented by a stipendiary minister but which is not to be compared.

While much work of engagement and evaluation takes place in the Church of England the other contexts would also need to follow suit in identifying new patterns in the ministry. Framework has been a key word in understanding the issues of the NSM training and deployment. And this must be understood clearly with all the stakeholders given above.

We remain hopeful that this ministry will be effective in the days to come and such will project the same deal of commitment and values that should be visible in the full time ministry. It is not personal or a personnel issue but all with their callings must be understood and developed as it inadvertently reverses back on the mission. We should be delighted of the work that has taken place and

persistence will deliver the necessary benefits in the time to come.

