

LAY MINISTRY

Today there is an increasing emphasis on lay ministry. We can see it in all sorts of ways. The Cursillo movement is lay led. Lay people are leading the “ministry of the word” in church services. Hospital visiting and services in nursing and aged homes have become part of lay ministry in many places. Lay people are also equipping themselves for ministry by studying theology.

This is all good. However not a lot has really changed probably because these sorts of ministries are seen to be flowing from the ordained ministry. They are not seen as ministries in their own right.

In this pamphlet we will deal specifically with *gifted* ministries. These are ministries which people have because that is the way that God has made and gifted them. They want, God wants them, to use their ministries.

CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

In the 1970’s Charismatic Renewal brought a renewed emphasis to the concept of lay ministries. It became quite clear that the clergy did not have all the gifts. God has given his gifts to the whole Church. We see this in Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:11-13, and 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. The context is that these gifts are given within the Body of Christ.

The recognition of gifting and the desire of people to exercise their gifts in ministry has raised some important questions:

1. Where does lay ministry, or “every member ministry” fit in with ordained or “leadership” ministry?

2. Does lay ministry, can lay ministry, exist in its own right without being dependent upon the ordained ministry?
3. Who authorises, authenticates and decides on who ministers and in what way?
4. Is lay ministry simply an expedient to cope with financially strapped parishes or a lack of ordained people?

LEADERSHIP

Much material has been produced within the context of gifted ministries and every member ministry. People have been encouraged to discover their gifting and to “covet” the gifts. This is right and proper.

Sometimes this has brought about a head-on confrontation with the clergy. Some have felt threatened. Some have wanted to be in the position of power. Power struggles have often developed.

The question, then, of leadership and therefore submission, is one that we need to get right. The concept of submission undercuts any pretence of position, status or power. It does underline that all ministry is that of service, simply because the “Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...” (Matt 20:28). Can we do less?

Leadership, however, is important. We can say that the ordained ministry is leadership ministry, in the sense of vision, direction, aims and goals, but it is also a ministry of enabling others to do it.

“Every member ministry” therefore can only happen within the context of the body, the Body of Christ, as each and every member begins to recognise, take up and exercise the ministry given.

All need to be submitted to Jesus as the Head of the Church, and the role of the clergy is to be the captain

of the team in working, playing and ministering together, so that God is glorified.

From this emerges three major principles.

FIRST PRINCIPLE:

Every member ministry is about “every member ministry”. It is the understanding and realisation that God equips the whole body for ministry and service. It is not about shortages of clergy or budgets.

SECOND PRINCIPLE:

Every member ministry is not about power struggles. It is not an attempt to usurp the place and the authority of the clergy. Yes, it may require a change in style and emphasis by the clergy away from the “oneman band” idea of ministry.

THIRD PRINCIPLE:

It follows that every member ministry must be set within the context of team effort.

NEW UNDERSTANDING

It is an over simplification to see lay ministry as a move to get rid of dictatorial clergy. It is true, none the less, that true lay ministry requires a new understanding by both clergy and laity alike.

In the process both will be freed, freed to exercise their proper ministry. Lay people will have the freedom to operate within their gifts. Clergy will be able to do so, too, as they are freed from much “ungifted” ministry that is laid upon them.

It is readily seen how some picking up and some laying down, can lead a church community into every member ministry. Both laity and clergy must be prepared to do that. It may be costly. It may put the clergy into a vulnerable position. It may demand a stepping-out in faith by the laity. It is worth it.

All of this reinforces the point that leadership is vitally important. It is a style of leadership that is different from the past. It is a leadership that enables ministry to happen, equips that ministry and encourages people to pick up their particular ministry.

WHERE TO BEGIN

There are many check-lists around which help people to discover their ministry gifting. It is best that this happens within the context of a house or cell group. Then each person can be encouraged to begin exercising their gifting within a familiar, comfortable and not too-threatening environment.

It also means that each person can start to do something. If it is done on too large a scale then people's expectations cannot be met. Once a person discovers their gifting then they usually want to use it. That person can become quite frustrated if there is no room to do so!

This way of proceeding requires that a home group is, and is seen to be a place of encouragement. For example, a person comes to the conclusion that they have a ministry of intercession. There cannot be a better place to begin than in a small group.

Again another person may believe that they have a ministry of healing. The small group can provide a wonderful forum for that.

However two things are required:

1. That there is room to do it, and
2. The leader is able to disciple the various members in their ministries.

Again we see the importance of leadership in enabling that to happen, and to equip the leaders of the home

groups. That is the role of the ordained ministry. It is good for every person to be accountable. One idea is for all leaders, paid or otherwise to have a job description.

Some questions for Discussion / Action:

1. How is gifted ministry exercised without countering the discipline of submitting to the church leadership?
2. What ways can be implemented to ensure accountability for ministry?
3. Use Eddie Gibb's books (I Believe in Church Growth; Body Building Exercises) or similar to check your ministry gifting.

Further Reading:

- C Peter Wagner: Leading Your Church to Growth. 1984 [p143].
- John Stott: Ephesians (The Bible Speaks Today series)
- Gibbs: Body Building Exercises.

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Copies of this pamphlet, and pamphlets on other topics, can be obtained from:

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