



Church Health Profile

Personal Ministry Feature Article

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The healthy church expects and equips its members to discover, develop and use their gifts for fruitful ministry.

There are three reasons why people are not involved in the ministry life of your local church: 1) They've never been asked to participate; 2) They've never been trained in what to do; and 3) They've never been thanked. Some would propose another reason: people are not committed to anything anymore. It could be, but probably not. People everywhere are dedicated to a plethora of causes and organizations. They are giving their time and energy to things like sports leagues, Longaberger baskets and other similar parties, Bingo and fundraising walks. Good things? Yes. Eternal things? No!

How are we to respond? Are people more passionate about sports, something-for-nothing schemes and charity than they are about God? What if the answer is "No?" What if we have lost the proper perspective of what ministry is really supposed to be? Sure, there are real pressures that will tend to distract and disengage ministry on every level. Just don't give up yet. It is helpful to keep the right attitude while actively engaging in ministry, and while getting other believers involved in personal ministry in the local church.

In Second Corinthians, chapter 3, we are reminded that God had changed Paul to the point of drawing this former Pharisee to heaven's purposes. God deals with His children in mercy by not giving to us what we deserve. Also, when we dedicate ourselves to serving God, he will reveal to us the mysteries of His kingdom. When that happens, as it did with Paul, God will then place us in a vibrant ministry. When we think about the process in which God calls and gifts us for ministry, always reflect on the awesome privilege it is to serve Him.

Understanding Personal Ministry in the Church

While involved in personal ministry, do not lose sight of those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 4:2-4). People are blind. People are distracted by an array of choices. People are dying. At the same time people are being saved. Stop looking at others for what they are. Look at them for what they could become if Christ could get a grip on their lives. There is hope for the lost, you know? That person you are looking at over there – they are going to make one incredible Christian! If every ministry could keep this fact as its driving passion, the kingdom of God would grow like never before and narcissism would quickly fade. Keep in contact with perishing people. The gorgeous aspect about sinners is that they too can be uniquely made into new creatures just like you and me.

If a church is to be effective for Christ, it must also make a shift in perspective to consider the audience. In 2 Corinthians 4:5-12, we're reminded to be expendable for Jesus' kingdom, not anyone or anything else. When Jesus is truly the audience, only the best will be attempted. When Jesus is truly the audience, strength, courage and wisdom will be supplied. When He is not the audience, burnout and hassle will prevail. In other words, to retain the sense of privilege in addition to gaining a passion for the lost, Jesus will be the audience of vibrant ministry. Whatever happens between now and eternity is relatively insignificant compared to the greatness of eternity. We are to be renewed everyday through the prospects of eternal life with God even when we grow weary in the ongoing task of ministry (2 Corinthians 4:13-18). Be sure to view the potential troubles of doing ministry as temporary compared to the timelessness of eternity in Paradise with God.

People everywhere want to be involved in important tasks that make a difference both now and later. In essentials there needs to be an agreed upon unity; in non-essentials, give and receive charity; and in all things decide to love each other with the love of Christ. Unity, how it relates to relationships in a given church, can be enhanced by the ways the church leaders structure the church. A leader can recognize a level of distrust and distaste when the culture, inside and outside the Church, stereotypes a bureaucratic or hierarchical structure as being dictatorial and ineffective. Perhaps, a better process for establishing a more biblical structure for a local church would be to implement a "flattened" or "systems" approach to organizational design.

The systems approach to running a church comes from a 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 theology. Every person, every gift and every ministry is important and interdependent with the other. It is a cyclical process that guides how the organization operates. Envision a bicycle wheel with Jesus as the center and every spoke being a ministry area of a local church. If one spoke is bent or missing, the entire wheel will not function properly. A systems approach strives to see the big picture. Nothing is independent, separated or compartmentalized in this structure. Everything is inter-dynamic. In other words, each area affects every other area within the entire organization in one way or another. One never deals with just one area of the church at a time. Rather, what needs to happen here is for leaders to constantly project how one change in a given area will affect another area, even though the issues seem to be completely separate. If church leaders continue to react to one thing at a time, the avalanching changes of culture will bury the church into frozen frustration. The Church is the Body of Christ. Therefore, we must see how each facet relates to the others, not merely disassembled parts doing their own thing that happen to be joined by some arbitrary spiritual bone marrow.

Using Spiritual Gifts in Personal Ministry

Closely related to this is the fact that all believers are gifted by God to build up the church. How often have we forgotten that every person who follows Christ has a spiritual gift? Each believer has something incredibly significant to contribute to the health of a local church. Without this person, the church is not as effective for Christ. Is there an excited expectation in your church that recognizes that every gift and person is wanted and needed to make the church a powerful force for Christ in your surrounding community? When is the last time there was a training class on understanding,

knowing, developing, and using spiritual gifts for your church? Never fear, spiritual gifts are not dead. They did not disappear when the apostles died. Spiritual gifts are not the same as spiritual fruit (study Galatians 5). Pentecostal theology has no corner on what spiritual gifts are and how they function. The Bible clearly states that every believer of Jesus Christ in your local church has and needs to use at least one of them.

Knowing your spiritual gifts does several things for you and your local church. In all actuality, it is one of the most exciting elements of Christian living. When you know your Spiritual Gift(s) ...

- It helps you determine God's will for your vocational endeavors.
- It mobilizes the Church for mission and purpose.
- It assists the local church in setting priorities for study, growth and ministry.
- It gives you, as a believer, a sense of worth and acceptance.
- It enables you to appreciate the gifts and ministries of others.
- It fosters unity among believers.

It is biblical to know and use spiritual gifts for service to the Lord through the ministry in a local church. It allows the local church to actually be the Church of Jesus Christ. It is the way individuals, and consequently a local church, will be equipped by God to be eternally effective for His Kingdom. Do God, your church and the lost community you serve a monumental favor. Expect and equip the people in your church to discover, develop and use their gifts for fruitful, life-giving ministry.

The Importance of Relationships

Relationships, and how they are developed in a local church, will greatly impact the recruitment of gifted volunteers. This is a key area of ministry life. In a typical Bible-believing church, around seventy-five percent of effective ministries would cease if it were not for God using gifted volunteers willing to serve Him. This is a crucial factor in explaining why some churches grow in overall health and others do not. There are seemingly never enough volunteers to go around for all the tasks needed to be accomplished. Some have never been given the opportunity to be trained in the area of spiritual gifts. Others, few as they remain, are simply not willing to sacrifice their time and energy for Christ to invest in active ministry.

While relationships should never be misused to recruit volunteers, the friendships enjoyed by a leader influence many to take on tasks in the church. Once a leader knows how his/her congregational members are gifted by God for ministry, there are other steps that need to be taken in the recruitment process. A leader must remember that people trust someone who is willing to do the work with them. A leader must learn who the audience is and "know his/her publics." A leader needs to become familiar with the congregational and personal history within a local church. Relational skills and knowledge are a huge impetus for the success of recruitment and retention of ministry volunteers in any local church. We are all people. We are part of a great church. Every one of us is uniquely gifted by God for works of service to Him. We are all people who, with God's power and strength, can have a dynamic personal ministry doing our part in helping the Body of Christ to function like He intended.