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### Pastoral Leadership: A Catalyst for Whole-Church Ministry

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# Pastoral leadership:

## A catalyst for whole-church ministry

**M**inistry in the New Testament finds its source and focus in Jesus Christ. Jesus set the tone and example for ministry by calling His followers to find greatness through servanthood. Jesus said He came “not to be served but to serve” (Matt. 20:28, RSV).

Based on Jesus’ example, ministry in the apostolic age was always viewed as a position of service (*diakonia*) by the entire community of God’s people (1 Cor. 12:15–26; 1 Peter 2:9, 10; 4:10, 11). Rather than being confined to an elite class of believers, service was the hallmark of all followers of Jesus.

Taking an active part in the fulfillment of the Great Commission was part—a crucial part—of the lifestyle of being a disciple of Christ. All baptized members were called to share in this service in accord with their special gifts.

### Ministry in the New Testament

A study of the concept of ministry in the New Testament reveals that the involvement of believers was driven primarily by their allegiance to Christ, the image they had of the church, their appreciation of their spiritual giftedness, and the apostles’ leadership. The image of the church as the people of God gave believers their self-understanding as the continuation and consummation of God’s covenant community (1 Peter 2:9). This image combines the identity of believers as God’s elect and holy covenant people with their priestly and prophetic responsibility of proclaiming Christ to the world.

The metaphor “the body of Christ” for the church suggests that the church is like a living organism with many functions that, though different, work harmoniously together for the health and growth of the whole body (1 Cor. 12:12–27). This image is a powerful reminder of mutuality and interdependence between church members and ministries.

The fact that each believer has received at least one gift from the Spirit indicates that each member is called to ministry. Each member’s contribution is essential because only when their ministry is performed can the body grow and fulfill its intended purpose. The body is negatively

affected whenever a member fails to play his or her unique part.

Paul’s fundamental concern is that no gift or ministry should be underrated. The entire body of Christ, leaders and members together, had the duty to witness inasmuch as all had received the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. The difference in gifts ensured that a variety of ministries could thrive. There was to be no thought of elitism among church members. Being a shepherd or a healer was related to one gift among many, not qualitatively different from other gifts.<sup>1</sup>

### Recovering the leadership role

Church health studies have established that there is a direct correlation between pastoral leadership and the long-term vitality of congregations. Pastoral leadership that empowers all members is considered the number one quality characteristic of healthy churches.<sup>2</sup> Following are three suggestions that have the potential to foster a whole-church ministry:

*1. Help believers fully embrace their identity as Christ’s disciples.* Recovering the New Testament’s perspective on ministry starts with helping believers fully embrace their identity as Christ’s disciples. While the world encourages us to search for our identity in external and temporal



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things, such as career development, social recognition, or even physical appearance, the Bible asserts that believers' identity is determined by God's verdict rather than that of their social location (1 Peter 2:9).

From the perspective of Scripture, therefore, what really defines our identity is not our family name, gender, ethnicity, nationality, level of education, job performance, or wealth. As Christians, our creation in God's image, our redemption by Christ, and the

certain social standards or being approved by certain people. Much of a person's life can be wasted trying to gain the approval of others.<sup>3</sup> When we learn to see ourselves in God's mirror, we will strive for a situation in which all our endeavors fit with our God-given identity. Therefore, Christians should not allow the voices of culture, popularism, media, personal preferences or experiences, or any such to overshadow the voice of the Bible on what constitutes true identity. According to 2 Corinthians 5:20 and 1 Peter 2:9, fully embracing our identity in Christ unavoidably leads to our involvement in God's mission. There is no passive membership in the body of Christ.

2. *Help believers discover and use their spiritual gifts.* Ephesians 4:11, 12 outlines the job description of a pastor: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (v. 12, RSV). The ultimate purpose of equipping the saints is to enable them to become full-fledged ministers in accord with their spiritual gifts and to

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enabling power of the Holy Spirit constitute the solid foundation of our identity.

Christians should see their true worth through God's eyes rather than those of others. They should avoid falling into the performance trap, becoming approval addicts, or being crippled by the fear of failure. Feeling good about oneself should not be contingent on meeting

actively participate in the building up of the body of Christ. Paul's counsel clearly refutes clergy-dominated ministry in the church. Therefore, being intentional about empowering members so that they faithfully fulfill their own ministry mandate is one of the most important aspects of pastoral leadership.

Leading church members in the process of spiritual gifts discovery, helping them understand and appreciate their giftedness, and showing them the various ways a gift can be used is one of the most powerful means of promoting whole-church ministry. At the end of the process of spiritual gifts discovery and after confirmation of the gifts by the congregation, members can be

assigned to the following four clusters of gift-based ministries:

The first cluster consists of *nurturing* gifts: wisdom, shepherding, exhortation, helping, discernment, faith, and compassion. These gifts focus on building fellowship, visitation, small groups, and member care.

The second cluster consists of *outreaching* gifts: apostleship, evangelism, miracles, compassion, servanthood, and prophecy. These gifts are concerned with equipping the church for outreach.

The third cluster consists of *witnessing* gifts: knowledge, faith, prophecy, teaching, evangelism, exhortation, and healing. These gifts focus on worship, Christian education, and church growth.

The last cluster contains *organizing* gifts: knowledge, administration, giving, leadership, helping, teaching, and wisdom.

Because of the overlapping of gifts between clusters, some members will belong to more than one gift-based ministry.<sup>4</sup> This gift cluster can also be used to resource volunteer ministries and nominating committees.

The involvement of members can be increased by undertaking strategic planning. For example, when a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis is used to gather factual information impacting a congregation's ministry, members are given a platform not only to express their perspectives on the health of their church but also to commit to addressing its challenges. The key point is this: "If we want people's intelligence and support, we must welcome them as cocreators. People only support what they create."<sup>5</sup>

3. *Cast a compelling vision for discipleship as a lifestyle.* Christ's commission to make disciples was not given only to the Twelve. Matthew 28:19, 20 could be paraphrased as, "As you go about your daily lives, make disciples of the people you interact with." The Great Commission is Christ's invitation to let our faith in Him permeate all our dealings—family, school, business, and so on. By virtue of this commission, all Christians are called, whatever their walk of life, to share their faith. God has intentionally placed each believer in their neighborhood, job, school, or other location for the strategic purpose of being outposts for His kingdom. They are the only missionaries some may ever meet or meaningfully interact with.

Christians should regard their work as a calling rather than just an occupation. When believers view their jobs as part of God's calling on their lives, they add new meaning to Christian witness. Thus, it is important for each believer to strive to

connect their deeply held professional dreams with their faith in Christ and their missionary mandate. In 1 Corinthians 12:4–7, Paul uses four distinct terms for the conferral of the Spirit: gifts (*charisma*—verse 4), services (*diakonia*—verse 5), workings (*energema*—verse 6), and manifestation (*phanerōsis*—verse 7).

*Charisma* is an inclusive designation of all the gifts of the Spirit. The emphasis is, rather than being based on the receiver's worthiness, spiritual gifts are the outworking of the Spirit's grace. *Diakonia* emphasizes the purpose of spiritual gifts: a Christlike attitude of servanthood for the common good of the community of God's people. It excludes any preoccupation for special status in the body of Christ on the part of the one who serves. *Energema* directs the attention to God's energy as the source of all gifts. *Phanerōsis* stresses that every believer has at least one spiritual gift for the common good.

In view of such an understanding of spiritual gifts, Christians are to consider spiritual gifts as given to them to be stewarded in the work of ministry. Full-body ministry calls for a complete exercise of the full range of available spiritual gifts. Thus, the architect, landscaper, computer software engineer, banker, garbage collector, shopkeeper, plumber, builder, nurse, all have been given special gifts by God to be used for Him.

By embracing their profession as a vocation, every believer becomes a full-time minister in whatever walk of life God has intentionally placed them for the strategic purpose of being an outpost of His kingdom.



- 1 Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 247.
- 2 Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (St Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996); S. Joseph Kidder, *The Big Four: Secrets to a Thriving Church Family* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2011), 27.
- 3 Robert S. McGee, *The Search for Significance: Seeing Your True Worth through God's Eyes* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 29–40, 53–62.
- 4 Dan R. Dick and Barbara A. Dick, *Equipped for Every Good Work: Building a Gift-Based Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 29.
- 5 Margaret Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007), 80.

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