



Called to Serve: Mobilizing and Training Volunteers

BY DEBORAH M. GILL

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION

When Jesus gathered the twelve disciples, He made a strategic decision to build His kingdom as a volunteer-intensive organization. He could have built His ministry on other options, such as a solo act or a wholly professional staff, but He chose to use volunteers.

The same is true with the Early Church (Acts 2:42–47). From its inception, the Church was a volunteer-intensive organization. Few people would derive their income from the church. Paul instructs pastors to mobilize everyone in the church — to equip them, to train them, to impart a vision to them, and to lead them — into a lifetime of voluntary service to Christ (Ephesians 4:11,12). Paul was a volunteer pastor. He supported himself as a tentmaker so he would not be a drain on the church. Lay leadership is God's idea.

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

God's vision for the Church is for every member be a minister. The Bible (Old and New Testament) uses distinct vocabulary for the people of God. There are generic Hebrew and Greek words that refer to people in general, but Scripture uses specific terms for God's people. In the New Testament, the word is *laos*, from which our English word *laity* is derived.

The term *laos* has no sense of second-class status, nor is laity inferior to clergy. Instead, *laos* has a lofty connotation. Distinct from other people, the

laos are redeemed for a higher purpose — to represent God in the world. That is what it means to be the people of God. The laity are ministers of God in this world.

In what ministries can laity serve? In the Old Testament, priest and prophet were not positions to which others could aspire. They were exclusive. They were also rare — few people served in either role. But such is not the case in the New Testament church. First Peter 2:4,5,9,10 (and Revelation 1:5,6) explain all God's people are His priests. Acts 2:17,18 explains in the last days the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all flesh, qualifying all Christians to be His prophets.

The unique ministry of the priest — intermediary between God and humanity, representative in the realm of the sacred — is a ministry for *all* God's people today. All believers have direct access to God; they are priests in their own right. The church is a new nation of priests mediating the light of Jesus Christ to this dark world. The unique ministry of prophet — to hear from God and speak for God — is open to all. There is no gender barrier (sons and daughters will prophesy). There is no generation barrier (young and old will see visions and dreams). There is no socioeconomic barrier (even servants and handmaidens qualify for this gift). The Day of Pentecost changed everything. Instead of exclusive roles, prophetic and priestly ministries are the domain of all the laity — a chosen people, a holy nation, the people of God.

Even the title *minister* does not connote any superiority in the biblical sense. Ministry equals service. Service equals ministry. They are the same word in New Testament Greek (*diakonia*).

PENTECOSTAL APPLICATION

If any church should value lay leadership and excel in volunteer ministries, it should be the Pentecostal church. We understand that the Holy Spirit gifts all members of Christ's body for charismatic ministry (1 Corinthians 12:12–30). We can appreciate that spiritual gifts come in various motivations (Romans 12:3–6) so each member finds great joy in making his unique contributions to ministry. And pastors must function in their biblical role as leaders in the church: to equip God's people for ministry.

By understanding the biblical paradigm, by valuing the vital role of the laity, and by helping laity discover, develop, and deploy their gifts, pastors can experience the joy of releasing volunteers in ministry. By equipping and empowering laity to do the work of the Lord, pastors multiply their effectiveness and share the most exciting action in the universe — being a coworker with God. ■

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