



EQUIPPER

The monthly e-magazine from the Church Administration and Development team of Grace Communion International

September 2013

Volume 8, Issue 9

MinDev.gci.org

Dear steward of the Spirit's gifts,

Last month we looked at being faithful stewards of our financial resources. This month we continue the stewardship theme, now looking at stewarding the "spiritual gifts" (Paul's term in 1 Corinthians) that the Holy Spirit gives to our members for their part in what Jesus is doing in and through his church.



PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

LifeWay Research director Ed Stetzer addressed this stewardship responsibility in a workshop I attended at the 2013 Exponential Conference in Orlando. Its title was, "Customers to Collaborators."

He began noting how research shows that the majority of Christians in all denominations and churches are not meaningfully engaged in ministry/mission. Sadly, most are "passive consumers" rather than "active participants." Ed challenged us to create (or re-energize) within our congregations/denominations a culture that helps members shift from "customers to collaborators."

Ed's research suggests that churches that successfully shepherd this shift have in place a mindset with supporting structures and programs that encourage a true "ministry of all believers." Rather than gimmicks to recruit volunteers to fill ministry slots, these are reasoned, obedient responses to God's declaration that his people are called and gifted by the Holy Spirit to be "priests of God." Note in 1Peter 2:5, 9 this exhortation from the apostle Peter:

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.... You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

On page two of this issue, you'll find my summary of Ed's suggestions for how pastors can help form within their congregations "a culture of participation." This culture encourages members to shift from passive *customers* to active *collaborators*. I trust that you will find his suggestions helpful in your setting.

In Christ's service:

Ted Johnston, *Equipper* editor

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Customers to collaborators
- 2 A culture of participation

A CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION

Below is a summary of Ed Stetzer's main points in his workshop "From Customers to Collaborators." He based his points on the apostle Peter's instructions in 1 Peter 4.

As believers, we know that we need Jesus above all else. However, we also know that Jesus, through his Spirit, gifts us then calls us to use those gifts in Jesus' ministry. But how do we achieve a true "ministry of all believers"? Here are four principles:

- 1. Break down laity-clergy distinctions.** Think about how your structures stand in the way of doing so: "When we build churches like theaters, don't be surprised when our members are observers." Systems or structures that demotivate or disempower the people of God are sinful. Sadly, many pastors find themselves in a position of co-dependency with a pastor-dependent congregation.
- 2. Use the gifts God has given.** Pastors are called to be stewards of the spiritual gifts given by the Spirit to the church (1Peter 4:10). Be sure to identify those gifts (gift inventories can help), then put in place structures and programs that provide ways for those gifts to be fully utilized. Hands-on experience is of great importance here, for people learn to identify and use their gifts primarily by doing. Here's a relevant quote from Stetzer: "If your church life is centered around the pastor, members become customers."
- 3. Empower people.** As an example of spiritual gifts, Peter mentions the gift of serving, which he says should be utilized "with the strength God provides" (1 Peter 4:11a). God provides the gift and the strength to use it, but we can thwart what God is intending to do through that member. Be sure to give careful thought about how you can empower people to faithfully use their gift. As Ed said, "Find and deploy the gifted people."
- 4. Show forth God's glory.** We don't mean to, but when we're pastor-centered, we rob God of his glory (1Peter 4:11b)—the unveiling of his goodness and power in and through the Spirit-gifted ministry of the body of Christ.

Implementing these principles in a pastor-centered church is, no doubt, a challenge. It often means changes that members resist, at least at first. But as Ed said, "People who are rowing the boat have less passion for rocking it." A good place to begin is to inventory the gifts that God has placed within the congregation and then let that resource base define how the congregation's ministries are structured (or restructured), rather than taking the opposite approach where the pastor simply goes about filling predetermined ministry slots. This latter approach tends to underutilize the congregation's giftedness, leading to demotivation at best and burnout at worst.

Dear pastor or ministry leader—please I urge you to give yourself permission to set aside "cookie cutter," "one-size-fits-all" expectations. Pray, dream, think, organize and then operate in accord with the Spirit's giftings and step-by-step leadership. By walking in step with the Spirit in that way, over time you will see emerge within your church a "culture of participation."

For a helpful resource addressing this important topic, the CAD team recommends the book *Doing Church as a Team* by Wayne Cordeiro (Regal, 2001).

