

Training Leaders in the Church to Serve



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Gethsemane Ev. Lutheran Church
Lee's Summit, MO
February 3, 2003

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Introduction

One thing is apparent from the start. Training Leaders in the Church to Serve, means we are going to be talking about Church and Ministry. Did you notice? Its right in the title. Church still means church. And ministry still means service. Training leaders in the church to serve means talking about one aspect of how the church carries out the ministry God has given it.

This is, of course, important. There is a reason the doctrine of Church and Ministry has occupied the attention of Christians for generations. There is a reason our WELS confessional statement, This We Believe, devotes an entire chapter to Church and Ministry and the Doctrinal Statements of the WELS includes thesis and antithesis on the subject. There is a reason I have in my file a two volume compendium consisting of 35 study papers/writings totaling 839 pages authored exclusively - with one exception - by WELS writers all addressing differing aspects of Church and Ministry. And it's not just WELS writers. Visit the library at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and make your way to section BV 652.1. You will find there a host of books dealing with leadership and equipping the saints. The same thing is true for the Seminary's online posting of essays. The reason Church and Ministry is important is because God's will for His people is important. How God wants His people to carry out ministry and serve each other with their gifts and with the Word is important.

This paper will not try to compete with more learned writers and exhaustive treatments on the subject of Church and Ministry. Our scope will be much more narrowly defined to the one particular subject of training leaders. That will limit the number of pages you have to work your way through at this conference and the number of thoughts you will need to digest. You might even refer to it as low calorie lighter fare on the menu of Church and Ministry. But my prayer is it will still offer you some nutritional value in the diet of spiritual matters; that it will give you some energy to expend in helping God's people serve with their gifts in carrying out God's all important work of the ministry of the Word.

Before we go any further, let's define how we will be using our words in this paper. The word "ministry" means "service." So it is proper to talk about many different forms of ministry, or service, among the body of believers. This is true whether it means serving people with the Word of God, or other types of service. In December 1992 WLS President, David Valleskey, addressed the WELS Symposium on the Ministry with a paper entitled, Coworking of Pastors, Teachers, Staff and Member Ministers. In it he referred to the "Report and Recommendations on Staff Ministry" to the 1991 synod convention and supported how it defined terms when referring to the ministry of the church. Even though they do not all come into play in this paper, it is worth our time to review the terms and note the differences. They are:

Personal ministry: The ministry every Christian has as a member of the Body of Christ (Universal Priesthood)

Public ministry: Ministry carried out in the name of and on behalf of the church, entered upon by call (formal or informal) of the church.

Member ministry: Public ministry that some members, by call of the church, carry out in the name of and on behalf of the church (normally voluntary and limited in time)

Offices of ministry: Public ministry that is typically a person's primary vocation (normally compensated and not limited in time)

Pastoral ministry: The office of the ministry carried out by one who has received a full theological training, e.g., a graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Teacher ministry: The office of ministry carried out by one whose training has been in the field of education, e.g., a graduate of the teacher training program of (Dr.) Martin Luther College

Staff ministry: The office of ministry carried out by one called to serve in a function other than that of pastor or teacher, e.g., a graduate of the staff ministry program of (Dr.) Martin Luther College.¹

As you can see, there is a difference between personal ministry and public ministry. In public ministry there is a difference between member ministry and offices of ministry. In offices of ministry three different types are listed although, according to our doctrine of Church and Ministry, there could conceivably be more. All of the definitions, however, begin with the premise that all of God's people have a ministry to carry out as part of the body of believers. In other words, all believers have different ways to serve the overall good of the body of Christ with the gifts God has given them. When it comes to serving people with the Word of God, This We Believe, includes the statement, "*In this sense all Christians are ministers, or servants, of the Gospel. God wants all Christians to share the message of salvation with other people.*"²

However, it is also true that among WELS Lutheran Christians, at least, the word "ministry" is often equated with the public ministry of the Word. Even more specifically it is usually understood in the sense of the pastoral office. This We Believe states, "*We look upon the pastoral office as the most comprehensive form of the public ministry of the Word.*"³ It would seem advisable to maintain such common understanding of words in our discussion of the Church and Ministry

subject of training leaders to serve. It strikes our ears as strange to refer to a member who has agreed to set up coffee for Sunday morning's Bible Class as being called to the ministry of the coffee pot. As important as that may be to some of us, and useful to the body of believers, it clouds the significance of those called to the public ministry of the Word who "labor in Word and doctrine." Therefore we will strive to be consistent in referring to "personal ministry" and "member ministry" with the terminology of "serving" and the work of full-time called workers such as pastors, teachers and staff ministers with the terminology of "ministry." If you have a personal preference for referring mainly to the pastoral office as the ministry you are not alone, as the above quoted statement from This We Believe implies. Our WELS doctrine of Church and Ministry, however, reminds us not to insist upon such usage by others.

Recognizing the Need for Leaders

What are we doing?

So, why are we spending time on this subject at all? Wouldn't our time be better spent reaching consensus on how to communicate to our members the importance of addressing our synod's budgetary shortfall in a positive and faith filled manner? Shouldn't we rather talk about the overwhelming demands for time and effort upon our called workers and how to help them, rather than adding another task of training others to the action items of their ministry? What about the big picture of mission work and the world's desperate need for the Gospel at a time when God is placing the Hmong, and Spanish speaking people, and foreign exchange students and other opportunities like a baby on our doorstep without even having to go into all the world to reach them? What about the big issues like morality, and parenting, and stewardship, and evangelism and membership retention at a time when all these things confront our congregations with ever increasing pressure like winter's ice flowing downstream in the spring and piling up against a bridge until it gives way? Shouldn't we rather be spending our time on issues like these? Maybe. Such subjects certainly would be worthy of our attention. But, that's not what you directed me to write about. And for that matter, maybe not. Perhaps, training leaders in the church provides more of an answer to addressing these other things than we at first realize. Can you imagine the wonderful, powerful, positive impact on the life and mission of the church if more of our members were involved in serving with their gifts, if more leaders in our midst were trained to lead others to use their gifts?

In their book, The Equipping Pastor, R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins describe the church as a stuck system that doesn't utilize the gifts of God's people nearly enough in carrying out the ministry of the church. How many of the problems they describe have you seen in your congregation, or others?

- *Overfunctioning Leaders.* Pastors and lay leaders feel stuck with all the responsibility for the church – from dreaming up new programs to locking the building at night.
- *Unmotivated Laity.* Pastors introduce lay training programs but cannot motivate people to get involved. Laypeople are passive receivers, the object of the pastor’s ministry rather than the subject of ministry themselves.
- *Standardized Pastoral Roles.* Churches view pastors as replaceable parts in a machine and compare the incumbent with the previous pastor or measure a pastor’s performance by standardized criteria. Many pastors feel called to a congregation even though they can see that it not a good fit.
- *Leadership Burnout.* Pastors blame themselves when they burn out. Congregations also blame the pastors, but the discouraged pastor may be a symptom of a problem in the church. The pastor has become the “identified burnout.”
- *Recurring Problems.* Decade after decade, generation after generation, the same problems surface, even though there has been a change of actors for the play, and “new blood” has been introduced. A church born of a split keeps splitting. The polluting negativism of significant members lingers long after they have left or died.
- *Maintenance Focus.* Most congregations are inward looking, focused on self-preservation rather than mission. Mission is the special interest of a few highly motivated members in the congregation.⁴

Does any of this sound like you? In varying degrees it describes many churches, and ministries. We are still sinner/saints. Let me rephrase that. More accurately, we are all – clergy and laity – beloved saints of God who still have a sinful nature clinging to us. Lack of perfect sanctification and lack of perfect understanding leads to lack of perfect church life here on earth. Too much reliance on the methods and attitudes of the past without learning anew in each generation all the beauties and mysteries of God’s grace and how it motivates to serve keeps the church from becoming a perfectly conditioned, well muscled body of Christ in this life. Jesus said that in the field of faith that is the church there will be weeds growing along with the wheat. Among the believers that are the true harvest of God there will still be varying degrees of fruit produced, some “*thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times*” what was sown (Mark 4:8). We should not expect an ideal church here on earth while the enemy still sows his weed seeds and while Christians still have to confess with Paul, “*For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing,*” (Rom. 7:19). It’s not until we get to heaven that the church will radiate with all her beauty as the bride of Christ. It’s not until we have our glorified bodies individually that collectively the hands, eyes and lungs will all work together in full harmony as the body of Christ.

That does not mean, however, that we should not work at building up the body of Christ, and equipping the saints for the work of the ministry and training leaders to serve. With a good training program the church can start running a little faster, instead of jogging. With continued gospel motivation the body can start lifting greater weights instead of being content to be a couch potato. Training leaders in the church to serve will help.

A practical need.

There is a practical side to recognizing the need for leaders. And that is, pure and simple, with more members gifted to be leaders, and trained to be leaders and leading others to serve according to God's direction more ministry will get done. John Raleigh Mott said, "*Greater is he that multiplies the workers than he who does the work.*"⁵ D.L. Moody wrote, "*It's better to put ten men to work than to do the work of ten men.*"⁶ Few would argue. How many times haven't pastors and church council members lamented the shortage of people to volunteer for mowing the lawn, or cleaning the church? Even more importantly, how often aren't congregations constantly searching for qualified individuals to help with the ministry of the Word as Sunday school teachers, or to lead the teen class? With more qualified teachers of the Word, more classes could be offered to congregation members for ongoing adult education in the Word. A more clearly defined and fully developed curricular approach to adult Bible study could be implemented. Who wouldn't want that?

The ideal situation would be to have many called workers serving in the full-time ministry of the church. Not exclusively, but especially do we mean having qualified individuals who could take the lead and do the work of preaching, and teaching, and counseling, and admonishing, and evangelizing people with the Word. Having lay members as members of the universal priesthood do most of that work - not as full-time called workers, but as volunteers or part-time called workers - raises a number of issues. Proper training, meeting qualifications, not being new to the faith are among the first that come to mind, as well as the whole matter of the divine call and the office seeking the man, not the man the office. Then there is the reality, as R. Paul Stevens states, that, "*The average lay person spends most of his or her life earning a living, relating to neighbors, and trying to raise a family.*"⁷ So it seems apparent that having many full-time called workers to carry out at least the ministry of the Word would be a great blessing to the church.

The Lord in His wisdom recognized how great a blessing called workers would be for His church. They would be wonderful gifts for His bride. He promised to give them. He ordained the public ministry. "*It is He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..*" (Eph. 4:11,12). These are called workers. They build up the body to prepare them for works of service.

The early Christian church is often viewed as the golden age of the New Testament church. They were, no doubt, closer to the ideal than we are. They received God's gifts in abundance and used them in faith. Both called workers and lay members using their gifts to serve. They chose men full of the Holy Spirit to serve in the daily distribution of the food so that the Apostles could devote more time to the ministry of the Word. They had men, like Philip, serve as evangelists. They had overseers, they had deacons, they appointed elders in their churches. We may not be able to define exactly the type of ministry each one of these offices carried out. Elders seems to be closest to our office of pastor (Acts 20:28), perhaps a combination of what we today view as pastor and elder. When the elders at Ephesus responded to Paul's request to meet him at Miletus, there were a number of men who came and bid him farewell as he boarded the ship. When Paul wrote, "*The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor*" (I Tim. 5:17), he was talking about leaders in the church and payment for their efforts (v. 18). When he added, "*especially those whose work is preaching and teaching*" (v.17), the conclusion is there were more called workers in the church besides what we call pastors and teachers. The point is there were a number of different types of called worker positions in the early church, paid, in many cases full-time, serving in both the ministry of the Word and in other types of service.

That would be ideal. There is also the reality of the moment where any given visible church is at in its spiritual maturity and use of God's gifts. One might say we are no longer in the golden age, we are in the last days. We do not have as many paid full-time and part-time called workers in our churches today. There are a number of reasons. How we understand and put into practice Church and Ministry is one of them. Another is the accepted, conventional wisdom of how we've always done things, or tradition. Having full-time pastors, and teachers and staff ministers are great blessings. But is having only one, or possibly two pastors, for large congregations up to 1,000 communicants and more doing all that we can do serve God's people with the ministry of the Word? Are all the needs to preach, teach, counsel, encourage, admonish, instruct, guide and lead with the Word in public worship and in private ministrations being fully met?

Stewardship an issue.

Stewardship becomes part of the issue, stewardship of time, talent and treasure. God treated His Old Testament visible church, the people of Israel, kindly as children. They did not have the full revelation of His Word as we do. They did not have His promise of a Savior fulfilled yet as we do. They did not have the fullness of the Spirit's outpouring and fullness of understanding as Jesus promised to give us in the New Testament. Through civil and ceremonial law everything was spelled out for them in their earthly lives as God's people. It was a blessing. The ceremonial law included the tithe. Ten percent of their income went to the Lord to honor Him

with their sacrifices and to fund the offices of the priests and the services of the Temple. They had plenty of resources to carry out ministry.

In the New Testament era God says we are *"no longer (to) be infants tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching.."* (Eph. 4:14). Now we have the full revelation of the Word. Now we have the promise of a Savior fulfilled. Now we have fullness of understanding and the Spirit's working in the New Testament. God now treats us like adults. Adults don't need rules and regulations like children. They have grown up to become mature, independent adults. They understand more. They care more. They make responsible choices and commitments on their own without having to be told. One expects more of adults than children. You expect more of yourself than your children, at least until they, also, become adults. You would never expect your children to do the level of work, put in the same amount of time and sacrifice, come up with the same amount of money to pay bills as you would of yourself.

It's not difficult to imagine our loving Father being disappointed in the level of maturity demonstrated by His grown children in the New Testament church when it comes to the matter of stewardship. If the children of the Old Testament gave 10% of their income to the Lord as they were commanded, what does it mean when we who are the adults of the New Testament average two to three percent of income in our giving now that we are free and mature and responsible to make our own decisions. Does that add up? There is no New Testament law. There should be no legalistic pressure to give more, masquerading as God's will, that is substituted for the proper motivation of the Gospel. But if we fail to use the first use of the law as a mirror to admonish selfishness, and we fail to use the third use of the law as a guide to teach God's expectations for giving to those whose hearts are motivated by faith to give, then we are doing God's people a great disservice. We are hurting the Church and Ministry. We are well aware that there are different levels of faith and different levels of fruits of faith produced by God's people. But even speaking on average, as long as we are content to accept two to three percent levels of giving by God's people, then we will need to accept, also, having fewer resources available to fund called workers to serve in the ministry of the Word.

Poor stewardship makes it difficult for the church to do ministry. That's reality. In a 1991 conference essay entitled, The Changing Profile of the Public Ministry, Pastor Daniel Koelpin made the following observations:

1. Large numbers of our church members...are spiritually and biblically ill-equipped to resist today's worldly influences.
2. The Sunday morning worship service can't do it all.
3. The ministry we are not getting done is hurting us more than we know.

4. Pastors and teachers can't do it all alone;
5. Member ministry (i.e., part-time ministry such as carried out by a congregation's Board of Elders) has some working problems, among them being the difficulty in finding enough members with the time and gifts to do the work and in finding more time for recruiting and training them;
6. There is a shortage of called workers for our present structure.⁸

Can you imagine, however, what it would be like if stewardship of treasury were not an issue, if 10% giving or more were the norm? Can you imagine how the vineyard of God's church would flourish and grow if there were greater numbers of called workers to serve? How would back door losses, and inactive member lists, and discipline duties, and confirmants that drift away, and members who desire more Bible classes, and special classes for special education needs, and couples that need counseling, and shut-ins who need visiting, and teen groups that need revitalizing, and neighborhoods that need evangelizing all be affected in your church if there were three or four pastors to the ministry of the Word instead of only one? That's saying nothing about having enough financial capability to send one or more of your own missionaries to spread the Word away from home. How great would that be? If stewardship of treasury were not an issue, most of those negative issues would diminish greatly and be replaced with such positive challenges as finding more room for Bible class attendance, and building bigger facilities, and starting daughter congregations, and reaching out to the community with Christian seminars, and finding ways for eager members to serve, and having two or three choirs, and arranging for family retreats, and calling more called workers. That's not reality at the moment, however. If we are not able to afford more called workers to do the full-time work of the public ministry, one thing we can do is start training more leaders in the church to serve and do more of the unfinished work that called workers otherwise would be doing.

A Scriptural encouragement.

Do not reach the wrong conclusion. Having more full-time called workers in the ministry of the Word would be a great blessing. It would address many needs of the church. But it would not, in itself, fulfill all Scripture's directives on Church and Ministry. Training leaders in the church to serve is not a second rate stop gap solution by default since we don't have more called workers as we need. We're not talking, here, about an attitude which says that if we can't have a new Nissan Maxima, we'll have to settle for an used Chevy pickup. My apologies to all Chevrolet owners. God says He wants to use Chevy pickups also. God says there are all kinds of vehicles in the garage of His church. There are pickups, and snowplows, and

limos, and tractors, and vans, and 18 wheelers, and garbage trucks, and bicycles, and garden tillers, and riding lawn mowers, and even a few skateboards. Notice, I didn't say there were any SUV's. Apparently, those with a greater knowledge of God's will than I have been able to determine that Jesus would never have driven a SUV. God engineered and manufactured them all to be used. Jesus bought and paid for them Himself and gave them as gifts to His church. He doesn't want them to remain parked in the garage, getting rusty. He wants them to be started up and driven out on the highways, and backyard, and gardens of our lives and used. Sure they will continue to need fuel and maintenance. There will be break downs and repairs required. But that's why God also called some to be mechanics, and maintenance personnel in His church. You get the idea. Personal ministry and member ministry, to use the terminology from the synod convention report on staff and member ministry, or to serve in different ways as we are accustomed to talking, is part of God's plan for His church. Public ministry and offices of ministry are given by God to build up God's people in faith and to prepare all of God's people to serve in the church and in the world with their gifts. *"To prepare God's people for works of service"* (Eph. 4:12), Paul says.

God's comparisons are even better. Ephesians 4:12 continues, *"so that the body of Christ may be built up."* You've heard it many times. The church is the body of Christ, of which He is the head. Paul says, *"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have differing gifts, according to the grace given us..."* (Rom. 12:4-6a). The entire chapter of I Corinthians 12 speaks clearly on this subject. If the eye of the body refused to use it's ability to see for the rest of the body, the rest of the body would suffer. It would compensate with hearing and touch, no doubt, and get along. But it would not be as fully functional and able to do things as it would be if only the eyes would cooperate. A member in the church is gifted by God to see the big picture of things. He has the vision to understand the needs and choices his congregation will be facing in the future. But if he refuses to serve on the Planning Committee because it will cut too much into his discretionary time, the rest of the church will suffer. It may shuffle along, and make do, and try to do its best without him. But the wrong property may be purchased, and the church's lack of visibility in the community will hurt its ministry. Notice, Church and Ministry are affected.

So it's not just a practical need to have more lay people serve with their gifts because we don't have enough money to pay for called workers to carry out ministry. More importantly, it's a Scriptural directive of our God to have all His people use the gifts He has given them. They are to serve each other by caring for each other, and encouraging one another, and helping one another in our lives of faith. They are to work together with other members of the body to assist with building up the church on earth in whatever way their gifts can be used to help. Training leaders in the church to serve will help facilitate this Church and Ministry.

The Need to Recognize Leaders

Who are leaders?

For training leaders to serve in the church it is helpful to be able to identify leaders. That observation, as they say, is not Newtonian physics. Nor is it computer programming to be able to recognize leaders. Most of the time, all one needs to do is open one's eyes to see who is usually leading. There are some diamonds in the rough who may turn out to shine quite nicely serving the church once asked to serve. Moses didn't want to lead and made all kinds of excuses not to lead. But after a little Christian persuasion from God, he served quite nicely, thank you very much. We should not neglect keeping our eyes open to uncover such gems and with a little polishing use them. But normally those who are already diamonds have a tendency to sparkle and it's not hard to notice them. Who are the people already stepping forward, taking charge and doing things leaders do? Make sure they are properly qualified for the situation in which leadership is needed, train them and let them lead.

This means, of course, not everyone is going to be able to lead. There are some natural born leaders, and there are those who have leadership thrust upon them who do well. But not everyone has the gifts to be a leader. When Paul identified different gifts in the church he wrote, "*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully*" (Rom. 12:6-8). There are those who believe the word for leadership in this verse should be understood in the sense of administrator, like one who supervises the distribution of social help to fellow members. But that, also, requires leadership abilities. Without leadership abilities a person put in charge of something soon flounders. Who hasn't seen a meeting run amuck because one who is not a naturally gifted leader loses control. He may be able to get the meeting to the finish line when nothing of consequence transpires. But let something controversial and potentially divisive surface, and all kinds of hands go up, and close friends take positions, and facts or figures get challenged, and without a good leader leading it won't be long and you'll have a mess on your hands. Don't expect anyone to be a leader.

Styles of leadership.

Recognize, however, that there are different styles of leadership. This is the place where many of the papers and books about serving in the church do their teaching.

There aren't many suggestions on training others to be leaders. But there are plentiful thoughts on how to lead. Books are written on the subject, secular and religious. Leaders are people who have the ability to influence others in how they think and act, and to get things done. Some lay members may have a better understanding of what is needed for good leadership, than pastors or teachers. Good. Tap into their knowledge and use them. Without trying to say all that could be said, we'll let a couple of authors summarize the main ideas. R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins in The Equipping Pastor, describe four leadership styles. They list different combinations of task oriented leadership (get the job done), and person oriented leadership (emphasize relationships with people). Here's their list:

- *Total Involvement*: High task and high relationships
- *Person Oriented*: High relationships and low tasks
- *Task Oriented*: High task and low relationships
- *Passive Involvement*: Low task and low relationships⁹

Stevens and Collins make a point of emphasizing, however, that not one leadership style serves best in every situation. *"Neither the people oriented style of leadership, or the task oriented style...is intrinsically better at releasing every member ministry in the local church."* ¹⁰ Depending on the maturity of the congregation and the needs of the moment, one style will often serve better than another.

Lyle Schaller in his book, Getting Things Done – Concepts and Skills for Leaders, would agree. He talks about type, role and style of leadership and generally divides types of leadership into two basic categories: democratic (relationships, person orientated) and authoritarian (task orientated). Democratic leadership encourages broad participation and strives to involve all the members of a group in decision making. Authoritarian leaders simply take charge, make decisions for others, set the goals and in general try to dictate what is intended to happen. Not every authoritarian style of leader may use the same degree of autocratic control, but the others know who is in charge. In an experiment on the two styles the authoritarian groups were more productive, but there was less tension and hostility and more cohesion in the democratic groups. One might think that a democratic style of leadership which involves people and builds consensus is to be preferred. And in the interests of harmony and member involvement in many cases it may be. But there is a sacrifice to be made in the area of getting things done promptly, or sometimes at all. There are different times and circumstances where one is to be preferred before another. Schaller quotes a study which concluded, *"that satisfaction with democratic leadership tends to be highest in small, interaction-orientated groups. Members are better satisfied with autocratic leadership in large, task orientated groups...the basic generalization is that as the size of the membership*

*increases, the people place greater expectations on the pastor to be an initiating leader. One of the greatest sources of satisfaction among the members of smaller congregations is a pastor who listens and loves. One of the greatest sources of dissatisfaction among the leaders of larger congregations is a pastor who refuses to accept the role of an initiating leader.”*¹¹ Enough on styles of leadership. The same principles would seem to apply also when identifying and using lay leaders in different circumstances.

Why train leaders?

We will soon be discussing the subject of training leaders. But first of all there are just a couple of quick, preliminary points. First of all, we are proceeding in this paper on the assumption that using lay leaders in the church does not lose sight of the generally accepted principle that in the church God, through the church, selects those whom are asked to lead. The leader does not push himself forward into that position. We are not disavowing the value of volunteering here. A person may see a need, know that he has the skills to take charge and lead others in accomplishing a certain task and volunteer to do so. By accepting such an offer the church, in effect, is selecting the man. Nor are we foolish enough to overlook the tremendous value of those who don't wait to be told to do something obviously needed, they just do it. The common, ordinary, everyday needs of the church that no one would dispute like buying a new trash can for the kitchen, or going out and mowing the lawn if it has been forgotten, or going up to visit with that visitor are what we are talking about here. What a blessing it is when a church has members who are ready to take the initiative to serve in this way without being asked. You don't have to wait to call a meeting, discuss the need, build consensus, and make sure everybody approves before replacing that burned out light bulb. Those are not situations calling for leadership of groups, just leadership in service by example.

The other thought to express is that when leadership is needed, training is often necessary. Whether it's in a part-time service in the ministry of the Word, like teaching Sunday school, or help that is needed in some other type of service, like organizing a roofing project, a person needs to be qualified for the role in which he functions. If he isn't qualified and ready to go, certainly training is needed. We don't take teaching Sunday school lightly, nor do we want leaks in the roof right after its finished and arguing among members about who is to blame. When it comes to the most important task of serving in the ministry of the Word like, for example, helping teach a Bible Class David Valleskey writes, *“It would be better for the pastor to do it all, or for some work to be left undone, than to utilize untrained, or insufficiently trained people in the church's public ministry of the Gospel.”*¹² Much damage can be done by unqualified people trying to do something for which they are not sufficiently prepared. Did you ever consider asking an unqualified, untrained doctor to lead the surgical team in performing your operation? Helping the great Physician of souls meet our spiritual needs is even more important.

Recognizing the Needs of Leaders

Not a program

What do leaders need in order to serve the church effectively? What do we need to do to train leaders to serve? Surprisingly, the answer is not as much as one might think. At least when it comes to equipping and motivating leaders to serve, initiating some kind of training program may prove more ineffective than we would like to admit. The main point of the book, The Equipping Pastor, by Steven and Collins is that pastors would be better served not trying to equip individuals to assist them in serving the different needs of God's people. They will accomplish much more by concentrating on equipping the church as a whole – as a “system” – and then the church will equip the saints. In other words, “*be shepherds of the church of God which He bought with His own blood,*” (Acts 20:28). Another way of trying to express the thought is concentrate on the environment of the church. Work on developing it's spiritual maturity and growth in knowledge and grace – not on conducting another program. That ought to sound pretty good to many pastors whose concern often is they are spending too much time on administration and meetings and trying to establish programs, and not enough time on feeding people with the Word.

Consider these thoughts from The Equipping Pastor by Stevens and Collins to help understand the concept of ministering to the needs of the church as a whole. They are not all logically tied together in sequence, but together they communicate a thought provoking message.

- *The most direct way to equip the saints for the work of the ministry is not to devise strategies for equipping individuals, but to equip the church as a system (as a whole made up of many interrelated parts, the individual saints and their gifts as they interact with each other), then the church will equip the saints.*
- *“I began to discover why some churches with many programs produced little leadership and intentional missions, while other churches with fewer programs but a healthier corporate life evoked lay ministry almost without trying.”*
- *“I believed that the church did not “have” a mission as one of many activities in which interested people could engage; I believed the church is mission. The workplaces, homes, neighborhoods in which people lived from Monday to Saturday were the primary location for the church's mission during the week. They did not “go” to church; they were the church wherever they went.”*
- *The equipping pastor must cultivate a culture that reinforces (the idea) that serving the Lord in the mission of the church (ministry) is not just what a person does with discretionary time, but with all of life.*

- *The equipping pastor is not merely one who gets the lay people to assist him. No, the equipping pastor assists the people to fulfill their own ministry, a much greater thing.*
- *Ironically, here we were trying to strengthen the ministry of the laity, and the whole program was clergy dependent.*

And, finally, there is this longer section but worth the read.

- *Simply put, Christian leaders serve God and God's interests in the world first. Only secondarily do they serve people. The order is profoundly important. For a Christian leader, the need is not the call. The call originates in the initiative of God, not the cry of humanity. If it originated in the needs of people, the leader could easily be overwhelmed by needs that he...cannot meet, and the leader would have no criterion for making the selection. Often such leaders exhaust themselves or become messianic. Some people, thinking they are servant-leaders, are actually functioning as doormats, thinking they are doing God's will by doing everyone else's will. In contrast, the Christian servant-leader is **first of all a servant of God.** (emphasis added).¹³*

Much of this is written to pastors. It is intended to help full-time called workers understand their role in assisting others to serve as leaders, or in other ways. Let me try to capsule the whole idea in a simple way. To train leaders in the church to serve, the first thing to keep in mind is don't try to start a clergy dependant program teaching others how to assist you in serving the church. First of all, serve God by doing your work as a pastor to preach the Word. Build up the body of Christ by preaching, teaching, encouraging, exhorting, rebuking, correcting, feeding and increasing peoples' understanding of God's will with the Word, in a patient and loving way. And then from that Word nourished, faith enriched culture of a strong body of believers let leaders surface as the situation demands, and lead.

Need for training..

Saying that pastors need not start training programs to get people to lead in the church, does not mean those who are called to lead don't have any need to be prepared. Moses was trained for his leadership role in the wilderness by shepherding sheep there and learning the territory before he was called upon to shepherd God's sheep. Even earlier, he had been prepared for understanding the ways of royalty by being raised in a royal family. Before that was the foundation for it all. He was trained by his parents in the fear of God so that when the time came, "He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time," (Heb. 11:25). Moses received a whole lot of training to serve as God's leader. Jesus prepared Himself for His public ministry.

He studied the Scriptures, even as a child amazing scholars and rabbis in the Temple with His grasp of Bible doctrine. When the time came for Him to train His disciples He was thoroughly grounded in the Word so that He could answer their questions and refute His critics on the basis of what God said. And then, in turn, He thoroughly grounded His disciples in the Word with sermons, and parables, and lessons and quotes from the Old Testament so that they were prepared to lead in the church.

The number one need

You know where we are going with this. There are other needs that leaders have to be properly prepared for service, as we shall in a few moments. But the number one need they have for training is the number one need we all have. And that is the one thing needful. This is what we meant also above when emphasizing the greatest thing a pastor can do to train leaders in the church to serve is to build up the body of Christ as a whole with the Word. When looking for leaders in the church, what is the first thing we look for? Ought it not be *“men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom,”* (Acts 6:3). That’s a far cry from just seeking a warm body that the Nominating Committee can convince to stand for election? Being full of the Spirit and of wisdom doesn’t happen unless a person is thoroughly grounded in the Word. Professor Mark Zarling in his 1998 paper, Leaders in the Lord, says, *“true ‘Lutheran’ leaders are concerned about the Word of God in their personal lives, and in the congregation they serve.”* **14** Seminary President David Valleskey, in his paper, Coworking of Pastor, Teachers, Staff and Member Ministers, talks about the importance of training in the Word, also, for members who serve. He refers to how careful we are to give thorough training in Scripture to our full-time called workers. And then he says, *“We need to be no less thorough in our training of people to serve in member ministry...”* **15** Later, he adds, *“In a sense every congregation is a mini-seminary with a part of the pastor’s work being the training of such member minister (leaders) as elders, evangelists, stewards, Sunday school and vacation Bible school teachers, youth leaders, and Bible Class leaders.”* **16**

All of this greatly underscores the number one need for training leaders in the church to serve is to help them grow in the Word. And this certainly is not just theoretical jargon giving lip service to the Word that doesn’t have much direct impact on how people actually serve when they lead. What pastor hasn’t cringed when it became apparent that the man selected to head the Stewardship Committee didn’t have an understanding of Scriptural stewardship principles. And then he tried to control the ship in stormy waters as the man was ready to start shaming people into giving more with the Law, or charge dues, or initiate some fund raising effort having no resemblance to Gospel motivated Christian giving. What congregation hasn’t been blessed when a man elected to lead the Board of Elders had a solid grasp of Scripture. And he showed it by leading the way in properly

applying law and gospel when the elders had to carry out church discipline with George's son who was unscripturally divorcing his wife. Professor Zarling referred to the practical side of leaders using the Word in their service to the church. He wrote,

- *The ways of the world do not work in the vineyard of Christ's Church. Quick fix programs do not make lasting, spiritual change within a human heart. When the congregation plans worship activity, the Word is our rule against which everything is measured. When the congregation undertakes the difficult assignment of disciplining the erring, Lutheran leaders know that no family pressure or raucous relatives can supplant the fact that we answer to the Good Shepherd. When the congregation seeks to improve its outreach efforts, priority is always given to how the Word of life can best be presented to people. Lutheran leaders are bound to the Word alone, and through it understand that they are accountable to the Lord of the church. 17*

The conclusion: consistent growth in the Word is the one thing leaders need most of all in order to serve in a God-pleasing way in the church. If we are going to train them at all, train them with the Word. Preach the full counsel of God in sermons. Insist upon attendance at Bible classes. Start meetings with studies of God's Word. Teach having devotions at home with their family. Guide them to appropriate devotional materials. Do it in a organized, loving way with full confidence that such growth in the Word will yield rich fruit in the leadership of the church.

A positive attitude.

Location. Location. Location. It's location that makes all the difference in the business world they say. Using the same approach in the church we would say: Attitude. Attitude. Attitude. Apart from seeking as our leaders godly men who are full of the Spirit and wisdom and building them up with the Word of God, the next single most important thing we can do to train leaders is to instill a positive attitude. Once again, if we go back to the pastor serving the church as a whole and building an environment in which Christians are ready to serve with their gifts, we're not talking so much about instilling a positive attitude in the leaders. We're talking about instilling it in the church.

Think about church life. What destructive crippling of the church's work is done and harm to spiritual life occurs when the prevailing attitude in a church is one of negativism and criticism. Always pointing out what's wrong, and how we're short in the budget, and how many young people aren't coming, and nobody wants to help, and the pastor's sermons aren't edifying, and why do we have to sing those old, stodgy hymns, and the teen league isn't any fun, and the attendance is down, and the roof still leaks, and who does Joe think he is anyway always wanting things to go

his way, and on and on and on and on. Who can bear it? It's bad enough to have to put up with one such person at work, or in the home. Who would want to be an active player in a church that is constantly negative? You are what you eat. If that's the kind of water people swim in all the time, you can expect them to be covered with sludge. It's the old self-fulfilling prophecy. Keep on telling a child he's a bad boy, and he'll be a bad boy. Keep on talking and acting as if things are not good in the church and, I guarantee, they will not be good. Nor will we get hardly anything out of our people in the way of positive, constructive, forward looking leadership and service. It only takes one voice to start the downward spiral if not checked. Discontent grows. Discord divides. How can one lead in situation like that? The church suffers.

Don't let it happen. Negativism happens easily. Building a positive attitude takes time and consistency. But just think of how enjoyable life is, and how much can get done when there is a spirit of harmony, and contentment, and togetherness in the home. The same is true in the church. Building a positive attitude in the church that fosters harmony and cooperation and expects good things will bear wonderful fruit in the readiness with which people serve. And they enjoy serving too. Life will definitely be better. Good things will happen.

Compare some of the long range consequences of having either a positive or negative attitude towards life. Read the books about how positive people on the average live longer, are happier, have more friends, are more successful, participate more, see good things in others, etc., etc. And then start counting on your fingers the number of negative people you know that have a lot of friends and are successful. It's so obvious. We have no justification for letting negative, critical, fault-finding continue in the church without working to get rid of it, must less being pessimistic about how things are going ourselves. Negativism is like bind weed though. Its roots do down deep. You can't just pull it out and get rid of it by successfully scuttling some negative attitude once. Like slowly poisoning the roots with application after application, it will take a steady application of a positive, can do, look at how we are blessed, attitude over a period of time to get rid of negativism.

To demonstrate how much serving in a positive environment makes a difference in how willing leaders are to serve, consider this assortment of comments taken from a Bible Class survey on leadership in the church. On the side of things that would encourage a person to use his gifts in the church and lead:

- *friendship with other serving members; encouragement/recognition from Pastor and other leaders in church; others who are enthusiastic – fun to work with; friendly people who ask me to help or make sure I understand what is available to join or support; encouragement from others; ...that things are running smoothly; fellowship; relationships; out-going leaders – a plan/goals, support; comradery is very important*

Notice how often positive words like friendly, enthusiastic, encouragement, fellowship, fun, plans, goals and good relationships are used. Compare that with the comments on what would discourage a person from serving.

- *personality conflicts; leaders that act as though you are not needed or wanted; chastising somebody for doing things wrong; when it's a my way or hit the highway (attitude); people that don't get along or work together; maybe the hard headedness of some people sometimes; being in situations where conflict may arise; criticism of work being done; if people...just get together to gossip; complained about the work being done; (and one which stated it quite bluntly) poor or negative attitudes.*

Once again notice the kind of words used: conflict, chastising, criticism, hard headedness, complaining. The message about maintaining a positive environment in the church to encourage service and leadership is pretty clear. The people, themselves, have spoken. We'd be foolish to ignore them.

We have the most positive environment of all built right into our status as the church. We are God's redeemed saints, righteous in His sight, enjoying God's peace, filled with hope; God promising to be with us and bless us in whatever we do in His name; walking together with others who believe as we do; the Law's negative condemnation of sin trumped by the Gospel's positive pronouncement of forgiveness; truth; guidance; fellowship; heaven waiting for us. How can we not be positive and filled with gratitude to our God? Maintaining a positive spirit of harmony and togetherness and God's blessings upon us, goes a long, long way in training leaders in the church to serve. Be committed and determined and unrelenting in being positive yourself and building a positive attitude in the church.

Other needs.

Building people up with the Word and maintaining a positive spirit in the church, I believe, are the most important things leaders need. That more than anything else will equip them to lead and influence others in positive, God-pleasing service. There are, of course, other practical things to keep in mind to train people so that they can serve effectively. Some of them are obvious. You can think faster than I can write, so in this paper we will simply list them with only a few comments on each.

Joining the church. This is not intended as humor. And it is perhaps the least obvious of the other needs. We're not talking about joining the church as in being received as a member. We're talking about those who are already members joining the thinking and culture and traditions and interests of the people they are to lead and be a part of where they are in life. Stevens and Collins in the Equipping Pastor said that for a pastor coming into a church that, normally, takes about three years.¹⁶

Leaders in the church may not need that much time to gain acceptance by a group (organization, board, project, etc.) they are to lead. But if a person is going to lead a congregation as a Building Committee chairman, he definitely needs to join the rest of the members to share the expectations and hopes and aspirations they have for the project. Think of how synodical leaders who come to a church for a presentation or other church related assignment are sometimes received. They may not be as well received, or receive the cooperation they desire, if members perceive them as "outsiders." Member may feel they don't understand or care about how "we" do things. They haven't "joined" the group. To lead effectively people need to make sure they are a part of the group and share the same interests and goals.

Modeling. Sometimes the simplest way to train another person is to show them. Modeling for a leader effective ways to communicate, and empathize, and encourage, and appreciate, and guide, and take charge and direct may not be a training program, but those who observe and emulate are in training. *"Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you"* (Phil. 3:17), Paul wrote. It's still good advice, also for training leaders.

Mentoring. Mentoring is similar to modeling. But this kind of training involves mainly one on one relationships. It is more specific in its goals and more specific in its structure. It involves not just showing, but observing and explaining and making suggestions. Taking someone along on a call where he or she observes you is modeling. Going with him when he makes a call and making suggestions afterwards, and following up with more counsel in the future to continue the development, is mentoring.

Tools. People want to be equipped with the proper tools and receive guidance on what is expected of them when they are asked to serve. There were a number of comments expressing this desire on the leadership survey that was taken. But that is more easily done when the task is more easily defined. What kind of tools do you give someone who is asked to lead? A gavel, a bull-horn, a leadership manual and Robert's Rules of Order come to mind as possible suggestions. But mainly what people want is clear communication of what is expected of them, i.e. job descriptions if you have them. If job descriptions aren't written out yet, write them out, or at least make sure people are clear on what is expected of them. And then provide them with whatever else that they need to do the job that they can't easily acquire themselves.

Trust. People need to be trusted. Leaders need to be trusted. If someone ends up in a leadership position in the church, let him do his job and don't try to get him to do his job your way. God gave him his gifts. Maybe God wants his gifts used in that situation not yours. Watch how quickly service and leadership in the church begin to evaporate if you ask someone to serve or lead, and then don't let them do their

job, unless its your way. Trust them. If it isn't the same way you would have done the job, or even as polished and effective as you might lead, fine. Someone else could do your job better than you can, too. We're not talking about overlooking malfeasance in office here. We're talking about letting those who are doing their best to serve as God enables them do their job. Trust God to work through them and their strengths and weaknesses, just like He works through you. It's worth remembering that God's *"power is made perfect in weakness"* (II Cor. 12:9).

Expectations. See tools above.

Vision. Share your vision. That's part of the training process. Those who lead need to see where the church is going. If you're staying put and not going anywhere, you don't need much in the way of leadership. Consider the other side of that coin too. If you don't have much leadership, you're probably not going anywhere.

Accountability. People need to be held accountable for their job performance. If they aren't doing their job through willful neglect, tactfully replace them.

Prayer. In keeping with the spirit of I Tim. 2:1,2 and Heb. 13:17,18 pray for leaders.

Praise. Do not underestimate the value of appropriate praise. It helps build a positive environment. Don't worry about somebody getting the big head, or serving because they want to be praised. That's putting the worst construction on why God's people serve with their gifts. That's saying their service does not come as a fruit of faith, but from the old Adam. That's being negative. And remember what we said above about being negative in the church. Let God be the judge of peoples' hearts and motives. He's far better at it than we are. If God can say, *"Well done, good and faithful servant"* (Matt. 25:21) with His glory and gospel motivation untarnished, we can feel free to praise also. And, as they say, a little praise goes a long way.

* * *

Summary

What have we learned? We've learned that the teaching of Church and Ministry is important. It's important to God and important to God's people. They are the church. They do the serving. According to God's plan leaders are needed in the church to lead people in the ministry of the Word, and to serve each other in other ways. When there aren't enough called workers leading the church, the church suffers. Members serving as leaders in the church are not just necessary substitutes when there aren't enough called workers. They are part of God's plan for the body of Christ to build each other up in the faith, and to serve each other, and bring His Gospel to the world.

We've learned not everyone can be a leader. But those who are full of the Spirit and of wisdom, who have the gifts and are qualified to serve in that capacity should be used by the church to lead their fellow members. There are different gifts in God's people leading to different styles of leadership among people. Each has its place according to the needs of a particular time and place. The examples of leadership that we have in the Bible remind us that leaders, also, often need to be trained for the service God would have them provide to His church.

We've learned that training leaders to serve in the church is not best carried out by instituting another program in order to train people how to serve. The most important training a leader can receive is to be thoroughly grounded in the Word of God. He is to know God's will for God's people and be responsible, first of all, to God for how he serves God's people with his leadership. It is also very important to maintain a positive attitude in the church and continually remind ourselves how greatly we have been blessed by God. Negative environments stifle service among all of God's people and hurt the church's ministry. Positive environments are a fruit of the Spirit and help the church carry out ministry.

There are common sense activities like modeling, and mentoring, and communicating expectations, and accountability, and vision, and trust, and prayer and praise that will cultivate more frequent and effective leadership among God's people. But God gifts His people for leadership and trains them by experience. It is our task to do what God asks us to do: feed His flock with the Word and make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. When that kind of training in the Word and by the Spirit happens, God's people will serve. Or, to use another common expression, what will happen is Church and Ministry.

Soli Deo Gloria

End Notes

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2. This We Believe, NPH, 1999, p. 29.
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11. Lyle Schaller, Getting Things Done – Concepts and Skills for Leaders, Nashville, TN, the Abingdon Press, 1986, p.87.
12. David Valleskey, The Coworking of Pastors, Teachers, Staff, and Member Ministers, p.22.
13. Stevens and Collins, The Equipping Pastor, p. 110
14. Mark Zarling, Leaders in the Lord, Presentation given to Western Wisconsin Men's Convocation, Watertown, WI, 1998, p 17. (Essay from personal file).
15. David Valleskey, Coworking of Pastors, Teachers, Staff and Member Ministers, p.22.
16. IBID, p.22
17. Mark Zarling, Leaders in the Lord, p. 18.