



Chapter 1

A

Needs – conscious Church



The denomination didn't make any difference to this man - neither did the location not the size. The preaching and music, though important, were not first on his list. He was searching for a church where people were real in their relationships. For several Sunday following the close of the service, he stood at the edge of the milling crowd, critically observing the way people related to each other.

He had burned in his former church. The relationships were superficial. People were cordial, even polite. They smiled and nodded their heads as they greet one another, but it was evident they were hurrying to more important agendas. He had thought people cared, but when the chips were down, no one was there for him. No one really cared.

In *this* church, however, he sensed a different culture. People were real. He saw them taking time to talk. Their smiles and gestures signaled bonded relationships. He eavesdropped just enough to conclude that people were really interested in one another's lives - their families and jobs, their troubles and sorrows, their joys and excitements. He saw one cry. He watched another throw her head back in laughter. He even observed a small group in the corner join hands in prayer.

After a few Sundays, he ventured inward from the fringe to see if he would be accepted. People talked with him. They included him in their little circles. Upon discovering that he was a visitor, one person offered to walk him to the refreshment table, then to the Information Center.

This was a different church culture. People were real. He was accepted. He was sure his new acquaintances truly cared. Before long he attended classes, reaffirmed his faith in Jesus Christ and joined the church.

Now that he's "in" what will happen? Will the momentum of this church's culture move him into doing a ministry as it moved him into membership? Are there *Discover Your Ministry* paths to follow with people who will accompany him through the process, like the person who walked him to the refreshment table? Is lay ministry as characteristic of the culture of the church as the love and care he is experiencing?

If a church is to be all God calls it to be, it will also respond to the unfelt needs of its people.

The church responded to his felt needs for love and acceptance. But if a church is to be all God calls it to be, it will also respond to the unfelt needs of its people by: One, learning what the Bible teaches about spiritual gifts, and two, equipping people to use those gifts.

Children's unfelt needs illustrate this. A child psychologist, being interviewed on a TV talk show, explained that children do not come to their parents complaining that their parents are not spending enough time with them. They do not ask for more quality time so they can develop into well-rounded adults. But parents who are alert to their children's behavioral symptoms will see that is what they need.

So it is with pastoral care in a church. Many people struggle and suffer with their problems alone, having no idea that they need pastoral care. It is a rare person who will come to the pastor to request more personal attention. But an alert pastor will pick up on clues such as sporadic attendance; arrested spiritual growth; minimal participation in the life of the church; and criticism of sermons, programs and people.

This is a new day in the Church. Leaders clinging to the traditional way of "doing" church are struggling. Many churches are in survival mode. A six-month study conducted throughout the first part of 1996 indicated that congregations find themselves stuck in old patterns that seem preoccupied with institutional maintenance. Many, however, are moving or have moved from the traditional to the new and are bursting with life.

Loren Mead, the perceptive founder of the Alban Institute, strongly believes the Church has to be "reinvented." He maintains then changes needed are so major that instead of tempering with congregations or polishing them up a bit, we need to "reinvent" them.¹ Management consultant Peter Drucker also believes churches are in trouble. Those that will not only survive into the next century but thrive are those which are "pastoral." He defines pastoral as giving attention to the needs of people.²

A panoramic sweep of Church history indicates we are in an interim age, uncertain whether we are to hold on to the past or take strident steps into the future. One thing is for sure: The Church can't stay where it is. Traditional structures are collapsing; membership and finances are declining. Our culture, in general, is different, hostile or benignly tolerant. It does not take the Church seriously, and is not supportive.

In this interim age (the period between what the Church was and what it is becoming), church-development strategies differ significantly. Some churches are trying to recapture the past. Their goal is: Do what we did before, only bigger and better. Some are holding steady. Their hope is: The curve somehow will soon turn upward. Other are shifting gears. Their risk is: We'll cast out lot with the Scriptures and

successful church models.

One of the dominant characteristics of churches bursting with life is lay ministry. They are giving the ministry to the people. They are calling their people to commit themselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ, to spiritual growth and to ministry. They help their people discover their gifts for ministry and equip them to do it. They support them in what they believe God is calling them to do, and hold them accountable. They believe that all Christians are ministers (some vocational and some volunteer), equal in importance while different in function. They believe the laity should be the primary ministering people in the Church.

The genre of lay ministry we are presenting in this book is pastoral care. The model we feature is the Lay Pastors Ministry, a system of congregational care by lay people. The history of the Lay Pastors ministry (nearly two decades now) warrants the focus. The model launched in one church in 1978, with no thought that it would go anywhere else, has been adopted and adapted by hundreds of other churches around the world.

Pastors who discover that they cannot give any member the kind of care they need are relieved to discover this successful system. They often say, "This will keep us from having to reinvent the wheel." Informed laypeople, concerned about the exodus out of the "back door" (or "disaffiliation"), become excited over the possibility of the Lay Pastors Ministry closing that door. Churches that put a priority on pastoral care look to us to help them implement this ministry, or, as many have done, just start it themselves by following the principles and plan given in my first book, *Can the Pastors Do It Alone?*

In this book I ask and then answer four key questions:

1. Are people ready to give and receive this ministry?
2. Are pastors ready to give this ministry to their people?
3. Are people ready to do this ministry?
4. What kind of structures does this ministry take?

The next three chapters cite reasons why laypeople can do this ministry, ways they can do it, how to give the ministry to the people and how lay pastoral care fits into your church's total life.

My prayer is that as you read and ponder what is written, you shall hear the refrain of Revelation 2:7 regularly: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This same refrain concludes the message to each of the seven churches (see 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22).

Be prepared to read this refrain at the conclusion of each chapter because I believe present-day indicators signal that the Spirit "says" the message of this book to your church.

Also, just as each church's message ended with a specific directive from the Spirit,

each of these chapters ends with a specific directive.

The success of your church's lay pastoral care ministry will be in proportion to its energy for these seven qualities:

- * **A Needs -Conscious Church**
- * **A Gift-Oriented Church**
- * **An Egalitarian Church**
- * **A Ministry-Balanced Church**
- * **A Biblical Church**
- * **A Mobilized Church**
- * **A Failure-Resistant Church**

Each quality warrants full treatment, therefore, I have written a chapter about each one.

So let's consider in this chapter what it means to be a need-conscious church.

ALERT TO THE NEED FOR PASTORAL CARE

To have a successful lay pastoral care ministry, the church must be needs-conscious: alert to the needs of its people for pastoral care and ready to (1) *assess* the need; (2) *adapt* to changing realities; (3) *adopt* or create a structure; and (4) *advance* with specific plans, goals and personnel.

Ready to Assess the Need

For several years, I have presented pastoral care seminars in churches that have established pastoral care as a priority. This priority usually results from a survey or other kind of study. Often the needs assessment is generated by a frustrated pastor, fueled by disillusioned members and is conducted by a board or assigned group.

Gary Titusdahl's story is the same as that of hundreds of churches. Gary is the pastor of a growing church, The First Congregational Church (UCC) in Cannon Falls, Minnesota.³

It became clear to me that I could not provide quality pastoral care alone....I felt guilty....I also felt inadequate as a pastoral caregiver for the entire congregation. The church's annual evaluation of my performance in 1992 described my pastoral care efforts as appreciated and, for the most part, effective. But, the congregation wanted more attention paid to its ongoing pastoral needs. In particular, the congregation said it needed more thorough follow-up to individuals and families suffering loss, confusion and grief.

Group meetings were made scheduled in member's homes throughout a period of several weeks so people could voice their opinions. pastoral care was overwhelmingly

determined to be the number one need.

But Gary was already on overload, thus it became clear that if members were to be adequately pastored, laypeople would have to do it. Enter the Lay Pastors Ministry.

I was invited to lead their first equipping seminar. Sunday, January 22, 1995, was a historic day - the first members were commissioned as lay pastors. People were excited, and their expectations were high.

The following week they began to P A C E their assigned flocks of five to eight households. Remember P A C E? The constituted their pastoral care:

P: PRAYING regularly for them;

A: Being AVAILABLE to them;

C: CONTACTING them; and

D: Striving to be an EXAMPLE

Four typical dynamics are apparent in Gory's story:

1. Only one pastoral caregiver: "I could not provide quality pastoral care alone."
2. Feeling of guilt and inadequacy: "I felt guilty...inadequate."
3. Involving people in needs assessment: "They scheduled meetings in members' homes."
4. Pastoral care identified as the priority: "they felt the urgency to develop a systematic approach to pastoral care."

What did the people meeting in these homes mean by *pastoral care*? Obviously they did not mean spiritual leadership, preaching, marrying, burying, counseling and crisis visitation. Gary was doing these. Let's hear how they understood *lay pastoral care*:

- "More thorough follow-up to individuals and families suffering loss, confusion and grief."
- "Responsive means to provide spiritual care for the width and depth of [people's] pain."
- "Giving personal attention, support and guidance in Christ's name."
- "Carry others' burdens and spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

People joining our churches deserve the kind of personal attention described in the words you have just read; and clearly, if they are going to receive it, laypeople must give it. The centerpiece of the Lay Pastors Ministry, **PACE**, adequately provides this one-on-one, "love-with-skin-on-it" kind of pastor care.

Formal assessment of the need for pastoral care by involving the congregation des

three things: (1) It brings people in on the ground floor of a new system. Being involved in the process makes their "ownership" likely. (2) The solid data gathered in the meetings helps the leader of the congregation make informed and firm decisions. (3) It assures acceptance, both by those who will become lay pastors and members who are to receive their care.

Ready to Adapt to Changing Realities

For Some reason churches are more resistant to change than other federations of people. All religion has a tendency to fossilize. No change means death; radical and sudden change can also mean death. Balance between the two extremes is the key to healthy change.

Some things in the churches should never change; some things are changeable and need to be changed; other things change without our choice. As we apply these three realities to pastoral care we see: First, the need for care never changes. Second, the kind of need and the ways of caring change. Third, our high-tech, increasingly impersonal, life-in-the fast-lane culture has forced change upon us, setting our agenda for us - giving personal care on a continuing basis.

The kind of church ready for this ministry will adapt to changing realities.

Ready to Adopt or Create a Structure

To move from assessing the need to meeting the need, a church must adopt (or create) a structure. It will search for visible form within which the invisible dynamics can come alive.

How often survey has led to nothing more than a file cabinet drawer filled with responses to questions; talk about what should be done has been nothing more than that - talk. somehow, someone has to carry the data and intention forward.

Many churches have done what the First Congregational Church (UCC) of Cannon Falls, Minnesota, did: appoint a task force of a few committed people to search for the best model of lay pastoral care available to them. After considering others, they selected the Lay Pastors Ministry. Other churches opt for different models. Some invent their own, taking principles and parts from existing packaged-and--ready-to-go ministries.

In 1987, Earl Andrews, the minister of congregational care for Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, read my book

A ministry launched without specific plans, goals and a "point person" is destined to mediocrity at best and failure at worst.

Can the Pastor Do It Alone? (Regal books), while flying home from Israel. He mused, *This will keep us from having to reinvent the wheel.* His congregation has 7,000 members to care for. I was invited to present our model of lay pastoral care to a select group of member present adopted our model. Later, they made necessary adaptations of their particular context.

Amazing! On the very day I was writing these words about adopting a structure, I received this fax from Ed Marshall, pastor of the Durbanville Baptist Church in Durbanville, South Africa:

Greetings from South Africa. Since last speaking with you in October 1994, we have decided to implement the lay pastor program in our church. The delay has been caused by...having to build to accommodate a growing congregation.

He then proceeded to ask about resources that would help them.

Adopting or creating an adequate form for the pastoral care ministry idea can be likened to birthing a child. If there is to be a child, the idea must move from desire and intention through conception and gestation to the delivery of a visible body. The point is made. The church in which his ministry can happen is a church ready to adapt, adapt or create a structure for the ministry.

Ready to Advance with Specific Plans, Goals and a "Point Person "

Can you imagine basketball team going into a game without a game plan? Can you imagine an inventor transferring money without setting a goal for its performance? Can you imagine a group of entrepreneurs starting a business without providing a "point person" - the one whose desk sign reads, "The buck stops here!"?

A ministry launched without specific plans, goals and a "point person" is destined to mediocrity at best and failure at worst. The people putting the ministry together must finalize the plans and get them on paper like an architect does for a house. Vague, undefined plans weaken a ministry from the start and open the door for misunderstanding and failure. Goals have to be set so workers have something against which to evaluate the effectiveness of the ministry and make "in-flight" corrections. A "point person," whether volunteer or salaried, is mandatory. Somebody has to be in charge.

Two flourishing models demonstrate ways to *assess* the need, *adapt* to changing realities, *adopt* or create a structure and *advance* with specific plans, goals and personnel. The first is the Eastridge Park Christian Church in Mesquite, Texas. In a 15-year period, the congregation grew from 300 to 2,000 members. If they were to do right by their people and be true to Christ's calling to "take care of my sheep" (John 21:16), they knew they had to do things differently. Senior minister Dan H. Carroll wrote:

By the mid-1980s, we began facing more and more challenging tasks as we attempted to minister to [the congregation's] individual needs and provide...a nurturing church home. Clearly more of this work surfaced than the ministers could do effectively.⁴

They believed that the call to ministry extends to all Christians, not just to ordained clergy. "We all shepherds," he stressed. To achieve their goal, "to minister to its members in areas of lay pastoral care," they created a near carbon copy of what the church in Cannon Falls, Minnesota did, even though the membership difference was 270 compared to 2,000. What they titled, "Four Essentials for an Effective Church," assured their success:

1. Listen to people's deepest yearnings.
2. Put together a system that will meet people's basic expectations of the church.
3. Improve the system so it goes beyond people's expectations to delight and excite them.
4. Act [through leaders] to empower all the people to contribute to the effort.

Even though Eastridge Park came up with a model quite different from our Lay Pastors Ministry, their "Cluster Program" accomplished the same objective. It enabled members to minister to one another. These

***The biblical way to operate
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words from the pastor are encouraging to every church leader aware of needing a structured pastoral care program for the congregation: "You don't need a complicated planning process, but you have to do some basic things." By "basic things" Pastor Carroll meant the four essentials listed previously: assess, adapt, adopt and advance.

- **Assess:** The congregation experienced more pastoral care needs than the paid staff could attend to.
- **Adapt:** Acknowledge that people who are not getting their need met will move on. Loyalties to the organization do not exist.
- **Adopt:** They created the Cluster Program, a decentralized plan within which members ministered to one another.
- **Advance:** They moved from need through planning to implementation.

The second model is Christ Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.⁵ As Pastor Dick Willis tells it, his personal new awakening, which was deeply spiritual and born of the Holy Spirit, launched the church into a lay pastoral care ministry. In addition to surrendering his life to God, he needed to surrender the control of the ministries in the church to the laity.

He said he had to unlearn much of what he was taught in seminary. Instead of being a "professional minister," he saw his responsibility now to spiritually feed and equip laity to do the ministers of Christ Church. The biblical way to operate the church is on the basis of spiritual gifts. In this way, each person finds a place of ministry.

In June 1994, Pastor Willis began to consecrate lay pastors. By April 1995, 80 had been appointed. Three categories of lay pastors comprise their model: (1) Wesley Group leaders (the goal is 400 of these groups meeting weekly); (2) Administrative Groups, such as trustees; and (3) Action Ministries, such as ushers and prison ministry. Each group has a lay pastor, the basic care-giving person in the congregation for his or her group.

This model demonstrates the same four essentials:

- **Assess:** First, a personal assessment led to spiritual and ministry renewal. Second, they learned that 80 percent of the 1.4 million people in Broward County are unchurched.
- **Adapt:** His "new awakening" reoriented his life as a minister. Surrendering control of the ministries to the laity reoriented the people.
- **Adopt:** The church is perceived to have three categories of lay pastors. A plan was established for leading and staffing the various groups of laity.
- **Advance:** A person who feels called to be a lay pastor meets with one of the ordained pastors. If the call fits the church's vision, that person is invited to be a lay pastor.

Part of being alert to the need for pastoral care is to be aware of and concerned about *all* members. It's not unlike parents of a large family who must be equally aware of and concerned for each child, the prodigal as well as the bonded. Joining a church is a two-way commitment: new members commit to active participation while the church commits to nurturing and caring for them.

Too often, when a member's commitments lessens, the church is not alert to the signals, doesn't care or does not have a ministry plan for reaching out to these people. A study made by a denominational leader, *Why They Left Their Church*,⁶ identified two major reasons people leave: failed expectations and broken or undeveloped relationships. The *coup de grâce* was failure of others in the congregation to miss them after they had withdrawn.

Two-thirds of those interviewed said they received no contact of any kind inquiring about their absence after they quit attending. Nearly half indicated they would have welcomed a meaningful inquiry from the pastor, or other church leader, and that it could have made a difference in their decision to disaffiliate.

A mother.....said, "We had a daughter with a fatal disease...From June until her death in November, we had heard not one word from then minister."

"I felt very abandoned in my church. I just don't feel connected anymore as a person. I don't think my presence makes any difference in that church."

The process of disaffiliating begins with a *Discomfort Stage*, moves to a *Withdrawing Stage* and culminates in the *Existing Stage*. The best time to prevent dropout is prior to or during the *Discomfort Stage*. The most effective antidote for reaching those in the *Discomfort Stage* is to provide a climate for lively interaction with others in the congregation and to create formal caring network.

This will not happen by itself.

Neither will it happen if it is left to the pastoral staff - not because they are under committed or lack ambition, but because they are already overloaded with priority ministries. It can, however, happen when a church wants it enough to plan intentionally for it, using as its starting point the awareness of the need for pastoral care - a need-conscious church.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Be alert to your church's pastoral care needs.

Notes

1. Loren Mead, *Action Information* (May/June 1990) published by The Alban Institute, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016.
2. Peter F. Drucker, *The New Realities* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 220.
3. Gary A. Titusdahl, "The Lay Pastors ministry," a thesis project dissertation, Doctor of Ministry Program, Cannon Falls, Minnesota. This document is at the library of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, 3000 Fifth Street, N.W., New Brighton, MN, 55112.
4. *Net Results* (June 1994), published monthly by the National Evangelic Association of the Christian Church.
5. *Circuit Rider* (April 1994), a publication of the United Methodist Church, 9-11.
6. *Presbyterian Life and Times* (October 1992), published by the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, Bloomington, MN 55425.