



Chapter 2

A Gift—Oriented Church



"NOW ABOUT SPIRITUAL GIFT...."

The new pastor spent all day unpacking books, visiting in hospitals and contacting some of the church leaders. The hour came for the annual church dinner, which had been planned long before his arrival. He was fatigued and famished. He stood in line along with other people, visiting and slowly moving toward the food. Looking up ahead, he noticed a woman forking one piece of chicken onto each plate. Before long he was at that spot.

Because he was hungry he asked for tow pieces. The reply: "One piece to each person. Please move along."

The pastor looked at her and said, "'ve had not time to eat since breakfast. Please, could I have two pieces?"

Her firm answer surprised him: "Each one gets just one piece. Pleas move along."

He thought he would pull rank: "Perhaps you don't know who I am; I'm the new pastor of the church."

He was shocked by here ever firmer response, "Perhaps you don't know who / am; I'm the lady in charge of chicken."

I told this story to a group of people in a new elder-orientation class. They laughed and I laughed with them. Then I asked them to read Romans 12:6-8 and explain the connection to the story. After reading the verses, they chuckled reverently. One volunteered, "I see the connection. If a woman's gift is forking out chicken, let her fork our chicken. Each person has a special gift for his or her ministry."

The kind of church in which lay ministry can be successful is the kind that will let laypeople use their gifts. A great variety of gifts is required because a great variety of ministries exists. The Holy Spirit orchestrates the giving and the using of spiritual gifts.

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines (1 Cor. 12:11).

Because the Spirit determines who gets what and who should do what, each of us needs to listen to the Spirit. Listening is a personal and private matter. It often

happens, however, in a public place, or during an unexpected moment such as a worship service, a retreat, while conversing with a brother or sister in Christ or while observing or participating in a missions project. How to hear the Lord is a great mystery; but one thing is clear, all who wish to here will hear.

A plethora of helpful books, tapes, manuals, magazine articles, along with several practical gifts-assessment tests have poured forth throughout the past three decades. Word is getting around that every Christians is endowed with spiritual gifts. The apostle Paul started it:

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers [and sisters], I do not want you to be ignorant (1 Cor. 12:1).

I do not intend to add to the gifts literature. I just want to call your attention to spiritual gifts and add a few thoughts. One thought is that by combining two major teachings - the variety of gifts and the use of the gifts - we conclude that people cannot be randomly interchanged.

The traditional church elects or appoints people to ministry positions as though any willing person can take his or her turn at that task. Churches that have functioned this way for generations find it difficult to start matching people's tasks with their spiritual gifts. They may have been merely filling slots instead of helping people to discover their spiritual gifts and hear God's call to their specific ministries.

"The most important decision facing your church today is decision to shift the focus of your church from the ministry of the clergy to the ministry of the laity," writes one of America's prominent layman, Robert Slocum. The possibility for this shift lies in every-member giftedness, the fact that God has endowed every Christian with gifts to us in ministry.

Slocum persuasively pursues this theme throughout his book, *Maximize Your Ministry*.¹ His thesis starts in the preface with a question, "What kind of church will be the effective in the next century?" With the keen mind of an atomic physicist (he worked in such high-tech fields as space exploration and laser system), keyed to analytical exactness, he answered his own question:

I am convinced the effective church for the twenty-first century will be the church that mobilizes, equips, empowers and supports ordinary Christians in ministry.²

Bingo! The possibility for this lies every-member giftedness.

Robert Slocum lays the responsibility for doing ministry on laypeople when he writes: "The challenge for each of us is to search out and identify our own call to lay ministry."³ The search will be rewarded because God has already given every searcher his or her gifts for ministry. Slocum brilliantly assures each Christian a successful search: "The Early Church had a commissioning service for lay ministry; it was called baptism."⁴

The Scriptures are the source for such thinking. Romans 12:6-8 powerfully declares this truth. The words of this passage not only inspired the theme of this book, but also played a significant role in shaping my beliefs about lay ministry. I like the cadence of the *New International Version* (Steinbron paraphrase):

If a man's⁵ gift is prophesying, let him prophesy;
If it is serving, let him serve;
If it is teaching; let him teach;
If it is encouraging, let him encourage;
If it is contributing, let him contribute;
If it is leadership, let him lead;
If it is showing mercy, let him show mercy.

These words sound like a mandate. They do not make ministry an option for us Christians. In our culture, people are not accustomed to accepting mandates. But this is not for people in our culture, it is for those who have been born anew into the culture of the kingdom of God. Mandates from God are an integral part of Kingdom culture.

"If it is encouraging, *let* him encourage!" (v.8). *Let* is imperative, therefore we need to know "who" is to *let*? Because *encouraging* is one of the pastoral gifts, we are talking about *letting* someone pastor. *Let laypeople do it!* Just who is to *let*?

THREE POSSIBLE ANSWERS...

1. You

You *let* means "You go ahead and do it. What are *you* waiting for? "If *you* are the one with the gift, *you* are expected to use it. Robert Slocum unequivocally insists that the responsibility for discovering ministry gifts and using them in service is the layperson's! This is true even for laypeople whose churches are not yet promoting lay ministry.⁶ *You* are the one who is to *let*. It is as though the verse reads, "If your gift is encouraging, then by all means *you* encourage!" Or as Bill Hybels, pastors of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, would say it, "Men and women, if you've been given the gift of encouraging, for *God's sake*, encourage."⁷

2. Church Leaders

These are pastors, professional staff and other leaders. They need to step aside so people with gifts can minister, not just "help out." Each member of the church is to function in freedom and authority within the areas of his or her gifts. Because leaders by virtue of their positions are aware of *their* own ministries, the directive *let* means they are to recognize the ministries of their members as well. *Let* means they are to acknowledge people's giftedness, accept them as partners in ministry and affirm them in their roles.

To believe that laypeople are also authentic ministers in their own rights and to affirm the parity of ministries requires a major paradigm shift for most leaders of

traditional churches. The shift is to solid ground because it is biblical. First Corinthians 12, for example, uses the human body to illustrate how all parts - prominent and hidden - are equally necessary.

Leaders, we dare not substitute preaching for action, or lip service for performance. *Let* is an active verb, suggesting that we must make a choice to allow. I am one who deceived himself for years, thinking preaching it was doing it. I, along with a group of committed and competent laypeople, *let* by creating a structure for lay pastoral care and relinquishing the pastoral care ministry to equip and commissioned laypeople.

3. The People

Again, our human body illustrates the truth that each part of the body needs every other part. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'" (1 Cor. 12:21). Let's apply this analogy to the Lay Pastors Ministry. Members cannot say to the lay pastor, "I don't need you!" The members of our churches are to *let* the lay pastors pastor them. They must let them into their homes and into their lives if the "body" is to function at its best. Conversely, the lay pastor will receive the ministry of those whose gifts are administration, prophecy or whatever. The mutual nature of all ministry is summarized in 1 Peter 4:10:

Each one should use whatever gift he [or she] has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches: If a man's gift is encouraging, let him encourage. If it is showing mercy, let him show mercy. You who have the gift, use it! You who are leaders, equip the saints, support them and step aside to let them use their gifts. You who are members, accept pastoral care from them.

People in my seminars often ask, "But isn't everybody supposed to care?" The is the reasoning of a traditional church-minded person. It is the proposed alternative to a structured Lay Pastors Ministry. The belief is that if everybody does their jobs, people will be cared for. But, this is the old and failed system of congregational care. Failure results from neglecting to distinguish between *caring in general* and *caring in particular*. Caring in general hasn't done it in the past, and it isn't going to be doing it in the future. There must be a better way - *caring in particular*.

Certainly, every Christian is to care for others, but not every Christian is given special gifts for pastoral care. This principle is also seen in other areas of church life. For example, every Christian is to witness for Christ, but not every Christian has the gift of evangelism (the gift of assisting an individual to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord). Every Christian is to give, but not every Christian has the gift of contributing (the gift of earning substantial sums of money in order to give large amounts to the church). Every Christian is to communicate some of what he or she knows about the Scriptures to family, friends and others, but not every Christian has the

gift of teaching (the ability to formally instruct groups of people in the truths of God).

So, whereas every Christian is to care for others, not every Christian has the gift of pastoring (endowed with a spirit of mercy and the ability

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to encourage). A prime illustration of this is the Neighborhood Watch program: It is every citizen's job to watch for suspicious people; but the police are the specialists in crime prevention and criminal apprehension.

Whereas all members are to care for others, it is the layperson with pastoral gifts, training and commissioning who is the specialist in PACE-ing people.

The Scripture make a clear distinction between the "fruit of the Spirit," which every Christian is to bear, and the "gifts of the Spirit," which are unique to each Christian. The *fruit* is essential for quality of life; the *gifts* are essential for ministry. Paul's analogy of the body with its many parts for special functions helps us understand *caring in particular*. The whole body is not an eye. The ear is not designed to sniff orders. The head and feet are each specialists in their unique functions.

This issue of caring in general versus caring in particular surfaced with high energy in one of my seminars. A participant challenged me from the floor: "We don't need a Lay Pastors Ministry. Everyone is a lay pastor! We just need to get our people to care for one another." My response was crucial because people from 23 churches were there seeking a way to care for their people.

I put four rhetorical question to this person:

1. Is everyone in your church being prayed for regularly?
2. Does everyone have someone keeping in touch with him or her regularly?
3. Does everyone have someone to whom they can bare their soul, to whom they can comfortably turn when the chips are down?
4. Is it possible to get everyone to do his and her part?

After thanking the person for opening an important door for us, I addressed everyone...

Take inventory by answering the following:

How many members of your church are you *praying* for regularly? Does your pastor or any member pray specifically for you in your life situation daily or weekly?

To how many of your members do you think you could be *available* in times of need or celebration? With how many have you built a relationship of trust so they will turn to you with confidence and ease?

With how many are you in *contact* monthly (and meaningfully)?

How many members know you well enough to see you as an *example*, not of a perfectly formed Christian, but one who loves the Lord, loves them and loves the church?

Recognize the italicized words as the ministry description for a lay pastor: P A C E. If pastoral care is to include all members and if it is to be done right, it takes people who have the pastoral gifts, who sense a call from God, who have been equipped and who give themselves to people within the structure designed to provide pastoral care for every member. They provide *care in particular* while others are providing (hit-and-miss) *care in general*.

To finish the story about the person who challenged the need for the intentional and structured pastoral care ministry, this person came to me after the seminar, apologized for her contrary spirit and emphatically affirmed that her church needed the Lay Pastors Ministry. She had just made what you call a paradigm shift, shifting from care in general to care in particular.

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A slow but sure way for churches to make th paradigm shift, not only to care in particular, but also to the parity of all ministers (volunteer and vocational, the focus of the next chapter), is to inculcate the idea that God and all His people are in a ministry partnership. God has His part; we have our parts. God provides the gifts to make ministry possible; we provide the bodies to do the ministry. Five observations help us to understand this divine-human partnership:

- God provides the colors; we paint the picture.
- God provides the notes; we write the music.
- God provides the soil; we plant the flowers.
- God provides the mind; we do the thinking.
- God provides the gift; we do the ministry.

GOD'S PART

He provides the gifts. First Corinthians 12:11 teaches that spiritual gifts for ministry are given, not earned. They are not learned, not deserved and not initiated by us. They are produced by seeking or desiring. They are distributed to each person according to God's choosing. They are just there, waiting to be discovered and put to use.

He determined each person's unique gifts. Romans 12:6 informs us that God gives different gifts according to His grace. Grace is the favor and generosity of God. First Corinthians 12:11 tells that the Spirit orchestrates the distribution of the gifts: "He gives them...just as he determines." They are not tossed like a bride's bouquet into the crowd; the Spirit deliberately assigns them.

He gives with the expectation that we will use them. First Peter 4:10 says it plainly: "Each one should use whatever gift he [or she] has received" (italics mine). Just as unused Christmas gifts presume poor choices, unused spiritual gifts seem to infer that God may have made some poor choices in His gift giving.

He gives with intention that we will develop them. The fact that Scripture calls us to love God with our minds (see Luke 10:27), especially our renewed minds (see Rom. 12:2), suggests that we are to use our mental faculties to expand the use of our ministry gifts to their fullest dimensions. Peter's directive to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (see 2 Pet. 3:18) includes growth in the development of our ministry gifts.

My growth in using the word processor to provide this message for others illustrates the point. God gives the gifts; we are responsible for nourishing and nurturing them from their undeveloped beginnings to full-bodied potential, just as parents are responsible for nourishing and nurturing undeveloped infants to their full potentials.

YOUR PART

You provide the body. Romans 12, which lists seven gifts, starts with a call to offer your body as a living sacrifice to God. It is significant that Jesus gave His body: "this is my body given for you" (Luke 22:19). Romans 6:13 is specific: "Offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness." Name the parts:

- **Hands:** Offer them to help others;
- **Arms:** Offer them to comfort a struggling person;
- **Ears:** Offer them to hear another's anguish or joy;
- **Feet:** Offer them to run errands for an incapacitated person;

- **Eyes:** Offer them to read for a blind person;
- **Brain:** Offer it to create strategies for helping a person in trouble or celebrating a person's festive occasion, such as an anniversary, graduation or birthday.

You provide the time. We won't get much done with our bodies if we use only discretionary time for ministry. If we want to use our bodies in partnership with God, we must build time for ministry into our schedules. For example, a lay pastor will have to intentionally schedule contacts by writing them on his or her calendar, or the body will never get around to it. This takes *self-control*, the ninth "fruit of the Spirit" (see Gal. 5).

You provide the skills. Just as the number and sharpness of tools the craftsman has to work determines the quality of workmanship, so it is with ministry. Let's look at this example as it applies to the Lay Pastors Ministry. A lay pastor can begin to care for a small flock of people just by using whatever ability he or she now has. But that person needs to acquire additional skills to maximize the effectiveness of the spiritual gifts.

For example, if the gift is encouragement, the lay pastor may have an empathic spirit, but may not have all the listening skills required to hear the unspoken hurts as well as the words. Continual growth in skills enables us to be progressively better in ministry.

God's part and your part together make a whole. God is doing His part. When we do our part, His work gets done. God started the process by giving each of us gifts. Withholding our bodies, refusing to provide the time and failing to grow in skill stymies the process.

Many of us who are not withholding our bodies may, however, need the counsel Paul gave Timothy: "Do not neglect your gift" (1 Tim. 4:14); and, "Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you" (2 Tim.1:6). We can become careless and delinquent in doing our ministries, or we can become sloppy in our ways, settling for mediocrity. The flame can die down. Our enthusiasm for ministry is subject to entropy, a cooling effect that reduces the amount of energy available for ministry. If Timothy needed Paul's reminders not to neglect his gift, but to fan (or rekindle) his gift into flame, we Christians need the same reminders today.

The kind of church in which lay pastoral care can happen is the church that will let laypeople use their gifts. And if lay pastoral care is really going to happen, a structure such as the Lay Pastors Ministry will have to be built - a ministry structure into which the people with pastoral gifts can flow. This will mean that the right people will be in the right places for the right reasons doing the right things.

"He who has an ear, let hear what the Spirit say to the churches." Enable your people to know what their spiritual gifts are and what to do with them.

Notes

1. Robert E. Slocum, *Maximize Your Ministry* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1990), pp. 170, 257
2. *Ibid.*, p.9
3. *Ibid.*, p. 170
4. *Ibid.*, p. 257
5. The Greek word for *man* is *anthropos*, meaning a human being, whether male or female; referring to the genus or nature, not to gender. We at the beginning of verse 6 clarifies the inclusiveness of man. It does not distinguish between man and woman, but between humans and animals, between human beings and God.
6. *Ibid.*, Slocum develops this position on pages 74 and 166-198.
7. "Leadership," *Christianity Today* (fall 1996): 62.