

## Chapter 3

# An Egalitarian Church



### CLASSLESS AND "MINISTRY-BLIND"

Suppose I am a layperson, sitting in my pew on a Sunday morning. While listening to the preacher, the following questions and thoughts are chasing each other around in my head:

1. *Why am I here and he there? Is he better than I? Is he more important than I? Do I rank lower than he?*

*There is no question that...*

- *He is good; his sermons are inspiring, interesting and informative.*
- *He is important; he is preaching the Word of God, and that is important.*
- *He ranks high; he is credential, respected and called to be spiritual leader of the congregation. That's why he's there and I am here.*

2. *He is a man of God. His prayers get through to God. He knows his Bible. He gives himself to serve God. That pulpit really sets him apart as "a man of God."*

*There is no question that...*

- *He is a man of God; he is a servant of god, loves God and seems very close to God.*
- *He has ability to pray; he can find the right words and express them in earnest.*
- *He deserves to be in the pulpit; God called him into the ministry. He is a minister. That's why he's there and I am here.*

3. *If God want to truly serve God, be important in the Church, rank high among*

*Christians and do significant ministry, I will have to change my course in life, go to seminary and be ordained. A long pause to ruminate. There must be a serious error in my thinking. I'll have to ponder this later, because I truly want to serve God.*

Later ponderings expose that the error is mine, thinking that....

- *Because he is good at preaching, important to the church and ranks high as spiritual leader of the congregation; and because I am not qualified to preach, am not as prominent in the church and not the spiritual leader of the congregation, I am a second class Christian.*
- *Because I am not an ordained minister, I am not called by God.*
- *Because he is ordained, he is better than I.*
- *Because he is there and I am here, I rank lower than he.*
- *Because he is behind the pulpit, he is a minister and I am something less.*
- *His closeness to God, his passion for ministry and his advanced spirituality is only for special people such as he whom God calls into the ordained ministry.*

Still more ponderings and later discoveries from discussion and Scripture reveal the deeper truth that....

1. *I also am called to do ministry. My call to ministry was given along with my call to faith. It's part of the new birth, included in my baptism.*
2. *I also have given spiritual for ministry. Because it is the Spirit of God who gives the gifts, who gives the gift, every ministry is significant and every volunteer and vocational minister is important to the Church.*
3. *I also am a minister. The difference between my ministry and his is function, not order. He is a specialist in his, I am a specialist in mine. Together we get God's work done.*
4. *I also have full access to the power of God for effective ministry.*
5. *I also need to be equipped, not for preaching, but for what God led me to do - not by going to seminary, but by taking advantage of training opportunities in my church and community.*
6. *I also have authority to do my ministry. His authority and my authority both come from God, not from credentials.*

The office of pastor is considered by most people to be the highest position in the Church. This notion, however common, is unfortunate development because it has forged a dichotomy, creating two classes of Christians: laity and clergy.

The origin of this error is traced to the fourth century when the Church adopted the hierarchical structure of the Roman empire, instead of staying with the New Testament "body" model. This historical development demonstrates how secular culture bonds with Christian culture. In this case it has been a curse because the hierarchical model replaced the "body" model. Paul's description of how the Church works as a body has been all but lost through the centuries:

Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor...God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other (1 Cor. 12:22-25).

Many churches are breaking free from this historical bond replacing the multi-level hierarchical way of being God's people to the every-member-equal "body" way of being God's people.

Today's traditional church, however, perpetuates this two-class order. This distortion erroneously continues to mislead Christians into believing that if they want to really serve God, they must leave their communities, go to seminary, be ordained and become pastors of local churches.

Not until the 1950s did the Church begin to awaken to a better way of doing God's business. It rediscovered the biblical model for ministry. Ephesians 4:11, 12 sharply focuses it by enjoining pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The context and other Scriptures make it unmistakably clear that every Christian is a minister. So many churches of all denominations are participating in this rediscovery that the result is nothing less than a second Reformation.

In the first Reformation, the Church gave the Bible to the people. In the second Reformation, the Church is giving the ministry to the people. The church is again becoming a classless Church. The disparity of laity and clergy is being replaced by the parity of all the people of God (the laos).

How did the Church we inherited arrive at this separation between clergy and laity and hierarchy? We need to know, for retracing our steps will help us to correct our course. The answer starts in the Old Testament and follows five trail markers to the present.

### **Marker 1: A Special Order of Priests**

In Old Testament Israel the priestly order separated priests from the rest of the people. They led the rituals, represented the people to God and received provision for their material needs from the people. Israelites who were not from the tribe of Levi could not join this order.

### **Marker 2: All Are Priests**

The New Testament does not provide evidence of an order of priests. Jesus' coming ended that order (see Heb. 4-5). The Church of Jesus Christ *in toto* is a "royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9). All Christians are given gifts for ministry. There is only one order: laos, "the people of God." All are ministers. All are priests. All are "called." Oscar Feucht, a Missouri Synod Lutheran Church theologian and churchman, wrote in his significantly titled book, *Every A Minister*:

To Old Testament distinction between priest and people, clergymen and laymen, is at an end. Christ, our High Priest, has made all Christians priests before God. All Christians are God's clergy, and there is no special clerical order in the Church.<sup>1</sup>

Church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette writes about how strongly Martin Luther believed in the equality of Christians:

Luther maintained that the works of priests and members of the religious orders are not a whit more sacred in the sights of God than those of a farmer in his fields or of a woman in her household duties.<sup>2</sup>

### **Marker 3: One Order, Many functions**

The differences between laity and clergy are not in *order*, but in *function*. Peter's definition of the Church - a "royal priesthood" - establishes the fact that only one order exists. That one order is priest (or minister), however, God has given it many functions. The function we are exploring in this book is pastoral care. *Pastor*, therefore, is understood to be a function, not an order.

In, *Why Priest? A Proposal for a New Church Ministry*, Hans Küng concludes that the New Testament does not really speak of a fixed church office. It uses a variety of terms almost interchangeably. The clergy office is not institutionalized.<sup>3</sup>

### **Marker 4: A New Order, Clergy**

The Unfortunate two-order change began with one of the greatest events in Church history, the Edict of Constantine in A.D. 312. Until that time the Church had been persecuted by Roman emperors. But during a dream on October 28, A.D. 312, Emperor Constantine saw a cross in the sky accompanied with the words "In this sign conquer." Thus, he conquered; then looked upon his brilliant military victory as proof of Christ's power and the superiority of the Christian religion. He legalized Christianity. The Church was suddenly favored and pampered.

The Church began to adopt the hierarchical structure of the Roman government, thereby starting its drift from the New Testament "body" design. The hierarchical structure elevated some functions and people over others, creating descending degrees of importance. This case system was antithetical to Christ's teaching, which opposed

vying to be greatest in His kingdom (see Mark 10:35-45).

The division between clergy and laity took shape. The clergy preached, taught, pastored and created forms of worship. The people were expected to pray and pay. (One contemporary interprets it: "Lay people are asked to show up, pay up, and shut up.") By the twelfth century, the canon lawyer Gratian wrote in his decretals : "There are two kinds of Christians, the clergy who are to be developed to the divine office...and the other sort of Christians who are called 'lay folk.'"<sup>4</sup>

The Church formed special orders from what were originally functions. For example, the pastors and teachers from the list of five ministries in Ephesians 4:11 are not classical orders in the Church, but are the functions of those to whom Christ gave pastoral and teaching gifts. The Church drifted into the error of institutionalizing these functions, making orders of them, elevating the people in these orders to levels of greater importance.

#### **Maker 5: Rediscovery of the Priesthood of Believers**

At times the Church struggled to free itself from the vise grip of hierarchy. The sixteenth century Reformation led by Martin Luther not only rediscovered *justification by faith*, but also rediscovered the *priesthood of believers*. *Priesthood* includes two roles: (1) *priest*, representing people to God; and (2) *minister*, doing service for God.

The Reformation regarded every believer to be a priest and every believer to be a minister. The Church continued to follow the "every believer a priest" reform, but because the grip of the two-class system was so powerful, the "every believer is a minister" reform failed. Not until the 1950s did the Church rekindle its struggle for this reform. Since then, multitudes of church leaders and congregations have broken free by rediscovering what had been lost from the New Testament model wherein every Christian is an minister, and that the differentiation between Christians is *function* - no *order*.

The awakened Church today is winning the struggle. It is releasing the power of the laity by giving ministry back to them, and relasing a new power in the clergy by restoring the clergy's function of equipping the laity to do the ministry. The historic meaning of the New Testament Greek word, *laos*, is again beginning to resound: "the people of God."

The Church can once again by classless, including both clergy and *laity* in one order - *laos*. At *laos*, clergy are now fulfilling their divinely-ordered roles, as *ministers*, not as *The Ministers*, whose function it is to equip other Christians for their ministries. As *laos*, laypeople are nlw fulfilling their divinely-ordered roles, doing the ministries for which they have been gifted. The second Reformation regards every Christian as a first-class Christian.

Jesus preeminently models all of the foregoing principles for an egalitarian church in the one act of washing His disciples' feet. If one picture is worth a thousand words, the following scene is worth a million:

After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him...When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them...." I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you...Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:5,12,15,17).

Let's examine how He models these principles.

### **HE WAS A SERVANT**

He washed His disciples' feet. He was a servant doing a servant's task. His serving unveiled a hard-to-see part of His nature. The Gospels tell mostly of His power, knowledge and wisdom. This one servile act, however, gives a kaleidoscopic twist to all of His acts, revealing Him as servant.

He served His Father by doing His Father's will; He served the sick by healing them; He served the 5,000 by feeding them. Long before washing His disciples feet, Jesus made it clear that He came into the world not to be served, but to serve (see Matt. 20:28). He had a true "servant spirit."

What in *our* spirits causes us clearly to use our education, ordination and prominence for self-aggrandizement, distorting our understanding of greatness and deceiving us into thinking that mental tasks are beneath our positions? Laypeople participate in this massive error by believing clergy live on this artificially elevated level. Jesus' example exposes this error.

We have His Spirit (see Rom. 8:9) and His mind (1 Cor. 2:16). Let's use them!

### **HE EXCELLED IN SERVING**

He excelled in all qualities: teaching, prayer, healing and now serving. And He excelled without an air of superiority. The Lord, on His knees before His disciples, basin and towel in hand, revealed the full spectrum of greatness. He was true Lord and true servant.

I am reminded of two clergy friends who exhibit excellence in serving. They regularly help clear the tables after church dinners, taking the plates and silver to the kitchen. One always arrives early to help set up the room or prepare and serve the meals. They feel as much at home while serving in the dining room week-day nights as they do serving in the sanctuary Sunday mornings. This is not put on; it is their nature.

### **HE WAS EGALITARIAN (CLASSLESS)**

Even though He was their rabbi and Lord, He thought of His disciples as brothers and

friends (see Matt. 12:49; John 15:15). He did not flaunt His positions, privately or publicly, inwardly or outwardly, subconsciously or consciously.

He accepted His role of great responsibility (forming the foundation for their faith and lives) and high prominence (rabbi, Son of God and healer) without creating a disparity that would have put Him in one class and them in another. He made it clear that He was merely fulfilling His Father's will. Their parity lay in the fact that they, too, were to fulfill their Father's will.

### **HE AFFIRMED DIFFERENCES WITHOUT DISPARITY**

He said, "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightfully so, for that is what I am" (John 13:13). The disciples were His pupils. However, this difference implied neither a greater/lesser nor higher/lower level of importance.

Peter, because he could think only in the categories of greater/lesser and higher/lower, was not about to permit Jesus to be His servant. It must be that he did not yet truly know Jesus, for he denied Him. His desire to serve: "No...you shall never wash my feet" (v. 8). To Peter, washing feet was beneath Jesus' dignity. To Jesus, it was an integral part of what He came into the world to do. He had served by teaching, healing, feeding, comforting and setting the record straight with the religious leaders. He was now serving by washing feet. A few hours later, He would perform the ultimate service, giving His life for His friends.

We in the Church need to take His counsel, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (v. 15).

I derived two essentials from Jesus' example for my own growth in this area, which I hope to pass on to you individually and to the Church at large.

First, Jesus demonstrated that differences do exist among Christians in their church lives; but the differences are function, not in order. By order, I mean rank, class, status, breed, genre, grade, caste, type or species. There is one order in the Church - laos, the people of God. Jesus affirmed one order when He declared, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister" (Mark 3:35).

Differences also exist in function, however, they are utilitarian. They do not infer differences in rank, worth or importance of a person, but differences in kinds of service. Jesus taught that our common denominator is doing the Father's will.

Second, Jesus needed to extricate Himself from Peter's Mental prison. As long as Peter considered Jesus above washing feet, Jesus could not serve Peter without forcing Himself on him. The mental prisons in which people lock their pastors and in which pastors lock their people confine them to these roles.

When I was a pastor in Hawaii, I experienced imprisonment in the minds of the people. They loved me. (The spirit of aloha is real.) I was their *kahu* (the Hawaiian word for "shepherd"). However, these people held me in such high regard that it seemed I was in a different world. Because of this, I was unable to be a "friend" and "brother" to them. Part of me loved it. They pampered me. they were awestruck in my presence. I

was untouchable. Little children looked up at me as though I were deity.

Another part of me resisted this lofty position because it was not my true self. The *kahu* mold they had pressed me into prevented most of them from getting to know me; and I didn't get to know them either. I felt that my ministry among them was seriously limited because it seemed impossible to disengage myself from the role in which they had cast me.

**When People put us on a pedestal,  
the temptation is not only to enjoy it,  
but also to take advantage of it.**

Jesus was not about to let Peter imprison Him in a superior upper level role. He freed Himself by harsh words to Peter. Peter acquiesced, and was then able to grasp a more complete picture of who Jesus was: servant first and foremost.

Clergy need to extricate themselves both from the role in which the traditional church has cast them, and the role in which they have traditionally cast themselves. Laity need to extricate themselves from the role in which the traditional pastor casts them. If they are not both set free from their tradition-set roles, their respective ministries will be seriously hampered.

### **HE IS OUR EXAMPLE**

Five of Jesus' words say it all: "Do as I have done." If we are not serving, we imply that we are better than our Lord. This is arrogance! If we accept and perpetuate the traditional two-order dichotomy, we imply that we are above our Lord. This is disdain! He neutralized two-level thinking every time it raised its ugly head; He "nipped it in the bud."

There are two examples of this. First, as we have seen, Peter forbade Jesus to wash His feet. But Jesus repudiated him, telling Peter that if he wanted to be part of His life, he would accept the washing. Peter accepted. When Peter put us on a pedestal, the temptation is not only to enjoy it, but also to take advantage of it. If Jesus had responded like many in the traditional church, He would have had Peter washing *His* feet.

Second, James and John vied with the other 10 disciples for the highest position in Christ's kingdom (see Mark 10:35-38). The others were indignant. Their request rankled the others and threatened to divide them into two camps. Jesus put an end to this brazen lust for privilege by telling the Twelve they didn't know what they were asking for. The two-storied traditional church needs the same rebuke.

If we continue to tolerate the two-class distinction in the Church without taking action to challenge and change it, we have sided with the element Jesus put down; we

disregard the example He set for His Church. Shall we call our disregard, rebellion, pride, nose-thumbing and arrogance disobedience or sin? We need to hear Jesus: "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:17).

We might call a one-class, one-level, egalitarian church a *ministry-blind* church. The term piggybacks in the "color-blind," a term describing a person who does not "see" differences in the color of people's skin. The *ministry-blind* church neither treats one ministry as more important than another and one minister as higher than another. *Ministry-blindness* enables us to see the variety of Christians performing their variety of functions all as laos, the people of God.

In the traditional church,<sup>5</sup> one ministry is seen as more important than another and one minister as higher than another. I believe the Presbyterian Church (USA) is trying to do something about this by no longer using the designation Senior Pastor in the Book of Order, replacing it with *Pastor, Head of Staff*. This is an attempt, small as it may be, to focus on function rather than office.

The Corinthian Christians wrongly perceived differences between their leaders. Some believed Paul was better than Apostle. Others were sure Apollos was better than Paul. Some felt that Cephas was the greatest. Not to be outdone by any of the preceding, some arrogantly claimed to follow Christ.

They quarreled. They divided into camps, lining up behind their champions: "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12). Paul appealed to them to be "perfectly united in mind and thought" (v. 10).

Christ was not divided, he wrote. Paul was not crucified for them. Paul pressed them to see that there was no difference in order, that there was no importance, that their ministries complemented rather than competed with each other.

"What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (3:5,6).

Unity was of supreme importance to Paul, therefore he carried this issue forward: "so neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (3:7). Planter and waterer are one in purpose. Both are faithful servants of God. The tribute was to God who called them and who made their service effective, not to themselves. End of subject? Not quite.

Lest their false perceptions of different ratings between their leaders metastasize to their perceptions of differences among themselves, Paul hastens to explain that they are God's temples. The Spirit of God is in each of them. Then he moves on with these words:

So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you

are of Christ, and Christ is of God. So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ (1 Cor. 3:21—4:1).

When Paul was on one of his missionary journey, he had to disclaim superiority attributed to him by pagans who regarded him as the god, Hermes. He now had to disclaim superiority to the Christians who regarded him as towering above them. In pagan Lystra, Paul shouted to the crowd wanting to offer sacrifices to him. "Why are bringing you good news" (Acts 14:15). Now in the Church he rebuked the Christians, declaring that he was no more than a servant, obligated to do what God assigned him.

The apostle Paul modeled egalitarianism.

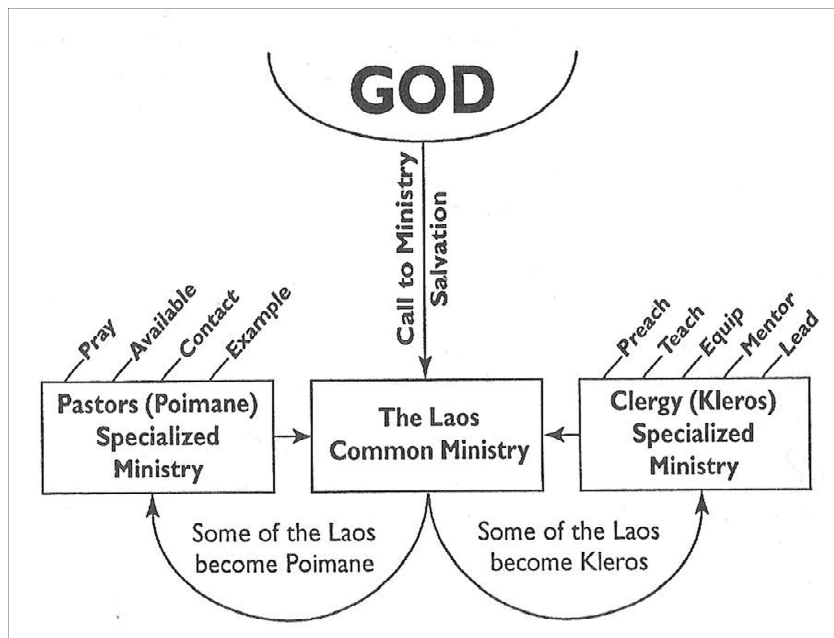
He was a *father* without being paternalistic.  
He was an *apostle* without being dictatorial.  
He was a *leader* without being domineering.  
He was an *authority* without being authoritarian.  
He was an *example* without being proud.  
He was an *equal* without abdicating his authority.  
He corrected without controlling.  
He *taught* without being officious.  
He *advised* without being manipulative.  
He *exhorted* without vindictiveness.  
He *compromised* without sacrificing his convictions.  
He *suffered* without self-pity.  
He *adapted* without losing integrity.  
He saw himself a *servant*; we see him a master.  
He saw himself a *sinner*; we see him a saint.  
He saw himself the *least apostle*; we see him the greatest.<sup>6</sup>

How far the Christian has moved from the egalitarian character of the man who had a greater impact on the Church than any other human! How sad that the Church drifted into its split-level, hierarchical aberration centuries ago and continues to perpetuate this malformation! What a need for contemporary leaders to shout to the crowd, "We are only

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healthy human body.**

human like you!" Praise God, increasing numbers of leaders are shouting in our day. The volume is increasing. Every church leader and every church members should help raise the volume.

Only in a one-level, classless church can all members be recognized as fully accredited ministers. Only there are members as free to do their ministries as vocational ministers are, the ministries for which God gave



them the necessary gifts and to which He is calling them. The diagram<sup>7</sup> above helps to understand the egalitarian dynamic.

The diagram could be extended to include many additional curved arrows flowing from "common ministry" pool to other specialized ministries such as evangelism, social issues, cross-cultural ministry, community improvement organizations, youth ministry and on and on.

Notice that clergy are not put down and laity are not raised up. Instead, we are all joined together at the highest level for redeemed folks, Laos, the people of God. No clergy bashing occurs (of which I have been accused at times); and no need for anti-clericalism (which has taken place at times through Church history). We are one in Christ and one in ministry. Only our functions differ. And functions unite rather than separate; they complement rather than compete, just like the many members of a healthy human body.

But what about obvious differences? Isn't there an obvious distinction between the pastor of a church and an usher? Yes. and no. In the church we can affirm differentiation in function without creating differences in rank. Our problem is that we see the church as an organization like any other organization in our community. The

CEO is on top—greater responsibility, more power and enviable prestige—while one of the actions is at the bottom.

Our culture reinforces hierarchical thinking. We erroneously equate the pastor of a church with the CEO, and one of the ushers with the auditor. We rank one higher than the other, thereby unavoidably ranking the other lower. Because this is the way it is done in the kingdom of our world, we think it must be the way to do it in the kingdom of God. Not so!

The disturbing fact about Jesus' teaching on greatness and the example He set is that if we believe what He taught and if we follow His example, we are at odds with our culture. We are in a bind, because if we don't believe and follow Him, we are at odds with Him. He taught:

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you (italics mine.) Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all (Mark 10:42-45).

A church may have a slick, enviable organization by adapting the business model, but that is about all it will be—a slick, enviable organization. The biblical model is that of a body, where each part, though different from all the others, is equally important and exists to serve all the other parts.

Differences in the Church are not to be compared with the difference between the CEO and an auditor, but with the difference between the head and the feet of a body, each indispensable to the whole. My paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 12:22-25 (quoted previously in this chapter), which I believe catches the true meaning for how the church is to function today, reads as follows:

Those Christians who are serving in ways which do not seem as important as others are indispensable, and the functions we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. God has combined the members of the church into one body and given greater honor to those who lack it, so that should be no division between lay and clergy. All parts of the body should accept all the other parts as equals.

The differences, then, are utilitarian. They are functional differences, assigned by our Lord so all of His work can be carried on:

All these [differences in faith, prophesy, etc.] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines [or "just

as he assigns"] (1 Cor. 12:11).

But to each one of us grace [for ministering] has been given as Christ apportioned it [or "as Christ assigned it"] (Ep. 4:7).

Each one should use whatever gift he has received [or "has been assigned"] to serve others (1 Pet. 4:10).

Each one of us is dependent upon all the others for doing our part. "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link." Any one person can curb the effectiveness of a whole group. Likewise any one person can augment the effectiveness of the whole group.

Two equalizing agents are prevalent in the Church: interdependence and mission. No one person can function effectively in the mission Christ committed to that individual independent from others. Think of the disaster of The Challenger, the space rocket that exploded seconds after liftoff, killing all seven astronauts. What was the commander? Interdependence and mission put them on the same level, regardless of titles, rank and name plates.

So, each person is an equally significant participant in the mission of the Church and equally dependent upon the others.

Because the Scriptures recognize only one order in the Church, the differences among us can be only in the diversity of functions God assigned to that one order. Then there are recognizable differences within each function:

### **Utilitarian Differences**

We differ, but our differences are in what we do, not in who we are. The Church is an organism, not organization; but even organisms have to be organized. Some has to be president, moderator, director, coordinator, etc.

### **Quality Differences**

Variety of experience, training, abilities and skills: careful/careless, thorough/incomplete, effective/ineffective.

### **Personality Differences**

Introvert/extrovert, warm/formal/ loquacious/laconic, activist/quietist.

### **Maturity Differences**

New Christian/seasoned Christian, wise/not-so-wise, well-read/not-so-well-read, milk/solid food (see 1 Cor. 3:2).

### **Training Differences**

High school/college, workshops/seminary, life experiences/formal education.

### **Effectiveness Differences**

Persuasive/weak, impressive/unimpressive.

### **Commitment Differences**

Total/partial, Christ-centered/self-centered, spiritual/worldly.

### **Age differences**

14/84, 25/50, Generation X/senior.

Other legitimate differences also existed. Paul recognized them. He wrote to his friends in Philippi that he had no one like Timothy to send to them (see Phil. 2:20,21). Everyone else looked at out for their own interests, not the interest of others. When it came to this man's passion for other-centered ministry, he was head and shoulders above the rest.

Epaphroditus was also singled out for commendation: "honor men like him" (Phil. 2:29,30). His surpassing passion for ministry put him at physical risk. He almost died for the work of Christ.

So within the ministry, inequality of excellence exists, not because of the nature of us humans, but because of the nature of commitment. And this can be nonjudgmentally recognized: "honor to whom honor [is due]" (Rom. 13:7, *NASB*).

Paul wrote that elders who direct the affairs of the church *well* are worthy of double honor. Can we assume that some did not do as well as others? Certainly. There will always be a difference in quality and effectiveness. But these performance variations do not challenge the fact that there is no difference in order.

I believe Jesus referred to performance differences in His parable of the talents (see Mark 25:14-30). Even though each of the two who performed increased his money 100 percent, the actual number of dollars differed. The one with five thousand dollars gained five thousand more; the one with two thousand gained two thousand more. The difference made no difference to the master for he equally commended both. It was the one who did nothing with his talent who was in trouble.

Recognizing differences in excellence should challenge every one of us to maximize our ministry, to strive to reach our highest potential. Watching brothers and sisters whose spirits are bursting with enthusiasm for ministry and who excel in performance should prod others of us to dedicate our giftedness to perfection and to deny halfheartedness and mediocrity. Could Peter have been referring to excellence in ministry when he used the word faithfully in his counsel to Christians: "Each one...faithfully administering God's grace [or ministry] in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10)?

All are first-class Christians, but all may not be doing a first-class job. All are in one order, class, but all may not be doing ministry as well as they could be doing it. The

idea is not to compare ourselves with others to see if we are doing ministry as well as they, for that would lead to gross wrong; but to compare how we are doing ministry with how we could be doing it.

This is the sense of Hebrews 10:24: "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Observing people who are doing ministry well should spur us on, not to do it as well as they, but to do it the very best we are capable of doing it. We actually may be capable of doing it better than they if we apply the same energy and spirit.

By reading this far, you now possess a body of truth, a newly recovered cache, about how Christ is building His Church in our era: egalitarian, classless, "ministry-blind," on order. What can you do with it? Because truth is power, and because truth is for a purpose, the following are some tailored uses for this truth:

**For leaders:** This truth arms you with the rationale to liberate your church from the confines of traditionalism and to lead it onward into new frontiers of lay ministry. This is a fair application of Jesus' confidence in the power of truth: "You shall know the truth that the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32, *NASB*). Preach it, teach it, love it, talk about it, create structures to house it. *Let laypeople do it!*

**For church member:** This truth assures you of your parity with the clergy. It authorized you to stand before a mirror (as one layperson told me she did) watching yourself articulate, "I am a minister!" Visualize both you and the clergy at laos, the people of God. Believe it, take it up, pray about what you should do. Then take action. *Let laypeople do it!*

**For your church:** If your church's culture does not include "every member is a minister," work together to change the culture. Culture change can start with preaching, but preaching alone will not do it. Culture change is far more than starting a new program. Culture change is a paradigm shift from the traditional model to the new. It requires a change of what you believe, how you see yourself, how you see one another and what you do. *Let laypeople do it!*

**For the Church at large:** Paul Stevens said it best: "Without every-member-ministry, we have un-lived biblical truth, unstrategic leadership deployment, untapped resources in the congregation and an unreached world!"<sup>8</sup> *Let laypeople do it!*

If you are going to do something with this truth, you have to begin somewhere.

Start with giving the pastoral care of the congregation to laypeople. The formal for doing this is provided in appendix H of this book. Hundreds of churches are using of Lay Pastors Ministry model and discovering that laypeople are also gifted for ministry, are also called by God to do ministry and are as turned on by doing pastoral care as vocational pastors. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." *Let laypeople do it!*

**Notes:**

1. Oscar E. Feucht, *Everyone A Minister* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), p. 64.
2. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Vol. II*, as quoted by George Hunter III in his book, *Church for Unchurched*, p.21.
3. Patricia Page, *All God' People Are Ministers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), pp. 36037.
4. Ibid., p. 64.
5. When I use the phrase "the traditional Church," I am referring to the Church universal form AD. 312 to the 1950s, the Christendom period as defined by Loren Mead in his book, *The Once and Future Church* (Washington, D.D.: The Alban Institute, 1991) pp. 13-22. He describes it as hierarchical, over-institutionalized and divided into two classes of Christians: clergy and laity. Many churches are traditional, trying to do business as usual and will barely limp into the next century without changing. Their cry is, "if only things could be the way they were!" while we say, "If only things were the way they could be!"
6. These biblical references, line by line, are for those who wish to study this part of Paul's life and ministry: father; apostle; leader, authority; example...
7. For the basic idea of this diagram, I am indebted to James L. Garlow of his book, *Partners in Ministry* (Kansas City, MO, 1982), p. 43
8. R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, *The Equipping Pastor* (Washington, D.C., Alban, 1993), p. XI.