



Chapter 6



A Mobilized Church

EVERY MEMBER A MINISTER

It takes all the people of God to do all the work of God. I would like to see this statement become a common cliché in the Church. God's work is so important and so large that it cannot be done by the typical 20 percent of the congregation who do 80 percent of the work. Neither can it be done by paid staff. In fact, no church can hire a staff large enough to do it all. Much of God's work is left undone, even in terms of pastoral care.

A man complained through *Monday Morning*, a denominational magazine for Presbyterian clergy, about the lack of pastoral care at the time of his mother's death.¹ He told how "deeply bothered" he was. His longing for ongoing pastoral care was exacerbated by disillusionment.

A pastor's response to this complaint may seem unfairly defensive of the clergy, but he is right:

As I understand it from Ephesians 4: 11, 12, God has given the gift of leaders, not to do the ministry, but to equip the saints to do *their* ministry. How might this work out in instances such as you encountered?

A story of contrasts helped me understand.

First, he told of reconnecting with his former "ol' rommie" from seminary. This friend had left the ministry to enter the field of software engineering because he could no longer take the usual 10-to-14-hour day. His killer schedule was overcrowded to keep up with all that was going on in the lives of his people. He believed he had to be there for them 24 hours a day. In the midst of this sacrificial serving frenzy, his wife became seriously ill and was bedridden for nearly a year. Not one person from the church called or visited her.

As he shared this sad commentary about the church, "his words dripped with bitterness." The reason: "He had taught his flock that he and only he was responsible for caregiving—and they'd learned their lesson well. Too well. He soon became another casualty of the ministry."

He contrasted this by telling about what happened while he was on vacation. A major

accident hospitalized a member of his church. People visited her. Some asked what they could do to help: Did she and her husband have insurance? Were meals needed? How could they pray?

Upon returning, the pastor asked the husband how he felt about the care they had received. He broke into tears while telling what the visits, hands-on help and prayers did for them. The pastor concluded with these clarifying words from Ephesians 4:11,12:

Have I and the other pastors here responded at all hours of the day and night to emergencies? Of course. But this precious flock is willing and able to provide so much more pastoral care than we could ever dream of—and they're doing it! NO, we aren't abandoning our call as pastors when we let our congregation know isn't only *our* job to be available 24 hours a day. I think we're just learning how to fulfill that call.

THE MOSES PRINCIPLE

Moses, the leader of Israel centuries ago, gives the twentieth century Church a model for total mobilization of all God's people. Read about it in Exodus 24—30. God called him to construct a tabernacle. The only way this could be accomplished was by all the people giving materials and skills. They did it!

First, let's examine Moses' role. Every congregation has a "Moses," the central spiritual leader. This person is commonly called the pastor. Moses' role in building the tabernacle parallels the pastor's role in building a lay ministry in the following eight ways:

1. *He met with God* (see Exod. 24:18, 34). He entered the cloud, staying there long enough to hear God out on a variety of things, all related to the tabernacle and worship. Inwardly, he had God's plan clearly in mind. Outwardly, his face took on a radiance, so much so that he had to wear a veil when speaking with the people (see 34:29-35). This visible change signaled the people to take his words seriously because he had been with God.

Parallel Principles:

- We need a place and time to meet with God regularly.
- It is imperative that we stay with God long enough to hear Him out if our words are to have meaning and our actions are to be significant.
- The inner conviction that we have heard God generates energy, confidence, competence and integrity.
- The "something different about us" that comes from our

time with God authenticates our authority to mobilize, instruct and lead His people.

2. *He got his vision from God* (see Exodus 25). "Vision casting" is the common term for one of the major roles of the "Moses" of a congregation. His vision was quite specific: "Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you" (vv. 8,9). The vision does not seem to be an ecstatic, other-worldly, mystical trance; it is concrete and rational. His mind must have reeled with the volume of construction details—27 pages in my Bible.

Parallel Principle:

Happy are the pastors whom meetings with God are frequent enough, long enough and deep enough to know they are hearing God, and that the vision they cast emerged during their time with Him.

3. *He taught the people* (see 35:1,4). "These are the things the Lord has commanded you to do." What he should teach the people was revealed while he was with God. The communication was so compelling that Moses knew God had spoken and that he was obligated to teach the things God has commanded.

Parallel Principle:

Teach Ephesians 4:11, 12, a neglected part of God's Word, with the excitement, passion and power of freshly given revelation: Pastors and teachers are to equip the saints to do the ministry. Then, teach the specific ministry focus on this book—pastoral care of a congregation by laypeople. Teach these as "the things the Lord has commanded you to."

4. *He led the people* (see Exod. 33:12). Moses had no doubt that God told him to lead these people. Neither did he question that these people were God's people. His leading included providing structure for their participation in God's project. Some were to bring materials such as gold, linen and wood. Others were to use their skills in crafting metals, making curtain and braiding gold stands. Leading them included inspiring them to have willing hearts.

Parallel Principles:

- Provide structures for ministry. The Lay Pastors Ministry is a likely structure for pastoral care.

- Call all the people to use their unique giftedness to do their ministries.
- People are ready to minister when meaningfully challenged.

5. *He corrected and disciplined them* (see Exod. 32-34). Forward movement in hearing and doing God's plan was interrupted by the impatience, skepticism and idolatry of the people. This happened—it's incredible—under the leadership of Moses' trusted associate, a priest named Aaron. Moses had to take quick and strong action to prevent God's plan from being derailed. The treatment was severe; their rebellion was crushed; the people mourned; and they continued God's project.

Parallel Principle:

Similar threats to God-ordered ministry are common in today's churches. At times, the modern "Moses" will have to call people to be accountable lest forward movement be obstructed.

6. *He inspected the work* (see Exod. 39:32-43). "Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded" (v. 43). Could it be that the excellence of their work was in part the result of knowing it would be inspected?

Parallel Principle:

A relationship exists between quality and accountability. The heavy truth is that God holds his leaders accountable for how well (or effectively) ministry is done; thus, it is imperative that leaders evaluate the work periodically. This way "in-flight corrections" can be made as necessary.

7. *He was with his people in worship* (see Exod. 40). He arranged all of the equipment: the ark of Testimony, table, lampstands, altar, basin, etc. He anointed the furnishings and the priests with oil. He was with his people as the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Leading the people into God's presence was task number one. Number two was teaching the people; number three was mobilizing them for action.

Parallel principle:

Worship, teaching and mobilizing come together for us in Ephesians 4:1-12: "There is one God and Father of all (worship)...but to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned...it...It was he who gave some to be ...pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service (teaching and mobilizing)."

8. *He completed the work* (see Exod. 39:32). It reads like the end of a formal report: "So all the work on the tabernacle...was completed." The writer of Hebrews cited the reason for Moses' success: "He persevered because he saw him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). His frequent meetings with God kept him at it through all the discouragement and stress.

Parallel Principle:

The responsibility of pastors and all who respond to God's call is to finish the work God gave them to do, to stick with it through all the tough times and follow it through to completion. At the end of Jesus' earthly life he prayed, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4), Again, Paul to Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord" (Col.4:17). A common time-management principle applies here: It's not how much you *do*, it's how much you get *done* that counts.

One more thing must be said about this completed work. Moses completed it, but only as a building supervisor completes a project, as a coach wins so many games in a season or as a general wins the battle. It's really the people who do it. In fact, this is the only way it can be done. It takes all the people of God to do all the work of God. "Those who have ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The parallel principles in Moses' role help us to see the role of today's pastors:

- Meeting with God regularly;
- Teaching the Word from God to the people;
- Leading the people of God;
- Holding people accountable;
- Being with the people in worship;
- Completing the work.

The second role to be examined is that of the people. It is only as the people fulfill their roles that pastors are able to fulfill their roles. Football illustrates this:

It is only as the players play well that the coach is able to coach well. By each doing his part well, the team plays a good game. The role of the *volunteer* minister fits hand-in-glove with the role of the *vocational* minister:

- Meet with God regularly;
- Hear God through His Word;
- Accept the leadership of the leaders and offer your own;

- Bring your spiritual gifts and energies to the Lord;
- Worship;
- Expect inspection;
- Complete the work.

God's role is the third role we must examine. Surprised? Does this come as an afterthought? Perhaps. We often get so caught up in doing our thing that we forget God is doing His thing. The fact is that if it were not for His role, our work would be for naught. Jesus understood this: "My father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working...the Son can do nothing by himself" (John 5:17, 19).

What did God do?

1. *He met with Moses.* It was God who took the initiative, descending to the top of Mount Sinai and calling Moses to meet with Him there. "So Moses went up" (Exod. 19:20). He could have refused God's initiative, but he didn't!

2. *He gave the vision.* "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (25:8, *NKJV*). He followed the big idea a sanctuary with the details—the size and material for the ark (acacia wood and gold), the lampstands made of hammered gold, 10 curtains of finely twisted linen, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn as well as hundreds of other details.

3. *He Himself was the motive.* "Motive" means "spring of action." The people knew God was worthy of the very best they had to give, whether skills or materials. It was neither Moses, nor the nation, nor the project, nor their religion that moved them to give themselves to this massive task. It was God who moved them. "To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain" (24:17). Awesome!

4. *He moved their hearts.* In addition to personally inspiring them to action and excellence, God gave His Spirit to form willing hearts and generous spirits. God's Spirit also bestowed "skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts" (Exod. 35:20-36:1). So, it was not only their willingness that originated with God; their competence as from God. Our is too: "Our competence comes from God" (2 Cor. 3:5).

5. *He provided the workers.* Moses was the leader of leaders. He led in carrying out the plan that God gave him. The project leaders were Bazelel and Oholiab. They led the workers. God revealed the plan, called the leaders, gave people willing hearts and filled them all with His Spirit.

6. *He provided the materials.* The ultimate sources of all things is God. He provided them; the people brought them. In fact they brought so much that Moses had to stop them from being more (see Exod. 36:3-7).

The tabernacle was completed. God used it immediately by filling it with His glory (see 39:32, 40:34,35). It was time to celebrate! They had heard God and acted on what they heard.

The following are a few corresponding New Testament and twentieth-century

realities I mined from this model:

- *God gives the idea for lay pastoral care.*

"Prepare God's people for works of service" (Eph. 4:12).

"Be shepherd of God's flock" (1 Pet.5:2).

- *Our Lord Himself is our motive for doing ministry.*

"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"

(Matt.28:20).

"The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

- *God provides the material for ministry.*

"But to each other of us grace [spiritual gifts] has been given as Christ apportioned it" (Eph.4:7).

"Our competency comes from God He has made us competent as ministers" (2 Cor. 3:5,6).

- *The workers are provided by God.*

"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest" (Matt. 9:38).

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16).

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet. 4:10)

It takes all the people of God to do all the work of God. *He who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says [through this model] to the churches!*

Commitment is the preeminent key to mobilizing a church. Earlier in this chapter, I told about the members of a church who cared for a

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woman hospitalized by an automobile accident. They were available because they were committed.

How many programs and ministries have failed because committed people were not found to do them! A pastor who delayed implementing the Lay Pastors Ministry for three years told me: "I have learned not to push a program until I have gifted and called people to do it."

By gifted and called, the pastor was talking about two essential components of commitment. Commitment assumes that the Spirit gives the gifts for doing ministry and,

silently within a person's conscience, sounds the call Mobilization gives commitment the opportunity to surface. The reality is that not every Christian is committed. This can make mobilization extremely difficult, if not impossible. In fact, the rule of thumb is the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of the work gets done by 20 percent of the people. What could your church do with 50 percent of your people working; or to dream wildly, 75 percent working?

That a high percentage may be only a dream is documented in a formal study of seminaries, churches and pastors:

Lay members, despite fairly regular attendance by about half of the population, are generally ill-informed about the basic tenets of their faith, often lukewarm in their commitment (*italics mine*) to building a community of believers devoted to serving Christ with passion, urgency and abandon.²

Marginal commitment, which creates great difficulty in achieving ministry objectives, is an issue churches have to deal with. This is especially true in light of shrinking budgets for staff and increasingly less discretionary time for members.

Some churches are reaping the ministry benefits from strengthening the commitment component of their cultures. One such church is the First Evangelical Church in Memphis, Tennessee. Pastor Duane Litfin tells about it:

"We emphasize 'one member, one ministry.' If you ask one of our members, 'What's your ministry?' he should be able to answer...When you say, 'I want to join this church,' that is a statement of commitment. So, for members, I expect attendance at worship, close relationships and active ministry. One of our strategic goal is that by the year 2000 every member will be in some form of ministry."

His reply to the question, "Do people know these expectations when they join?" was, "Yes, the 'every member in ministry' is in our Target 2000 strategic plan. And in the new members' class, I'm up front about the expectations."³

Another church where commitment is a strong component of its culture is the Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. They are able to identify 5,000 of their members doing specific ministries. On a Sunday I worshiped with them, the congregation was asked to stand and greet one another by telling what ministry they were doing. Pastor John Ed Mathison tells in the following words how important the "every member in ministry" theme is to their church:

The emphasis on the ministry of the laity is something that must be kept constantly before the church. An occasional sermon is not sufficient. It needs to be taught in Sunday School and preached from the pulpit.

We people join your church, they should be given immediately an opportunity to indicate where they feel led to serve.⁴

Mobilization for ministry, activated and sustained by commitment, is the engine that drives ministry. At least seven signs mark an every-member ministry church:

1. An intentional, well-defined strategy.
2. A programmatic provision to enable people to discover their gifts, to hear God's call and to come forward to commit themselves to a ministry.
3. Publicizing specific equipping opportunities and schedules.
4. A process for presenting a "menu" of ministries from which people can choose. This process replaces using delegation, appointment or election to determine where individuals should serve—"filling slots" as someone called it.
5. An every-member ministry preaching and teaching priority, thereby making the biblical teachings on spiritual gifts and divine call well known by the members.
6. Communicating the high-level expectation to new members that every member of the church will be serving God in some specific ministry.
7. Lay leaders model their every-member ministry orientation.
8. Clergy and other staff leaders relinquish ministry to gifted and equipped laypeople.
9. People are comfortable with the goal of every-member ministry—the expectations, procedures, theology and terminology—as characteristic of the culture⁵ of their church.

We have seen that mobilization of the congregation is the key to ministry, and that commitment is the key to mobilization. It's time to ask, Just what is commitment?

Commitment is that compelling force with the self that drives one's decisions for action. It is generated by the simultaneous activity of the Holy Spirit and the human mobilizer—the call of the Holy spirit being heard by a person's spiritual ear while the call of the mobilizer is being heard by the person's physical ear.

Because this commitment is deep within the person, it can be quite an emotional thing, but not necessarily so. In fact, we need to be aware of the difference between a feeling-driven assent and Holy Spirit/human spirit-driven engagement. Paraphrasing a humorous plaque I read in a novelty store helps me understand the difference: "Kissin' don't last. Cookin' do." My rendition: "Feelin's don't last. Commitment do."

Commitment, then, is that life-controlling energy deep within one's self, generated as the Holy Spirit bonds with the appeal. The Holy Spirit continually nourishes that ministry energy to the degree we continue to be "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).

Without commitment a person may intend to do ministry, but may not follow through, just as the son said to his father, "I will, sir," when told to go work in the vineyard. But he did not go (Matt.21:30).

Without commitment a person may do ministry for a time but not continue, like Demas who, according to Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 24 was Paul's fellow worker and

"dear friend," but according to 2 Timothy 4:10, deserted Paul "because he loved this world."

When a person is committed he or she will do ministry and, though wavering at times, will continue doing it. This is Peter. He "left everything and follow him" (Luke 5:11). Though sometimes weak, he was committed. We read of Peter's continuing commitment throughout the Gospels and the book of Acts.

These three—the son, Demas and Peter—shed new light on commitment. Making a commitment is one thing; continuing a commitment is another. The act of commitment *sets* the course; acts of renewed commitment *stay* the course.

When members are weak in commitment, it is usually the church that is at fault. If the church is not strong enough to call its people to commitment and then again to renewed commitment, it will be too weak to mobilize its people for ministry. We must call our people to commitment. The energy of the Spirit will be in these calls, thereby releasing the energies of the congregation into ministry.

"He how has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." *Let laypeople do it!* by mobilizing your congregation.

Notes

1. *Monday Morning*, a magazine for Presbyterian leaders, P.O. Box. 635. New Palestine, IN 46163 (December 18, 1995): 1-16.
2. "The M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust," Renew of Graduate Theological Education in the Pacific Northwest, P.O. Box 1618, Vancouver, WA 98668.
3. *Leadership Journal*, 465 Grunderson Drive, Carol Stream IL. 60188, Summer 1989, p. 26.
4. John E. Mathison, *Every Member in Ministry*, Discipleship Resources, P.O. Box 189, Nashville, TN 37202 (1988): 6.
5. Culture is that which most people in the church know is expected, permitted and appropriate. Ministries incongruent with the culture of a church will fail no matter how biblical, well organized, well promoted or heavily endorsed.