



## Exploring Participatory Ministry (Part One)

### *Creative Frameworks*

It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-12)

What does your church look like? No, I don't mean the picture postcard image . . . I am speaking of a shift of concept from church as a noun (a physical place) to a verb - the state of being and responding as the Body of Christ as the Spirit empowers us. This is so different from people who just happen to meet together on a Sunday. One of the keys for going deeper - and the one I am going to major on in this series - is allowing gifts to surface and making room for the Lord.

It was a great joy a few weekends ago to participate in a Conference near Hereford that a friend of mine was co-leading. He and his colleague made a great deal of space for just this, allowing the Lord to work in power. At one time the two of them ministered together for over an hour by words of knowledge and 'observing' what the Lord was doing in people's lives. Many were deeply touched, and I was impressed by the way the leaders were willing to lay aside a large portion of their teaching ministry in order to allow room for God to move. The following morning they took things a step further. The speaker had prepared a talk in great depth (on the theme of 'Caution or Portion - are you entering the full portion the Lord has in store for you or are you too cautious to step into it?') Once Andy reached the podium, however, he knew that this was not what the Lord had in mind for that hour. Instead he called people forward who had been healed the night before. A dozen really special testimonies followed. He then commissioned those twelve to minister to people out of their new place

with the Lord on those associated topics and categories. I respect that approach. As a gifted man of God, Andy could perfectly well have ministered to all those types and conditions himself, but he deliberately chose to release others into *their* calling instead. This was so much more creative and participatory!

We have often shared in these publications our longing to see leaders making creative frameworks that allow the Lord plenty of room to move in power, in order to release new ministries. Even if the ministers are exceptionally anointed and empowering, the Body of Christ is unlikely to learn to move in the power of the Spirit only by listening to lengthy one-man sermons week by week. It is usually possible to say much in a shorter period of time, without missing any of the vital ingredients, and still make room for people's individual contributions - as in the example of the conference mentioned above, where real needs and burdens were addressed.

### ***Moving beyond Titles to true equipping***

We often focus on the titles evangelist, pastor and so on, and too little on their ultimate role: to multiply their own calling by equipping the saints to minister. The word 'equipment' (Eph. 4:12) literally means 'to set bones back into their proper position, or 'to put something back into its correct position'. It is the word used for mending nets, for setting bones or for restoring those who have strayed from the faith. (Gal. 6:1, Matt. 4:21)

Amazingly, bones that have been properly reset can sometimes be stronger than they originally were. Paul very deliberately uses inclusive language here - 'until we all reach unity' - as if to stress that God is concerned with everyone - not just with high profile speakers. This is how the church reaches maturity (literally 'a perfect, full grown man'). It is all about leaving behind rugged individualism, immaturity and 'empire spirit.'

Michael Harper has much wisdom to share about this in his challenging book *Let my people grow*.

[In all too many churches] power has been concentrated in a few hands, and this has produced generations of sermon-tasters and sacramentalists - watching [ministers ministering] and taking the sacrament, rather than being actively involved in the ministry. What is even more tragic is that the end result has been like unemployment: men and women in their thousands have drifted away from the Church, bored and frustrated because of their lack of employment.

Baby sitters are all right to look after babies, but if they continue to do so when the babies have become adults, they are not going to have many customers.

A recent survey revealed that nine out of ten working businessmen claimed that what happened on a Sunday morning bore no relevance whatsoever to their weekday work. In these articles we are going to seek ways to help deploy people to their full capacity. This will undoubtedly bring that percentage down, and bring both the Lord and His people joy!

### ***New Wine requires new Wineskins***

Years ago David Pawson warned that the biggest problem amongst leaders was *envy* toward those who appeared more gifted or successful than themselves. The loss such envy causes to the Body of Christ is immense, with all too many promising ministries being quashed through lack of nurture and opportunity.

May the Lord reach out to those who have been squeezed out of any opportunity to minister, or even wrongly displaced, as the result of competitive leaders being unwilling to honour someone else's giftings. Many of these people have then spun out into a vacuum, or into extreme individualism, simply because the 'system' denied them any place within it.

Since new wine really does require new wineskins, church leaders always need to be looking out 'over the horizon' to nurture gifts that may, for the moment, be dormant - or indeed which have yet to see the light of day and need some midwife-ing touch.

May we have the grace and discernment to sense the Spirit's touch on people and initiatives that He is particularly blessing - no matter whether or not they have a neat church label attached.

Many church members are involved in serious enterprises and carrying huge burdens which are never publicly recognised, let alone supported.

**Check out: how are your envy levels faring?** Do you welcome or keep your distance from particularly gifted people? Do you go out of your way to nurture people - and welcome it when they end up going further and faster than you yourself have gone?

Many pastors mistake sound teaching ministry for genuine leadership. The teaching may be true, and even fervent, but if it leaves people's deepest needs unmet, then there are dimensions of the Spirit's moving that are not being experienced. No wonder the more spiritually attuned become increasingly reluctant to devote their precious time to

something that neither meets their personal needs nor enables them to make any significant contribution.

All too often cautious leaders only incorporate *certain* aspects of renewal into the life of the Church - just enough, they hope, to satisfy the more lively. In such ways even true disciples inadvertently end up grieving the Spirit of God and stunting the growth of promising people. Had these people been mentored and encouraged, and then given a platform, their ministry could have developed in very different ways.

No wonder John Wimber trumpeted the repentance message the Lord Jesus gave him, '*Give me back My headship of the Church*'. Where the Lord is allowed free reign, it is so much more fun, fulfilling and fruitful than models which revolve around individual leaders and their power bases. The scale of change that is required to achieve these changes may look immense, but as we shall be seeing, even quite small changes of heart as well as structure will provide frameworks that make it easier for God to do more in.

I was in a church the other day where the pastor hardly ever receives calls to pray for people. That is not because he is unpopular; it is simply because he is blessed with many in his church who are more skilled in that area than he is - and he is more than happy for them to use their gifts in this way.

Yes, there do have to be carefully selected programmes and agendas - but our brief here is to urge us to be confident and courageous enough to remain open to the Sovereign Lord *when* He chooses to move in completely different ways - even when this proves highly uncomfortable to those who prefer everything to run along more predictable lines. God knows what He is doing, even if we have much to learn about how best to administrate His moving. The equation is simple:

- God does not want a few privileged individuals doing all the talking to a much larger group of passive 'listeners'
- Those who are too fond of their own voices rarely make the best participatory leaders.
- But we do need people who can lead with poise and confidence where the Holy Spirit is leading- for love of Jesus, for the building up of the Body of Christ and for revelation to pre Christians of who it is we love and serve.

One of the main contentions James Rutz makes in his influential book *Megashift* is the need to transfer power 'away from the centre.' He reports that there was enormous spontaneity and participation in the early days of the Azusa Street meetings 1905-6. The Holy Spirit is a very capable leader!

Racial distinctions were set aside in unheard of ways - and that in the year when there was an all time high for lynchings of blacks in America. It soon came about, however, that meetings were expected to run according to an appointed order. When some illiterate Mexicans wanted to testify, they were ruthlessly crushed by the leaders. Meetings became 'programmed' and the fire was gradually snuffed out. It is said that the overall leader, a black Afro-American pioneer called William Seymour, died of a broken heart.

As Rutz describes, 'the empowerment of the laity that we are seeing today represents the greatest megashift in the history of the church.' As he points out, 'you can move real fast . . . if you don't have to build buildings . . . or hire pastors to do all the work.' (Megashift, pp. 63-64) In other words, leaders are to teach and raise up the next generation of leaders and people who minister in the power of the Spirit.

What we bring to meetings will obviously reflect the way God has made and designed us - but we must make sure that we *make* the time to discover what is on the Lord's heart. In the following editions we are going to begin an exciting and important journey, unpacking how we can expand and facilitate more participatory styles of ministry.

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