

MAXIMISE 2021

THE MINISTRY OF PRAYER & THE WORD-TALK 2

Yesterday in Acts 6 we heard the Apostles assume and apply the first of three important Biblical principles:

Principle No.1: maximising gospel ministry, in ourselves and others, is a priority for every Christian (v.1-2) – I hope you were persuaded of this yesterday

Principle No.2: building teams enables churches to maximise their gospel ministry (v.3-4) – we’re going to look at this today; and then tomorrow...

Principle No.3: different people need to accept different roles to maximise gospel ministry (vs.5-6). Today we’re looking at teams enabling gospel ministry!

¹ In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers and sisters choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:1-7)

This passage reveals the Apostles demonstrating their understanding of the need to build teams to maximise gospel ministry. There are three elements to how they expressed this:

- (A) They preserved loyalty to gospel mission by managing change carefully!
- (B) They proposed appointing leaders for delegated ministries!
- (C) They began to develop a team structure to enable their prayerful word ministry!

Notice first the wisdom of what people today would call ‘change management’. Many churches would benefit from their leaders carefully adopting the staged approach adopted by the Apostles:

They preserved loyalty to gospel mission by managing change carefully! (2-6)

The way the Apostles handled this crisis was not only loving but also preserved loyalty to the gospel mission of the church; some leaders tend to arrogantly presume that careful consideration of change processes is unnecessary (because the congregations should just

accept leadership decisions - when in fact they're causing avoidable frustration) or worldly (because we have to think strategically like business people when in fact God's common grace provides great wisdom for us to benefit from in organisational wisdom):

- A. **They listened humbly and responded carefully to the complaints** – Sometimes complaints are so spurious they should be ignored – as when Nehemiah responding to the accusations of Sanballat in Neh.6 saying, '*Nothing like what you are saying is happening: you are making it up out of your heads*'; but more often, even if criticisms are exaggerated or ill-informed, there is a genuine problem to be understood and addressed and much pain can be avoided by listening humbly and then responding carefully.

- B. **They gathered everyone to explain their thinking** – Some decisions need to be kept entirely private, but usually distress and division can be allayed if explanation is given – for frustration and disengagement often results from unexplained decisions; Christian churches are not democracies – authority to govern is entrusted by God to those appointed in the church as Elders (a team of senior men – team to benefit from the collective wisdom of different perspectives, gifting, and experience; senior to avoid the folly of youth; men to lead the church like a family); Heb.13:17 says, '*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.*' But submission is a lot easier if leaders take time to explain their thinking to those who must live by their decisions.

- C. **They provided the spiritual perspective on the situation** – Sometimes leaders may neglect the spiritual issues raised by a situation and base their decisions on pragmatic factors – perhaps because they assume their theological knowledge makes them experts in all areas of life (which it doesn't) or because they forget that godly people want to hear God's perspective from his Word, not flawed human opinions; notice how the Apostles propose organisational change to enable gospel ministry which pleased the church.

- D. **They presented a proposal** – Leaders who impose their own solutions without any opportunity for discussion will both make avoidable mistakes and frustrate their congregations with dominating leadership. By contrast leaders who only ever consult to ask others for suggestions can also be frustrating if they never offer any solutions. Ideally, we want servant-hearted leaders (like Jesus) to offer proposals for feedback.

- E. **They proposed to carefully delegate the relief ministry** – So often delegation is the answer to administration problems which emerge in growing churches – where pastors can become a bottleneck because they won't let go of ministry; an OT parallel would be in Moses when old Jethro, his father-in-law, urged Moses to appoint assistants, '*the work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone;...but select capable men from all the people – men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain, and appoint them as officials...that will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you*' (Ex.18) i.e. build a team.

- F. **They invited and trusted the involvement of those who've been hurt** – Sometimes it's unwise to involve people who complain because they aren't loyal to the mission of the church, but where one person or group has a legitimate concern – those people may well understand the issues well and bring great energy to addressing the concerns, and hugely appreciate being trusted and brought into the solutions - whereas pastors just appointing their own friends will keep people feeling alienated.

- G. **They required high standards of godliness in their appointments** – One might think practical relief ministry wouldn't require such high standards – good reputation (key in the pastoral epistles because leaders with bad reputations in the community can ruin the credibility of church outreach); full of the Holy Spirit – for all ministry, including operational ministries, work better when done the Creator's way with godliness; and 'wisdom' presumably means the practical abilities required by the job – too often we appoint people who are godly but ineffective – or effective but ungodly - the Apostles see the need for both

- H. **They solemnly authorised the new leaders** – There is no point delegating responsibility without conferring the necessary authority to conduct the ministry – so the Apostles dignify this new ministry with public appointment and prayer, recognising this relief work as a ministry for God which needs his blessing, and laying on of hands – to indicate to the whole church, that just as with pastoral appointments of elders, these leaders have real delegated authority; there can be no doubt that the restoration of unity and the loyalty to gospel mission which followed, resulted in very large part from the wisdom with which the Apostles managed this change and the way the delegation was done

Next, we see here is the Apostles' commitment to team ministry.

They proposed appointing leaders for delegated ministries!

The NT frequently likens a local church to the human body. Christ is the *head* who leads the church, and the Bible is *the heart* of the body, pumping God's life giving word around all the limbs and organs of the body to equip them for their work; Bible teachers are like the mouth, given by the risen Christ to equip the members of the church in their ministries that together grow the church in number and maturity in Christ (Eph.4); but Bible-teachers are not the only ministry of a church any more than a mouth is the whole body!



For the different parts of the body are different people with different ministry gifts given by God for serving one another in the common mission of the body – which is making disciples of all nations for Christ. So a church must not behave like the proverbial one man band – with one overworked pastor rushing around doing most things badly

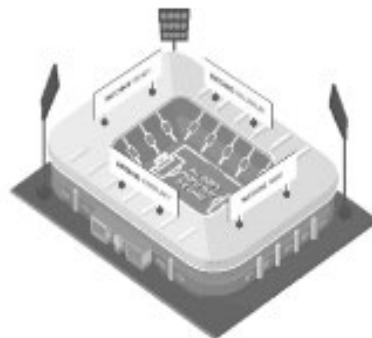


or just one thing well - but more like an orchestra in which the different instruments all contribute co-operatively to make beautiful music; and pastors must not become like conductors who are trying to get everyone in the orchestra to learn their role – but rather encourage them to contribute their own distinctive sound for the benefit of beautiful, harmonious music! Churches need to nurture a variety of ministries.



In some contexts, leaders need to be encouraged to pay more attention to the teaching ministries of the church (e.g., Sunday expositions, small group discussions, family devotions, one to-one Biblical counselling, music ministries, and private devotions). All are word ministries that edify or build up the church because the Bible is the heart of the body – training others in their ministries and co-ordinating them for mission.

But in other contexts, pastors need reminding that their church needs more than their own teaching ministry! In 1 Cor.12 Paul explains that just as the various different parts of our bodies are all necessary and interdependent, so the various different gifts and ministries of our church members are all necessary and interdependent! No one should be made to feel inferior or be neglected or be discouraged from their ministry for everyone is needed! And no-one should be allowed to feel superior and make their own ministry the centre of everyone's attention since everyone else is needed too: *'The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable...'* (1 Cor.12:21-21) i.e., healthy churches are team ministries where bible-teachers are training other members of the church in their diversity of gifts for a range of ministries that build up the church in their unity and maturity in Christ. At Dundonald we've often illustrated this by comparing church to a football stadium.



Many regard church as a crowd of spectators (the congregation) gathering to be entertained by expensive professionals (the preachers) playing the game (pastoral ministry)! But it's the ministry of all God's people that builds churches: the players are not just clergy but all the church members to serve in teams led by captains (Elders and Ministry Leaders who lead by example), trained by coaches (bible-teachers) with the manual (the Bible) to play the game (making disciples of all nations for Christ) in a suitable style of play for the community being reached (e.g. loving God, loving each other, loving our neighbours) while nurturing the youth academy (children & youth Ministries) to defeat the opposition (sin, world and devil) before

the watching crowds (unbelieving friends, family, colleagues, community) i.e. in Biblical churches every member is a minister!

I think team ministry is a much-neglected aspect of church life in our British evangelical scene; which is sad because attention to team ministry will have profound benefits in three major areas:

- a) **Growing our churches** - instead of neglecting ministries that are needed to grow our church, often because leaders are vainly trying to train everyone in their own bible-teaching ministries, the immense potential in the gifts and ministries of church members needs to be unleashed e.g., 'making the most of Xmas'.
- b) **Protecting our senior pastors from burnout** – instead of senior leaders becoming exhausted by desperately trying to do all kinds of ministries themselves, for which they're often ill-suited or have members who could do it as well or better, church members can be recruited to share the load.
- c) **Recruiting church members to the mission of our churches** - instead of church members feeling frustrated that they have little to offer their church except to contribute financially and make up numbers on rotas (e.g., child-care, coffee or sound desk) and eventually moving on in search of new adventures leaving pastors frustrated by the relentless 'churn' of people leaving, some may be persuaded to stay in order to contribute ministry which helps grow the church! It's so sad that church members with significant roles in their working lives find themselves under-used at church because they're not particularly gifted or experienced in Bible-teaching ministries. Please don't mishear me – bible-teaching ministries must lead the church – but they are not the only ministry required to make disciples for Christ. It's not just individuals who make disciples: churches make disciples. And a church is more able to make disciples when all sorts of non-word ministries are equipped to enable the word ministries e.g. in our church, we only need a few preachers – but the whole congregation can be helpful in maximising the salvation impact of one sermon even though they themselves, as much as they try, may not be very good at explaining the gospel for various reasons e.g. they may bring friends, offer lifts to get people there, organise parking, serve in a welcome team, serve in sound, lighting, media or catering teams, play in the band, be a smiling face or an encouraging welcome, dress the stage or work long hours earning money to pay for more staff. Suburban churches can fall into the trap of trying to copy city-centre training churches focussed upon equipping large numbers of Christian students and young professionals with potential to be paid Christian workers and becoming frustrated that their church is different. They can even resort to trying to recruit Ministry Trainees from student churches to train students to be professional Word ministers, while neglecting the congregations God has actually given them! Again, please don't mishear me: we want to encourage as many as possible to volunteer for full-time gospel ministry of every kind, but we mustn't neglect the potential in the church members God has given us to grow bigger churches that can plant and resource other gospel work; if we've learned nothing else from this pandemic, surely, we've learned how important tech, media and operational

people are to the mission of a church; we will be better equipped for mission online after lockdown.

d) **Church members have some functions which are the same.** Under the new covenant established by Jesus' blood, we all *know the Lord* (Heb.8), we're all empowered by the spirit to prophesy the word of the Lord (Acts 2) and we're all commissioned to make disciples of all nations (Mat.28); so we do want to train all our church members from the Bible to explain the gospel and disciple a younger believer as best they can individually; but these ministries are not just individual but also collective – and churches can do wonderful things collectively that no-one can do as well on their own! Biographies are usually written about preachers instead of churches and outreach resources are usually written by evangelists for individuals instead of pastors for churches – but churches can do amazing things as a team that no-one could on their own e.g., God has used the whole the Dundonald church family to grow and plant many churches collectively as a church family! Because in addition to what we do together.

e) **Church members have other functions which are different.**

As the people of Israel were equipped with different gifts for building the tabernacle (Ex.35), so Jesus builds his church as the wise man building on the rock of the gospel, through bible-teachers equipping people to use their different gifts for body-building the church towards maturity “in Christ”; some are more spiritual, some are more practical, we all have a unique collection of gifts as God decides which grow with practice and change over time but all co-operate in one aim of making disciples of all nations for Christ i.e.

A CHURCH IS NOT LIKE FERRERO ROCHER - A CHURCH IS MORE LIKE LICORICE ALLSORTS!



The Apostles knew this so they proposed appointing leaders to whom they could delegate the emerging ministries and were completely content for commendations to come from others; many of the best ideas in any church family don't come from the pastors but from members – if they're invited to contribute and can see their ideas being used; can you see what's happening here?

They began to develop a team structure to enable prayerful word ministry!

When God describes his pastoral ministry it's not therapeutic (as we often assume), its redemptive (cf. the divine shepherd leading his people through the desert in Ps.78 is leading them to the promised land i.e. heaven; when King David says 'The Lord is my shepherd' he doesn't describe God cuddling him but leading him through the valley of the shadow of death into God's presence in heaven); so when he expands on his pastoral ministry in Ez.34 he describes three kinds of ministry among exiles from God: search...rescue...gather (Evangelism); feed...rest...heal (teaching) and judge...protect...allocate (i.e. govern); fulfilled in the good shepherd Jesus who laid down his life for his sheep; elders bear a collective responsibility for those three aspects of pastoral ministry: evangelism, teaching and governance; they need to recruit help and build teams, especially in those areas where they themselves are weak; where would you say British Evangelical churches are stronger or weaker? I suspect our churches are strongest in teaching, weaker in evangelism and woeful in strategic governance; Don Carson warns in a recent Themelios article that the leadership responsible for implementing this evangelism, teaching and governance is described with three parallel terms: Pastor/Elder/Overseer because requires the *teaching of the pastor e.g. in faithful exposition of the Bible, the wisdom of the Elders e.g. in appointments of leaders, and the management of the overseer e.g. in providing clear vision and strategic direction for the church!* In his brilliant book, "Wisdom in Leadership", Craig Hamilton writes, "The reason vision, mission and strategy matter is because they help you provide clarity. And clarity is what everyone wants and needs. People want to know what they are supposed to be doing and how they're supposed to be doing it. If you're the leader, then it's your job to clarify those things for them...clarity is the key" So how does a church clarify the different ministries necessary for its mission as the Apostles began to do here?

The benefit of a multi-ministry team structure is quite simply more ministry being done to grow the church.

It's helpful in understanding this to represent the ministries the Bible says are necessary for growing a church in a rectangle...

The benefit of multi-ministry structures is... more ministry to grow the church

Assume Biblical Church ministry is:



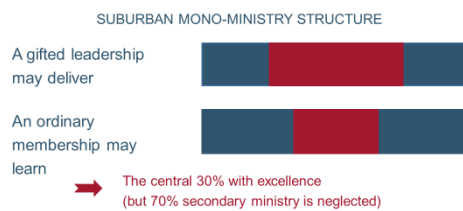
And then to divide it up to allocate different responsibilities to those with the gifting, training and experience to do them well...

The benefit of multi-ministry structures is... more ministry to grow the church

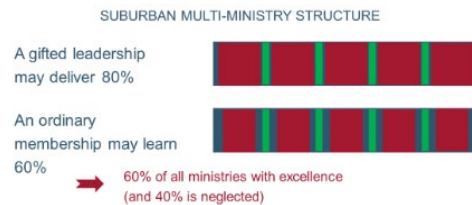


Now let's compare the impact of a 'Mono-ministry' structure (where people are being equipped for the same ministry) with a 'Multi-ministry' team structure (where people are being equipped for their different ministries):

First consider the effect of a Mono-Ministry structure...



Now consider the effect in the same church of a Multi-Ministry team structure...



Conclusion

While a city centre church may choose to focus in a central ministry (e.g. small group leadership excellence) other churches with fewer potential leaders can encourage more of their congregations into ministry with multi-ministry ("purpose-driven") structures i.e. more ministry is being done to grow the church: lower the bar, build teams, embrace good meetings, measure outcomes, pray.

Now let's consider how many streams of ministry you want: we don't know how the Apostles organised things (presumably because there isn't a one size fits all perfect structure so it wouldn't be helpful to tell us) though you could guess five: devotion to the Apostolic

teaching, devotion to the fellowship, devotion to the breaking of bread, devotion to prayer, and now devotion to poverty relief.

There are different versions with various benefits:

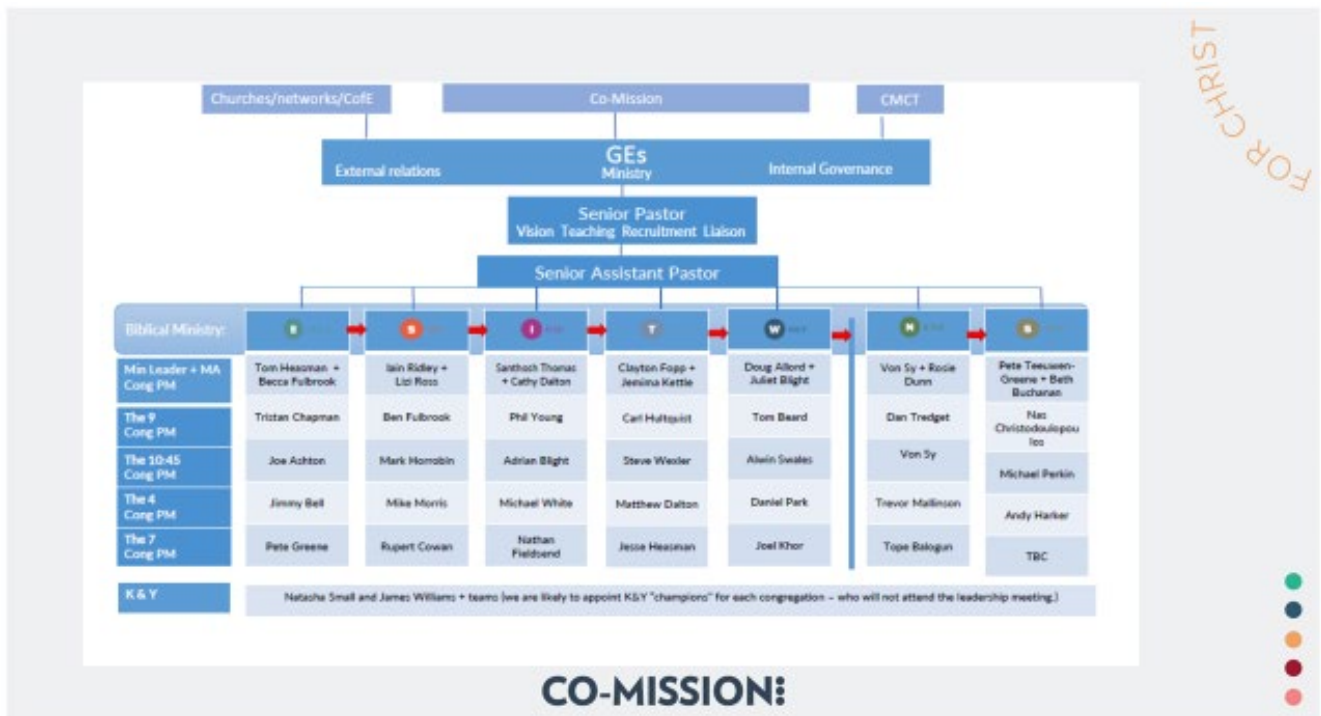
5M's – Magnification / Membership / Maturity / Ministry / Mission

4E's – Engage / Evangelise / Edify / Equip (plus Exalt or Export?)

WITNESS – worship / instruct / train / Network / Evangelise / Serve / Support



This kind of structured team applies to a tiny plant where the part-time Pastor and Elders allocate the ministries (the pastor normally leads the teaching ministries), to a small church where the Ministry Trainee or assistant pastor take evangelise and serve, the pastor takes instruct and train, and elders take worship, network and support; or a middle-sized church like Dundonald – so let me show our structure now – not because it's right (there's no right structure) but because we're team structured for our collective mission...



The key benefits of a developed Team Ministry structure are:

- a) A maturity development pipeline so everyone is making progress (a detailed database)

- b) Specialisation per gifting/training offering focussed excellence e.g., Evangelise: Something Better
- c) Increased range of ministries without gaping holes e.g., Serve: we're sticky.
- d) Opportunity for church members to serve in a variety of teams e.g., Envision: 60 committed leaders.
- e) Senior Pastors flourishing rather than exhausted headless chickens e.g., Assistant pastors.
- f) Congregational team pastoring e.g., seven ministry teams looking after us not one leader.
- g) The quality of Sunday gatherings e.g., Worship
- h) Great new initiatives e.g., Making the Most of Xmas/ Real Life

NB: No team is more important than another for the shared goal of all the teams is: making disciples of all nations for Christ i.e., we are a lifeboat not a cruise ship.



In Acts 6 we see the Apostles developing their teams' structure: the team of 12 formed a new team of 7! Because building teams enables churches to maximise their gospel ministry which as we saw yesterday is the priority for every Christian!

Tomorrow we'll consider **Principle No.3**: different people need to accept different roles to maximise gospel ministry (vs.5-6).

For now, build teams!