

for a variety of subsequent courses”. In terms of what is available for the pre-Alpha stage they give four particular examples:

- *Start*, originally produced by CPAS, but now taken over by *Leading Your Church Into Growth*. This is a six-session course with a consciously working-class non-book culture edge. A follow-up to *Start* is *Moving On!* (a seven week interactive course).
- *Uncover*, produced by the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, equips people to read Luke’s Gospel with an interested friend once a week for seven weeks. It is a beautifully produced tool with on-line resources that can be accessed by a smart-phone.
- *Table Talk*, published by the Ugly Duckling Company, is a conversational card-game which creates space to ‘explore’ the questions of life. A variety of *Table Talk* packs are available. A follow up to *Table Talk* is *Puzzling Questions*, a video-based six week course.
- *Essence*, published by Share Jesus International, is a six-week course “to stimulate a deeper spiritual life, drawing from the teachings of Jesus and the Christian mystics”. The style is laid-back and experiential – and includes relaxation exercises, making bracelets, smashing pots and modelling in dough.

I confess that I am not familiar with any of these four examples, but I am greatly encouraged by Ireland and Booker’s review. There is no one way to win people for Jesus. We need to develop diverse mission strategies if we are to reach the world in which God has placed us.

## **The Greatest Challenge Facing the Church: Ministry as Empowerment**

**Rowland Croucher**

*Australian Baptist minister and founder of John Mark Ministries. The following article appeared in his book 'Your Church Can Come Alive' (JBCE, Melbourne).*

It was 10.00pm, and the 60-year-old patient would not last the night. She was still conscious, so her grieving daughter and I prepared for a bedside vigil. Then a thought: I preach about the ministry of the whole church, so why was I there in the hospital? I phoned the chairman of elders, and asked him to arrange for a different person to come each hour. They did, and he himself was there at 4.00 a.m. when the lady died. He committed the departed and grieving ones to the Lord, and 'went home on a high', privileged to have been involved in such a strategic pastoral opportunity! When I saw him last week – twelve years later – he lit up again as he talked about it!

The saddest question pastors ask is: “How can the church learn to minister to itself – and to the world?” The laity's saddest question is: “Why won't pastors empower us for ministry too?” There's a catch-22 here somewhere. 'Ministry as empowerment' is in the category 'What they didn't teach you at theological seminary!'

Where two or three are gathered together there is power. “Power is... an ever-present reality which one must confront, use, enjoy, and struggle with a hundred times a day”.<sup>26</sup>

History is about power. So is psychology. Self-esteem derives from the ability to influence one's destiny. To be involuntarily powerless is to be without hope. All behaviour, says Adler, has something to do with striving for power. However, such striving is sick when those at the apex of power pyramids bolster their images with larger offices, special titles, distinctive clothing, deferential treatment, and prominently-displayed certificates and honours. ‘Image-makers’ earn big bucks giving advice about ‘power dressing’, ‘colour and flow analysis’, ‘impression management’ (“don't grasp the lectern when speaking” they say, “look what happened to Nixon!”), and even what spectacle-frames makes the wearer look more sensitive/capable/ authoritative, etc. There's a story of a pastor advertising his degrees on his street letter-box plaque! Brother Roger of Taizé refused to be called 'prior' in his community. “I am their brother...It is impossible for those holding positions of responsibility in the church to add honorific titles to their service of God”.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Rollo May, *Power and Innocence: A search for the sources of violence* (1972) 121.

<sup>27</sup> *The Wonder of a Love* (1981) 85.

Theology, too, is about power: “On every page of the New Testament one finds the terminology of power”.<sup>28</sup> (

Some believe all power is evil. Tony Campolo, in *The Power Delusion*, says that power is the opposite of love, while others (Machiavelli, Nietzsche) that power is good (“all weakness tends to corrupt, and impotence corrupts absolutely”<sup>29</sup>). Here we'll assume power is neutral, but is directed to good or evil ends. Essentially power is the ability to get things done. Authority is power conferred by an institution. Leadership is getting things done through others. Empowerment is giving away, rather than accruing, power.

### **Power in the church**

Where two or three gather in churches, there is power. Surveys tell us that most clergy enjoy preaching more than anything else. “Here”, said one, “I'm not at the mercy of petty bureaucrats!” Lay leaders may exercise power, even becoming “permission-withholders” (Lyle Schaller). I asked some Anglican clergy about the most powerful group in their church. It was the women's guild: when they don't like the vicar they withhold their fête-moneys!

Church renewal is the process whereby church people, systems and structures receive new life, meaning and power. Ministry renewal happens when pastors and leaders move from an organizational/maintenance mode of leadership to one of empowering the whole church for ministry. The church-as-institution may resist such empowerment. Religious institutions tend over time to domesticate<sup>(30)</sup> and routinize faith-traditions. Marx may have had a point when he suggested that institutional religion is the enemy of social transformation because it sacralizes the forms and structures of society.<sup>31</sup>

Christians bring a mix of altruism and a 'what's in it for me' agenda to church meetings. Roy Oswald, in *Power Analysis of a Congregation*, says that every person in an organization has banked an amount of 'power currency' through personal (knowledge, position, verbal skills, etc.) and corporate (role,

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<sup>28</sup> Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers* (1984) 99.

<sup>29</sup> Rollo May, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy and the Oppressed* (1972)

<sup>31</sup> Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind* (1981).199.

reputation, influence with group/s, access to communication channels) attributes. The pastor-leader had better identify formal and informal power-holders, groups and factions, and trace those communication channels if he or she is to influence people. Then, says Oswald, the more I empower others, the more powerful everyone in my system is, the more powerful I become. In the words of a 1970 book by David Dunn, *Try Giving Yourself Away!*

A renewed church will take seriously the role of the laity in ministry. As J.D. & E.E. Whitehead put it, “A contemporary shift in ecclesiology, our understanding of the nature and structure of the church, has significantly influenced the shape of theological reflection in ministry. Previously we have been familiar with a church in which an individual authority (whether Catholic pope, Episcopal bishop, or Methodist pastor) reflected on and made decisions for the believing community. The emphasis today moves toward understanding the community of faith as the locus of theological and pastoral reflection.”<sup>32</sup>

Although the church comprises human beings, it is not a human institution. The church's ministry is Christ's (John 20.21), carrying out in the world his ministry both extensively and intensively. Its mandate coincides with Jesus' own definition of his calling (Luke 4.18-19). The style of Christ's 'headship' was exemplified in washing his friends' feet. His badge of office was not a sceptre, but a towel. He models 'servant leadership', an authority to be found not in titles or status, but in empowering others (cf. Mark 10.42-44). That is to be our model too.

The ministry belongs to the whole church, not just trained clergy (Eph 4.11-12,25). So we will have to abolish the 'clergy' - or the 'laity'. Every Christian is a minister – the whole church are the *laos*, the people of God. Our terminology should catch up with our theology at this point: let us drop use of the singular noun, 'minister'. “Why is it” asks George Goyder “that the church today will not trust its members? Why does the church so often decline to recognize and to accept the activity of the Spirit among unregulated groups of Christians? Why is all initiative in the church expected and presumed to derive from the clergy? It is because we have substituted for the biblical doctrine of the Holy

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<sup>32</sup> *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection & Christian Ministry* (1983).5)

Spirit as ruler in the church a doctrine of our own, unknown to scripture, the authority of professionalism".<sup>33</sup>

## **Ethology**

Ethology is the study of the comparison between human and animal behaviour. An important concept in ethology is the notion of territoriality: the practice of marking a piece of ground and defending it against intruders. Animals as diverse as fish, worms, gazelles, and lizards stake out areas and put up fierce resistance when intruders encroach on their area. Many species use malodorous secretions to mark the boundaries of their territory.

Some scholars argue that people are territorial animals: humans' genetic endowment drives them to gain and defend territory, much as the animals do. "The dog barking at you from behind his master's fence acts for a motive indistinguishable from that of his master when the fence was built".<sup>34</sup> The list of territorial behaviours is endless: in a library you protect your space with a book, coat, or note-book; you 'save a place' in the theatre or at the beach - reserving a spot that is 'mine' or 'ours'; juvenile gangs fight to protect their turf; neighbours of similar ethnic backgrounds join forces to keep other groups out; nations war over contested territory; pastors accuse others of 'sheep-stealing'.<sup>35</sup>

'Turfism' is rife in churches. The roster lady quits because someone didn't consult her about flowers left from the Saturday wedding; the organist won't play anything composed after the 1900s; the women's fellowship won't give the pastor - or anyone else - the key to their new room; the board chairman is angry because they met when he was away; an elder complains that the youth director took some kids to a Christian rock concert; the cleaner resigns because young people left chairs in disarray; the pastor is miffed when a Bible study group starts up without his knowledge. As a result of our fallenness, this planet and its inhabitants have substituted 'territoriality' ('my space - keep out') for 'hospitality' ('my space - you're welcome!'). The Bible has many stories and injunctions about reversing this effect of the Fall.

Pastors and leaders in the church are invited to be 'hospitable' rather than 'territorial', and it's something they generally do very

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<sup>33</sup> *The People's Church* (1977) 33.

<sup>34</sup> Ardrey, *The Territorial Imperative* (1966), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Lyle Schaller, *Effective Church Planting* (1979).65ff.

poorly. The biblical models are clear. Moses was told by his father-in-law: 'You're killing yourself!' (Ex 18.18). His advice: Pray for the people, teach them God's laws, and appoint co-leaders. When Jesus was recruiting disciples to lead his church, he had the same three priorities: prayer, teaching (by modelling and instruction), and training for ministry. It's amazing how much Jesus delegated, very early, to his disciples. Then, when these apostles messed up the early Church's social welfare system, they had an 'a-ha' experience: 'Oh, we should have remembered; our task is to give our full time to prayer and teaching the Word, so let's delegate other ministries to people full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom' (Acts 6.1-4). It would be wonderful if more pastors had this kind of 'a-ha' experience.

So why don't they? Fasten your seat-belts: these paragraphs will contain some turbulence. The Devil could not get Jesus to accrue power to himself (Matt 4.1-11; 16.21-28), so he has tried the same temptations on the shepherds of Jesus' church - and he has generally succeeded. The church, very early in its institutional history, developed an 'official' ministry which separated 'ordained' Christians from others. These 'priests' alone had sacramental prerogatives. The Protestant Reformers rejected Roman Catholic and Orthodox theology at this point - the whole church is pastoral, priestly, prophetic - but may not have taken their reformation far enough. Protestant pastors generally feel that they, too, control certain prerogatives in the life of the church (presiding at most sacramental observances, preaching most of the sermons, chairing most of the meetings, visiting most of the sick, etc.), and are often reluctant to share these ministries with others. They have perhaps forgotten that their key role is equipping (Eph 4.12), empowering others for ministry, not doing it all themselves as paid 'professional employees' of the Church.

Frankly, it's nice having these privileges: all the clergy surveys tell us they enjoy these public roles in most cases. Taking power to ourselves is the devil's primal trick, however. Justice is essentially about power. When we deny others their empowering, that's unjust. Pastor-teachers ought to spend more time with fewer people, training them for leadership and ministry on the job.

The main point we are making about ordination for ministry is that everyone's in it! Every Christian is ordained for ministry (at baptism). If the Protestant Reformation at least put the Bible into

the hands of ordinary Christians, we need another Reformation to put ministry there as well. Today, all branches of the church are facing this question with renewed urgency. The 1989 Lausanne II conference of Evangelicals may be remembered most for its strident attack on clericalism. The progressive Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx similarly wrote: "There is no mention in the New Testament of an essential distinction between 'laity' and 'ministers'... the ministry is not a status, but a function. For the New Testament, the essential apostolic structure of the community and therefore of the ministry of its leaders has nothing to do with what is called the "hierarchical" structure of the church." <sup>36</sup> His thinking moved even further: "The early eucharist was structured after the pattern of Jewish grace at meals... at which just anyone could preside... The general conception is that anyone who is competent to lead the community in one way or another is ipso facto also president at the eucharist (and in this sense presiding at the eucharist does not need any separate authorization). The New Testament does not tell us any more than this". <sup>37</sup>

Pastors are nurturers, not primarily performing tasks, but growing people. They nurture by example and exhortation (in that order, 1 Pet 5.3; 1 Tim 4.11,12; Tit 2.7). They produce co-leaders, and once the community has recognized them, such persons ought to be commissioned for their ministries. This can be done at a special service, by the 'laying on of hands' (hands belonging to representatives from the congregation, not necessarily those of the 'heavies' present!). Let us encourage the commissioning, from time to time, of everyone who has a recognized ministry within the church body. Wouldn't it be wonderful if more pastors aimed to do what Saul and Barnabas did in the church at Antioch: reproduce themselves in other leaders within a year!

How will they do that? Essentially:

- Let's get our theology of ordination and ministry straight: what we generally call 'ordination' is really accreditation, a necessary step where a church-as-institution agrees with God's prior calling to a ministerial vocation. All Christian men and women are ordained already!

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<sup>36</sup> *Ministry: a Case for Change*, (1981) 21,135.

<sup>37</sup> *The Church with a Human Face* (1985) 119-120.

- We need to train a generation of professional clergy who are not threatened by others and with proven skills in people management.
- Managers/pastors train others best by modelling: it's a master-apprentice relationship.
- A redemptive teaching model involves reciprocal learning, rather than a powerful all-knowing teacher pouring information into pupil's heads.
- However, this requires openness, humility, ego-strength, and teachability on the part of the teacher.
- It requires lots of time - doing ministry with others, then analyzing, praying, de-briefing and encouraging the trainee.

In practice,

- 70% of the average pastor's visitation is non-confidential, another 20% may require the consent of the counselee: the pastor ought to be accompanied by another on most of these occasions.
- Allow those with the requisite gifts to help lead worship, Bible studies, small groups etc. but public ministries should be exercised only after training and proven competence.
- Your church ought to be a miniature theological seminary: run courses on everything to do with ministry, and have lots of resources (books, audio- and video-tapes) available.
- Pastors: share any and every ministry except pastoral leadership. The buck ends with you: you cannot evade that responsibility.

In an American basketball stadium hangs a large banner: 'IT CAN HAPPEN HERE!' It can happen in your life, in your church!

## Preaching the Gospel – Using Words!

### Peter Thomas

*Minister of North Springfield Baptist Church, Chelmsford*

Sometime in the 1990s, a striking saying became popular. “Preach the gospel and if necessary use words.” Attributed to Francis of Assisi, riding on his reputation and widely quoted by people who should have known better, it seemed to fit the mood of Christians