

Service

Ministers often hear excuses from folks whom they have asked to serve in some role in church. The next time you feel like GOD can't use you, just remember...

Noah was a drunk

Abraham was too old

Isaac was a daydreamer

Jacob was a liar

Leah was ugly

Joseph was abused

Moses had a stuttering problem

Gideon was afraid

Sampson had long hair and was a womanizer

Rahab was a prostitute

Jeremiah and Timothy were too young

David had an affair and was a murderer

Elijah was suicidal

Isaiah preached naked

Jonah ran from God

Naomi was a widow

Job went bankrupt

John the Baptist ate bugs

Peter denied Christ

The Disciples fell asleep while praying

Martha worried about everything

The Samaritan woman was divorced, more than once

Zaccheus was too small

Paul was too religious

Timothy had an ulcer...

AND

Lazarus was dead!

In light of Veterans day, today we are talking about Service.

Today we are talking about the need for every member of the congregation to use their time and talents to participate in the ministry of the church.

Our reading from Ephesians today seems to be about leadership....I mean, It talks about apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

What's that all about?

Let me digress for a moment and give you an easy way to remember these five foundational leadership roles. There is a ministry for each finger on your hand.

The apostles are the thumb. The thumb is the foundation of the hand and the apostles are the foundation of the church ministry.

You use the index finger to point things out, just as the prophetic role involves, not so much predicting the future, but pointing out things that the church needs to address today.

The third finger is the longest, just as the evangelists are those who are responsible for extending the church's touch.

The ring finger represents relationships and it is the pastoral ministry that is primarily concerned with our relationships with one another as well as our growing relationship with God.

Finally, the little finger is sometimes forgotten. Similarly, teaching is one of the most important ministries within the church, but it is one that is too little appreciated and too often forgotten.

Ephesians talks about these important roles, but what are these roles for? Does Paul tell us that these roles exist to change the world? Listen to the text.

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”

The leadership roles of the church exist to prepare God’s people for works of service. The thing that really matters is not what the leaders do. What matters is the works of service done by God’s people. It is those works of service that build up the body of Christ.

What is that all about?

There are varying degrees of involvement that people have in the church.

Willow Creek is a large church and they have many materials on all kinds of things, and I first encountered one commonly used model for understanding these groups within the church when I was looking through some of their materials.

It identifies four groups: the core, the congregation, the crowd, and community.

The core are the folks who serve in the leadership roles, who are there whenever the doors are open, who teach the classes, who visit the shut-ins, and whose generosity pays most of the bills. These folks know about

service. These folks give much of themselves to the church. They also are the group in the church who feel best about what the church is doing and feel most personally fulfilled by the church experience.

The group called the congregation makes up the majority of the typical church membership. They come on Sundays most of the time. They serve on occasion and will volunteer to help with special events. They take a turn in other areas of ministry. Generally, they give steadily, but not sacrificially. The typical church could not survive without the contributions made by these folks.

The third group, called the crowd, may be on the church roll, but you normally couldn't tell that. When they talk about the church they talk about what "those people at Park" are doing. It is third person, them not us. They don't make meaningful financial contributions and they rarely serve. Sometimes they are called C&E members because they show up on Christmas or Easter. They see the church primarily as a place for baby dedications, marriages, and funerals. As a church, we hatch'em, we match'em, and we dispatch'em.

The final group is the community. These are folks who are outside the church whom we seek to reach. We serve them. They don't contribute to us, instead we spend money to develop relationships and meet needs.

The church grows by moving people from one group to another.

We grow when we move folks from the community into the crowd or congregation. We grow when we reach people in the crowd and bring them into the active congregation. We grow when more members of the congregation become part of the core leadership of the church and that group grows.

We are going to be talking about giving more next week. Still, church growth people often measure where people fall within these 4 groups based on their giving. People in the group, called the congregation in this model, give about 2% of their income to the church. If you give

significantly more than that, especially if you tithe, you are part of the core. If you give significantly less than 2%, you are part of the crowd.

But I don't think that the most important factor is money. Anybody can write a check. The most important factor is service. Are you here to be served or to serve? Are you doing for others or expecting others to do for you? We intend to serve the community. Members of the crowd are served more than they serve. For the congregation, there is a rough equilibrium. Those at the core are servants to the rest.

In growing churches, there is a culture of service. People get past the idea that serving others is uniquely the job of the paid staff and the elders. They view themselves as an active part of the church's ministry. They volunteer. They give. They do.

Why did we read that rather odd story about Elijah and the widow?

Did you hear her situation? She had a heart for service. She was more than happy to offer hospitality. She was willing to give a glass of water. But sharing her food was a different matter. She and her son were starving. They were preparing to eat their last meal together and then die. She was reluctant to share that last meal with another.

When she got past that and did share what she had, she found that her resources were replenished. Giving brought with it the resources to give.

Many people in the congregation can sympathize with the widow.

They have so many demands on their time. They have their careers. They have their families. They need time for themselves and their interests. They want balance.

What they have trouble understanding is that as they give themselves in acts of service in response to God's call, those efforts do not drain them. Instead, they find themselves energized.

It helps to keep their lives in balance. They benefit from service, often more than those whom they serve.

It is part of our intrinsic makeup to provide service to others. When we deny that side of ourselves, we will never be whole. It is only through service that we become the people we were created to be.

So why don't more people serve? Historically, the church as a whole has been part of the problem. One thing that we have done poorly is that we have focused on the wrong thing.

Churches were so focused on getting names on the roll that we tried to make membership as easy as possible. The message went like this. "Come be part of our church. You don't have to believe exactly like we do. You can come to services as often as you choose. You can give as much or as little as you want. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. Come join us. We're easy." We made it harder to join a social club than to join a church.

We set the bar so low that we gave people the impression that church membership meant little.

We can hardly be surprised that people believed us. They don't take church membership seriously today because of our message then.

Who are we to complain? We need to change our attitude toward membership. Membership needs to include, not requirements, but expectations, relative to belief, participation, giving, and service. We need to raise the bar.

Another mistake that churches make is that we define certain service roles and we push people into those roles.

That has led us to put people into situations of service for which they have no talent, no gift, no interest, and no call from God. It is not surprising that such people are unfulfilled. They continue out of a sense

of obligation until they finally burn out, often leaving the church entirely.

Let me tell you about a marriage counseling session that I heard about. The husband had been talking a lot! He was saying, "Until I got married, my habits were as regular as clockwork. I rose exactly at six; half an hour later I was at breakfast. At seven I was at work. I had lunch at one, supper at six, and was in bed at nine-thirty. I ate only plain food, and didn't have a day of sickness during all those years...."

"My," interrupted the pastor, "and what were you in for?"

To often, service roles are so structured and impersonal that people feel imprisoned in them. They have no freedom so the role is not their own.

God has given each individual their own talents and interests and gifts.

As Paul said each part does its work Instead of pigeon holing folks into whatever position happens to be open, we need to give people an opportunity to explore and discover what their gifts are.

We need to help them find the role that energizes them. We need to give them the freedom to shape their own ministries, even if they are ministries that have never been part of the church before.

If you are not giving as much in service as you know that you could or should, I want you to think today about something that you could do that fits your gifts and interests. Let me list a few.

We also need people who are willing to work with kids. That includes child care, teaching, children's church and the children's sermonette. We always need help with special children's events like the Easter Egg Hunt, VBS, Christmas Party.

We need people with administrative skills. In addition to budgets and finance and record keeping, we need organizational skills. Events like

our VBS, fall family festival, trunk or treat, holiday bazaar, etc. require a tremendous amount of organization and planning.

Can you do that kind of work? We need to contact businesses in the community, the police, and fire department. We need people to figure out what supplies are needed and acquire them. You can't convince me that there are not a few people out there who have the gift of shopping.

We increasingly need technical skills. We need people running the tech booth for morning services. This includes some computer skills and some interest in working with video.

We need people who have musical and drama talents. That could be as simple as joining the worship team, but if you have talents that you would like to use in other ways, I am certain we can provide you with the opportunity.

We should never forget the important role played by people who have gifts in the areas of hospitality and fellowship.

In addition to our fellowship time every week, we have special meals on a regular basis. If you have skills here, I guarantee that you will have opportunities to use them.

Maybe you would be interested in encouraging folks. Could you send notes on behalf of the church to shut-ins, people on the prayer list, and greetings (or maybe condolences) on people's birthdays?

Maybe you phone older people on a regular basis to check on them and offer a few friendly words. Maybe you could greet people as they arrive at the service or make sure that everyone of our visitors gets a warm welcome.

We have just scratched the surface. We need folks who can help keep up the property. We need people who will help with special mission and service activities. If you have a talent, and you see the need, there is a

good possibility that God is nudging you in that direction. How will you respond?

I will close by reading Paul's words about what a serving church accomplishes.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.