

Developing Ministries

It is a wonderful privilege to be able to serve within the kingdom of God. It brings a sense of purpose along with positive outcomes in the local church.

The best way to develop ministries within the local church setting is to pray and challenge the people to look for opportunities to find and use their spiritual gifting. This process of discovery can occur through seminars and through honest interaction with friends and leadership. I have discovered that if a person has a particular burden for a certain ministry, it usually means that it has been placed there by the Spirit of God. Furthermore, as a person 'owns' a ministry they are more likely to endure trials and stay for the long haul.

Strategy

After preaching one Sunday on 'The Kingdom of God', a doctor in our congregation approached me about starting up a type of 'Weight Watchers' class where people in the church and community could encourage one another in a Christian atmosphere. Many other successful ministries have commenced within the church and community as people use their practical ministry gifts. Unfortunately, pastors threatened by other peoples' gifts, can stifle growth.

Another way to develop ministries is for leaders to take time to discern the needs of the community. They then need to share those needs with others and, when necessary, challenge people to become involved. With perseverance, this approach will prove worthwhile in the long term.

Sometimes it is right that a ministry should close, because there is no ongoing need for it, or because there is no special sign of approval of God upon that work. It has been said, both rightly and sadly, that if the Holy Spirit were removed from the church, much of its activity would continue unchanged.

New ministries must receive oversight and support. When someone expresses interest in serving, I often encourage them by saying, 'That's great, keep praying about it. Talk with others, ask for their input, and if it still seems right, step out in faith and give it a go. Keep us updated on your progress, and if you need support, know that we are praying for you and will encourage you along the way.' If there is a clear mismatch between the person and the ministry, I gently redirect their enthusiasm. I also ask them to take responsibility for keeping me informed of their progress.

Those involved in ministry need to learn how to work effectively with others. In areas that are particularly people-focused such as leading a community outreach or running a drop-in centre, it is important to have a management team in place. This group provides oversight, support, and accountability for the work being carried out.

Management team

The management team should carry out the following task:

1. Record in writing, the vision and goals of the ministry which are from time to time to be reassessed and altered as necessary.
2. Meet with the leader at least monthly to pray, review progress, and make decisions together.
3. To hold the leader *accountable*, which will also help prevent pride and errors creeping in. Having only one person overseeing the work can deter objectivity and bring about an unhealthy emotional involvement. If the work is quite large seek therefore to invite several people to form a management committee depending on the size of the work.
4. Include people on the management committee from a range of backgrounds. Where possible, they should have hands-on experience or a genuine commitment to the work, which can help prevent power struggles.

'but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety' Proverbs 11:14.

Fellowship

It is often helpful to hold a wider monthly gathering for leaders involved in different people-centred ministries. In my experience, ministry workers can sometimes feel that their own area is closest to God's heart and where 'the rubber really meets the road,' though this is not true. Sharing together helps each worker understand the challenges, joys, and difficulties others face, broadens their appreciation of other ministries, and gives them an opportunity to pray together.

Prayer support

For several years, we have used a monthly prayer calendar, assigning each day to pray for different people involved in ministry. This has been very helpful, not only by informing the church about what people are doing, but also by helping them pray more effectively.

New people

Encourage new Christians to become involved in ministry, but do not rush into it prematurely. Paul, for example in writing to Timothy warns that a new Christian should not be appointed to the office of eldership too soon (1 Timothy 3:6). Pride and inexperience have been the downfall of too many enthusiastic workers.

New people shifting into a church need to settle into the Fellowship before they are released into ministry, regardless of how gifted they are. Do not go against this principle unless there

is a strong witness by the Holy Spirit. Time brings out a person's true spirit. Many church fellowships require that new people shifting in are not to hold any position of responsibility for at least six months. This rule is normally beneficial for all concerned.

When people fail in ministry

Unfortunately, people do sometimes fail in ministry. Although this can initially cause deep heartache, being relieved of the role often brings a sense of relief, as many already realise they have not been doing well.

It is an injustice to allow enthusiastic people to carry on in ministry if they are obviously unsuited for the position. One preacher made the comment that the greatest pain he experiences is 'when he makes a mistake and his friends do not point it out to him'.

There are right and wrong ways in asking a person to stand down from doing a task (or in altering the direction in the way it is going) especially when you know it is going to cause turmoil. The following steps must be preceded with prayer for wisdom, a right attitude and the right timing.

Firstly, give genuine praise for some aspect of their character or work done. *Secondly*, point out the problem and the need for them to step down. If you are dealing with a paid staff member bear in mind legal requirements that go with laying off people. For example, several warnings must be given first. Keep the elders informed. *Thirdly*, praise them again for some aspect of their character or the effort they have put into the ministry. Check up on that person at a later stage to encourage their progress. This is very important.

Itinerant ministries

At one time I travelled throughout South America, spending most of my time in Uruguay and Argentina, holding seminars for pastors and church leaders. As there appeared to be a weakness in 'the local church and missions' and 'team ministry' in these two countries, I concentrated on these two subjects. The response to these talks was very encouraging. Surprisingly though, on returning home, I discovered that several people did not agree with the strong emphasis we have in our church on Missions and giving, along with the emphasis on team ministry. After much prayer, love and dialogue things settled down again. I cannot help thinking of a certain very gifted Bible teacher who regularly travels around the world lecturing on leadership, while his New Zealand based church has developed a serious problem with a dearth of quality leadership and that has placed that church in a very vulnerable position. There needs to be a right balance.

'Developing a ministry is not about building something great overnight; it is about faithfully planting, nurturing and investing in people until God brings the growth' (Anonymous).