

Introduction

Training is an obvious strategy and ministry priority. It is also an enormous joy and privilege to groom young gospel workers and see them established in the field.

Yet as ministers we do not instinctively train others in ministry. Over the last half of the 20th century there has been shift toward training through the discipleship ministries, but the clergy are still in the main not effective coaches. In fact most do not even think much about this side of the ministry. Why is this? Why don't we coach? What are the obstacles in our thinking? What shifts in our thinking need to occur? What patterns in our church and ministry inhibit the personal training of co-workers? You will see there is a close relationship between many of these ways of thinking.

This mind shift involves moving from an institutional to a personal view of gospel ministry.

From ordained ministry to diversity of ministries

It is right that denominations ordain or accredit their ministers to provide for Christ's flock faithful godly and able shepherds. However there are three ways in which the practice of ordination militates against training in the churches.

Firstly, if the only real ministers are persons ordained by the denomination, the church will not encourage young apprentices to test their gifts of preaching and teaching.

Secondly, if there are enough ordained ministers to fill the pulpits of the denomination, there appears to be little need to train more. Pulpits will only become vacant due to natural attrition.

Thirdly, we will only select people for training who fit the mould of the ordained ministry. We will miss many gifted people who could break new ground for the gospel outside the denominational structures. Many who might not fit comfortably in traditional ministries are the best evangelists, church planters, ethnic ministers, women's pastors, student workers, writers, managers and so on.

We need to coach for diversity.

From solo to team ministry

Often connected to views of ordination, is the model of the solo pastor. There is one minister of the church who is expected to exercise all the public ministries of Word and sacrament, pastoral visiting, evangelism, school Scripture classes and the like.

Coaching is a team ministry. The minister needs the vision and freedom to build a ministry team, initially with just one fellow-worker, for the purpose of training. Church members are often opposed to team ministry for a variety of reasons. It appears elitist to select one or two for training, they want the real minister to preach or visit not the trainee. The training takes the minister's time from what he is expected to do. Team ministry is a different vision of church.

From church polity to ministry partnership

Issues of church polity, how churches are governed, often dominate local churches. At one level this is to be expected since all denominations are partly defined by their distinctive understanding of

church government. Being a church faithful to its denominational heritage is important. However, inflexible commitment to a particular polity can destroy coaching. Where do trainee ministers and ministry teams fit in the structures? Are they elders, deacons, ministers, priests, members of the church committee? It is more helpful to think in terms of ministry partnership rather than power structures. The partnership ethos will draw workers into the gospel enterprise.

From event strategy to training strategy

Churches typically adopt an 'event strategy' in evangelism. A variety of events are used to proclaim the gospel, including church meetings, guest services, mission meetings, men's breakfasts, women's suppers and many other creative gatherings. We must do more and more of this. Yet at one level this strategy is failing. In our post-Christian, secular age, most unbelievers will never come to our events. Even our members are patchy in their attendance. The strategy relies partly on the appeal and gifts of the speaker and so we are limited by the availability of such people. For the church pastor, the setting up and running of events can dominate his life. We spend all our time getting people to come to things. In some ways it is a strategy of centralism, control and convenience. People have to come to us, on our terms, to hear the word. In the end an event strategy distracts us from training.

A 'training strategy' on the other hand, increases the number and effectiveness of gospel communicators, both personal and public. A training strategy will raise up more speakers and so increase the number, variety and effectiveness of events. Events can be used to train workers. If all members are offered some training in evangelism, more unbelievers will attend our events. It is a strategy of chaos and inconvenience. It takes time to train evangelists and these young evangelists will build their own ministries as they preach the Word. We are no longer in control of the program. As the gospel is preached, Christ by His Spirit gathers his people into all kinds of fellowships which don't fit our neat structures.

From filling gaps to developing resources

One of the immediate pressures as ministers is to fill the gaps in replacing leaders who run our programs. So we recruit the new Sunday School teacher, the Youth leader or director of our women's ministry. This is maintenance mode in leading a church, just keeping the existing ministries afloat.

If we are resource-driven we can move into expansion mode. We should start with the people God has given us, not the program. We need to consider each one as a gift from Christ to our church, to be equipped for ministry. So the question becomes, "What ministry could this member exercise?", not, "Who can fill this gap in our personnel needs?" Thinking this way will open up new areas of ministry because of the particular gifts and opportunities of our members. Instead of filling the vacancy on the committee, they might start a ministry to their ethnic community or in their work place. Out of this mind-set we will discover and train those who will offer themselves for the full-time ministry.

From building structures to building people

How do you plan your ministry? There are two broad possibilities. You can look at current structures

and programs such as church meetings, youth work, Sunday School, Bible study groups and ask how can we do these better? This assumes the structures are still useful in reaching our goals. The other way is to start with a blank piece of paper, with no structures or program. Then ask, who are the people God has given us, how can we help them grow in Christian maturity and what are their peculiar gifts and opportunities? This is a revolutionary mind shift. By thinking and praying name by name, you will focus on your flock, their spiritual needs, their gifts and the ministries you should build around them. You will conclude that some structures no longer serve a worthwhile purpose. This can be a painful process for those attached to their particular program. But you will see that new ministries can be planted by coaching your flock in the use of their gifts and opportunities.

From using people to developing people

Church programs are commenced and maintained by willing volunteers. They are the lifeblood of our churches. They pour their evenings and weekends into church, children, youth, Bible studies, committees, property and the rest. The danger is we use them and not coach them. They burn out, their ministry is curtailed and we have not developed their Christian life and ministry potential.

From responding to problems to helping others make progress

As ministers we inevitably must deal with problems. We are shepherding God's people who have many needs. There are often tensions in church life and with the community. But we need to ask whether our ministry is reactive or proactive. If we are mostly reacting to problems, we will not have enough energy for training and growing new work.

From relying on training institutions to establishing local training

We decline to coach young ministers in our churches because we have relegated the training of pastors to the seminaries and colleges. It is necessary to bring together gifted pastors to provide rigorous theological and academic training in a college setting. But a college cannot be expected to provide the total training in character, conviction and skill needed for a young pastor. Much of this must be done through coaching our apprentices on the job in church life. The colleges should be finishing schools for professional ministers.

From immediate pressures to long term expansion

As leaders in ministry, we are easily consumed by keeping the program running and the people happy. The urgent crowds out the important. And everyone thinks their agenda is important. We know that training leadership will maintain and expand the ministry but it takes all our energies just to keep the wheels turning.

From local to global vision

There is a real fear of losing our much needed leaders if we train them. One of our goals in coaching is to encourage some into further formal training in theology and on into church or missionary ministries. We become exporters of trained people. In a resource poor church this is very hard. Even in churches with many leaders, regular turn over and re-training is demanding. But we must have a global and not just local view of gospel work. The goal is not church growth, which always means my church, but gospel growth.

From management to ministry

Ministers do need to be responsible managers of the resources entrusted to them and there will always be a certain amount of administration to do. The trap is to be so caught up in the management exercise that the ministry of teaching and coaching is weakened. Ask yourself how many hours per week do you spend on committees, managing property, organising programs, running the church business? Could others be trained for some of this? Could you coach someone into the administrator role? Could you divert some of your time in administration to coaching one or two ministry leaders?

From our comfort zone to vulnerability

Coaching can take us outside of our comfort zone. For personalities that are more reserved and private, the idea of opening up our lives and ministries to someone we are coaching, is threatening. It will actually be healthy for our own Christian maturity, encouraging integrity and spurring us on to love and good deeds.

If we were never personally coached in ministry, we either undervalue its importance or feel inadequate as trainers or both. We don't start coaching because it is outside of our own experience. Coaching may be a new adventure which stretches us as much as our apprentices.