

Advice for Leaders—Be a leader who mentors and develops more leaders

By Bob Young

God's plan is to reach a lost world and he does it through the local church. Jesus is the head of the church and he calls it his body. Paul writes, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Eph. 1:22).

During my 25+ years in local church ministry, I had the privilege of working in two churches during times of significant growth and development—one church tripled in 11+ years, the other almost doubled in 8 years. I then spent a dozen years in Christian higher education where I was privileged to teach ministry courses, to be personally involved in various mission endeavors, and to consult with numerous church leaders. Since retirement, I have continued to help in local church ministry settings but my primary role has been in mission work across Latin America. One way to summarize what I do is to say that I coach churches—developing members and leaders who can effectively model biblical ministry. I am 100% committed to the local church. I work to develop, train, and coach leaders to facilitate effective ministry in the local church. Leaders come in various shapes and sizes. Paul was a missionary but he also calls himself a herald and preacher. Timothy was a minister and an evangelist. Church leaders in the New Testament are sometimes called elders, sometimes called overseers (bishops), and sometimes called shepherds (pastors). (In both Acts 20:17-31 and 1 Pet. 5:1-4 all three ideas are applied to the same group of leaders in a single passage.) Elders know how to apply the word of God to life; overseers administer (help others toward ministry), and shepherds feed the flock.

In a church without elders/overseers/pastors, a minister/evangelist often takes on the task of explaining Scripture, supervising the work, and feeding the local church. Ministers functioning with minimal leadership support from others in the church often become "solo pastors" and the church becomes dependent on one individual. This tends to place an artificial cap on the number of members the church can assimilate. It is hard for a church to grow beyond 75-100 with this leadership model. "The" leader in this model sends the subtle or not so-subtle message to the congregation that the church depends on him. Yes, the church needs teaching, mentoring and spiritual nourishment, that does not mean that one person must do it all. *One task of effective leaders is to develop other leaders.* Think about Jesus and the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, Paul and Timothy, Paul and Titus, Timothy and others (2 Tim. 2:2).

According to Ephesians 4:12, leaders are called to equip God's people to do the work of the ministry. The leaders are not called to do the ministry but to equip the saints (members) to do it. This reminds me of what Jethro told Moses in Exodus 18:18, "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone." Jethro told Moses to equip leaders over groups of ten, 50, and 100 so that the people "will go home satisfied" (Exodus 18:23). The lesson is that the people will not be satisfied or spiritually nourished when one person assumes total responsibility to do it. The advice of Jethro was to meet the people's needs in smaller groups and with more personal relationships.

Wise leaders see themselves as mentors who help others find involvement in the ministry of the church. The work of the church is done by the body; the ministry belongs to the body. Every member of the body has his or her own activity (4:16). When a church develops so that a group of leaders is actively training others and encouraging ministry, the artificial cap is removed and the church can assimilate more members—often reaching 200, 300, or more. The key is in the multiple-leaders model, with leaders who facilitate the ministry of the entire body of Christ.

Leaders, how much time do you spend developing other leaders? Does your congregation depend primarily on you? Some preachers have an open-door policy. They are liked, and they feel important, but the truth is that they can genuinely minister to only a small group of people. Many more never show up or go away unsatisfied. Effective leaders take seriously the advice of Paul to Timothy, what you have heard from me "entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2).