

## **What Kind of Ministry or Mission Work Do You Do?**

By Bob Young

After about 40 years of preaching and full-time local church ministry intertwined with a dozen years of teaching and administration in Christian higher education, in 2010 Jan and I began a new work focused in ministry and missions. Many have asked, “What exactly is it that you do?”

Let me begin with some history. During more than a dozen years in Michigan, I observed the struggle of numerous small mission congregations. In my work at Ohio Valley University, I saw the struggle of countless small churches across the northern and northeastern U.S. In visits to various mission points during the last 20 years, I have seen the same struggle. Simply described, the struggle is to develop healthy churches with effective, healthy leaders: churches capable of fulfilling God’s eternal purpose for the church—sharing the gospel, establishing new congregations, and strengthening and maturing those new congregations.

In mission work, the church has often emphasized church planting more than church development. Numerous churches have been planted but many of the churches have failed to develop to spiritual maturity. Many of the churches planted have ceased to exist. An emphasis on the number of baptisms has at times led to unnatural evangelism efforts. Absent a holistic approach to church planting, the result is measured by the number of baptisms rather than by the development of strong churches. Without strong churches, much of the fruit withers and is lost. Further, those who work in planting a church often leave after a time so that no missionary presence remains to assist with stability and maturity. One way to meet this need is through visits and encouragement to provide guidance and to help develop mature congregations.

### **The Biblical Model**

This is the process Paul used to edify churches and assist with leadership development (Acts 14:21-23). Paul not only established churches, he also returned to strengthen and edify those churches and to assist with developing and naming leaders. He provided continued encouragement for church leaders as is seen in the meeting with the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20). When he could not return in person, others went to help with the development of the churches, as in the example of Apollos to Corinth, Titus to Crete, and Timothy to Thessalonica, or the example of Paul’s leaving Silas and Timothy in Thessalonica and Berea.

The purpose of this work is similar—strengthening and fortifying churches, assisting in church development, the development teachers and leaders, and refocusing churches as missionary churches willing to accept the challenges of local evangelism and planting new churches.

### **What is the goal of the work?**

→To develop mature churches—members who understand the nature of the church, the nature of Christianity and the role of every member. To provide sound, solid, and plain teaching on what it means to be a Christian, a part of the body of Christ

→To develop mature leaders and teachers, to prepare leaders by helping develop spiritual maturity

→To teach about the nature of biblical leadership—to describe servant-shepherd leadership models. This involves describing servant elders who are charged with teaching and preaching, providing spiritual counsel and managing relationship, with less emphasis on developing a hierarchical structure. In Luke 22, Matt 20, and Mark 10 Jesus taught that the leadership model of the kingdom would not involve hierarchy, control, and power

→To explain biblically the characteristics of leaders and the role of leaders—to develop leaders who have no desire to run things or wield power. The goal is to help churches organize biblically, not with leaders as a board or a group of managers who make sure the church functions to please the members, but with leaders who understand biblical leadership, spiritual leadership, servant leadership, and transformational leadership. Toward this end we help rethink biblical descriptions of leadership and seek to understand afresh the characteristics or qualities of leaders.

→To teach concerning the role of the minister, to convince the minister that his task will be easier with biblical organization, to help define the minister's role according to talents and gifting and the needs of the congregation. We need ministers who are committed to doing what ministers do and are not threatened by other leaders.

→To teach concerning the role of the members—to develop effective ministries which involve every member as a minister so that the elders are not weighed down with such things but are instead freed for prayer and pastoring.

In summary, the goal is that all understand the nature of the church and specific roles in the church so that the church (elders, deacons, ministers, and members) understands and appreciates what it means to function as a team where all are working together according to their own activities, gifts, and responsibilities (Eph. 4:11-16).