

Every Member a Minister

By Allen Ratta

The Obstacles

There is a mindset that is still prevalent in some church circles and in the thinking of lay persons that ministry is the *job* of the professional minister. Some church members feel that their offerings fulfill their total ministry obligations and they are thereby exempted from any actual church service. On the other hand, there are pastors who jealously guard certain ministry functions as *their turf*, severely limiting the participation of others. Such thinking, on both parts (conscious and unconscious), greatly hinders the disbursement and the development of effective Care Ministries, which represent an extension and participation of pastoral care by the laity of a congregation. Biblically speaking, there is every reason for a church to develop a robust and extensive set of Care Ministries that can fully connect with and meet the needs of congregants in their times of celebration, need or crisis

Empowerment

The effect of the saving/qualifying power of Christ is to level the playing field of ministry for all believers. There are no special classes of Christians with privileged accesses, special powers, or secret knowledge. Paul boasts of this equanimity in Christ, *"I thank my God always concerning you [every Christian] for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge,"* 1 Cor. 1.5 (NASB) Yet there remains a deeply entrenched bias that draws a deep artificial divide between vocational "credentialed" pastors and volunteer or paid, lay persons.

Biblical Foundations

One of the great revelations of the New Testament is the elevation of the *individual* to discover, participate in, and fulfill their God-given destiny. This truth becomes powerfully evident through a comparative study between the Old Testament offices of Priest, Prophet and King and how these same ministry functions play out in the lives of ordinary New Testament believers. If it can be demonstrated that these privileged Old Testament offices are relegated to the domain of the common New Testament believer, there will be little ground to argue for the kind of separation between clergy and lay persons that some still cling to today. This article would argue for a total empowerment and unleashing of the laity into every area of church ministry, including pastoral care. It should be noted that such an empowerment in no way impinges on the value and validity of the New Testament office of pastor and of pastoral authority.

The Office of Priest

The Old Testament set aside the office of the priest to a specific genetic line (Levi) over which the individual had no volition. Not only are those limitations entirely removed in numerous New Testament passages, but the office is redefined in wonderfully participatory language. Peter states, *"...you also [every Christian], as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* 1 Pet. 2.5 (NASB) Temple ministry and the offering of sacrifices are here radically redefined and relegated to the turf of the *common* community member (see Heb. 13.16). The priesthood of every believer finds even fuller expression in the words of James, *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."* Jas. 5.16 (NASB) The "one another" language opens the door to all. If the priestly function of confession is within the domain of ordinary Christians, one must ask what level of pastoral care is beyond the spiritual qualifications of the common church member.

The Office of Prophet

The Old Testament prophet was a rare and select individual upon whom the Spirit of God would descend and impart special capabilities and/or utterances. Paul eradicates Old Testament Pneumatology with the words, *"But to each one [every Christian] is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."* 1 Cor. 12.7 (NIV) Paul's concept is revolutionary to Judaism. For Paul, every true believer now qualifies as an individual repository of the divine Spirit. The work of Christ transforms *all who believe* from sinners into the perfection of imparted holiness. This makes, everyone who believes, a dwelling place (temple) of God's Spirit. In fact it is this very indwelling of the Spirit that is the qualifying mark of every true believer. As Paul emphatically states, "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." Rom. 8.9 (NASB) Moses' ancient prayer has finally been answered, *"Would that all the LORD'S people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!"* Num. 11.29 (NASB) It would appear that the Old Testament offices of priest and prophet have been distributed to every believer. Who then can question the ministry capabilities of those who have the Spirit of God? One could surmise that such persons who desire to participate in pastoral care will certainly find special moments of Spirit-led empowerment along the way. ConnectionPower's [PowerMember solution](#) empowers churches to unleash an extraordinary level of Pastoral Care Ministries that increase member retention and firmly close the back door.

The Office of King

There are no privileged *blue bloods* in the New Testament church. Whereas the Old Testament king embodied divine authority, Jesus imparts this same authority to the Christian commoner, *"Behold, I have given you [every Christian] authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you."* Lk. 10.19 (NIV) The apostle John affirms the power and authority of every believer with the joyful words, *"...greater is He who is in you [every Christian] than he who is in the world."* 1 Jn. 4.4 (NASB) One of the notable hallmarks of Christ's leadership was that he spoke and taught with authority. His disciples displayed this same trait in the book of Acts. In Christ, the commoner has been elevated to a "royal priesthood," who shall one day "rule and reign" with Christ. We do well to remember that the person we may consider unqualified today will be ruling tomorrow. I can imagine no more empowering words on this subject than the words of Peter. *"Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."* 1 Pet. 4.11 (NASB)

Now the full picture of the work of Christ emerges. Christ has made every believer a priest, prophet and King through his authority and empowerment. This remarkable truth should have a profound impact upon the way we look at the ministry capabilities of the common believer. Rather than holding them back from certain ministry functions, as if they are inadequate, the pastor needs to inspire "all who believe" to rise up to their full capabilities of service in Christ.

Footnote

ConnectionPower's ministry [strategies](#) are rooted in the strongly held belief that every believer needs to be empowered and released into meaningful Kingdom service. We believe that great care and skill needs to be applied in the development of ministries so that believers are honored and given the maximum potential for success in Kingdom work. We consider our ministry solutions to be in direct support of a pastor's efforts to effectively mobilize "all who believe."