

A BIBLICAL AND CONTEMPORARY MODEL OF MINISTRY

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Introduction

Every church operates with a model of ministry, whether conscious or unconscious. Developing an intentional model of ministry will force a congregation to ask itself crucial questions about its character and purpose. It will enable a congregation to sharpen the focus of its ministry, increase its ministry effectiveness, and integrate its members more fully into its life and witness. The following is an attempt to develop from biblical principles a ministry model that has contemporary relevance.

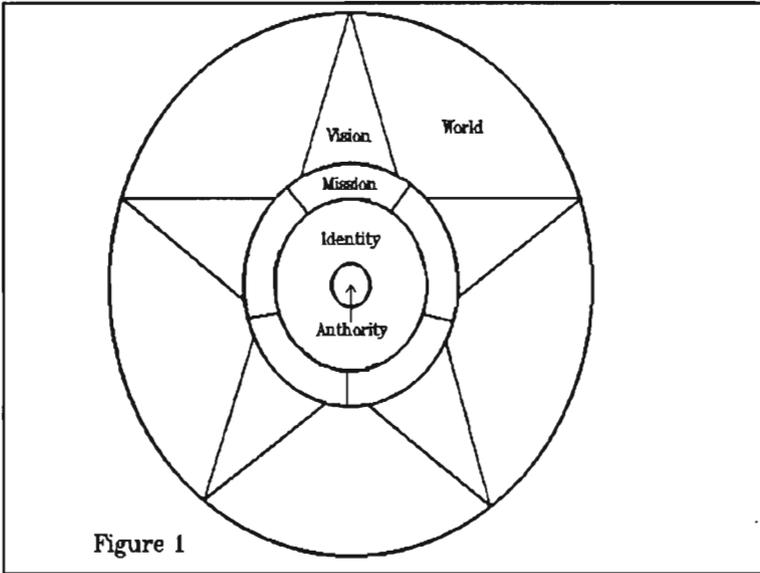


Figure 1 shows an overall model of ministry. The shape indicates

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that ministry extends from the center of the church outward into the world. The model has four parts, with each part built upon the parts inside it. The center of the diagram (the innermost circle) represents the authority for the church's ministry. The Jewish leaders asked Jesus with what authority he acted as he did (Mark 11:27-28). With what authorization does the church engage in ministry? From whom or what do we receive direction about what the church is to be and do? The next circle represents the identity of the church, what the church is to be. The church develops its identity on the basis of its sources of authority. The five-part ring surrounding the identity circle represents the church's mission, what the church is to do. The church's mission is based upon, and supported by, its sense of identity. The five points of the star represent the church's vision, the specific programs and ministries an individual congregation engages in to fulfill its mission.¹ The points of the star indicate the sharper focus required for particular ministries that will reach out into the world to achieve the church's purpose in the world.² In what follows, I will examine each of the four parts of the model in turn. I will sometimes illustrate my points by reference to Smoky Row Brethren Church, the congregation in which I serve as a deacon and lay leader.

Authority

Figure 2 is an expansion of the authority, identity, and mission circles from Figure 1. The inner circle (authority) has been expanded to show three parts: a cross, representing Christ; the Word, or Scripture; and the Holy Spirit. The authority for the church's ministry is fundamentally Christocentric. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus states: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (NRSV).

The church has thus been commissioned by Christ to go into the world to make disciples, and he promises to be with us in our task. The church's authority is based on the authority given to Jesus by the Father (John 17:1-2). Just as the Father sent the Son into the world, Jesus sends his church into the world to continue his ministry (John 17:18; 20-21). God has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

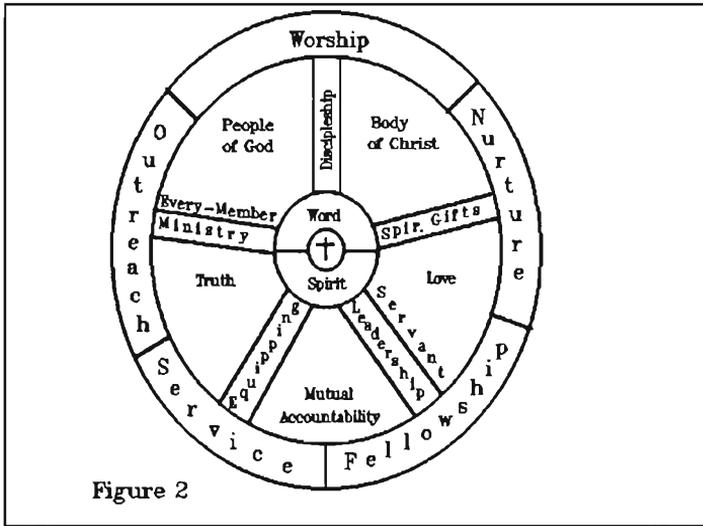


Figure 2

The authority of Christ is revealed and affirmed to us by the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The Word and the Spirit provide guidance for the church's ministry and equip its people to do it. Both Word and Spirit testify to Christ (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39-40; John 15:26). The Word reveals to us the way of salvation and equips us to fulfill our calling (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:15-17). The Spirit guides us into truth, reveals God to us, helps us, and empowers us for ministry (John 14:15-17, 26; 16:13-15; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 2:10-13). Through the Word and the Spirit, the church develops its sense of identity and mission.

Identity

The middle section of Figure 2 is an expansion of the identity of the church. The five segments in the background represent the church's ecclesiology--its understanding of what the church is and what qualities are fundamental to it. The five spokes radiating outward from the Word and the Spirit and supporting the mission circle represent the church's philosophy of ministry--what approach the church will take to fulfilling its mission.

The **ecclesiology** represented in the model has five elements: people of God, body of Christ, truth, love, and mutual accountability.

People of God. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible shows God's unfolding plan to form a people for his own glory (Gen. 17:7-8; Ex. 6:7; Deut. 7:6-8; Is. 43:6-7, 21; Jer. 31:31-33; Rom. 9:24-26; Eph. 1:3-14; Rev. 21:3). God began this work with the Old Testament nation of Israel and continued it with the New Testament church. This understanding of the church as the people of God has several implications. God has called his people into existence, has redeemed them, and has promised to be eternally faithful to them. They, in response, must remain faithful to him, live lives worthy of their calling (Eph. 4:1-3; Phil. 1:27-28), and seek to glorify him in everything they do (1 Cor. 10:31). As God's people, the church is inclusive, crossing racial, ethnic, class, age, and gender boundaries (Mt. 28:18-20; Gal. 3:28; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rev. 7:9-10). The church should be a place where dividing walls are torn down and peace is proclaimed to those who are far off (Eph. 2:11-22). As God's people, the church is a community rather than a collection of individuals, and it should have an identity that distinguishes it from the world (Phil. 2:14-16).

Body of Christ. Several passages in the New Testament describe the church as the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-26; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:11-16; Col. 1:18). This image shows that the church consists of diversity in unity--a diversity of personalities, backgrounds, experience, needs, and gifts brought into unity in Christ. There are no Lone Ranger Christians. Members of the church are members of one another, dependent upon one another for the health and growth of the whole body. Each believer is joined to the head of the body, Christ, from whom the body receives its life. Everyone in the church is valued, and everyone's contribution is necessary. This understanding helps the church avoid a hierarchy of function in which some persons or offices are esteemed and others are not. It also makes essential a church organization that fosters mutual caring, support, and accountability.

Truth and love. The proper functioning and growth of the body of Christ also requires a balance between truth and love: "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love" (Eph. 4:15-16). The church must model both a commitment to the truth of the

gospel and a loving acceptance of people. It is easy to overbalance in either direction. We can preach the truth with a harshness that is insensitive to human need and drives away the very people we want to reach with the message of God's acceptance in the gospel. We can also let our desire to reach people water down our witness so that we never present them with the demands of the gospel.

Mutual accountability. Speaking the truth in love is one aspect of the mutual accountability that must exist among the members of the church. Believers are to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2), encouraging one another and admonishing one another when necessary (Col. 3:12-17; 1 Thess. 5:14; Tit. 2:15; Heb. 10:24-25). We must practice a form of loving discipline that takes sin seriously and maintains the purity of the church while always having forgiveness and restoration as its goal (Mt. 18:15-17; 2 Cor. 2:5-8; Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20). We must also have a philosophy of leadership that encourages consensus and provides accountability for all members.

The **philosophy of ministry** represented in the model consists of five elements: discipleship, spiritual gifts, servant leadership, equipping, and every-member ministry. These five elements form a sequence.

Discipleship. The fundamental condition for effective ministry is a commitment to a life of discipleship on the part of individual members and the church as a whole. In the Gospels, Jesus calls people to follow him as their basic response to his announcement of the gospel (Mark 1:17). Furthermore, disciple-making is the focus of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). We must be disciples before we can make disciples. It is only as we follow Christ that we can engage in his ministry with the promise of his constant presence. Disciples will bear fruit; apart from him we can do nothing (John 15:5, 8).

Being Jesus' disciple means continuing in his word and obeying him (John 8:31; 14:15, 21). It is a life-long process. The church should foster discipleship through its preaching and teaching, and particularly through a network of small groups in which members can grow together and can be accountable to one another. It is critical that the church's presentation of the gospel not detach conversion from the call to discipleship. We must be sensitive to the brokenness of everyone who responds to the gospel; many people need to fully grasp the message of God's grace before they can hear God's demands. Yet in the face of our culture, which encourages lack of commitment, the church must proclaim Jesus as Lord and ourselves as his disciples (Rom. 10:9-10; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:5-11).

Spiritual gifts. As part of their growth in discipleship, members should identify their spiritual gifts. The Lord has given gifts to the body of Christ to prepare its members for service so the body may be built up (Eph. 4:7-12). The Holy Spirit distributes these gifts as he desires (1 Cor. 12:11). This means that the various ministries of the church should be performed by the persons gifted in those areas, whoever they may be. Since every believer has at least one gift, it also means that every believer will have an area of ministry (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). This approach makes recruitment a matter of prayerful discernment and openness to the Holy Spirit rather than one of pigeonholing and arm-twisting.

The church must teach about spiritual gifts and model their use. Small groups are the ideal setting in which to discern and develop spiritual gifts.³ The main biblical passages on spiritual gifts can make people aware of numerous possibilities, although these lists are probably representative rather than exhaustive (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; Eph. 4:11). Inventories such as the Wagner-Modified Houts Questionnaire can assist in this process.⁴

Servant leadership. Among the spiritual gifts given to the body is the gift of leadership (Rom. 12:8). George Barna identifies leadership as the critical issue facing the modern church.⁵ As with other spiritual gifts, the gift of leadership can be discovered and developed in small groups, which provide a safe context for believers to take on new responsibilities and practice new skills.

Numerous models of leadership compete for attention in our culture, many of them based on the exercise of power and authority. Jesus describes a different model in Mark 10:42-45: leaders in the church are not to dominate others but to serve them, following the example of Jesus himself.⁶ In their character and attitudes, leaders exercise influence through example (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9).⁷ In developing vision and setting direction, servant leaders work by consensus, respecting the guidance of the Holy Spirit through all members and taking responsibility for bringing the congregation to a unity of mind and purpose (Rom. 15:5-6; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2).⁸

Equipping. Servant leaders will equip the members of the body to do the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11-13). The congregation should make training available for all areas of ministry, from Sunday school teachers to worship leaders to nursery workers. More often, a church will simply recruit workers and then turn them loose without training or supervision. A

commitment to equipping requires that leaders share responsibility and intentionally impart skills as well as knowledge to the congregation.⁹ It also takes time, but it is an investment in the effectiveness of present ministry as well as in the pool of future leadership.¹⁰

Every-member ministry. Gifted disciples, equipped by servant leaders, will be prepared to do the ministry of the church, which belongs to every member (Eph. 4:12; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).¹¹ The congregation should be organized to involve everyone in ministry. Its structure should channel people with identified gifts into appropriate areas of ministry and provide ongoing support for them. At Smoky Row Brethren Church, the work of the church is assigned to various ministries, the chairpersons of which sit on the Board of Directors. Participation in one of these ministries (along with membership in a small group) is expected of all members.

Mission

The mission of the church follows from its identity as the people of God and the body of Christ. The outer ring of Figure 2 represents the five-fold mission of the church: worship, nurture, fellowship, service, and outreach. This element of the model is illustrated by the description of the early church in Acts 2:42-47.¹²

Worship. Worship is both the beginning and the end of the church's mission.¹³ Acknowledging God's worthiness and giving him praise and honor is the only possible response to what he has done for us (Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 13:15).¹⁴ Worship deepens our relationship with God, out of which all our ministry grows. Corporate worship also deepens our relationship with one another. Worship celebrates and draws upon the presence of God in our midst and fits us for our life in heaven.¹⁵

Nurture. Teaching is one of the aspects of Christ's commission to the church (Mt. 28:20). One of the goals of the church is to promote the growth of its members "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The purpose of the Christian life is to be conformed to the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). The church is the context in which such growth takes place.¹⁶

Fellowship. God has called believers into fellowship with Jesus and with one another (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3, 6-7). The word usually translated

as fellowship, *koinonia*, actually means participation. The fellowship of the church is not merely social activity but intimate involvement in one another's lives as we live out together our relationship with Christ.¹⁷ Some scholars have said that all the ethics in the New Testament are community ethics. We can carry out the responsibilities of the Christian life only with the help of one another.

Service. Within the church, believers are called to serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13). The numerous "one another" passages in Paul's letters demonstrate the interdependence of the members of the body of Christ. Jesus himself is our example of humble service (Mark 10:42-45; John 13:1-17; Phil. 2:5-11). The church should provide opportunities for each member to become involved in ministry.¹⁸ Service to others is a primary means for believers to grow in their own faith, as well as the only means for the body itself to be built up.

Outreach. Outside the church, believers are called to minister to people's spiritual and physical needs. The church's commission from Christ is to make disciples in all the world (Mt. 28:18-20), and each believer must be ready to give a defense of his or her faith (1 Pet. 3:15-16). We must also be willing to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the prisoners (Mt. 25:31-46). Too often the church has created a false dichotomy between evangelism and social concern. The gospel of Christ brings salvation to the whole person, so the church must be ready to minister to the whole person.¹⁹

Outreach can take the form of church programs or support for the members of the congregation in their individual ministries outside the church. It can take place in specialized settings or in the everyday settings believers find themselves in. Although Figure 2 shows outreach as one part of the fivefold mission of the church, Figure 3 illustrates that outreach can take place in all five areas.

Vision

Figure 3 focuses on the vision of the church, the specific ministries a congregation engages in to fulfill its mission. Specific ministries will vary according to God's calling for a particular congregation.²⁰ The figure lists possible ministries in each of the five mission areas. For example, worship can be carried on in private, through prayer groups or meetings, in the

Sunday service, through singspiration evenings, and in seeker services directed to the community. Nurture can be accomplished in personal study, small group Bible studies, Sunday school classes, the youth program, and adult seminars. Fellowship can be developed through personal relationships, fellowship groups, men's and women's groups, and all-church events. Service can be performed in acts of personal assistance, targeted care groups, participation in church ministries, ministries of reconciliation, and counseling. Outreach may involve personal evangelism, mission groups, foreign missions, and community services such as a food pantry or preschool. Once the congregation's vision has been developed and implemented, its programs should be periodically evaluated and, if necessary, redefined or terminated.²¹ Because each believer is a member of the body and is involved in relationships, each mission area lists activities that take place in an individual context, in a small group context, and in a larger corporate context. The church must encourage personal devotion and spiritual growth as the foundation for personal and corporate ministry. It must also take advantage of the encouragement, exhortation, and vision that come from the whole body assembling together (Heb. 10:24-25). But it also needs small groups for the aspects of Christian life and ministry that are not easily accomplished by individuals or by the body as a whole.

Small groups are critical for building close relationships, encouraging growth, and engaging in targeted ministry. Without small group experiences, members will not feel closely connected to the church, especially if the church is large (over 150-200). With the increasing brokenness in families and the fragmentation in society, the church must provide people the network of relationships they cannot find elsewhere.²² Small groups especially can take the place of the extended family that most people no longer experience. At Smoky Row, small groups provide much of the infrastructure of the church, serving as the main conduit for communication, fellowship, personal growth, spiritual care, accountability, and practical material support. Small groups can also be a base from which like-minded or similarly gifted individuals can engage in ministry. To be effective, small groups must be thoroughly integrated into the life and structure of the church.²³

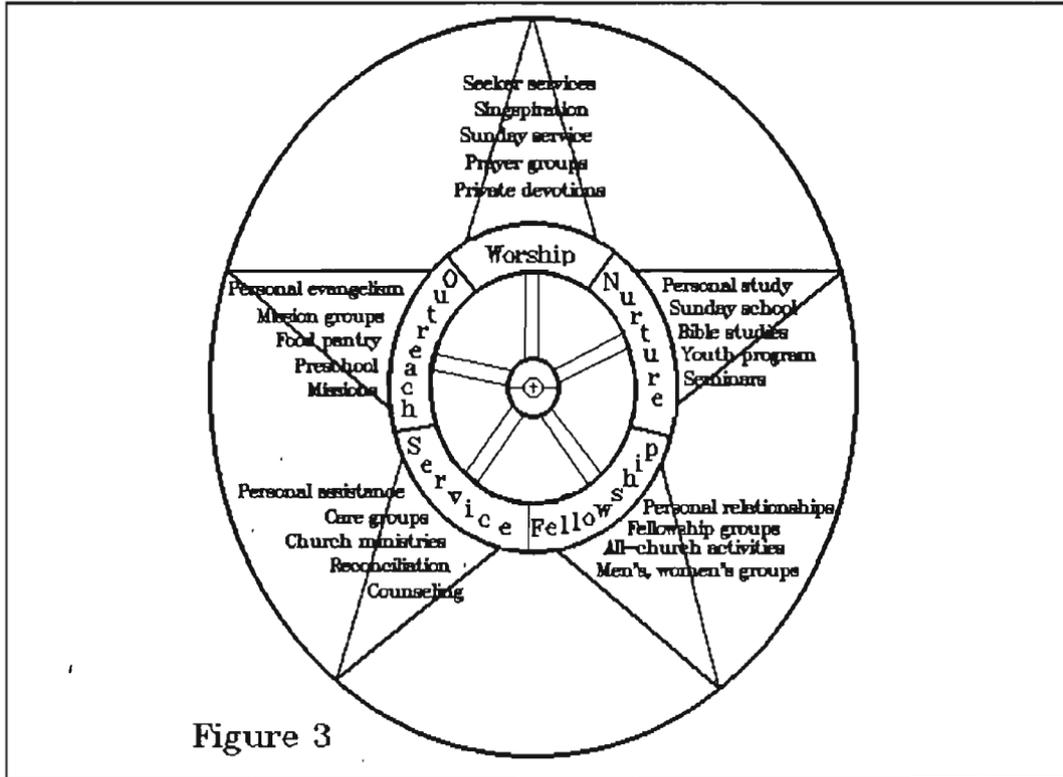


Figure 3

Conclusion

This ministry model is flexible enough to be implemented in churches with a variety of organizations and polities. It does require that a congregation be self-aware and intentional about its ministry. It establishes an organic relationship between a church's identity and actions, and it requires that church programs function to fulfill the mission of that congregation in its context. This model shows members where they fit in the life of the church. It is grounded in the church's foundational beliefs, but it is adaptable to new situations, encouraging a periodic review of programs and ministries to see if they are achieving the purpose for which they were created. Finally, it is a wholistic approach, addressing members as whole persons in relationship with others and encompassing the whole life of the church in its mission to the world.

ENDNOTES

¹See George Barna, Today's Pastors (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 117-120 for the distinction between mission and vision.

²R. Paul Stevens has challenged the church to view its members as missionaries rather than church-tenders. He says that members "must insist that the life, teaching and training of the church should be directed toward the marketplace, home and society rather than to the church." The Equipper's Guide to Every-Member Ministry: Eight Ways Ordinary People Can Do the Work of the Church (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 16.

³R. Paul Stevens, Liberating the Laity: Equipping All the Saints for Ministry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 63.

⁴Wagner-Modified Houts Questionnaire, 5th ed. (Pasadena, CA: Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth, 1989).

⁵Barna, 117.

⁶In David L. McKenna's model of incarnate Christian leadership, the core of leadership is character; the mission of the leader is servanthood; the task of the leader is team-building; and the goal of the leader is empowering

others. Power to Follow, Grace to Lead: Strategy for the Future of Christian Leadership (Dallas: Word, 1989), 22, 24, 25.

⁷See Stephen R. Covey, Principle-Centered Leadership (New York: Summit Books, 1991), 119-122.

⁸For James D. Anderson and Ezra Earl Jones, effective leadership "forges a consensus rather than simply searching for an amenable, smoothed-over, majority point of view." The Management of Ministry (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 81. Kennon L. Callahan believes that successful missional churches have "solid, participatory decision making." Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strategic Planning for Mission (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), xiii.

⁹Stevens acknowledges that equippers (such as equipping preachers) will face "the challenge of making room for others to minister." They must find their security not in doing all the ministry themselves but in trusting God and exalting others. Stevens describes several methods of equipping other than imparting information in traditional courses, such as apprenticeships, situational learning, and small group contexts. He advises a variety of approaches (Equipper's Guide, 33, 14).

¹⁰Mary Ellen Drushal has observed that developing leadership in the church involves equipping the spiritually gifted and then encouraging the equipped and affirming their labor. Mary Ellen Drushal, "Recruitment of Leaders," Lecture given at Ashland Theological Seminary in Ashland, Ohio, on March 28, 1994.

¹¹George Barna found that a top priority of American pastors is getting the laity involved in ministry, although pastors are often uncertain how to accomplish this (100-103). Barna traces part of the problem to the lack of the gift of leadership among pastors (122). Kenneth C. Haugk describes several other reasons why churches are not practicing the "priesthood of all believers," including inertia, traditionalism, a focus on the institution rather than human needs, a reluctance of clergy to give up control, lack of training in equipping, apathy, and lack of faith. "Lay Ministry: The Unfinished Reformation," The Christian Ministry (November 1985): 5-8.

¹²This five-fold purpose (with evangelism substituted for outreach) appears in the constitution of Smoky Row Brethren Church. I served on the committee that drafted the constitution.

¹³"To the extent that ministry flows out of worship, to that extent it is renewing, enabled, empowered, and yields abiding fruit. To the extent that ministry does not flow out of worship, it is impaired, exhausting, and leads toward fleeting accomplishment." Douglas M. Little, Lecture given at Ashland Theological Seminary in Ashland, Ohio, on March 7, 1994.

¹⁴See the definition of worship by Julia Ann Flora, "Come, Let Us Worship!" The Brethren Evangelist 106 (July/August 1984): 8.

¹⁵Stevens, Equipper's Guide, 78.

¹⁶Stevens suggests that the various means of nurture in the church be integrated by a congregational learning curriculum developed by the congregation itself (Equipper's Guide, 20-26).

¹⁷Stevens observes that solid relationships are necessary for ministry: "In order to be an equipping environment, therefore, the local church must be structured for relationships" (Liberating the Laity, 31-32).

¹⁸Stevens calls for an "experimental climate throughout the church" in which members can discover and develop their gifts (Equipper's Guide, 85).

¹⁹Stevens observes, "The church's mission is composed of both evangelism and social action and each is deadly without the other" (Liberating the Laity, 105).

²⁰Callahan states that successful missional churches have two or three specific objectives to minister to identified groups of people (xii-xiii). George Barna argues that all churches should have a target audience in mind (105-111). This is an important factor when planting a church. When an established church wants to become more intentional about its ministry, it would do well to get to know its community and target the type of people in that community.

²¹Mary Ellen Drushal has created a detailed procedure for developing and implementing vision in a local church. Her process includes evaluation and redirection. "Instructions for Strategic Planning in the Local Church" (Department of Christian Ministries, Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, Ohio, 1994, Photocopy).

²²Stevens argues that the model of kinship within the church can help people live out their own covenant relationships in their marriages and families (Equipper's Guide, 131).

²³See the categories used by Karen Hurston and Judy Hamlin in "Three Basic Types of Small-Group Systems," Discipleship Journal, Issue 62 (1991): 43-45. The small group system at Smoky Row has features of both the "incorporated" and the "totally integrated" system. It is overseen by the Board of Deacons rather than a professional staff person, it does not take the place of Sunday school, and it does not have evangelism as its sole focus. However, the system does take the place of traditional Sunday evening or midweek services. It is integral to the church's functioning, and is not merely one possible activity among many.

