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EMPOWERING LAITY

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will discuss ways to empower the laity within the East Central Papua Region (ECPR) of the United church in the Rigo District of Central Province, so that they can be effective in their ministry.¹ The purpose of this research is to help the church evaluate its ministry, aimed at the laity; reconstruct its theology about the laity, and develop its focus on capacity building for every church member.²

The research will focus on the United church in the Rigo District only, and will address ways of empowering the laity, and providing training for their effectiveness. The laity refers to deacons, gifted believers, and professional Christians, as well as those involved in women's, youth, and children's ministries.

Its argument will be that, when the clergy and lay leaders know the proper definition of Christian ministry, give priority to equipping ministry leaders, and discover the areas to empower their congregation members, then the church will be more effective in its ministry.³

¹ The East Central Papua Region (ECPR) is one of the 12 regions of the United church, which starts at Gabagaba, and ends at Marshall Lagoon, but this paper will focus on the author's district of Rigo.

² Some congregations and circuits do not have youth workers, or full-time staff for Christian education ministry, and this shows that the future congregation members are being neglected.

³ When the laity, which includes women, youth, and older children, are taken care of, then there is balance in the work of the church.

This research will be done through document analysis, interviews through questionnaires sent by email, and the author's own experience as a layman over the last 30 years. The theoretical framework for this essay will focus on ministry, biblical theology, and capacity building.

The research questions are: What does empowering mean? How can God's people be empowered through theological education? How will the discovery of gifts empower the laity? What can the church do to empower the laity?

This paper aims to help the clergy and the laity work together, so that the church can become effective in its witness and service to others. Sound biblical teaching, and understanding of the theology of the "priesthood of believers", will remedy the ministry problems of the church. Often, the church is doing so much on spiritual issues, they leave out the social aspects of life.⁴

THE DEFINITION OF EMPOWERMENT

To empower means to give official authority, or legal power, to enable or promote self-actualisation or influence.⁵ It can also be defined as working with and through people, so that they can be enabled to reach the highest level in their personal and professional development.⁶ In addition, to give your influence to others for the purpose of personal and organisational growth, by sharing yourself, your influence, position, power, and opportunities with others, with the purpose of investing in lives, so that they can function at their best.⁷

Some leaders are threatened by the prospect of the delegation of their responsibilities, so they fail to delegate their responsibilities. Others use committees, but the leaders can often control these people. Miller says good

⁴ Kivare Enaha, congregation member, Girabu United church, Rigo District, interviewed by mobile phone in English on March 20, 2013.

⁵ Author unknown. "Empower", in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empower> (accessed March 23, 2013).

⁶ John. C Maxwell, and Jim Dornan, *Becoming a Person of Influence: How to Positively Impact the Lives of Others*, Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997, p. 184.

⁷ *Ibid.*

leaders never give their leadership away, but they share the visibility and responsibility of leading.⁸

Those who fear delegating their responsibilities must think in terms of servant leadership. This is a biblical concept, but, due to cultural influence, church leaders fail to implement this concept in their own life and ministry. However, it is the best remedy for churches and ministries that need effective and efficient organisation models. Shaw asserts that:

It is only through servant leadership that we can begin to address the worldwide leadership crises in the church. It takes a servant attitude to be willing, not merely to train leaders for future replacement . . . but to rejoice when another is able more-effectively now to take the position of leadership, built, not on power and control, but on a proven and trusted record of self-sacrifice, service, and empowerment.⁹

When an individual is empowered, that process will continue in the individual's sphere of influence.¹⁰ This can be true in Papua New Guinea, which is a communal society, where influence can spread through one's clan, family, and village. In Melanesia, the elders in an egalitarian society, and those from a chieftaincy system, have a lot of influence, because of their status.

TRADITIONAL WAYS OF EMPOWERMENT

In Melanesia, the chiefs were the orators, mediators, warriors, and men of great wealth. The chief had the interest of the whole community in view, and was always there to listen to grievances. Upon arrival, any visitor was first taken to the chief. That is what the London Missionary Society (LMS) did, when they first entered the Southern Region of PNG.¹¹ In Central

⁸ Calvin Miller, *Leadership: 13 studies for individuals or groups*, Colorado Springs CO: NavPress, 1987, p. 78.

⁹ Perry W. H. Shaw, "Vulnerable Authority: a Theological Approach to Leadership and Teamwork", in *Christian Education Journal* 3-1 (2006), p. 128.

¹⁰ Maxwell, and Dornan, *Person of Influence*, p. 184.

¹¹ The London Missionary Society (LMS) is now known as the Council for World Mission (CWM), and its work in Papua resulted in the Papua Ekalesia in 1962, which later merged

Province, when the Revd Dr William Lawes of LMS visited Keapara in 1876, he was taken to see the Chief, Amona Ope, who was living at Keapara Eina.¹²

Traditional leaders talked to the whole community, when there were problems. They also provided leadership during feasting, or talked at funerals, or other important occasions. In my area, chiefs arranged feasts for making peace, and fulfilling other communal obligations. The *Vele* (chief) was responsible for the welfare of the community. In order to fulfil tribal obligations, the chief was given food, pigs, shell money, and other valuable goods in the community. In this way, the chief could carry out his duties properly.

While the elders united the clans, and solved problems faced by their people, they also had their own weaknesses. In many societies, chiefs were not able to disseminate important information, because they believed that this would lead to disempowerment. Seeland alludes to this:

To distribute one's knowledge in its entirety, so that all possess that knowledge equally, is to deprive of oneself of the power formally held, and, by implication, of one's position of leadership. To hold back that knowledge, or to maintain it as one's personal possession, thus becomes the means of maintaining one's leadership role, and controlling influence within the society.¹³

However, the Bible urges that church leaders must impart knowledge to others, so that they are able to pass it on to others.¹⁴ Leaders must not hold

with the Methodists, to form the United church of PNG and Solomon Islands in 1968. In the mid-1990s, the United church in the Solomon Islands became a separate entity, and, therefore, the church in PNG is known as the United church of PNG.

¹² The name Keapara Eina is used to distinguish it from the Keapara village and the clan. This area is situated between the large village of Keapara and Karawa. This is oral history, told to the author by his father.

¹³ Dan Seeland, "Stressing Servant Leadership in a Land of Big Men and Great Men", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 23-1(2007), p. 9.

¹⁴ See 2 Tim 2:2.

onto knowledge, they must share that knowledge, so that others can be edified and empowered to participate in God's mission to the world.

EMPOWERMENT IN THE CHURCH

The United church in ECPR has greatly influenced its members through education and health services, and has equipped its adherents, in various ways, to lead and organise church meetings, and other community activities. Since the coming of the LMS in 1876, there has been integral human development. However, with the influx of other churches into the area, the United church in ECPR needs to look again at its ministry, and equip its laity to be more effective.¹⁵

In ECPR, the deacons have played an important role in helping the clergy in ministry. Deacons have taken the lead in attending to pastoral care and ministry issues, while congregational executives manage the administration work.¹⁶ This kind of arrangement is helpful, and a sign of good teamwork. However, others may see teams as another elite group trying to control the affairs of the church. This is where the church needs to conduct teaching on the responsibilities of its leadership.

Pastors need to see potential in their leaders, share resources with them, and believe in them completely to carry out their duties.¹⁷ The clergy can pray with their leaders, give them books to read, instruct them on biblical leadership, and show an interest in them. To empower people is not a one-sided affair, the act of empowering changes lives and it's a "win-win situation for you and the people you empower".¹⁸ Being a faculty mentor to cell groups at the Christian Leaders' Training College (CLTC), has enriched the author's life.¹⁹

¹⁵ There are Pentecostals and SDA churches coming into the area, as well as cults.

¹⁶ In all local churches of ECPR, there are only deacons and local church office-bearers, but no elders.

¹⁷ Maxwell, and Dornan, *Person of Influence*, p. 184.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹⁹ From the author's experience, his cell group members have become close friends, who have prayed for him, and encouraged him, and some of them still pray for him, even when he is not their mentor.

Often the concept of empowerment is misunderstood, because there is a wrong perception on the roles of the clergy and the laity regarding ministry. Ministry is the first area to be discussed, to ensure that people know why the laity has to do ministry. Ministry is defined as, “the lifestyle, responsibility, and privilege of every believer”.²⁰ However, this definition is not found in the *Webster Collegiate Dictionary*, which defines ministry as “the office, duties, functions of a minister”. Inrig says that the dictionary definition distorts biblical truth.²¹ Therefore, this paper will support the notion that ministry is for everybody.

According to Inrig, “Ministry is not the activity of a spiritual aristocracy, or the work of a professional class”.²² His allusion is that empowering the laity is not to cause “spiritual anarchy”, which fails to recognise the different gifts that God gives to the laity and the clergy. In addition, Inrig urges the church to design a biblical philosophy of ministry, which can help “determine one’s priorities, and shape his activities”.²³

Many people see ministry as a responsibility of the clergy only, and should be confined to the church and its programs. This is a wrong concept, which needs to be rectified. There is a misunderstanding, since very little teaching is done on this subject. Most churches do not have clear, written documents, defining the roles of the clergy and the laity. Churches have hardly approved organisational charts, which clearly show “who reports to whom”.²⁴

Therefore, the onus is now on church leaders, both clergy and laity, to see the problem, and work out a solution. According to Lohia Garo, the church has done little in terms of empowering its parishioners.²⁵ A similar

²⁰ Gary J. Inrig, “Called to Serve: Toward a Philosophy of Ministry”, in *Vital Ministry Issues: Examining Concerns and Conflicts in Ministry*, Roy B. Zuck, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Kregel Resources, 1994, p 20.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Alejandro R Gorospe Jr, “Financial Management in Churches: Problems and Solutions”, in *Asian Theological Seminary Phronesis* 13.1 (2006), p. 44.

²⁵ Lohia Garo, a former youth leader from Kwalimurubu, interviewed by questionnaire through email on March 28, 2013.

sentiment was expressed by William Numa, stating that there were too many activities organised in the church, with so little on prayer to empower people.²⁶ However, Poro Renagi noted that the church was empowering through biblical teaching, outreaches, and through the various ministries of the church.²⁷

These responses show the different congregations have different levels of empowerment. The difference in the levels of empowerment is attributed to the maturity of the laity, and their involvement in different ministries.²⁸

EMPOWERMENT IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Empowering people should not be confined to the church, because there are others, who need to be encouraged, so that they can reach their potential. Furthermore, as Melanesians, we have an integrated worldview, therefore, consideration must be given to those who are not part of the church. When leaders are only concerned about those in the church, their congregation becomes inward looking, and there is no witness to the outside world. Therefore, Silvosio asserts that:

God designed us to be His ministers. Today the word “minister” is associated with religious and liturgical matters. But, a minister is simply someone who looks after, cares for, or tends to something, or someone. Waiters, doctors, lawyers, and taxi drivers are ministers, since they render services to people’s needs.²⁹

In the New Testament, there are many parables, which refer to the marketplace, and Silvosio cites 11 examples. For instance, there is a parable on construction (Matt 7:24-25), winemaking (Luke 5:37-38), farming (Mark 4:2-20), treasure hunting (Matt 13:44), farming (Matt 18:12-14), and

²⁶ William Numa, a member of TSCF, is from Hula, interviewed by questionnaire through email on March 27, 2013.

²⁷ Poro Renagi, from Viriolobut married to a Rigo lady, and is an active member of Prison Fellowship Ministries, interviewed by questionnaire through email on April 3, 2013.

²⁸ “Ministries” refer to Christian education, pastoral care, missions, evangelism, discipleship, youth, women’s, men’s, and children’s ministries.

²⁹ Ed Silvosio, *Transformation: Change the Marketplace and You Change the World*, Ventura CA: Regal Books, 2007, p. 99.

management criteria (Luke 12:35-48). The marketplace is defined as the combination of government, business, and education.³⁰

When believers are involved as marketplace ministers, they can become change agents, and influencers in their spheres of influence.³¹ Zaccheaus is an example of a believer in the marketplace, and such people are important to the progressive establishment of God's kingdom everywhere.³² According to Silvos, when Zaccheaus was saved, this event affected his household, and his extended family. Furthermore, Zaccheaus' salvation was felt in the marketplace, too. However, it is evident that there is a gap between the pulpit and the marketplace that needs to be bridged.³³ This would not be the case, if the concept of priesthood is applied to every believer.³⁴

The other way is to walk alongside those who are hurting, and let them explore for themselves to find answers to their problems.³⁵ This is a good model of empowerment to work with people, so that they discover solutions to their own problems.

In ECPR, when the women, youth, and children are empowered, they can make a significant contribution to the church and the marketplace.³⁶ Disempowerment can result in poor self-image, self-pity, and violence,

³⁰ Ibid., p. 165.

³¹ Marketplace ministers are lay people, who minister in the secular arena, for instance, as a doctor in a hospital, while pulpit ministers are those working full-time in the church. Refer to Ibid., p 66.

³² Ibid., p. 58.

³³ Ibid., p. 65.

³⁴ See Eph 4:12; Rev 1:6, 5:10, 20:6.

³⁵ Duli Asi, "Report on the Cause and the Effects of Indigenous Youth at Risk: A Preventative Counselling Approach", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology*, 28-2 (2012), p. 56.

³⁶ While the author was teaching Spiritual Formation at CLTC Banz, he found that children, youth, and women are neglected by their local churches. In ECPR, this is seen in the way funds are allocated to ministries and the prioritising of ministry to the three groups of people. Even in training expenditure, the congregations spend more money in educating their student pastors, rather than funding children's, youth, and women's programs, while it concerns the majority of its church members.

leading to other social problems.³⁷ In the NT, Jesus cared so much about the marginalised, and spent time with them.

It is through the marketplace that the church can develop kingdom-living principles, demonstrated through the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt 5-7). Through the church’s involvement in the marketplace, outsiders can know that there is an alternative to “greed, corruption and oppression”.³⁸

When empowered, the laity can use the marketplace to care for the hurting, the rejected, and those who are powerless. Those, who are in the secular field, can counsel and encourage people that they work with. However, they must do their counselling during lunch hours, and not use up their working time. Some Christians have gone further by starting prayer groups in their offices, especially during lunch hour. Such ministries need to be encouraged, as they can equip the laity to witness on their own turf.

This should not discourage those who are in full-time ministry, as there are so many needs among people who work in Christian organisations as well. The author counsels young people, using the free short-message service (SMS) on the Digicel mobile phone. These are people who do not normally attend church, or are nominal Christians. He also uses Facebook to get in touch with non-believing friends.

One does not have to leave the full-time ministry to reach nominal Christians and unbelievers. The author had to counsel a former colleague facing marriage problems in Port Moresby, using email and the SMS service of Digicel. In a few days, that man’s problem was solved, he stopped drinking, and he stopped hitting his wife.

Empowered believers are the key to transformation in the marketplace and the church. They can model transformation principles, and demonstrate biblical values in their workplaces, thus bringing a Christian influence to the marketplace.

³⁷ When such problems are encountered, then church leaders must find ways to empower their own people.

³⁸ Silvos, *Transformation*, p. 205.

METHODS OF EMPOWERING THE LAITY

For the church to be effective in its witness to the world, it needs to “practise and affirm the priesthood, gifting, and service of all believers. Christian ministry should not be restricted to any caste or group, and certainly not to the minister of a local church.”³⁹ This calls for the ownership of ministry by all the people, so that they can be responsible in maintaining their own local church.⁴⁰

When members take ownership of church ministries, they are able to contribute more towards its effectiveness. Haon argues that, unless the “whole people” concept is recovered in the church, then the prospects of recovering the ills of the Melanesian church will continue to remain remote and elusive.⁴¹ The author concurs with Haon that the exclusion of the laity from church life and ministry has caused the church to become ineffective. On the other hand, the laity and the clergy have little knowledge on financial management, and this is the reason for empowerment and training, so that the church can become a good steward of its resources.⁴²

To understand the biblical theology of the “whole people of God”, one needs to study the meaning of the words “clergy” and “laity”. The NT vision for every-member ministry can be aided by a comprehensive biblical foundation for the Christian’s life in the world and the church.⁴³ Interestingly, the word

³⁹ Keith Barnard, “Every-member Ministry”, in *Serving God’s People: Re-thinking Christian Ministry Today*, Harold Rowdon, ed., Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 2006, p. 49.

⁴⁰ A good example is when, in 1996, the BTA Director went to Madang to talk to the Takia literacy program about the ownership of the program, because they refused to support the project. Once they were told about communal ownership, they became responsible for the program.

⁴¹ Abel Haon, “The Church Impacting Melanesia: a Case for People-Centred and Participatory Ministry”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 24-1 (2008), p. 24.

⁴² Both clergy and laity leaders must have some training in bookkeeping, and community development, and learn about health issues, social welfare regulations, and so forth, to be well informed so they can help their people, when they are affected by social, moral, and physical matters.

⁴³ R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, Ministry in Biblical Perspective*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p. 4.

“clergy” comes from the Greek word, κληρος (*klēros*), which means “appointed or endowed ones”, and refers to the whole people, not just leaders.⁴⁴

According to Baigent, despite the important concepts of holy places, holy people, and holy actions, for Israel, there was no distinction between sacred and secular, and “all is subsumed in serving God, by keeping His covenant stipulations, which cover all aspects of life”.⁴⁵ This shows that the Jews embraced the integrated worldview, which is similar to Melanesian belief. Therefore, there is no distinction between the sacred and secular. Likewise, the church in Melanesia must not follow the notion that only what the ordained ministers do is important, as this is not biblical. At this stage, the church needs to know about the priesthood of believers.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

The “priesthood of believers” is a doctrine that is misunderstood today. Each Protestant denomination has its own interpretation of this doctrine. Many Christians in Melanesia are also confused with the doctrine, and some see the laity as, “non-ordained Christians, who help the clergy do the work of the church”.⁴⁶ Stevens see others categorising the laity as, “people in part-time service, and those ministered to by the clergy”.⁴⁷ Such definitions of the laity show that there is discrimination, and no proper understanding about the role of the laity. That is not the way the Bible intended laity to be treated.

The “priesthood of all believers” is a doctrine, ultimately of biblical origin, formulated by Luther, affirming the common dignity, calling, and privilege

⁴⁴ This concept can be found in Col 1:12; Eph 1:11; Gal 3:29.

⁴⁵ John. W. Baigent, “Bible Tradition and Ministry”, in *Serving God's People: Rethinking Christian Ministry Today*, Harold Rowdon, ed., Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 2006, p. 3. Refer also to Deut 10:12-13.

⁴⁶ R. Paul, Stevens, *The Abolition of Laity: Vocation, Work, and Ministry*, Exeter UK: Paternoster Press, 1999, p. 25.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

of all Christians before God.⁴⁸ This doctrine was fundamental to the whole of the reformation. “However the reformation did not abolish the ministerial order, leaving somewhat uncertain the relationship between the clergy and the laity.”⁴⁹ Likewise, there are those who disagree with the ordination of the clergy. Torrance argues that there is no “NT warranty for ascribing any special qualifications of priesthood to the ordained persons within the common priesthood”.⁵⁰

For the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers” to function successfully in the church, all elders need to abide by biblical principles. Some pastors may feel out of place in their ministry, since they are used to an ordained priesthood. Others may see that they have no rights, and they cannot be placed in the same category as the laity, which has little biblical training, and are not professionals.

According to the Congregational ethos, “ordination is not vested in elders, but in the hands of the whole church”.⁵¹ In the Methodist church, the priesthood of all believers is not for individuals, but for the whole church.⁵² Others see the priesthood of all believers as people in the community of saints. God constructed His body, as such, that all are priests to one another, and this has to do with service, and not positions or status. We are all “believer-priests, and we all stand equally before God”.⁵³ This definition is acceptable to most evangelicals. Luther also stated that: “We are no

⁴⁸ D. F. Wright, “The Priesthood of all Believers”, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer, eds, Leicester UK: IVP, 1998, p. 513.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 531.

⁵¹ G. W. Kirby, “Congregationalism”, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer, eds, Leicester UK: IVP, 1998, p. 160

⁵² Author unknown, “Priesthood of all believers in Methodism”, available online at <http://www.en.allexperts.com/q/Methodists-957/2010/5/Priesthood-Believers.htm> (accessed March 31, 2013).

⁵³ Author unknown, “Priesthood of All Believers”, in *Theopedia*, <http://www.Theopedia.Priesthood-of-all-believers>, (accessed March 29, 2013).

longer professional minister and laity, but God's missionaries. There is no gap, no chasm, and no gulf."⁵⁴

Ministers and laity can form a plural eldership. While some may not agree with plural eldership, the NT never indicates such distinction between the clergy and the laity (Heb 13:17).⁵⁵ In the New Covenant, every believer is a priest before God.⁵⁶ Plural eldership shows that the church is a family unit, and the shared leadership portrays the family character of the church.⁵⁷

In the OT, the Israelites were God's holy people, set apart to serve God alone.⁵⁸ To be holy meant, "separated from all corrupt people or things, and consecrated totally to Christ".⁵⁹ The whole nation was entirely dedicated to God's service.⁶⁰ The NT understanding of the laity is seen as corporate priesthood, without distinctions. From such a background, all believers are called to minister to each other, and offer sacrifices. For one to offer his or her body as sacrifice means "daily offering of a life of service".⁶¹ This is different from the OT, where the priests were the ones who were offering sacrifices. Spiritual worship is not confined to the church, but to daily life as well.

EMPOWERING CHRISTIANS THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING

After explaining the biblical theology of the laity, the next factor is the best way to mobilise believers in ministry. The laity can be mobilised through capacity building. The uninformed laity will create problems in the church, because there is ignorance, and lack of empowerment and knowledge. Empowering laity can be done through capacity building, which will result

⁵⁴ Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the 12 Keys*, San Francisco CA: HarperCollins, 1990, p. 33.

⁵⁵ William J. Knaub, "Biblical Leadership and the New Covenant Priesthood", <http://www.bible-research.com/Knaub.html> (accessed March 26, 2013).

⁵⁶ Rev 1:6.

⁵⁷ Other references include: Acts 14:23; 20:17; 1 Tim 4:14; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-2.

⁵⁸ See Deut 7:6.

⁵⁹ Earl S. Karland, and Kenneth L. Baker, "Deuteronomy", in *NIV Study Bible*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2000, p. 254.

⁶⁰ See Ex 19:6.

⁶¹ See Rom 12:1-3.

in increased knowledge, management skills, and new capabilities, to improve administration.⁶² Capacity building should not be seen as a tool only for secular organisations to use, because this concept can help the church in improving its ministries, and to fulfil God’s mission on earth.

In research by Nehrbass in Vanuatu, the church, which was seen to be the agent of transformation and empowerment in the past, is now unclear about the purpose of theological education.⁶³ The cause of the problem was attributed to the church following “this-worldly” pursuits. This shows that the church had failed to focus on human development, and is only doing its best to survive to maintain its *status quo*. As a result, integral human development lags behind, while so much effort is given to infrastructural development, and administrative issues.

A Bible College in India had to handle capacity building issues, after continuously evaluating its training programs, and effectively training leaders to reach the masses.⁶⁴ The College had to resort to non-formal training strategies to train its students, as well as equipping local church planters in the community. Gupta and Lingenfelter assert that,

Identifying, equipping, and enabling people to use their gifts and abilities will empower the church to fulfil its mission. We must break out of the professional pastor box, develop the leaders in our congregations, and have the courage to release them to train others.⁶⁵

While the author concurs with Gupta and Lingenfelter, it would be helpful to include other courses, such as, agriculture, carpentry, bookkeeping,

⁶² Author unknown, “Capacity building”, in *Business Dictionary*, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/capacity-building.html> (accessed February 26, 2013).

⁶³ Kenneth Nehrbass, “Formal Theological Education in Vanuatu: Hopes, Challenges, and Solutions”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 27-2 (2011), p. 54.

⁶⁴ This is the Hindustani Bible Institute (HBI) in Chennai, India.

⁶⁵ Paul R. Gupta, and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Breaking Tradition to Accomplish Vision: Training Leaders for a Church-planting Movement*, Winona Lake IN: BMH Books, 2006, p. 20.

mechanical training, and health, so that church planters can meet social, physical, and mental needs of their people.

However, if the author was to adapt the Hindustani Bible Institute (HBI) model, then methods, such as, story-telling, drama, skits, and music would be used as part of the teaching methods, since teaching materials can be expensive. However, training needs to be done for clergy, who may never have attended a bible school as well.

Sound biblical teaching, provided by pastors, Bible teachers, and evangelists, will certainly enhance the spiritual maturity of the people. In addition, the teaching must be relevant and contextual, and must address the needs of the people. Furthermore, when the laity is not properly trained or equipped, then heresy can divide the church. This is what was experienced in the SSEC in the Solomon Islands. Fangalea asserts,

Part of what is hindering the spiritual progress of the SSEC today is attributed to the fact that many of its members are biblically illiterate. Many have fallen victim to strange movements coming into the church, simply because of their inability to distinguish right from wrong.⁶⁶

He suggests that in-depth theological teaching, a clear biblical statement of beliefs, and the upgrading of theological institutions, will help the SSEC to spiritual maturity. One of the key issues mentioned is the attitude of church leaders. There is also danger when ministry is given priority over other issues. According to Piper, common obstacles to spiritual growth are caused by ministry-related issues, and not worldly matters.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Gideon Fangalea, "Spirituality: the South Sea Evangelical church in the Solomon Islands", in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 26-1 (2010), p. 30.

⁶⁷ John Piper, *Brothers, We are not Professionals: a Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*, Fearn UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2003, p. 59. What Piper meant is that, when pastors spend so much time in ministry, they neglect prayer, meditation, quiet time, and other spiritual disciplines.

In ECPR, and also in other regions of the United church, so many church programs and activities often can kill the spiritual lives of the people.⁶⁸ The people will be worn out by constant preparations for various activities, and they fail to read the Bible, meditate, and pray. Such problems can be handled when the laity are taught to be involved in some of the administrative tasks.

Capacity building will help people to think and plan ahead. The believers will find their place in the body of Christ, and they will be actively involved in evangelism, and other field ministries.⁶⁹ The believers can become spiritually mature, and stand on their own feet.⁷⁰ However, church leaders should not only rely on the laity to contribute their resources to the church, but lead by example in giving and becoming servants.⁷¹ At times, it is the lay people that do everything, while the minister only preaches on Sundays. The danger is that people rely so much on their ministers and church leaders, and they cannot participate meaningfully in the church.

On the other hand, the church should not look for outside help, but look within its own laity, and use the skills that they have. Sometimes, some congregations have even used contractors to come and help build a new church building, when there are so many qualified tradesmen in their congregation.⁷² Using a contractor can cost the church so much money. When the congregation has no skilled workmen, then they can look to the other sister congregations for help. Gupta and Lingenfelter state that,

⁶⁸ The author has seen so many church programs, which are held, one after the other, and this often disturbs the spiritual life of the people.

⁶⁹ Poro Renagi, an active member of Prison Fellowship, interviewed by the author, in a questionnaire sent through email on April 3, 2013.

⁷⁰ William Numa, from Hula, and a member of TSCF, interviewed by the author, through questionnaire sent by email on March 27, 2013.

⁷¹ Lohia Garo, from Kwalimurubu, former youth leader, interviewed by questionnaire sent by the author through email on March 28, 2013.

⁷² The Waigani United church in Port Moresby used its own congregation members, who were qualified tradesmen, to extend the church building. This saved money for the congregation.

Christian professionals are key leadership resource persons. Financially able, and gifted with skills of communication, organisation, and management, they may assist movement leaders and pastors to encourage and train others. Further, their engagement in ministry, models for church planters helps the recruitment and empowerment of “non-clergy” in the mission work of the church.⁷³

Therefore, the church needs to assess capacity building needs, to help its own members, so that those skills can be used to extend God’s kingdom. Often, so much emphasis is placed on spiritual matters, while the people encounter so many social issues, and do not know what to do.

When the church includes capacity building in its spiritual programs, then there is balance, and the people’s physical needs can be met and addressed. Often, church institutions get support from the government, and through overseas aid, but the ordinary people do not benefit from such schemes. Therefore, the church needs to partner with other agencies, so that ordinary believers can benefit from capacity building programs.

EMPOWERING BELIEVERS FOR MINISTRY AND SERVICE

To make capacity building work, all members ought to be involved in ministry and service. It is pointless in training and equipping people if they do not do anything at all. While not every believer is a pastor, all believers can minister to the world and the church.⁷⁴ Furthermore, service in God’s army is not optional, since everyone is drafted into service.⁷⁵

All Christians are created for ministry (Eph 2:10), saved for ministry (2 Tim 1:9), called into ministry (1 Peter 2:9-10), gifted for ministry (1 Peter 4:10), authorised for ministry (Matt 28:18-20), and commanded for ministry (Matt

⁷³ Gupta, and Lingenfelter, *Breaking Tradition*, p. 134.

⁷⁴ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1995, p. 368.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

20:26-28).⁷⁶ These scripture references show us the importance for empowering believers, so they can participate in ministry.

The clergy and church leaders need to help others see their potential, so that the whole church is involved, as illustrated by Figure 1, below. Therefore, the laity should not give excuses about not being equipped, since the scripture is clear about the role of the laity.

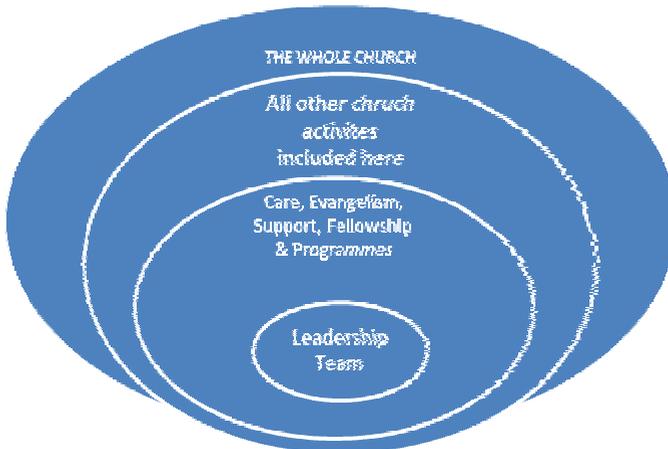


Figure 1: The Belmont Leadership Structure⁷⁷

SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO EMPOWER THE BODY OF CHRIST

A Christian's involvement in the church, through ministry and service, can only be accomplished by recognising the individual believer's spiritual gifts. The church needs to consider the spiritual gifts of its members, as gifts are intended by the Holy Spirit to enhance unity.⁷⁸ Furthermore, ministry is a joint effort of service (2 Cor 6:1), and it is for the enrichment and betterment

⁷⁶ These teachings, taken from the various NT scripture references, is done at Rick Warren's Saddleback church, and has been practised to bring the church to where it is now.

⁷⁷ David Knowles, "Administration and Management", in *Serving God's People: Rethinking Christian Ministry Today*, Harold Rowdon, ed., Carlisle UK: Paternoster Press, 2006, p. 94. This diagram shows how the leaders do administration so that it involves everyone in the church.

⁷⁸ Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 12:12; Eph 4:12.

of the believers (1 Cor 14:5, 12, 26). Believers should not say that they have no gifts, because the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to every believer.⁷⁹

BIBLICAL TEACHING ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS

All believers are given gifts for the common good of the Christian community. Therefore, each person has a gift to contribute, to the edification of the believers.⁸⁰ Spiritual gifts must be used to glorify God, and should not be abused by individuals. However, spiritual gifts are often overemphasised, to the extent that natural gifts are pushed aside.⁸¹ According to Warren, a person must be involved in ministry, to discover their gifting. It is not helpful to discover your gift, without ministry involvement.

The author concurs with Warren; since Melanesians are practical people. Their participation in ministry will reveal their gifting. After that, they can do Bible studies, or attend a seminar, to know more about spiritual gifts. Above all, gifts are for the common good of the Christian community, and must be utilised for people-centred ministry.

DISCERNING THE ABUSE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

While spiritual gifts are for the whole church, and can build up the church, often these gifts can be abused, and destroy the church.⁸² This is not a new problem, since it was experienced in the Corinthian church.⁸³ There were people, who downplayed their gifts, denied the gifts of others, and could not understand the interconnectedness of the gifts.⁸⁴

It is important to understand spiritual gifts, and church leaders must know how to discern heresy. Spiritual gifts must be used correctly, to avoid chaos in the church. According to Warren, spiritual gifts reveal a part of God's

⁷⁹ 1 Cor 12:4-11.

⁸⁰ 1 Cor 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10-11.

⁸¹ Warren, *Purpose-Driven Church*, p. 371.

⁸² Several youth members, and some elders, in Port Moresby, left their church, because there was friction regarding the use of spiritual gifts and submission to leaders.

⁸³ See 1 Cor 12:14-20.

⁸⁴ James Lawrence, *Growing Leaders: Reflections on Leadership, Life, and Jesus*, Abingdon UK: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2004, p. 259.

will for your ministry, but not all of it.⁸⁵ This is because Warren also considers one's natural talents, which also come from God.

Therefore, believers must be careful in the way they use spiritual gifts, because these gifts come from the Holy Spirit, and people should not play around with them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To empower people, the church needs to evaluate and audit⁸⁶ all its existing ministries, to ensure that the right people are involved. The next step will be to develop a theology of the laity, and explore ways for capacity building in the church.⁸⁷ This will be the way forward, for effectiveness in the church. To do an audit, the regional church leaders can ask questions, pay visits to certain areas, or get reports sent to them for evaluation.⁸⁸ After the audit, the lay leaders and the clergy can do seminars on developing relevant and contextual theologies for ECPR. It is important for the church to formulate new theologies that can suit today's conditions, and the changing scene of Christianity in the nation.

The final step is to develop strategies on capacity building, to equip people in all aspects of ministry, so that the church can effectively meet needs and minister meaningfully to its members, and others that need spiritual help. This would mean providing training, resources, and equipping people with skills to help others. For example, running literacy programs for the illiterate, or developing youth leaders, and training leaders for children's ministries.

⁸⁵ Warren, *Purpose-Driven Church*, p. 371.

⁸⁶ To carry out an audit, will mean looking at standards, operations of the ministries, and finding ways to improve effectiveness. This will be a useful exercise to help the church to be effective in doing ministry to reach out to the lost.

⁸⁷ Churches in PNG need to develop local theologies to make their ministries meaningful, and appropriate to their own context. It appears that many denominations are still holding onto Western theologies, which must be decolonised.

⁸⁸ In the mid-1990s, the author remembers the United church doing a self-evaluation exercise, which was done in all the congregations, and this is a good way to see how the congregation and the whole church is progressing. Every congregation member participated in the survey.

CONCLUSION

Finally, God's people can be empowered, through training programs conducted by the church, to discover their gifts, through continuous involvement in ministry, and a more concerted effort in biblical teaching, preaching, and studies on the priesthood of all believers. The church can collaborate with other like-minded organisations, so that the laity can be empowered to do their tasks effectively. For instance, courses on conflict resolution, agriculture, carpentry, and financial management will help equip the people for effectiveness. Apart from that, developing skill in counselling, bible interpretation, preaching, spiritual formation, and pastoral care can be helpful in empowering the laity.

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