8

How Do Churches Make Mature Disciples?

The Church's Ministries for Discipleship

We learned in chapter 7 that the church needs to determine its characteristics of spiritual maturity and a way to clearly communicate them to the congregation so that its people know and remember them. The next step is to design a process or strategy that will help people incarnate the characteristics. This is the sanctification or spiritual transformation process that leads to maturity and involves the church's ministries. It is your ministries and their sequencing that make up your disciple-making pathway or game plan. If a visitor or a member asked you how your church would help him or her grow as a disciple, what would your answer be? My goal in this chapter is to help you answer this question by designing a disciple-making pathway for your church. To accomplish this we will identify and explore your primary disciple-making ministries.

Church Ministries

The church's ministries are its means or activities that God uses to implement or incarnate its marks of maturity in the believer's life. The ministry involves not only the activities (what we do) but the staff (who does it) and the budget (how much it costs to operate it). In this chapter I will address the activities of ministries, and I will address staffing and budgeting in chapters 10 and 11.

I use the term *ministries* (and on occasion *activities)* as a broad term that includes various services, group meetings, events, seminars, programs, personal relationships, and so forth.

If I were to attend your church one Sunday unannounced and visit a Sunday school class or a small group and ask those in attendance why they are in the class or group, what would they say? I suspect that at first there would be silence. Then, if it is a Sunday school class, someone might raise a hand and answer, "To study the Bible." Then I would ask, "Why study the Bible?" Someone has said that if you ask why often enough you will get to the heart of the matter. What I am attempting

to learn is whether or not the class or group, or any ministry for that matter, understands its purpose or why it is doing what it is doing.

Every ministry must have a clearly articulated purpose or end that answers the question, why are we doing what we are doing? Every ministry housed under the roof of the church and any beyond must answer this question. Nothing should be done for its own sake. For example, we do not implement a small-group ministry merely to say we have one or that we are on the cutting edge. That makes no sense. If one of your ministries is a Sunday school program or a small-group ministry, then it must have a clearly understood and well-articulated purpose (and some may have more than one). And that purpose must in some way lead back to and contribute to the church's mission, which is to see its people grow to spiritual maturity. For example, a small-group ministry is the means to provide your people with fellowship and a sense of community, which is vital to making disciples and moving toward spiritual maturity. If a church sponsors a ministry that has no purpose and therefore does not contribute to the mission and maturity, then someone needs to explain why the ministry was started and, more importantly, why it should continue, outside of the fact that those involved in it will get mad if it is discontinued.

It is also important to note that God has entrusted us with the responsibility of crafting the ministries or means that will accomplish his ends. In effect, under God's direction, we are selecting activities for the Holy Spirit to use in the life of the church. Thus we must take this process very seriously. In all humility, we are asking God to take these ministry activities and use them as a means to accomplish his ends—to grow his church (1 Cor. 3:5–9). This should be a most humbling experience, and we should never take it lightly.

Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, underlines the importance of our ministry means for making authentic disciples:

Other churches may take a different approach; they have a different thumbprint. And that's fine. But every church needs to grapple with the question of how to follow the specific instructions that Jesus gave all of us: "Therefore go 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 I have commanded you."

It's not enough to have a succinct mission statement engraved on a plaque and hung in the hallway where it can inspire everyone. While that's a good step, it's only wishful thinking unless there's a concrete, Spirit-inspired game plan to turn it into reality.

And it is your church's primary ministries that are vital to your disciple-making game plan. You design and implement these ministries to make and mature disciples.

Before I go any further, I must include a disclaimer. Just because a church has a ministry game plan does not guarantee disciples. While the church's leadership does its best under God's guidance to develop its ministries, there is no guarantee that its people will actively, willfully pursue them. Some people could be involved in all of the church's primary ministries but be merely going through the motions and not maturing. They are "checklist people" who go through life completing checklists, and the church's primary ministries become simply another checklist to make them feel as if they have accomplished something each weekend for God. Dan Kimball, an emergent church pastor, wisely warns: "A numbered, step-by-step prescription for spiritual progress many times can prohibit organic growth."

Types of Ministries

There are numerous ministries that take place in churches all over the world, and all of them fall under one of two headings—primary or secondary ministries.

Primary Ministries

Importance

The primary ministries are the most important in helping your congregation embrace the marks of a disciple and move toward maturity. They are not ministry electives but ministry essentials. They provide the blueprint or game plan to accomplish the church's mission and are mandatory for those who are serious about spiritual growth. These ministries are designed for and thus benefit all believers in the church, and it is expected that every believer will involve him- or herself in these ministries. Thus the church will need repeatedly to communicate their importance to the congregation. If you are a pastor, you may get tired of hearing yourself repeat this to the congregation, and you may be convinced that

they are tired of hearing about it as well. Some sage has said, though, that when you get to this point, the congregation is just beginning to get the message.

Assimilation Process

As I am using the term in this book, *assimilation* addresses how a church orders or arranges its primary ministries to bring people into the life of the church, keep them involved in that life, and move them on to spiritual maturity. It relates to how your church moves people from outside the life of the church to become a vital part of that life. When a person desires to connect with your church, how does he or she do so? What activities, events, or relationships would he or she experience first, second, third, and so on? How have you arranged these ministries to help a person come to faith and then move on to maturity? The answer reveals your assimilation process.

The Number of Primary Ministries

Each church is different. It is possible for a church to have only one primary event, especially if it is small. Most have at least two primary events and some have as many as seven. Following are several examples of the number of primary ministries, moving from the typical traditional church to the emergent church (that people of the younger generations, such as Mark Driscoll in Seattle, Washington, are currently planting all across North America). In addition to the number of such ministries, this section will also provide you with several samples of other church's primary ministries that could prove helpful as you design yours.

For many years, the typical traditional church has offered three events that make up what some of us refer to as the "three to thrive" strategy. The first is the Sunday morning event that consists of a Sunday school class followed by a large-group meeting for worship and the preaching of God's Word. The second is a Sunday evening event that most often involves a second sermon or Bible study led by the pastor. In a larger church, a staff person or an intern may have opportunity to preach during this service. In addition, some churches have a ministry for the young people and children, such as a training union or an Awana program. The third event is the Wednesday evening prayer meeting. Some use this as a time of prayer, but others may use it as another preaching or teaching event. I so enjoyed teaching the Bible that in one of my churches I used most of the time on

Wednesday night to teach and reserved the last ten minutes or so for prayer requests and prayer.

When we examine today's contemporary churches, we find a broad range of primary ministry events.

Some congregations in the Fellowship Bible Church movement have a large-group worship and preaching event and small groups. The large-group event is the Sunday morning worship celebration, where people present themselves corporately to God, study his Word, apply truth, and respond in various ways to God's greatness. The small groups, or Community Groups, involve from eight to sixteen adults who join one another on their faith journey, encourage one another to put their faith in action, pray together, may play together (enjoy one another's company), and have opportunity to meet the needs of others in the group or in the broader church through sacrificial acts of service.

The church that has the most ministry events that I am aware of is Willow Creek Community Church. They have seven primary activities or ministries. Hybels explains, "The strategy we pursued for many years took shape when I wrote it down one day on a napkin in California. Every believer at Willow Creek sees it as their blueprint to accomplish our mission. We call it our seven-step strategy and it's part of our 'thumbprint' as a church."

In assimilation order they are the following:

1. Build an authentic relationship with a nonbeliever.

2. Share a verbal witness.

3. Bring the seeker to a service designed especially for him or her.

4. Regularly attend a believer's service.

5. Join a small group.

6. Discover, develop, and deploy one's spiritual gifts.

7. Steward one's resources in a God-honoring way.

Saddleback Valley Community Church, pastored by Rick Warren in Southern California, has four ministry events with an optional fifth event for leaders. In assimilation order, they are:

1.   Bridge events that are community-wide events designed to connect with their community and make it aware of the church.

2.   A weekend seeker service—much like that of Willow Creek—where members can bring their unsaved friends to whom they are witnessing.

3.   Small groups that provide fellowship, personal care, and a sense of belonging.

4.   A Life Development Institute that provides opportunities for spiritual growth, such as Bible studies, seminars, workshops, and mentoring opportunities.

5.   An optional SALT ministry (Saddleback Advanced Leadership Training) for the training of leaders.

As I consult with churches, I encourage them to embrace fewer primary ministries, not more. The reason is "less is more." The average congregant will not remember five to seven primary ministries. Opting for fewer ministries promotes clarity and encourages the leadership to "do less" well.

My friend Jeff Gilmore is the pastor of Parkview Evangelical Free Church in Iowa City, Iowa. He has taken a slightly different approach. The church offers four primary disciple-making ministries: worship, small groups, an ABF (Adult Bible Fellowship), and a class for congregational mobilization (people attend this only once, so it is not ongoing for those who have been through it). While they offer small-group ministries and ABFs, they ask their people to choose which best fits their discipleship needs. This gives their people some leeway in pursuing discipleship. For this to work, the church has to communicate regularly and well these two options and their unique benefits.

The new kid on the block is the emergent church that consists mostly of the younger Bridger generation or Millennials. An interesting characteristic of this group is their thumbs-down attitude toward structure and organization. Someone shared with me recently that he was at a meeting of emergent church leaders, and they decided that they wanted to move in a particular direction (I cannot recall

what that was). So they began to organize to accomplish their goal. What was humorous was that someone raised his hand and pointed out to the group that they were doing the very thing they were against, and everyone laughed. They realized that the accomplishment of their goal required organization and structure.

I believe that most new church plants develop and organize ministries similar to the way that churches have been organized in the past. Some have a large-group time of worship because of their size. And most have small-group ministries. Some with which I have connected focus primarily on the small group, which may meet in a house as a house church. And they attempt to address the biblical ministry functions in that setting. As they grow numerically, they will start other house churches, and in time some will gather once a month for a large-group worship event. But clearly the emphasis is on the small-group ministry. Consequently their primary ministries may be very similar to those of the Fellowship Bible churches. However, the small-group ministry is the first and the primary point of assimilation, whereas the worship-preaching service is second.

As the emergent churches grow and develop, they will react to what they see as the inadequacies of the Builder and Boomer church ministries. The Boomer churches did the same to the Builder churches. I believe this is most healthy. Dan Kimball instructs, "Emerging church leaders need to rethink the whole concept of discipleship, because quite frankly, if we're honest, the modern church hasn't done that good a job. If making disciples is our primary goal, we'd better not be afraid to reconsider how we go about it."

Ultimately a determining factor in addressing how many primary ministries you might include in your maturity process is your culture. We must ask, How many meetings should we expect our people to attend? Given the busyness of our current culture, how much time should we ask them to give to the church? Many typical, traditional churches established during the era of the Builder generation asked their people to attend three primary meetings a week. Today many churches find that their people attend less. For example, one large, thriving mega—Bible church in the Dallas area surveyed its people and found that most attend once every three weeks. So what are your expectations for your congregation?

The Purpose of the Primary Ministries

Regardless of the number of events a church offers, the idea is for people to move into the life of the church, embracing all its primary ministries, whether as few as two or as many as Willow's seven. This is most important. Again, these are not discipleship electives but essentials. So if the first assimilation ministry is the large-group time of worship, then most will begin there. But they must not stop or cluster there, as so many tend to do. The challenge is to move people to the next ministry event—to get them out of the stands and onto the discipleship playing field so they attend not only the worship service but a small group or Sunday school or both as well. And the process continues for any other primary ministries.

Thus if you have three primary ministries, the goal and challenge is to involve all your people in all three ministries. Embracing these disciple-making ministries signals an individual disciple's growing commitment to the Savior and the church. It will also help the church evaluate how well it is making disciples. Simply count and regularly keep track of how many people are involved in these ministries. Is the number growing or decreasing? I will say more about evaluation in the next chapter.

Age Groups

Every church is made up of people from various age groups—adults, youth, and children. I recommend that all of your church's age groups follow the same disciple-making process. Initially, you plan for the entire church with the focus on adults, and the disciple-making ministries you choose for them will be much the same as or similar to those for youth and children. For example, if you decide to have a large-group worship time, a Sunday school class, and a small group for the adults, you could do the same for the youth and children. Obviously in smaller churches some of the ministries will be the same as those for adults, youth, and children. For example, due to the church's size, the youth and children participate in the adult worship experience but have their own age-specific classes and/or groups.

Secondary Ministries

All ministries beyond the primary ones are the secondary ministries. As a consultant, one way I help churches identify their secondary ministries is to list all

of their ministries on a large whiteboard. Next we circle the few primary ministries, and those that are left are the secondary ministries.

Importance

Secondary ministries are secondary in the sense that they are not essential to the church's purpose of making mature disciples. They are electives, not essentials, so they are not as important to the church's disciple-making strategy as the primary ministries. Still, when combined with the primary ministries, they provide an overall picture of how all the church's ministries are operating in light of the church's disciple-making process. Examples of secondary ministries are men's and women's Bible studies, vacation Bible school, the midweek service, special Easter or Christmas programs, a Christian day school, twelve-step ministries, Mother's Day Out, homeschooling groups, and so on.

The Origin of the Secondary Ministries

Secondary ministries have likely come into existence because the church may not have done a good job with a primary ministry in the past. It may have gone through several years with a poor preacher and/or poor worship. Or the Sunday school program may not have taught the Scriptures well, and people felt they needed more in-depth teaching. Thus, for example, the women or men decided to start a men's or women's Bible study.

The Problem

There are at least five problems with secondary ministries.

1.   *Distraction not attraction.* Many of the Builder churches have added numerous secondary ministries, thinking that if they offer more programs, they will attract more people. Some even pride themselves in their many programs. I refer to this as the "menu philosophy of ministry." We have learned, however, that people more than programs attract people. A plethora of programs will attract some people, but not to the degree that many used to think it would. Instead, many programs distract people from the primary disciple-making ministries.

2.   *Confusion not clarity.* These ministries cause confusion for the congregation. For example, when I go out to eat at a restaurant, I prefer fewer choices. When I open the menu and I see numerous entrées, I find it confusing and more difficult to

decide because I like everything I see on the menu. They all look so good. When people look at numerous ministry opportunities, many look good, and they are confused. We must opt for clarity over confusion, and this happens when we limit or even eliminate secondary ministries, not mixing them in with the primary ones. People need to know what is expected of them in terms of the church's ministries. That is clarity.

3.   *Complexity not simplicity.* People are not dumb. Nevertheless, the KISS principle (Keep it simple, Simon) is always the better route. Why make ministry matters complex when we can make them simple? Simple wins out every time. In addition, we have a saying at the Malphurs Group that "less is more." Simplicity always involves less, while complexity involves more.

4.   *Diffusing energy instead of directing energy.* People expend energy when involved in the various ministries of the church, and that energy can be either diffused or directed. It is the difference between a laser and a lightbulb. A laser directs or focuses energy, and this is what needs to happen with the primary ministries. All of our energy is to be focused on them, and people must focus on them if they are to become growing disciples. A lightbulb diffuses energy. And the secondary ministries do the same. They add to the ministries list and thus diffuse or distract energy away from the essentials.

5.   *Requiring staff and funding instead of freeing staff and funding.* Some secondary ministries require the involvement of staff and funds that the church would better spend on the primary ministries. We will see in the last two chapters that a church must both staff and budget around the essential primary disciple-making ministries not the elective nonessentials.

So what can the church with a rather sizeable "ministry menu" do? I have at least three suggestions.

1.   Some ministries can be eliminated. The way to accomplish this is through evaluation. It is imperative that churches evaluate not only their people who are involved in ministry (both lay and staff) but their ministries. Regardless of how you discontinue these ministries, be aware that when you start eliminating them, those who have been part of them will be upset with you. So make sure you communicate with these people. They need to know why you are eliminating some

of their favorite ministries. And be prepared even to lose some of them from the church.

2.   Make it difficult to start new ministries. Keep the ministry menu lean. New secondary ministries must demonstrate a strong need for their existence, must have an in-house trained leader, must not require the services of the staff, must not depend on the budget for funding, must not attempt to raise funds from the congregation, and the leaders must be involved in the church's leadership development program.

3.   Tie some of the secondary ministries into the primary ones. For example, vacation Bible school could become a regular part of the church's primary evangelism strategy. A women's Bible study could become an extension of the Sunday school ministry, and the same with a men's Bible study. When you do this, you will need to communicate this constantly to your people. It is important that they connect what may have been a secondary ministry to the primary ministry, or the secondary ministry could become more important for some than the primary ministry. And they must be encouraged not to abandon a primary ministry for a secondary one. Secondary ministries are to augment not distract from a primary ministry. The point here is that some former secondary ministries can supplement the primary ministries and enhance spiritual maturity. However, I would still be reluctant to assign staff and funding to these ministries.

Designing a Unique Disciple-Making Strategy

Unless yours is a church plant, designing a disciple-making and maturing process will largely involve critiquing your current process in general and your primary ministries in particular. But how does it work? The following three steps will show the way.

Step 1: Construct a Maturity Matrix

The Maturity Matrix consists of a horizontal and a vertical axis as represented in the figure below. (I have also included a blank sample in appendix C for your use.) Here we are using the matrix to help you design your strategy to make disciples. It will also help you to evaluate your process and explain and communicate it to your congregation in the future. In chapter 7 you identified at least two but not more than five characteristics of a mature believer. Place them along the top of the

horizontal axis, as I have done with the five Cs in the figure on page 97 (I have included in parentheses a function under each C for instructional purposes. It is not necessary for you to do this).

Step 2: Identify Your Primary Ministries

Next, write all of your church ministries on a pad (or whiteboard if working with a team). Identify your current primary ministries (at least two but not more than seven), and place them along the vertical axis in assimilation order. I have used three ministries (worship/preaching service, Sunday school, and a small group) as an example for you. Now you have in front of you the big picture of what your church is doing (its primary ministries) and the reasons for them (characteristics of maturity).

Maturity Matrix

Characteristics of Maturity

	Conversion (Evangelism)	Community (Fellowship)	Celebration (Worship)	Contribution (Service)	Cultivation (Teaching)
Worship/Preaching Service					
Sunday School					
Small Group					

Step 3: Evaluation

Measure or evaluate each primary ministry for spiritual impact. To do the evaluation, the ministry team should ask the following questions of each primary ministry on the vertical axis. Note that there are boxes corresponding to each heading on the horizontal and vertical axes. As you evaluate each ministry, put a check in the box to show that a certain ministry promotes the development of a certain characteristic.

1.   *Is this ministry designed to develop at least one of the characteristics of maturity in our disciples' lives?* (Some may develop more than one.) And is it doing so?

2.   *How well is this ministry developing that characteristic?* The answer may be found in the numbers—people vote with their feet. How many people are attending, and is that number growing? (As I will argue in the next chapter, you must keep accurate records of attendance of your main ministries.) I encourage you to do annual quantitative research (a congregational survey or analysis) and qualitative research (one-on-one interviews with key people) of your congregation that will give you an even more accurate read than the attendance numbers do, as Willow Creek Community Church has discovered. I do understand that some pastors simply aren't wired to do this and even the thought is intimidating. However, a large church will have an executive or administrative person who may have the needed skills. A small church could recruit a layperson who is so wired and could take responsibility for such an endeavor.

3.   *Do any ministries need to be tweaked or even replaced*? Every ministry has a shelf life. Some ministries simply outlive their effectiveness, and there comes a time when they need to be replaced. You must consider whether now is the time.

4.   *Are there any ministries that do not develop any characteristics of maturity?* If so, do you need to change or even eliminate these ministries?

5. *Are there any characteristics of maturity that no primary ministry develops?* Inevitably, when I take churches through this fifth question, the two characteristics

that are most often missed are evangelism and service. Most churches' ministries fail to develop these two essential characteristics of maturity. For those that are not doing evangelism, I sometimes suggest that they add Willow Creek Church's first two steps—build a relationship with a lost person and share a verbal witness—to their primary ministries. Another option for those who include small groups as a primary ministry is to include a service and evangelism component to what they do in their small groups. Each small group would embrace a particular ministry within or outside the church, and they all could go through evangelism training. An advantage of doing this in the small groups is that they can hold one another accountable. For those that have only a "faithful few" (usually around 20 percent or less) involved in service, I suggest adding a service component to their primary ministries. But explain to your people that they will go through the training for service only one time or once every few years.

6. *Are you aware of other churches' primary ministries?* How other churches minister may be a reflection of their unique communities. Such knowledge could be helpful to you as you tweak or even renovate your primary ministries, especially if the other churches are located in an area of the country that is similar to yours. I provided several examples earlier in this chapter. The example of Willow Creek follows.

Willow Creek

I suspect that some readers, especially those of the emergent generation and those in smaller churches, may be a little turned off by my using Willow Creek as an example, because it is a Boomer megachurch. However, they are one of the few churches in North America who are doing with profound results the kind of diagnosis that I am suggesting. In 1992 two staff persons (Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson) with help from an outside consultant (Eric Arnson) began to conduct congregational research, attempting to gain a unique understanding of the spiritual lives of Willow's people—how they grow and what the church could do to help them. They conducted both quantitative research that involved surveying their people and qualitative research that involved personal, one-on-one interviews. This was an extensive project that they now pursue every three years. While this is a good process, I am not convinced that you will have to do the same extensive and elaborate kind of research to discover useful information. A church can design a

single survey and conduct personal interviews with core leadership, such as a board, church staff, and key lay leaders. I have included in appendix D some questions that can be used quantitatively (in a broad congregational survey) or qualitatively (in one-on-one personal interviews) in designing a tool to use with a congregation.

When Willow conducted their research, what they discovered caused them to rethink everything about how to do church. For example, they found that one-third of their congregation drove more than thirty minutes to get to church, and these people were not inviting their unchurched friends to attend the services (a key aspect of Willow's strategy), nor were these people involved in Willow's other ministries. They also discovered that their church activities alone did not drive spiritual growth and that the role of the church in people's lives changes as they mature, providing them with opportunities to serve more than with organized teaching and connecting opportunities. In short, as their people matured, they played more of a role in their own spiritual development than did the church. This included personal spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, Bible study, journaling, and so forth.

As many of you know, it is easier to talk about tweaking and changing ministries than it is to actually pull it off, especially when dealing with primary ministries. Many people find comfort in routines, even when the spiritual effectiveness has long since worn off. This is where loving strength and leadership cultivation pay rich spiritual dividends. Teach your key leaders and bring them along until they can view and embrace change as a friend. There still may be bullies who rebel or attack your leadership and attempt to persuade others to side with them so that changes are not made, and you will have to deal with them. It is imperative that this kind of behavior not be tolerated. People who bully and attack leadership must be formally disciplined, according to the procedures spelled out in your church constitution.

Factors That May Affect Primary Ministries

As you may have noted so far in this chapter, there are several factors that affect the kinds of ministries that appear on the vertical axis of the Maturity Matrix. These factors may also help you as you measure and evaluate your primary ministries. The following factors may affect a church's primary ministries and how it conducts those ministries.

Predominant Generations

The predominant generation or generations (Builders, Boomers, Bridgers) in a church will affect the primary ministries. For example, you minister differently to Builders than you do to Boomers. While the marks of a disciple's maturity are the same for each generation, the ministries that produce them in the disciple will often be different. An example is style of worship. Each generation seems to prefer a different style of worship, ranging from the great hymns of the faith for older congregants to a praise format for Boomers to a "vintage-faith" worship gathering for the younger members. And a liturgical approach will appeal to others.

The Church's Location

Another factor that affects primary ministries is the location of the church. Is it located in rural, suburban, or urban America? Location affects the church's ministry mind-set. My experience is that rural churches tend to be resistant to more contemporary ways of doing ministry. They are slow to try new approaches, preferring the tried and true. And the result is that many of these churches are not surviving. However, some urban and many suburban churches are ready to blaze new ministry trails.

The Church's Ethnicity

A third factor that affects primary ministries is the church's ethnicity. A black church may prefer to take the offering differently than a predominantly white church. Some black congregations are used to an offering walk where the congregation goes to the front of the sanctuary to drop their offering in a plate located there. And others prefer to pass a plate. And some Anglos are concerned about sending the wrong message, so they place a plate or box on a table in the back of the worship area. Traditional black churches aren't afraid to let their services go on for more than an hour, with lots of music and a lengthy sermon. However, they tend not to be as involved in small-group ministries.

The Church's Size

The size of the church will also affect the types of ministries it offers. Larger churches do ministry differently than smaller churches. For example, larger churches can offer different worship venues because they have enough people to

provide multiple services, whereas some smaller churches may struggle to fill one service.

Confidence in Pastoral Leadership

A fifth factor is the church's confidence in the pastor's leadership. I have been in situations where lay leaders questioned the senior pastor's competence. Consequently, when he addressed issues affecting the core ministries in the church, these people either ignored his ideas or argued with him for their own views. Note that in these situations these pastors have lost the confidence and trust of their people and are likely on their way out.

Some pastors may have more support, but still there may be a group of people who struggle with pride, are not teachable, and feel they know more than the pastor. Incompetent or questionable pastoral leadership is an issue that a church must address if it hopes to be a Great Commission church that makes authentic disciples.

Factors Affecting Primary Ministries

Predominant Generation

Church's Location

Church's Ethnicity

Church's Size

Confidence in Pastoral Leadership

Communicating the Primary Ministries

Communication both informs and reminds people of the church's primary or core ministries—the ones that will aid them in moving toward spiritual maturity. My experience as a church consultant is that few churches communicate well, and most do not communicate enough. There are a number of practical ways to communicate your ministries to your people.

The Sermon

The most obvious means of communication is the sermon. Because of the importance of the church's core ministries, the preacher would be wise to mention them often any way he can, whether he is preaching specifically on the ministries or using them as an example or in an illustration.

New Members Class

When people join a church, especially younger people, they are sending the message that they are ready to commit to the church and its ministries. The new members class is a way to make sure they know what the ministries are. This is the time to present and explain the reason the ministries are important as well as the purpose of each. In my church we ask our new members to sign a covenant of commitment to four areas, one of which is to serve in our ministries.

You should be aware that some churches struggle with the concept of membership. When people hear the term, they are reminded of churches that stress membership for all the wrong reasons, such as a desire to be the biggest church in the denomination for "bragging" purposes. If your people struggle with the term *membership*, use a different term, such as *partners* and *partnership,* that better communicates your expectations of them.

Sunday School

The Sunday school class, ABF (Adult Bible Fellowship), or youth group can aid communication by regularly reminding people of the reasons they are in the class and its role in the church's mission, as well as in helping them become mature disciples.

Website

The younger generation is techno savvy and used to getting much of their information on the Internet. Many will check out the church on its website before

ever showing up at a service. Others who are already part of the church will depend on the website to some degree to know what is going on in the church. So make sure you post information about your ministries.

Brochures

Churches that communicate well produce quality brochures that explain their values, mission, vision, and strategy. They are also an excellence source of information on the ministries that the church offers.

A Video Production

A DVD presentation of the church's ministries is an effective way to communicate important information. I had one student who produced a DVD as his class project. The video recorded ministries in action and in this way communicated that his church provided for making disciples.

A Visual

A visual object that depicts your vertical axis of ministries can be a memorable way to communicate. Andy Stanley, who pastors North Pointe Church near Atlanta, Georgia, uses the rooms of a house to explain his church's ministries. When those who attend his worship service walk into the auditorium, they see three rooms of a house up on stage. Then Stanley walks them through the rooms, explaining how the foyer corresponds to the worship service, the living room represents the Bible study events, and finally the kitchen depicts the church's small group meetings.

An apple, several arrows, a tree, or even a stool have been used to communicate a church's ministries. The various parts of the apple, such as the skin, flesh, and core could depict your primary ministries. Depending on the number of ministries, you could use three or four arrows that point inward toward one another. Each arrow represents a ministry, and they rotate around words such as "A passionate follower of Christ." Often Scripture uses a tree as a symbol of spiritual strength (see, for example, Jer. 17:7–8). A three- or four-legged stool, with each leg representing a ministry, is also a good illustration.

The pastor of the church could follow Stanley's example and, when preaching on the topic, include the visual illustration. For example, he could place the stool next to the pulpit and sit on it as a disciple. Then he could point to the various legs, explaining how they represent the primary ministries and how they are necessary to support the maturing disciple.

Communicating Primary Ministries

The Sermon

New Members Class

Sunday School Class/ABF/Youth Group

Website

Brochures

Video Production

Visual Illustration

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1.   Write all of your church's ministries on a piece of paper or a whiteboard. Identify your primary ministries. Those that are left are your secondary ministries.

2.   Draw a Maturity Matrix, or use the one in appendix C, and write your marks or characteristics of a disciple on the horizontal axis. Then place your primary ministries on the vertical axis. Do you have any characteristics that are not supported by a ministry? If so, which ones? Do you have any ministries that do not support any of the characteristics? If so, which ones?

3.   Who will construct this matrix? If a team will do it, who will they be—ministry staff, a strategic planning team, or others? Why might you opt for team involvement as opposed to having one person, such as the pastor, do it?

4.   Using the Maturity Matrix, do you find that any ministries need to be tweaked or replaced? If so, which ones? When and how will you go about changing them? Will you use the matrix regularly to check on the relevance of your primary ministries?

5.   If you decide you need to change or replace some of the primary ministries, what ministries will replace them? Have you looked at the ministries of other like-minded churches? If so, how might they fit into your church?

6.   How many secondary ministries did you identify in question 1? Do you need to eliminate some of them? If so, which ones? How will you handle the potentially negative response of those involved in these ministries? Is there a way that some of these ministries might legitimately be combined with your primary ministries?

9[1]

---

[1] Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 87–105.