

Moving Members into Ministry

by

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Maybe you know someone like Sam, who attends his church faithfully every Sunday—but he is not involved in doing ministry through his church. He soaks in the teaching each week, but does little with it. Others view Sam as a committed member simply because he is there every Sunday morning, and no one would dare question his faithfulness.

Yet, Sam is really doing nothing in his church. How do you move members like him into ministry? Here are some basic principles that we learned in a study published in my book, *Membership Matters*.

1. Pray for Laborers

Jesus gave us clear guidelines for securing workers: pray for God to provide them (Luke 10:2). The fields, He said, are ready, but the workers are few. Have you seen that problem in your church?

My experience is that churches look for laborers, and they begin praying only *after* they've not been able to secure workers through their established processes. I've even heard workers announce something like, "We still need a fourth grade boys' teacher, so we'd better pray about this one"! Is it possible that we would have less difficulty finding workers if we started praying before recruiting?

I encourage churches to have a standing committee that prays for laborers. This committee prays that God will (1) provide workers for current openings; (2) guide the

church in enlisting and training potential workers; and (3) remind the church to affirm current workers (see #6 below).

2. State Expectations *Up Front*

Why do so many church members (like Sam) join a church and just sit? Here's the primary reason: churches expect very little from members, and that's exactly what they get! One of the best ways to correct this problem is to state expectations in a required membership class. Our study shows that churches with effective membership classes stress five expectations of members:

- Identifying with the church (e.g., through public baptism)
- Attending worship services and small groups
- Serving in the ministry of the church
- Giving financially toward the church's work
- Promoting unity in the church

Stating these expectations is no guarantee there will be no Sam's in your church, but *not* clarifying expectations almost assures that you will. Even if your church begins by raising the bar with only one of the five expectations, that's a start.

3. Put a Ministry Placement Strategy in Place

Ministry placement is not automatic, nor is it easy. In the churches we studied, leaders had an intentional placement strategy in place. Most often this strategy was built around one of three tools: Rick Warren's SHAPE concept (*The Purpose Driven Church*), Wayne Cordeiro's DESIGN program (*Doing Church as a Team*), or John Powers' BodyLife Journey plan (*BodyLife*). These strategies are built upon the assumption that

God works through our life experiences, our desires, our spiritual gifts, our personalities, and our abilities to prepare us to do ministry in His church. Members who saw how God had prepared them then worked with church leaders to find the right place of ministry for them.

4. Recruit for Ministry Face-to-Face

We asked laypersons in our study why they chose to get involved in their church's ministry. Listen to the personal recruiting that their answers reflected:

“A minister spoke to me and challenged me to get active.”

“The Minister of Education sat me down and talked to me.”

“Two guys approached me and asked me [to serve].”

These types of answers we heard over and over again. Leaders in the churches we studied did not recruit workers through bulletin board sign-ups, worship folder tear-offs, or pulpit announcements. Rather, they sought workers by challenging members face-to-face. In most cases, a personal challenge and invitation made the difference. It makes sense that this method—a method that Jesus modeled for us—would be effective.

5. Offer Entry-level Ministry Positions

Not every member is prepared to be a teacher, a deacon, or an elder. New believers, for example, are not yet qualified to take leadership positions. New members who transfer from another church probably need some time to know the church before taking on a highly visible leadership role. Both groups might, however, be ready to take on the challenge of “entry level” positions that allow them to get involved in the church.

Entry-level positions might include parking lot greeters, refreshment committees,

class custodians, choir members, and any other position that may not demand significant training. The goal is to help everyone get involved at some level as quickly as possible so that new members feel needed and wanted. Moreover, entry-level positions help to evaluate potential leaders, as a person unwilling to serve in an entry position probably won't make a good servant leader later.

6. Recognize and Affirm Workers

Stop and think about the number of workers in your church who have served faithfully Sunday after Sunday, year after year, and sometimes decade after decade. Most often, we take for granted these dependable church members. We assume they will serve, and we neither recognize nor affirm them. To be fair, most of these workers would not want any recognition—and that spirit is exactly what makes them great to have in the church—but their reticence to be recognized does not let us off the hook. We honor God by affirming His work in the lives of those who give their best for His church.

One simple way to recognize workers is to sponsor an annual Workers Banquet. Cater it, publicize it, and make it special. Not only will the current workers be grateful, but potential workers will also see that their church will appreciate their service.

7. Don't Give Up Easily

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul taught that God puts His church together as He wishes (12:1-11). He gives spiritual gifts as He desires so that the church fits together properly as His body. If God takes responsibility for this task, how can we not believe that He will provide the workers needed in our churches? Our task is to help members find their role, challenge them to serve, equip them, and hold them accountable. This work is not easy,

though, and sometimes it's tempting just to give up and overwork the current workers. Rather than taking that wrong step, the answer is to return to principle #1 and start the process again.