

MINISTRIES

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. – Ephesians 2:10

Paul says the pastor's number one job is *to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ* (Ephesians 4:12). "Ministry" is just another word for doing God's work, serving God by serving the people he loves.

When a church grows beyond a handful of people, they will naturally start dividing themselves into ministry groups. Some will work with the children, some will share musical skills, some will take care of the building, and so on.

As your church grows, it becomes helpful to formalize these ministry groups. You can avoid a lot of trouble later on if you have written policies outlining what each group does, how they relate to each other, how people become a part of the group, and so on. For instance, are members elected – by whom? Or appointed – by whom? Or do they just volunteer – approved or overseen by whom?

These rules are particularly important for those who handle church money or have legal responsibility for church property. Most denominations and established churches have detailed policies for these things. If yours doesn't, read some from other churches for ideas.

There are basically three kinds of ministries. The first focuses on a task

MINISTRIES

to perform. The second focuses on a group to serve. The last oversees the resources that support the first two. I'll list the most common kinds of ministry groups and give a thought or two from my own experience.

Pastor beware: every one of these groups will want you involved in their ministry. That's a good thing, but it can also be bad. It's good that the groups feel their ministry is important enough for the pastor to be part of everything they do. It's bad because they can easily take up all your time. This is the place to remember what the apostles said when they set up the first ministry group in the Jerusalem church:

We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word. - Acts 6:2-4

Train, support, resource, encourage and oversee your people, but beyond that, let them do their ministries, and you do yours.

Task-Defined Ministries

Every congregation should fulfill **the seven main functions of a local church: worship, member care, discipleship, serving, evangelism, societal transformation, and prayer.** Your church may combine some of these or sub-divide them, but you need to address these seven functions in some way. Task-defined ministries do this.

The job of ministry groups is not to do the ministries, but to organize and promote the ministries so everyone can do them. For instance, often church members feel that only the people in the evangelism group have to do evangelism, and the rest of the congregation are off the hook. Sometimes even the group members begin to believe that. As pastor, keep reminding your people that every Christian is responsible for the work of the church.

By the way, where I've used the word "group," many churches say "committee,"

“team,” “board” or “council.” Prayerfully consider the terms you use, because each word carries connotations. “Committee,” “board” and “council” can imply that this group legislates and plans work for other people to do. “Team” implies a group that works together, which some people can take to mean that those not on the team are not involved in the work. I’m using “group” as the most generic term, but it may not be the best word for your church.

Worship ministries

Every pastor knows a worship service doesn’t just happen. If there will be music, somebody has to plan and rehearse. If you are celebrating Communion, somebody has to prepare the elements. If you use candles or flowers, somebody has to find them and set them in place. If you designate people to read Scripture or hand out bulletins or receive the offering, somebody has to schedule them. If you decorate for special seasons, somebody has to get the decorations, put them up, and take them down. The worship ministries group plans and coordinates all these things, and the myriad other logistical details involved in your worship services.

Member care ministries

Jesus said, *Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.* (John 13:35). As we’ve said before, God created human beings to be his family. The church is the people who are trying to live that out. The more people do things together, the more they get to know and love each other, the more they feel like a family. Some of the things they do together might just be for fun. Others might involve accomplishing a task, like a church work day when people come together to wash windows and fix up the building. Sometimes a member needs a little help, like meals for the family of a new mother. When a member misses church for two or three weeks, somebody should check on them to see if everything is alright. The member care ministries group plans and coordinates these activities.

Some churches have formal membership lists, with specific criteria and

responsibilities. Others consider everyone who attends church to be members. Formal membership can help assure that only mature Christians who agree with your theology can vote in your meetings or serve in leadership. It may also give some leverage if church discipline is required. Informal membership can be more attractive and inclusive – and it’s certainly a lot less paperwork.

Discipleship ministries

There’s a lot more to becoming like Jesus than listening to a sermon every week. The discipleship ministries group coordinates Bible studies, Sunday School classes and other opportunities for people to develop their souls and grow in their faith. A big part of this is encouraging people to have a daily prayer and Bible reading time. Providing written resources, such as a daily devotional magazine or website, can be very helpful.

Before I became a pastor, I found that my greatest spiritual growth came in small groups of other Christians. We helped each other know God, understand the Bible and live the Christian life, with not a pastor in sight. Such groups can meet in homes, at work during lunch hour, in coffee shops, or wherever and whenever works.

Some of your most effective leaders might turn out to be people you would never expect, like housewives, students or retired people. Train, resource, recognize and encourage them. Don’t micromanage, but do stay aware of what is happening in the groups, because situations will arise from time to time that will require your attention as pastor.

Evangelism ministries

Evangelism moves people from having no knowledge of Jesus Christ to knowing about Christ, recognizing their need of Christ, and finally putting their faith in Christ. Their journey doesn’t stop there, but the task changes from evangelism to discipleship.

Ideally, the journey to faith parallels a journey to involvement in your

church. When people don't know about your church, you want them to become aware of it and view it favorably. That involves advertising and public relations. When people visit, you want them to have a good experience. That involves seeing that your members, building, worship service and programs make a good impression. When people go home their first Sunday, you want them to come back. That involves follow-up. The evangelism ministries group plans and coordinates all of these things.

It's been said that every church member should be able to answer three questions: Why do people need Jesus? Why do people need church? Why do people need my church? The ability to answer these questions, and the confidence to share those answers with non-Christians, requires training and motivation. Coordinating that is another job of your evangelism ministries group.

Aid ministries

Aid ministries, sometimes called helping or mercy ministries, demonstrate God's love in practical ways. It may be as simple as helping an elderly person in care for their home. It may be feeding homeless people, or clothing orphaned children. Needs are everywhere. As church people work together to help others, they grow closer to each other and to God. They often say it's one of the most rewarding things they ever do. Finding, planning, publicizing and coordinating these opportunities to serve is the task of the serving ministries group.

A note of warning: in some settings, offering help to those outside the church may be seen as an attempt to bribe them to become Christians. Be aware, and pray hard before violating local customs.

Social influence ministries

Jesus taught us to pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Where earth is not like heaven, God's will is not being done. Christians are called to pray and work to correct that.

MINISTRIES

When the problem is with individuals, we are to *patiently correct, rebuke and encourage your people with good teaching* (2 Timothy 4:2). When the problem is with systems of society or government, we are to influence those in power to bring earthly “kingdoms” more in line with the Kingdom of God. Social influence ministries, sometimes called peace and justice ministries, work to make the congregation more aware of social issues and plan responses, often in coordination with other churches and organizations.

Some pastors feel that the church should not be involved in trying to change society, but just focus on individuals. It’s true the church has a poor track record when it tries to take over the role of secular government. But it’s also true that most of the world’s advancements in human rights, such as the abolition of slavery in England and America, have come about through Christian influence in society.

One note of caution: on many social issues there is a fine line between righteousness and politics. If a person feels no need to try to help when large segments of the population are hungry or oppressed, that’s a question of righteousness, by any Biblical definition. If people want to help, but disagree about the most effective way to do it, that’s not a question of righteousness, but a matter of politics. Keep a careful eye on your social influence ministries to be sure they don’t stray into the area of politics.

Prayer ministries

Prayer should be the ongoing activity of every Christian. It should underlie, guide and cover every ministry of the church. Because of that, many people don’t think of establishing a separate ministry for prayer. But the fact is, a recognized group devoted to practicing and promoting prayer may be the most important ministry group your church can have. Prayer accesses the most powerful force in the universe.

The first task of a prayer ministry group is to teach and promote prayer, not just as a private personal exercise, but as a ministry that objectively changes the world to a new reality. The second task is to practice prayer themselves. Some people have a calling to intercession. Pastor, if you’re smart, you’ll

identify those people, organize them into prayer groups, encourage them and recognize them. Some pastors recruit a special prayer group to pray specifically for the pastor. That can be a real blessing.

Group-Defined Ministries

Group-defined ministries are among the first ministries that develop in most churches. Whether it's caring for children, getting the teen-agers together, or visiting shut-ins, certain groups of people need special attention. Clubs and support groups can also be a great "side door" into the church, a way for your members to invite friends who would be wary of a church service.

Infants, children, teens, young adults and the elderly have different abilities and needs, so Sunday School classes and fellowship opportunities are often broken up according to age. Some churches expect all ages to participate in the main worship service, while others provide alternatives for some age groups. Often, the responsibility for providing all these ministries falls on the one age group I didn't mention – active adults. Don't forget to provide for them while they are providing for everyone else.

In modern society, churches need to take special precautions to protect the children in their care, and to protect members who work with children. It's not unknown for child predators to stalk churches looking for their next victim. It's also not unknown for perfectly innocent church workers to be charged with molesting the children in their care. You need a system in place to protect both. The most basic element is a requirement that two adults must always be present in any children's class or ministry. You also need a way of knowing who is authorized to take a particular child out of your care.

Age Groups

Infants and pre-schoolers

Don't discount the ability of even very young children to learn about God. Babies can learn to associate Jesus and church with feeling good and secure. Toddlers can learn songs and Bible stories. Some people treat the nursery as just a place to warehouse children while their parents do church stuff. It can be so much more.

On the practical side, safety and cleanliness are your top priorities for this age group. If the parents don't feel confident that you will take good care of their child, they won't use your children's ministry, and they may even leave your church.

Children

Don't underestimate the spiritual potential of children. They have a way of asking questions that get right to the heart of a matter, and their simple faith can lead them to pray powerful prayers. Make opportunities for them to practice what you teach them. And encourage them to invite their friends. Children can be great evangelists.

Teens

Many churches focus their youth groups on games and food, with little spiritual content. Churches can't compete with the secular world in the area of entertainment. But many teens are very interested in the deeper questions of life. They want to know that their lives have meaning, that they can make a difference. When teenagers become committed to a cause, they go all the way. Ask God to show you how to tap into that passion.

Young adults

Most adult needs are based around life situations, which we'll talk about in a moment. Some churches have specific groups that focus on young adults as an age group. Don't try to organize activities for these groups. They are fully capable of doing that themselves. Just facilitate and support them – and as always, keep an eye on what they are doing so you can head off potential trouble, such as a false teaching infiltrating the group, before it arises.

The elderly

In some cultures, as people get old enough that they are no longer physically able to do the kind of work they used to, they begin to feel useless. This is a great time to encourage them to become part of a prayer ministry. Even if they can't get out to prayer meetings, they can certainly pray. Their age gives them the wisdom and experience to pray in detail about things that are going on in the church. Encourage them that God may have spent their whole lives preparing them for this most important ministry.

Life Situation Groups

Grouping people by age is an easy and often effective way of tailoring ministry to certain shared needs, but there are other groupings that should not be ignored. For instance, people in a particular life situation may share similar needs. Many churches have groups for women, men, singles, parents of small children, or widows and widowers. Each situation has its own unique set of challenges to living the Christian life. Sometimes it's helpful to be around people who understand what you're going through. Sometimes it's just more fun to be with people when you have something in common.

Support Groups

Support groups are a specialized kind of life situation ministry. Some events or situations leave people needing special help that is best provided by others dealing with the same issues, perhaps with a trained facilitator. People struggling with addictions, dealing with grief, raising a child with disabilities, healing from various forms of abuse, women facing emotional aftermath from abortion, these and many more can benefit from meeting together to support each other. Some of these groups are short-term, others may last a lifetime. All are opportunities to demonstrate the love and power of God to people who may be unusually aware of just how much they need it.

Interest Groups

Interest groups and clubs can be great ways to get people together for fellowship and demonstrate how God fits into every area of life. Groups can be organized around hobbies, sports, almost anything. Every church activity doesn't have to be overtly spiritual. One of the best ways for people to come to the Lord and grow in discipleship is to just spend time with mature Christians. Interest groups are a great opportunity to do that.

Support Ministries

Does your church meet in a building? Do you receive tithes and offerings? Do you spend or give away money? Is anyone other than the pastor involved in making decisions or carrying out ministries? Do you make copies, order supplies, or keep records?

If you are like most pastors, the answer to all these questions is yes. Caring for all these details may not seem like ministries, but they are, and vital ones at that. These are what I call resourcing or support ministries. You could say **they make all the other ministries possible**. They support all the other ministries by providing the resources that allow them to function.

There are basically four resource areas that need to be responsibly handled if your church is to function smoothly: **money, property, personnel and administration**. In smaller churches all these areas may be handled by one group, sometimes called deacons or elders, sometimes called an administrative board or church council or presbytery. In other systems each area has its own group. I'll talk more about these areas in upcoming chapters.

Support ministries all face a common temptation: getting priorities backwards. It's way too easy to start looking at evangelism as a way to get more people to support the church budget, instead of remembering that the purpose of the budget is to win people to Christ, and carry out other ministries. It's way too easy to ban children from certain areas of the building because they might mess it up, instead of remembering that the building is just a tool for ministry, including ministry to children. Keep your people focused on what really matters.

As pastor, Ephesians 4:12 says your job is to equip the people to carry out the ministries. That makes you the main resourcing and support minister. In other words, a big part of your job is to **make sure your leaders and workers in all kinds of ministries are trained, equipped and encouraged.**

The Ministry Matrix

Task-defined ministries focus on doing a specific ministry task, usually for the whole range of people. Group-defined ministries focus on ministering to the needs of a specific group of people, usually with the whole range of ministry tasks. **The ministry matrix is a way of reminding your task-based ministries of all the different groups they need to serve, and your group-based ministries of all the different ministries they can be involved in.**

Let's draw a ministry matrix for your church and we'll see how it works. Take a piece of paper and list all your task-defined ministries in a column down one side. Then list all your group-defined ministries across the top. Draw lines across the paper between each task, and down the paper between

MINISTRIES

each group. The grid you've just drawn is your ministry matrix.
Here's an example:

	Children	Youth	Women	Addiction Support
Worship				
Member Care				
Discipleship				
Evangelism				
Aid				
Social Influence				
Prayer				

This is how it works. Say your worship ministry group is planning a special Easter service. As part of their planning they can look across the columns and ask themselves, “Will children understand this service? Is there a place for them? What about the teenagers? Would the women’s group like to coordinate a meal afterwards? Is there anything in the service that could especially help people overcoming addictions, or potentially pose a problem for them?” Every task-defined ministry group can do the same. Basically you are asking two questions for each group. First, **how will our event or our overall ministry serve this group?** Second, **is there a way this group can help us with our event or ministry?**

Going the other direction, each group-defined ministry should go down the page and think about what their group needs from each area, and how they can be involved in it. For instance, the children’s ministry group should periodically ask, “How are we teaching the children to worship, and involving them in our worship services? Do we follow up when a child stops coming? How well are we helping our children grow up as good disciples of Jesus? Are we winning children to Christ and teaching them to share their faith? How can children be involved in our service projects? How can we help our children think in a Christian way about what’s going on in the world? Are

we teaching our children to pray effectively, and do we appreciate the power of their prayers?” Again, you are asking two kinds of questions for each area of ministry. First, **is my group being ministered to in this area?** Second, **how can my group be involved in carrying out this kind of ministry?**

Ministry Planning

Most churches find it helpful to get all the ministry leaders together once a year to plan events for the next twelve to eighteen months. Probably the most common way to do it is also the least effective. That’s to have a meeting in the same place and time slot where you usually have meetings, pull out a calendar, and pencil in all the things you did last year. If you want to totally exclude creativity and new ideas, that’s a good way to do it.

I’m guessing you don’t want to totally exclude creativity and new ideas. In fact, you may even be in favor of them, at least a little. In that case, your goal isn’t just to put some events on the calendar. Your goal is to find out what God has in mind for your church for the coming year, and through you for your community. Here are some ideas I’ve found helpful. We covered some of these in Chapter 13, but I’ve repeated them here to keep them all together.

Meet someplace different

It’s amazing how a simple change of scenery can spark creativity. It doesn’t need to be anything fancy. Maybe your town has a library with a meeting space available to the public. Maybe there’s a park with a pavilion. Perhaps there’s another church in town with a room they would let you use. The point is to get your people’s thinking out of the same old rut. That’s a whole lot easier if you’re not in the same old place.

Allow plenty of time

It's hard to explore new ideas if everyone is watching the clock. Allow at least half a day. A full day, with a break for lunch, is better. If you can do it, an overnight retreat with your leaders can be a wonderful way to combine planning with fellowship and spiritual growth.

Invite a guest facilitator

Just as a change of scenery can spark creativity, so can a change of voice. Somebody said, "An expert is somebody who gets off an airplane with a briefcase." You don't have to fly someone in. Perhaps you and a pastor friend can trade off facilitating for each other. We listed some of the reasons for this in Chapter 13.

Appoint one official note taker

Everyone should take notes, but be sure you designate one person to keep the official version. That way, when Charlie says, "My notes say we're going to do that on the 20th" and Sue says, "I wrote down the 27th," you have a place to go for an authoritative answer.

Start with a brief Bible study

After your opening prayer, don't just dive right into filling the calendar. Take some time to remind everyone what this meeting is really all about: discerning the specific things God wants you to do in the coming year to fulfill the three purposes of the church. A time of interactive Bible study around those areas can help people refocus. This can be especially important if some of your leaders have jobs that involve similar kinds of planning activities, but very different goals and priorities.

Revisit your vision and mission statements

If you have written vision and mission statements, take a few minutes to review them. Remind yourselves of what they say and why you wrote them that way. Consider asking your leaders if anyone feels there is anything about them that might need to be re-evaluated or updated. One of the main reasons for having these statements is to help you decide whether any given event or program is fulfilling your church's calling. Before anything goes on the calendar, you should be able to say how it helps advance your vision and mission.

Evaluate the last year

What worked well? What didn't? What could you improve? What might not be worth doing again? Almost every program or event has a life cycle. First it's new and exciting, then it becomes routine, then it becomes "the way we've always done it," then it begins to lose effectiveness. Finally it's time to put it to rest, and invest your time and resources elsewhere. That can be a hard decision, but a necessary one. When people stop coming because they want to, and only show up out of a sense of duty, that's a good sign that you probably need to start looking for something new. On the other hand, I've always felt that if even a few people want to continue an activity, as long as it doesn't take resources that could better be spent elsewhere (including the pastor's time), there is no reason to make them stop.

Dream

I always like to include some time for dreaming. It's sometimes called brainstorming. This is where you ask your group an open-ended question: What is your dream for our church for this year? If money and workers and time were not a problem, what would you like for us to do this year to move us more toward being who God made us to be and doing what God made us to do?

The process is simple. First, everyone throws out ideas while somebody writes them down in a place where everyone can see them. After the ideas stop or a set time runs out, the group chooses a few ideas that seem worth further investigation.

It's amazing how exciting and creative this process can be. But it only works if one very important rule is followed: during the first stage, when ideas are being tossed out, no discussion is allowed. Every idea gets written down, no matter how crazy or impossible it might seem.

The first few times you use this process you will have to work hard to enforce this rule, but be strong. If you don't, people will grab the first idea that is suggested and start talking about whether they think it will work, how much it will cost, who would be in charge, and how some other church tried it and it didn't work. You'll use up all your time, and people will be discouraged from suggesting other ideas. Make sure you get all the ideas out on the table before you begin sorting them out and evaluating them.

Seek synergy

Use your ministry matrix. Look for how the different areas of your church can work together. How can an educational activity also involve fellowship? How can a fellowship activity also involve evangelism? How can the men help with a woman's activity? How can a children's activity involve worship? Be creative. Don't let the lines between your ministries become walls.

Avoid scheduling conflicts with local events

I once served a church where many of the most active people were also rabid Washington Redskins football fans. I quickly discovered that if I wanted anyone to come to a meeting or event, I better not schedule it when the Redskins had a game.

In your community, what draws crowds may be sports or school events or civic activities or even another church's annual affair. Before your planning meeting, task someone with finding out as many of these dates as they can,

so you can take them into account in scheduling your own events. Of course, you also want to avoid conflicts within your own church.

Agree on who is responsible

How many times have you heard this exchange? “Weren’t you supposed to do that?” “Oh no, I thought you were going to.” For each activity, be sure everyone is clear about who is in charge – especially the person in charge. When more than one person is involved, be sure everyone knows who is supposed to do what, the due date, and who they should tell when they have done it or if a problem comes up.

Send a summary to all participants

You can put everything on a calendar, list planned activities in chronological order, or group the activities according to who is responsible. However you do it, make sure your records include who, what, when and where for every planned event.

Report to the congregation

Your people want to know what their leaders have planned for them. Reporting back makes them feel like their church is active and alive. It lets them get church events onto their own calendars. And it’s a great opportunity to encourage people to get involved in particular activities.

Set your budget later

We’ll deal with budgeting, and the pros and cons of a written budget, in Chapter 17. I bring it up now because experience shows that if you set your budget before you plan your ministries, your financial expectations will limit your dreams. And remember what Jesus said: *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (Matthew 6:21 ESV). How you spend your money reveals

your priorities. If you set your budget first, your spending priorities will most likely have been set with a money mindset rather than a ministry mindset. Remember, money is just a tool to help you do ministry. Let your ministry goals drive your budget, not the other way around.

Make long-term plans

Besides annual planning meetings, **it's important to have some long-term goals in mind.** What does God want your church to look like in three years? Five? Ten? Naturally, the farther out you get, the less certain and specific you can be, but you do need to have some kind of direction in mind. Especially when it comes to acquiring a building, or buying equipment, or hiring a staff person, knowing your ministry priorities is vital. Do you need a kitchen or a classroom? An organ or a drum set? A youth pastor or a custodian?

In my experience, many people have unspoken assumptions about what the church is all about and where it should be heading. They are unspoken because everyone assumes everyone else sees things the same way. When you reach a decision point and people discover that other people have different ideas, they can feel surprised and even betrayed. A long-term plan can start these discussions without the stress of an impending decision.

Long-term planning, sometimes called strategic planning, is a long process. Consider the needs and resources of your church and the needs and resources of your community. Look for places where they intersect. Remember that your people are your greatest resource, other than the power of prayer.

Points to Remember

- Train, support, resource, encourage and oversee your people, but beyond that, let them do their ministries, and you do yours.
- The job of ministry groups is to organize and promote ministries so that everyone can do them.
- What you call your ministry groups can determine how people see them.
- Some ministries focus on tasks, others on people groups, others on

support and resourcing.

- Gather your leaders to evaluate, plan and coordinate ministry activities at least once a year.