

FULL-TIME MINISTRY PEOPLE

Part One



Church leaders influence people for God. All of us have been especially blessed and impacted by those who are in full-time ministry.

But some have disappointed and hurt us too. Who should be in full-time ministry? How should they get started? What should they be doing? What should they be called? Who are they accountable to? How should they be supported? How much should they get? And should anyone know how much they are receiving?

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

Regular ministers vs. full-time ministries

Every Christian is an ambassador, servant or minister of Christ. But in the New Testament church some were set apart for special service for which they were to be financially supported. This special group of people is the focus of this article.

GETTING INTO MINISTRY

Talk about New Testament variety!

Timothy and Titus were spotted, recruited, trained and supervised by Paul.

Called, in the most direct possible sense Jesus himself spoke to, called and trained the twelve. Saul, a highly trained Rabinnic Jew heard a voice from heaven. There could be no question as the clarity of these calls to ministry. ·

Motivated from within

There is no record of the polished and wellschooled Apollos being called. He simply appears in the pages of Scripture as a man with a message from God. Stephanus and his family "devoted themselves to the ministry". The elders of whom Paul wrote to Timothy worked hard at preaching and teaching. We don't know how many of them were in full-time ministry. But there is no record the apostles were. ·

Observed & Recruited.

Timothy and Titus were reliable "volunteer ministers". They were spotted, recruited, trained and supervised by Paul. And considering the kind of man we know Paul to have been they probably not the only ones he "introduced" to full-time ministry! The Biblical principle is that people may be moved by God and His people to enter fulltime ministry in a wide variety of ways!

Doing Ministry

If the paths to ministry in the New Testament seem diverse and lacking in uniformity, the task to which they were committed was not. The work involved spreading the Good News, making disciples and establishing self-propagating churches throughout the world.

The relationships of full-time ministers

It should go without saying that their relationship with God was the primary one. On human terms they had no obvious hierarchical structures although some like Peter, James and Paul carried lots of weight. More experienced ministers tended to influence or supervise those with less experience. In general terms, supervision was informal, based more on calling, giftedness, maturity and experience rather than on rank or structure.

Pragmatic Realities 2000 years of History

Every Christian in our generation has been powerfully impacted by 2000 years of history. Terms like clergy, missionary, reverend, support personnel, lay-preachers, laity have accumulated special meanings which impact each of us in slightly different ways. Even Biblical words like: bishop, priest, pastor, minister, deacon, commendation, ordination, evangelist, apostle, prophet, false prophet, church - all have extra significance for us because of their historical usage. Few of us would consider calling the leaders of our churches bishops, even though it is a perfectly good New Testament word.

Denominational Distinctives

Every denomination or grouping of churches began with a desire to correct wrongs or to better fulfill perceived Biblical priorities. After years of practising those new directives their uniqueness tends to fade. Other church groupings or denominations pick up on good ideas. People gradually discover that theirs is not the only Biblically obedient group. We are living in an era of rapid travel and communication. People of different denominations are mingling and talking like never before. Denominational barriers are coming down, sometimes in very positive ways and other times carelessly and without much thought. How we view full-time ministry people both in our circles and in others is coloured by diverse denominational practices.

Diverse Governments

Governments require churches to be organized in ways they can relate to. In Canada government bodies regulate funds we receipt, marriages we perform and trusteeships or corporations we establish. How we are organized and administer our finances in support of full-time ministry people is shaped in part by the governments we live under.

Cultural Shifts

The settings in which ministry are done impact their style and mode of operation. If ministry is being carried forward in a country with a rigid class system, full-time ministry people will be forced to adapt to some degree. Similarly, levels of wealth and education make a difference in how leadership is practiced. Some societies or cultures like their leaders to be strong and authoritarian. Others want leaders who are more inclined to dialogue and consensus. Some adaptation is necessary. We are living at a time when communication is instant. People are moving all around the globe everyday.

Concluding Words

How people get into ministry, what they do, what they are called, how accountability works, and how they should be supported financially will differ. This is true in part because the New Testament itself provides us with an adaptable set of principles - more than a rigid list of rules. It is also true because our practices are impacted by pragmatic realities. It takes courage and faith for every generation in every place to blend these two strands.

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