How Ministry Teams Get Things Done

The pastor charged with recruiting teachers for the congregation's Sunday school classes expressed her frustration: "Every year it gets harder and I don't see that changing! I've tried every strategy and reached out to new people over and over again. At least I know one thing—what I'm doing isn't working." But one thing this leader and many others have not yet tried is a ministry team approach.

The biggest myth about mobilizing teams is that they can be created by gathering a few people together and naming them a team.[1] Leaders often wonder: Can a church add ministry teams without revising their present structure or bylaws? Yes! Churches that transition to a team-driven methodology add teams while reducing the number and size of their traditional committees. Although the church neither renames nor disbands all of its committees, those groups may meet less frequently.

Unleashing the Power of Teams

Each ministry team is comprised of church members and worshipers who have not yet joined the church. Unlike committee appointments, ministry-team coordinators recruit for their teams throughout the year.[2] Anyone can be invited at any time to join a team. Being part of a ministry team offers in-service learning and a sense of belonging for congregational newcomers. Further, the governing board and committees do not assume micro-management control of ministry teams. Rather, they hold ministry teams accountable to their church's core values, beliefs, vision, and mission.

Ministry-focused vs. constituency-focused. Traditional, constituency-focused committees tend to be assigned tasks. Each member senses a responsibility to represent the constituency that appointed him or her. When churches establish committees (typically on an annual basis), members are elected or appointed to reflect the diverse views of the congregation. Thus, committee members relate to the leaders or group who gave them their charge and to those they represent. In contrast, ministry-focused teams seek out individuals with the skills and talents needed to make the team work effectively. As a result, team members relate to each other and look for ways to best use their gifts to make a difference. In this way, the enthusiasm generated for ministry glues the team together.

Shared leadership vs. designated chairperson. In teams, the leadership function is shared by team members. In the most high-functioning teams, every member considers him- or herself to be a leader. A consensus model of decision making works well because members feel free to act on their own sense of things. Whereas in a committee, individuals may feel the pull to represent the interests of a constituent group. Because the committee chairperson receives authorization from the church's governing board, he or she assumes responsibility for communicating the committee's decisions back to the board. In effect, an expansion of team ministry decentralizes congregational control.

Motivating people vs. maintaining control. Teams unleash the three factors that motivate people—autonomy,

THE ONE DISADVANTAGE OF ADOPTING
A MINISTRY TEAM APPROACH IN YOUR CHURCH.

mastery, and purpose. Delegating leaders, in the traditional committee model, give subordinates responsibility for decision making and problem solving. While delegation works in situations where people draw paychecks for their work rather than intrinsic rewards, Daniel Pink asserts in his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us* that workers gain autonomy when they own independence over "their task, their time, their technique, and their team."[3] Thus, ministry teams help satisfy the innate human need to be needed, help others, make a difference, share their God-given gifts, master skills and learn new ones, enhance self-esteem, and gain a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Setting up a Team to Succeed

Creating an effective team requires intentionality and accountability. First, the team's purpose must be clearly defined by the group. For example, if a team achieves its purpose, what will be the result or impact? What will be different because of the team's work? Teams can get distracted and over time expand their task list. Teams that state their purpose in writing and have continuing conversations about their focus tend to avoid wandering away from their original assignment.

Second, what type of team is needed? Understanding the distinct work of three types of teams enhances the probability that members with the right gifts will be recruited.

- *Decision-making teams* take on big-picture issues like making choices about a congregation's vision, identifying the goals that move the church toward its next chapter in ministry, or outlining strategies for building financial stability. Strategic planning or visioning teams are good examples of this type of teamwork that eventually is taken under consideration by the entire congregation.
- *Task-accomplishing teams* undertake specific assignments important to the church's mission. For example, a task team may take on the responsibility of providing a free breakfast to community residents each weekday in the church's fellowship hall. Task teams are evaluated by how well they carry out their assignments.
- *Self-directed teams* assume a great deal of autonomy to accomplish their goals. For example, church leaders know they need to review their policies with regard to the use of church facilities by community groups. A team is formed to conduct the review, gather information, and make recommendations about rental policies and fees.

Third, how many people make up a good team? Research indicates that five to seven individuals is about the right size. For instance, Amazon.com, which operates with teams, suggests that team size is optimal when "two pizzas" can feed the team. Team size operates independently of the size of the congregation. Even large congregations need to exercise discipline to keep teams in the two-pizza range.

Fourth, effective teams pay attention to the small issues. The following specific behaviors undermine a team when members fail to

- show up or arrive on time for meetings
- respond to emails, texts, or other communications in a timely way
- demonstrate commitment to the work or complete assignments on time
- share resources and credit for work well done.[4]

Finally, few teams operate effectively in a congregation struggling with dysfunction. A dysfunctional congregation is characterized by an absence of trust. Congregational leaders must earn trust and work to create trust within the congregation as whole.

"Every Member in Ministry"

One congregation that uses the ministry team model adopted "every member in ministry" as their motto. By involving a high percentage of members in team ministries, the church grew several hundred new ministries. Congregations and other nonprofits are America's largest employers. Volunteers show up for work in churches that "pay well." The "salary" they seek is challenge, personal growth, opportunity to make a difference, and meaningful experiences and relationships. How well does your church pay?

1. Material drawn from John W. Wimberly Jr., *Mobilizing Congregations: How Teams Can Motivate Members and Get Things Done* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015). See also *Church Effectiveness Nuggets*, Vol. 23, "Fine Tuning the Organizational and Communication Engine," http://www.theparishpaper.com/sites/default/files/resources/Church%20Effectiveness%20Nuggets-%20Volume%2023.pdf

2. Depending on team type, coordinators arise from the team or are recruited by church leadership.

3. Daniel Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), p. 94.

4. William Dyer, et al., *Team Building*, 4th Edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).