Are You Helping or Hurting Your Mission?

One of the keys to a church's missional success is how its members are deployed. There are two approaches—one facilitates the church's mission; the other often frustrates it. **Few in the church ever clarify this choice, but every church makes it, and every church lives with the consequences of its choice.**

The *institutional* approach to lay ministry begins with the needs of the institution. Every church needs Sunday school teachers, committee members, musicians, ushers. In the institutional approach, when a job opens up, the response is to search for a person who seems most suitable to fill it and/or is most likely to say yes. Success, in such churches, is when a member says, "Okay, I'll do it." Hopefully the person is qualified, gifted, and motivated for that ministry; but there are no guarantees. If it turns out there is a mismatch between member and task, the result is a job poorly done and a member mostly frustrated. "Plugging warm bodies into ministry slots in a congregation," says Pam Heaton, "tends to increase volunteer burnout, dissatisfaction, and departure."[i] With the institutional approach to lay ministry, church members exist to serve the needs of the institution.

The *individual* approach is far less widely practiced, but significantly more effective for missional success. Here the goal is not to fill a vacancy but to find or create a place where members can joyfully and productively participate in the mission. Rather than beginning with the needs of the institution, the individual approach begins with the strengths of the person. Church members are encouraged to try a position related to their interest and see how it fits. If it does, the member may choose to spend more time in that ministry and/or receive additional training. If the task is not comfortable, or the person does not feel a sense of calling, he or she is guided to explore other ministries that might be a better fit. If a match cannot be found, creating a new ministry is explored. In the individual approach to lay ministry the institution exists for the benefit of the people rather than the people for the benefit of the institution.

Consider the difference in results of these two approaches to lay ministry…

Ministry Measure	*Institutional* Approach	*Individual* Approach
Percent of the church community involved in ministry	Less than 20%	More than 20%
Individual's satisfaction with ministry task	Often frustrated	Usually fulfilled
Personal energy level as a result of the task	Drained	Rejuvenated
Reason for participating	Doing what I must	Doing what I like
Effect on interpersonal church relationships	Friction	Fusion
Number of people declining to serve	Many	Few
Resignations from the task throughout the year	Frequent	Infrequent
Church leaders' motivation for filling the role	Institutional need	Individual growth
Frequency of new ministries created	Seldom	Often

Take a Lay Ministry Check-Up…

The chart below can help you discern whether your present approach to lay ministry is increasing or decreasing the liklihood of missional success. First, write in line 1 the number that represents your total church constituency—all church members, plus regular attenders who are not officially members (above age thirteen). Next, determine in which column your church falls on rows 2-18. All the numbers in the chart are percentages. Calculate your percentages based on your total church constituency (line 1), unless otherwise noted.

If you find your scores are primarily in the left columns, it is likely that your members are seen as "workers" and the focus of your ministry is on the church institution. The farther your scores are to the right, the more likely your members are seen as "ministers," and the focus of your ministry is on people.

"Workers" - - - - - - - - - - - - "Ministers"

	PROBLEM AREA	NEEDS ATTENTION	AVERAGE	GOOD	IDEAL
1. TOTAL CHURCH CONSTITUENCY: _____					
2. Constituents with a specific role/task	0-20	21-29	30-49	50-69	70+
3. Constituents with a "church-focused" role (% of #2)	96+	95-86	85-75	74-61	60>
4. Constituents with an "outward-focused" role (% of #2)	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20+
5. Constituents who attended worship 1+ in past 4 weeks	0-34	35-44	45-59	60-69	70+
6. Total # of constituents involved in a small group	0-10	11-29	30-45	46-64	65+
7. Constituents who began attending in last 12 months	0-2	3-4	5-6	7-10	11+
8. New constituents (from #7) with a role/task	0-29	30-44	45-59	60-69	70+
9. New constituents (from #7) involved in a small group	0-29	30-49	50-69	70-79	80+
10. Constituents who began attending 12-24 months ago	0-2	3-4	5-6	7-10	11+
11. Constituents (from #10) with a role/task	0-29	30-44	45-59	60-69	70+
12. Constituents (from #10) involved in a small group	0-29	30-49	50-69	70-79	80+
13. Total role/task positions available in the church	0-20	21-29	30-49	50-69	70+
14. Role/task positions with written job description	0-10	11-29	30-50	51-74	75+
15. Positions with specific pre-service training	0-10	11-29	30-50	51-69	70+
16. "Maintenance" oriented role/task positions (from #13)	90+	89-80	79-70	69-60	59>
17. "Outreach" oriented role/task positions (from #13)	0-8	9-15	16-20	21-34	35+
18. New roles/tasks created in the last 12 mo. (from #13)	0-2	3-4	5-6	7-10	11+

Row groups (left margin labels): rows 2–6 = **People Involved**; rows 7–12 = **New Attenders**; rows 13–18 = **Ministry Positions**

Source: *The Growth Report* Vol. 2 No. 6, Institute for American Church Growth (Pasadena, CA)

Ask a team of 3-4 people in your church to do this research and report back what they have found. Then **use the following questions to focus discussion** among your leaders about how to best accomplish the work Christ has given your church:

1. On which side of the chart do most of our scores fall?
2. Are the results of this assessment consistent with our previous perceptions?
3. Which items seem to be most important to address?
4. What activities do we engage in that have brought us to this point? Can they, or should they, be changed?
5. What steps would be involved in moving toward an *individual* approach to lay ministry, and away from an *institutional* approach?

(See ***What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Rules for Effective Church Leadership*** [Gary McIntosh & Charles Arn] for more practical tools on this and other topics related to church health/growth. Available April, 2013 from Baker Books.)