

15
D
15

NORTH AMERICAN STUDY CONFERENCE - OCTOBER 15-17, 1986

**A RESPONSE TO "A SERVING PEOPLE"
by Ron Penner**

Thanks to Brother Herb for raising a number of provocative insights for us on some key questions.

I offer several reflections, questions for clarification and some suggestions for further discussion.

1. On Servanthood...

In our era of individualism and consumerism, we do need to be reminded that one of our central goals is to do the hard work of sacrificial service. The paper offers us an excellent Biblical background on servanthood.

What I do miss is a discussion around the real-life issues of being servant-leaders. How does one serve and lead at the same time? Does servant leadership end with modeling, or is there scope for taking initiative or even becoming directive under certain circumstances?

2. On Spiritual Gifts...

The section highlighting the equal "gifting" of men and women, clergy and laity, is a point which we need to hear in our day. [68:13] Given our denomination's commitment to encouraging our sisters' gifts in ministry, this affirmation challenges us to encourage such ministries in our churches.

3. On Clergy and Laity...

What I understand Herb to be concerned about in this section is to:

- * Have each member of the church be thinking and dreaming a vision for the church and its ministry,
- * Make room for non-salaried members to be involved in leadership and decisionmaking, and
- * Avoid both extremes of authoritarian leadership and the tyranny of individuals or small groups in the church blocking the decisionmaking process.

As I read and reread the section I was left with some disease about several matters.

- * I kept wondering what good leadership looked like. "Strong

leadership," tends to be linked with an anticongregational style, "pyramidal, centralized, top-down." What would good leadership look like in a congregational model? This is one of the key questions I would lift out for our discussion.

* I wonder about the degree of correlation between the model of leadership and the utilization of gifted lay persons. The suggestion is that "strong leadership" will result in less lay involvement. We could cite examples where this is the case, but we could also identify churches where this is not so. We may need further work on this. But I would urge caution in accepting this as a kind of conventional wisdom.

* Similarly, I would question whether centralized decisionmaking is automatically the domain of professional clergy and lay persons are only in support ministries. [70:51] There are churches where the leadership group consists primarily of "lay-persons."

* Is it necessarily the PRIMARY domain of the professional clergy to train and equip laypersons for service? [71:19] Could this not also be the responsibility of every gifted equipper in the church, whether salaried or unsalaried?

4. On Women in Leadership...

I appreciate Herb's intent to build a case for women in ministry from a Biblical base (equal giftedness; restriction passages) and a logical base (consistency).

The ordination/blessing for ministry suggestion is a helpful one, providing, I would suggest, that we build in ways of covering one of the other major purposes of the process, namely checking one's doctrine.

Herb's position I believe is that of encouraging women to have full access to ministry (except for the position of leading pastor) and therefore also to blessing for ministry. It strikes me that one of the direct implications for our churches is to open our hearts and associate staff positions to our sisters. Or, will our sisters have to go to other denominations to exercise their gifts and ministries? That stands before us as a direct and immediate challenge in the decades ahead.