



## Preacher's Pen *by Gene McCoy*

In April of 1993 I preached a sermon among a series of three when our congregation was considering my employment. The thesis of that message, as true today as it was then, is the fact that what a church needs is not more **members** but rather more **ministers**. One of the principles supporting that thesis is the fact that any organization is limited in size and productivity by the scope of the leaders' ability to manage the people and resources. I cannot recall the statistics or the figures, but it would require an extremely gifted leader to effect and oversee the growth of a congregation beyond our current size, especially in our culture dominated by consumer-minded people (a.k.a. church customers).

The biblical principle is expressed in Eph. 4:12. God gave to the church various people whose purpose is to equip Christians for the work of service. The goal is the building up of the body of Christ. The building up in this Scripture is spiritual rather than numerical. The thesis of my sermon is supported just the same, however. Our primary purpose is not to add members to our congregation but to raise up and equip ministers to do the work of serving. Our goal is not to bring more customers into our congregation to consume the services we offer, but rather to recruit more disciples who will eagerly submit to a systematic and intentional training regimen to become more effective and productive servants.

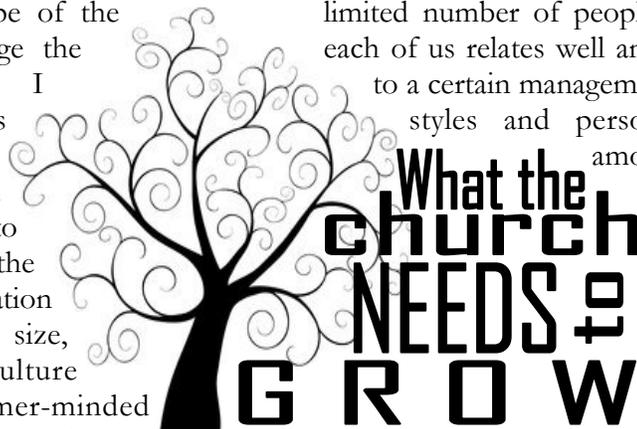
But the consumer mentality constantly challenges the attempts of responsible church leaders to fulfill their commission. That the focus of many is upon customer satisfaction rather than training for service is evidenced by the things about which they grouse. They usually reveal self-absorption. This, in itself,

mitigates against the Lord's commission to make disciples.

One reason a church stagnates at a numerical plateau is that the current leaders have reached the capacity of their ability or willingness to manage the people or resources. It may also be attributed to the fact that any given leader is going to be effective with only a limited number of people. The reality is that each of us relates well and responds favorably to a certain management style. So the fewer styles and personalities represented among the leaders in a group the more limited will be the growth of that organization. In either scenario, the conclusion is the same. We need more ministers.

Our experience is not unique or isolated, which is no consolation. Every congregation always needs more ministers — more people who are intent upon serving the body to build it up. These servants are needed at every level. But I am addressing the need for more men who will prepare for leadership roles.

Since we first identified eight areas of church life for which deacons were needed, there have been only rare periods during which we have had a full complement of such servants. For over a year, the preacher and youth minister have functioned in that role, as has one Elder. Three of the eight ministry teams are being led by men who already hold another demanding leadership role in the church. This could be tenable if there were men in the process of preparing to assume the duties. But such is not the case in our congregation. This should prompt grave concern and be a matter of ardent prayer as we consider the implications regarding the long-term health of the congregation. This is especially true in view of the fact that these



men, now serving by default, are over-extended. The growth and health of our congregation is compromised and hindered by the dearth of qualified ministry leaders.

Adding new members to the congregation without the benefit of capable and willing deacons to take responsibility in employing them in ministry is to build a house of cards that will collapse beneath its own weight as consumers grow discontent by the inability of the congregation to provide whatever they think they need. If the trend of recent years continues, in which we have seen a decline in the number of deacons, our congregation will be more ill-equipped to nurture a body that serves.

This is not an appeal for men motivated by guilt to step into this office. One should satisfy the biblical standard before assuming the office. But it is an appeal for more men to seriously pursue leadership roles in the congregation by becoming intentional in Bible instruction and deliberate about on-the-job training.

The solution in the minds of some is to hire more staff members to do this work. Even if we could afford more salaries, that would not relieve us from the teaching of Eph. 4:12! Rather than *staff* up we need to *man* up.

I challenge men having the potential to qualify for leadership offices to actively pursue such functions. Participate in a serious course of Bible instruction and study so as to become more knowledgeable and adept in using the Scriptures to teach others. Become involved in a ministry team that does not currently have a “dedicated” deacon — one who is not distracted by other leadership duties that warrant his full attention. Take initiative to learn from those now doing the job and offer to serve as an apprentice until you become biblically qualified and adequately equipped. Ask the Elder liaison for a ministry team needing leadership to mentor and groom you for that role.

Make the ongoing strength and stability of our congregation your personal interest and responsibility right now as you train for leadership service. The congregation will not grow above and beyond the ability of the leaders to manage. Nor will it rise above the level of the leaders’ maturity in Bible knowledge and spiritual judgment. The future of this congregation depends upon the next generation of leaders. Who will they be? We must not wait until tomorrow to identify them!