

What happens inside the preacher during sermon preparation plays a huge part in establishing credible preaching and worship.

**Rebirth of the Congregation** ---- a quote from R. E. Bieber.

*“As long as the treasure of God’s grace is borne in the earthen vessels of these human bodies, the congregation will doubtless remain the body into which believers fit and in which they function in any given place on earth. The congregation is in fact the only concrete manifestation of the Church on earth. It is the place on earth where the corporate life of the body of Christ becomes actual.*

*Conventions and vast assemblies of people may at times rise to a level of genuine worship and impart to the people a sense of the presence of God. But the place where the Body of Christ becomes apparent as a body is where believers renew their commitment to their Lord, to each other, and to the wounds of the world, week by week, as they have done unbrokenly in the congregation for twenty centuries even while the structures above them have risen and fallen.*

*Where else can Paul’s analogy of the human body really apply, but in the congregation? Where else does one person need another as the foot needs the eye? Or serve another as the hand serves the mouth? Where else is the seat of the Church’s life on earth?”*

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## Murmuring about Ministry

In a fast moving secular society the traditional model of Christian Ministry has changed. The local Church and the way it functioned used to largely depend upon the influence of **one person**, the Minister. Not today. A clear shift in understanding and practise has already occurred for two major reasons.

**Firstly**, our culture, the way we live and think is subject to rapid change. In the complex and socially diverse world that we live in it is impossible for one person to stretch themselves across the needs of all the generations and expectations of the community like some sort of all round ‘Super Person.’

**Secondly**, we have discovered that while God always provides specific people and gifts to lead and care for the church, the bible clearly says that every member is gifted and equipped by the Holy Spirit in different ways to engage in ministry. When each member does this, the Body of Christ is healthy and built up to a position of strength and maturity. Eph 4.12

If we have not really understood these two principles that have changed the way the church practises ministry today our expectations will be unrealistic. In our frustration it may even seem as if the ordained clergy of today are copping out of their traditional role when in reality the way they minister has changed. If we have inherited an **elevated view** of the ordained clergy as people who are a little more Christian than the average person we will need to adjust our thinking. If we have inherited a **passive understanding** of what it means to be a Christian so that we usually attend church to listen and watch, we may need help to identify the gifts God has given us and the Holy Spirit who helps us to find the courage to put them to work.

## Two common responses

1. There is something within us that seeks to project some people into positions of status over others. Sporting or music celebrities are typical examples. In the same way we have a need for a sort of medicine man, a person to be responsible for the mysterious spirit side of life. We will gladly hire someone and pay them if they will stand between ourselves and God. In the Bible God chose Israel to be a different people, to be a nation of Priests as a witness to the surrounding nations. As soon as Moses disappeared into the heights of Sinai the people turned to Aaron and demanded the services of a professional.

The Church like its ancient predecessor can delegate the walk of faith to a paid figurehead but the moment it does this it is into a form of idolatry. To call an ordained Minister is in keeping with the Christian gospel as long as the minister does not become a priest and relieve the people of their corporate ministry and priesthood. The money we put in the offering plate does not take care of our responsibility to share the Good News with others. If we don't share the Good News it means we are poorly taught, ducking out of our role or we are into the idolatry of creating a Super Pastor or Priest.

2. As the Israelites were led by Moses through the wilderness they faced constant change. However they responded to any and every difficulty by constantly **murmuring** and undermining their leader. The Apostle Paul faced a similar problem with the church at Corinth and Galatia. Some of the greatest trouble makers were not those outside but those inside the church who gossiped and stirred up trouble because their own expectations were not being met.. Paul wrote his longest pastoral letter to explain that the Holy Spirit had united Christians into one body with many parts. His most passionate letter was about being free from the law and the influence of those who resisted the new way that God was at work. There must be a better way to respond!!

## Body Ministry ---- the a better way ahead

1. Give thanks for the creative gifts and the diverse ways God is using to minister and reach out to our complex, changing culture and lifestyle.

2. Attending a Church brings us together with people of different personality types. Sometimes it is hard to see how another person can be a valuable member of the Body of Christ. But this truth has the power to transform our attitudes toward each other.

3. Think "Body Ministry". Paul addresses every believer, "*You are the Body of Christ and each one of you is part of it.* 1 Cor. 12:27. God is using **many members** to meet **many various needs** in our diverse world. Instead of murmuring, gossiping or focusing on our personal likes or dislikes of the clergy, prayerfully read and ponder 1 Corinthians Ch.12. Ephesians 4:1-16, being open to what God may want to say to you.

4. Ask Elders and others to help you identify or confirm your gifts, then get on with putting them to use in the church and community so that God can build others up.

5. Encourage others in the use of their gifts. Instead of taking them for granted or of having "just a church job attitude", recognise the continuing ministry of Christ today through ordinary people.

6. Wherever you can, delegate tasks and create opportunities for others. Match peoples gifts to a suitable ministry so they will enjoy being part of the Body of Christ.

7. Pray that amid the distracting pressures of our times that all Ministers of the Word will make space to, "*Devote themselves to prayer and serving the Word*" (Acts 6.4