



LAY PASTORS MINISTRY

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Let me start by defining a laypastor. Usually layman is an ordinary person. For a doctor, it is somebody who has not been trained to understand medicine. In other words layman is some one who is an amateur.

An Anglican priest in one of the Lay pastors training seminar in Nairobi Kenya last month said "a lay man is one of my flock, one of my congregation. One of the ordinary Christian people to whom I have to minister, lead and instruct." But this is not only true in Anglican Church; other churches would answer the same. The assumption is what some one has said that "a layman is one of the privates in Gods army and the officers are the clergy –Ministers, parsons, priests."

It is this understanding that has brought about a distinction and grading of the clergyman and the layman so that it seems as if there are two grades and graces and categories of Christians; the laity and the clergy, with the clergy having the job of running the church, the ministry of deciding the doctrines and administration, and preaching the sermons and above all setting a good example. They have to be first in moral standard ads. But the laity, who might be classified as a second class, are imposed with as it were not having quite the same status in the church or probably in heaven hereafter, nor do they have the same responsibility for the church or for their moral standards

Unfortunately, many churches, church organizations and ministries are growing smaller every year because the clergy has failed to decentralize leadership among the gifted laypeople within the congregation. It is in this regard that the lay pastor's ministry has come in to train and equip the laity among African churches.

In recent years since this ministry {LPM} came in to light within the East and Central African region, this attitude has changed in many churches and has been further developed so that the layman is now filling the place in the church through the decentralized leadership by the clergymen. He is expected to give, or raise money in stewardship campaigns. They contribute time as church treasures, compound keepers, to give the pastor more time for Sunday sermons; they even serve as substitutes to the clergy as local preachers, layleaders, Sunday school teachers, even sick visitors as street corner preachers and evangelists .But again it is it is just filling the gap for shortage of the clergy by doing some minor duties which the pastor can, with careful supervision, delegate.

In the Old Testament, the children of Israel –priests, prophets, and people were

described all together as the people of God. This idea is the same and unfolded in the in the New Testament – the idea of the church which meant not a building, not denomination, not the clergy, but people .The church in the New Testament refers to people of God-a community, a fellowship of Christians meeting anywhere and, in essence, the assembly of called out one .This was the Greek word "Laos"from which we get laity.-the people of God.

These include carpenters, house wives, bussinesmen, governors, kings, etc-the ordinary people all together classified as the people of God, The body of Christ, the church of God.{Romans 12,Ephesians 4,1corinthians 12}

In the biblical definition, there is no clear distinction or grading between clergy and laity, between skilled and unskilled, white and black, well educated and half educated ,male and female, Jews and gentiles ,top and bottom people, All are the people of God.

What evidence determines ones calling is whether he is a devoted and committed Christian. It is not whether he is archbishop or a chauffer. We are all saints in the sense we are human beings sanctified and strengthened an enlivened by the same holy spirit indwelling in our hearts and there is nothing sanctimonious about true Christian living, for it is possible for a lay lady to show more love for God than the tycoon, a laborer than the works manage, a school girl than the headmistress.

This is where the church has made her greatest in staging what has been properly described as a "one man show" where "too often the clergy undertakes to fulfill by themselves the whole ministry of the church and too often the laity delegates their ministry to one man –the clergyman.

Certainly the clergy has been chosen by God to do important functions. He has been ordained in one way or the other, but clergy and laity have particular responsibility to nourish, equip, help and sustain the laity for the ministry. 99% of the church consists of the ordinary people, the non-professional laymen who must become experts as Christians in their own fields. The great question is therefore," where do the ordinary millions of Christians come in the scheme of things in the church? Must the laymen continue to be those who only attend the meetings, pay their money into the coffers of the church to support the programs of the clergy, and just do nothing to try to change things? Do the laymen not want to that count?

Christ does not grant special gifts only to men and women, who are full-time, life time employers of the church .All the people of God share Christ's ministry in and to the world on the frontlines. But the work of frontline soldiers belongs especially

to the laymen who spend most of their working and waking hours in social, political, economic, and cultural areas where decisive battles of faith are being fought.

Indeed the laymen have been well described as "Gods frozen people" This is just why we have failed to fully evangelize the world because laymen are often left out in the church programmes. Most of us, the clergy have forgotten that "while we are constantly looking for better methods but God is looking for better men. Men are Gods methods". For if each nominal Christian in the world, and there are one billion, were motivated and trained to win one person to Christianity in a year and would train that person to repeat the process, the world could be reached in less time and than it has taken us in this generation. If only 20% of those professing Christians would faithfully be trained in the art of personal soul-winning and lay training, the job of the world out reach would be half done.

The lay pastors ministry, Kenya and East Africa's greatest interest now is how the layman in all Christian churches in this region could be trained and equipped for the ministry and in turn be a witness for Christ in the field of his Endeavour, since all Gods people are chosen and all are offered the same grace and guidance of the holly spirit to perform the different functions of the church, *the training of the layman to function in the world has to be uppermost in the church.*

This training has to begin a guideline which leads the individual to personal assurance of sins forgiven, of eternal life, and of positive relationship and of positive present possession in Christ. There should be a positive awareness training of responsibility to glorify God, to bear witness and have fellowship one with another, to read Gods word, and to spend time in prayer to obey Gods word and His known Will for their lives. Full surrender and true Christian commitment to the unctional guidance and obedient to the Holy Spirit.

There should also be assertion in the discipline of devotions through daily devotions in maintaining victorious, spirit filled and dynamic Christian life in their capacities as teachers, doctors, clerks and police men etc. The professionalism of Christian ministry which consequently makes dependence of members of the congregation with respect to the minister in order to function as a church must be discouraged at all cost. The communication of the gospel and the subsequent fulfillment of the great commission must no longer be the task of specialist instead; the leadership must be decentralized among the gifted members within the congregation. It is, I believe, the normal task and the privilege of every believer to witness and minister to the glory of God wherever God has placed him/her in the world.

In order to enlist the support of the laymen in this great task of outreach for

Christ I would like to endorse that personal evangelism which is the biblical method for evangelism should be revitalized in the church .Without personal evangelism; we will never evangelize the world. With it we could evangelize the world because in this generation because personal evangelism is layman evangelism. It encourages location evangelism, agegroup evangelism, and occupational evangelism. This works out that engineers who are Christians will win other non-Christians engineers, Doctors win Doctors, Nurses, bussinesmen etc, and this is evangelism by occupation. The young Christian in every nation can best reach the young people and middle aged and older age the same. This is evangelism by age. All these are the lay activities.

This basic strategy amplified and multiplied through out every type of employment and neighborhood and place of work and all age-groups in every town and city in every nation of the world holds the key to evangelism and church growth in this generation.

The main actor is the layman.

The teaching of the word of God is clear **“we are in the world but not of the world”** it is good that the church is in the world, but if the world is in the church, then we are in problem.

No matter how we look at it the successful witness and ministry of the church is impossible without a total mobilization of the whole people of God in this ministry to the world in all capacities, capabilities, and ramifications for the glory of God and salvation of souls. **The training of laymen in Christian ministry and witness is the master key in church development.**

The Lay pastors Ministry, Kenya, East Africa, began this excellent journey in late 2001, until then this ministry has reached many churches and church organization with a very high number of lay pastors trained on the process. Being the only church organization with this kind of the ministry, many churches have shown great interests in our programmes. So far LPMs operations are in East Africa with a view to scale up its activities in the rest of Central African region.

With over 100 million people live in this region, the Lay pastor's ministry has been hardly hit by various combinations of factors resulting into a sorry state of their out come. Some of the major factors and challenges include:

[1] High levels of illiteracy .This makes many lay pastors unable to read the bible and make scriptural notes. This has forced the ministry to translate most of our training materials in to the local languages which they can best understand.

[2]High rate of poverty and food deficiency levels. Poverty level in African communities and especially within East Africa is steadily growing with over 78% living below poverty level. With the same % earning less than \$ 1 a day or nothing at all,

this has really affected this ministry negatively especially during training seminars, conferences, forums etc where we ask them to donate a very little amount for the upkeep during the training. Many lay pastors can not afford to contribute financially because of high rate of poverty level in this region.

[3] Bad traditions and culture undoing the gains made by the church. African traditional culture is a great hindrance to the work of God in this region.

[4] High rate of spread of HIV/Aids pandemic that is impacting negatively among the regional communities. Most of our work has been hindered by this scourge, for example, few days ago I led LPM, Kenya team for training seminar and a one day follow-up in Tanzania, to our shock, on our arrival, were told by our partners that four of the people who have undergone our trainings had lost their lives due to Aids infections. Aids is claiming many people with great potential in the church.

Since the initialization of this ministry here in Kenya and East Africa barely six years down the line, LPM has trained over 1500 lay pastors and collaborated with many churches and church organizations with East African region. Many clergy and church leaders normally visit our offices and invite us to conduct one or two days seminar for a particular church, however in most cases we conduct two to three days lay pastors trainings seminar's where we invite lay pastors from different churches. In most cases we invite a maximum of sixty lay pastors per sitting. We normally use church halls. Our office has a small conference hall which can accommodate up to 15 people. We normally receive many lay pastors visiting our office, ones a week, especially on wednesdays; we hold small trainings within the office.

Apart from training seminars, we have General conference ones a year, and also chaplaincy programmed in the learning institutions. We have a programme for scouts and colleges where we meet teachers and students and students leaders apart. This has effectively worked in this region. We normally meet the teachers and tutors during lunch time and students during pastoral programs.

However this excellent work has its own challenges, ie. LPM, Staff lacks basic skills, Lack of training materials, poor or lack of transport facilities, among others.