

Nothing To Do in the Church?

Jim Elliff

Several years ago a well-known sports announcer was asked to explain the game of American football. Among other things, he said, "Football is 22 men down on a field desperately in need of rest, while 22,000 people sit in the stands desperately in need of exercise."

That's an apt description of many churches I know also.

Most pastors will tell you, if they are honest, that only 20% of the people among those who actively attend *do* anything besides attend one or more large group meetings. And that's among those who are considered active.

Excuse the drama, but *this is pathetic!*

What's the problem?

The first problem, obviously, is that many people on the rolls of evangelical churches are not converted. But what about those who are active and show some signs of being true followers of Christ? Shouldn't they be ministering to others? Are we called just to "sit and soak?"

Certainly not!

The apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12, describes the church as a body, with each person gifted differently. He states that "each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." In other words, we each have been given gifts from God to serve the whole body. This is the way God designed the church: "one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills."

Paul goes on to draw a picture in our minds of a body with each part being necessary for the whole. "For the body is not one member, but many." That is, our various abilities, bestowed on us by the Spirit, are working together to make the body healthy. And no one is left out. The small toe is important and the mouth is important. We each have something to do by God's design.

You don't get to choose what you are in the body. That's the Spirit's business. But count on this: you are important to the body and have something to offer.



How to get started

Not every church emphasizes the gifting of the body well. Some believe they cannot serve without a special commission or a committee appointment or pastor's assignment. But this isn't the way it should work.

1. **Explore by doing.** You may not have a title, but you can begin to try out your gifts. For instance, what if God has given you a unique gift of giving? Well, you can do that in a big way without any title. Write down the financial needs of people in a list and begin praying about how you can help them. Or, suppose you think you have a gift of encouragement. Can you try that one out without committee approval? You bet you can. Wherever your interests lie, give it a try. Do you love older people? Well, nobody is stopping you from visiting a nursing home on your own, are they? Just don't ask for money to do your ministry don't expect everyone to join with you.

2. **Get some advice.** If you are stumped about ministry, get some counsel from friends, family and spiritual leaders. Again, emphasize to them that you don't necessarily need a title, but that you want to find out how you can serve the body of Christ with your life. Perhaps they will say, "You're good with your hands and can fix just about anything. We have widows who need practical help. Maybe you are the one who is supposed to keep in regular contact with them to serve their needs." Others will see your strengths and can often provide just the right insight into ministry.

3. **Think "service."** In other words, think about the needs people have and seek to meet those needs. It might do you good to privately list various weaknesses you see in the church and seek to change them, not by politicking, or complaining, or through church business meetings, but by rolling up your sleeves and working. What if you see a lack of devoted followers among you? Perhaps you could meet with friends to read the Bible aloud and pray. This might do wonders to increase devotion. Or suppose you notice a coldness among the people. Change that by coming early to greet every person you can, and by opening your home each week for various church members who don't know each other well to join with you for Sunday lunch. Let them share the food preparation by making it a potluck meal. They'll love it!

You get the point. Your gifts are important for the church, but you must USE them for the common good. And the church needs those gifts *now*, not later.