

# Guest Ministry

By Bill Scheidler

I have personally been strengthened and encouraged through the various great ministries that have come to our congregation over the years. Unfortunately, there have been times in the past when our congregation has also been hurt by outside ministries. It is because of this that pastors must exercise caution and use biblical wisdom in screening and evaluating outside ministries.

## A. On the Positive Side

Guest ministries have the power to bless, strengthen and encourage the local church.

1. By providing a breath of fresh air.

Every church can get stale if it constantly breathes its own air. Guest ministries can help bring a refreshing to a church that is in a time of drought or discouragement.

2. By providing a variety of expression.

Every ministry is unique and is used by God in unique ways. By exposing our people to a variety of ministries, it gives our people input that they might otherwise not experience.

3. By exposing people to all ministries.

Not every church, especially in its formative years, will have all of the ministries functioning in their mature expression. By bringing in teachers, prophets, evangelists, apostles and other types of ministries, people are able to experience what these ministries are designed by God to produce.

4. By providing objective ministry.

A ministry coming from the outside can often see things more clearly than those who are minding "the stuff". This perspective can help local pastors evaluate what they are doing and how they are doing it.

5. By confirming truths that are being taught by the local pastor.

When guest ministries preach or prophesy the same things that have been coming forth on a local level it strengthens those truths in the hearts of the people and helps establish the local congregation.

6. By broadening the vision of the local church.

Traveling ministries can often give a broader perspective to what is going on in the worldwide Body of Christ. This is vital so that the local church does not become isolated and narrow in its vision.

7. By providing assistance in times of crisis.

Outside ministries can be the neutral party that is needful when attempting to resolve internal conflicts, especially between leaders.

8. By deepening the message of the church.

Many ministries offer seminars and specialized teaching at a depth-level that is not always found in the local church. Special seminars on marriage enrichment, family life, leadership development, music and worship can permanently change a local church.

9. By providing counsel and encouragement to the local pastor.

The local pastor is able to relate on a peer level to a visiting ministry on whom he can rely for counsel and encouragement.

#### B. On the Negative Side

While it is true that some of the greatest blessings have come to the church through guest ministries, it is also true that some very negative things can happen when proper precautions are not taken. Outside ministries have been known to:

1. Sow seeds of contrary doctrine.

If a guest ministry preaches a doctrine not held by the local leaders, they can sow serious seeds of division in the congregation that may take years to weed out.

2. Draw disciples unto themselves.

A guest ministry can elevate what they are doing to such a degree that the people can begin to transfer their support from the local church to the traveling ministry. Those who follow the outside ministry may even set themselves up as judge or critic of the local leadership.

3. Abuse their position for personal financial gain.

Ministries at times can insist on taking huge personal "love" offerings, use the church for the marketing of books, tapes and other items, or they can use the church membership to enhance a mailing list that is principally run for the purpose of fund raising.

4. Overstep the authority of the local leadership.

There is no higher authority in the established local church than its eldership. Mobile ministries can sometimes see themselves on a much higher level than local leaders. When they do, they will often disregard the local guidelines given as a parameter to their ministry. There are many so-called prophets and apostles around today who do not submit their own ministries to anyone, who want to speak into and adjust churches with whom they have no authority relationship.

C. The Balance

As with most truths, we must find balance to experience the life that is to be offered through recognizing and receiving ministries in the Body of Christ.

We do not want to reject mobile ministries because some have damaged the local church. However, we do not want to be so foolish as to open our doors indiscriminately to any and all concerns.

The same flow of water that can be a raging flood that destroys everything in its path can also be a source of life when it is properly controlled and channeled. I offer the following as suggestions to safeguard the precious flock of God.

1. Know the ministries that you receive.

This means doing everything you can to familiarize yourself with them

2. Be sure all ministries are under some local church authority.

Every person in the Body of Christ is to have a head or a spiritual covering. To whom do they submit in ministry? Who will adjust them if there is a problem?

3. Do not allow visiting ministries to take their own offerings.

Much abuse could be avoided if this simple guideline were followed.

4. Do not allow the visiting ministry to garner a mailing list from your church.

Their communication should be to you as the spiritual leader of your congregation.

5. Clearly communicate any parameters or guidelines within which you would like the visiting ministry to operate.

Use extreme caution when these are disregarded.

6. Selectively feed these ministries to your people.

Remember that when you have a guest in your pulpit, you are feeding your people just as surely as if you were preaching the message yourself. Therefore, it is good to assess the needs of the people and select a ministry that you believe will best meet this particular need. You select them -- don't just take them as they come.

#### D. A Final Caution

You may have noticed that I have avoided the use of the term "trans-local" when referring to ministries. The reason I have done so is because of some of the abuse I have seen in the use of this word or concept.

The local church is like the natural family. It is an autonomous social unit. That means that it is self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. In its established state, the church looks to no outside authority, but is ruled from within by its local eldership.

In a church's embryo state (while in the formation process) it often is governed from without by apostolic authority until such time as the local eldership is set in. At this time the apostolic authority is parallel to the authority that a father has over his single children.

However, as that church is established, the base for authority becomes the local eldership of that church. The apostle's relationship now changes to parallel the relationship that a father has to his married children. It changes from a chain of command to a chain of counsel. Hopefully, the children will always love, respect and seek the advice and counsel of their father, but if they choose not to, nothing can be done.

*"Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow-workers for your joy: for by faith you stand." II Corinthians 1:24(NKJV)*

In addition, it is important to note that no New Testament ministry had authority beyond that which was either the result of their own ministry or that which was

voluntarily given by the recipient of the ministry. No legal authority could be imposed in either case.

As we grow together in love and fellowship, it is my sincere hope that we will draw from each other in ministry. When you are planning special speaking events, look to other pastors in MFI as a resource to you and your church. I believe you will be greatly blessed.