

## **POWER IN THE CHURCH**

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Traditionally ordination has been understood as the church conferring on its ministers the authority to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments. But from a New Testament perspective this priestly emphasis on the role of the minister is misplaced. The New Testament emphasis is upon leadership. Paul, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, as also in Ephesians 4, describes how all God's people are called to serve, but some are called to lead (see Rom 12.8; 1 Cor 12.8; Eph 4.7). Indeed, in the light of the New Testament I believe that first and foremost ordination is the act whereby the church confers authority upon its ministers.

Whatever the niceties of theological interpretation, one thing is certain: if today's churches are to face up today to the challenges offered by contemporary culture, then it desperately needs leaders who will think through those challenges and who will offer strategies for enabling their churches to fulfil Christ's mission today. If such strategies are to be effective, then churches will need leaders who will help enable churches to make the necessary changes to their life in order to adopt the necessary strategies.

Today's ministers need to be leaders. For where the right leaders are not only present, but also exercising their power to lead, there the church will grow and new members will be found. What is more, these new members will not just be Christians 'recycled' from other churches, but converts whose lives have truly been turned around by the Gospel of Christ. But this will only happen as leaders exercise their 'powers' of leadership. Chaplains may have a role to play in hospitals and in prisons - they have, however, no role to play in the church. One reason why many churches are making little impact on their communities is that time and again their ministers have felt trapped by the personal needs and expectations of their members. They have assumed the role of their church's personal chaplain. But the fact is that there is more to ministry in the local church than caring for the pastoral needs of church people - ministry also involves caring for those outside the church. Ordination to the Christian ministry places a call on ministers to mobilise their people for ministry and mission not only in the church, but also beyond the confines of the church.

In practical terms this means that, first of all, ministers must exercise the power that is theirs and give the lead their churches need. As Peter Wagner, the American church growth guru, somewhat proactively once said: 'Pastor, you should be the spark plug! Pastor don't be afraid of your power!' Yes, it can be uncomfortable being a leader - the person first out of the trench is first in the firing line. Secondly, this means that churches should encourage their pastors to give a lead - and unless it truly is an act of 'kami-kazi, they should more often follow it rather than question it. One thing for sure: the church that forever quibbles over its leader's proposals, is doomed to stagnation and to death.

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