

Seven Steps to Move Members into Ministry

Sam attends his church faithfully every Sunday, but he is not involved in doing ministry through his church. Others view Sam as a committed member simply because he is there every Sunday morning, and no one would dare question his faithfulness.

Yet, Sam is really doing nothing in his church. How do you move members like him into ministry? Here are some basic principles we learned in a study published in my book, [Membership Matters](#).

1. Pray for Laborers

Jesus gave us clear guidelines for securing workers: pray for God to provide them (Luke 10:2). The fields, He said, are ready, but the workers are few.

My experience is that churches look for laborers, and they begin praying earnestly only after they've not been able to secure workers through their established processes. Is it possible we would have less difficulty enlisting workers if we started praying before recruiting?

I encourage churches to build praying for laborers into their DNA. The staff and church should pray not only for current workers, but also for potential workers. Prayer meetings should include a time of focused prayer for more workers, even when all the current positions are filled. God will provide the laborers if your church will follow His command to pray.

2. State Expectations Up Front

Here's the primary reason church members don't get involved: churches expect very little. One of the best ways to correct this problem is to state expectations in a membership class. Our study shows that churches with effective membership classes stress five expectations of members:

- Identifying with the church (e.g., through public baptism)
- Attending worship services and small groups
- Serving in the ministry of the church
- Giving financially toward the church's work
- Promoting unity in the church

Stating these expectations is no guarantee there will be no members like Sam in your church, but not clarifying expectations almost assures you will.

3. Have a Ministry Placement Process in Place

In the churches we studied, leaders had an intentional placement strategy. Those strategies included the SHAPE concept (Rick Warren), the DESIGN program (Wayne Cordeiro), BodyLife (John Powers), and Network (Willow Creek). These processes are built

upon the assumption that God works through our life experiences, desires, spiritual gifts, personalities, and abilities to prepare us to serve in His church.

4. Recruit Face-to-Face

We asked laypersons in our study why they chose to get involved in their church's ministry. Listen to the personal recruiting that their answers reflected:

"A minister spoke to me and challenged me to get active."

"The Minister of Education sat me down and talked to me."

"Two guys approached me and asked me [to serve]."

Leaders in the churches we studied did not recruit workers through bulletin board sign-ups, worship folder tear-offs, or pulpit announcements. Rather, they sought workers by challenging members face-to-face—the way Jesus recruited disciples. In most cases, a personal challenge and invitation made the difference.

5. Offer Entry-level Ministry Positions

Not every member is ready now to be a teacher, a deacon, or an elder. All members might, however, be ready to take on the challenge of "entry level" positions that allow them to get involved in the church.

Entry-level positions include parking lot greeters, refreshment committees, class custodians, choir members, and any position that does not demand significant training. The goal is to help everyone get involved at some level as quickly as possible so new members feel needed and wanted. Moreover, entry-level positions help to evaluate potential leaders, as a person unwilling to serve in an entry position probably won't make a good servant leader later.

6. Recognize and Affirm Workers

Too often, we take for granted dependable church members who serve week after week. To be fair, most of these workers would not want any recognition, but their reticence to be recognized does not let us off the hook. We honor God by affirming His work in the lives of those who give their best for His church.

One simple way to recognize workers is to sponsor an annual Workers Banquet. Cater it, publicize it, and make it special. Not only will the current workers be grateful, but potential workers will also see that their church will appreciate their service.

7. Don't Give Up Easily

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul taught that God puts His church together as He wishes (12:1-11). Our task is to help members find their role, challenge them to serve, equip them, and hold them accountable. This work is not easy, though, and sometimes it's tempting just to give up and overwork the current workers. Rather than taking that wrong step, the answer is to return to

principle #1 and start the process again.

What specific action does your church take to move members into ministry?