

How Many Ministers Do We Have At First Methodist?

June 25, 2006

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Jim Moore, a pastor in Houston, Texas, tells a story about a minister who had some problems and decided to leave the ministry. He ran into trouble, however, when he couldn't find other work. Finally, in desperation, he took a job at the LOCAL ZOO. The GORILLA had died, and since it had been the children's favorite animal, the zoo officials decided to put someone in a gorilla costume until a real replacement could be found.

It was the minister's job to put on the costume, hop around the cage, and entertain the kids. To his amazement, he found it the best job he'd ever had. He was getting more attention than he ever had in the pulpit. There was no stress — no complaints, no committees. And he could take a nap any time he wanted to — it was part of the act.

One day as he hopped up and down, he felt so frisky he decided to *TRY THE TRAPEZE*. But as he swung high, he lost his grip, flew over the bars, and landed in the lion's cage next to him! Stunned and dazed, he looked up and saw a FEROCIOUS LION charging right at him. Of course, in his panic, he forgot he was supposed to be a gorilla, and screamed, *"Help! Help!"* To which the lion said, *"Hey buddy, be quiet! I'm a minister, too!"*

Wouldn't it be something if every one of us could say that and mean it: *"Hey, I'm a minister, too!"*

In the church where I grew up, under the heading "MINISTER" on the bulletin cover, it would list the name of the pastor and the associate, but then it said, Entire Congregation.

And I visited a church in our Conference which had a banner hanging in the sanctuary over the exit doors with these words: *"You are one of 243 ministers in this church."* What if each one of us said: *"I'm a minister, too"* and served like a minister? WHAT WOULD IT DO TO OUR CHURCH, TO OUR CITY, TO OUR WORLD?

That's exactly what happened at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came and the disciples said, *"Hey, we're ministers, too!"* And they took up Christ's ministry and turned the world upside down.

What Paul was saying in our scripture lesson today is that we are all in this together! Remember how he put it in verses 5 and 6: *"There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us."*

The truth is that ALL CHRISTIANS — whether we are school teachers or students, office workers, salespersons, military men or women, homemakers or the ordained ministry — we all are called of God to minister in Christ's name. Verse 7 says, *"A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church,"* to minister in the community and the world.

Some of us, like me, have had a bishop lay hands on our heads, but all of us have felt God's touch on our hearts. And God's touch on your life is your calling to ministry.

What if we all responded to that call? What if we all took it seriously? What would happen if each of us believed that we were one of the ministers of First United Methodist Church in Enterprise, Alabama? What impact would that have on our worship services, our Sunday school, on our budget, on our outreach programs, on our caring ministries? You see the point is this: That's precisely the way it ought to be.

WHEN ITS TIME TO WORSHIP, what would happen if we all said, *“Hey! I’m a minister too!”* One Sunday morning a wife went upstairs to wake her husband. And in her most cheerful voice she said to him, *“Get up and get ready, honey. It’s almost time to go to church!”*

He pulled the covers up over his shoulder and turned over. *“I don’t want to go to church today,”* he said.

She said, *“Come on now, honey, we always go to church.”*

He answered, *“I’m tired. I want to sleep in.”*

*“You can sleep some other time. We are going to church today,”* she told him.

With that, he sat straight up in bed. *“Give me ONE GOOD REASON why we need to go to church today!”*

*“I’ll give you THREE reasons,”* she replied. *“First of all, it’s good for you. Second, it’s a habit in our family – we always go to church! And third, YOU are the minister AT THE CHURCH!”*

I’m trying to plant a thought in your mind that will flash on like a neon sign every Sunday morning when you may be trying to decide whether to go to church. *“Hey — You’re a minister too! You’re needed here; You’re part of it; You’re responsible for it! You help to make it happen! It’s your ministry too!”*

Whenever I counsel with a couple preparing to get married, we always talk of spiritual matters and I discuss with them their relationship to God and the church. And I tell them that regular attendance at worship needs to be one of the cornerstones of their marriage relationship. I tell them that Pam and I made the decision to be in church every Sunday that it is possible. It saves a lot of time and energy and arguments.

One young man replied, *"That's different. You're the minister. You get paid to be there!"* But I went on to explain our family decision was made years before I became a minister. But he raised an interesting question.

Is it really different for me and my family? Do we have an obligation to be in church that you don't have? I honestly believe we would come to church even if I weren't the minister and getting paid to be here. Millions of Christians across the face of the earth have made that decision — they go to church every Sunday that it is possible, because they genuinely believe that being in worship is part of their ministry too.

AND WHEN IT'S TIME FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL, what would happen if we all said, *"I'm a minister too!"* A recent national poll shows that 92 percent of the churched Americans and 68 percent of the unchurched want their children to receive religious instruction. The same poll also indicates that adults between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five are the fastest growing age group in our Sunday Schools. And that is encouraging.

Most church growth studies indicate that the number one quality that people look for in a church, is friendliness of the people. Most of us need the support and companionship of friends. Most persons surveyed say they can best experience that friendliness, acceptance and support in face-to-face groups, and the Sunday School is especially important for that connectedness.

The Sunday School is a place where we nurture close personal relationships, where we study the Bible and discuss our faith. The Sunday School is a place where we support one another in prayer and concern, where we celebrate and share personal events and experiences. People have a deep need that cannot be satisfied with surface relationships. Christian fellowship goes deeper. Paul uses the analogy of the church as the body of Christ

when he says: *"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."* That is true fellowship.

Through the Sunday School, we acquire knowledge and understanding of the Bible that enables us to be faithful witnesses in our homes and at work, and in our communities. Through it, we become better equipped for helping to create a world that is more loving, just, and serving.

Larry Banbury taught a Sunday School class of SEVENTH GRADE BOYS, and I was one of them. The first time I ever remember praying out loud in front of a group, was in Larry's class. He would have us stand up, get in a circle, and hold hands while we prayed. I'm not sure which was the bigger miracle: getting me to pray out loud or getting a group of seventh grade boys to hold hands!

One Sunday morning, I had gone to class, but before the teacher arrived, I decided to cut class, and I took my offering money and went to the Kewpee diner and bought a cup of hot chocolate. I was sitting on the stool at the counter, and suddenly the door opened and Larry Banbury walked in. That hot chocolate didn't taste nearly as good as it had just a moment earlier. Somebody had ratted me out. Larry walked over to the place where I was sitting, put a big hand on my shoulder, and simply said, *"Gary, it's time for Sunday School. It won't be the same without you."* He had left the ninety-nine and came looking for the his one lost sheep. He taught me that it was important for me to be in Sunday School. How about you? What would your Sunday School class be like if every member were just like you?

And what would happen WHEN A PROBLEM NEEDS SOLVING, if everybody said, *"I'm a minister too!"* In a church bulletin I received a while back, the sermon was titled, *"Are You Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?"* I didn't hear the sermon preached, but I

imagine his point was that as Christian people, our calling is to be part of the solution. We are to use our energies not to cause problems or complain about the ones we see, but to solve them.

Let me use a very simple illustration. If you are walking outside the church and notice somebody has thrown down a Coca Cola can in the yard – what do you do? Or you are leaving the building and notice that the lights have been left on in a classroom or hallway; what do you do? You pick up the Coke can and turn off the lights. You don't say, "*That's not my job!*" You don't murmur and complain that somebody ought to do something. YOU do something, because this is YOUR CHURCH, and you are a minister, too!

Whose responsibility is it to come up with the programs, and ministries, and outreach ideas for the Church? *IS IT MY JOB?* Yes, but not mine alone, not if we believe we are all ministers too! Some of the most effective programs we have in this church are programs initiated by people like you. That's been true in every church I've served, and I've been smart enough to get out of the way and let those ministers run things.

We are all called to be God's ministers, and we are to give our energies to solving problems, not creating them.

And one more point. WHEN YOU SEE SOMEONE IS HURTING; what would happen if we all said, "*I'm a minister too!*" Robert Schuller said that the purpose of the church was to "*find a need and meet it, find a hurt and heal it.*" That is a pretty good mission statement for the church.

The Greek word used in the New Testament for church is "*ecclesia.*" which means "*gathering of the called out ones.*" The church is a community of people called out of the world by God to belong to God and be God's people. We have been called together as a

church called Enterprise First that we might worship God, and that we might RECEIVE GOD'S FORGIVING AND RENEWING GRACE. But it doesn't stop there. We also come together that we might be SENT OUT again, into a hurting world, to be God's ambassadors of forgiveness, reconciliation, renewal and love.

I close with another story Jim Moore told of a friend of his who was working as a bank executive. As she walked past one of the offices, she glanced in and saw a YOUNG WOMAN sitting at her desk, CRYING. She went in to see if she could help.

*"What's the matter," she said. "Tell me about it."*

The younger woman explained: *"You know my mother died just three months ago. And I became engaged last night. I'm going to be married. I need to begin planning a wedding, and I don't know what to do. And I don't have a mother to help me."*

*"Oh yes you do!" she said. "I'LL BE YOUR MOTHER!"*

And as they hugged each other, an incredible friendship was born – all because one person saw somebody hurting and said, *"I'm a minister too!"* Let us pray:

AFTER SERMON STORY:

Close your eyes. Visualize:

1. Your family
2. Your neighborhood
3. Your circle of friends — at work and at play
4. Your Church
5. The world beyond your church

What difference would it make if you were to say, "Hey, I'm a minister, too!"