

Connie denBok

“The world has changed . . . ” murmurs the voice of Galadriel in the opening scene of “Fellowship of the Ring” the 2001 adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. She is the queen of an ancient people anticipating the end of one age and arrival of another. As the Church transitions with the world it has always found ways to reconfigure ministry and preparation for ministry. We have shifted from the age of apostles who were personally apprenticed to Jesus, to a priesthood of the Table, to scholars of the Word, to Pastors of the Parish, and now to . . . What is Church in this new age?

For certain it will not look like my graduating class from Emmanuel College, anticipating a career of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care, and it will not look like my settlement charge where civic life revolved between School, Rink, and Church. Clergy no longer serve a community as its most literate and learned educators, nor as exclusive ritual keepers for life’s passages like births, deaths, and marriage, nor as the most entertaining diversion available on Sunday, nor as staff paid to support a community of active volunteers who own a stable local organization. Why ever would we continue to train and order future church leaders as if it was?

I suggest that we ask three questions:

- For what purposes were each of our ministries designed, to meet what needs?
- How does our education, formation, and recognition process reflect the training of leaders equipped for a former era and what must change?
- What alternatives might address the changing landscape of the 21st century while remaining faithful to the broad Christian tradition?

In other words, how can we know when to pour more resources into renovating the old structure, or build fresh from the foundation.

Reformations have always looked to one of the most creative and adaptive periods of church history, the first century. We might look to the New Testament document that rejoices most effusively in the Church, the letter to the Ephesians. It contains a model implicit to much of global Christianity today.

There are four premises which speak to us from the fourth chapter of Ephesians:

- Christ is a living, engaged, and engaging part of all Church life.
- All accountable ministry carries leadership responsibilities and leaders are accountable for results.
- Accountable leaders are charged with five primary areas of ministry, and no one individual is equipped to do all or even most.
- Effectiveness of ministry leaders is measurable. Lay people mentored, trained, and sent to do ministry is our metric. For instance Jesus may have

been very good at ministry, but his brilliance was sending 12 and then 70 who were able to do the things that he was doing.

The nomenclature of Ephesians is strange to my tradition which leads by teaching and by administrative work with committees: APEST. Like a neon sign that has several letters burnt out, we are familiar with the ST of APEST. In the interests of familiarity, let us begin at the end.

S stands for shepherding. It is only one of two places in the New Testament where this term is used for accountable leaders and never in the sense of a caregiver looking after a passive care receiver. The metric of a good shepherd is pacing a healthy flock through rest and food and hazards and ultimately community care of lambs.

T stands for teaching, the *raison d'être* for an educated clergy. The goal of ordered ministry is not to transmit knowledge, which will be collected and savoured for personal acquisition, but to “equip the saints for works of ministry.” Teaching and educational events, which do not foster ministry, are simply accumulated information. What great teacher has ever emerged who was not himself or herself inspired by a great teacher?

The E on our imaginary APEST sign burnt out some years ago and we haven't replaced it. Our Methodist ancestors appreciated that laity needs Evangelists to equip them for ministry. As Christendom no longer provides a reliable source of church people to fill positions, pews, and plates for offering, the most jaded church executive might consider the practicality of creating new church people. Of course we do not want a value system that places institutional survival above the work of God in the world – which is the good news of our evangelion.

P is for prophet, a ministry that has fallen out of favour and in again. One of the interesting quirks of prophetic ministry throughout history and scripture is that prophets were never left to operate the mechanics of an institution. It's not what they do. We know prophets are effective when God's people mobilize.

And the other is so strange to our ears that we will need time to unpack it. The root of the word apostle means those sent out on a mission by Jesus, who see the vision, communicate the passion, create the structures to carry it forward. We have no outward mission without apostolic ministries, the A in APEST.

When the Church of another age, recognized that Priestly clergy were not enough, it rediscovered the role of Teachers and when that was not enough it sent Diaconal ministers on apostolic missions. The number of ordered ministries is of less import than their content, their metrics, their capacity to build a Church and equip the saints without societal props. As the stable world of Church and Society for which the United Church was formed has radically shifted, so must those who will lead the church and prepare those leaders *“to equip the saints for works of ministry”*.

An excellent treatment of this topic may be found in Alan Hirsch's The Forgotten Ways. ISBN: 9781587432491

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