

Chapter 6

Church Life Beyond “The Work”

“...Pray the Lord of the harvest
to send out laborers into His harvest”
(Luke 10:2).

It's hard to imagine any cliché getting more mileage in the LC Movement than that of being “one with the ministry.” Lives have been altered forever based on the strength of those four small words. Nor is this too melodramatic an assessment for LC members who have been hurt by “ministry mania.” Talk to the young person whose engagement was dashed because of loyalty issues related to “the ministry.” Worse, listen to the morose saint whose long-standing marriage has been estranged or terminated because he or she was not enough “for the ministry.” Now add the stories of those in embattled churches and others whose reputations have been permanently impugned, again, over ministry issues. Even dismissing half of these complaints as illegitimate (which is a very generous percentage), the other fifty percent still demand an explanation.

Does being one with the New Testament ministry of Jesus Christ cause all of these problems? Of course not. But then, being “one with the ministry” as it is used in the LC Movement, does not mean standing with and supporting the work of Jesus Christ. It refers to exclusive devotion to the Living Stream Ministry, the personal incorporated work of Witness Lee.

A Strange Arrangement

The Body of Christ was another emphasis that slowly crept down from the upper echelons of the LC Movement into its local membership. At first most of us said nothing against it because of its Biblical nature, and in fact said “Amen” when we heard it. Still, the phrase “the Body of Christ” which later became “the Body” which later turned into a weirdly intoned “the baaaady” became a catchword unto itself. No longer was it a teaching for general edification. There was an elite considered to be “the representatives of the Body,” which had “the feeling of the Body,” “knew the Body” “saw the Body,” “understood the leading in the Body” and “moved in the Body.” It could even excommunicate (“quarantine”) others in the name of “the Body.” The Body became an entreaty meant to contest local decisions that were not in accordance with “the ministry.” As exaggerated by LSM authorities, “the Body” was versus “the churches.”

Having heard “the Body” mentioned with such mechanical regularity, the burning question became “Who or what is the Body?” The LC Movement has two ways of answering this question. One is the public relations version that has been crafted for showing outsiders. It contains broad inclusive language that wards off criticism and gives the Movement a veneer of normalcy. The other way of defining the Body of Christ is for internal consumption only. It views the Body as exclusively being the collection of LSM-approved local churches. These churches are members that ought to move in harmony with the other members under the direction of the head, represented by “the ministry.” Where such cooperation might be remiss, ministry representatives brandish reminders that “the Body” far outranks lowly little churches. This attitude of course is never aired in front of Christianity Today Magazine and never paraded around the Evangelical Christian Publisher’s Association. Doing so would likely lead to public reproach. However, it is precisely these hidden

in-house attitudes that guide Movement leadership as it deals with individuals and member churches.

Over the years, as elders such as myself became more of a liability to LSM control, “Body” rhetoric increased, while an emphasis upon the churches all but disappeared. The churches were said to be “merely the means” to reach the ideal, which was the Body consummated in the New Jerusalem. The alleged intention was to live life today as though it were already the next age, a proposition highly dysfunctional if followed absolutely.

However, the intended goal was not really New Jerusalem living. It was a desire for ministry delegates to dispense with local church hurdles. The ministry head was tired of interference at the local level—the if, and’s and but’s of elders who chose to lead the church rather than surrender that responsibility to headquarters.

“The work” (the organized activity of “the ministry”), wanted to speak directly to the saints, to shape their values and powerfully direct their allegiances. It was assumed that member churches would run much better as local training activities and classrooms than a family of the faith. “Two years of training is equal to twenty years of church life,” was the official statement. Thus the unfortunate influence of “the work” reduced congregations from their already weakened state to a collection of pre-fabricated ministry groups. It was as if a woodsman had taken a tree, a thing of life and natural symmetrical beauty, and then decided to improve upon it by cutting it down, chopping it into pieces, and assembling it into a coffee table. It would be more functional for the builder, but never again a thing of life.

The Local Church Movement—
Group of churches or Global Work?

Despite Watchman Nee's efforts in books like *The Normal Christian Church Life* to keep the church and "the work" separate, the largest percentage of the Local Churches are now utterly indistinguishable from the Living Stream Ministry. This strongly suggests that they are not a group of churches at all, but a consolidated global work. Today we certainly do not hear of any ministers or works related to these Local Churches that are unrelated to LSM. Any that have threatened to appear have been thoroughly blacklisted.

The exclusive alignment between the Local Churches and LSM has resulted in noticeable repercussions. One of them is the LC Movement's heavy over-stamp with the culture in which its work began. Movement churches are not, as they claim to be, a representation of the community of local believers. This is borne out by the prevailing Asian representation and characteristics seen throughout its congregations. I say this without intending any offense toward the many good Chinese-speaking Christians who meet with the Local Churches. However, we must honestly reconsider the much-celebrated boast of being the "One New Man," and thus being above culture.

Oriental thought and culture pervade the LC Movement to the point that in some places entire churches are now Chinese-speaking. Of course from the spiritual point of view, nothing is wrong with this. In the eyes of God, race is not a factor enabling one person to gain better access to Him than another (Col 3:10-11; Eph 2:14-15). However, according to testimony (our presentation of ourselves to the other people in a city), it is another thing. No matter what kind of enlightened age that we live in today, typical local people who visit a congregation always observe its racial make-up. If the percentage of attendants seem racially lop-sided, they will write the congregation off as an ethnic church

and won't come back. For instance, if the Mexican population of a city is 1% but Mexican representation in the church is 40%, then an observer will conclude that something is peculiar. And the situation would be exacerbated if worship were conducted mainly in Spanish. You could challenge critics with Colossians 3 and Ephesians 2 but they will say that they are not making racist statements, just that they are not interested in a Mexican ministry.

If you are Chinese speaking, put yourself in this situation: travel back to Taipei and enter a meeting where 85% of the attendants are Ethiopian. At first you are bewildered. You had no idea that so many Ethiopian people were in Taipei. Then you realize there aren't so many—in fact, less than 1%. Your next question is why that they have all congregated in that church. Then you find that the chief figure in their ministry is Ethiopian and that the movement started in Ethiopia and spread to Taipei in the early sixties. Still, you try to be broad, reading their materials and adopting their teachings. It is not long before you begin to get a whiff of Ethiopian attitudes about authority, family, settling disputes, women's roles, etc. When you are bothered, you are then told that you should drop your Chinese ways and “be transformed.” Much of what happens in the church is strangely dysfunctional, though it seems to make sense to those of Ethiopian descent. This, you are firmly told, is the way of the cross. Verses are produced to back up the claims, though expounded with a very distinct Ethiopian flavor.

The meeting hall is located in the middle of Taipei but you find it very difficult to bring other Chinese people to the meetings there. Your Chinese friends assure you that the Ethiopian church people are nice but it is, after all, a church where the food, expressions, language, and companionships are mostly African. Following years of a maddeningly sluggish church growth rate, you become frustrated. However,

saints point out to you that the Lord is moving in other places on the globe. You go to some of those places—Singapore, Malaysia, British Columbia, Argentina, and Norway. All are either significantly Ethiopian or at the very least overlaid with Ethiopian culture. The only explanation given for this is that the Lord is moving among the Ethiopians. No veteran church member considers that this is occurring due to the churches being dominated by a single work born in Ethiopia.

When you approach the Taipei church leadership (which is 75% Ethiopian) they nicely rebut your concerns with Colossians 3 and Ephesians 2, but at last decide that perhaps they should try to do something to accommodate the majority Chinese speaking population around them. So, the Ethiopian saints attempt to cook Chinese food and try to act more Chinese. The leadership excitedly commends this as “blending,” but the outcome is that neither the Ethiopian saints nor the Chinese visitors are comfortable.

Now transpose this example into North America. The facts of history show that the LC Movement came to this continent from the Far East by Witness Lee and that from beginning to end he was its most prominent leader. Despite all protestations to the contrary it was a “one-man show”—Witness Lee only. There was no balancing element, no other minister of equal status (and from a different culture) like a T. Austin-Sparks. Furthermore, in many places pioneering members of the Local Church immigrated from the Far East and played a major role in its development here as well. The result was a church network that was in many respects decidedly oriental.

Whenever a ministerial monopoly exists within a religious movement, the peculiarities of its home culture will dominate. They will surface in ways that are repellant to foreign contexts. Worse, spirituality itself will tend to be defined according to the image of that culture. This is extremely recognizable in the LC

Movement, where the only sanctioned work has confused Asian culture with “the One New Man.” Naturally this creates friction with the habits of the indigenous cultures that it penetrates such as that of America with its tendency to give opinions, question, challenge, and joke. Because of this, many matters considered normal by Western people have been branded as unspiritual. Compliant LC westerners who try to alter their cultural fingerprints to be more Movement friendly, become a strange kind of east-west hybrid to those around them.

Wherever a church is filled with this dynamic, a visitor will come to the conclusion that something is not quite normal. Perhaps church folk will wear Canadian or American or African or German faces at first. But given a little more time, they will begin to seem peculiar to their own countrymen. This will not be “peculiar” the way it is spoken of in 1 Peter 2:9, where the believers’ chosen status makes them peculiar. It will be peculiarity according to foreign human culture.

In many cases things characterized as soulish or spiritual were really just cultural differences. Judgements passed on the American bent toward humor and individualism could just as easily be applied to the Asian emphasis on communal conformity and respect for authority. Obviously there are sinful extremes associated with all human cultures. However, supposing amoral differences as evil belies an ignorance of basic sociology.

There will always be broad-hearted individuals who can manage church life outside of their social comfort zone. I commend this. Actually, I am one of these people. The first few years of my church experience (and my wife’s) was lived in Germany and Mexico. During that time, we were always part of the minority who needed translation, who had difficulty with the food, and apart from the warm special efforts of a few, wandered around after meetings clueless, while

everyone else was visiting with their friends. We still managed to personally thrive and grow. However, expecting everyone to be that kind of person is unrealistic. Wherever the ethnic mix is disproportionate to the locals, they will congratulate you on your diversity but avoid your congregation as a choice of church home. Underlying their reaction will be the more basic question of whether you are really a local church constituted with local people or a foreign import of some kind.

None of this is to suggest that meeting the needs of local immigrant populations is wrong. The church at large needs various works to reach all ethnic groups and broad hearted congregations to receive them. However, a church in a city with minority constituents that claims to be “the One New Man” and uninfluenced by culture is a joke. It doesn’t take very penetrating scrutiny to establish that fact, either. Usually evidence of it pops up in humorous, unexpected ways. A brother told me about a Korean campus group that used as their opening line, “Do you want to study Bible?” (with the article “the” omitted). The group gained a few Caucasians who, when they began participating in group outreach, approached people with the same line—“Do you want to study Bible?” Once odd things like this accumulate, a dominant culture can no longer remain hidden from view. It reminded me of the funny way that we say “serving ones” instead of “servants” or “new ones” instead of “new people” or “young people” instead of “youth”—just a few of the linguistic eccentricities birthed in another era or simply dubbed “Brother Lee Chenglish.” There’s nothing inherently wrong with the subtleties of this vocabulary, but it is passing strange to mainstream American listeners.

Like those involved in the Korean campus work, wherever a group’s fabric is saturated with a single ministry, unconscious patterns will exist among its members. Visitors will always notice, but if they speak

up, long time members will become irritated, feeling that the “new ones” are making too much of inconsequential things. It is usually not that the things are insignificant, though. The problem is that group veterans have grown numb to their own counter-cultural idiosyncrasies.

Although LC Movement teaching denies that “the One New Man” is tainted with culture of any kind, it is doubtful that there has ever been such a colorless testimony of Jesus Christ, completely unaffected by human surroundings and background. Nor is it likely that life here was ever meant to be that way. Using Ephesians 2 or Colossians 3 to eliminate culture on earth is to misuse those passages. Instead, these should remind the saint that neither race nor culture should prohibit fellowship in the Body of Christ nor make value statements about the worth of one Christian over another. Culture is not the enemy. In fact, when cultures are mocked and derided as ipso facto unspiritual, someone’s culture is prevailing, even if it is only at an unconscious level.

Our concern then, is not whether a culture is present in the church, but whether it is at stark variance with the immediate world around it. Whatever congregation becomes too unlike the prevailing culture in which it is located will be treated as foreign, and therefore, unacceptable to the people it is alleging to reach. We were quickly stung by this reality in Uganda Africa. One of the cultural items that piggybacked our work was our choice of music—the famous black hymnal published by the Living Stream Ministry—and our way of singing the songs in it. Needless to say, its contents strongly represent nineteenth century European music. After a few months of this singing style, one participating congregation rapidly dwindled from 200 to about 6. It seems that among other things, we had ignored the local singing culture with its strong affinity for contemporary Christian music and local tribal

sounds. The community was not interested in our strange blend of American-Chinese local church baggage. But rather than tell us about it (which the Ugandans were much too polite to do), they voted with their feet and nearly all disappeared. Predictably, when we allowed other musical work to penetrate the developing church there, people began finding the Lord within a recognizable, less threatening matrix. Their feet once again voted, except this time to join us.

Resolving the problem of cultural discordance does not involve conducting a witch-hunt against foreign cultural characteristics among us. Remember, all kinds of people will be in the church today, especially as the result of a world community that becomes increasingly integrated. Instead, as we loosen the grip of “one work” upon the churches (either the past “one work” or any future one), and allow various helps, then many peculiarities will naturally smooth out.

A Great Tree

Scripture neither shows us an exclusive work entity straddling the church, nor a distinct and separate work entity existing at all. All the saints were reconciled in “one Body through the cross” (Eph. 2:16). We also see that “God has set the members, each of them, in the Body just as He pleased” (1 Cor. 12:18). We do not see that God has reconciled us in “the work” or has set us in “the work.” Then what is this mysterious activity that now artificially dictates the course of so many Local Churches?

By observation we learn that “the work” responsible is led by personnel linked with LSM through over-lapping directorships and financial flows of funds. These include the Defense and Confirmation Project (DCP), Bibles for America (BFA), the Lord’s Move to Europe (LME), and various training centers. It is a multi-tiered structure, where those of senior status

occupy the higher echelons with a worker at the top who may be called an “apostle,” a “coordinating brother,” a “responsible brother,” or some other designation of honor.

Movement work has its own rules of conduct, financial arrangements, policies, corporate entities and even its own cemetery (Grace Terrace Memorial Gardens). To avoid the blatant appearance of hierarchy, the few real decision-makers are kept shrouded in the vague description of “the blended brothers.” This works rather conveniently when repercussions arise from wrong or unrighteous decisions.

In its worst forms, “the work” is not necessarily populated with the most spiritually productive or gifted. It may not even be filled with “the called.” As in any incorporated activity where money and prestige are in abundance, Movement work tends to be manned with the most loyal and ambitious. At its lower end are the simple-minded who volunteer to be used by the organization in return for recognition, financial offerings, and relative places of importance. These are willing to do whatever it takes to advance the agenda of perceived superiors. They are the worst sort of “yes men,” not ever daring to substantially disagree even with unscriptural decisions. Dissenters can easily be isolated, demoted, and then purged. This would mean personal disaster. For having never developed a ministry of their own, such “workers” have no worth in relation to the larger Christian community. The credentials they have spent so much time and energy accumulating in their small world would look like “play money” to the Christians outside LC circles. Therefore to them, separation from “the work” would mean the end of Christian service.

Needless to say, this pathetic summary does not match any work of God in the Bible. Since the Movement “ministry” does not allow the checks and balances of other works, it has grown from a small

spiritual burden in China into a tree full of roosting workers. The churches produced by it are not much more than anemic appendages attached to its boughs. Apart from that tree, they would quickly die, having become little more than outposts dependant on men and materials. Indeed, the most appropriate way to refer to a Movement church today is not a church in a city but Living Stream Ministry in a city.

Works Within the Work

The New Covenant has an activity proceeding out of it called “the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12). Of this there is no doubt. The question is whether an individual can claim that the particular work he is doing can be classified as “the work” to the exclusion of others. Considering the biblical data on the description of New Testament work, we find it broadly defined as:

1. The salvation of sinners
2. The subsequent growth of those who are saved in areas of spiritual realization, knowledge, fellowship, and the formation of morality and virtues that make the believer look like His Savior.
3. The building up of faith-based relationships among believers in the community, characterized by the higher virtues of love, longsuffering, forgiveness, repentance, meekness, etc.
4. The healthy formation of ethical relationships in employment, marriage, citizenship, parental roles, and generally speaking, to all humanity inhabiting the world community.

5. Compassion-based works toward the needy in the Lord's name.
6. The perfecting of gifts that enable the previous five areas.
7. The founding and establishing of churches that embody the previous six areas.

Nearly every healthy scriptural enterprise existing among Christians can fit somewhere in this grid. The real ministry is shared by a great many ministers. The real work is shared by a great many workers. An allusion to this can be seen in the Lord's command to "pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers [plural] into His harvest [singular]" (Luke 10:2). Paul also embraces this thought when he writes that "we [plural] have this ministry [singular]" (2 Cor. 4:1). It is true that only one great overall ministry exists, but the efforts to carry it out are varied beyond mortal choreography. An association that organizes all workers and commands the allegiance of all local churches is unknown to scripture.

We find in Acts 13 the Holy Spirit saying of Paul and Barnabas, "Separate them now for the work to which I have called them." In this statement we see the work but we also see that it is the work to which I have called them. It was the work specifically assigned to Barnabas and Paul. Their going out from Antioch did not invalidate the efforts of other believers throughout the region. Much has been said of Acts being the record of divine work, and with this I agree, but a number of passages paraphrase events which the writer has no wish (nor space) to chronicle. Luke does not tell us what all of the Twelve apostles and other workers accomplished. Yet Movement teachers habitually assume that if something was not recorded in Acts either it didn't happen or simply didn't count before God.

Omissions in the book of Acts ought to be seen as similar to John's famous verse which says that "there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen" (21:25). John was saying that his gospel was not a complete, exhaustive record. Some material was left out because of considerations of space and burden. Neither is Acts an exhaustive record of New Testament work, although it is an excellent one with Peter, Paul, Philip, Stephen, and Apollos being showcased there. We find implications that point to smaller ministerial adventures conducted by the unknown and unnamed. They were no doubt smaller in scope, but not necessarily smaller in quality. Churches dotted Judea without any clear record concerning who raised them up. Antioch and Rome were two pivotal churches whose roots cannot definitely be traced to any individual or official apostolic endeavor. It is perhaps sufficient to say that "the work," the movement of the Head through the members, did it.

The fact that Paul and Barnabas left Antioch to carry out the ministry, didn't mean that the Spirit's work in other locations was suspended. In fact, the work of the prophets and teachers in Antioch continued (and everywhere else), being just as authentic and important to God as the mission that the Apostles were about to embark upon. When the Holy Spirit said of Paul and Barnabas to "Separate them," it was a separation from His ongoing work in Antioch. Thus, a divinely sanctioned separation occurred in an atmosphere of prayer and brotherly agreement. This newer, smaller enterprise, would target the great masses of unreached humanity and prove every bit as strategic as its parent work had been.

Although Paul and Barnabas later returned to Antioch, we cannot see indications that it was for any reason other than spiritual fellowship. No doubt the believers in Antioch had supported their mission with

prayer. Possibly they had also funded it and the two men wished to announce the fruit of their labor to them. But we do not see Paul reporting back to receive further orders. As his ministry progressively manifested and he spent larger amounts of time in the mission field and with the churches he had raised up, Antioch became the proverbial empty nest in relation to his activity.

And this is only one of many possible works in the principle of Ephesians 4:11. There we find a collection of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers perfecting the saints unto the work of ministry. For those who feel a compulsive need for “coordination,” this arrangement sounds dysfunctional. After all, it is a list of diverse workers globally laboring without managerial oversight. Nor is there any intimation that these ought to be lined up in a pyramid service scheme with Paul, Peter, or anyone else at the top. Still less do we find any apostolic commands given concerning how workers ought to coordinate themselves into a single company. The only example we see is that of diverse works meeting many needs. This decentralization of course minimizes the possibility of a worker enthroning himself above others and claiming that only his work is the work of the ministry. Besides, contrary to Living Stream’s emphasis, the Greek text does not emphasize “the work” or “the ministry.” The definite articles (“the”) don’t appear in the Greek text. The phrase could equally be rendered “saints unto ministering service.”

The work trying to keep the oneness

No attempt was made in the New Testament record to form a connectional system between churches. If one did exist, then apparently the Holy Spirit chose not to bring it to the forefront as an important issue to be copied or implemented.

Yet the alleged last will and testament of Witness Lee mandated coming together multiple times of the year for “blending.” The need of these activities, which is now accepted as necessary, has been grossly overstated. With such a culture of conformity among local churches, it is hard to imagine any church needing to blend away their differences, especially when they are already 99.9% the same! Even if no conferences occurred for the next twenty-five years, videos, books, and visits would continue to exert a strong conforming influence upon member congregations. It is ironic that Local Church members would spend so much time to “blend” with other (virtually identical) Local Churches. This, while ignoring nearby non-LC congregations of fellow-believers in their own cities, who also belong to Christ’s one Body. If blending were a divine mandate, then the local setting is exactly where it would really be needed!

Originally the LC Movement’s conference culture caught on because of its inherent power. Now the events that pass for conferences are a ghostly remnant of what they once were. For the most part they still manage to occupy calendars because of the dreadful condition of member churches. Congregations that continually participate in this extra local Church life are driven by a sense of isolation and idleness. They cannot get along with local Christians because of their obvious religious bias against them, so they are alone, marooned in a tiny exclusive group. Apart from mechanically handing out LSM literature, they cannot mobilize themselves unto any meaningful work that affects their community. Leaders and more active congregational members therefore feel the regular need to escape and find encouragement elsewhere. The big crowds of the conference setting and larger-than-life messages temporarily satisfy that need. This reliance upon extra-local activities and persons for spiritual nourishment and direction is unhealthy to say the least. It has kept

local churches in a perpetual state of ineffectiveness as far as any redemptive effect on their cities.

The cumulative affect of conference life on the internal condition of the churches is dismal. Only a certain percentage of the saints attend these special events, leaving the indifferent majority at home. Furthermore, the conference content may be hopelessly theoretical and recycled over the years to the point of absurdity. Attendees who want to “bring it back in a bag” for those who stayed home, usually end up doing so in a setting that fulfills the description of “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7).

None of the apostles practiced bringing all the churches together either regionally, nationally or internationally in order to “keep the oneness” or “blend” or “put strength together.” If first century Christians wanted to come together extra-locally, they could have easily done so in Jerusalem during the Old Testament feasts. However there is no indication that they did this or that the apostles ever encouraged such gatherings. Geographically speaking, some churches were very close together such as Colossae and Laodicea (only 7 miles apart). But aside from reading each others’ correspondences from Paul (c.f. Col. 4:16) and sharing informal friendships (.c.f. Col. 4:15) there is nothing said concerning the need for the churches in those places to have blending events together.

No record exists nor are commands given for multiple large convocations between the churches. Instead, we see full-time workers, not saints, traveling from place to place, laboring, bringing their salutations from other churches, their news, and their fellowship. The closest example we find of an interchurch network was a one-time relief offering from a number of the churches to the poor in Judea. Paul was centrally involved in this work, journeying, collecting donations, and bringing it back to the ill-affected brethren. He did

not do it with the stated objective of putting everyone together. As far as we can tell, there was no regular offering circuit in the name of blending the churches.

Suggestions on how to utilize workers

Work-sponsored extra-local events are all too often a rejoinder to the dispirited or lonely condition of local churches. A trumpet is blown and a drum beaten to stimulate attendance, but fewer soldiers answer with the fresh-faced gusto that they once did. Full-time workers sigh and lament the narrow view of their localized brethren. They then begin speaking of “the big picture” or “the Body” or some other suitably grand emphasis that will put the churches together. Yet, there are easier solutions to church malaise that do not require hotels, precious vacation time, trips that criss-cross the map, vacant seats at all family holidays, and a regularly crippled local meeting attendance.

Most local churches (the honest ones) have a sense of resignation when it comes to spiritual work. Their efforts to generate a local labor in the past met with little or no success. Generous investments of time and money resulted in poor turn-outs. So now they have elected to stick with what they know—meetings and materials. Worse, some justify this retreat, saying “We’re not here to do a work, we’re here to be a faithful remnant” and other spiritual sounding platitudes. The question is, are we here to do anything more than swap teachings over coffee? I say this with apologies to those who have been hurt by this and that “flow” over the years, but I believe that there is a great deal of work to be done. And no, I do not think that much of what wounded the saints in the past counted as real New Testament work. Those things tended to be schemes calculated to grow a peculiar sect of Christianity.

It is time to join the authentic, non-sectarian New Testament work modeled in scripture. In the

coming chapters I will address some of the factors that have sabotaged our efforts in reaching people. Meanwhile, it is sufficient to say that a local endeavor to do the work of Christ has great potential. It can be so fulfilling, that no one involved will be counting the days until the next glorious out-of-town activity. In fact, when you do attend relevant conferences or workshops, you will find them far more profitable if your main focus is the city in which you live.

So, first of all, don't be idle. Nothing erodes morale like inactivity. The saints can tolerate a certain level of friction and even chaos as long as leaders can point out a gradual forward progress. No one, however, wants to dedicate his life to a church that has lost all momentum. Set short and long-range goals in the area of affecting people—a plan for students or neighbors or singles or for a particular community. Choose a target group that matches the gifts resident in your church. If you don't know how to get started in a particular spiritual enterprise then read some books on the subject or consult area Christians who have some success in the effort you're contemplating.

I realize that this flies in the face of our previous culture. Innovative learning is frowned upon in the LC Movement, especially where it might involve help from other Christians. "We don't receive anything from Christianity, no matter how good" has for years been the attitude aired from public platforms. It is hard to know which is worse: the determination not to receive help from genuine Christians or the quarters that the Movement did end up receiving help from. During the door-knocking campaigns of the eighties and the formation of the two-year training (FTTA), the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons were repeatedly cited as successful models to emulate—two of the worst expressions of heretical Christendom! With this in view, it certainly seems ridiculous to refuse help from

those of orthodox heritage. And no doubt, healthier fruit is likely to be borne out of it.

Obviously, skilled ex-Movement workers should be considered as valuable sources of assistance. Although they may have some of the same blind spots that you have, they will understand your church's cultural trappings better than anyone else. It makes sense to invite workers who have ministries not available to you locally (of course this should be done in coordination with your local leadership). Ideally speaking, full-time workers should be seen as consultants, that is, persons who can help produce a new direction, or those who can aid in one that is already underway. They may visit for special events like local conferences or workshops, however, they should never be life-support systems. That would mean while the "anointing" on a special worker is present, the church is blessed. But while he is away, the church floats aimlessly, waiting for him to provide nourishment or the newest set of marching orders. It should not be this way. Insightful ministry and leadership, the daily lifeblood of the church, is the responsibility of local believers.

This obviously places a burden upon church leadership to rise above mediocrity. As long as attention is not paid to developing first-rate service, a congregation will flounder indefinitely and simply never grow. After all, why would the saints recommend the church to their friends when the teaching and leadership there is below-par? If he possesses the appropriate gifts, a visiting worker can provide workshops on good preaching skills, practical shepherding, how to set up gospel dinners, even how to deal with difficulties in the church. Under all those circumstances, the goal would be to enrich the church's effectiveness toward its surrounding community and thus enable it to stand on its own feet.

Perhaps the most serious weakness in the future of any ex-Movement church will be its traditionally untrained service core (despite countless “training” events that only specialized in theoretical aspects). While we celebrate the universal priesthood of the believers, this should hardly mean the universal priesthood of the “yahoos”—folks with minimal knowledge or understanding of what they’re trying to do (while they sound off as though they wrote the book on it). There are two very important words to remember: seek help. Recently our campus ministry called in workers from another group to receive advice on how a worship band can effectively operate. We sat around a table and asked question after question, getting important angles on what to do and how to view certain things. No one called it a training, but that was exactly what it was. Rather than try to reinvent the wheel, we chose to enlist the help of workers who had already “been there, done that.” The results were instructive and encouraging.

As a final piece of advice on enjoying the benefits of workers, attend strategically timed conferences. If this sounds like a contradiction to how I started this sub-section, then let me make a few qualifications. Yes, occasionally hit the conference trail, but don’t live there. Some in the LC Movement spend more time in airplanes than praying and planning for the salvation of their neighborhoods. As one brother sadly said, “They will drive for hours to a conference but find it hard to drive ten minutes to pursue any meaningful local labor.” After all the “feasts,” and various activities around the globe, no energy or interest remains for the poor failing situation at home. The propaganda mill however, will always report major victories somewhere in someone’s church far, far from home. But rest assured, it will never be yours.

For those industrious congregations that hope to make a difference where they live, attending well

placed, well planned, relevant conferences can be a definite shot in the arm. A little time away can perfect views and render helpful suggestions on carrying out local work. This does not mean that the whole church must participate, nor does it mean that only conferences organized by local church workers should be considered. There are many excellent examples of Christian workshops/conferences specializing in everything from family values to leadership to the development of ministerial skills.

On Supporting Works

Movement work has generated plenty of nonsensical and damaging “flows.” The unfortunate backlash of it all leaves saints and churches suspicious of any full-time endeavor. For instance, ought ministerial activities to be materially supported? The Bible does provide affirmative examples. Indeed, the vast majority of healthy Christian groups support some type of para-church ministry and view it as an investment in the Kingdom. One of the duties of church leadership ought to lie in assessing the worthiness of various works. Exactly how do they fit within the overall New Testament work? Do they further the interests of Christ? Does budgetary support seem good to the saints and to the Holy Spirit?

Until this present age of mammon passes away, even the most spiritual works require some type of financial investment. This is most obvious where ministerial calling occasionally collides with secular employment. An individual may be led to leave his job since there is not enough time to effectively remain employed and pursue the work to which the Holy Spirit has called him. Over time, a group of brothers with similar leading might join him in his ministry efforts (such as coworkers with Paul). The church at large may see this as a commendable work, deserving support.

Ensuing financial arrangements could take on a number of different forms, ranging from pledges of long term support to partial care to occasional contributions. Of course the church also has a right to withdraw support whenever the leaders or responsible parties deem it expedient.

There is an enormous amount of flexibility in these considerations, rendering it impossible to define any rigidly fixed system. In fact, as soon as assumptions that it must be this way or that way are made and taught as intractable rules of order, the Spirit will be artificially limited. Additionally, the workers themselves may labor under unnecessary hardships or perhaps, guilt. The examples of financial support that we have in scripture provide principles, not trenches.

The New Testament work of Jesus Christ is not an institutional monopoly. Nor could such a thing ever properly represent the New Covenant. A controlling entity of that kind will always operate at complex simultaneous levels of motive. On the surface it will appear to serve the believers and the Lord's interests. Deeper is an almost irrational concern with guarding the legacy of its founder. Far deeper and carefully concealed are the obsessive preoccupations with power issues, money, public image, and internal politics. Contrast this "system of error" to the simple reality of Christ working through His members—of believers laboring not for the growth of a corporate business entity, but for the well-being of the needy, the unsaved, the saints, the local congregation, or Christians in the church at large. This less-spoiled version of "the work of ministry" is a far cry from its warped counterpart and truly a blessing—"gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8).