

Identifying New Shepherds

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If your purpose is to multiply churches through cells or small groups — and it ought to be — then help your church planting apprentices to plan and arrange to turn over new groups to new shepherds as soon as possible (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). That is, **do not** encourage them to settle into a group and shepherd it indefinitely. To facilitate this, implement a 2 Timothy 2:2 leadership training ‘chain reaction’ from the beginning. Start new groups through apprentice shepherds, working toward four-level mentoring chains like the one Paul started with Timothy, who trained ‘reliable men’, who trained ‘others also’.

When we add man-made requirements to those of Scripture for new leaders, we sinfully stifle the work of the Holy Spirit and contradict His gifting. We often hear Western clergy complain, “But there is no one qualified to lead!” Of course, new believers do not meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:1ff to be commissioned as a pastor, as they are not yet “proven”, **yet** they certainly can gather their unbelieving friends to hear about Jesus the way Cornelius, Zacheus and Levi did in the New Testament. They can shepherd their own families and share Christ with friends, which they normally will do when someone like Aquila and Priscilla mentors them behind the scenes. We must recognize them as leaders when they do this, for they are leading! It is a matter of truth and of sensing the working and gifting of the Holy Spirit. In so doing, we do not yet ordain them as official “elders” or “pastors”.

Informal ‘gathering’ meetings of these new leaders often develop into a cell group or church, if we keep the perfectionists and legalists off their backs. Then you can appoint them as ‘provisional shepherds’. Doing this encourages those who want to shepherd and who show an ability to do so. We can recall more than one church leader expressing diplomatically that they prefer to reserve such positions of leadership for popular, well-dressed leaders who — they imagine — will attract tithe-payers into their congregations.

In other cultures, one seldom sees new cells or churches grow out of groups consisting primarily of mature believers. Groups led by mature Bible teachers almost never spawn a new group. Rather new cells and churches normally arise from groups of new believers led by a novice shepherd who is mentored by a pastor, missionary or other more experienced leader. Let us understand the potential in zealous, obedient, new believers who want to be taught and coached!

So, how to recognize those who will likely make good shepherds now and, maybe, elders later?

(1) Mikel Neumann reported from Madagascar that pastoral gifting could often be seen in new small groups. When someone showed concern for others of the group, asking them to express their views, that person often emerged as the group shepherd. (See 1 Tim. 3:2b).

(2) George Patterson reported from Honduras that the most reliable way to predict which men would succeed over time as group shepherds and church pastors, were those who started by shepherding their own household (See 1Tim. 3:4). About one in three men who undertook to lead their own household in family prayers and worship, and heeded a mentor, proved able in time to pastor the resulting church successfully.

(3) Galen Currah reported that, in India and SE Asia, those who are able to gather others around themselves would lead them as a new cell or church, at least until someone more gifted or respected emerged in the group. Often these catalysts were a ‘man of peace’, who invited evangelists into their home. These then worshiped with him and taught **him intensively** to obey the commands of Jesus for one or two weeks. These apprentices then invited friends and relatives, and shared the gospel with them, to become a growing house church.

New shepherds emerge **in** three ways. Do not overlook any of them. Find them among **1) converts, 2) apprentices** and **3) self-starters**. 1) Help converts to start shepherding their own families in their own home. Mentor them, and let them grow around them and mature as their unsaved friends join in. 2) Let apprentice leaders practice leading your group, then start their own **groups**. 3) Open doors for dormant self-starters who are equipped to lead but have never been offered the opportunity to start. Light a fire under them!

The promise of Scripture is clear: “God gave to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.” (Eph. 4:11. Scholars say that the word “gave” in the original language is a timeless verb, meaning that God still gives such people to churches.) Therefore, watch for such people. If they are not there, they soon will be.

When you see a man or woman responding to the Word of God with faith and obedience, approach them about leading a new group consisting of their family and friends, especially the unsaved ones. If they are familiar with the traditional church they might object, saying that they are not capable, or are unqualified. Offer to coach them from behind the scenes. Assure them that with God’s help, they can do it, and that you will be there to meet with them regularly over several weeks or months.

Available materials that facilitate the raising up of new leaders by mentoring them:

Pastor’s Storybook (English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Hindi). Fast-paced story of a new church led by a novice shepherd who find help from Bible stories. Some versions include an index of Bible stories. Evangelism, 8 units, commands of Jesus, 7 units, New Testament ministries, 14 units. Visit <<http://www.Paul-Timothy.net>>.

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