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## A Member of the Crew

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# A Member of the Crew

BY PAUL ANDERSON

**W**HEN I was a high school senior seeking direction as to what to do with my life, my pastor, Joe Roher, said to me, "Paul, your direction in life is already decided for you." Good! I thought. *Will it be a law career or art?* He went on. "You are to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Now, the way you invest your energies and earn your subsistence should be the means by which you are the most effective disciple possible."

That made sense to me. A couple of months later, as a counselor at Quaker Canyon Camp, preparing to make a presentation for fifth and sixth graders at "Adventure Camp" on the Lord's call to missions, the Lord spoke to me: "Are you asking those kids to do something you're not willing to do yourself?" "No," I responded, "I just want to know that the calling to ministry is Your doing, not just my own idea." The Lord confirmed this calling to me by means of several Scripture passages, and immediately I decided to attend Malone College and pursue studies in Christian ministries.

Several years later, as a young pastor and seminarian, I was challenged by Elton Trueblood, who as my mentor would say, "If you are a Christian you are a minister. A non-ministering Christian is a contradiction of terms." And, "The church of Jesus Christ is a ship that carries no passengers; for all are members of the crew." And again, "Laity" is a bad word. Don't use it! The New Testament church knew of no distinction between laity and clergy . . . The goal of the pastor is not to be the minister, but to be about the task of *helping others realize and carry out their own ministries*. That is the ministry of multiplication, and perhaps the most crucial ministry of all." Not a bad definition of "vocational" ministry.

Over the last three or four decades, many of the greatest strides toward Christian renewal have been taken as a result of churches recovering again that Reformation and Quaker ideal: The priesthood and ministry of Christ extends to all believers; not just a handful. The question is not *if* a healthy Christian will minister—but *how*.

Genuine ministry can happen through a variety of means. A working defini-

tion of it might be, "ministry involves identifying human needs and meeting them—energized and empowered by the transforming love of Jesus Christ." The vocational question is this: "By what avenue has God called me to further His loving reign and redemptive work in the world?" Vocation implies a calling, and vocational ministry is something we do *through* our occupations, not just besides them.

**T**HE CHRISTIAN works not for self or gain, but to serve the needs of others as Christ's hands and feet in the world. This may be one of the best means of Christian witness we can imagine. Work becomes the means of ministry, and not surprisingly, genuine service succeeds. It is said that Quakers came to Philadelphia to do good . . . and they did well. But their success was rooted in the fact they sought to identify the needs of others and to meet those needs.

One Philadelphian Quaker was so concerned about the drunkenness of men who were only served alcohol at meeting places, he eventually invented a drink made from roots called "root beverage." One of his assistants said something like, "Excuse me, but I think it might sell better if thee called it 'root beer,' Mr. Hires."

To this day, the great chocolate firms of Britain are owned by Quaker families—Rowntree's, Cadbury's, Terry's—who originally invented hot chocolate also as an alternative to more addictive indulgences.

Nearly all firms having to do with British banking (Barclay's Bank), accounting, insurance (Lloyd's of London), the early iron industry and eventually railroads, emerged as Quakers—noted for their honesty and desire to serve—became entrusted with greater responsibility.

**T**HE FIRST prison ministries, asylums for the mentally ill, alternative schools especially for the underprivileged (eventually becoming schools attended by Presidents' children), were initiated by Friends who felt moved by God to reach out to those who were overlooked by society. The fixed price system, the nonlethal transferral of governmental power, the philosophical roots of American democracy—all of these originated with Quakers who believed in living with integrity, and that with God's help one could always improve upon the norm. Even the digestive wafer—the Graham cracker—was invented by a Friend who found that "urchins" off the street could not concentrate in school if they did not have at least some food in their stomachs.

To be called to become a Christian is to be called to be a minister. Genuine Christian ministry does not need Christian labels attached to it to be effective. They may even detract from the main thing, which is the Lord's meeting of real needs through us.

In this consumerist age, Christians may wrongly ask, "What am I getting out of this church?" The vocational question is, "How am I best able to serve—within this church and beyond it—connecting human needs with the transforming love of Jesus Christ?" Such an inquiry may lead to one of the most important journeys of all: the transition from being a passenger to becoming a member of the crew.

**About this issue:** As you can see, we have treated the topic of "Vocational Ministry" from several angles, especially as it helps the local church identify means of recognizing, cultivating, and implementing the ministry gifts and callings of its members. Note also the queries on radical stewardship for discussion in the local church. **EF**