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### **An Empowered Church**

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The Africa Region Mission Statement pronounces: ‘The Church of the Nazarene on the Africa Region is a Christian holiness family made up of various language and cultural groups for the purpose of: Worshipping the Saviour; Fellowshiping and Serving with the Saints; Winning the Lost; Discipling the Won; and, Deploying the Disciplined.’ The only way that this mission is going to be realised is when every leader and every pastor in Africa is effectively empowered to fulfil his or her own mission.

Is the Church of the Nazarene in Africa effectively empowering her leaders? I would like to suggest that this question should be considered not out of a institutional point of view, but rather out of a ‘grass roots’ or personal point of view.

I joined the Church of the Nazarene in 1984 in order to follow the call of God to go into pastoral ministry. I remember that it was with a sense of great excitement that I entered the Nazarene Theological College in Florida, Johannesburg. As the four years sped by my sense of excitement grew as I looked forward to going out and pastoring. In 1989 I moved to the Regents Park Church to take up a position as Associate Pastor. In April 1992 I moved to the Three Rivers Church to take up a position as Senior Pastor that I fulfilled until the end of the year 2001.

My tenure first as Associate Pastor and then Senior Pastor included both good and not so good experiences. I spent three and a quarter years at the Regents Park Church. It was expected of me to run the Christian Education Department and Nursery School. This I had to do based on my learning and exposure that I received at the Nazarene Theological College. Most of the time it went well. Often however I did not know what to do. A nagging question entered my thoughts whether there would not have been a better way to do the job.

I spent almost ten years at the Three Rivers Church of the Nazarene. When

I got there I was informed by the church board that I was to ignore my predecessor's work and to start running the church as if it was a new church. I proceeded then to attempt to build the church with the knowledge I gained from my years as student at the Nazarene Theological College and as Associate Pastor at the Regents Park Church. Over the years my best experiences included building good relationships with the people in the church, as well as the community. I also had good experiences in seeing many people growing as Christians. However, in terms of seeing the leadership of the church growing in adopting new ways of ministry, I had little success. In terms of seeing new people settling down in the church, I also had little success. Seeing the lack of growth in the church only increased the nagging question in my mind whether there is not a better way to run the church.

Over the years I started to ask some very real questions about the following issues.

- 'What am I doing wrong and what am I doing right?' The problem with this question was that I had no way of really knowing whether what I was doing was right or wrong. The result was that I spent years trying new approaches to ministry without really knowing that it was the right approach for my church. Every time the District or General Church introduced a new approach to ministry, I would try it out, one way or another, seldom with lasting results.
- 'Am I not holy enough?' I often sought God's anointing on my ministry.
- 'Am I not praying enough?' I often prayed that God would send revival. I noticed many people in various churches prayed yet without significant results.
- 'Is there something wrong with the people, including local leaders, in the churches?' I quickly realised that the whole point of having churches is to lead and develop people into having a life fully devoted to God and to be empowered to live for Him. Therefore I could not look for the fault with the lay people; rather I had to look at the leaders of the church.
- 'Is there something wrong with the District or Regional Leadership?' Over the last eight years the district and region that I am part of had very good leaders. Their leadership per se was not the problem.

- ‘Was there something wrong with the theological training that I received?’ I noted that out of the 24 courses that I completed only 7 related to practically running a church. Subsequent to my theological training I was exposed to many other outstanding courses. My conclusion was that there was nothing wrong with the theological training that I received.

In my quest for better ministry, I started to speak to many of my colleagues within the Church of the Nazarene, and without. To my amazement I discovered that many of them struggled with the same nagging questions that I have been struggling with to a lesser or greater degree. Consequently, many pastors are experiencing a sense of insecurity, failure, and even confusion.

The conclusion that I came to was that the average pastor, including myself, has and is receiving excellent theological training as well as various other courses and programmes. However, in terms of turning theoretical training into practical hands-on ability there seems to be a problem. In considering this conclusion, I thought of the first years that I started my tenure as Senior Pastor at Three Rivers. I cannot help but think that I, and the church, would have done so much better if there were someone who could have walked the road with me as a mentor or a coach to reflect or interpret for me what I was doing right and what I was doing wrong.

Recently I was exposed to a video of the Equip Group of Dr. John Maxwell on the issue of empowerment<sup>1</sup>. I was sufficiently impressed that I concluded that our pastors, including myself, would have been a lot more effective if we had an adequate empowering system in place. The younger pastors, and their families, would be a lot less susceptible to hurt and disappointment if they were adequately empowered right from the beginning. Our pastors would be a lot more effective in steering their congregation in the midst of a fast-changing society if they were empowered on an ongoing basis.

The empowerment that I am talking about goes way beyond the classroom that imparts new knowledge. It includes helping the pastor not only to have the knowledge of what has to be done, but also creating enough practical wisdom, understanding and self-confidence to minister effectively. It is the kind of empowerment that takes place when a pastor

has a person or a group with whom he can share his specific situation and be guided by the combined wisdom of his colleague or colleagues to resolve that situation.

The Equip organisation suggests the following twelve steps to empowerment:

1. Know yourself
2. Know the people that you would like to empower
3. Clearly define the assignments
4. Teach the why behind the assignment
5. Discuss the growth process as they go, interpret what is happening to them as they grow in their ministry
6. Spend relational time with those that you are attempting to empower
7. Allow them to watch you work
8. Give them resources that they need
9. Hold them accountable for their assignment
10. Encourage them to journal through the process so that they may monitor their own progress
11. Give them freedom to fail
12. Evaluate and affirm them regularly

These twelve steps may look to some as straight forward; however, I would like to suggest my observation is that very little hands-on empowerment is done beyond the typical classroom situations. Much emphasis is laid on educating our pastors and leaders in the classroom; however, little emphasis is laid on how to make it work on the 'front-line'.

I would like to suggest that local leaders as well as district and regional leaders be empowered to empower other leaders. The consequence will be many fold, for example:

- Local churches and districts as well as our region will function a lot more effectively
- National leaders on all levels of the region will become ready for regional leadership much quicker
- New churches will be matured a lot faster
- Pastors and their families will be a lot less susceptible to unnecessary hurt and disappointment

In conclusion, it is the stated goal of the Church of the Nazarene in Africa to have one million members in the year 2010. Without adequate empowerment it will not happen. We may reach the numbers, but will we have a strong national church that is self-sustaining and self-propagating?

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-14).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Maxwell, Dr John C., *Equip: The Laws of Leadership*, Equip, Atlanta GA

<sup>2</sup>All Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version* (NIV).

