

MARKS OF CHURCH MATURITY

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written and said about the importance of the five-fold ministries in the church – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph.4:11). What often gets lost in these discussions is the purpose for those ministries – “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.” (Eph.4:12b-13) God’s purpose for calling people to and gifting them for ministry is that his body, the church, might become mature or fully developed.

Discussions on spiritual maturity tend to focus on the maturity of individual members, and while that is critical, in addressing the Ephesians Paul is talking about the maturity of the body as a whole. Actually, individual and corporate maturity go hand in hand. A church composed of spiritually immature members will not be mature collectively.

Those of us involved in positions of leadership need to understand what a mature church looks like because it is the goal toward which we are working. We should be striving to see the following five characteristics of church maturity being developed within the churches that we lead.

1) Evangelistic Focus

The church exists to bring lost people into a relationship with Christ. A mature church never loses this focus and is always seeking for ways to connect with people who are not yet Christ followers in order to bring them into a relationship with Him. In a mature church evangelism is recognized to be the responsibility of all believers and not just

those with the gift of evangelism or those given evangelism as a ministry assignment. A mature church will regularly equip its members to share their faith with their friends and neighbors so “they are prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks them to give the reason for the hope that they have.” (I Pet.3:15) A mature church regularly schedules intentional outreach activities designed to bring the gospel to those who do not yet believe.

2) Deliberate Discipleship

In a mature church, individual believers are consciously encouraged to grow “to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”. (Eph.4:13) Discipleship is not left to chance, but is intentionally planned and organized. New believers are directed into an ongoing program for getting them established in the faith. Discipleship programs are provided for life-long development – from youth to old age. Discipleship programs focus on both spiritual development into the likeness of Christ in addition to equipping for ministry in line with each person’s giftedness.

3) Leadership Development

A mature church is involved in a continuous process of identifying and equipping those God has called and gifted to lead His church. People are given the opportunity to develop and exercise leadership gifts. Those with giftedness to serve beyond their own local church are encouraged and supported in being equipped through Bible College training and other training opportunities. A mature church has a pool of capable leaders it can call upon to exercise whatever leadership functions are needed and regularly releases such leaders to serve beyond their own local church.

4) Self-Sustainable

A mature church is able to function without dependence on outside sources of support while at the same time remaining dependent on God and interdependent with others. That is, the church is structured in such a manner that it does not require outside resources to function but sustain itself and its ministries through the resources God provides through its members. This enables the church to partner with other churches and organizations to engage in ministries that neither could accomplish on their own. Biblical stewardship is taught and practiced on a consistent basis.

5) Missionary Vision

A mature church actively responds to the Great Commission (Matt.28:19-20) to reach those “beyond”. Rather than inward looking concerned about its own affairs, such churches are motivated and mobilized to reach those outside the doors of their church both near and far (Acts 1:8). This missionary vision is reflected in giving toward missionary activity, praying for the mission work supported by the church, as well as involvement in sending members to be part of actual missions endeavors. Such churches do not see themselves as part of the “mission field” but rather as part of the “missions task force”.

These are the characteristics that should be evident in a mature church. Do they describe our church?



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