

# MINISTRY IS FOR EVERYONE

## Keynote address by the Rev'd Kevin Simington

### Ephesians 4:11-16

As I start, I'd like to get a bit of a feel for who is taking part in this session. So can I just ask all the ministers to give me a wave – anyone who is in ministry somewhere. OK, I can see some people waving, some not waving, and some of you looking a little confused – thinking “What does he mean by minister?”.

I have a confession to make, it was a bit of a trick question. I'm sorry, I confess that I was deliberately vague in not defining what I meant by the terms, 'minister' and 'ministry'. You see, the truth is, all of us should be putting our hands up in answer to that question. Because according to the Bible, according to the New Testament, every Christian is a minister – every member of God's family is called to ministry in some way.

And for the next half hour or so, I want to focus on a passage of the Bible that says precisely that. In fact, this Bible passage has the potential to be revolutionary for your church. In fact, I'll go so far as to say that if every church in our diocese put into practice the principles found in this passage, it would transform our churches and transform our diocese.

So, here it is, Ephesians 4:11-16. Lets have a read.



***“<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> to equip his people for the work of ministry, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>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.<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.<sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”***

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OK, there it is. I believe this is THE most important passage in the whole Bible for our understanding of how the church is meant to operate. This passage in

Ephesians is God's blueprint for the proper functioning of the church on Earth. So, let's unpack it in detail.



We start off in verse 11, which says ... ***"<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers"*** – these are the God-appointed leaders of the church on earth – the leader dudes (if I can use that term in a non-genderist sense). And they are God's gift to the church – this verse says God "gave" them to the church. And the very next verse tells us what their job is:



**Verse 12:** ***"<sup>12</sup>to equip God's people for the work of ministry"***. There are two important words here. Firstly, ***"equip"***. This is the word ***"Katartismos"*** – and it was the word commonly used for mending something that is broken (a fisherman mending his nets, or a doctor mending a broken bone) and also for the trainer of an athlete and the coach of a team. The second key word is this word "ministry", which is the Greek word ***"diakonia"*** which is very commonly used throughout the New Testament to indicate a wide range of ministry – from preaching through to simple, practical acts of service.

So, putting these two concepts together, the job of the leader dudes is to train and coach God's people as a team, in the process fixing whatever is broken and get them working properly again as a team, so that, together, they might do the work of ministry.

Can you see how this is a very different concept from some people's view of church ministry? The view of some people is that the professional clergy – priests, deacons and LLMs - are meant to run around doing the work of ministry while everyone else cheers them on from the sidelines.

**\*\*\* Someone once defined the game of soccer as "A small group of people desperately in need of a rest, cheered on by a large number of people desperately in need of exercise."**

**Some churches can be like that!**

Let me make this really clear: the primary calling of the paid ministers in your church is not to run around doing all the ministry, but to train and equip the whole church, the unpaid ministers, to run onto the field and do the ministry themselves.

**\*\*\* When I stand in God's presence one day and give an account of my service for God as an ordained minister, God is not going to ask me, "How did you go doing all the work of the church?". He's going to ask me, "How did you go getting all the church to work?" That is my calling: Equipping, training and coaching the body of Christ. And if you are one of the leader dudes, that is your primary calling too!**

**So, let me talk very specifically to the leader dudes among us for a few minutes.**



Let's look again at the leadership gifts mentioned in verse 11:

***"<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers"***

I'm going to focus on a couple of these leadership gifts that are most appropriate for us in our contemporary setting. I'll start with the evangelists.

God raises some people up to be evangelists; there are some paid ministers who are particularly gifted in evangelism, and they are God's gift to the church. But notice, please, what their primary responsibility is. The evangelist is **not** called by God to simply run around doing lots of evangelism.. No. The evangelist's primary calling is to train and equip the **whole church** for evangelism. And when that evangelist leader eventually finishes his or her term of ministry in that church, after 3 years or 30 years, if the end result is that the church is no better equipped for doing evangelism themselves, then the evangelist has failed to fulfil his or her primary calling.

The same is true of Pastors. Those church leaders and ministers who are particularly gifted in pastoral care are not called by God to run around doing all the pastoral care for the church. Their primary mandate, according to Ephesians 4, is to train and equip God's people to minister to care for one another. And when that pastoral leader's ministry in that church eventually comes to an end if the church is not more effective and better equipped to pastorally care for one another, then that pastor has failed to fulfil his or her primary calling.

**This is a very DIFFERENT model from how some churches tend to view the role of the clergy. But it's God's model for effective ministry. **Everyone** is in ministry. Everyone is on the field. And it's only when that is happening, that the church has its best shot at being effective and healthy.**

And that is precisely what the next verses in this passage spell out. Let me read them to you. And I want you to notice that they describe the results that will inevitably follow when this model of ministry is adopted:



*“<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> to equip his people for the work of ministry, **so that the body of Christ may be built up** <sup>13</sup>**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.**<sup>14</sup> ... and jumping to verse 15 ... <sup>15</sup>**Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.** <sup>16</sup>**From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”***

Folks, there is God’s blueprint for a healthy, mature, effective church! Everyone is on the field! No one is on the sidelines. The coach is on there with them, and they’re all ministering together. Everyone is involved in ministry.

**THIS BEGS THE QUESTION ... what is all this “ministry” that everyone in the church is meant to be doing? So far, I’ve spoken mainly to the leader dudes, so now let me turn my attention to everyone else. The unpaid ministers of the church.**

Let me tell you a story.

**\*\*\* In the late 1980s, I was the senior minister at Engadine Church of Christ, and one day I got a phone call from Glenys. She had been sharing her faith gently and gradually with her next door neighbour over a period of months, and her neighbour had finally said, “I want to become a Christian. What must I do?” Glenys phoned me in a panic, saying, “Help! Can you come and lead my neighbour to Christ?” And I responded by saying, “No. You can do it.” ... I talked her through it, gave her some Bible verses to read with her neighbour and I described the kind of prayer she might pray with her friend. The next Sunday, Glenys brought her neighbour to church, and they were both beaming! Their faces were glowing with joy so much that I almost needed sunglasses!**

If I had gone and prayed with that lady myself, I would have robbed Glenys of the joy of ministry and I would have reinforced to her and to many others that that kind of ministry is a job for the professionals. But because I didn’t go,

because I encouraged her to do it herself, she made the wonderful discovery that ordinary people can be ministers of the gospel.

 ***2 Corinthians 5:17-18 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, [so, any Christian in other words], they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us [that's everyone – all of us who are Christians] the ministry of reconciliation."***

If you are a Christian, God has given you the MINISTRY of reconciliation – not just your paid minister, your deacon or priest or LLM – it's your ministry too! The ministry of calling lost people back into relationship with their Creator is NOT just the ministry of the clergy and leaders – it's the ministry that God has given to his whole church.

Now, let me push the PAUSE button here for a moment, before you all rush out and start preaching on the street corner. This doesn't necessarily mean that all of you have to be red hot evangelists. Let me relieve you of that pressure! You might go through your whole life without ever actually 'converting someone'. You may never have the privilege of doing what Glenys did that day - in terms of praying with someone as they commit their lives to Christ. You may never be the last link in the chain – but we can all be A link. And you don't have to be a great evangelist to be a link in the chain.

Because the truth is, when a person finally makes that monumental decision to become a Christian – to turn in faith and repentance to Christ – it is almost invariably the last step in a very long and gradual journey of faith. It's the last link in a long series of links – conversations they've had with other Christians, things they've watched and noticed in the lives of other Christians, things they've been given to read by other Christians.

Whenever I have the privilege of praying with someone as they commit their life to Christ, I am very conscious that I am just the last link in a long series of links. And YOU – my brothers and sisters – are those links.

**In a recent sermon at Parkes I spoke about the difference between being a witness and being a gifted evangelist. Not everyone is gifted to be an evangelist, but we are all called to be witnesses for Christ and to play our own small part in this ministry of reconciliation.**

**When you summon the courage to speak up about your faith, when you dare to slip that little comment into a conversation, when you courageously hand that person something to read, when you dare to invite someone to church or to an outreach event, or when you quietly go on living a godly life despite the deterioration of morals all around you** – you are a being witness for Christ and you are an integral part of the church’s ministry of reconciliation. We all have a part to play! It’s a ministry God has called the whole church to – not just the dudes up the front who are doing the preaching.

So far, I have spoken mainly about the ministry of reconciliation, but God’s call for you to be involved in ministry encompasses many other aspects, not just evangelism. For example, it encompasses pastoral care.

**\*\*\* A lady in a church where I was the minister once asked me, “Does our church have a visitation team?” And I replied, “Yes. You’re it!”**

## **THE ONE ANOTHERS**

Have you ever taken note of all the “one another’s” in the New Testament. There are over 40 exhortations in the New Testament for the whole church to be involved in pastoral care ministry towards “one another”. Let me just read a small selection of these one anothers to you:

- care for one another (1 Cor 12:55)
- be servants of one another (Gal 5:13)
- bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2)
- be kind to one another (Eph 4:32)
- forgive one another (Col 3:13)
- encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11)
- build up one another (1 Thess 5:11)
- do good to one another (1 Thess 5:15)
- exhort one another to good deeds (Heb 10:24)
- confess your sins to one another (Jas 5:16)
- pray for one another (Jas 5:16)
- love one another (1 Pet 1:22)
- be hospitable to one another (1 Pet 4:9)

The one another’s of the Bible show that pastoral care ministry in particular is the job of the whole body – because it’s too big for just one or two people. **The**

pastoral visitation team in your church is in fact the whole church! At least, it's meant to be.

*\*\*\* Many years ago, a lady in our church, Marj, spoke to me after the morning service and said, "I was in hospital this week and no one from the church visited me!" I replied, "Well, that's not quite right. I happen to know that your Bible study leader visited you during your 2 days in hospital, and two other ladies from your Bible study group also visited you separately." She replied, "Yes, but no one from the church visited me!" She meant me, of course. And I said to her, "Marj, they ARE the church". I didn't defend myself or explain to her that I had been very busy visiting people with much more serious issues that week and that I couldn't possibly visit everyone who needed visiting.*

If the pastoral care ministry of the church rests solely upon the shoulders of just the paid minister and maybe a handful of others, then WE ARE IN BIG TROUBLE. Because a handful of people can't possibly care for a whole church.

**You see, EPHESIANS 4 IS GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR A HEALTHY CHURCH – because ministry is just TOO BIG for a handful of people. Ministry is for EVERYONE.** Do you want to know who the ministry team is in your church? Look around you next Sunday while you're sitting in the pews. You are the ministry team. You and everyone else in the church.

### **SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

And I've only had time to discuss two areas of ministry that we are all called to – pastoral care and the ministry of reconciliation – but ministry in the church is as wide as you want to make it. Because God gives to every Christian, gifts and abilities that are to be used for ministry – all kinds of gifts to be used in service for him – **hospitality, serving, cooking, maintenance skills, artistic and musical skills, listening, praying, organising** – and when everyone in the church puts their gifts to use, when everyone gets involved in ministry, the church is blessed, Christ is glorified and his Kingdom on Earth grows.

CONVERSELY, churches where people AREN'T very involved in ministry, churches that are characterised by passive consumerism – where they pay the minister and wonder why he or she is not getting round to visit everyone – are almost always characterised by discontent among the laity and exhaustion among the clergy.

**Here's a cute little anecdote you might have heard before:**

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done in the church and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.

You might not have any particularly spectacular gifts. You might think that all you can contribute is very simple acts of service. That's OK. Because God has a way of using very ordinary people to do extraordinary things...

\*\*\* In 1934, there was an Evangelistic rally in Charlottesville. The preacher was, Mordecai Ham, a travelling evangelist. A large marquee was erected on the village green where the rallies were held. One night, two 16 yr old boys heard music coming from the tent and were intrigued. They walked into the tent to see what was going on, but the place was packed and they couldn't find any seats. So they turned around and were about to walk out again when two big, meaty hands clamped on their shoulders and an elderly usher and said "I've got just the seats for you boys." He turned them around and marched them down to the very front row and plonked them down in front of the lectern just as Mordecai Ham was about to start preaching. At the end of the sermon, both boys walked forward to give their lives to Christ. One of them was William Graham, Billy to his friends. And he became one of the greatest evangelists the world has ever seen. Through his ministry, millions of people came to faith in Christ.

But there's a backstory here, that's really interesting. That usher, as it turns out, had tried for several years to find some way of serving God, but had failed. He was in his late 80s and wasn't very sharp mentally anymore. But he still wanted to serve God somehow. He tried Sunday School teaching, and Bible Study leading, pastoral visitation, but he just wasn't cut out for any of that. And he had gone to his pastor and said, "What can I do for God?" The pastor had struggled to know what to suggest until he heard about the upcoming crusade and suggested that he volunteer to be an usher. That elderly usher had no way of knowing that his ordinary act of service that night would have world shattering, eternal consequences.

In fact, he never found out the full extent of how God used him on that night, because that elderly usher died many years before Billy Graham even began

his ministry. He never found out how God used him. But he knows now, doesn't he? Because he's in glory right now and he can finally see how God used his simple act of service to change the world.

You never know, do you, how God is going to use your ordinary acts of service and ministry for his glory. But when we all pull together, when we all work in God's harvest field together, God can do great things through us! Because ministry is, indeed, for everyone.

***<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> to equip his people for the work of ministry, so that the body of Christ may be built up<sup>13</sup> 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 ... as each part does its work.***

May that be true in your church and throughout our whole diocese, as we seek to be a vibrant, healthy church that is effective in reaching our communities with the good news of the Gospel.