

June 2005, *Equipping*



Ministry...mine or ours?

Last night, as I watched the Blue Jays play the Orioles, I was struck by the magic that happens when highly gifted baseball players actually play as a team; when pitcher, catcher and short-stop become one harmonious unit. It's beautiful!

When you think about the ministry that God has given you, which adjective does your mind connect to that ministry... "mine" or "ours?"

At a recent meeting of Mennonite Church U.S. and Mennonite church Canada Formation staff, we observed that developing team ministry is vital for healthy churches; and that the key agents in building team ministry are pastors who give team development high priority and model team ministry in how they work together as a pastoral team (if there is a multiple-staff) and how they nourish each ministry group in the congregation.

As I look around at pastoral teams across the country, I often see pastors working in parallel ministries with their fellow pastors or lay leaders. They may be in what is called "pastoral teams," but they tend to pursue their ministries in a highly individualistic way. Do they collaborate and consult? Are they exercising mutual support and accountability? Do they meet regularly for team building and mentoring? Often, not very much. If you were to ask why this is so, time and the pressures of ministry would be cited as the main obstacles.

Developing team ministry was a high priority for Jesus. He called together twelve individuals from very diverse backgrounds, and mentored them through three years of ministry experience and teaching. He poured enormous energy and time into the lives of these disciples. He formed them into a team. It was a high priority. As a result, the leadership of the early church was based on team values and dynamics absorbed by the disciples such as praying and discerning God's will together and mutual care and accountability.

What are the pay-offs for the team approach? In a workshop on ministry teams, led by Dale Stolfus, Linford King and Marlene Kropf, of Mennonite Church U.S.A., the health-giving power of team ministry is described, for the congregation, their mission and their leaders.

- a. **Team leadership is healthier for congregations.** *As yeast permeates the body of Christ, team leaders model harmony and communion. The strength of their unity and mutuality creates momentum for the gifts of every member to be called forth, developed and exercised. Thus the ministries of the body of Christ are empowered.*
- b. **Team leadership is healthier for the church's mission in the world.** *In an organism where each one's gifts are valued and where the call to love and serve God in the world is offered to each one, the team approach undergirds and supports diverse callings. The body of Christ is able to respond more flexibly and nimbly to local and worldwide challenges when leadership is dispersed.*
- c. **Team leadership is healthier for leaders.** *They have companions on the journey who share the weight of responsibility, the discernment of decision-making, and the gifts of joy, sorrow and wisdom. More important, the team itself keeps growing, changing, and maturing as they respond to one another, share power, and listen to God together. Serving with other makes each leader potentially stronger.*

As individuals, we respond to God's call and we are given gifts to serve the body of Christ. As individuals we take responsibility for our life as followers of Jesus. But we are not to go at it alone. We are called to serve together, and to experience the joy and encouragement that comes from serving in teams.

—Sven Eriksson, Denominational Minister