

It is people who carry out the ministry of the church. The church needs to recognize and celebrate the ministries of its members in the church and community in order to help people continue and strengthen their ministries. This recognition and support may increase members' confidence, comfort and sense of self-esteem. It will also help the church run smoothly and have an effective mission.

## History and Background

People who are church members are members of the Body of Christ, "chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God" (1 Peter 2:9, TEV). The ministry of the church is the ministry of all the people, called together and sent into the world "to all peoples everywhere" (Matthew 28:19, TEV). "All peoples everywhere" historically has been understood to mean people around the world. Now it is also understood to mean people wherever they are-on the job, at the supermarket or in the hospital. Christians can minister as they work, in their leisure time, when they gather as a group or when they are alone.

Some people do routine tasks out of a sense of commitment and love of the church. So it is for Charlie Green. Charlie's chosen ministry is to shovel his church's walks out of a concern for safety. People who have a limited concept of ministry often do tasks out

of a sense of obligation or duty. Their perspective needs to be broadened.

## Common Practices

Often churches celebrate the ministries of their members without really thinking of it that way. Bulletins acknowledge gifts of flowers for the altar. After a church workday, the coordinator says thanks during the worship service. The cooks are asked to come out and be recognized by the clergy group that gathers for lunch. Occasionally the ministries of people in the community are recognized and celebrated by the church. Usually that's when they are also being recognized in a big way by the community. For example, Jean Myers, who retires after 25 years on the board of directors of the YWCA, has a dinner in her honor. The church is represented at the dinner and Jean's ministry is mentioned in church, although it may not be called ministry.

## Ways to Celebrate Ministries

Celebrating ministries helps broaden the understanding of ministry. Intentional, planned recognition makes sure people don't get the idea that what they do to carry out the church's overall mission is ministry only if it's "big time", or done at church. Here are some of the things churches do to recognize and

celebrate the ministries of their members:

- Have a service of dedication for leaders at the beginning of the church program year.
- Feature a person and her or his ministry in each issue of the church newsletter.
- Invite people to share something about their ministries, making these an offering to God during Sunday worship.
- Have recognition dinners for people who minister in the church and in the community.
- Send letters of appreciation and thanks to people at both ends of their terms in office and on committees--and in the middle.
- Give a gift to special leaders--those with many years of service or with a particular creativity or accomplishment. The gift might be supplies for their work or a scholarship for further training.
- Feature a different kind of ministry in the community at each church coffee hour. Ask all people engaged in that ministry to wear special nametags or post their pictures. Give them an opportunity to talk about their ministries or write comments.
- Have a coffee hour featuring people who volunteer in the church--all the people who have baked communion bread this year or raked leaves or folded bulletins. Nametags can indicate what their ministries were.

- Choose a Sunday to say thanks to people who contribute to the blood bank by volunteering their time or their blood.
- Offer before God the ministries of people, in general or particular, such as intercession, concerns, offering or benediction.
- Ask all people who belong to civic organizations to sit together or give them an opportunity to tell what they do for the community.
- Recognize the people who represent your church at association, conference, national or ecumenical meetings by asking for a report of their personal impressions and understandings as well as information about procedures and official votes.
- Have a sermon on celebration of ministry to help people understand that they minister not only by working for the church but also in the community and at home. They minister when they take soup to neighbors with the flu, make donations rather than exchange expensive gifts and do their job in a considerate and caring way.
- Establish a means of collecting and maintaining information about people's ministries.

## Skills and Attributes Needed

Celebrating ministries of your church members doesn't require any special skills. It does require:

- An understanding of ministry of the whole people of God.
- An awareness of the many ways people minister. This probably will require a list of all people who volunteer time and energy for the ongoing life of the church. For ministry in the community, you will need to ask people to consider and share the ways they minister.
- A commitment to recognize all kinds of ministry.

## Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- Use **Come, Follow Me**, a resource published by the Parish Life and Leadership that is designed to help individuals and groups consider the ministry that lay members have to offer. Order from United Church of Christ Resources, 800 537-3394.
- Subscribe to **United Church News**, the national newspaper of the United Church of Christ. Information is at [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org). Ongoing news updates are available online, as is United Church News itself. Print copies are available free of charge by mail.
- See the video **With These Gifts: Expressions of Lay Ministry in the United Church of Christ**, produced by the Parish Life and Leadership. Use the study guide to help viewers expand their personal sense of ministry by watching

seven UCC laypeople in ministry. This video is available in all United Church of Christ Resource Centers.

- Ask your pastor for books or articles on the ministry of the laity.
- Set up and maintain a way to collect information about people's ministries to be able to celebrate them.

## Issues Facing the Church

- Many people still do not perceive the ministry of the church as being the ministry of all the people. They see ministry as something done only by an ordained or elected person. How can you counter this idea?
- Churches that do recognize the ministry of all people often recognize only ministries within the church's life. How can they understand that this idea of ministry is too limited?
- It is not too hard to consider that people elected in the church to positions on the governing board are engaged in ministry. Some churches have difficulty, however, in understanding that the service or outcome of the task can make even a routine one become ministry. What can be done to help people understand that the bell ringer performs a ministry of calling people to church or that shoveling snow is a ministry towards the safety of the community?

- Sometimes churches recognize people but do not celebrate their ministries. While this is affirming, it doesn't focus on ministry. How can celebrations be extended to include ministries as well as the people who do them?

## Questions

- Why is it appropriate to celebrate people's ministries?
- What things has your church done in the past year to celebrate ministries?
- What is a new way your church might begin to celebrate ministries of its members?