

Jehovah's Bystanders!

Turning Passive Spectators Into Active Participators

A pastor was once asked if he was concerned about all of the Jehovah's Witnesses who regularly visited in his community. He replied, "I'm not so worried about them as I am some of my own members who are 'Jehovah's Bystanders.'"

Many of our church leaders who are involved in identifying and motivating laity realize that one of the church's greatest blessings is also one of its greatest burdens.

The **blessing** is the fact that the church has at its disposal a vast army of volunteers that are willing to be trained and involved in ministry. These volunteers are willing to sacrifice thousands of combined hours of labor at no cost to the local congregation. The **burden** is that you have to go and find them and then convince them that they need to commit five or six hours a week to service and two or three additional hours for training and discipleship. To mobilize a volunteer organization like the local church requires real leadership skills. Here are some guidelines to follow to help people move from bystanders to witnesses for Christ.

Show that ministry is for everyone. Many people remain spectators because they feel that ministry is the turf of the pastor and present church leadership and they do not want to usurp power. Through teaching, preaching and the printed media show that all believers are special and are needed to do ministry inside and outside the local church. Many people in the church have professional or technical skills of some kind and could be enlisted for active service.

Develop an interview process. Even if your church is small don't overlook the "power of the listening ear." Ask the key question, "What are your gifts and talents?" Find out what makes them happy or sad as this can be a clue to their anointing and their ministry. Discover their present feelings about the church. Ask, "Are there things you'd like to contribute to the church that you've never been asked to do?" Find out what changes they would like to see in the church in the area of evangelism and outreach. The key is not only to listen but to really hear what is being said. What comes out of these meetings can be the difference in people remaining bystanders or in becoming active participators.

Redefine the concepts of "leadership" and "responsibility." Many times people will not respond to volunteer duties in the church because their success is gauged by the amount of work they do. The old model of leadership is to be at the church every time the doors are open and once you begin a task you can never quit. It's the "you serve until you die" syndrome. First, people must be motivated internally. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. They have to have an internal *want to*, God has to first do a work in their lives. Once God has spoken, then the recruiter must allow for *levels* of participation.

Some will be able to offer more time and effort than others. Give the work a time frame. Let people know there will be an opportunity to rethink and refocus their leadership roles. Let them know that ministry will be “shared.” A potential source of burnout is when people think, “I’ve got to take it all over and do it myself.” Burnout is why a great many people who were active in other churches are “bystanders” in yours. They don’t want to be “used” again so they don’t volunteer for anything.

Give the people a “challenge” and a “chance”. Take a look at what is going on in the church body. Ask the pastor to preach a series on involving laity in ministry. List every active ministry and have this list available for the prospective workers. People will respond when they feel that there is a real need for their services.

Great ministries in the local church. These ministries will depend on the size and structure of the local church and some of the ones listed will already be in operation. The list below is abbreviated. For more details write us at: laity@msn.com. For now, just pick and choose a few that could be activated in the next few weeks. Don’t be afraid to launch out and try some of these.

- Take Five Life Groups
- Jail Ministry
- Lay Revival
- Altar Counseling
- Pastor’s Prayer Partners
- Hospital Visitation
- Cult Training Class
- Greeters / Ushers
- Church Visitation
- Nursing Homes
- Outreach Chapels
- Tract Distribution

Begin now! It’s easier to just continue with “business as usual.” Make a decision to begin some of these ministries soon so you can help turn “bystanders” into “participators”.