

The Ministry of Management

By Jim Canning, CPA (retired)

When I was growing up in the 1940s and 50s, most churches and other ministries were small and not very complex. Much of the work was done by volunteers, and the word “management” was generally considered a business term and not commonly used in ministry settings. We have come a long way since then, and as churches and other ministries have become larger and more complex, the need for good management of these organizations has increased.

While there are many definitions of management, it basically is a combination of activities. Simply stated, management is “the art of getting things done through people and with people.” Just as in businesses, this can include planning, hiring and supervising people, handling finances, overseeing facilities, ensuring legal compliance, technology issues, etc. In ministry-type organizations, this can also include coordination of programs, raising funds, and carrying out ministry activities.

While the word “management” does not appear in Scripture, the functions of management are part of the activities of the gift of administration or governing mentioned in Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12. In smaller ministries, management functions are often carried out by the leader along with the leadership functions while in larger ministries it is usually more effective for the duties to be split between two or more people, each focusing on what they do best.

There are currently over 350,000 churches in America and roughly 100,000 parachurch organizations. To operate most effectively, each one needs people who understand management and desire to use their skills to

serve God in this manner, either as an employee, board or committee member, consultant, or volunteer.

Growing up in a strong evangelical church, I heard many invitations at revival services, missionary conferences, and youth meetings for people to come forward and dedicate their lives for missionary service, the pastorate, or youth ministry. Never once, however, did I hear an invitation to come forward and dedicate yourself to serve the Lord as a manager or an accountant. As a result, people with the gift of administration generally went into business or other areas and were often considered “second-class Christians.”

Following some major scandals involving religious organizations in the 1970s, however, the issue of good management of Christian organizations became a major concern. In 1976, a group of Christians gathered to form what would become the Christian Management Association (now the Christian Leadership Alliance (CLA)), and in 1979 the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) was formed to ward off increased government regulation of nonprofits. During this time, a number of books on the leadership and management of ministries were written, including several by Dr. Ted Enstrom, long-time Executive Vice President of World Vision and early pioneer on this subject. Today, his books still provide helpful reading on this topic.

Americans currently give approximately \$115 billion to churches and other ministries every year. Each of these organizations needs good leaders and managers to maximize their impact. The challenge is that many Christians don’t realize that they can use their

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management skills in ministry, and therefore don't think of management as ministry. The reality is, however, that with so many ministries today, as people retire and change careers and new ministries are formed, there is a continual need for people skilled in management and wanting to serve the Lord in this manner. Fortunately, today the CLA, many Christian colleges, and other groups are providing excellent training to prepare people for such a ministry and to help those already involved in ministry.

After a number of years in the business world, God led me to become the Chief Financial Officer of World Vision International. It was a wonderful blessing, and I am so thankful to have been able to serve the Lord in this manner. It was truly a highlight of my career.

As you think about your career, consider the gifts that God has given you and be open to how or where He may want to use you in the future.

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About the Author

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Dr. Jim Canning is a CPA by training and a former partner with Ernst & Ernst (now E & Y). After leaving public accounting, he served as Chief Financial Officer of World Vision International for 15 years.

Jim attended Biola University, where he received a BA degree in Christian Education. In addition, he holds a B.S. degree in accounting and an MBA in management from California State University, and a Ph.D. in executive management from Claremont Graduate University. For several years, he was a professor in the Crowell School of Business at Biola University.

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