

So You've Been Asked to Serve

John R. Cionca

This article first appeared in *Moody Monthly*, July/August 1986

How do you respond when someone asks you to serve in the church? Whether you are presently non-involved or over-committed, how do you decide? Obviously, you pray regarding your decision. You may seek counsel from your spouse or friends. But before you decide, ask some questions.

First, ask yourself:

Does the Lord want me to be a servant?

That's a leading question. The answer is clear. Just as Jesus "did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45 NIV), so, too, he expects his followers to give of themselves. "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:15-17).

In what areas am I already involved in ministry?

A great time to assess the value of your present commitments is when you are asked to consider a new one. Everyone, even a retired grandpa, seems to have more things on his "to do" list than time permits. Few people seek additional work, but all of us should be open to new areas where we can make a meaningful contribution.

Some may best serve the church by their deep involvement in a local fellowship. Others may best minister to the body through their relationships with non-believers in their community.

What is your present servant status? How spiritually effective are you in your endeavors? Can God be opening to you a new avenue of service? Asking yourself these questions will help you evaluate whether you should accept a new commitment.

Next, ask the person requesting your service some questions that will give you clear information to help you decide.

What are the responsibilities of this position?

You may be asked to teach sixth graders, but when that ministry is spelled out more clearly, you may find it includes teaching, visitation, follow-up of students, attendance at department meetings, and participation in teacher training. Only when you know all the particulars of an area of service can you make a wise decision.

When Dick and Betty were told by their pastor that the primary class needed two new teachers, they first wanted to hear a complete description of the ministry. The pastor sat with them at their dining room table and clearly explained each point of the job description. Dick and Betty's decision to teach was made easier because expectations were spelled out clearly in writing.

How long is the term of service?

Life is not static. Our situations change from year to year, month to month, even day to day. While you might be able to serve in a particular program today, your situation or desires or opportunities will likely change with time. A wise decision to serve includes a definite term of service.

Beverly was afraid to say yes to working in children's church because she feared being stuck with a lifetime assignment. She had served in other areas before, but she had never been asked if she wanted to stop, or even if she needed a break.

Most committee positions have a limited term. Some ministries, such as the choir or vacation Bible school, may be seasonal or have a natural breaking time for reassessment of one's commitments. Other programs, however, can be open-ended, unless you ask for a specified time of service.

Some thoughtful churches use a one-year term of service in their Christian education positions. Teachers can renew their commitments each year, and many do. The predetermined limit allows servants to reassess their commitments and to work not under unwanted obligation but out of joy.

Who will supervise my ministry, and to whom can I turn for help?

Bob didn't mind working as Sunday school teacher, but at times he wished he had more direction from someone. Sometimes his teaching materials and supplies were missing. On a few occasions he was sick and needed help finding a substitute. The Christian education committee seemed primarily to be a decision-making body, and the children's Sunday school coordinator had recently resigned and had not yet been

replaced. Bob didn't want to trouble the pastor with his missing markers, but to whom could he turn?

Such a dilemma can be prevented by a good job description, which will spell out key relationships for you. You will be accountable to an immediate supervisor, but the relationship is two-way, as well. It is equally important that the supervisor be available as a resource person for you. He/she is the one who can help assess how you are doing and give you assistance in being effective in your new ministry.

As you prayerfully weigh a decision to serve, consider not only if there is a specific person to oversee your ministry, but also how effective that person will be in leading and helping you.

What training is available to help me develop this area of service?

When we do a job effectively, we experience fulfillment and joy in our service. When we do a job poorly, we not only feel discouraged, but also shy away from future involvement. Training is one of the most important ingredients in making us more competent and confident. Whether it's deacon training, a choir workshop, instruction for ushers, or a Sunday school convention, training helps make people effective ministers.

Jerry took his work as a deacon and a teacher seriously. Because of his commitment to both the Lord and his church, Jerry was willing to participate in a comprehensive training program, including a weekend seminar. He doesn't consider himself just a name on a church organizational chart. He views himself as an overseer of the congregation and a minister to fifth- and sixth-graders in the same way the pastor is a minister to the congregation. Jerry considers his service a fulfilling, long-term adventure. His two church ministries bring him great joy.

The availability of training opportunities will also give you vital data for your spiritual decision.

Why do you think I am the right person for this job?

"Would any warm body do, or is there something about me, specifically, that led to my being asked?"

As you determine whether you should become involved in a new area of service, you need to assess your spiritual gifts, abilities, and God-designed make-up. And while you are making your own evaluations, ask the other person for his or her assessment. How does he think you match the position? What characteristics in your life has he observed that led him to ask you to minister in this specific

capacity? That input, along with answers to the other questions, will give you some objective information for making a Christ-honoring decision.

In 2 Corinthians 5:15 we read that Christ died for us, “that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” One of the primary reasons Christ died for us is that we in turn should be His servants. Biblically speaking, the normal Christian is one who serves; it is the abnormal Christian who does not accept the responsibility of being an active member of the body of Christ. To whom we minister, and in what areas of service we labor, however, are left to our choice.

So you’ve been asked to serve. There is joy in service when you minister in areas that complement *who you are*. As you prayerfully consider your response, ask the questions that will help you make a Christ-honoring decision.