

Quality characteristic 2: **Gift-oriented ministry**

"When Christians serve in their area of giftedness, they generally function less in their own strength and more in the power of the Holy Spirit."

The quality characteristic "gift-oriented ministry" demonstrates particularly well what we mean by "divine growth automatisms." The gift-oriented approach reflects the conviction that God sovereignly determines which Christians should best assume which ministries. The role of church leadership is to help its members to identify their gifts and to integrate them into appropriate ministries. When Christians serve in their area of giftedness, they generally function less in their own strength and more in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus ordinary people can accomplish the extraordinary!

An interesting corollary result of our research was the discovery that probably no factor influences the contentedness of Christians more than whether they are utilizing their gifts or not. Our data demonstrated a highly significant relationship between "gift-orientation" ("My personal ministry involvements match my gifts") and "joy in living" ("I consider myself to be a happy, contented person").

None of the eight quality characteristics showed nearly as much influence on both personal and church life as "gift-oriented ministry." This is why it doesn't surprise me at all that the practical tools we have developed on this quality characteristic have had by far the best reception of all of our church growth materials. Here church growth is not merely a topic for a few church strategists; it is a crucial element for the life of each and every Christian.

**Spiritual gifts
and the
"priesthood of
all believers"**

Unfortunately, in recent years some have misunderstood the gift-oriented approach as just another passing church growth fad. But the discovery and use of spiritual gifts is the only way to live out the Reformation watchword of the "priesthood of all believers."

How can this be achieved when Christians do not even recognize their God-given gifting and calling? According to a survey we conducted among 1600 active Christians in German-speaking Europe, 80 percent could not identify their gifts. This appears to me to be one of the primary reasons why the "priesthood of all believers" has, for the most part, never been achieved in the lands of the Reformation.

Part 1: 8 quality characteristics

Resistance to the gift-oriented approach grows out of the false theological paradigms which persistently stifle and restrain much of Christianity. Technocratic thinkers tend to dictate which ministries lay-persons should assume and then search eagerly for "volunteers" to fulfill their vision. Should they not find any volunteers, they apply pressure. People must conform to their leader's preconceived framework.

In contrast, "spiritualists" often resist fitting their gifts into an established plan, since they are hostile towards church structures in general. From their point of view, it wouldn't be truly "spiritual." In addition, many of these spiritualists identify spiritual gifts exclusively with the extraordinary, spectacular, or supernatural, which of course keeps the gifts from being included in the church growth planning process.

Technocratic and spiritualistic resistance

Two of the ten questions with which we calculated the quality index for gift-oriented ministry: The question about the "use of gifts" (left) makes the difference particularly evident between above and below average churches. Of all the variables associated with this quality characteristic, the question on "lay training" (right) has the greatest correlation with church growth.

