

Evaluating Collaborative Approaches to Preparing and Delivering Sermons

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A growing number of North American churches are experimenting with collaborative models of sermon preparation and presentation. This trend reflects reevaluated ecclesiologies, creative ministry paradigms, and responses to cultural changes. As Western culture grows more distrustful of authority, broader participation in the preaching process may help churches communicate truth more effectively. This paper reviews a variety of team models and evaluates the collaborative approach in relationship to issues of theology, leadership development, and church authority.

Alone in the Study, Alone in the Pulpit

Phil spends a significant portion of each week preparing his next sermon. Locked in his office, or sitting in a coffee shop, he prays, plans, studies, searches and writes, pouring his heart into a process he considers a blessing and a responsibility. Each Sunday morning, he passionately and effectively communicates the fruit of his effort, trusting God's Spirit and God's Word to bring their intended results. On Monday, Phil evaluates the video of yesterday's sermon. On Tuesday morning, he begins his process for the coming week. Phil's approach to the preaching task resembles a familiar process: alone in the study, alone in the pulpit. He may be outstanding in both but he is flying solo.

The Collaborative Approach: Two Models

A second approach offers an interesting alternative. Growing numbers of pastors and churches are experimenting with collaborative approaches to sermon preparation, sermon delivery, or both. Some preachers invite a team into the sermon preparation process. Others develop a team of two or more preachers to share the preaching role within a congregation. A combination of these two models draws strength from both a preparation team and a preaching team. These models of collaboration possess potential to strengthen the preaching ministry of a local church and overcome several limitations of the solo model.

Let us be upfront with our agenda. Our thesis is that a collaborative approach to sermon preparation and delivery is a better method for the task of preaching than the more familiar solo model. We encourage solo preachers to invite other people into the preaching ministry, either to join in the preparation process, or to join as members of a preaching team, or both. We are convinced that this approach makes theological and practical sense and can serve to help communicate scriptural truth more effectively to our churches in the context of a rapidly changing culture.

The collaborative approach to the preaching ministry of a church can be broadly defined by the two models introduced above: a preparation team and a preaching team. We begin by giving examples of the two models, briefly describing a few of the variations within each. This is intended to give readers a mental picture of what collaboration looks like before moving to the subsequent evaluation of the general approach. We drew these models from observation, personal experiences, interviews with several local church teams, and the literature referenced here. For convenience, we reference by name the churches from which we learned. Their locations and web addresses are listed at the end of the paper. Recognize that these are only a sampling of the many churches utilizing a team approach. It seems in every conversation we had about this project, we were informed of more churches and more variations of these models.

In our assessment of the preaching landscape, we have identified three factors leading to the growth of, and supporting the use of, collaborative preaching. Churches pursuing collaborative models are compelled by theological convictions, ministry considerations, and responses to cultural changes. This third factor, responses to cultural changes, will address the potential for collaborative models to serve as a helpful approach to preaching in the secularized West. Evaluation of these factors follows the presentation of our team models.

Preparation Teams

According John McClure, sermon preparation teams assisting a preacher were advocated as early as 1963 (McClure 1995, 7). This method brings multiple voices into the study with the preacher and invites them to influence the information and formation of the sermon. In some cases, team members are members of a church's staff. In many other cases, however, volunteers willingly offer their time and resources to serve alongside preachers. We identify five variations of the preparation team model: Mapping, Creating, Studying, Assisting, and Coaching.

Mapping

In this model, a team meets to plan the annual, quarterly, or monthly preaching schedule. Solo pastors often map their own preaching schedules. This model simply adds a team who shares the load and expands available resources. Scriptures, themes, and series are discussed and calendared. If multiple preachers are used, this mapping process may also determine who will preach each particular sermon or series. Crosswalk Church and NewSong Church both use teams to map sermon series. Another variation of this is a group of preachers from different churches who retreat together each year to pray and plan their sermon series.

Creating

The preachers at both Coast Hills Community Church and Yorba Linda Friends Church meet weekly with "creative teams." This practice seeks to strengthen the view of the sermon as one component of the total worship experience. The creative team may include worship leaders, musicians and other artists, technicians and other support persons, and administrators. As the preacher shares the text, theme, ideas and direction for the sermon, the creative team works together to envelope the sermon with creative impact. Team members also often influence the preacher's thoughts by suggesting additional insights and ideas.

Studying

In a growing number of churches, preachers are opening wide the study doors to invite teams directly into the process of sermon development. In the book, *Preaching as a Social Act*, Don Wardlaw describes a very elaborate pre-sermon study process in which five different congregational small groups and dozens of other individual church attendees study a pastor's sermon texts prior to his sermons to provide insights, suggestions, questions and potential applications from which the pastor can draw (Wardlaw 1988, 55-56). Doug Pagitt, of Solomon's Porch, describes a pre-sermon dialogue group of eight to twenty attendees who work with him in sermon preparation. Each Tuesday evening, they gather to study the scripture for the next sermon, exploring questions and issues that the preacher may not readily see (Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 2003, 85-87; see also Pagitt, *Preaching Re-imagined*, 2005, 24, 185-189). In another model, preachers publish their sermon text, theme, and ideas on their weblogs early each week, inviting their entire congregation to interact with their sermon material prior to delivery. A pre-sermon study or focus group assists a preacher with insights into the text, questions related to it, and practical applications to the variety of contexts represented in the group (Freeman 1987, 100-102). They also usually offer post-sermon feedback serving to strengthen the preacher over time (Ibid). The common thread in all of these is that the preacher invites others into the study and learns from their contributions.

Assisting

A simple variation on the previous model is the preacher who uses an assistant or two to help with tasks like research, gathering illustrations, contributing creative or technological components of the sermon. This variation looks less like a team but may still save the preacher time. The recognition that others have experience and expertise, the commitment to ask for help, and the discipline to delegate specific tasks all reflect positive steps toward greater collaboration.

Coaching

The coaching model uses mentoring or peer coaching relationships to strengthen sermon delivery and preaching skills. At Crosswalk Church, the three-member preaching team utilizes a peer coaching model. The preacher for the week delivers his or her sermon to another team member a day or two before delivering it publicly. Team members also coach each other between their two worship services and evaluate each other's sermons early the following week. At Light and Life Christian Fellowship, the pastor mentors several developing preachers. They preach in a semi-regular rotation in order to receive feedback from the pastor and encouragement from the congregation. In another variation of the coaching model, an experienced preacher teams with a less experienced preacher of another nearby church. They prepare together from the same text and preach very similar sermons to two different congregations. In each of these cases, preachers work in relationship with other preachers to develop their sermons and skills.

Preaching Teams

While preparation teams partner with the preacher in the study, preaching teams partner in the pulpit. Some presenters share portions of the same sermon, others share the whole preaching ministry in a church. The following four variations describe models in which all participants have prepared for an intentional delivery of a part or whole of a sermon. Models we did not include here are those in which the preacher leads a post-sermon discussion (see Pagitt Preaching

Reimagined 2005 or Achtemeier 1980, 79). The following are four types of preaching teams: Partnering, Developing, Exchanging, and Interviewing.

Partnering

In this model, two or more preachers share the preaching responsibilities for a congregation. They plan together, set a preaching schedule that gives each preacher time to prepare, and they each preach alternating sermons or sermon series. This partnership presents the congregation a variation of preaching styles. Yorba Linda Friends Church uses two primary preachers, one shouldering about two-thirds of the load. Crosswalk Church and NewSong Church both use three primary preachers. At NewSong Church, one of the team preachers serves voluntarily. For many preachers and congregations, this model presents quite a departure from the familiar and predictable solo model.

Developing

The Developing model builds on the Coaching model listed above. A primary preacher mentors other preachers and assigns them specific sermons in which they hone their skills. We mentioned Light and Life Christian Fellowship, in which the pastor develops young preachers in the study and in the pulpit. This congregation has witnessed some of these young preachers develop into church planters. Canyon Hills Friend Church develops preachers by confidently letting several of their staff and elders preach. They have witnessed significant growth in these leaders. In this model, the developing preachers are more than simply guest preachers, invited to fill the pulpit while the pastor is on vacation. They reflect an intentional leadership development process.

Exchanging

As a baton is exchanged in a relay race, so sermon presentations can include exchanges from one preacher to another. Crosswalk Church exchanges every week. One preacher presents the majority of the message and another preacher offers a summarized conclusion and practical application later in the worship experience. Canyon Hills Friends Church occasionally uses multiple preachers in a single sermon, each presenting one key point of the overall message. At NewSong Church, a husband and wife team shared several messages together during a series on Christian marriage. Examples of this type of teamwork are noted in Freeman (1987, 105), Achtemeier (1980, 79-81) and Thompson (1969, 37-64).

Interviewing

Testimonies shared in worship are not new. Congregations have long been encouraged to hear God's story through the lives of those other than the preacher. However, some preachers strategically utilize personal interviews within a sermon to illustrate and apply the truths they are teaching. Sometimes, the majority of a sermon, or even an entire sermon presentation, can be a single interview or a series of interviews. Rob Bell, from Mars Hill Bible Church, employs this method on occasion (Bell 2007).

The collaborative models used can be as diverse as the personalities, preaching styles and ministry values of each pastor or local church. However, commitment to a collaborative approach seems to rise out of a few common values and ministry goals. The analysis below

includes three of the key factors we believe contribute to the growth of the team approach; theological convictions, ministry considerations, and responses to cultural changes.

Collaborative Preaching and Ecclesiology

Inviting others into the preaching ministry of a church requires and communicates a different ecclesiology than the familiar solo model. The preacher thinks differently about the role of the community of faith, and the congregation thinks differently about itself and the preacher. Collaboration demonstrates the value of greater participation in one of the ministries usually reserved for one person.

It may seem obvious that the primary theological factor underlying a collaborative approach is the ecclesiological metaphor of the Body of Christ. And this is, in fact, the case. Preachers inviting others into the preaching process value the Pauline emphasis on the Body of Christ and the gifts of the Spirit. Focus on spiritual gifts is certainly not new. Churches have utilized spiritual gifts tests and have encouraged ministry according to giftedness for years, but not usually around the ministry of the preacher's sermon. The familiar model of the solo preacher is presently being challenged by invitations to use one's spiritual gifts to strengthen the preaching ministry of the church. Inviting those with teaching gifts to develop as preachers alongside another, or inviting those with study gifts or creativity gifts or other supportive gifts to assist a preacher in the preaching process expands the understanding of the role of spiritual gifts in a congregation.

As an aside, it is interesting that preaching receives the significant attention it does by pastors and congregations considering it is not mentioned among the lists of spiritual gifts regularly studied (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30, Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Peter 4:10-11). Jesus and others in scripture clearly preached. The Bible certainly includes sermons and instructions to preach. Preaching has always functioned as an important ministry in God's plan. Why is preaching not listed as a spiritual gift? We recognize that some have identified the spiritual gift of prophecy with the activity of preaching. However, for the purposes of this project, we define the task of preaching as a part of the teaching ministries of a local church. Preaching is one of the methods used by the church as it carries out its various teaching ministries. Preaching is, then, a subset of teaching. Churches are called to teach (Matthew 28:20; Acts 2:42), elders are expected to teach (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9) and teaching is listed as a spiritual gift (Romans 12:7; Ephesians 4:11). Teaching is accomplished in a variety of ways in a church; preaching is one of them.

Collaborative preaching provides a clear ecclesiological model for all of the ministries of a congregation. It takes the commitment to the theology of the Body of Christ to a new level. The solo model subtly communicates that only one member of a particular congregation has the spiritual gifts required for the preaching ministry. A team approach, even if that team merely assists the lone preacher, reveals a theological value inviting greater participation in the ministry life of a church. If the preaching ministry of a local church is built on a team rather than an individual, the rest of the church's ministries will more likely be built around communities of ministers than single leaders. And the ecclesiological principle of interdependence within the Body is strengthened. Fred Craddock reminds us that "how one communicates is a theological

commentary on the minister's view of the ministry" (Craddock 1971, 52-53). In other words, methods communicate our theology as clearly as our messages; maybe more so (Ibid). The methodology of team communicates a theology which values spiritual giftedness, cooperation, and interdependence in the Body of Christ.

Another ecclesiological factor motivates preachers who embrace a team approach. Several preachers we interviewed expressed a concern to avoid the "personality-driven" model of church leadership. Recognizing that some church attendees are drawn to the preacher's personality, and attempting to resist the temptation to become that focal point, these preachers have chosen to model a collaborative approach accentuating a plurality of leaders. The team model, especially the model of multiple preachers, carefully and intentionally reminds listeners that the head of the Body of Christ is Christ. It helps strengthen members' organic connection within the Body to Christ, and weakens the tendency to connect to Christ through a lone human leader. Of course, the use of a singular preacher need not exalt that person to an inappropriate position in the minds of the hearers. This is certainly not the intent of most solo preachers. And the use of multiple preachers does not automatically insure a proper view of the headship of Christ. However, it offers a clear opportunity to help avoid misplaced headship and teach an important truth.

Shared leadership in a local church is not limited, of course, to preaching. Shared leadership models draw from the model of a plurality of elders described in scripture. Jesus entrusted his ministry to a group of disciples. The Holy Spirit, after Pentecost, empowered groups of local ministers. So too, many churches and movements today value the model of shared leadership or a plurality of elders. Our contention is that this commitment can permeate the preaching ministry of a church as well. It communicates a collegial value through the most visible role in a congregation.

One possible objection to the team approach is that it may be viewed as devaluing strong church leadership. It could be seen to weaken the effective influence of a strong pastoral leader. However, strong pastoral leadership need not be demonstrated by a singular preaching voice. In fact, one of the earliest collaborative models of preaching we are aware of arose from a desire for stronger leadership. Bill Hybels, founding pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, recognized that he needed to relinquish a significant portion of his preaching in order to become a stronger leader. Thus he invited those whose primary spiritual gift was teaching to share in the preaching ministry of Willow Creek in order to allow him to utilize his stronger leadership gifts (Hybels 1995, 107-108, 126). Other churches follow this model in order to strengthen both the teaching and leadership ministries in their congregations and to encourage ministers to serve in their areas of spiritual giftedness.

A commitment to collaborative preaching yields an interesting theological by-product. Preaching includes the communication of theological ideas. By nature of the model, collaboration encourages engagement in conversation around the theological issues being preached. Shared ideas and deeper conversations result. Several church teams we interviewed shared stories of interesting theological discussions and decisions which flowed from their working together. The use of teams challenges churches and leaders to think through their ecclesiologies more intentionally. For example, NewSong Church wrestled through whether it should include a female on its teaching team. The process produced a theological study, a

scholarly paper, and the opportunity for its staff and entire congregation to wade into this challenging issue together. Theological reflection, rooted in community, leads to more effective learning.

Collaborative Preaching and Ministry Effectiveness

Collaborative preaching possesses the potential to increase the ministry effectiveness of both individual preachers and entire congregations. For the preacher, a team offers additional time and mental resources, strengthens creativity, and counteracts pastoral isolation while helping the preacher work from areas of giftedness and personal calling. For the congregation, it provides a healthy model of teamwork, strengthens leadership development, and expands communication effectiveness to a broader range of learning styles.

A team of preachers sharing the preaching load provides individual preachers more time for study and reflection. For example, NewSong Church uses a team of three preachers. Each preacher prepares a three week sermon series while the other two team members preach their own three week series, essentially providing six weeks of preparation for each three week series. One member of that team, George Haraksin, commented that the additional time allows him to live with his messages for several weeks before preaching them. In his previous experience as a solo preacher, his preaching depended more heavily than he liked on his own natural speaking ability and his efforts at finding the latest sermon illustrations. The time provided by the team allows him to let the implications of his study settle into and flow out of his life and heart (NewSong interview, July 2, 2007).

If a preacher utilizes a preparation team, the additional mental resources provided by other members of the team serve as significant benefits. Solo preachers are limited to their own resources and their ability to access resources. While access to creative resources and study aids grows hourly by the megabyte, and God's Spirit certainly empowers mental strength and enhances creative energy, individuals are still limited by their personal capacities of time and mental energies. When working in teams, individuals can experience a synergistic flow of creativity. Preachers desiring to work with a team will be served by studying the research describing the differences between learning teams and work groups (for example, see Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 2000, 128-142). Church staffs, committees, and task forces often function only as work groups, each individual assigned to and responsible for his or her contribution to the group. Strategists exploring the effectiveness of teams recognize that team learning takes collaboration to a different level by sharing goals and responsibilities in an environment of mutual accountability and interdependence. A work group is likened to a bowling team; each individual's score contributing to the total. A learning team is likened to a football team, each individual only able to function interdependently on the other team members. The business and professional world has learned a great deal about team learning from works like Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) and Katzenbach and Smith's *The Wisdom of Teams* (1993). Christian works like Herrington's *Leading Congregational Change*, (2000) and Hawkin's *The Learning Congregation* (1997) are integrating ecclesiology with principles of team learning for greater ministry effectiveness.

Collaboration also strengthens a leader's ministry by counteracting the isolation that so often accompanies the preaching component of pastoral ministry. In the solo model, the more diligently a preacher works, the more isolated he or she becomes. A team approach is sometimes more work, but it pulls pastors out of isolation and into important relationships with other ministry leaders. Matthew Cork, the lead pastor at Yorba Linda Friends Church, indicated that he has much more time to connect with members of the congregation and with members of the church staff as a result of sharing the preaching load with another teacher. He believes this increased connection with others also strengthens his preaching (Yorba Linda interview, Jun 6, 2007). Preachers are not the only ones who need strategic connection with others. All leaders of church ministries can tend to "silo." "Silo" is termed used by both churches and businesses to describe the consequences of focusing so exclusively on one's particular area of work that team learning and healthy collaboration are neglected (see Lencioni's work in *Silos, Politics and Turf Wars*, 2006). In churches, barriers between ministries do not usually exist intentionally. However failure to intentionally develop interdependent relationships with others in an organization can lead to this problem. Collaboration develops healthier individuals and organizations by breaking down barriers of exclusivity and isolation.

Teams allow people to focus on their unique strengths or interests. For example, a preacher with a passion for apologetics can be teamed with a preacher who loves history and a third interested in issues of current culture. Another example is a preacher whose expertise is Biblical languages teamed with a preacher trained in spiritual formation. In cases like these, preachers can feel encouraged to pursue their areas of strength or interest, realizing that a team member will provide balance in another area. In the model of a preparation team, people with varying interests and strengths can be invited to bring their strengths or interests to the table as a service to the one preaching. For example, a preparation team might include one who loves to do research, another who is extremely creative, and yet another with technical savvy. Together, they make the preacher and the preaching ministry stronger. This approach encourages personal development and mutual appreciation.

As shown, preachers grow in ministry effectiveness by being part of a team. Collaborative preaching also strengthens the overall health of a congregation. It can exercise healthy models of teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution. Of course, effective teamwork requires development in these areas. But good collaboration at the executive level of church leadership offers the entire congregation the opportunity to learn from and participate in healthy processes of group dynamics.

One of the most important strengths of a team model is the prospect of equipping others in the church to strengthen their own gifts and fulfill their own vocations. This advantage applies in both models: the preparation team and the preaching team. At Light and Life Christian Fellowship, a seasoned preacher mentors a small team of developing preachers. Each of these developing preachers receives regular opportunities to preach. The congregation embraces the value of leadership development by encouraging these mentorees as they share the preaching ministry with the senior pastor. Several of these mentorees have proceeded to plant churches or have developed into pastoral leaders for existing contexts. In the preparation team model, a preacher inviting a resource team or a creative team into the sermon development process may not directly develop additional preachers. However, this model can encourage and equip those in

the congregation to minister according to their unique giftedness. As they serve the preacher by assisting in the preparation process, they are developing their own ministry strengths. Leadership development is hard work, time-consuming, and requires healthy relationship skills. Collaborative models of preaching provide one platform to strengthen the leadership development commitments of a local church.

One weakness of the solo model is that preachers communicate best to those who share their learning style. A team allows for different teaching styles to engage a wider range of learning styles in the congregation. This is an obvious benefit in the preaching team model. However, even in the preparation team model, a support team working alongside a lone preacher can help that preacher learn to communicate to a broader range of listeners. If the preacher commits to being a more effective communicator and receives input from the rest of the team, the entire congregation reaps the harvest.

Collaborative Preaching and Cultural Changes

As Western culture changes, and as the Church adapts to minister in this changing context, collaborative preaching offers one ministry model that may help churches and pastors more effectively communicate the truth of scripture. Some observers call ours the Age of Participation (see McLagan, 1995). Jonathan Schwartz, CEO and President of Sun Microsystems, asserts that our culture has moved through the Information Age into the Participation Age and that organizations who succeed in this Age will invite participation by everyone (Schwartz, 2005). In this highly interactive culture, many are no longer satisfied to passively receive information streaming at us. We now expect to contribute to its development. We want to help create what we consume. The internet is an obvious example of this, especially its latest form which includes weblogs, social networking sites, and participatory online resources like Wikipedia. The entertainment industry also contributes to a growing culture of interaction and participation. Not only are we offered more choices of entertainment, but we are invited to shape the outcome of our entertainment. Technological developments invite interaction in numerous spheres and help create the expectation of participation.

How can this trend help us in ministry? Most church leaders embrace the principle of participation. We teach the theology of the priesthood of all believers, the gifts of the Spirit, and every member a minister. We invite, even plead for, greater ministry involvement. This principle was a hallmark of the Protestant Reformation, and in recent decades, a primary tenet of the spiritual gifts movement. Elaborate programs offer churches helpful systems to increase congregational participation. So churches should look for creative ways to leverage the growing cultural value of participation, even in their preaching ministries.

Pre-sermon focus groups, sermon preparation weblogs, creative teams, surveys, interviews, testimonies, and dialogue sermons all increase participation in the preaching ministry. These give participants genuine opportunity to contribute to the effectiveness of the preachers' sermons and the clear communication of truth. Their insights, questions, applications, research, and creativity truly help shape the outcome of the sermon and increase its impact. Preachers who genuinely seek input, listen carefully, and practice the fine art of dialogue will increase their effectiveness as communicators. And congregants will have greater interest in hearing the final

product to which they have contributed. They may even be more apt to attend and will certainly listen more attentively to the sermons they have helped to craft. Practices of these types nurture an overall sense of mutuality. According to the experience and observation of Doug Pagitt, participation in the preaching ministry encourages participation in other areas of ministry inside and outside of the congregation. “When people feel their thoughts are taken seriously in one context, they will carry that confidence into other contexts” (Pagitt *Preaching Reimagined* 2005, 173).

In the preaching team model, pastors who share the preaching load as a form of leadership development communicate to others with teaching gifts and public speaking skills that they, too, may be able to serve in ministry by preaching occasional sermons in worship. At Canyon Hills Friends Church and NewSong Church, the collaborative approach planted a seed in the minds of several congregants to this end. Though not staff members, they were invited to preach as a part of their ministry development. This ministry option is not usually considered in a solo model. In a church that models collaboration, the invitation to participate in all facets of church ministry is communicated more clearly. If our culture values participation, churches can leverage that value for Kingdom benefit. Collaborative preaching highlights the intersection of a participatory ecclesiology and an interactive culture.

Another cultural change that collaborative preaching helps address is the growing distrust of authoritarian models of leadership. One characteristic of the secularization of the West is the growing suspicion toward authority (Johnston 2001, 34-35). Secularization results in a rejection of external sources of authority, especially religious authority. Individuals become their own authenticators of morality (Ibid). This evolution is dramatically impacting the Church in the West. “No longer can the preacher presuppose the general recognition of his authority as a clergyman, of the authority of his institution, or the authority of Scripture.” (Craddock 1971, 14) Movements toward inductive, narrative, and dialogue preaching have been attempts to respond to this (McClure 1995, 30,39). Fred Craddock’s work (*As One Without Authority*, 1971) and the Lewis’ work (*Inductive Preaching*, 1983) offer instructive models of inductive preaching. Models of narrative, conversational, and dialogue preaching are presented by Eugene Lowry (*The Homiletical Plot*, 1980), Lucy Atkinson Rose (*Sharing the Word*, 1997) and William Thompson (*Dialogue Preaching*, 1968). All of these are helpful attempts to communicate more effectively to an authority-resistant audience. But collaborative preaching takes the next step.

The solo preacher, even using inductive, narrative, or dialogue preaching, remains the singular public voice of authority in most churches. A preacher’s role is the most visible in a local church. Without wading into a church polity discussion, we recognize that in some churches the preacher is the singular human voice of authority. In many other cases, however, the preacher shares the authoritative role with elders or, in cases of congregational polity, the entire church membership. Regardless of a church’s polity, the solo model often leads to the perception that the person of the preacher carries more authority than is true; that he or she is the singular interpreter of truth and voice of God for a specific church.

Evangelical churches endeavor to point people to the authority of scripture. Authority rests first in the message, not the messenger. When the messenger is open to input and insight from others, or when a plurality of messengers shares the preaching voice, it communicates to listeners that

the truth of the text lies outside of the interpretation of a lone leader. When preachers demonstrate that they trust the interpretative work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others – that their voice is one among others – they convey a humility that makes the truth more palatable for this culture. Collaborative preaching can help give the Church a hearing in this culture by eliminating one barrier: the perception that a preacher wields power by right of being the lone voice of truth. Of course, a collaborative model does not assure this, any more than a solo model necessarily communicates an abuse of power. However, methods communicate values. And in a culture that distrusts authority, a collegial method of preaching that invites participation and diffuses human power may just earn the Church a better opportunity to be heard.

As a final thought on the relationship between preaching and authority, consider Thomas Long's metaphor of preaching as bearing witness. In contrast to the preacher as herald, pastor, or storyteller, Long suggests we consider the preacher as witness-bearer. "The witness image emphasizes the authority of the preacher in a new way...not authoritative because of rank and power but rather because of what the preacher has seen and heard" (Long 1989, 44). This image changes the relationship of the preacher to both scripture and the community of faith. Long says, "It is not the preacher who goes to the scripture; it is the church that goes to the scripture by means of the preacher....The preacher goes on behalf of the faithful community and, in a sense, on behalf of the world" (Long, 45). The preacher is a member of the community, serving the community as witness-bearer to the truth. Embracing this image, one can see how a plurality of witnesses makes the case for truth stronger.

Conclusion

Collaborative preaching is hard work. It requires more coordination and relational effort than solo preaching. It may require more time. A team preacher must work with the schedules of other busy people, especially those who are volunteers to the ministry. And a collaborative model may seem at odds with the expectations of a congregation used to the familiar solo model. However, as we hope we have shown, the hard work is worth it. The benefits of collaboration outweigh the challenges.

Whether preachers choose to use a preparation team for their own sermons or to become a member of a preaching team alongside others, or both, collaboration is valuable. It strengthens and demonstrates the theological convictions of the Church by expanding collegial ministry principles into the preaching ministry. It aids both preacher and congregation in numerous ways. And a plurality of voices gives the Church some footing in the attempt to speak truth to a secularized culture. Unlocking the study and the pulpit makes sense theologically, practically, and culturally and helps to serve God's purposes in the world through His Church.

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Crosswalk Church, Redlands, CA. www.crosswalkvillage.com. Interview with two members of the preaching team conducted May 15, 2007. Phone interview with a third member of the preaching team conducted June 4, 2007.

Life and Life Christian Fellowship, Long Beach, CA. www.llcf.org. Running emails and personal correspondence with the senior pastor.

NewSong Church, San Dimas, CA. www.newsongsd.org. Interview with three members of the preaching team conducted July 2, 2007.

Yorba Linda Friends Church, Yorba Linda, CA. www.ylfc.org. Interview with the lead pastor and the creative team conducted June 6, 2007.