

**Kelly A. Fryer. Reclaiming the L Word: Renewing the Church from Its Lutheran Core.
(Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2003).**

Chapter 6. Everybody Has Something to Offer

I love my job as pastor! But it is NOT the only job. And it is not the most important one. Not even close. The renewal of our church hinges on a rediscovery of the important Lutheran idea that Everybody Has Something to Offer. The reformers called this principle “The Priesthood of All Believers.” I know that this may sound unkind, but I just don’t see much evidence in our congregations that we really believe that everyone is a minister. Instead, what I see too often are pastors who are overwhelmed and depressed because they have desperately been trying to “take care” of everyone ... and people who are crabby or uninterested and bored because they don’t feel like they have anything meaningful to do.

THE REAL HEROES

There is this crazy idea out there that somehow church “starts” when the pastor says so. Or that you can’t *have* church if there’s no pastor. Where did this wacky idea come from? I know one thing for sure: it is *not* in the Bible. The REAL heroes in the Biblical story are ones whose names we don’t even know. There is the little boy who shared his lunch and gave Jesus the bread and fish he needed to feed 5,000 people. Or the man who nobody else would go near because they thought he was possessed by 1,000 demons. Jesus healed him, and the guy went out to spread the good news, becoming the first true evangelist.

A PASTOR’S JOB

As early as 1520, Luther wrote “Therefore any one who knows he is Christian should be fully assured that all of us alike are priests.” Luther said a lot of outrageous things in his time, and this has to be on the TOP 10 list. Every Christian proclaiming the Word, bestowing the sacraments, offering forgiveness and comfort and hope, praying and serving and giving themselves away in a sacrifice of love for others? Every Christian a *priest*? In a lot of places, even in our church today, Luther would get in trouble for spreading these ideas around!

Paul goes out of his way to help us imagine the church as a human body, where each single part is just as important as every other. We have each been given gifts to share. We have each been given a job to do. A pastor’s job is to lead God’s people into the freedom Christ died for – to spark our imaginations – to call us into the future God has in store for us – to challenge us to follow where the Spirit leads – to equip us to do what God calls us to do. ***A pastor’s job is to help us become who we are: members of a priesthood of all believers. And OUR job, as the baptized people of God, is to get busy – at church, at home, at work, in the community, and wherever God sends us -- being God’s people and doing what God leads us to do.***

AS NEW AS ... THE BOOK OF ACTS

What would it look like if we imagined the church as a training ground for God's people to practice doing ministry, so that they are prepared to do it in their homes, workplaces, neighborhoods, and wherever they are called to be about God's business? **What would it look like if our lay leaders saw themselves as coaches**, teaching and encouraging and challenging people in our congregations to discover, develop, and use the gifts that God has given them for their ministry? **What if the pastor's main job was coaching the coaches?**

This is a call to embrace in a radical new way what is, in fact, a ridiculously old concept. In the early days of the church written about in the book of Acts, each and every Christian was expected to take responsibility for life in the church and for the church's mission in the world. There are five strategic behaviors that we can identify in those early Christians:

- 1) **Pray Always.** Let's agree not to do anything that is not steeped in prayer.
- 2) **Set People Free.** We may need to mess with our structure, so that it sets people free to do God's work, rather than stifling new ideas.
- 3) **Take Action.** Don't just have good ideas. Make them happen!
- 4) **Expect Surprises.** Be prepared for occasional chaos and wrong turns.
- 5) **Be Hopeful.** Know that all things come together for good when we trust God.

Do we have the courage to commit to this bold Lutheran concept that we belong to a "priesthood of all believers? We ought to know, down in our Lutheran souls, that **God is at work in every single one of us.** Everybody has something to offer.

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD // THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Read Jeremiah 1: 4-10.

What excuses did Jeremiah make for not answering God's call? How does God respond? What are your excuses?

2. Read Acts 17: 1-9.

What is Jason accused of in this passage? Is it OK for God's people to turn things upside-down once in a while?

3. Is everything fine here the way it is? Or do we need to re-envision what it means to be a pastor? A member of the church? A follower of Jesus?

4. What do you LOVE to do? What do other people say you are good at? How can you put these gifts to work in ministry?

5. Does the thought of the "chaos" that might result if people in our church are set free to do ministry excite you or scare you?

6. What makes it hard for us to get past the idea that ministry is "the pastor's job"?