

A Revisit of the Ministerial Concept of Lay and Full-Time Ministers in Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana and its Missional Implications

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Abstract

In their article “Pentecostal Mission Approaches” White and Niemandt (2015, 241–269) make a case for how some Pentecostal Churches in Ghana have made good use of lay/tent ministry in their missionary agenda. However, among the Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana, lay ministers are not recognised as full-time ministers of the church. The understanding of these churches is that the lay/tent ministers by their definition do not operate in the five-fold ministry. In some of the churches, they are not accredited by the church to be part of their General Ministerial Council Meetings and the Annual General Meetings. Unlike the mainline churches, the lay or tent ministers in the Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana are also not allowed to vote or to be recommended for Executive Council positions. These issues therefore make it essential to investigate the historical and theological understanding of the concept of the lay and full-time ministers in church history, Ghanaian Pentecostals’ view of the concept, as well as the missional importance of lay ministries in the church and the *missio Dei*.

Keywords: Minister; lay minister; full-time minister; mission; Pentecostal Churches in Ghana



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Introduction

Sending missionaries or church planters to various places for evangelism and to plant churches in contemporary times, has become a very expensive venture for many churches due to economic and immigration issues.¹ One of the means that have been used by some mainline churches and missionary organisations to address this challenge is the use of tent ministers (bi-vocational ministers). Tent ministry refers to the activities of matured Christians who, while dedicating themselves to the ministry of the gospel, receive little or no pay for church work, but perform other jobs to provide support. It can also be defined as a method of Christian evangelism in which missionaries support themselves by working full time in the marketplace with their skills and education, instead of receiving financial support from their church (Siemens 1999, 733–741). The Apostle Paul’s missionary account says that he supported himself by making tents or being a bi-vocational minister while living and preaching in Corinth. On another occasion, he reported that he frequently performed outside work, in order not to be a financial burden to the young churches he founded (1 Cor 4:1–12; Acts 18:3–5; Acts 20:34; 1 Thessalonians 2:9).

In their article “Pentecostal Mission Approaches” White and Niemandt (2015, 241–269) make a case for how some Pentecostal churches in Ghana have made good use of tent/lay ministers in their missionary agenda. In spite of the good idea to use lay people in their mission agenda, there is some contention regarding the understanding of the terms “full-time minister” and “lay minister” or “laity.”

In the Christ Apostolic Church International (hereafter CACI), lay ministers are not recognised as full-time ministers of the church. Their understanding is that lay ministers by their definition do not function in the five-fold ministry (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher). In their context, those who are appointed as “lay pastors” are not accredited by the church to be part of the decision-making body of the church “General Council” (Christ Apostolic Church International 2017, 29–31). They are also not allowed to attend the annual General Council meetings and they have fewer benefits from the church. It is interesting to note that some of the lay pastors are working as circuit ministers.

In the Church of Pentecost (2010, 44, 48, 92–97), elders and presiding elders are appointed to take charge of local churches. Many of these church elders are working in the secular world and are also serving in their local churches. They are non-paid staff of the church. In their case, the presiding elders report to their district pastor or area apostle.

The question one would ask is the following: Are these elders or presiding elders functioning well in both the ministry and their secular work? If the answer is “yes,” then it is time for the Classical Pentecostal Churches to start thinking of the move from the traditional understanding of ministry, where it is thought that those called into ministry are the ones in “full-time ministry.”

1 This article is based on a paper presented at the First African Pentecostal Theologians Association conference held at Pentecost Theological Seminary, Kasoa, Ghana, from 21–22 November 2017.

These issues, therefore, make it necessary to investigate the historical and theological understanding of the concept of lay and full-time ministers; Ghanaian Pentecostals' view of the concept; terminological challenges with the use of the terms "clergy" and "laity"; contention of the sixteenth century Reformers; lessons from the mainline Orthodox Churches in Ghana; the proposal for engagement of tent/bi-vocational ministers; and missiological implications of engaging tent or bi-vocational ministers.

The Concept of Laity/Lay Ministers in Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana

Classical Pentecostal churches began in the West in 1906 as a result of the Azusa Street experience, and appeared on the Ghanaian religious scene in the 1920s. Apostle Peter Newman Anim and his Tabernacle Church, which started in 1917, are credited with the origins of classical Pentecostalism in Ghana (Larbi 2001, 32–33).

The labour of Peter Anim and his Tabernacle Church gave birth to the Christ Apostolic Church (currently known as the Christ Apostolic Church International); the Apostolic Church in Ghana; and the Church of Pentecost (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005, 23). Two of the three churches named here came into being as a result of a continuous reformation and the personal constant acquisition of knowledge sought by Anim through his affiliation with foreign churches and their teaching about the Holy Spirit and his work in believers (Larbi 2001, 32–33). The Church of Pentecost surfaced through a split in 1939 in the group due to doctrinal differences in the Christ Apostolic Church and the Apostolic Church, Gold Coast. The latter grew rapidly under Pastor James McKeown. The church led by Pastor James McKeown later (on 1 August 1962) adopted the name of the Church of Pentecost (Church of Pentecost 2015).

The Assemblies of God, Ghana, the fourth mainline Classical Pentecostal Church in Ghana, was founded by Rev. Lloyd and Margaret Shirer, the first Pentecostal missionaries sent by the American Assemblies of God Church to Ghana in 1931, after serving as missionaries in Burkina Faso. They settled in Yendi in the northern region of Ghana at the invitation of the king of Dagbon (Bansah 2012, 14). Their ministry flourished and they later opened branches at Kumasi in 1944 and Takoradi in 1945 (Larbi 2001, 72–75).

The concept of the "laity" or "lay ministers" among the Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana come with various definitions, depending on the church's administrative structure. Generally, among the three main Classical Pentecostal Churches (the Christ Apostolic Church International; the Church of Pentecost, the Apostolic Church Ghana), elders, presiding elders, deacons or deaconesses are categorised as the laity or lay ministers of the church. According to the Christ Apostolic Church International (2017, 97):

... workers of the Church comprise both Ministers and other employees of the Church. The Clergy comprises all ordained and probationary Ministers of the Church. The laity comprises employees of the Church who are not Ministers. Lay Ministers are volunteers of the Church who have been assigned as caretakers of a branch of the Church and they are part of the Clergy of the Church.

Unlike the Christ Apostolic Church International, the Apostolic Church Ghana (2006, 41–43) defines lay ministers as people who are appointed and are serving as elders, deacons and deaconesses in the church.

The definition of “laity” and “lay ministers” in the context of the Christ Apostolic Church is a bit problematic. Theologically, the laity and lay ministers are usually seen to be in the same category or to have the same meaning. But in their context, the terms have been separated and defined separately. The word “layman” is derived from a Greek word *laikos*, which means to “have no skills,” that is, not a professional. The lay person is an ordinary person who has not received any formal training for the ministry work (Ledbetter 2008). However, this is not the case in the context of the Christ Apostolic Church International. Many of the people that are appointed as lay pastors are professionals who are doing well in their areas of profession. Furthermore, some have also pursued theological education, but since they are not appointed as full-time pastors, the church does not recognise them as professionally qualified ministers or pastors to perform sacramental duties. The authors contend that if this is the case, such ministers should rather be called “tent-ministers” or “bi-vocational minister.”

Having outlined Classical Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches’ view on the concept of lay and full time ministry, it would be essential at this point to discuss how this concept of ministry (clergy/laity) evolved in early church history.

Historical Overview of the Concept of Lay and Full-Time Ministers (Clergy and Laity)

Although the word “ministry” is often associated with the work of the clergy, in its biblical sense it denotes the work of the entire church, the body of Christ in the world. Ministry is what the church does, or is supposed to do. However, the church’s understanding of ministry is far from that of the New Testament. Today most people see Christian ministry largely as the preserve of the clergy. The purpose for the discussion in this section is to examine the historical development that has given rise to this situation. It will also outline the role that lay persons have played in the history of the church.

The Concept of Clergy and Laity from the Second to the Fourth Century

The Didache (early second century) recognises two groups of leaders: prophets and teachers who were mobile, and elders/bishops and deacons who were local. The former apparently only visited occasionally (Williams 2005, 132–133). Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110) recognised one elder as bishop in each congregation, and this was the only person permitted to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. However, they were not salaried (Ignatius, *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1:51, Johnston 1998, 45–58). Justin Martyr (c.160) (cited by Johnston 1998, 45–58) discusses the work of bishop/pastor as a full-time role involved in:

- Distribution of gifts and ministry to the poor.
- Meeting with other pastors for consultation.

From the third century on, the church called her bishops and presbyters “priests.” This was largely due to the carry-over of the Old Testament Levitical model, with high priest, priests and Levites. This eventually played a big role in setting pastors or priests apart from others (Frend 1984, 405).

Following the conversion of the Emperor Constantine (312), the role of church and clergy changed (fourth century). Bishops were raised to a higher social status (Frend 1984, 488):

- Bishops were given the same status as senators and magistrates.
- Church council decisions were made equal to government decrees.
- Ordination became the means of making an essential spiritual change; that is, imparting special powers to consecrate the Eucharist.
- Bishops could only be approved by a senior bishop and this moved on to the election of bishops only by other bishops.
- A provincial bishop (metropolitan) became recognised as head over other bishops.
- Bishops were salaried by the government.
- Christianity became an official state religion of the Roman Empire in AD 390, with bishops becoming people of great power and influence (Faivre 1990, 144–145; Jankiewicz 2013).

In this context the ministry had assumed once more the character of the Old Testament Levitical model—with high priest, priests and Levites—and had to a greater extent forsaken the New Testament concept of a spiritually gifted body where, under responsive leaders, members were engaged in corporate ministry.

The developments outlined above have resulted in the various forms of ministry structures we have in the church today, albeit with some modifications. Most churches now have some sort of structure that gives special power and status to the pastor or bishop—making him different from others in that he is given a job description he is hardly able to handle. The popular notion is that the clergy are a special group marked out by the fact that they are empowered or permitted to perform certain duties which the laity are not permitted to perform. It should be noted that all the people of God are priests of God, so collectively we are a “royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9).

The Clergy and Laity Divide: Use of Terminologies

The developing understanding of words such as “clergy”, “priest” and “laity”—as applied to ministry—has also contributed to the “dividing wall” between the clergy and the laity. Although the root words from which we derive the English words “clergy” and “laity” are found in the New Testament, our usage of the terms “clergy” and “laity” is far removed from the New Testament concepts.

The English word “clergy” comes from the Latin *clerus*, which relates to the Greek word *kleros*. It means “an inheritance.” Nowhere in the New Testament is “*kleros*” used to designate a separate class of ordained leaders. The New Testament sees the believers

collectively as God's inheritance. This implies that the use of the term "clergy" to refer to a special elite group of church leaders is a perversion of the New Testament teachings (Bair 1999). In the time of Origen (third century), *kleros* became an established term for those who held office in the church, as opposed to the rest of God's people. By the fourth century, the unbiblical distinction between priest and people was widely accepted (Ogden 2003, 90).

On the other hand, the English word "laity" relates to the Greek word *Laos*, which means people. All in the body of Christ, whether saints, bishops, or deacons (Phil 1:1), are the people (*Laos*) of God. People of God is a title of honour bestowed upon all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 6:16; 1 Pet 2:9–10). This implies that the word "laity" did not have the same meaning in the Bible as it has today (Wood 2011, 269–270).

The Greek word for lay person (*laikos*) used in reference to the uneducated masses was later used to describe the common people as distinct from the clergy. The word, however, is not a New Testament word. It is rather found in 1 Clement, at the end of the first century, where it applies to the simple and faithful in contrast to the educated priesthood of the Jews; and in the third century, the word was commonly used in the context of the church (Ledbetter 2008). Eventually there developed a split between the clergy (the educated religious leaders, such as the priests) and the laity. Thus, the word "clergy" was employed to designate a limited number of persons who functioned in the Christian assemblies, and it came into use during the third century. One of the unfortunate outcomes of the clergy doctrine was that it communicated the notion that without the clergy present, there simply was no church. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and many other church practices could not happen unless a clergy/priest was present (Stevens 1990, 29).

Ambrose of Milan (339–397) widened the already existing gap between the clergy and laity. In his writings, priests or clergy were put in a different status than ordinary Christians and by virtue of their ordination were reckoned to be better than other Christians. He applied the exhortations and duties, which the New Testament assigns to all believers, and urged them on the priests (Smither 2009, 59–91; Williams 2017, 97–98).

St Augustine of Hippo (354–430)—writing on the nature of valid ordination—asserted that ordination conferred an indelible character on the individual ordained and that ordination was the permanent possession of the individual priest. With this affirmation by Augustine, corporate ministry in the local church ceased to be the norm. In effect, the church became a pastoral institution adopting the shape of society's structure with parochial churches and division between the priest and the laity (Guder 2000, 83–107).

Contention of the Sixteenth Century Reformers

During the Reformation age, the Reformers insisted that every Christian, whether a man or a woman, has a divine calling. This was a reaction against medieval Catholicism teaching that bishops, priests, monks and nuns are superior because of their religious calling. The Reformers rejected this as both clericalism (separating clergy from laity) and dualism

(separating “sacred” activities like prayer from “secular” ones like running a home or earning a living). They affirmed that God is interested in the whole of life (Blake 2009). In view of this, Luther argued that:

Those who are now called “spiritual,” that is, priests, bishops or popes, are neither different from other Christians, nor superior to them, except that they are charged with the administration of the Word of God and the sacrament, which is their work and office. (Lund 2002, 29)

Luther (in both *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* and *Letter to the Christian Nobility*) affirmed the priesthood of all believers and denied that a special priesthood belonged to any class in the church (Baldovin 2011, 408). Luther based his theology of the equality of all believers on the basis of the theology of baptism, and drew on the language of 1 Peter 2:9, in which the whole church is described as a “royal priesthood” (McFarland 2011, 409). For Luther, tailors, carpenters, cooks, farmers, and so forth have also been called “consecrated” like priests, each to “the work and office of his trade.”

It can be concluded that many centuries of unbiblical teaching and a non-liberating church environment have taught lay persons to think that their role is not as significant as that of the pastors. The idea that the “non-professionally” or non-theologically trained is a “layman,” is unbiblical. Furthermore, the role played by religious orders in the Middle Ages constituted a definite separation of the life of the church and its mission. These religious orders were a link between internal and external ministries in that they provided human resources to the church.

Lessons from the Mainline Churches in Ghana

There are great lessons that Classical Pentecostal Churches could learn from the mainline Orthodox Churches in Ghana. Classical Pentecostal Churches have a limited voice in the socio-political, economic and educational arena of Ghana, because from their beginning they refused to live an incarnational missional life. They refused to integrate themselves in the secular and social life of the country because of fear of being tagged as unspiritual. Intellectuals and educated ones were seen as a threat and worldly. Academic engagement was seen as unspiritual. However, the mainline Orthodox Churches took advantage of this limitation among the Pentecostals and established themselves in many influential places.

It should be noted that Jesus’ ministry was first of all incarnational (Jn 1:14; Matt 1:23; 2 Cor 5:19). A working definition of incarnational ministry is the immersion of one’s self into a local culture and “becoming Jesus” to that culture or environment. Incarnational ministry seeks to dispense ministry from a distance and embraces ministry up close and personal. In doing this, the love of God and the gospel of Christ are incarnated or embodied by the person ministering. The core of the concept of incarnational ministry is to live the good news rather than preach the good news; by influencing one’s context or place of work with the gospel. The church is called to live an incarnational missional life. Being missional is a way of being present in the world by being the incarnational presence of Christ to our neighbourhoods and profession. It is to the extent that the church actively reaches out to its neighbourhood that it will be recognised as a relevant presence in the community. The universal priesthood of all

believers means that every Christian is called to his/her neighbourhood (Van Aarde 2017, 2). Wright (2010, 216) submits that in the missional church, the emphasis is not upon missions but being an incarnated missional presence. Incarnational missional churches see ministry beyond the boundaries of the church.

Proposal for Engagement of Tent/Bi-Vocational Ministers

In light of the lessons from the mainline Orthodox Churches in Ghana, it is appropriate to propose that Classical Pentecostal Churches should begin reflecting on appointing and engaging bi-vocational ministers, as it has been done and practised in many of the mainline Orthodox Churches as well as the Lighthouse Chapel International. This approach to pastoral calling or appointment should be seen as a collective and inclusive missional calling, whereby bi-vocational ministers are seen as equally important and can function in the five-fold ministry according to the grace and calling of God upon the individual.

We are making a case for the consideration of bi-vocational ministers because the call of God for ministry has nothing like full-time or part-time apostle, prophet, pastor, evangelist, teacher, and so forth. According to Van Aarde (2017, 1), the traditional division between priest or pastor and lay people, who are the true priesthood (1 Pt 2:9), has been broken down so that all who confess Christ as Lord are “priests” and are called to a missional vocation.

It is worth noting that even though the Christ Apostolic Church International in the past few years has made it a point to appoint lay ministers, it is rather unfortunate that the church has not integrated them into their decision-making body. The Church of Pentecost has, however, moved a step forward in this direction by appointing some of the ministers who are engaged in ministry and equally working for their university and seminaries and other related ministries, such as chaplains in the military and Ghana Prison Service. They should, however, in the future consider people working in the secular work environment as well. To emphasise this approach to ministry, the vision 2018 of the Church of Pentecost (2014, 28) states that “effort would be made by the Church to run specialised training in ministry areas, such as children and chaplaincy ministries for educational institutions, hospitals, military forces, prisons, and police.”

According to the Church of Pentecost *Ministers' Handbook* (nd., 12), tent-making ministers perform all the duties of a pastor. They discharge other duties incidental to the calling as assigned by a supervisor. In spite of this defined duty of the tent-making ministers in the Church of Pentecost, the implementation is still not very clear since their annual white paper called “Executive Council Decisions” does not cover tent-making ministers who have been appointed by the church, but rather the full-time ministers.

Engaging bi-vocational ministers gives the church an incarnational missional branding and encourages young professionals to both serve the church and progress with their profession. It also increases people’s view of ministry as a call rather than a profession.

Missiological Implications of Engaging Tent or Bi-Vocational Ministers

Among the Reformers, John Calvin—one of the most influential people in Christian history—was a layman who became a self-made theologian. His famous *Institute of the Christian Religion* was not the work of a clergyman or a theologian, but a lay person. This, therefore, implies that the call of God for ministry could be carried out by people who will avail themselves to be used by God to change their generation.

In the seventeenth century, lay theologians like John Bunyan, Milton and Hugo Grotius all stand tall in the history of the church. Mention can also be made of a layman like Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, who—influenced by the Moravian Brethren—moulded a little group of laymen and women for world mission. The English Methodist movement, the Baptist movement and the Plymouth Brethren are also examples of lay movements that have made a mark on the church's horizon.

In our own century, lay people like J.R. Mott influenced the students' missions, while Howard Guinness sold his sports equipment to enable him to go to Canada to bring Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship to that country. Renewal movements in our own day (small and big groups, the Charismatic renewal and so forth) have all looked to the New Testament church for an empowering vision. These references are to point out that the priesthood of all believers is essential to the church structure.

According to Balia and Kim (2010, 120), we still need priests or pastors, as we need other leadership functions (teacher, evangelist, apostle, prophet Eph 4:11), but the basic structure for the local church and for mission is the priesthood of all believers. Walker reports that many of the overseas branches of the Church of Pentecost were planted through the use of the tent-making mission approach. He argues:

The understanding that spirit baptism gives the power for witness was paramount among early CoP members and therefore caused them to preach the gospel everywhere they found themselves. As a result, mission stations or branches of the CoP were opened in foreign countries—not through the initiative of the church's mission department or by an organized church rally or crusade, but by individuals who had travelled to do their private businesses. The mission approach used here was a “bottom-up” approach whereby grassroots members went to places they had not been sent, preached without any intimidation and established churches before reporting to an elder or pastor. (Walker 2010, 163,165)

According to Kärkkäinen (2002, 877), Pentecostal mission praxis is characterised, among other features, by aggressiveness, boldness, and the participation of all believers. A primary function of the Spirit is the provision of specific gifts for ministry. The New Testament refers to these as “spiritual gifts.” These gifts are most commonly identified by the Greek term *charisma*, which in the majority of its occurrences denotes spiritual gift. Spiritual gift is also occasionally denoted by the terms *pneumatikos* (1 Cor 12:1, 28; 14:1) and *dorea* (Eph 4:7).

A wide range of spiritual gifts accompanies and effects the broad distribution of ministry that has already been observed in the New Testament. In fact, a special touch of the Spirit has been given to every single Christian to qualify him or her for one or more special ministries.

The main purpose of these gifts is to present the gospel to those who have not heard it, to call them to repentance, to announce forgiveness of sin and a new beginning in relation to God and with neighbours through Jesus Christ (World Council of Churches 2005, 4). They are also for the upbuilding of the congregation. The priesthood of all believers is understood as the task of believers to permeate the world through service and witness.

Conclusion

This article makes a case why bi-vocational ministers should be engaged and be recognised by the Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana. In order to achieve the objective of the study, the article discusses historical and theological development of the concept of “lay” and “full-time ministers”; Ghanaian Pentecostals’ view of the concept, terminological challenges with the use of the terms the “clergy” and “laity”; contention of the sixteenth century Reformers; lessons from the mainline Orthodox Churches in Ghana; a proposal for engagement of tent/bi-vocational ministers; as well as missiological implications of engaging tent or bi-vocational ministers.

The article argues that the church is called to live an incarnational missional life. Being missional is a way of being present in the world by being the incarnational presence of Christ to our neighbourhoods and profession. It is to the extent that the church actively reaches out to its neighbourhood that it will be recognised as a relevant presence in the community. The universal priesthood of all believers means every Christian is called to his/her neighbourhood. Incarnational missional churches see ministry beyond the boundaries of the church.

It was noted that since many of the elders or presiding elders (lay ministers) in Classical Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches are functioning well both in the ministry and their secular work, the contention on the understanding of the term “full-time minister” and “lay” or “laity” among them should be looked at theologically and biblically. Furthermore, Classical Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches should start looking at ministry or call to ministry as a missional assignment which surpasses being called as either a full-time or part-time minister. When God calls people for ministry, there is nothing like full-time pastor or part-time pastor, as it is being interpreted and understood by Classical Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches. Even though some efforts have been made by the Church of Pentecost to address the issue at hand, they need more commitment to make it a reality. It was further noted that in spite of the fact that the Christ Apostolic Church International in the past few years has made it a point to appoint lay ministers, it is rather unfortunate that the church has not integrated lay ministers into their decision-making body.

In view of the above, the authors submit that engaging bi-vocational ministers gives the church an incarnational missional branding and encourages young professionals to both serve the church and progress with their profession. It also increases people’s view of ministry as a call rather than a profession.

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