

Weekly Column
Korean Newspaper



Melvin University
and Me

About associate pastor

One of the grey areas in lay ministry is the issue of associate pastors. It is different in large churches, but in small churches (200 people or less), I have seen it really awkward. Simply put, the role of the associate pastor is ambiguous. Since we haven't studied the role of associate pastor in our ministry in depth, it is not easy to define their position and role.

In lay ministry, however, the roles of the laity and the pastor are distinct. The pastor is the equipper, and the laity are the ministers. So where is the best place for an associate pastor? Naturally, it is preferable to join a team of pastors who are equippers. So they join the teaching ministry.

The problem that arises is not that, but rather the feeling of emptiness that comes from the layperson taking over the pastoral work that the associate pastor has been doing. The question may be asked, 'Isn't the work of the associate pastor being done?' Where is the place for the associate pastor to stand? In some cases, this is exactly what happens.

For example, a new associate pastor was hired at a small church that had been doing our Lay Pastoral Ministry for several years and had a well-established staff of lay pastors. They had been doing a lot of work as an associate pastor in other churches, so when they came, there was nothing to do. So they thought, 'This church is very strange. They have a good system where the members take care of everything...!'

Although they had learnt a lot of things in seminary, they had never heard of lay people doing this, nor had they been taught. When the senior pastor saw

that he was struggling, he said, 'You should learn from the lay people, so that you can do ministry in this church.' The head of the LPM team also attended the pastors' meetings and shared the situation of the church with each other, so the associate pastor gradually began to adapt to the church.

The best case scenario is that the associate pastor actually learns about lay ministry. The phrase 'if you don't know it, learn it' is not only for kindergarteners, but also for adults. As an associate pastor, they can learn by observing the senior pastor in terms of lay ministry and by seeing how the congregation responds.

And, if needed, provide administrative help. Maybe they can join a leadership group. In fact, some churches do that. But the keys should be given to the laity. If the keys are taken by the associate pastor, they go back to the way things were, and the layperson becomes 'unemployed' again. Lay leadership development does not happen again because everything is dependent on the associate pastor.