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Book Review

AdMinistry: The Nuts and Bolts of Church Administration

By Thomas F. Tumblin
Abingdon Press, 2017
108 pages
US\$12.15, Paperback

Reviewed by Timothy Clothier, a pastor in south-central Pennsylvania, serving within the Charis Fellowship. His other published works include doctrinal statement papers for the Charis pastors network and a book on spiritual gifts (*To Each is Given*, BMH, 2020). He is currently enrolled at Grace Theological Seminary and plans to complete his doctoral work soon.

In *AdMinistry*, Thomas Tumblin sets out to outline and explain the various administrative aspects relevant to local church ministry. Given his extensive ministry experience (outlined on the back cover), Tumblin combines real-world insights and biblical principles to provide the reader with a how-to manual for beginners.

Those naturally inclined to administrative work will find *AdMinistry* lacking an in-depth and nuanced level of detail. However, those less inclined towards administrative work will find this book a helpful resource that will continually yield fruit. In many ways, Tumblin puts complex administrative cookies on the bottom shelf, allowing the reader to understand the basic administrative principles inherent to local church ministry.

One of the foundational aspects of *AdMinistry* is Tumblin's explanation of the book's title. Rather than merely seeing administrative work as a barrier to real ministry Tumblin believes that administrative functions are functions of ministry. Tumblin contends that the

administrative functions of ministry are “the flesh and muscles of incarnational ministry” (viii) by which ministry is held together and built. Furthermore, “*Administry*...enlivens mission, paving the way for lives to be changed [by providing] pliable systems and structure that adjust to new context and unexpected circumstances” (2).

Consequently, Tumblin takes this foundational understanding of ministry administration and proceeds to outline six different “stewardships” that must be managed well. In order, they are People, Relationships, Resources, Places and Spaces, Fiduciary Responsibility, and the Mission of God.

Before proceeding through each of the six areas of stewardship, Tumblin first outlines his theological and philosophical convictions regarding administrative ministry. In summary, Tumblin sees the arc of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation being the prevailing way in which humanity finds itself within the story of the Bible. This arc not only provides the rationale for why administry is necessary (beyond mere legal requirements), it also explains why administry can be difficult. However, “as participants in God’s redemptive activity, we enjoy the down payment of the Spirit—God with us now in fullness of life while being the foretaste of the best yet to come” (15).

Therefore, Tumblin draws out five different implications from the theological model he outlines. They are:

1. How we honor every human being will lead to person-centered behaviors (15);
2. Love for God, and others, manifests in a relentless press toward God’s purposes (15);
3. We can live into what the King James translation calls longsuffering (ital. original, 16);
4. We practice administry in an imperfect world being redeemed by God’s grace (16); and,
5. The same incarnating presence of the Spirit precedes us into administry (16).

Administrative ministry does not exist for itself, nor does it exist to restrict ministry from taking place. Rather, rightly ordered administrative ministry provides the necessary structure and guidelines that allow the church to function and flourish. Furthermore, Tumblin asserts that such administry is inevitably Spirit-empowered ministry. The local church should pursue and expect nothing less, for “all things should be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:39, KJV).

As a young pastor with a growing part-time ministry staff and lay ministry leaders, I found Tumblin's chapter on stewarding people to be particularly helpful. "Mission is not accomplished alone," he writes (19). Consequently, the church must continually strive to call out believers into lives of service and equip them for the task at hand (Eph. 4:12). Additionally, it is imperative to resist the pull towards "solo ministry performance" (19). Rather, we must recognize that the Holy Spirit has gifted each believer for the building up of the body.

Practically speaking, this means that we need to understand that the best way to lead is in dependence on God and interdependence on one another. This conviction should be woven into the DNA of the church so that it actively guides who we would consider hiring. As Tumblin states, "The danger is to consider the pastor [any staff position] the 'hired gun' who performs all of the ministry while the members and constituents watch from the sidelines" (24). Therefore, understanding what God has called and gifted His church for is vital in developing healthy teams of lay leaders and hiring staff to provide leadership to such teams.

Tumblin also touches upon an underdeveloped yet critically important part of ministry leadership: trust. He writes, "We may initially trust a person's title or position, but lasting trust builds as we experience trustworthiness through relationship" (32). As ministry leaders, we must recognize the significance that building trust, through biblical relationships, has in forming healthy ministries. Without trust, there is no biblical leadership.

In each of the other areas of stewardship, Tumblin offers additional wisdom to clarify both the purpose of an area of administrative ministry and its design. What follows are brief reflections from each remaining chapter.

Chapter 4: Stewarding Relationships. In this chapter, Tumblin interacts robustly with other professionals and published works on the subject. The chapter shed light on the diverse ways relationships are formed and the different relational settings that people engage in. Citing Edward T. Hall, Tumblin identifies four different relational settings or spaces. Public, social, personal, and intimate are equally important but for distinct reasons. What is more, "it is healthy to appropriately present different personas in different settings" (44). As a result, ministry leaders should actively consider how to lead people in forming healthy relationships through each of these spaces. This will include helping individuals navigate the different social challenges that each space provides, but it also means that churches should have "multiple relational entry points at each stage" of one's journey (48).

Chapter 5: Stewarding Resources. Building trust with those we

lead happens in a variety of ways. While this is not exclusively related to money, it most certainly includes financial stewardship. Navigating the complexities of budgets, fund accounting guidelines, IRS regulations, offerings, and paying the utility bills are all areas a local church must succeed at. Churches must pursue financial excellence as both a means of worship—stewarding the resources God has given—and trust building. Tumblin could have done more to outline and demonstrate how a church's budget and balance sheet can be tools for ministry— not just for reporting. To be sure, he does touch on the difference between restricted and unrestricted funds, but what he leaves out of this chapter is how to use the budget to plan for future ministry, not just pay for current ministry.

Chapter 6: Stewarding Place and Spaces. The physical assets that a church has are also important tools for ministry. In today's world, this may include buildings owned for over a century or even trailers used to store all the belongings of a fledgling church plant. Regardless, the wise use of these resources is important. Connecting back to the point of critique in chapter five, Tumblin rightly exposes how churches often “defer maintenance and tolerate inefficiencies, particularly in times of financial constraint” (64). However, what is missing is how a church may proactively plan for the moments when a roofing system needs to be replaced, a boiler needs major work done, or the entire children's area needs a new coat of paint. How might local churches follow Joseph's lead, using the “years of plenty” to prepare for “years of want”?

Chapter 7: Stewarding Fiduciary Responsibility. This short chapter covers the basics of what churches need to know to maintain a minimum standard of legal compliance with the government. Best practices are outlined, and some helpful suggestions are offered. Nevertheless, this chapter could have been strengthened with specific steps or suggestions leaders could take if the legal documents of the church (deeds, wills, trusts, tax-exempt forms, articles of incorporation, etc.) are not accessible or have been lost. These documents are important, should be kept safe, and should always be available.

Chapter 8: Stewarding the Mission of God. In conclusion, Tumblin reminds local church leaders of who we serve and the significance of our work. He writes, “We are in service of the Lord God Almighty” (79). Jesus has commanded His church to make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20), and church leaders are responsible for right stewarding all the tools and resources God has given them towards that end.

AdMinistry is a helpful primer on the administrative aspects of local church ministry. As such, this resource can be a great tool for those just beginning to serve in such a role or those with basic questions regarding how

best to use the tools and resources God has provided. However, the book lacks depth for those who are familiar with administration. Nevertheless, for those serving in small churches, or for those less administratively inclined, this book will provide significant and practical instructions.