



International Christian Dance Fellowship

***A series of papers from CDF
leaders and teachers on different
aspects of Faith, Arts and Ministry.
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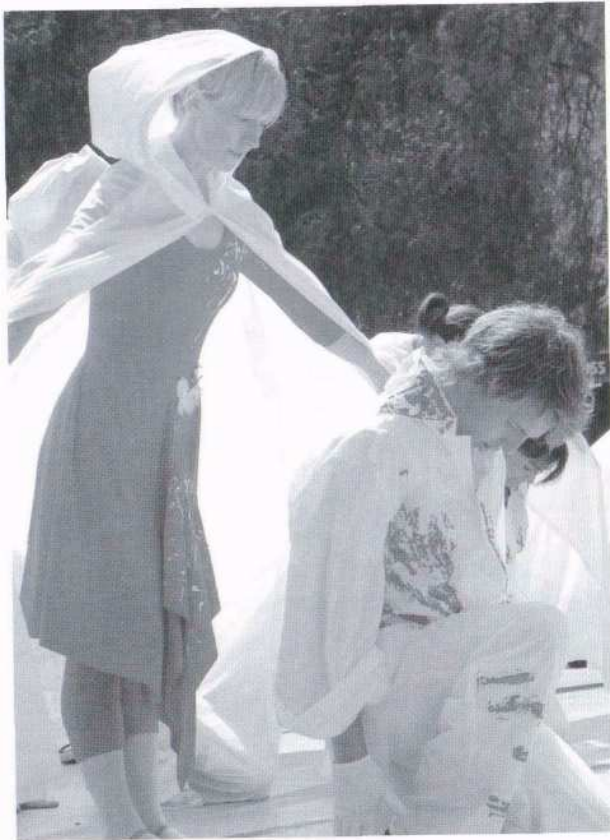
THIS IS AN EXCERPT from “Are there any Dancers in the House” by Michelle Leaney, Pastor of the Arts at Hillsong Church, Sydney, Australia and an advisor to ICDF.

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CHAPTER 4

Dancers ... Or Ministers?



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Can dance really be a ministry?

The dictionary defines ministry as "the service, function, or profession of a minister of religion".

Many stop there. "Minister of religion" ... who is that? The one who writes "minister of religion" in the occupation section when filling in a form? A full-time paid pastor or priest?

As you come to him the living Stone — rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to Him —you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

'See I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.'

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

'The stone the builders have rejected has become the capstone,'

And,

'A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall'.

They stumble, because they disobey the message — which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:4-9)

"A chosen people, a royal priesthood." Who are they talking about? "To you who believe." That's us!

"Priesthood" in the dictionary is defined as "the office of priest". "Priest" has the same meaning as "minister". So, if we are the royal priesthood — we are all ministers.

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In earlier chapters, we have already looked at the fact that, in various churches across the earth, dance is being used:

- £» in praise and worship;
- £• as a communication tool for evangelism and teaching; and V* in prayer, intercession, prophecy and healing.

So can dance be a ministry?

Is praise and worship a ministry? Are evangelism and teaching ministries? Are prayer, intercession, prophecy and healing ministries?

"OK", I hear you say. Dance in those ways is ministry. But what about dance that is just entertaining? Surely that can't be a ministry.

Here are some more questions to ponder: &• Is all dance in a church service or an outreach "ministry"? 9^l Is all dance in a non-Christian event either entertainment or art?

What about someone who just wants to create dances? They love God, recognise their creative gift comes from Him, and so they go ahead and add fun, energy and beauty to the world.

Imagine for a moment, a child playing. He falls and scrapes his knee. The mother applies the usual band-aid and cuddles, and prays for Jesus to take the hurt away. Afterwards, they sit quietly and read a nice little book about some friends who play together in the park. The book has a moral to it, and is based on "love your neighbour as you love yourself". As the story concludes, the little boy's father arrives home. He puts down his bag and the little boy runs to him. After a big hug, the father spins him around and around until they fall in a heap on the floor, laughing. A big game of tickles, followed by a crazy game of chasings.

The question I have for you is this: Which interaction between parent and child had the most value? The boy and his mother, or the boy and his father?

The contact with the mother had *obvious* spiritual content. That with the father didn't, and yet you can see that all of these things are necessary in the life of the child, for him to grow up whole in spirit, mind and body.

So is dance that just adds beauty to our world — a bit of "play", valid? Yes. But, would we really go as far as to call it "ministry"? Yes!!

What is the practical significance of the changing colours of the sunset — which just take your breath away? The incredible design in the lightening bolt on a stormy sky? The fragrance of a rose? God has created so much just for beauty and enjoyment. Are we not created in His image, and called to do what He does?

Like all ministry, it really comes down to calling. Do what you are *called to do*. Don't waste your energy on what someone else is called to do.

A completed dance, and the performance of that dance, is the *end product*. The product is important, but the process is even more important. In fact, it is *the process* that really determines if what you do is ministry.

The minister brings all they have and are to God. The minister will obey and follow him. We, as the royal priesthood, offer "spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God". What God does with that - what is produced, is His responsibility.

It is the "process" which determines if you stop short at being just a *dancer* or become a *minister*.

If you are to produce a creative piece that adds fun and beauty to your world, your process may involve only a short prayer, acknowledgement of God's presence with you.

"Lord, thanks for another great day to dance in! Thank you for making me creative, just like You. Help me to create great dances today. Keep me from the enemy, so that I don't dishonour you in any way in my dancing. Let's do it!! Amen!"

ARE THERE ANY DANCERS IN THE HOUSE?

However, if your purpose is a more obvious spiritual outcome - then there will be a more spiritual input in your process.

Over the years, I have learned a few things that help to create dance "ministers".

Prayer

Pray every step of the way:

- * For God's chosen dancers to come.
- * For guidance on the right jobs for the right people.
- * His appointments — not just activity or bookings.
- * His values. For example: Is bigger better? Yes and no. It is true that with more in the crowd, more people are being reached. As the group's reputation grows, the crowds you dance before may grow larger and the events more prestigious. Does that mean you turn down all small, seemingly unimportant events? No. Who can tell when the one soul saved is the next Billy Graham? Or when one small event is the beginning of a national or international revival? So be guided by the Holy Spirit — you cannot judge on human standards alone.
- * For protection against the enemy - and the unity of the dancers.
- * Over the choice of music and inspiration for choreography.
- * When obstacles come your way.
- * Be in daily, hourly, communication with the Father.
- * Encourage the dancers to be independent prayers, as well as praying together.

His Word

- * Make sure the dancers are sharing in the Word together.
- * Encourage them to meditate on the Word individually.

- * Teach the dancers to speak the Word. Even little things like "I can't do it" - is that what the Word says? No, it says "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). Speak the Word of God to renounce the lies of the evil one.
- * Always bring a fresh word from God for each rehearsal or performance. Sometimes you need to give this responsibility to others in the dance team. (It helps them grow, both personally and in their leadership ability.)

Know who you are in Christ

Remember who you are in Christ. If you are not sure — search the Word - that is the mirror you need to hold up to see yourself as God sees you. If Satan tries to pull you down (believe me, if you want to minister, he will) just remind him of who he's messing with!!

I am a child of God (John 1:12)

I am a joint heir with Christ, sharing His inheritance with Him (Rom 8:17)

I am God's workmanship — His handiwork (Eph. 2:10) *I am chosen of*

God, holy and dearly loved(Col 3:12; 1 Thess 1:4) *I have been raised*

up and seated with Christ in Heaven (Eph 2:6) / *have direct access to*

God through the Spirit (Eph 2:18)

/ have been rescued from the domain of Satan's rule, and transferred to the Kingdom of Christ (Col 1:13)

/ have been given a spirit of power (2 Tim 1:7) *Christ Himself is in me*

(Col 1:27) There are heaps more where these came from ... look for

yourself!

Submit to the vision and leadership of the church

Don't be an elitist doing your ministry. God placed you in the body of Christ - the church. In relationship. Under authority. I love that our dance team is from just one local church. But, even if you are dancing in a "para-church" group (i.e. a group of Christians from different churches) you need pastoral leadership, someone to be accountable to, who will help to keep you on track. Don't give up on the local church. If your dance company is from a number of different churches, you still need to be planted in a local church. To leave the church and just hang out with other Christian artists, is like forming a body with a bunch of legs (read 1 Cor. 12:12-27). You may avoid the uncomfortable feeling of having people who don't understand your calling as a Christian artist, but how will that ever change if the artists are not there? Don't wait for the church leadership to recognise your worth and begin to include you. Serve in whatever way you can at your local church, even if it is not with your artistic gifts. Your creative outlet may be elsewhere, but if you continue to be faithful in the local church and don't push too hard, you will be surprised what doors open. We'll look at this in more detail, in the chapter, "What do you do if your pastor says 'No?'".

Creating with the Holy Spirit

God is the Creator, and in His image we were made creative. So when you create while tapping into the Creator, you have two creative forces working together as a team. I can't think of anyone that I'd rather collaborate with than the Creator of the Universe!! This doesn't usually happen by sitting down and waiting for the Lord to give you the entire choreography. Ask for His presence and involvement and begin to create in faith, believing He is working with you. You will be amazed at the way Jesus will touch lives through you when you work with Him.

Discipling the dancers

If you have a dance group, you have a "small group", an opportunity for the members to be disciplined and pastored. This will not happen without

thought, prayer and a strategy. Just because they are in the group, doesn't mean they are being disciplined. The leader is responsible for working out the best way for this to happen. Perhaps your church already has a good strategy for discipleship, and it is as simple as making sure they are regularly attending a small group bible study or cell group in your church, and checking they are in church even when not dancing. You cannot always tell when someone is having a hard time. Some are really good at putting on a mask. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal things to you.

Don't avoid conflict. If you love your dancers, you will confront issues in love and wisdom, and help them walk through the difficult times. If you don't, they will be in the group all smiles, and then the next week they are gone forever. One thing I find helpful is to follow the example of Paul, when he wrote the letters to the churches. He used what is often referred to as "the sandwich technique". He would give praise for the great things they were doing, then bring correction in areas they could improve, and then end with encouragement or more praise. Love the person, and don't emotionally ostracise anyone who has made a mistake. Remember, you are correcting behaviour, not a person. Continually see their potential and who Christ is making them to be.

Discipleship is more than correction. It is igniting passion and vision. It is feeding them the Word of God. It is upholding them in prayer through the hard times, and celebrating with them in their victories. It is family. It is community. It is a safe place. It is love.

Developing a Kingdom mindset

Seek to grow in your relationship with God. Walk daily with Him, so that you understand the way He sees things. Romans 12:2 calls us to "be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so you can test and approve what God's will is". The best way I know to renew your mind, and bring it in line with the mind of Christ, is to read and meditate on His Word, and just basically spend time with him.

Increase your awareness of the presence of God

Sometimes I hear people say "let's call down God's presence". Or, "we had a great prayer meeting - God turned up in a big way!!". Does that mean He wasn't there before that?

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. (Psalm 139: 7-10)

He is always there. It is just our awareness of His presence that increases. We can make an obvious connection with Him, where we enjoy relating to each other - or we can ignore Him. Either way, He is always there. Always ready to commune with us. We don't need to huff and puff... work it up ... strive ... to connect with God. Any time is a good time ... any place is a good place ... He is never too busy.

Come near to God and He will come near to you. (James 4:8)

So, the more you remind those you dance with of God's presence, the more likely they will bring their relationship with God into their dance. Our worship is a response to this relationship - as the more we know Him, the more we want to worship Him with all that we have and are (Romans 12:1).

How you enter the platform, and what you do immediately prior to this, is key to your awareness of the presence of God. I always make sure I bring a word from the Lord specifically for the dancers for that day's service ... something we are believing for while we dance. We commit the dance to the Lord for all He wants to do through it, and we give ourselves over to worshipping Him. We join with the singers, musicians and worship leaders to pray before the service.

The tendency of some dancers is to spend those last moments before going onto the stage, frantically rehearsing the steps — afraid of making errors.

I never allow this. I simply say to them, "We have done all that we can in prayer and rehearsal to arrive at this moment. God will bless what we have done, and add His anointing, and use what we offer Him in faith. So relax, breathe deep, and become aware of His presence. Recognise you do this to bless HIM. Imagine you dance before the throne room of God, and you dance for Him only — see Him enjoying your praise." At the most, a last minute think through the order of the song and choreography is fine, as long as you can stay calm and focussed spiritually. You need to warm up, and stay warm, but there is no reason why you can't gently move or stretch while praying.

Developing skills and dance excellence

We've talked a lot about the heart motivation - offering to God what you are and allowing Him to do the rest. Does that mean that technique and skill have no place? NO! In fact, if we are really keen to offer Him all that we are, and if we are serious about the call of God on our lives to dance, we will definitely do all we can to improve and increase our skill.

GO TO DANCE CLASSES! To improve your physical fitness, strength, flexibility, coordination, vocabulary of movement, dance memory, and skill. I still take dance classes whenever I can. When I was dancing on the platform, it was absolutely essential - to stay fresh, to challenge my physical boundaries and to keep my brain and body connected!! If you can't do dance classes right now — do something! At least get a video or exercise to an aerobics program on the TV.

STUDY THE WORD OF GOD - in your own meditation and study at Bible College, in Bible Studies - to improve your knowledge of the Word. Perhaps you could also read more Christian books, or find an evening bible course that only involves one night a week. This is just as important as dance class if you want to truly minister. The more of the Word you have in you — the more of the Word you have to impart.

DOES ALL OF THIS SEEM LIKE A LOT TO DO? Don't worry!! This is a life long process. God does not expect you to become perfect in all these areas on the first day. I know I'm not!! Just keep growing in each area, "being confident in this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion, until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6).

You are an ambassador

When asked to dance anywhere, especially if it is away from your own church, you need to bear in mind that you are two things:

- * Christ's ambassadors; and
- * Representatives of your church.

As Christ's ambassadors, we need to faithfully represent Jesus. So remember: *

- * Your commission (Matthew 28:18-2)
- * You are clothed with power by the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:45-49)
- * You should display the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25) ^ *
- * You are to be an example (1 Timothy 4:11-16)

Many people want the stage and the spotlight for all the wrong reasons. When dancing in a ministry context, they may be able to look the part, but how they are off-stage will very often give them away. When you walk into a room, it should be evident that Christ's ambassador just walked in. How you handle the problems as they come, how you notice the people around you. The humility, patience and compassion you display. The way your team love each other, and respect their leader. Whether you are demanding, or grateful for being there. All of these are just as important as what you bring to the platform.

I remember two different youth dance teams who came to minister through our church. Although both were equally brilliant on stage, their offstage behaviour was quite different. One represented Christ well, the other was demanding, rude and proud. One team has been invited back, however the other will not have the door opened to them again.

These things may be obvious if you have walked with God for any length of time, and have spent time growing in the Word and in the Spirit. Yet, we are not perfect. We do not always live as Christ would have us live in every waking moment. However, when we go as ministers, or even if they just know we are Christians, and we go to provide entertainment, we need to be more alert. There is less room for error when you hop into the spotlight of ministry. Many eyes are watching and assessing. If you can't hold it together for two hours, then you will probably find there are basic spiritual and character issues that need to be seriously looked at in your life.

Now, I know many Christians who have grown past this point. They can basically go out and represent Christ well. However, I also find that some of these will still use the opportunity when they go outside their church for ministry, to step out from under the leadership they are submitted to and see this as an opportunity to do their own thing. This kind of behaviour really stems from a person's perception of the place of the godly leadership of their church in their lives. If you see the leadership as restricting and controlling, stopping what you really want to do, then when the leader is absent you will be tempted to use this opportunity to do all the things you do not feel free to do back in your church. Alternatively, you may skip doing some of the things you have been asked or taught to do, that you do not feel are important. However, there is such deception in this. You may not even consciously realise you are doing it. You can spiritualise this path in so many ways. You can feel that you are answerable only to God, and you are now the leader in this situation. However, wherever you go you represent your church, and your leaders are still leading you whether present or not.

If you want the covering and anointing of your church, you need to take on the responsibility of accurately representing it. When I have been asked to go and minister elsewhere, I don't ask myself, "am I today representing my church, or is this just my thing today". I am ALWAYS a representative of my church. If I am ever uncertain of whether I am on track with my choices, I just imagine my pastors being present. If I would feel uncom-

CHAPTER 5

Dance For The Church Service

comfortable doing what I had chosen to do in front of them, then I am on the wrong track.

I also expect that of the people in my team. There has been a lot of territory taken in the area of dance. When you have done a battle of significance, and gained territory - you need to then protect that territory as the enemy will try to take it back. If I appear over-protective of people and their lives - it is the call I have to be a shepherd, pastoring the dancers. If I appear over-protective of the territory of dance, it is because I am aware of the fact that it has taken many faithful dancers who are surrendered to God, to reclaim the dance to its original purpose - to glorify the King of Kings.

My friend, you have an amazing calling. You have been entrusted with a gift that came from the very heart of God. He designed it for His glory and for your freedom.

Dancers ... ministers ... artists ... servants ... devote yourselves to all that you have been called to do for His Name's sake.



If you have been given the amazing opportunity to dance in a church service, then here are some of the steps I encourage you to take, so that what you bring into weekend services is the right thing for that moment.

You need to understand what God is doing and why

I have been involved in Dance Ministry since 1982, however, over the past few years, some key issues have challenged me. I've needed to understand what happens when we dance in Praise or in Worship. Was there really a place to simply "entertain" in church (that doesn't sound very spiritual!). I've needed to go back to the basics. These are big topics, so I will cover them in detail in the following chapters, but I do seek wisdom from God on what He is doing and why He is doing it. He doesn't always give you all the answers right away. You need to obey Him, whether you understand or not. However, He has promised to give us wisdom if we seek after it. Getting to the core purpose will help you stay on track and help make many small and large decisions easy.

Understand what your leadership wants

I have covered this one a lot in the previous chapter, so you know how important I think this one is. However, it is not just enough to know their vision and line up your goals for the year and beyond. Know what they are wanting from their church services. What part can you play in helping them achieve their goals for this one specific service? Are you helping to carry this service with them? Are you a spectator or a participant? Are you contributing your faith? Is it as important to you as to your pastor that people will get saved, or meet with God and walk away ready for the next week? Are you bringing excellence to the platform?

Make your leadership's goals your first priority. Then let your other goals sit under these. I make sure I am aware of the goal of the whole service, and don't only focus on our small part. The dance usually lasts for only a few short minutes of the service. So, if today in church we are taking a faith

offering (e.g. for a building fund), that is part of my goal in the dance - to raise the level of faith so that the offering that is brought will totally bless God and exceed everyone's expectations. I'm praying for what we leave behind, after we leave the stage. I want us to have contributed for the sake of the rest of the service - as well as the moments we are on the platform. I'm focusing on how we can make sure that what we do will be excellent - both spiritually and physically.

After that, I may have other goals. My goal for the dance that day may be that people will be healed as we dance, or that people will be set free. The goal may be to expand the boundaries of what people have experienced before, so they can move forward in how they appreciate dance. Perhaps there is a mindset to break - a box that dance had been placed in. However, my God-given goals are consciously placed below the God-given goals of my leadership, because I totally trust what God is doing through them. I am loyal to them, and I know that anything God wants me to do will have an open door anyway. I don't have to fight any battles.

With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles. (2 Chron. 32:8)

That doesn't mean I won't have challenges along the way that may involve conversations with the people involved when we seem to have opposing goals. For example, the people involved in stage design may not understand the dancers' basic need for space. Sometimes, people may believe that dance can only be an "item", when we know that it can contribute significantly more than entertainment. However, I do know that God goes ahead of us and prepares the way before us.

If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:6)

ARE THERE ANY DANCERS IN THE HOUSE?

Understand the awesome responsibility we have when we dance in church

This was a big one for me. Since dance had stopped completely as a part of the Sunday services, our worship music team had just been going ahead in every way. As I stepped back into leadership, I said to myself, "Look at where this church is at! God is using this team to give the whole world a new song. They are leaders in how the world worships!" It had taken a long time for a very committed group of worship leaders, singers and musicians to produce that. It had taken God's seal of approval and His anointing. It had taken people, obedient to the call of Christ, being steadfast and occupying their place well — their hearts full of faith and committed to doing "whatever it takes".

The last thing we wanted to do, whenever we walked onto the platform was to undo what God was doing in the service. We could not take this platform for granted. We needed to be in total unity with this team - and add to what they were doing. We had to get amongst this worship team as often as we possibly could. To understand its vision, and how it functions on a daily basis. To sit under the worship pastor's teaching at every opportunity — to join them in praying for the service. We had to push the boundaries of how we, as individuals, were becoming "extravagant worshippers". We cannot afford to see ourselves as an island — the dancers. We have to be positioned amongst the team.

Also, the standard of musical excellence was almost daunting! I knew our level of dance, as we started out, would not match that. I knew it was going to take a serious plan of action to catch up - so that what we presented in church was a "match" to what was happening in every other area.

Having said all that, I also knew that God would use us — just as we are!! You don't grow in your ministry, unless you are doing it. You will make mistakes along the way. Don't take yourself too seriously. God will be glorified, and will use what you do if your heart is in the right place - if what you present is "your best" at that moment. God will receive **your offering**,

when offered with faith, just as He did Abel's offering (Gen 4:4). Don't do nothing because of fear that it won't be good enough. Let's face it - nothing we give to God will EVER be good enough, no matter how great a dancer, musician, leader, preacher or businessperson you are. When you feel overwhelmed by the task, just go back to the basics. God often whispers in my ear, and says "Remember, it's all about God and people." Just love God, and everyone around you, with everything you have. Do your best, and enjoy the journey!!