

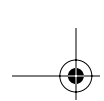
# 1

## Redefining Leadership

**W**e might think that leadership is so self-evident that it doesn't need to be defined. We might assume a leader is simply the person at the head of the pack who determines the direction and persuades those in tow to follow faithfully. But that assumption is seriously inadequate and could be thoroughly misleading. It provides an apt description of a tour guide holding aloft a brightly colored umbrella for a group of people who need clear direction and the security of one another in an alien land. But it does not apply in the much broader context of leadership within movements that are looking to engage, infiltrate and transform culture—the task of the church engaged in mission within Western contexts.

As we consider the complexity of leadership in contemporary cultural settings, we will draw on biblical insights and secular wisdom. In regard to the latter it is recognized at the outset that the church should not simply follow the leadership insights and models of the business world. Yet we may discover we have much to learn from recent thought in secular business literature concerning such issues as values-based leadership, which recognizes the gifting of others and the fact that leadership is not simply confined to the pinnacle of the hierarchy but rather emerges at every level of an organization. Christian thinkers also have a valuable contribution to make by both affirm-





ing these insights and subjecting them to a discerning theological critique.

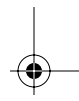
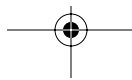
The relationship between the secular and spiritual is a symbiotic one rather than a clash of opposites. In the secular realm many significant changes in thinking have occurred. For example, the management-by-objective philosophy that proved so demanding, manipulative and destructive for so many in the business world has now been largely superseded. In the course of reading a large number of recently published books on leadership in the for-profit and nonprofit worlds, I have been struck by their emphasis on humility, a servant attitude, spirituality and consistently upheld values as essential ingredients for leadership visions to be actualized. This welcome development is in line with leadership values made explicit in the New Testament.

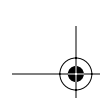
#### LEADERSHIP IN TRANSITION

Leadership is a complex issue; it cannot be defined in one short sentence. It takes on different forms in diverse situations in which individuals demonstrate contrasting leadership traits. We can more readily identify the characteristics of leadership by their absence since, unfortunately, we have more experience of both leadership vacuums and leadership muddles than we do of leadership that has a clear sense of direction and empowers the community it leads.

Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith provide two broad categories that describe the absence of leadership in any organization or community—zombification and atrophication. These terms describe the protective response encountered in organizations where leadership has become either laissez faire or controlling. They observe that “numbing oneself to experience is a natural response to unfulfilled expectations, unprocessed pain, unfinished grieving, unresolved conflict, and repetitive disappointment.”<sup>1</sup> In other words people have stopped thinking for themselves and have become lethargic. These two conditions are all too prevalent in many churches. The authors provide a range of telltale symptoms, which I have listed (with slight modification):

- People are punished for being aware and being authentic. In other words, telling it as it is.





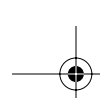
- [Leaders] stop telling the truth and lie or keep silent about things that matter.
- Feedback is no longer oriented to how [people] can succeed but to how they have failed—not just in their work but as human beings.
- Performance assessment becomes judgmental and hierarchical rather than supportive and participatory.
- Honesty is separated from kindness, integrity from advancement, and respect from communication.<sup>2</sup>

If these indicators are accurate in relation to the business world, they are even more applicable and widespread with respect to the church. The casualty rate among church leaders has reached disturbingly high levels as leaders leave local church ministry because of burnout, stress-related illness and disillusionment. When churches become dysfunctional and toxic, they are prone to project their problems onto the leaders, whom they hire and fire with increasing rapidity. Or else trapped leaders, with nowhere else to go, simply curl up and sit it out until retirement, like hedgehogs without the benefit of protective spines.

Yet the scenario is not all doom and gloom. Some older leaders have successfully made the transition and are today leading vibrant congregations. A few leaders of seeker-sensitive megachurches that came to the forefront in the 1980s and 1990s are in the throes of taking a second—and equally radical—step into the twenty-first century to retain and reach out to those under thirty. However, some of the most adventurous leaders to engage the counterculture movements of the 1960s have since become the most conservative in reaction to the present cultural challenges. They still bear the scars of their previous phase of entrepreneurship, and they don't have the energy reserves to face a fresh challenge.

I am aware of two or three megachurch pastors who are reconsidering their ministry priorities, recognizing that there is a growing desire for church structures that are more relational, with less emphasis on a stage-managed professional performance and a greater focus on the need for active partici-





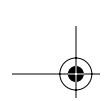
pation in the worship experience, ministry to one another and mission in the world. This shift is evident not only among boomer pastors but also among some younger leaders who have been successful in attracting a younger congregation but are aware of a high turnover rate.

One perceptive member of a thriving Gen-X congregation meeting as part of a megachurch writes of a prevailing success-driven gospel and self-help Christianity, with a lack of authenticity in relationships and members of their small groups seldom holding one another accountable. She states in a paper submitted as a class assignment in my course on the emerging church that although their music is upbeat, “without an authentic, life transforming relationship with Christ and the Church, worship becomes little more than singing songs to a rock band and conjuring up an emotional high rather than being in the awesome presence of God.” These are not the views of a judgmental person; at the outset she includes herself among those whom she describes.

At the present time God is also raising up a new generation of leaders who are acutely aware of the inadequacies of a consumer-driven church model. With the exception of those who have been safely corralled in the Christian subculture or were enculturated into the world of yesterday in their seminary training, it is a generation that is aware of the growing chasm between the church and popular culture. (I hasten to add that not all seminaries are exerting a retrograde influence!)

The church of the twenty-first century needs missional thinkers and apostolic leadership. By missional leadership, I mean leaders who can read the Scriptures with fresh eyes, relating the story of redemption to the human condition in its present cultural contexts—contexts that are increasingly multicultural and influenced by global trends. Whereas theology of mission was once taught as a specialist course, we now need to teach our entire repertoire of Bible, theology and church history courses from a missional perspective. One of the greatest tragedies in theological education has been the separation (to their mutual impoverishment) of ecclesiology from missiology. This separation has resulted, on the one hand, in a missionless church





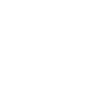
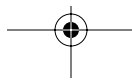
and, on the other, in a churchless mission. Here we can learn valuable lessons from the churches of the Southern Hemisphere—if we are prepared to set aside our intellectual elitism or, more bluntly, snobbery.

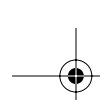
#### **DEFINING LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP**

It is possible to define *leadership* in such a way that it applies across time in relation to the church regardless of its particular tradition or context. J. Robert Clinton provides the following definition: “A Christian leader is a person with a God-given capacity and the God-given responsibility to influence a specific group of God’s people toward God’s purpose for the group.”<sup>33</sup> This definition draws attention to the initiative of God in calling forth leadership, a point that is strongly emphasized throughout Scripture.

We have only to think of the call of Abram, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, David, Isaiah, the Twelve and the apostle Paul as well as the leadership roles played by Miriam, Deborah, Dorcas and Priscilla and the prophetic ministry of the evangelist Philip’s four daughters. Many of these individuals were not obvious choices in terms of their innate abilities and experience, but in each case, having been called, they were equipped by God in order to fulfill their calling. Their role was to “influence,” not dominate, the group among whom they were given leadership responsibilities. Clinton’s use of the term *group* leaves open the extent of their leadership. Some individuals exercise leadership behind the scenes by advising and mentoring other leaders who have a more public and extensive sphere of influence.

This is very different from much of the leadership literature of the 1980s that focused on high-powered, entrepreneurial leadership exercised by larger-than-life “charismatic” personalities. In its secular usage *charismatic* does not apply to spiritual gifting but to fast-talking persons with magnetic personalities, inflated egos and the big ideas necessary to provide them with a sense of personal fulfillment. Thankfully, this understanding of leadership has been strongly challenged in recent years. There is increasing evidence demonstrating that such high-profile, charismatic leadership is not sustainable in the long term and ultimately has a debilitating





effect on the entire organization over which it has been imposed.

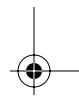
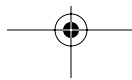
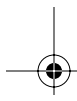
James Kouzes and Barry Posner emphasize that “leadership is not the private reserve of a few charismatic men and women. It is a process ordinary people use when they are bringing forth the best from themselves and others. Leadership is your capacity to guide others to places they (and you) have never been before.”<sup>4</sup> Steven Bernstein and Anthony Smith express the same point of view:

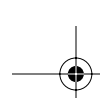
Leadership is now understood by many to imply *collective* action, orchestrated in such a way as to bring about significant change while raising the competencies and motivation of all those involved—that is, action, where more than one individual influences the process.<sup>5</sup>

In attempting to define leadership, especially within the contemporary church context, it must be understood as applying to every level of the church’s structure. On the assumption that every disciple of Jesus Christ will exercise some kind of influence on the people around them, they are *de facto* leaders. All it requires to constitute an individual as a leader is for one person to be following! Furthermore, the choice of who functions as a leader within a particular situation depends to some extent on the nature of the task at hand and the availability of a person with the appropriate gifts. Robert Banks and Bernice M. Ledbetter, in offering their definition of leadership, embrace this broader concept. For them “leadership involves a person, group, or organization who shows the way in an area of life—whether in the short- or the long-term—and in doing so both influences and empowers enough people to bring about change in that area.”<sup>6</sup>

At the outset it will be helpful to draw a distinction between the narrower and broader definition of leadership. Walter Wright expresses the distinction well:

If by leader we mean one who holds a position of authority and responsibility, then every Christian is not a leader. Some are—some are not. But if by leader we mean a person who enters into a relationship





with another person to influence their behavior, values or attitudes, then I would suggest that all Christians should be leaders. Or perhaps more accurately, all Christians should exercise leadership, attempting to make a difference in the lives of those around them.<sup>7</sup>

Here my concern is primarily with the narrower definition of leadership, although many of the observations will equally apply to every Christian who influences others. Wright's definition of leadership encompasses both the narrow and broader understanding. "Leadership is a relationship—a relationship in which one person seeks to influence the thoughts, behaviors, beliefs or values of another person."<sup>8</sup>

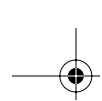
Leaders don't function in isolation but with the backing of a team whose roles may change from time to time. Sometimes a leader will deliberately step aside to take a breather, much like an athlete during a cycle race who for a time cedes leadership to a teammate in order to relieve the pressure. Migrating geese demonstrate the same strategy out of instinct, when the lead goose in a typical V formation drops back and another takes the lead.

Among athletes functioning as a team, this is not a self-serving, competitive move but rather one that is made out of consideration for the person who has been setting the pace and needs a respite before assuming the leadership role once again. In contrast, when athletes compete as individuals, their constant jockeying for position represents a trial of strength, a clash of temperament or a ruthless pursuit of advantage by exploiting a moment of weakness. The leadership scenarios within the emerging church require sharing leadership responsibilities among a team. We will consider in some detail the significance of team leadership within the local church in response to the solo-pastor model of leadership that has prevailed in the past.

#### REEXAMINING THE CONCEPT OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

In reaction to the prestige-seeking and domineering style of leadership that has prevailed in some ecclesial traditions, the servant-leadership model of Jesus provides a welcome correction. Sometimes the use of this servant con-





cept has resulted in an abdication of leadership, particularly when it was mistakenly understood to imply that the servant's primary role was to meet the demands of those he or she was called to serve. This is a serious misunderstanding of the servant role of Jesus, who was first and foremost the servant of his heavenly Father.

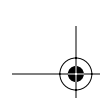
Jesus unswervingly sought his Father's guidance for the direction of his ministry. Rather than simply responding to popular demand, he took the initiative in terms of his overriding purpose. The morning after Jesus had ministered to the sick in Capernaum, Simon appealed to him to meet the pressing needs of the crowds who had again gathered. Jesus responded by declaring, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come" (Mk 1:38). The demand for Jesus was so relentless in Galilee that had he allowed pressure from the crowds to determine the future course of his ministry, he would never have completed the work his Father had entrusted to him. As a servant leader his primary allegiance was to his heavenly Father. Jesus knew that his path of obedience would lead to Jerusalem, where he would be betrayed, rejected and crucified.

Serving as a Christian scholar in a business school, Shirley Roels critiques the common understanding of servant leadership:

Is it really an accurate representation of Jesus as portrayed in the Bible? Frequently, we use servant leadership to mean leaders should simply absorb and carry out the ideas of others. That model is attributed to Jesus. It seems to me that Jesus wasn't *just* a servant of people. His example of servanthood was defined very differently because of his unique connection to the will of God.<sup>9</sup>

First and foremost Jesus was committed to doing his heavenly Father's bidding, not to meeting the demands of his followers and the crowds. He came to fulfill the role of the "servant of the Lord." The idea of the servant of the Lord as understood in the Old Testament was by no means a demeaning one. To the contrary, it was a title of honor, applied to Israel's national





leaders and, even more significantly, to the servant king referred to by Isaiah. It referred to the special messenger sent by God with whom Jesus identified—an identification that was also assumed by the early church.

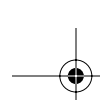
We need to exercise care when applying the notion of servant leadership to leaders within today's church. We are not Jesus. Consequently, we are prone to be selective in our obedience, we display sinful tendencies, and we are limited in our understanding of God's will for our lives; thus we struggle to interpret and follow his day-to-day guidance. Servant leadership can neither be made a justification for whatever we are doing nor become a pious cover for human weakness, false humility or abdication of responsibility.

Roger Greenleaf, the Quaker author of the groundbreaking book *Servant Leadership* and a thinker ahead of his time, expounds the concept with discernment and contemporary application. Writing in 1977, Greenleaf explained the insights he gained during his time as a manager at AT&T, but it took a decade for his ideas to begin to make an impact on secular leadership. He drew inspiration for his model from the life and ministry of Jesus. For Greenleaf true servant leaders are those who are prepared to take the initiative. But before embarking on a course of action, they listen to God and to the voices around them in order to determine what God requires of them. They are committed for the long haul, maintaining faith and hope, patience and fortitude. They also make time, no matter how busy their schedules, to withdraw from the relentless demands of daily life in order to refocus and renew their strength.

Such discipline enables servant leaders, who are all too aware of their limitations, to demonstrate foresight and anticipate their next steps. As they exercise discernment, servant leaders are constantly making connections between isolated pieces of information, looking for a coherent pattern to emerge. Gifted with intuition that Greenleaf perceptively defines as "a feel for patterns," they conceptualize rather than simply critique. Greenleaf chides:

Too many settle for being critics and experts. There is too much intellectual wheel spinning, too much retreating into "research," too little preparation for and willingness to undertake the hard and high-risk





tasks of building better institutions in an imperfect world, too little disposition to see “the problem” as residing *in here* and not *out there*. In short, the enemy is strong natural servants who have the potential to lead but do not lead, or who choose to follow a non-servant.<sup>10</sup>

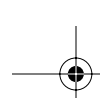
### LEADERSHIP SHAPED BY CONTEXT

Though it can be defined in general terms, leadership is profoundly influenced by the context and the personality of the individual. We cannot simply transpose one style of leadership from one particular time, location and cultural setting and apply it to another. Herein lies one of the problems in trying to impose biblical models of leadership without distinguishing universally valid elements from those that are context specific. The models of leadership seen in Scripture are not always reproducible, but there are valuable lessons to be learned that can be adapted to situations in our own lives where similar circumstances prevail.

Abraham, for instance, demonstrated a style of leadership that was appropriate for a patriarchal, extended family. Joseph, before he was liberated by Pharaoh to function as a grand vizier over all of Egypt, emerged as a leader first as a household slave and then as a long-term prisoner. During his long years facing adversity, he demonstrated fortitude, patience, trustworthiness, God-given knowledge and extraordinary gifts of strategic planning. Moses, after an even longer period of preparation, was called by God to become the liberator of his people from enslavement in Egypt. Joshua, Moses' loyal lieutenant, succeeded him as a military commander and led Israel to victory over the Canaanites through a succession of skillfully led campaigns. David became Israel's greatest king within a theocratic context. For years after, the prophets of Israel exercised leadership as bold, antiestablishment figures that told the nation and its leaders what they needed to learn from God but were so often unwilling to hear or heed.

Moving to the New Testament, we encounter Jesus' model of leadership. Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom. Jesus chose twelve unlikely individuals as pillars of his church and prepared them for leadership by hav-





ing them observe all that he did, listen to his teaching and eventually go out as his representatives.

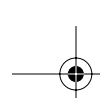
In the contemporary situation, traditional pastoral leadership is often shaped by inherited patterns of hierarchy, status and indispensability, resulting in a dependent, disempowered and disgruntled following. When churches are dysfunctional, traditional leaders buckle under the weight of the unreasonable demands laid on them. Among the consequences are a high percentage of pastors leaving from burnout or moral failure, taking early retirement, or seeking alternative employment outside of the local church. By contrast the emerging leaders are concerned not with institutional maintenance but with missional effectiveness. They focus on ministry by the church in the world rather than ministry *in* the church that is largely confined to the existing members.

**TYPOLGY OF LEADERSHIP**

Different situations require distinctive leadership gifts. One complex array of challenges might require a range of leadership expertise, necessitating a team approach. In order to tackle an unfamiliar or new set of circumstances, highly *creative* individuals are needed. These are people who can think “outside the box,” who are prepared to experiment and take risks.

Then there are the *executive* types who are the principal decision makers. Their skill is in their ability to see the big picture—the capability to distinguish the crucial elements and evaluate options. Besides the macro, they also see the micro, which keeps them anchored in an unswerving and passionate commitment to “keep the main thing the main thing.” But executive types need people alongside them who have *managerial* skills, who can determine the steps that need to be taken in order to achieve what Jim Collins and Jerry Porras describe as the BHAG—the “Big Hairy Audacious Goal.” They write, “A true BHAG is clear and compelling and serves as a unifying focal point of effort—often creating immense team spirit. It has a clear finish line.”<sup>11</sup> The leadership team needs to identify and pursue unswervingly the primary goals that undergird the movement’s vision.





The creative and executive types of leader rely on individuals with managerial skills who are *task oriented*. Task-oriented leaders need to be served by leaders with *interpersonal skills*, who will function as the team-builders, consolidating, resolving conflict and restoring the group's morale. Such individuals encourage and reassure so that each person feels valued.<sup>12</sup>

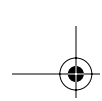
#### CHARACTER, CHARISMA AND COMPETENCE

It is unreasonable to expect that all of these gifts and skills will reside in one individual, which is one of the fundamental reasons why leadership must be team-based rather than attempted solo. Whatever the local church context, irrespective of size, leadership represents a daunting challenge. Unlike leadership within the business environment or in the military, church leadership must embrace all comers, from the cradle to the grave. Also the BHAG in question is nothing less than the communication of the good news of Jesus Christ, accomplished through credible communicators who demonstrate in their own personal and corporate life the accessibility, sufficiency and attractive reality of that message.

Leaders who attempt such a daunting task in their own strength set themselves up for failure. With every step they need the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit as well as the support of a team of people who share their values and commitment. Leaders are constantly challenged to sacrifice values in the interests of expediency. Within the context of the church, as well as in business and political spheres, leadership failure arises more out of character failure than unwise decision making. Yet *character* must not be divorced from *competence*. We must not lose sight of the need for visionary, entrepreneurial, risk-taking and Holy Spirit-inspired leadership. These leadership qualities are especially needed as the present church suffers from a loss of sense of direction, as an increasing percentage of local churches struggle for survival, and as the church finds itself increasingly marginalized and its influence evaporating. Who will step in to turn the tide?

Throughout history we have seen God raise, call and equip the next generation of leaders to attempt great things in his name and power. Writing



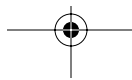


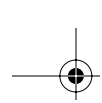
primarily in reference to the business world, Jean Lipman-Blumen observes that charismatic leaders who espouse a decidedly radical vision often appear in times of great distress. Their contribution is needed precisely when society's ordinary coping mechanisms are out of kilter. She describes their response as a devotion born of distress.<sup>13</sup> An increasing number of senior church leaders recognize that the potential leaders emerging from traditional channels do not have the vision, passion and risk-taking qualities necessary to shape and direct the church in an uncertain future.

Using Lipman-Blumen's language, we need to move from a *transactional* to a *transformational* leadership model.<sup>14</sup> The former represents those who work within a given structure, meet the needs of their followers and are skilled in striking compromises in order to keep everyone on board. On the other hand the transformational leader, prepared to think "outside the box," works to transform structures. Transformational leaders shape the lives of individuals around them, providing them with intellectual stimulation and presenting them with significant challenges.<sup>15</sup> This style of connective leadership is more evident among the under-thirty-fives, and women tend to be more adept at it than men. The controlling style of leadership that is so prevalent among the builder and boomer generations, and that typically determines the church's corporate culture, must give way to this empowering, connective style if the church is to reinvent itself to meet the missional challenges and opportunities of a new day.

#### LEADERSHIP MATRIX

For too long the church has operated with a long list of requirements that an individual must meet in order to be considered for leadership. This flies in the face of the evidence of how significant leaders have emerged among the people of God over the course of history. Jesus did not start out with such a list; otherwise he would not have chosen any of his original team of disciples. Instead, he selected unlikely individuals who were teachable and whose lives he could shape through his presence among them. But until he had ascended into heaven and imparted his Spirit to them, his ministry could not become





their ministry, which is why he insisted that they wait in Jerusalem until they had received this promise of the Father (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4).

Leith Anderson argues that there is no definitive list of qualities and qualifications precisely because leadership is not just about leaders. Rather, “it is about a matrix of followers, organizations, circumstances, power and history.”<sup>16</sup> Such a radical rethinking about the nature of leadership in today’s fast-paced and unpredictable world is not confined to those addressing the needs of the church. Peter Senge, who is famous for his contribution to systems theory, comments:

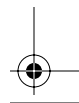
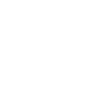
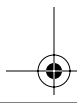
We are coming to believe that leaders are those people who “walk ahead,” people who are genuinely committed to deep change in themselves and in their organizations. They lead through developing new skills, capabilities, and understandings. And they come from many places within the organization.<sup>17</sup>

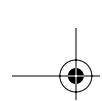
Warren Bennis, contributing to the same volume, urges: “We need to move to an era in which leadership is an organizational capability and not an individual characteristic that a few individuals at the top of the organization have.”<sup>18</sup> Such thinking is in line with our understanding of the church as the body of Christ. It is a living organism, in which all members (1) find personal significance in the context of relationships, which enables them to (2) develop their full potential as they (3) make their distinctive contribution in conjunction with others.

This understanding provides the urgently needed antidote to the individualized and privatized religion that has crippled the life of so many churches. Personal identity and significance can never be achieved by “navel gazing.” The individual is made whole and healthy within a community that has both a shared history and a shared hope—a timeline and a channel through which corporate identity and purposeful activity can be expressed.

#### NEW LEADERS FOR CHANGING TIMES

Yesterday’s styles of leadership will not be adequate for the opening decades





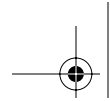
of the twenty-first century. The future is too unpredictable for the predetermined parameters once provided by long-range planning. The church, along with the business world and other institutions, has to learn the skills of just-in-time planning as well as the creation and consideration of alternative scenarios. The original meaning of the word *manage* needs to be recovered. Before the controllers purloined the word to signify “control,” it meant “coping,” responding promptly and appropriately to unforeseen circumstances over which we have no control. In the area of pastoral care, we still use the term in this sense. We ask someone who is faced with a domestic crisis or tragedy how they are managing—that is, how they are coping.

It is evident in rapidly changing times that knowledge does not necessarily flow from experience. Yesterday’s solutions and procedures may not provide an adequate or appropriate response to present challenges. Hence, the biggest hurdles facing long-time leaders may not be in learning new insights and skills, but in unlearning what they consider to be tried and true and what thus provides them with a false sense of security.

Some church leaders begin their ministry with the best of intentions in terms of changing their style of leadership from controlling to empowering. But the entrenched dependency system they inherit causes them to take matters into their own hands on account of shortage of volunteers, incompetence of those who have assumed responsibility or long-entrenched expectations of members. Leaders who allow themselves to become trapped in this system work on the assumption that if *they* don’t do it, it doesn’t get done. Empowering leaders must be prepared to challenge any separation of responsibilities, which leaves the pastor to attend to the “spiritual” and “sacramental” areas, while laypersons shoulder some of the responsibility for practical matters such as finance and property maintenance. Pastors and lay-leaders stand together in addressing the spiritual and practical aspects of ministry, maintenance and mission.

Warren Bennis, considering the challenges that organizations face in the wake of the knowledge revolution and globalization, insists that we need new leaders—not just younger leaders, but leaders with new competencies.





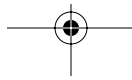
In fact, he urges all of us to listen to the under thirties and over seventies.<sup>19</sup> The younger generation brings a fresh perspective, whereas the old folk bring insights without the temptation to grasp power, being content for younger people to take their lead.

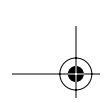
### GAINING WISDOM AND BUILDING TRUST

While we understand Bennis's call to heed younger voices, we might be surprised by his highlighting of the "over seventies." Seniors bring two distinctive contributions: their broader perspective and the wisdom of their years. They can often think more objectively because they no longer have to defend their positions. Some octogenarians are spectacular visionaries because they are ready for their final fling in life. They are no longer nervous about change because they won't have to live with it for very long! As I have dialogued with younger leaders, many have expressed their longing for mentoring by older leaders. (This is especially true among those who have had a tense relationship with their boomer parents but who love their grandparents.) Keeping this in mind, it is a mistake to regard the emerging church as a passing youth phenomenon. A single generational cohort makes for a very self-serving church. Those churches that have the most significant influence among the under-thirty-five-year-old generation are those with 15 to 20 percent of the members in the over-sixty-year-old category. These seniors provide much-needed mentoring, accountability, encouragement and wise counsel.<sup>20</sup>

Younger leaders typically provide a very different style of leadership from that of their elders. One matter of great concern is the lamentable disconnect between the leadership generations at present. Bill Easum comments that "many of today's most significant leaders are under 30 and we have never heard of them."<sup>21</sup>

Many younger leaders realize that authority does not come with a position and a title but that it has to be earned. It is established on the basis of trustworthiness and competence. They understand that leadership emerges as power is shared rather than as authority is exerted. That power may arise





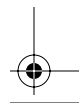
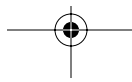
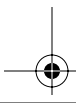
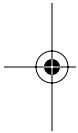
from the application of one's area of expertise, but it is based on trust and is reinforced as personal relationships are deepened and extended. Charles Handy uses the example of the rowing crew of eight going backward steered by a cox who cannot row. When he used this illustration an oarsman in the audience responded: "How do you think that we could go backward so fast, without communicating, if we were not completely confident in each other's competence, committed to the same goal, and determined to do our best to reach it? It's the perfect description for a team."<sup>22</sup>

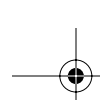
The leaders of the future must grow and flex with a changing context. They recognize the need to respond rapidly to the unexpected. They are risk takers who maintain a low profile because they take so much flak. They are also individuals committed to change precisely because they recognize the need for change within themselves. Motivated by their insatiable curiosity—a curiosity that drives them to see connections between apparently unconnected pieces of information—leaders of growing organizations are committed to lifelong learning. This in turn results in a refreshing humility; rather than simply make statements, they admit the limitations of their knowledge and continually ask questions. Leaders are constantly growing and making course corrections as they incorporate their new insights. If they stop learning, they eventually stop leading.

#### LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

The chapter began with generic definitions of leadership and then explored the various dimensions of leadership, emphasizing how profoundly influenced it is by context. Now we will highlight the leadership challenges that arise when we compare and contrast the traditional church with our post-modern and increasingly neopagan culture.

Church leaders in the twenty-first century must be prepared to reexamine all of their established assumptions, policies and procedures. They must initiate change by asking those they serve whether the church and its leadership are obstacles or channels to becoming a more effective missional presence in their specific cultural context. In many cases the task of the leader





may involve bringing churches to face a painful reality or to overcome determined resistance that stems from ignorance or reluctance.

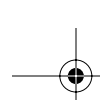
*Beyond preserving the inherited institution: Leading a mission-focused community of disciples.* The primary task of the leader is to reconnect ecclesiology and missiology in order that the church be defined first and foremost by its God-given mission. Under the centuries-long influence of Christendom, a disconnect developed between church and mission. Mission is God-given in that it represents the heart, initiative and patience of God's relationship to humankind throughout the ages. It is a mission in which all three persons of the Trinity work inseparably and distinctively.

Consequently, if the church is to carry out its commission faithfully, it must draw its models, inspiration, motivation and wisdom from the earthly ministry of Jesus in relation to his Father and the Holy Spirit. The apostle John emphasizes this point by recording Jesus' declaration to his heavenly Father concerning his disciples: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (Jn 17:18). John then records Jesus' assurance and his challenge to the disciples gathered in the upper room on the day of his resurrection: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (Jn 20:21).

At the heart of Jesus' mission was the training of a group of close followers who learned by (1) listening to his teaching, (2) observing his interactions with people from all walks of life (which included responding to their needs as well as challenging their assumptions) and (3) working under his personal supervision. They were first disciplined learners (disciples) before they were sent out as his personal representatives (apostles).

It is precisely those who had been disciples themselves that Jesus commissioned to make disciples among all peoples. In other words, in order to invite others to join our ranks, we have to have been through the discipling process ourselves. Furthermore, Jesus envisages that the communities of believers will continue to take their message and ministries into the world in order to become a transformative presence. In proclaiming the good news of the reign of God made present in Christ, those communities function as ser-



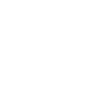


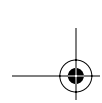
vants and anticipatory signs of a God-ordered future in which Christ will reign supreme on earth.

If response to this call of Jesus is the message and mission, how should potential leaders be identified and prepared? Clearly, they need to have been transformed and redirected by that message; otherwise, they will have no credibility. Their training must also relate closely and comprehensively to the mission for which they are being prepared. It must provide both a thorough theological understanding as well as the missiological insights necessary for crosscultural communication from the margins of society. By contrast, so much ministerial training has focused on caring for the flock of God and on maintaining the “shop.” So much of our traditional theological agenda has been shaped by a Christendom-context mentality and has been largely confined to an internal debate between various theological factions. A missional theology, on the other hand, focuses on dialogue with unbelievers and those of other religions.

*Beyond ideology-driven evangelism: Leading a values-based community of disciples.* I confess to a growing disquiet about the time-honored term *evangelism*. When we refer to the good news of Jesus Christ as an *ism*, we are in danger of reducing it to an ideology. The heart of the gospel comprises news to be proclaimed and received rather than abstract propositions to be affirmed. This news is bound up with a story and a person, of which we are invited to become a part. Instead of *evangelism*, we should retain the verbal form, which is the way the term is used in the New Testament. *Evangelization* signifies the proclamation of the good news that is actualized in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In contrast, so much of contemporary *evangelism* has consisted in bringing individuals to a point of decision—turning to Jesus as the Savior, who secures forgiveness of our sins and assures us of a place in heaven. While the gospel includes those important truths, it embraces so much more. It is as much concerned with how we live our lives *before* death as with *after* death. In its true New Testament meaning, eternal life embraces the here and now as a prelude to eternity.

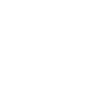


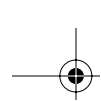


The task of the leader is to spell out the dimensions of personal and community identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that is our baptismal covenant. Baptism bears witness to what God has done on our behalf and also signifies our identification with Christ. But that identification cannot be confined to an internalized and individualized commitment. We are baptized not only into the person of Christ but also into his body, constituted as the church here on earth, with all its diversity and imperfections (1 Cor 12:13). Baptism is a profoundly corporate act that signifies for all believers their new identity as members of a community of faith. Furthermore, as members of Christ's body, they are baptized into his mission, equipped by the Spirit to make their distinctive contribution to the totality of the ministry of the church.

If the church is to be credible as it communicates the message of the good news of the reign of God, it must demonstrate the values of the kingdom, including humility, honesty, integrity, purity of life, justice and compassion. Not only must leaders explain these values and qualities in light of the baptismal covenant, they themselves must model such qualities and live in relationships of mutual accountability with the churches they serve. Such an understanding of leadership has profound implications for the identification of potential leaders and for the way they are trained. The traditional route—the academic environment based on competitive performance and individual effort—will need to be carefully reevaluated in light of the pressing need for character formation, relational skills and ministry competencies.

*Beyond dispensing information: Seeking spiritual formation rooted in Scripture.* In most Protestant churches the overwhelming emphasis in ministry is imparting information. The pastor serves as the teacher, communicating knowledge and wisdom through sermons, Bible studies and other classes. In the missional church the concern to relate biblical and theological content is broader than information output. Missional leaders focus as much attention on “intake” as on “output.” What is being received, reflected and acted on? They are constantly asking the “So what?” question. Knowledge, missional leaders understand all too readily, can be made an end in itself. Once





again, this attitude—dispensing information—is often reinforced by the course content and grading criteria in seminary education.

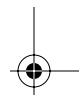
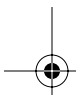
I well remember a conversation with a highly successful pastor of a mega-church in a traditional denomination. He was a founding pastor who had led his church from a handful of people to a congregation of over twelve thousand members. Many leaders would envy his success in growing a church, yet he had become increasingly restless. He was haunted by the question “Where is the life transformation?” Were his church members living a qualitatively different life from the general population? What profile was the “watching world” likely to construct after observing and interacting with those who professed to follow Christ? Were professed followers more trustworthy or sincere? Did they live a simpler lifestyle, demonstrate a healthier family life by giving high priority to being a spouse and parent, and live out gospel values in the workplace? Or were they indistinguishable from those who made no profession of faith in Christ?

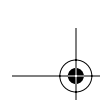
We need to select building materials carefully to ensure that we build a durable construction on the foundation laid by the apostles.

If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Cor 3:12-15)

Church planters therefore should not be driven by show and speed but by concern that the faith communities they have helped establish survive in the midst of adverse circumstances—and even more importantly, that they pass when the Lord gives the ultimate test on his return to earth.

The lack of adequately disciplined church members is a widespread problem, not only in the Western world but also within the rapidly growing churches of Africa, Latin America and Asia. If life transformation is to take place among believers, the all-encompassing nature of the life of discipleship

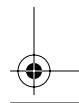
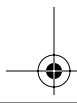


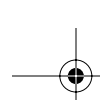


needs to be taught from the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. The Gospel of Matthew is particularly helpful in this regard. It fills out the concept of discipleship, instructing communities of first-century believers in the establishment of their new identities as Christ followers. Only after the Twelve have experienced the life-changing impact of the discipling process are they in a position to embark on their mission of making disciples among all peoples.

However, the conditions of first-century discipleship do not establish a comprehensive list of rules. Issues change with time and situation. For this reason the individual believer needs the wisdom and discernment of a community of faith and relationships of mutual accountability. It is through such interactions that profound transformation begins to take place. This is borne out by research conducted in 1987 that indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in values between a churchgoer and nonchurchgoer. Gallup reported at that time, "Church attendance, it appears, makes little difference in people's ethical views and behavior with respect to lying, cheating, pilferage, and not reporting theft."<sup>23</sup> It was only among those who were committed to their church in activities beyond the worship service that a statistically significant difference was found in terms of truth telling, the absence of racial prejudice and the ability to see beyond materialism.

The reduction of discipleship to an itemized list of "dos and don'ts" can readily lead to legalism and judgmental attitudes. The latter occurs when followers of Christ within one cultural context judge other believers living in very different contexts by their own criteria. With patience in listening and in a spirit of mutual understanding, each must hold the other accountable according to the values of the reign of God spelled out in the New Testament. Last, there can be no life transformation resulting in a person becoming more Christlike without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the person's life as well as within the community of disciples (Rom 8:5; 1 Cor 6:19; Gal 5:22-25; Eph 5:18). Believers must cultivate the attitude of abiding in Christ in relation both to the values they uphold and the mission they are committed to.



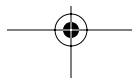


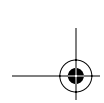
*Beyond the controlling hierarchy: Leading empowered networks of Christ followers.* Younger leaders are presently demonstrating much more egalitarian models of leadership. In today's diverse and rapidly changing world, people on the frontlines must be informed and empowered to make the right decisions promptly. This is a challenge facing many organizations. The church is not alone in its need to develop new models and provide better leadership selection and training.

In order to lead in today's fast-changing world, leaders must not project an aloof, know-it-all image. We are all in a learning mode, especially when facing situations not previously encountered. To empower others effectively, leaders must have demonstrated competence in their own area of specialization. But they not only must be aware of what they know, leaders must readily acknowledge what they don't know. Both elements are essential for the empowerment of others.

Indeed, leadership largely consists in making connections, connecting the dots between isolated pieces of information and bringing together people who have the combined resources to address the challenge. The task of the leader is (1) to seek the wisdom of the leadership team when assessing the overall situation, and (2) to bring together those with the necessary task, organization and people skills. Because of this, leaders need to be trained to think in a lateral rather than a linear mode. They must learn to work across disciplines for the simple reason that real-life challenges may cover a broad range of issues.

*Beyond the weekly gathering: Building teams engaged in ongoing mission.* The New Testament emphasizes that a local congregation is not merely a group or crowd of people who meet together for an hour or two each week. Rather, a congregation should be viewed as a federation of teams—people who support and encourage one another as they live out their faith commitment and minister to the people they are in contact with. Within the body of Christ, ministry and mission flow out of relationships. Frances Hesselbein notes that in addition to being mission focused, values based and demographics driven, the organization of the future will be relationship centered, led by





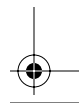
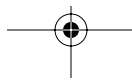
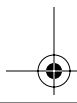
individuals who always find time for people.<sup>24</sup>

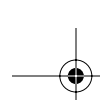
Team building requires considerable skill. It is so essential to ministry that it needs that to be a foundational part of leadership training. In a healthy team, each individual feels valued and believes that he or she is engaged in a worthwhile endeavor. Each knows his or her distinctive contribution and also the skills, wisdom and insights that other members can provide. Team members affirm one another in mutually enriching relationships. A synergy develops as they combine their efforts to find solutions and to develop strategies to tackle specific issues. Team building, a challenging prospect when working with paid employees, is even more so when working with volunteers. Consequently, the next generation of leaders must be trained in such an environment in order to develop the ministry skills appropriate for leading the contemporary church.

*Beyond a gospel of personal self-realization: A service-oriented faith community.* Younger leaders see the manifold ministries of Christ in a far more holistic way than have many of their predecessors. They do not think in hard and fast categories, which separate the Great Commandment (to love our neighbors as ourselves) from the Great Commission (to go into all the world to make disciples). The authentic disciple does not consider them distinct. God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, and in turn the Son pours his love into our hearts that we might continue his mission.

For younger leaders, the greatest concern isn't how to get people to come to church but how best to take the church into the world. Their emphasis is not on extraction from the world but on engagement with society. This emphasis on engagement needs to be reflected in the church's criteria for selecting leaders and training them for ministry. For example, those who seek ministry in the church as an escape from the pressures of secular employment need to be weeded out. At the same time, those offering themselves for ministry without any significant life experience outside of the church need to immerse themselves in the secular world—just as a missionary candidate would be encouraged to have prefield, crosscultural experience.

The greatest commandment, to love our neighbors as ourselves, is not a



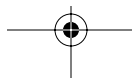


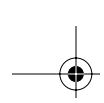
means to evangelization in the sense that conditions are attached in order for material benefits to be received. But disciples of Jesus, engaged in such service of compassion and social justice, do so in the spirit of Christ so that their acts of service become the good news of the reign of God that point unmistakably to Jesus as the source, to whom disciples openly bear witness. If there is a hidden agenda, then their actions flow more from manipulation than from love. True love takes the initiative without conditions, demanding nothing in return. When people turn to Christ as Savior and Lord, their response to the gospel comes as a byproduct. Usually this occurs because of the distinctive manner in which the service is offered in the name of Christ. The people engaged in the ministry of feeding the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless or refuge for the outcast and the abused reveal the very character of the Lord they serve.

The personal qualities and selfless commitment of the followers of Jesus raise questions and are powerfully attractive. Those engaged in these ministries are more than willing to speak appropriately about the Christ they serve. But the service is offered unstintingly and unconditionally whether or not that spiritual response is forthcoming. There is no hint of discrimination in responding to the needs of those they are called to serve. They seek to glorify the Name, whether or not they have opportunity to name the Name.

*Beyond the inwardly focused church: Leading a society-transforming community of disciples.* Every local congregation should ask this question: If the Lord were to remove us overnight from our neighborhood, in what ways would the surrounding community become aware that we were no longer in their midst? A missional church does not simply meet the needs of its own members but equips groups of disciples in order to affect the worlds they inhabit.

Most of the time the church is dispersed and deployed on its many mission tasks. It is as much the church when it is in dispersion as it is when it gathers week by week for its corporate worship. The task of leaders is to help church members identify their mission and function as agents of the reign of God in their place of employment. By establishing appropriate structures that enable these ministries to function, they facilitate the building of Christ-





following teams who work out the implications of their discipleship in their vocation.<sup>25</sup>

This is the broader agenda within which leadership needs to be defined. It will not suffice for leaders to serve as institutional guardians and functionaries. Instead, they are called to exercise an apostolic role, which requires them to send and accompany the church into the world, operating on the frontiers where the people of faith engage the communities in which they work and live.

#### SUMMARY

I have identified a range of challenges that must be addressed if established, traditional churches are to transition into “mission-shaped faith communities.” The advent of the information age underlines the necessity to see leadership as a team function, recognizing the distinct contribution of each team member in terms of their personality, gifting and experience. We have seen that leadership combines character, charisma and confidence. In the context of the emerging church most leadership will emerge from within the congregation. At one level or another every person is exercising some measure of leadership. Consequently, the church must understand leadership to be a value that permeates the whole community.

