

## DEVELOPING NEW MINISTRY LEADERSHIP

What does a church need to make a difference? Transformational leadership is a critical ingredient. Leaders with a growing relationship with God and passion for sharing Christ's love with the lost and broken. Leaders who minister with bold faith, gracious humility, risk-taking flexibility, and a balanced perspective on life and ministry. Leaders who are connectors, catalysts, and change agents in their church and community. Leaders who encourage and equip people to share in the church's vision, and who recognize and cultivate the strengths of others on the leadership team and in the congregation. (See [Tool #48, Qualities of Transformational Leadership for Holistic Ministry.](#))

It is God's design to supply the church with gifted leadership (1 Cor. 12:28). God will accomplish great things in the Kingdom through leaders, and the congregations they serve, who are faithful in taking the first steps toward holistic ministry (Matt. 25:21). But what if your church's leadership is not there yet? What if, as a church leader, *you* aren't there yet? Does this mean your congregation has no hope of cultivating dynamic holistic outreach? Not at all—but it does mean digging in with prayer and taking a longer view of the process, focusing on reproductive leadership.

### ***The Importance of Reproductive Leadership***

Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around from morning to evening. . . . Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone." (Ex. 18:17-22)

This story from Exodus illustrates that religious leaders have always been prone to "Atlasitis"—allowing the full burden of ministry to rest on their shoulders. Leaders can be so overwhelmed by the press of immediate tasks that they fail to recognize the potential under their noses for sharing their load and multiplying their impact. For holistic ministry to be effective both in the short and the long term, church leaders must engage in "reproductive leadership," that is, leadership that reproduces leadership qualities and capabilities in others.

The exchange between Moses and Jethro suggests several benefits of new leadership development. First, it saved Moses from burnout. The tendency in many churches is to install good leaders and work them to death. The pressure on existing leaders can be relieved by expanding the work force and by preparing substitutes for times of staff turn-over, leaves of absence, and ministry sabbaticals. Second, it helps to ensure continuity of vision a leadership cycle ahead. Would your church's holistic mission carry on without you? The book *Developing Leaders for Urban Ministries* suggests, "Every leader's role is to prepare each ministry to be an equipping link to the next generation of leaders."

Third, leadership development strengthens the process of helping the congregation take ownership of the vision. "When the leader shares power with other people, those people in turn feel more strongly attached to the leader and more committed to effectively carrying out their responsibilities." The judges Moses trained gained new knowledge and reverence for God's law, as well as a better appreciation for Moses' leadership. Fourth, Moses' delegation shortened the waiting list for Israelites seeking justice. Expanding the

pool of skilled, committed leaders better serves the community. It improves the quality and quantity of social services, and creates more opportunities for unchurched people to interact with mature Christians.

Leadership development is part of God's plan for the church. The gifts of leadership are to be used "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12). If existing leaders fail to recognize and nurture God's call in an emerging leader, they thwart the work of the Holy Spirit in that person's life and in the life of the congregation. Moreover, because leadership development brings out the best of God's design in people, it is another way that a church loves and nurtures its members. "The more we train people to lead, the more they are blessed in their secular jobs," observes a New Covenant leadership trainer. "If you can be a leader in a church, you can be a leader anywhere." New Covenant has found that developing people's leadership skills has often improved their overall quality of life. Leadership development in the church is particularly important among populations who have typically been disempowered by society—such as minorities, people with disabilities, or people without access to quality education.

For busy church leaders, new leadership development may feel like an inefficient distraction from the press of urgent ministry demands. Showing someone how to do something usually takes twice as long as doing it yourself. But Jesus' ministry demonstrated the priority of leadership development over short-term efficiency. He could have organized his ministry in assembly-line fashion, to teach and heal the greatest number in the shortest amount of time. Some days, in fact, that was what Jesus did. But he invested significant amounts of His limited time on earth in developing a close mentoring relationship with His disciples. This investment laid the foundation for the explosive growth of the church after Jesus' ascension.

### ***Selecting the Next Generation of Ministry Leaders***

What should you look for in prospective ministry leaders? Clearly, signs of the ten qualities listed above indicate leadership material. Look for someone who consistently serves and witnesses to others in low-key, spontaneous ways, as a holistic servant leader in the making; someone who takes initiative and tends to attract a crowd, as a budding catalyst; someone who has had an experience of stepping out on a limb of faith or weathering a period of ambiguity and change, as an ally in helping the congregation develop new holistic outreach.

When considering a person's qualifications for leadership, don't overlook the "been there" expertise of people who have experienced transformation relevant to the church's area of ministry. Consider the "success stories" among those served by your church's outreach to see if they may be potential ministry leaders. Most of the current leadership of Life in Christ, for example, began as converts in the church's Drug Free ministry. Bishop Dickie Robbins personally discipled the men who eventually became the elders of the church. He stuck with them through their addiction because he recognized the potential power of their testimony. They in turn responded to his love and commitment, and eventually dedicated their lives to sharing God's good news with others.

Most importantly, select people who are willing to share the vision and mission of your church. You don't want lay leaders who are automatons, submitting in lock-step fashion. But there has to be some consensus of purpose, says a lay leader at New Covenant, else you end up with "leadership with their own agenda, with the vision of the church going one direction and their vision going another direction." If leaders do not buy into the vision, they will wander off by themselves, or worse, wander away with some of the sheep from the fold.

Tools such as temperament and personality indicators (e.g., Myers-Briggs) can help assess an individual's potential place in the leadership team. But no matter how much information you gather, there remains an element of art and mystique to identifying and developing leaders. Discerning God's guidance for current and prospective ministry leaders is rooted in prayer (Matt. 9:37–38, 2 Cor. 1:11). Jesus prayed before selecting his disciples, prayed for his disciples, and then prayed for future generations of their disciples (Luke 6:12-13, John 17:9-20).

### ***Leadership Development for Holistic Ministry***

Jesus modeled a variety of leadership development methods. He spent a lot of time teaching, shaping the disciples' theology and mission. He nurtured their spiritual growth by teaching them how to pray (Luke 11:1). He related to disciples as a team (Matt. 5:1), in small groups (Mark 9:2), and one-on-one (John 21:15ff.). He used on-the-job leadership training by sending out the twelve and the seventy, and then reviewing their progress reports when they returned (Luke 10:17–20). Often he used problems as teaching moments—"The people are hungry, so what are *you* going to do about it?" (John 6:5–6). He tested their faith and ministry skills (Matt. 16:6–8, Mark 9:17–19). He modeled leadership, explaining his actions to them as he went (Matt. 21:21, Mark 9:29). And Jesus spent time just hanging out with his disciples—eating, sleeping, and walking together.

Jesus' example indicates that effective leadership preparation means keeping several factors in balance.

*Balance formal and informal training.* Resources for formal leadership training include seminaries, church leadership institutes, distance learning programs, and "secular" training relevant to a given position—for example, a degree in social work or nonprofit management. No formal training program, however, can substitute for "relational empowerment." Emerging leaders need not only *information* about theology and skills, they need *formation* as disciples and whole persons through mentoring relationships with other leaders. The more time existing church leaders spend with prospective ministry leaders, the more they will grow in unity and spiritual maturity.

Personal mentoring is essential to cultivate a holistic ministry vision in emerging leaders. Existing leaders serve as a living textbook for the church's mission. Ten years ago, Bishop Milton Grannum invited a select group of men in his church to begin meeting with him for a Bible study twice a week, at 5:30 a.m.—a sure test of commitment! He selected the men based on "what I saw they could become." The purpose of these meetings, says Bishop Grannum, was to give prospective leaders a chance to "get to know my mind," and he theirs. Out of this close-knit group came a core team of elders and ministry leaders.

*Provide a well-defined structure, but leave room to grow.* As new leaders take on ministry responsibilities, existing leaders must clarify their roles, tasks, and degree of authority. Provide job descriptions and set out clear performance expectations. Establish goals and a process for accountability. At the same time, give new leaders room to develop. As they demonstrate competency, delegate more responsibility. A ministry leader at New Covenant Church praises Bishop Grannum for keeping a healthy balance between holding leaders accountable and helping them to grow into positions of authority. “He gives you all the freedom you need,” she says. “But when you call him to get involved, he comes.” Regular meeting times are a key to discerning when to provide more structure and when to step back and make room.

One of the best way to develop and test skills is in the incubator of supervised experience. Every church leader should have an apprentice. Assign a youth leader-in-training to a Sunday School teacher, for example, or appoint an assistant to the director of an outreach ministry. In addition to on-the-job learning, the mentor and apprentice can share times of prayer and Bible study. As the apprentice’s confidence and competence grows, the mentor can allow added responsibilities, until the apprentice either takes over the position or branches out on his or her own.

*Build successful experiences, but allow new leaders to learn from mistakes.* Give people small jobs which lead to bigger jobs (Luke 19:17). This allows you to make an honest appraisal of the person’s growth, attitude, competencies, and maturity in ministry. When leaders succeed, encourage and recognize their efforts before the congregation. But when new leaders make mistakes, don’t yank them from their position; rather, walk them through the learning process. Holistic ministry entails taking risks and sticking together. Make sure leaders know they have a network of support when they feel discouraged, ashamed or afraid.

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