

Christ Church Communiqué



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Healthy Church Leadership

We hear much about leadership today. There are speakers on leadership, seminars on leadership, books on leadership, ministries devoted to leadership, summits on leadership, training institutes for leadership, degree programs in leadership, centers for leadership, and programs on leadership, to name but a few of the “world of leadership” things out there. Given all of this, it’s both sad and perplexing that one of the things that remains woefully lacking today are leaders. And nowhere is this lack more glaring than in the church. Indeed, few qualities are as wanting in the local church today as healthy, biblical church leadership.

Oh, don’t misunderstand. We have plenty of “up-front” people—men and women who possess personalities, charisma, “command presence,” business acumen and achievements, who are socially facile, and who are known as being people who can “get things done” and “spearhead an effort,” but, alas, this is not leadership. And where leadership *is* present, our thinking is surely fuzzy. To be sure, the church has plenty of men who are “successful” leaders in the world—CEO’s and vice-presidents and MBA’s, and the like—but this is not *spiritual leadership*. In fact, confusing leadership with spiritual leadership is one of the church’s great mistakes. Many erroneously believe that if one is a “successful” leader in the business world that he or she ought to make for a “successful” leader in the church. Nothing could be further from the truth. Leadership does not necessarily correlate with *spiritual leadership*. And even in those situations where spiritual leadership is present, this alone does not ensure that the leadership is healthy.

So what is leadership and how does leadership differ from *spiritual* leadership? And what is it that makes spiritual leadership healthy and effective? It is to these issues that we turn our attention in this issue of the Communiqué.

Leadership

Great leaders are identified and characterized by several qualities:

1. **The ability to cast and realize vision.** More often than not, great leaders are visionaries. They are able to capture a vision that embodies the changeless

“Declaring the preeminence of Christ in all things, to the glory of God in everything, and for the joy of all peoples everywhere.”

values of their organization and cast this in a simple and understandable way to encourage “buy-in,” and foster enthusiasm and motivation. However, there is a difference between being a dreamer and a visionary. Dreamers only dream; leaders know how to set realistic goals that will move their organization progressively toward its vision, equip the people to achieve these goals, and mobilize the resources of an organization (e.g., people, time, and money) in the service of its goals in a manner that is fully consistent with its vision.

- 2. The ability to cultivate a team of competent colleagues.** Great leaders enlist others to share in the vision-setting, vision-casting, and work on the goals that move an organization closer to its vision. Great leaders are not “lone rangers,” nor do they demand that everything be done their way or be done by themselves. Rather, they understand the importance of team-building, vision-sharing, and delegation in getting the work done. Indeed, great leaders replicate themselves and are keen to “work themselves out of a job” by training others to perform their tasks. Great leaders never bring on board only those who are clearly inferior to themselves in an effort to retain their position as the identified leader. Rather, they are secure in themselves and their ability to get the task done, and bring on to the team the very best people, even if those people are more competent than themselves.
- 3. The ability to effectively communicate.** Great leaders are clear thinkers and effective communicators. They say what they mean and mean what they say, and they adjust their level of communication to meet their audiences, without being condescending or disrespectful. Great leaders bring the vision to life, and are constantly reinforcing the vision of their organization through written and oral communication that is clear, concise, and highly persuasive. They know how to “sell” not only the steak, but the sizzle—and those listening can hear the crackle.
- 4. The ability to think strategically.** Great leaders do not rush from vision-casting to resource implementation, but, rather, spend considerable time strategically aligning the people, resources, and strengths of their organizations in the direction and service of their vision. They understand their competition, barriers to entry in the “marketplace,” and potential obstacles before launching their work, and they have thought long and hard about how to overcome the challenges that could thwart the realization of their goals.
- 5. The ability to be courageous in the face of opposition and disappointment.** Great leaders are not easily discouraged and they are doggedly persistent, without being “hard-headed.” They know how to receive and appropriate feedback and criticism, and they profit from their mistakes—and, vicariously, from the mistakes of others. They do not allow negative people or circumstances to deter them from the accomplishment of their goals or to cause them to doubt their vision. Great leaders “press on” long after lesser people have bailed out.
- 6. The ability to make long-term commitments and delay gratification.** Great leaders understand that things of lasting value take considerable time and effort to build and nourish. Great leaders are not “flash-in-the-pan” sorts who expect overnight success. They cast a huge vision and set big goals, but establish realistic timelines. They are content with where they are and what they have, but

never complacent or self-satisfied. Great leaders are willing to sacrifice in the short-term in order to realize their goals over the long-term. And great leaders *never* compromise on their vision or core values.

Spiritual Leadership

Well, such are the primary ingredients that make for a great leader. As you can see, great leaders are in very short supply today, and they are even more vanishingly small in number in the church. Therefore, when that rare “leader” does show up, it is tempting to place him or her into a position of spiritual leadership. Rarely, does this work out, for, unfortunately, leadership skills are insufficient for answering the call to *spiritual* leadership in the church. In fact, there are many highly successful leaders who, once placed into positions of church leadership, are miserable failures. Indeed, some of the worst spiritual leaders are those who are the most successful leaders in the community. So what makes for spiritual leadership?

- 1. Godliness, not mere niceness.** Spiritual leaders are, first and foremost, spiritual followers. They have cultivated a deep, personal, authentic, and transformative relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The spiritual leader’s life is marked by the presence, power, and provision of God’s Spirit, and evidence of genuine spiritual fruit is being produced as the leader has yielded every area of his or her life to God’s direction and control. Spiritual leaders are serious students of God’s Word and people of fervent prayer. Little wonder that others are naturally drawn to spiritual leaders in times of trial, trouble, and confusion.
- 2. Character, not mere personality.** Personality is what we see of a person; character is who one really is when no one is watching. The qualities of character demanded of spiritual leaders are outlined for us in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Again, these are enduring patterns of character, not instances of personality. As such, when the Scriptures state, for example, that a spiritual leader is to be “above reproach,” this does not mean that there is no charge that can be brought against the person (in which case, no one, including Jesus Christ, would be able to serve as a spiritual leader!), but that, though the person will continue *to* sin, the leader does not continue *in* sin. The leader’s character is deeply etched by the transformative power of the Gospel and there is clear evidence that the enduring trajectory of the leader’s life—in all areas—is toward Christlikeness. The spiritual leader loves God, not sin.
- 3. Accountability, not mere responsibility.** Spiritual leaders sense not only their responsibility to others, but their accountability before God. Such is a truly awesome thing; so weighty, holy, and consequential, that A.W. Tozier concluded that the safe and true leader is likely the one who has no desire to lead. Where one maneuvers to be placed into a position of spiritual leadership, does the same for the sake of another whom they wish to have serve in spiritual leadership, or considers himself deserving of spiritual leadership, you may be certain that the

one so inclined is unsafe and spiritually disqualified. Spiritual leadership is always God-appointed; it is never self-assumed.

- 4. Respectability, not mere likeability.** Spiritual leaders will tell the truth...in love. They say what *needs* to be heard, not what people *want* to hear, and they willingly pay the price for doing so. Spiritual leaders are astute to the politics of church life and aware of those with personal agendas, but are neither a part of this nor cater to it. Spiritual leaders willingly sacrifice personal friendships for the causes of integrity, truth, righteousness, and God's greater glory. They understand that those who seek to be merely liked are, in the end, neither respected nor liked; while those who seek to be respected will, in the end, be both respected and liked.

Healthy Spiritual Leadership

Sadly, even in churches that have spiritually qualified leaders, health and holiness are not guaranteed. Indeed, relationships between church leaders have become increasingly strained in recent decades, with not a few churches suffering from high staff turnover, low morale, abnormal patterns of conflict, political infighting, struggles over control, contentiousness, gossip, and competing agendas. In due time, these conflicts spill over into the pews and what is characteristic of the relationship between leaders becomes characteristic of the church as a whole. As a result, the power, presence, and provision of God have all but been removed from some "churches" that now function merely as spiritually-themed institutions seeking growth and fame. The seriousness of this situation was well-described by John Calvin writing in a letter to the church at Geneva on 25 June 1539:

If you contend with your ministers, so that dissensions and scandals are created, as I hear they are, it is evident that their office, in which the glory of Christ should shine forth, is put to shame and almost trodden underfoot. Beware, then, lest while you intend to humble man, you in reality declare war with God.

What the church desperately needs today is not leadership, or even mere spiritual leadership, but *healthy spiritual leadership*. What does this look like?

- 1. Healthy spiritual leadership is ordained.** Spiritual leaders recognize that God calls; man affirms. All true spiritual leadership derives from the ordination of God, not the employment of man. As such, all healthy spiritual leaders understand that they labor *for* God, *with* man, not the reverse.
- 2. Healthy spiritual leadership is loyal.** Where there is healthy spiritual leadership, there is unity; and where there is unity, there is loyalty. Unity does not mean uniformity; indeed, healthy spiritual leaders may differ from one another on matters of strategies, the implementation of resources, and nonessential doctrine. However, healthy spiritual leadership is unwavering in its commitment to the vision, identity and mission of the church; the essential doctrines of the Christian faith; the personal support and protection of fellow

leaders; and the wholehearted endorsement and encouragement of decisions, even when not personally favored.

3. **Healthy spiritual leadership is accountable.** Healthy spiritual leadership is always accountable to the ones whom they serve—and, ultimately, to God Himself. As such, healthy spiritual leaders keep no secrets, engage in no gossip, entertain no rumors, and harbor no bitterness, while yet identifying and maintaining strict confidentiality where absolutely necessary. Healthy spiritual leaders provide frequent forums for the exchange of information, the raising of questions, and the expression of concerns. They are responsive to the inquiries and comments of those whom they serve, and both open and honest in their dealings with others.

Conclusion

Well, what we have laid out here is certainly not exhaustive, and more could, and, perhaps, should, be said about healthy spiritual leadership, for as we have noted, healthy spiritual leadership is one of the greatest needs in the church today. But, I believe that this is a good starting point and that we have set out the map and compass of God's blueprint for healthy spiritual leadership.

So what about you? Would you aspire to become a leader? Good. How about a spiritual leader? Better still. But allow me to encourage you to prayerfully consider becoming a healthy spiritual leader. Yes, it will cost you—perhaps everything. But all the joy and provisions of heaven attend the one who would faithfully serve the King. So, fall on your knees and give yourself afresh to God and to His purposes, that He may use you where He may wish. Beloved, the need is great, the supply is short, and God's church anxiously awaits the arrival of healthy spiritual leaders.

Grace and peace,

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