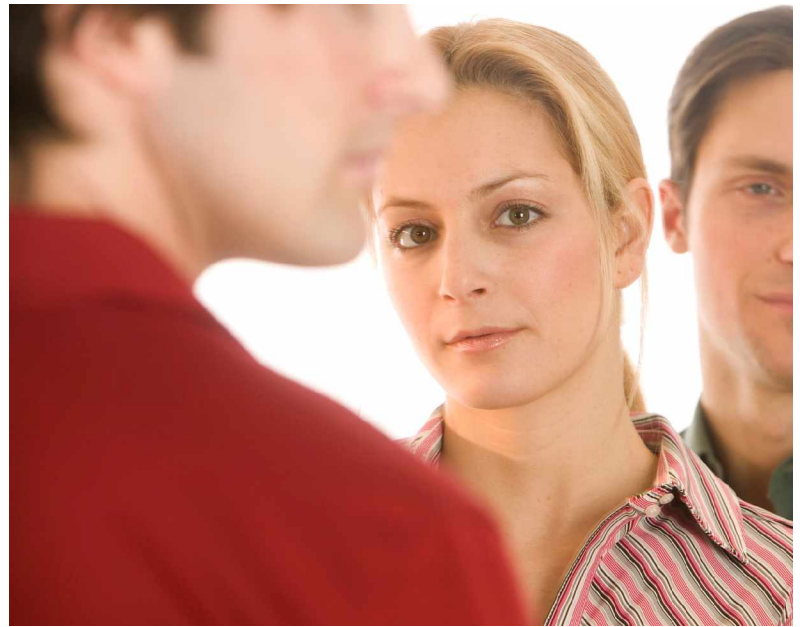


Evangelical Congregational Church

# So You're A... Church Leader



## **CALLING TO LEADERSHIP**

Leadership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a great honor and a great responsibility. The scripture says that “many are invited but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). Those who serve in leadership capacity in the church are to be those who are called, chosen, and who have dedicated themselves to service as God leads. This should be our foremost reason for service, a sense of a calling from God and a willingness to lead. Each of us has gifts given by God for the upbuilding of His church. From Paul’s letter to the Corinthians we learn that there are different gifts: teaching, preaching, healing, administration, tongues, and interpretation. We are to use these gifts, “stir them up” as Paul writes to Timothy, so that the church may be served and the work of God goes forward.

But leadership implies not only service in a specific sense, such as a steward, trustee, Sunday school teacher or lay delegate, but also a lifestyle. The use of God’s gifts without dedication to the whole work of God in our lives leads to a sense of incompleteness and fails to set a standard of service pleasing to God. Using our gifts exemplifies what Paul calls fruit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22). God needs the whole man, not just a few hours, or even many hours, in service each week. Leaders in the church are to be leaders in many senses: leaders in patience, leaders in forgiveness, and leaders in dedication, as well as leaders of her people.

It goes without saying that we, as leaders must have a deep sense of our own unworthiness in God’s eyes without the saving work of Jesus Christ. We must be among those who know in the deepest sense that “...it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)”. We must believe that we are “...God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10). This attitude, coupled with a love for the people of God, is only adequate motivation for Christian service. Working in the church is no easy task. If desire for prominence, power, or authority is used as a substitute for deep dedication to God, not only will the work of God be hindered, but the temporary glory will soon wear off. That kind of motivation will not sustain a leader for the days ahead when the need is not for personal glory but for personal sacrifice.

## **ATTITUDES OF LEADERSHIP**

The unique nature of leadership in the Christian church is nowhere more clearly outlined than in the John 13:13-14, where Jesus takes the place of a servant and washes his disciples feet with the saying, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.” In Mark 10:44, Jesus says “whoever want to be first must be slave of all.” A servant of all, and yet a leader? That’s a difficult task, but that is the Biblical pattern of leadership. No wonder the scripture contrasts that with earthly leadership. Yet in all things, Jesus is the pattern. In Philippians 2:7, we read “Christ Jesus...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.” Humility is indispensable to a Christian leader. Biblical leadership, therefore, has none of the benefits earthly leadership can provide, and cannot be based on self-serving motivation.

In addition to true humility, Biblical leadership requires continued personal growth. We lead as God directs. His direction can come in many ways, but certainly consistent Bible reading and prayer are unquestioned ones. This was, once again, a pattern in the life of Jesus, and can be no less in ours. We must grow in personal grace and strength, as well as in wisdom for leadership. We are inadequate in ourselves for the task. All of the great leaders of the Bible found their own personal resources insufficient and they had to rely on God. Of course, we are to dedicate and use the talents we have for Him. However, human talent and cleverness, like human motivation, will be inadequate. God will give his grace, and without it we can do nothing.

Another indispensable attitude of Christian leadership is willingness to sacrifice and do so willingly. Human nature will often lead us to say, “Why me?” “Why should I be the one to do this or that job?” “Why doesn’t someone else do it?” “Why do I always get stuck with all the work?” There is, no doubt, some fairness in these questions that come to all of us. There are others that should be sharing the work but are not. However, these are not the proper questions for us; they are God’s business. The scriptures give a marvelous example of proper attitude for us. In the last chapter of John’s Gospel, Peter asks Jesus about John—“Lord, what about him?” Jesus replied...“What is that to you? You must follow me.” (John 21:22) Jesus calls for sacrifice on our part, regardless of what others do. Our willingness to sacrifice may motivate others. One definition of sacrifice is the giving up of something for something better.

## **ACTIONS OF LEADERSHIP**

The proper attitude of leadership is one of love, humility and servanthood. The proper actions of leadership require personal holiness. The DISCIPLINE of the Evangelical Congregational Church has much to say on Christian practice. We are to press onward to Christian perfection in our lifestyle. As John Wesley put it “Let it therefore be considered not only a privilege, but the duty of all true believers to strive earnestly to attain Christian perfection, and in so far as they have ability and opportunity, to encourage all others to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ.” (DISCIPLINE, par. 131.1) In this quote, John Wesley touched on a most important aspect of holiness, one well stressed in the writing of Paul to Timothy and Titus: We are to be examples to others. Our personal lifestyle is to be a positive influence on others and their lifestyle, the end result being a life blameless before God and a challenge to men.

The Scriptures provide specifics regarding life that should be exemplary in a leader. These are as important today as when they were first presented many years ago. (DISCIPLINE, par. 142, 143, 144) Briefly these are:

1. Taking the name of the Lord in vain.
2. Profaning the Day of the Lord by godless and useless diversions.
3. Use of beverage alcohol in any manner and dealing in the same.
4. Quarreling, fighting, gossip, slander and other divisive actions.
5. Dishonesty in any of its forms.
6. Uncontrolled temper.
7. Pride, vanity and wastefulness.
8. Questionable amusements and games tending to draw us from God.
9. Worship of worldly wealth.

In addition, the DISCIPLINE also enjoys positive virtues for us all. These are:

1. Loving God with all the heart, mind and strength. This is evidenced by faithful attendance at worship, keeping the sacraments, searching the scripture, prayer, and fasting.
2. Cultivating a Christ-like attitude of sympathy, helpfulness and mercy. Feeding the hungry, clothing the destitute, sheltering the homeless and helping all in need.
3. Presenting the claims of the Gospel to unsaved, inviting them to services.
4. Helping and loving the brethren.
5. Showing charity to all.
6. Promoting peace and good will to all.
7. Practicing chastity, modesty, sobriety.
8. Speaking the truth in love.
9. Contributing to the support of the church, at home and abroad.
10. Demonstrating the fruit of the spirit.

While these listings may contain some items that sound a little quaint to modern ears, they are not so in God’s eyes. We need more than ever to stand against some things, for example, the use of alcohol which enslaves men. There should be no compromise on this point especially when the use of beverage alcohol is ever on the increase and is a social problem of major proportions. To this, add the use of tobacco, which is prohibited to our pastors. This is part of the whole problem of drug abuse which should in no way be condoned. With the current wave of gambling, in some instances promoted by state and local government, and pornography, we must take a stand against these about which the scripture clearly speaks.

Love, honesty, modesty, and concern for the human and social needs of others are all as necessary today as ever. Faithful support of the Lord's work is also vitally important. There are more demands on our money than we can count. The Lord deserves His tithe first, and then His gifts and offerings. The State gives us no choice! God does, and we must be sure to honor Him in this way. If we expect the members of our churches to be cheerful and generous givers, we must set an example for them to follow.

The infinite worth of each man in the sight of God has meaning today. Abortion on demand, callous treatment of the elderly, and cheapening of the value of human life through public media such as television, all work to debase and devalue the worth of lives for whom Christ died. We ought to be sensitive to all these areas and act accordingly.

These principles should not be vague generalities but should be taken as personal actions. James 2:20 says "...faith without deeds is useless." Leaders should be exemplary in good deeds. This means doing and abstaining.

It may be asked "Where is our freedom in Christ?" Our freedom in Christ is to not do the things that the world does so that His work goes forward. As strongly as Paul argues for freedom from legalism in Galatians 5:13, he also writes in chapter 5, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love." In Romans 14:13 he writes more directly on this "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way" and "Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself." (Rom. 15:2-3)

## **CONCLUSION**

Do you still want to be a leader in the Church of Jesus Christ? Does the task seem too great? Of course it is, at least in human strength. But God has been calling, training, and using leaders throughout all of recorded time. He is able to make us what we need to be. Moreover, we have before us the greatest opportunity life can afford. We can be part of the greatest venture the world has ever known and can ever know. We can say with Paul, "You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone...in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-20, 22) We can be builders together with God in His Church, His eternal work and can hear His commendation "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matt. 25:21) Let's be the kind of leaders God can use.

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