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## Relational and Incarnational Leadership: A Flattening of the Congregational Hierarchy and a Shared Journey of Faith

Timothy D. Ozment

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

RELATIONAL AND INCARNATIONAL LEADERSHIP:  
A FLATTENING OF THE CONGREGATIONAL HIERARCHY  
AND A SHARED JOURNEY OF FAITH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

TIMOTHY D. OZMENT

NEWBERG, OREGON

JANUARY 2007

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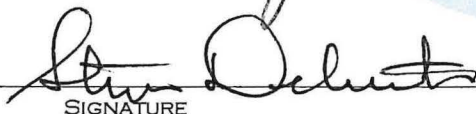
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With this preface I wish to thank and acknowledge: Len Sweet, Larry Shelton, Loren Kerns, the authors I have read, and my cohort – a band of brother's and sisters. Your words and life have inspired me. I also want to thank Rae Gruenkemeyer – staff member, editor, and friend. Our conversations together have helped shape both the congregation we serve and my own personal faith. Davette Lee – who edited this work during a very busy time of year, and along with her husband, the Rev. Paul Lee, Jr., who helped me grow up spiritually. As a teenager I spent many Sunday nights in their home learning the deeper meaning of our faith and raiding their refrigerator. I want to thank my brother-in-law and a valued friend from High School, Woody Webb – thank you for the many times we spent together talking about our faith and how to live a life pleasing to God, and most recently for letting me use your house while I dove into the library at ONU.

I want to thank my family. Jennie, a wife without whom I would not be the person I am today. You were my best friend before we were married, and through thick-and-thin, you are still the best friend I have. I want to thank Matthew, Christopher and Sarah – our children. Thank you for your patience with me as I read during intermissions at your recitals, plays, and when you were on a bench at your ball games. I especially want to thank you for waiting patiently at the dining room door – my makeshift study – while I finished a thought or paragraph before asking me some important question. I know the answer I gave was far less significant than the attention you deserved.

These are a few of the relationships that have formed me spiritually, and have inspired me to believe that leadership is a shared journey of faith.

Timothy D. Ozment

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## **ABSTRACT**

The problem addressed in this paper is: How can mainline congregational leadership move a church forward toward health in a postmodern world wherein the mainline Church as a whole is in such serious decline? This problem will be addressed by proposing a model of pastoral leadership that lives relationally and incarnationally with the congregation, flattens the hierarchy, and nurtures key lay leaders who are empowered to: answer their personal call, cultivate intentional relationships, and nurture the congregation into a missional and incarnationally focused living organism. Pastoral leadership, as we will argue, is, therefore, primarily living incarnationally and relationally with a congregation by helping indigenous people find innovative answers to their local and global problems. To present the importance of this style of relational leadership, we will look at: Chapter I – an introduction, by means of a familiar church dialogue and the current state of the mainline Church; Chapter II – The Trinity as a relational model of leadership; Chapter III - Moses as a communal model of leadership; Chapter IV – Nehemiah as a spiritual leader; Chapter V – Nehemiah as an emotionally intelligent community leader; Chapter VI – John Wesley’s leadership as a flattening of the hierarchy and a model of relational leadership, and in Chapter VII – we will investigate corporate leadership as a spiritual model and a flattening hierarchy.

## **CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION**

### **A Familiar Dialogue**

Rev. Tim entered Rae's office and sat down in the ottoman across from her desk. This was not unusual, as these visits were frequent and more often than not turned into important discussions about ministry, vision and the direction of the Grace United Methodist Church.

"I don't know, Rae. It seems we missed the mark somewhere between engaging our church, especially the key adults, in the decision making and learning process, and setting them loose in the ministry field. Somehow they turned into chaplains of modernity and lost focus on what is important from a leadership point of view," Rev. Tim said, reflecting on the last three years.

"They are key leaders in our congregation, aren't they?" Rae asked. "Didn't we target them from the beginning to be our core group of leaders, and aren't leaders supposed to be ministers?"

"Yes," Rev. Tim said, thoughtfully. "But everything I've read in the last 20 years has encouraged clergy to steer away from the chaplaincy-maintenance style of ministry. It is death to a congregation because it puts far too much focus inwardly instead of outwardly. Looking inwardly toward each other, we can become a circle of friends, and never see the multitude that is on the outside of the circle."

"So, what do you think it will take to turn things around?" Rae asked.

Rev. Tim sat for a few moments with his eyes closed, as much in deep thought as in prayer. "It seems there are two things that need to happen. First, these adults need to believe that they have some say in what happens around here. I mean more than just

believe; they need to have ownership of the vision, mission and work to which God is calling us.”

“Sounds like you believe our core leaders need to feel like they have a part of everything we do here,” Rae asked as much as stated.

“Well, maybe not everything. Maybe those things they have interest in; those things they are gifted for, and the overarching mission and ministry of the church. I would hate to make each individual leader responsible for the minutiae of the entire church. Yet, I agree with you, if they don’t have an invitation and/or permission to be involved the comprehensive vision and life of the church, they probably won’t be,” Rev. Tim replied.

“So, you think they moved from being in the loop, to being tied to one area of ministry?” Rae asked thoughtfully.

“I like the way you said it, ‘tied to one area.’ I can see that is exactly what happened and why a few of them felt they had been dropped out of the loop and simply dropped out of church. At one time we were meeting together regularly around the mission and vision. They were making important decisions, and they were highly motivated to be involved. Then we shifted them into a chaplain role, and they began to lose heart. We have to help them regain that sense of ownership and leadership again.”

Rae sat with a furrowed brow. “But things were going well until about a year and a half ago. Five years ago we launched two worship services to create more space in the parking lot and in the sanctuary. We even stepped out and offered one of the services with a praise band. People loved – and still love – our worship services. We had a few small groups taking off. The Lay Ministry Team was started, and every member in our

entire congregation has been contacted regularly by this team. We're far more connected than we've ever been. So... what happened?"

Rev. Tim sat for a few moments, gathering his thoughts. "I could blame the 'Wal-Mart' churches that have stolen sheep from us, but I think it's more about leadership and discipleship than that."

"Wal-Mart?" Rae asked.

"You know, every department store and local grocery store is losing revenue because people are choosing the convenience and discount that a one stop shopping center like Wal-Mart can offer. They have the finances and the power to outdo any local competitor."

"You mean, like Wal-Mart, these larger congregations can offer what we can't offer?"

"Yes. But, I want to avoid that being an excuse for rolling over and playing dead. I still believe we are the Church – not just a part of the Church and not just a piece of the pie. We are the full embodiment of the Church right here on Schwartz street, and we need to start believing and acting like God is going to use us to fulfill ministry from this location.<sup>1</sup> We shouldn't be comparing ourselves to smaller congregations, nor should we be comparing our selves to mega-churches, either. The question isn't: are we better or worse than some other congregation? The question is: are we living up to the call and the gifts God has given to us?"

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Küng, *The Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), 121-122.

Rae began to chuckle, “Now you’re preaching, but I love what you’re saying. My question still is, if we can’t point our fingers at other congregations, then what happened here?”

“I’ve thought and prayed a lot about it. I’ve been really convinced that somewhere my thinking shifted from teaching and mentoring our core leaders to one of arrival. In my mind they had arrived, and I stopped leading them,” Rev. Tim said.

Rae chuckled, “Well, when you’ve arrived at your destination, it’s time to stop, isn’t it? If someone keeps leading after you’ve arrived at your destination, then you’re just moving farther away from where you wanted to be.”

Rev. Tim laughed. “Exactly; but, that was the problem; we arrived. The second contemporary service was launched, the Praise Band was eating up a lot of my time, we engaged core leaders in self-sustaining chaplaincy ministry, and I just moved on. All the time I kept thinking, more unconsciously than consciously, that I had done my job, and that they were going to break out into ministry, and that the church would flourish.”

Rae chuckled. “Yes, and they broke out alright – some in ministry, but some broke right out the back door.”

“Here’s what I’m thinking. Would it be possible to refocus our adult group of key leaders? Can we help them shift from arrival mentality to developing a metaphor of creating companions for a journey of faith and partners in the rhythmic life of tending a garden? I’m talking about long-term, incarnational, and missional living with one another and the larger community. I want to engage every one of our leaders in a study of our congregation and meet with them regularly for several weeks. Ideally this group will continue to meet together for a long time to come. I will model for them what

pastoral care should look like, and they can model for others what an intentional small group should be.”

“I have two questions. One, if you’re making this decision, aren’t you creating the vision and not the congregation?” Rae asked.

“Well, I suppose you could look at it that way. But, I see myself as the gardener God has put in this field. I’m not going to tell the church how to grow or when to grow. My job is simply to help choose the seeds that get planted, lay out the boundaries for where we start planting the seeds, and then remain engaged by nurturing what begins to grow. The overall vision, the growth, the type of soil that is receptive or not – well, that’s up to God and the congregation.

“Good answer,” Rae continued. “My second question is: you do know that not everyone is going to participate?”

“Yes, I’m trying to be realistic; but I also know that the best chance for compelling change will happen if we give everyone a voice. We may not like every voice we hear; we may not agree with every voice that is raised, but this is the church, and God has called *all* of us to participate. If I or a small group of leaders make all the decisions, it makes the vision mine or a small group’s at best. God needs this congregation as a whole, or as much of it as possible, to be engaged in the mission and ministry, and that includes the decision making process,” Rev. Tim answered.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I for a brief list of contributing factors for this loss of momentum.

## Contextual Factors

### *Demographics*

The Salem Grace United Methodist Church is located in the heart of Salem, Illinois, directly behind the County Court House. Salem is the county seat of Marion County. Although Salem Grace is in the center of Salem, it would be classified as a rural congregation of 270 in average attendance. The population of Salem is 7,909, with a total of 41,691 residing in Marion County. Ethnically, Salem is primarily a Caucasian community, with less than 5% ethnic minorities residing within the city limits. A few factories dot the landscape, but our primary employment is retail, farming and oil field production.<sup>3</sup>

### *Brief History*

In 1907, the Salem Grace Methodist church moved to its present location. How long it was in existence beforehand is in debate; however, the congregation thinks of itself as “almost 100 years old.” There are two stained-glass windows which bookend the sanctuary, one to the north, and one to the south, with the congregation facing east in theater style seating. These windows nearly cover the entire wall and stand approximately 45 feet in height. They originally cost \$1,400 and are now insured for nearly \$1.4 million.

An important story to this congregation is that in 1906 the early church trustees deposited the finances raised to construct the church building with a local bank. Along

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<sup>3</sup> Demographic information obtained from the *2000 Census of the United States*, (2006, accessed December 15 2006); available from [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en).



with the money from the church, the bank had invested much of its own holdings in a local coal mine, which never produced a single car of coal. The bank lost the entire investment, this being before FDIC insurance, and the bank president skipped town to avoid accountability. The congregation was forced to raise the money to build church facility twice.

For the past 30 years the congregation has fluctuated between 240 and 280 in average attendance. 240 is approximately 80% of the capacity our parking lot will hold; based on 2.5 people per automobile. 280 is 80% of the seating capacity of our sanctuary. A rule of thumb, used by church construction consultants, suggests that a congregation will seldom, if ever, grow beyond 80% of the parking capacity or 80% of the seating capacity of a congregation.<sup>4</sup> It may rise above this mark for a period of time, but will eventually level off to this threshold.

In the year 2000 we proposed two worship services in order to create virtual space. This enabled us to do two things. First, it effectively circumvented the 80% rule without a major building campaign. Sunday school was sandwiched between the two services to free up the parking spaces during the transition between the two services. Second, it offered an alternative style of worship for those who were seeking a “contemporary” flavor of music, and a relaxed style of worship in terms of dress and attitude.

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Wagner, a well-known church consultant, has articulated this “rule,” but the first author we are aware of putting it into print is Kennon L. Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* (New York, NY: Josey-Bass, 1983; reprint, 1997), 30.

### *Symbols and Icons*

The “twice-paid-for” story, and the stained-glass windows that seem to embody their history, are important reminders of the faithfulness of previous generations. These “icons” can either hinder this congregation’s forward momentum by tying them to their past, or if framed properly, can be used to inspire leaders to risk something great for those who will come after. This congregation would not be here today if previous generations had simply given up and not remained faithful to the call of God. If this church is to face their current struggles, and hope for a better future, they will have to set aside their fears, cast their traditions into the future, and become as faithful as those who have gone before.<sup>5</sup> It is important, especially for the argument we will propose, to recognize that a pastor, or pastors, are not the key figures in this congregation’s story; but rather, an entire previous generation of faithful congregants are champions of their faith.

### **State of the Mainline Church**

Do congregations need transformation? This is the question that keeps being asked sometimes in the affirmative as congregations venture into uncharted territory, or sometimes in the negative as congregations question whether transformation is necessary or just the latest fad or flashy seminar offering. We propose that if we take an honest look at the Church’s situation as a whole and, more specifically, our individual congregations, we will discover that something is quite amiss, and that transformation is

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of tradition being an anchor cast before the church and used to pull her forward see Len Sweet, *Aqua Church: Essential Leadership Arts for Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc., 1999), 72-74.

indeed a necessity if congregations hope to effectively fulfill all that God has called her to do.

The state of the mainline Church, at least in the Northern hemisphere and the Western world, is no doubt in trouble. Stuart Murry suggests that, "If the current rate of decline is not arrested, the Methodist Church will have zero membership by 2037."<sup>6</sup> In spite of the fact that literature, both secular and scholarly, are replete with statistical analysis revealing this decline, some have attempted to redefine, or ignore numeric decline, and replace it entirely with a concept of church health that is defined by spiritual growth and social activism alone.<sup>7</sup> We agree that church health is far more significant than attendance statistics alone can reveal; yet, we assert that for decades the bulk of mainline congregations have either been numerically stable or declining, and this is, at least in part, an indication of waning health.<sup>8</sup> Many church buildings in Europe are more like museums than living places of worship. In January of 2006 we visited Dublin, Ireland and Belfast, United Kingdom for a worship seminar. Sadly, many of the congregations are barely hanging on. According to some of the members of these antiquated churches, if it were not for endowment funds, they would have long ago

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<sup>6</sup> Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004), 6. See this work for a lengthy, but thorough, discussion of why Christendom has failed the Church.

<sup>7</sup> In particular see Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Two articles, among many, regarding mainline decline are: Benton Johnson, Dean R. Hoge, and Donald A. Luidens, "Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline," *First Things*, no. 31 (1993), Donald A. Luidens, "Fighting 'Decline': Mainline Churches and the Tyranny of Aggregate Data," *The Christian Century* 113, no. 32 (1996): and.

See also George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 27-29.

closed their doors. Reports from other countries in Europe indicate a similar state of affairs.

There are a few congregations that appear to be moving forward and into some healthy growth. At first glance, these are congregations that may appear to be willing to move beyond traditional forms of church life and denominational ties, but on closer examination they have simply become relevant to the community around them. A question, nonetheless, that deserves attention is whether numerically growing congregations are effectively reaching the unchurched within the community, or are they simply draining vibrant members from fading congregations? Our suspicion is the latter. Although we have no hard data to indicate that this is in fact the case for Ireland, anecdotal evidence gleaned from conversations with a handful of members of one community church indicates that most of their members have transferred from other declining congregations.

Similar conversations with two congregations in Seattle, Washington also revealed the same answers. In June of 2005 we visited Mars Hill, a congregation of about 6000 at the time. Mark, a volunteer at their help desk, informed us that most of the growth Mars Hill was experiencing was from de-churched, those having dropped out of regular church attendance, or churched individuals who were unsatisfied with their former congregations. That same month we visited the Church of the Apostles (COTA), a smaller emerging congregation about 15 blocks away from Mars Hill. Where Mars Hill was a thriving mega-church with lots of paid staff and volunteers, COTA was made up of about 45 regular worshipers and a core team of about six people, only one of whom is paid staff. We spoke with both pastor Karen Ward and with Tom, “the philosopher.”

Tom informed us that most of the people attending were unhappy with their former congregations and were looking for a place where they felt welcomed and encouraged to participate. Although their goal was to reach the unchurched of their immediate community, very few members, he regrettably had to confess, were unchurched individuals.

While we do not question the validity of the ministries these congregations are providing, and we are quite excited about the vision all these congregations have, the reality is this kind of “growth” is not, in actuality, Kingdom growth. Adding members who transfer from other congregations is a net earning of zero for the Kingdom of God. William Chadwick discusses this in his little known but profoundly important book, *Stealing Sheep*. He found that only 20 to 24 percent of all congregations are experiencing numeric growth. On average these congregations, who are growing, are receiving only 20% growth from the unchurched.<sup>9</sup> Having surveyed several of these growing congregations, he found the number of unchurched being gathered to Christ to be as low as 10% of a congregation’s overall growth. That means that 80% to 90% of increase occurring in these “growing” congregations is coming from already churching individuals. As Chadwick points out, “Transfer growth by its very nature can occur only if there is transfer decline somewhere else – bringing no numerical gain for the Kingdom.”<sup>10</sup> This kind of growth, wherever it is found in the world, is not contributing real Kingdom

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<sup>9</sup> William Chadwick, *Stealing Sheep: The Church's Hidden Problems with Transfer Growth* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001).

Although Chadwick did find a few congregations who were transferring in only 25% churching individuals: see chapter 5, footnote 4; however, most congregations were not doing nearly this well.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

growth. It can, if not recognized for what it is, fool congregations into believing that the Church is doing well.

It would appear that North American mainline congregations are on the same statistical downward trend that many of the European denominations and congregations have suffered over the last several decades. Our anecdotal research confirms what others, who have done more serious research in this area, have stated. The church in North America is at a point where it needs to seriously consider its future, and what changes, if any, are appropriate to avoid a similar fate.

### *Prometheus and Modernity's Inadequate Solutions*

How we engage the problem, the methods we use, and the metaphors we borrow, is important to creating the kind of spiritually rich and diverse congregations that will survive in the postmodern world. As a caution, the story of Prometheus is an age-old tale about the futility of technology to solve problems. Prometheus was a Greek god who rebelled against the other gods in order to help humanity. He offered the human race the knowledge of fire to compensate for the harsh reality that they were mortal and would one day die. The offer was a false hope that technology would somehow save them from the eventual reality of their death. Modernity is still trying to utilize some charm, ritual or technological device to improve the world's condition, an attempt to design just the right magical bullet to solve all problems. Church leaders can fall into the same trap, believing that just the right program, book or spiritual formation technique will deliver

the church and move her towards health. "Just a little more fire from the gods and we will get the world running right after all."<sup>11</sup>

Judith Neal, Benyamin Lichtenstein and David Banner, organizational and business professors, have conducted research into spiritual formation in the work place and how transformation is effected by this religious enterprise. Specifically, they point out what they believe to be the wrong motive of utilizing spiritual formation techniques as a means to one's predetermined goal. Throughout modernity, "Management thought has been dominated by the assumption that the job of the manager is to control everything, so that things turn out 'right', i.e., according to plan."<sup>12</sup> It was, in part, an issue of trust. Management, and often clergy, believed it was their responsibility to keep the institution, and all aspects of the institution, healthy. By doing so, they effectively removed responsibility from the hands of co-workers and laity. Further, they manipulated people and the system to accomplish the goals they had determined would provide for positive outcomes.

### *Leadership as Organic Relationships*

What we are suggesting is that leadership, like spiritual formation, is organic growth which is primarily a process of slow change, not a mechanical quick fix, the results of which are not always predictable. Robert Dale says:

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<sup>11</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 21. For a well rounded discussion of Prometheus' error and the Church see, 19-29.

<sup>12</sup> Judith Neal, Benyamin M. Bergmann Lichtenstein, and David Banner, "Spiritual Perspectives on Individual, Organizational and Societal Transformation," *Journal of Organizational Change management* 12, no. 3 (1999): 181.

In stark contrast to machines, congregations are living communities. That's the reason, try as we may, leaders and faith communities overreach when we announce we are "managing change." God built constant change into our universe and into our faith communities. Congregational transition is "already in progress." From a leadership perspective, congregational change isn't started or stopped by the will of congregational leaders. From a theological point of view, congregational change is by God's will and is the Creator's proprietary work. Congregations are called to become more like Christ, not more like their pastors.<sup>13</sup>

Not only congregations, but church leaders who have bought into a modern-mechanical management style are in need of transformation. Our assertion is that leadership must regain this organic and relational mindset to effectively lead congregations in a postmodern world.

If leader's chief motivation is to insure the bottom line is taken care of, then plans can be made, visions cast and goals set with little or no consultation with God other than the obligatory opening prayer and benediction that God would bless what we've planned. This leaves little room for God, what Neal, et al, refer to as "grace," to alter our course, make lasting changes, and do what only God can do



Figure 1 Leverage.

with divine omnipotent wisdom. In this kind of mechanical bottom-line and get-it-right view spiritual formation, relationships, and control, et al are regarded as tools in the hands of leadership to accomplish the goals they have set forth instead of tools in the hands of God to shape and form a congregation into the image of Jesus Christ.

Dale continues:

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<sup>13</sup> Robert D. Dale, *Seeds for the Future: Growing Organic Leaders for Living Churches* (Danvers, Mass.: Lake Hickory Resources, 2005), 41.



We have used mechanical maps to guide our leadership for more than a third of a millennium. The common advice has been to “find that, fix this, change that, apply leverage here.” In the Industrial Age, leaders used machine images, mostly drawn from the pressure images of levers and hydraulics. Leadership was defined as “what you do,” a series of programs, a set of skills, and the tricks of the trade. As the effectiveness of the mechanistic model has faded, trends, fads, and “flavors of the week” multiplied but still don’t match our new ministry challenges.<sup>14</sup>

Leaders, trained in modernity, want to move congregations forward, and they have been trained to leverage their positions and the positions of others to accomplish the goals they have set forth. This model has been based more on modern business practices than biblical principles of organic-spiritual growth. Leveraging can be done whether the congregation approves and with hardly a thought if God does. Without proper judgment spiritual formation, relationships, influence, even God, becomes just another means to leverage power against the congregation to force the results leaders want. (See Figure 1, above)<sup>15</sup> This is working against the natural and organic order of church life. Dale points out, “Health generates energy naturally. If you as a leader are pushing the community and willing it to change, you’ll likely burn out by working against your own community.”<sup>16</sup> An organic understanding of growth realizes that one cannot grab the head of a wheat stock and pull it to maturation. To avoid damage all one can do is water, fertilize, nurture, weed, etc. In other words, leaders influence the environment in favor of growth, but the natural order of the DNA within the wheat stock itself, the mystery of God, will give the growth in its own time. Importantly, this growth is predetermined by

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>15</sup> For a similar image see this website promoting business technologies and business consulting. Lisa Lang, *Science of Business* (2005, accessed December 10 2005); available from <http://www.scienceofbusiness.com>.

<sup>16</sup> Dale, 33.

what God has already woven into the DNA of this particular seed. One cannot naturally get a carrot out of a seed of corn, but that exact error is made by leadership when they try to manipulate congregations and God in order to get the specific fruit leadership desires. Instead of allowing God's wisdom to bring forth fruit in accordance with God's plan, they attempt to manufacture their own.

### *Relational Leadership for the Journey*

Len Sweet wrote, "People are constantly talking with others on cell phones and the Internet, but those people are treating those around them as objects to get past, not as subjects to pass through."<sup>17</sup> Not to take Sweet too far out of context, there is a great reality that we have always been in danger of ignoring those around us as "real" and "important" as we journey on our way to some destination. We experienced this in Ireland last year as we attended a cross-cultural seminar that our

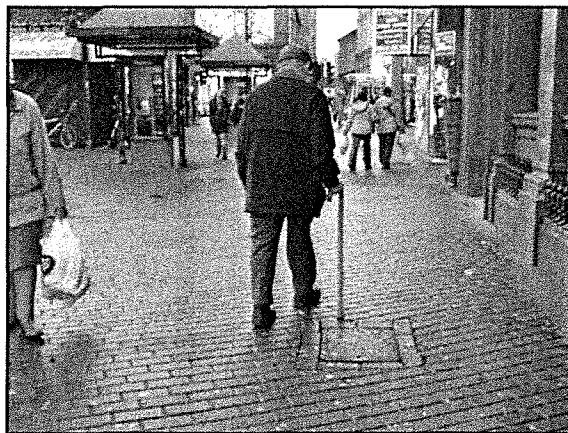


Figure 2 Belfast, UK, (N. Ireland)

degree required. We had three extra days to see an entire country we may never return to again. Highly motivated by that thought, we sat out literally on a dead run. It took us two days before we realized we had covered a lot of ground but had failed to make a connection with these living Irish people or the God whom we proclaimed to know. We had passed by thousands of people and walked around a dozen ancient buildings on

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<sup>17</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question, into the Mystery* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 19.

streets that were older than our great-grandparents, in order to get to some other *must see* destination. In that moment, standing on the walkover of the Dart railway, somewhere between Dublin's Connolly Station and Glengarry, we looked toward the Irish Sea with England somewhere in the distance and paused to give God thanks. We were in a country we had never been to before, one we may never return to again, and had forgotten the blessing of simply soaking in the reality of that place, ancient and modern, visible and mysterious.

The Christian faith and church, like our eventual understanding of that trip, is not a destination but a journey. Each moment is a gift of God to be lived in that moment with the people God has given to us. The means God is using to fit us for heaven is the journey. The end, if we can truly speak of an end, is the relationships that carry us along. By this we mean that God uses people to intersect our lives, but not as mechanical automatons that have no feelings or remain unaffected themselves. Our lives cross, and at that point of intersection we are different than we were before, and will never be quite the same again.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the question is what difference, if any, will this crossing make? We can either try to squeeze out of the other person what we need; or we can attempt to soak up in osmosis fashion the blessing of the moment and the gift of the journey together.

We suggest that church can – and often has in modernity – become a place where people are used as a means-to-an-end. The bishop and cabinet could use clergy to create a conference that will be of significance. Clergy could use laity to create a bigger local

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<sup>18</sup> For a scientific discussion of how the universe is interconnected in a web of relationships and how this effects our life and possibly our leadership philosophy see Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 2nd ed. (Berkley, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 1999), 40-47.

congregation; one they believe will be remembered as a legacy long after they are gone. Or, clergy could climb the ladder and step on a congregation as just another rung toward a bigger church, a nicer parsonage and a better salary. The congregation is not innocent in this means-to-an-end life, either. The church and clergy can be treated as vending machines that dispense spiritual goods, in an effort to shore up someone's life, take the sting out of some loss, or just have a more meaningful and productive life. Sometimes even laity are willing to squeeze what they can out of the system.<sup>19</sup>

Len Sweet suggests:

The difference between an object-based church and a relation-based church is the difference between a church that sells itself versus a church that brings people into a living, lifelong relationship with Christ and one another. A relation-based church is less a place where creeds are dispensed and adherents conscripted than a place where people can connect with God and with one another, and where their faith journeys can be encouraged and enabled.<sup>20</sup>

Peter Rollins of Ikon in Belfast, United Kingdom (Northern Ireland) was a former worship leader on staff at a growing congregation in Belfast. However, it was leaning towards a Vineyard style congregation. It is now a member of the Willow Creek Association.<sup>21</sup> Peter felt that leadership was avoiding the cerebral in place of a sociable religion. Too many believe that seeker-friendly means dumbing down worship, theology, philosophy or praxis.<sup>22</sup> For Peter theology is in the worship and how we network with

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<sup>19</sup> For a good discussion of what is wrong with means-to-an-end thinking in church see Neil Q. Hamilton, *Maturing in the Christian Life: A Pastor's Guide* (Philadelphia, Penn.: The Geneva Press, 1984).

<sup>20</sup> Sweet, *Out of the Question, into the Mystery*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> We do not mean to intimate that there is something wrong with being associated with either of these two movements. However, neither of these are indigenous forms of leadership, worship or church life in Northern Ireland.

<sup>22</sup> For a conversation about what worship should be, and should not be, see Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 37-53.

one another. We learn to engage the holy by the way we design and interact with the entire worship experience and not just the sermon.

Peter Rollins wrote:

Ikon is no crypto-evangelical mission or advanced seeker service, for this commitment to conversion is not one that is offered by 'us' to 'them' (whoever this 'them' happens to be). Rather, everyone in the bar (participants and passers by) is a potential implement of our further conversation. Consequently, the evangelical nature of the community does not resemble a one-way diatribe leading from 'us' to 'them' but rather embodies a multiple dialogue that moves from one to another.<sup>23</sup>

In 2002 a handful of friends were at The Menagerie having a pint, this is Belfast, Ireland, and were discussing the divide between church and secular, between worship and praxis that should not exist, but rather a faith that encounters people where they live. Someone suggested that they put together a worship experience utilizing the space in the pub. With some uncertainty that the pub would go for it, but with quite a bit of excitement, Peter asked management if they would be willing to allow them to rent space. Within two or three weeks they were asking people with similar interests to join them.

During our interview, Peter was passionate that this was not a "team" per say. Rather these were fellow companions on a journey. Team implied inclusion and exclusion, and Ikon was going to be participatory from the ground up. Peter said, "It is a group of people working on it. This is a group of people who through deep reflection, thought, theology, philosophy, art, music, fragile humility, and ambiguity want to explore their faith. They are self-critical and deconstructive."<sup>24</sup>

Ikon does not offer a full menu for church life. Instead, they encourage participation in local congregations for discipleship, mission and accountability.

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<sup>23</sup> Pete Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006), 75.

<sup>24</sup> Pete Rollins, "Personal Interview," (Belfast, United Kingdom: 2006).

What Ikon offers is a space where church and community can meet. This is a place where the head and heart can come together in a worship environment, people can dialog around similarities and differences, and where they can think about how their faith is lived out in a community which is far more divergent than they had previously recognized. Ikon is where they discover that they are participating on a connected journey.

In the second half of Rollins' book he offers a caution about utilizing Ikon's worship services that could easily be stretched to include their entire orthopraxy in general:

These services could not and should not be packaged as some universal product to be exported around the world. The idea that what follows could be . . . fails to grasp that these events are locally produced and reflect the skills and needs of a particular group. Ikon is an organic, local community that takes the skills of that community in order to serve that community.<sup>25</sup>

This is an idea we shall return to later in our dissertation, but suffice it to say here that local community, local leadership, and local skills are important answers to indigenous problems and how local communities may experience them. That is not to say that an outside source may not be needed at times to help congregations see clearly the "lay of the land" from a new perspective, but it is to say that denominational-top-down programming and vision will seldom, if ever, provide a solution to a local community's problems.

Pastoral leadership, as we will argue, is therefore about living incarnationally with a congregation and helping indigenous people find innovative answers to their local and global problems. In the process leaders may offer their unique brand of seeds to be

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<sup>25</sup> Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*, 74.

planted, but if they are not careful these seeds may turn out to be more like the kudzu planted along southern highways to solve the problem of erosion. Unfortunately, this solution of a fast growing and nearly unstoppable vine has been more harmful to native flora and fauna than the original problem of erosion it was meant to solve.

### **Answering the Right Questions**

Therefore the question: “Do congregations need transformation?” is an important one to ask. If we take a hard look at the reality that most mainline congregations are in statistical stagnation or decline, honestly look at the lack of meaningful Kingdom growth within those congregations fortunate enough to report rising numbers in membership, and if we agree with the statement, “If you keep doing what you’ve been doing, you’ll keep getting what you’ve been getting,”<sup>26</sup> we will inevitably respond with a decisive, “Yes. Congregations are in need of transformation.”

The question then remains: “What kind of transformation is my congregation in need of?” That is a question that we believe cannot be addressed with absolute certainty for all congregations in a single dissertation, but must to be addressed in a specific, contextualized and local fashion for each individual congregation. The very nature of the question hinges not only on the word *transformation* but equally upon on the phrase *my congregation*. Within this dissertation our attempt will be to construct an overarching theme of developing indigenous, transformational and relational leadership that can apply good principles and practices of change management and address the specifics of how to

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<sup>26</sup> This phrase or ones similar to it have been around long enough that the original author is indefinable, nevertheless see Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), xi.

apply the lessons learned to the congregation we are currently serving, the Salem Grace United Methodist Church located in Salem, Illinois.

We concede to the reality that what needs to change within the life of any given congregation is far more pervasive than can be addressed within the pages of this single dissertation. Church management, discipleship, stewardship, evangelism, missions, worship, spiritual formation, communication, etc. are all worthy topics of investigation and study. Each of these factors contributes to the health or decline of a congregation. However, this dissertation will center on the development of a core group of transformation leaders within a congregation who can move a church forward into a healthy life. It is this core group who would invest their lives in one another, investigate the health of their own congregation, share in the discernment of God's will for the congregation's vision and mission, and develop a plan for sustainable health, while keeping in mind that health is a journey not a destination.

### **Goal of the Study: Our Claim**

We claim that although there are multiple reasons for the decline of mainline congregations, and the United Methodist Church in particular, congregations can become healthy and effective if pastors flatten the hierarchy and nurture key lay leaders who are empowered to: answer their personal call, cultivate intentional relationships, and nurture the congregation into a missional and incarnationally focused living organism. Pastoral leadership, as we will argue, is therefore about living incarnationally with a congregation and helping indigenous people find innovative answers to their local and global problems. As such we will look at: The Trinity as a relational model of leadership; Moses as a communal model of leadership; Nehemiah as a spiritual leader; Nehemiah as



an emotionally intelligent community leader; John Wesley's leadership as a flattening of the hierarchy and a model of relational leadership, and corporate leadership as a spiritual model and a flattening hierarchy.

## CHAPTER II

### THE TRINITY: A RELATIONAL MODEL FOR LEADERSHIP

#### Introduction

In spite of the abstract nature of theological doctrines surrounding the Trinity and the difficulties finite human minds have in grasping the complexity of the divine existence of God, the Trinity can be essentially described as a cooperative relationship, a shared authority and a fluid hierarchy. Important to our argument, we will demonstrate that from a Trinitarian point of view God does not lead in solitary independence. Rather, the Godhead consults, meditates and acts together. The three, in one, are active in the creation process and throughout the biblical narrative, living in communion and community. “What is the Trinity, after all, if not *relationship*?”<sup>27</sup>

#### In the Beginning

From the opening chapters of Genesis we encounter the creation story, the orderliness of all things and relationships. While God speaks and all that we know and have yet to discover about this universe is brought into existence, it is incomplete until relationships are a possibility for all of humanity. Relationships – consultative, essential and broken – are a part of the first three chapters of the Bible. Thomas Oden does a noteworthy job of capturing the core of the biblical narrative found in Genesis:

The drama [of the Creation and Genesis narrative] is all about relationship. It is the thorny, conflicted, seductive, unpredictable, unfolding epic of a covenant relationship between Yahweh and Adam, Yahweh and Abraham, Yahweh and

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<sup>27</sup> Brad A. Binau, "What's in a Name? Trinity in Light of the Trinity: A Relational Perspective," *Trinity Seminary Review* 25, no. 1 (2004): 14.

Israel, Yahweh and humanity. The real story concerning creation is about the creature/Creator relationship.<sup>28</sup>

There are at least two important sections to the creation narrative. One begins with God hovering over the great void and calling all things into existence (Gen. 1:1-26). The other section begins with a specific conversation that leads to the creation of humanity. “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’” (Genesis 1:26) It is of significance that we entertain the words, “Let us.” These are the words of a God who is already divulging God’s triunity. Here we have the first intimation that God is not just a massive or mindless mover of creation, but God actually has a conversation in the creation process, a conversation with God the Creator, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.<sup>29</sup> One way to describe the complexity of God’s three-in-oneness is to express the extraordinary supposition that God is in relationship with God’s own self. We will discuss this in more depth, but here it is important to note that a conversation – a relationship – within the Trinity is in place participating in the creation process.

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God, Systematic Theology: Volume I* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987), 233.

<sup>29</sup> Because we believe God is one-God, we will use bracketed identifiers, God (the Creator), God (the Son) and God (the Holy Spirit), to distinguish between the work each part of the Trinity contributes to the whole, and to which member of the Trinity we are referring to. Also, because we believe inclusive language is important, we will attempt to use (the Creator) in place of the traditional (the Father). However, for a good discussion from a feminist perspective concerning the use of “the Father” as a non-patriarchal form of identifying God see Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Pub., 1991), 18, note 7. Following LaCugna’s lead, we will therefore not correct quotes, scripture or avoid the use of traditional language where it is unwarranted.

One of the first things God remedies after creation is in regard to the loneliness of Adam by producing a helpmate, wrought out of his own bone. “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’” (Genesis 2:18)<sup>30</sup> For many years the people of the Bible believed in and acted upon these words, creating a marital system in response to the need for companionship. It is a system that has worked both within and without the Israelite camp. Even recent research has offered the staggering statistics of how important a man and woman being united in the raising of a child is to the child’s level of success in the world.<sup>31</sup>

It is worth mentioning that although successful marriages improve the health and welfare of family members, the opposite is also true. Just being married is no guarantee of a happy life, a successful partnership, or brilliant children. While right relationships and common goals are vital to the success of a marriage; conflict, control, co-dependency and many other factors may contribute to the erosion of relationships, thus weakening family cohesion and frustrating important goals. The same can be said of institutions of

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<sup>30</sup> Throughout this work I offer the supposition that whether particular passages of scripture are just a redaction of many years of editing or the absolute words of a God who saw fit to preserve for us what was spoken make little difference to the argument of this work. The people of the Bible and those of Jewish and Christian heritage acted on these words in important and life transforming ways. Further, I would submit that these are the texts we have and must utilize them as best we can to understand God’s design for the Church and the advancement of God’s Kingdom. Thus, I propose to avoid lengthy discussions in regard to higher criticisms.

<sup>31</sup> See: Abbott Ferriss, L., "Social Structure and Child Poverty," *Social Indicators Research*, no. 78 (2006): 453–472, Abbott L. Ferriss, "Social Structure and Child Poverty," *Social Indicators Research*, no. 78 (2006), Bill Muehlenberg, "The Case for Two-Parent Family Part I," *National Observer*, no. 52 (2002): 44-49, Bill Muehlenberg, "The Case for Two-Parent Family Part II," *National Observer*, no. 53 (2002): 49-59, "Parents May Be Asking: Risks to Children Living with Single Parents," *Pediatric Alert* 28, no. 3 (2003).

all forms. Leadership, or a marriage, that keeps right relationships a priority finds that success is much more likely.<sup>32</sup>

From the beginning of scripture we are offered a point of view that relationships are important parts to any successful institution, be it marriage, government, corporate world or the Church. Relationships that are shared, empowering and on even footing appear to be the most sustainable. Unfortunately the church, and in particular clergy, have at times forgotten that their task in making disciples requires relationships, shared responsibilities, and the empowerment of others to carry the weight of God's work. It is an effective way of life echoed throughout Scripture and Church history.

### **The Trinity<sup>33</sup>**

"Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.'" (Genesis 1:26) One may ask why this discussion of the Trinity is germane to the argument regarding leadership, being posed. Trinitarian theologians might offer the supposition that if we are created in the image of God, the *imago Dei*, then Trinitarian theology holds an important key to understanding God's intention for the style and

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<sup>32</sup> For a good discussion of the history and role of marriage see: Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History* (New York, NY: Viking, Penguin Group, 2005). Especially relevant to the current discussion see Coontz pages 310 ff.

<sup>33</sup> A caution needs to be voiced from the outset as to how far one can employ an understanding of the Trinity in a fallen and imperfect world. How far, after all, can we push fallen humanity to resemble God? It is also warranted to be cautious of *theosis* – the making of humanity into God. As we move forward we will attempt to avoid the trap Eve fell into as Satan whispered, "You will become like God, knowing good and evil." May it be enough for us to learn what it means to be made simply yet profoundly in the image of God and thus live our lives in obedience to God's will and purpose.

framework of the leadership for which we search. Ultimately the “Christian life is a participation in the history of the Triune God in whom freedom and love, personal existence and life in solidarity with others, are inseparable.”<sup>34</sup> If reviving the *imago Dei* within us and living a life in communion with God is the goal to which we aspire, then a theology of the Trinity should tell us important information about this life we so desperately seek to live.

Daniel Migliore points out that the Trinitarian relationship is of vital importance to our understanding of life and leadership.

This communicative ontology within God that prompted the production of humanity-as-dialogical beings demands that we enter into continual dialogue with God and with others. There is no justification for an unrelenting monological ‘proclamation’ by the Christian to the other, if we are to become truly human and God-like.<sup>35</sup>

If we are created in the image of God, then we are created to be in relationship. This God-like relationship demands an ongoing dialogue with other persons without hierarchical or oppressive demands. Instead, our conversation, like the Trinity, should remain fluid as we ebb and flow into one another’s perception and point of view.

Several modern and postmodern theologians have moved the Trinity from a merely speculative philosophical or abstract pursuit to an immanent existence of relationships. As we shall see, this relationship is shared, communal and equal. Several authors offer such understandings, but perhaps a quote from two will suffice to introduce the concept. In her work on the Trinity, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, Catherine Mowry LaCugna writes in her introduction:

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, "The Trinity and Human Liberty," *Theology Today* 36, no. 4 (1980): 497.

<sup>35</sup> Seng-Kong Tan, "A Trinitarian Ontology of Missions," *International Review of Mission* 95, no. 369 (2004): 288.

Because of God's outreach to the creature, God is said to be essentially relational, ecstatic, fecund, alive as passionate love. . . . The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately therefore a teaching not about the abstract nature of God, nor about God in isolation from everything other than God, but a teaching about God's life with us and our life with each other. *Trinitarian theology could be described as par excellence a theology of relationship*, which explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood and communion within the frame of God's self-revelation in the person of Christ and the activity of the Spirit.<sup>36</sup>

Stanley Grenz, a theological scholar and Trinitarian theologian, in particular, writes:

Contemporary Trinitarian theologians, seem to have exchanged [a purely abstract and isolated] theological conception for a more appropriate social understanding of the divine reality that takes seriously the relational – the perichoretic life – of the Trinitarian persons comprising the one God.

. . . According to this Trinitarian communal ontology, the three members of the Trinity are “persons” precisely because they are persons-in-relationship; that is, their personal identities emerge out of their reciprocal relations.<sup>37</sup>

### *Who's In Charge Here?*

Some have misunderstood scripture to suggest that God (the Creator) will put Jesus on the throne thus abdicating God (the Creator's) right to rule. Simply put, this is a human understanding of leadership and lordship. It is an earthly-human way of trying to describe in temporal human terms some understanding of a king relinquishing his authority to a son. On the contrary, scripture does not speak of God (the Creator) abdicating the throne. It does speak of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God (see Acts 2:33; 5:31; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:13; 10:12; 12:2) and of the Lamb

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<sup>36</sup> LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 1. Emphasis mine.

<sup>37</sup> Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 332. Grenz uses the term “perichoretic life.” Perichoresis is a Greek word which means circle dance indicating the intimate and playful relationship believed to be lived within the Trinity. See also LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 270-278. For a detailed discussion of how the Trinity and perichoresis should influence team-based ministry in the church see Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church*, 4-14.

being in or near the center of the throne, but not sitting upon it (see Revelation 5:6; 7:9-10; 7:17). However, Revelations 22: 1-3 describes the “throne of God and of the Lamb.”

Simply, it is a throne which belongs to both. As an alternative, Janell Johnson writes:

It is perhaps this image of God as a community of equals that provides one more way to view and answer the question of how human beings are intended to reflect God’s image. Each divine figure of the Trinity exercises dominion over creation and is involved in the biblical narrative in its own unique, yet cooperative, way. There is no hierarchy in place.<sup>38</sup>

Richard Gaillardetz, a Catholic theologian, suggests that the very nature of the Trinity as non-hierarchical and relational gives us a clear call to live in communion with one another. This communion should, as he proposes, remove from our community life any domination or the manipulation of others for our own benefit or for the benefit of the institutions we serve, especially the Church.

We are called to realize our personhood in the life of communion patterned on the triune life of God. Just as the personal, relational being of God as communion is devoid of any relations characterized by domination, manipulation or subordination, so too is the human person called to reject these kinds of relationships and to realize his or her personal being in relationships which are fundamentally reciprocal, mutual and life-giving.<sup>39</sup>

God mutually uplifts each part of the Trinity without malice, covetousness or jealousy.

“To speak of God as triune is to redefine the power of God in the most radical way. . . .

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<sup>38</sup> Janell Johnson, "Genesis 1:26-28," *Interpretation* 59, no. 2 (2005): 178.

<sup>39</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, "In Service of Communion: A Trinitarian Foundation for Christian Ministry," *Worship* 67, no. 5 (1993): 421.

Although the argument of a non-existent hierarchy within creation and the Trinity deserves more attention than is here given, we submit that the basic treatise of Gaillardetz’s argument stands. For more information concerning the Trinity as communion, see also, Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, 31; 51-57.



God is not the will-to-power but the will-to-fellowship.”<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Johnson in her controversial book, *She Who Is*, describes this Trinitarian relationship in radical, yet powerful terms. For Johnson, God cannot remain a merely philosophical or theological concept that allows our lives to go untouched. Instead, God must radically alter our way of thinking about God’s existence and, therefore, alter our way of treating one another.<sup>41</sup>

For our purposes this is more than a mere abstract theological opinion. In terms of practical theology God invites us to live into the *imago Dei* within us, or, as some might suggest, let it out of us. Because we carry within us the *imago Dei*, God’s expectation is that humanity will also lift one another up in mutually supportive ways. Leadership is therefore less about being a dictator and more about becoming a mentor, encourager and gardener/shepherd.

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<sup>40</sup> Migliore, "The Trinity and Human Liberty," 490. In this article Migliore offers a compelling discussion of God as Almighty, as defined by the Arian Nation of Nazi Germany, and the implications of an all powerful God who plays favorites but is unmoved by the work and passion of Jesus as an equal participant in the Trinity.

<sup>41</sup> See: Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1992). As to the controversy surrounding this work, one of my seminary professors used to say, “Do not read these divergent theologies to merely pick them apart. Instead, read them to understand what your theology is lacking.” Johnson’s theology has often been criticized for its heavy emphasis on a description of God as Sophia. This is an unfortunate criticism, and perhaps an unfortunate name to utilize, as it can be confused with Sophia worship in ancient near eastern religions, the worship of the goddess of wisdom. Nevertheless, I do not propose to either defend or condemn Johnson’s theology, or anyone else’s herein quoted, but rather to glean from them an understanding of what my theology sorely lacks.

In the words of Brian McLaren, “If I seem to show too little respect for your opinions or thought, be assured I have doubts about my own, and I don’t mind if you think I’m wrong. I’m sure I am wrong about many things, although I’m not sure exactly which things I’m wrong about. . . . If, in the process of determining that I’m wrong, you are stimulated to think more deeply and broadly, I hope that I will have somehow served you anyway.” Brian D. McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 20-21.

*Paul and the Trinity*

From a biblical perspective Paul is the first theologian and scholar to seriously develop the doctrine of the Trinity. Keeping in mind that Paul never used the term Trinity, he lays out the framework upon which the church has built a deeper understanding of the doctrine. If we believe that the Trinity holds important clues to a shared style of leadership and a flattened hierarchy, then we must reconcile, in some fashion, why Paul appears to be somewhat conflicted in his treatment of the hierarchy of the Godhead. We must offer some explanation for Paul's Trinitarian theology, especially that which describes God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and yet retains God (the Creator's) authority over, not only all of creation, but over Jesus and the Holy Spirit as well. Paul's struggle appears to be staying consistent in what he believes regarding both equality and hierarchy being part of the Trinitarian experience. Nonetheless, we put forward that in spite of the abstract nature of the Trinity, and the difficulty even Paul had in grasping the complexity of the divine existence of God, the Trinity holds important truths for our perception of pastoral leadership. Mainly, the trinity points toward cooperative relationships, a shared authority and a fluid hierarchy.

At times Paul appears conflicted. Intermittently he promotes the idea that God (the Creator – Yahweh) is very much in control, while Jesus (the Son) is subordinate. In 1 Corinthians 15:27-28 Paul implies that God (the Creator) is the authoritative ruler of the Kingdom. Paul suggests that it is God (the Creator) who sends, puts everything underneath Jesus and makes Christ a subject of God (the Creator's) rule.<sup>42</sup> Also, in

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<sup>42</sup> William Barclay believes “We are used to thinking of the Father and the Son on terms of equality. But here Paul clearly and deliberately subordinates the Son to the Father. . . . [However] It is not a case of the Son being subject to the Father as a slave or even a servant. . . . It is a case of one who, having accomplished the work that was given him to

Galatians he states that God (the Creator) sends the Son as well as the Spirit of the Son, indicating the hierarchy of authority that Paul might certainly have extrapolated from his Jewish roots. However, in Philippians Paul writes:

“<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form.” (Philippians 2:5-7)

Here, Paul poses the argument that Jesus is equal, or at least can be equal, with God (the Creator), but of his own volition Jesus chooses to make himself nothing. God (the Creator) places God (the Son) into human form, and Jesus does in fact give up equality with God for a time, so that humanity might be redeemed.

We want to avoid any intimation that Paul’s writing was uninspired or contradictory. We suggest that the revelation of the Trinity was fully there, if not fully understood. One way to explain his apparent confliction is to highlight the fact that he was clearly laboring as a well-trained orthodox Jewish scholar and as a first century Christian writer with the concept of what will eventually be called the Trinity. Paul’s Jewish struggle to understand the Trinity must have been complicated. It would be a logical Jewish interpretation of the Trinity, especially considering their adherence to strict and simplistic monotheism, one God, one Lord and one Ruler, to place Jesus beneath God (the Creator).

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do, returns with the glory of complete obedience to his crown.” Barclay, William, *The Letters to the Corinthians, The Daily Study Bible Series*; (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA: 1975) 151-152.

See also: Augustine, *On the Trinity* (1894, accessed September 17 2006); available from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130101.htm>. Relevant to the quoted passage is Chapter 8; paragraphs 15-21. Augustine, like Barclay, sees Jesus’ reign on earth as under God (the Creator), but his reign in heaven is in equality with God (the Creator).

Briefly, Paul understood that the Messiah, according to Old Testament prophecy, was a Davidic king returning to the throne. Jesus did not claim he was an earthy king like David, but his claim was to a heavenly kingdom. This claim implied the far more serious assertion that if he were not God, he was, at least, on equal footing with God. The idea of God having a Son and that Son dying on a cross for the atonement of sins, the salvation of humanity and the birth of a new covenant were obviously difficult concepts for an orthodox Jewish scholar who believed in one God. To introduce Jesus as the Son of God on equal footing with the creator of the universe must certainly have appeared, at best, to be polytheism and, at least, blasphemy. It is one important reason why the Sanhedrin and Pharisees had such a difficult time with believing Jesus to be the Messiah. Further, it is a partial reason why Saul persecuted the church before his conversion experience and subsequent name change to Paul. It is quite possible that Paul's training kept him in a quandary over the hierarchical nature of the Trinity. Even well-trained present-day clergy and laity have struggled with the concept of Trinitarian theology after centuries of well-written pieces on the subject which came years after Paul's death. One way to explain any apparent contradictions could be done by calling Paul's knowledge and the extent of his Jewish theological training into question, but we believe it leaves much to be desired in offering a satisfactory explanation.

Perhaps a better explanation is that we may have forgotten that Jesus has both a life of equality with the God (Creator) in eternity and a life of servitude beneath God (the Creator) here on earth. If we agree that Jesus was fully human and fully divine, then Jesus in his incarnation, or humanity, would be subject to the rule and authority of God (the Creator), yet in his divinity Jesus would rule with God (the Creator and Holy Spirit).

It would explain Paul's eloquent words in Philippians 4 that Jesus gave up equality with God to be made in the form of a human being. He became obedient to all things in the created world, including obedience to God and obedience to death. One can surmise that while in this earthly body, Jesus relinquished his authority to God (the Creator), but would be restored to that place of glory above all things as he rejoined God (the Creator and Holy Spirit) in his rightful place.<sup>43</sup> However, this theory has its own problems, and we affirm that "Christ in his incarnation did not cease to be God, but he chose to meet us on our level."<sup>44</sup> It is both kenosis, defined as an emptying of authority, and hypostatic union whereby both natures, human and divine, remain intact. This is different than what kenosis is often referred to as the emptying of the very nature of God in order for Jesus to become human. Jesus did not cease to be God, but he did become obedient to the order God (Creator, Son and Holy Spirit) had instituted in the universe.

### *Of Trinity and Triangles*

How one illustrates the Trinity may reveal more than one may realize. The Trinity, in Paul's view, retains the pyramid structure so often used as a descriptive tool, except that at times Paul seems to see each corner being the identifying part rather than the sides. Thus, during Jesus' time on earth, God (the Creator) would retain the top of the hierarchy while the Son and the Holy Spirit would remain subordinate. Some might argue that this applies not only during Jesus' incarnation but beyond it. They see

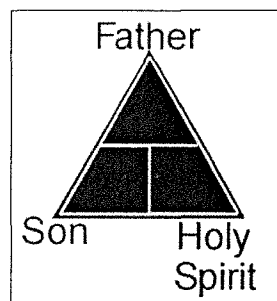
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<sup>43</sup> This is referred to as kenosis theology. The root is taken from the Greek word *kenoó*, meaning to empty. Jesus emptied himself of the nature of God and took on the full life of a human being. However, we suggest this to simply mean an emptying of himself of authority but not of the nature of God.

<sup>44</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *God, Authority, and Salvation*, Essentials of Evangelical Theology, vol. I (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1978), 128. See also 136-138.

this as a biblically accurate description, to place God (the Creator) above Son and Spirit. (See Figure 3, below) However, it does a disservice to the other persons of the Trinity and makes it difficult to advocate the Trinity as one God rather than three deities.

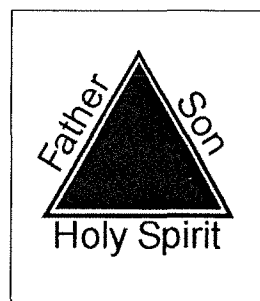
While there may be a distinguishable social order within the Godhead and a hierarchical arrangement above creation, within the Godhead there is no strict hierarchy of personhood as we would understand the term. If there were some “pecking order” within the Trinity, it could be argued



**Figure 3** Trinitarian hierarchy

that God is three separate deities. Each person of the Trinity would have to be separate in order for one to be subjected to some authority under the other. However, if we claim that each person of the Trinity is distinct, yet one, then we must insist that there are no levels of domination to be grasped, at least not eternal levels of domination.

John 1:1-3 states that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”

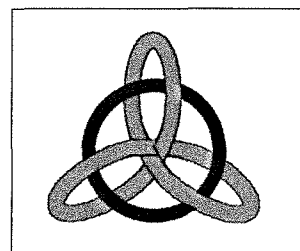


**Figure 4** Trinity as egalitarian hierarchy.

Apparently the writer of John maintains that not only was the Word with God, but nothing was made without the Word taking part in creation. That is a strong statement to indicate the harmonious and egalitarian relationship between God (the Creator) and God (the Son). In this passage the Godhead is equal and lacks the strict hierarchical status some have attempted to place upon the Trinity. Many Trinitarian theologians therefore place the emphasis on the sides of the

triangle rather than the corners. (See Figure 4, above) In this way neither person of the Trinity is truly above or below the other. It would be helpful if the triangle could be rotated so that neither person of the trinity retains the upper hand, so to speak.

The Celtic triangle may be the better option. (See Figure 5, below) It is a series of interlocking ellipses indicating the fluid relationship and existence of the trinity. Each part of the triangle is interlocked, and is sometimes depicted with a circle intertwined within the three, indicating the eternal existence of God; a circle has no beginning and no end. One's eye is drawn into the flow of the triangle in a circular movement up and into each segment. Leadership is therefore fluid. The life blood of authority, love and grace flows cyclically throughout the whole. Again, it would be helpful if we could rotate the triangle around the center thus allowing for each personality of the Trinity to take the lead, so to speak, in the creation, salvation and infusion processes, each part fulfilling that function which we understand it to perform within the life of the Trinity. Yet, the trinity is never separate nor acts truly alone.



**Figure 5** Celtic Trinitarian view – as fluid and eternal.

### *Trinity and Functionality*

We assert with others that it is at least helpful to understand God when we utilize some functional order within the Godhead. Each part fulfills some function that is united with, yet separate from, the other. J. I. Packer and Thomas Oden compiled both ancient and modern creeds to understand the development and nature of evangelical theology. They write of the Trinity:

While all three divine persons are personally involved in all divine works, and while no one of them does or, it seems, could act alone, the Bible usually gives primacy of focus to one over the other two when dealing with the three discernable areas of divine activity.<sup>45</sup>

God (the Creator) is that part of the Trinity which brings transcendence and holy authority, resulting in a God that is unable to be seen by human eyes lest we die. God (the Son) brings incarnation and compassion to the table which results in a God that dwells among us as an advocate with God (the Creator). Further, Jesus is a God who understands our individual lives, temptations and deaths. God (the Spirit) brings the creative power and an indwelling charisma, resulting in a God who is not above, nor merely beside, but a God that actually dwells within and gives us the power we need to live faithful lives. God (the Spirit) is breathed in to the disciples, thus giving them life, (John 20:22).

Jürgen Moltmann sees between the Trinity and creation a logical hierarchical structure (i.e. God the creator over created beings), but this is categorically different than seeing a hierarchical structure within the Trinity. While Moltmann felt that theologians had neglected adequate discussion of the Trinity as three separate persons in favor of unity, he ardently argued for equality as well. For Moltmann, although there is a definite hierarchy with God clearly above creation, God does not stop with this expected conventional hierarchical arrangement. Under the watchful eye of God (the Creator) humanity could have been seen as little more than a piece of created matter underneath God's authority and lordship, but God is unwilling to leave humanity at a distance. Instead God moves into the world as Emmanuel, God with us and, perhaps more

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<sup>45</sup> James I. Packer and Thomas C. Oden, *One Faith, the Evangelical Consensus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 171.



importantly, God for us. With God (the Son) humanity becomes more than mere servants of God; they are called friends.<sup>46</sup>

Stanley Grenz writes, “That the Creator’s intent that humans be the representation of the divine reality means that the goal of human existence is to be persons-in-relation after the pattern of the perichoretic divine life disclosed in Jesus Christ.”<sup>47</sup> Grenz suggests that God has no intention for humanity to share in surface relationships based on human constructs alone. Rather, “The indwelling Spirit seeks to transform the ecclesial community after the pattern of the perichoretic life of the triune God.”<sup>48</sup> This perichoretic life is primarily understood in the agape love, withholding nothing, at the core of God’s existence. Grenz defines this kind of love beyond merely human terms of affection or devotion that allow persons to remain separate individuals.<sup>49</sup> God intends that the community of faith truly share in communion with one another. “To accomplish this goal, the Spirit, by means of incorporating them ‘into Christ,’ places participants in one another.”<sup>50</sup>

Put another way, the ecclesia, as the apostle Paul suggests, is the body of Christ. Just as the Trinity is separate, yet one, so, too, the Church is not merely separate parts

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<sup>46</sup>See: Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981), 213-222.

For an interpretation of Moltmann’s position on this point see: Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, 44-45.

<sup>47</sup> Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, 332.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>49</sup> See a similar argument in: Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 151.

<sup>50</sup> Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, 334.

acting in autonomous ways but rather one organism. She functions as a whole and not as mere individual or separate parts. A body that has parts that functions in different and uncontrollable ways is a body racked with neurological dysfunctions and/or disease. A body that moves together, flows and functions as a whole, is able to perform amazing acts of strength, posture and beauty. It is the difference between a prima ballerina, a figure skater, a gymnast, et. al. and an individual ravaged with the final stages of some neurological disease that has left his or her limbs uncontrollable or paralyzed.

The individual church is not merely a part of the body but represents and contains the entire body of Christ. The whole Church is present in the localized gathering. Just as the entire Trinity is present when Jesus walks the earth, so, too, the Church is present when the local body comes together. Hans Küng says:

“The local Church does not merely *belong* to the Church, the local Church *is* the Church . . . endowed with the *entire* promise of the Gospel, and an *entire* faith, recipient of the *undivided* grace of the Father, having present in it an *undivided* Christ and enriched by an *undivided* Holy Spirit.”<sup>51</sup>

Any attempt to excuse a local congregation for a lack of vision, mission or incarnational power is inappropriate. Each congregation is expected to live a life of faith and grace not as a small part of the body, but as a triumphant recipient of the whole promise and presence of God (Creator, Son and Holy Spirit). Applying a Trinitarian understanding of the Trinity and the Church, and Grentz’s Trinitarian view in particular, we submit that only when the local church truly functions as a whole with core leadership providing the clear signals and communication necessary for fluid movement can she truly be healthy. Core leadership, which includes but goes far beyond the pastor, becomes the link which directs the body as she learns to dance.

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<sup>51</sup> Küng, 121.

Küng and Grenz go much deeper in their thoughts than we have stated here.<sup>52</sup>

They would most likely push our understanding of the Trinity, *imago Dei* and the ecclesia beyond merely functional realities and toward a mystical union of all God's people united in Jesus Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is the work of the Trinity and in particular the Holy Spirit.<sup>53</sup> Further, this is not merely an optional add on to transformational leadership, or any Christian leadership for that matter. It requires a life committed to spiritual formation, not only individually but corporately. Without this depth of spiritual relationship, congregational transformation is most likely destined to fail. "A congregation with a low level of spiritual and relational vitality will tend to manage conflict in ways that preserve the status quo."<sup>54</sup> "Spiritual and relational vitality is the life-giving power that faithful people experience together as they passionately pursue God's vision for their lives."<sup>55</sup> Those who submit to the will and formation of God, to the transformation of leadership first and congregation second, and to sound biblical and shared leadership, will develop a congregation that can move forward as the fully empowered and incarnational church God has called her to be.

### **Summary: Trinitarian Relationships**

Returning to the single purpose of raising the issue of the Trinity in the first place we again put forward that in spite of the abstract nature of theological doctrines

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<sup>52</sup> Admitted as does Moltmann, Oden, LaCugna, et. al.

<sup>53</sup> See also, Jürgen Moltmann, *Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1996), 301 ff.

<sup>54</sup> Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey*, 9. See Herrington, Chapter 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 16. See also Herrington, Chapter 2.

surrounding the Trinity, and the difficulties finite human minds have in grasping the complexity of the divine existence of God, the Trinity can be essentially described as a cooperative relationship, a shared authority and a fluid hierarchy. How exactly that relationship exists is a mystery. The fact that it does exist holds profound implications not only for understanding God, but for how we understand one another and how we live out our lives of faith together in community. It implies that Godly leadership is never a solo endeavor but part of a communion and community of faith. Within the Trinity, leadership is a mutually-shared responsibility, and if we contain the *imago Dei*, then church leadership should reflect the same cooperative relationship. The Church and church leadership, in particular, are invited to have the same humble mind of Christ, not grasping at equality but laying down their lives for others. With this Trinitarian relational foundation we now turn our attention to the biblical account of how this relational God inspired others to lead.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **EFFECTIVE BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP: MOSES A COMMUNAL MODEL**

#### **Introduction**

Moses seems to be a welcome hero and companion for many clergy as his story parallels so much of their struggle to be worthy and effective leaders. He is perhaps one of the most admired leaders in biblical history. From his humble and dangerous beginnings as the infant of a Hebrew slave, through the demanding years of learning to be an effective leader of a sometimes ungrateful nation, to his last surrender to God's will that he not be allowed to enter the Promised Land he had so longed for, there is something that speaks to every person attempting to be faithful in leading others. Within this chapter we will look at Moses and glean from him what faithful and successful leadership looks like in a communal context. Primarily, Moses learns the importance of humble leadership that shares the labor and builds a trusting relationship with a core group of selected individuals who will perform the bulk of the leadership task.

#### **Solitary Heroes Or Relational Leaders**

When we think of biblical leaders we often think of the solitary biblical hero, such as Moses, parting the Red Sea; David, accepting the challenge to fight Goliath; Elijah, confronting the priests of Baal and calling fire down from heaven. We are impressed with the faith and spiritual fortitude of these biblical heroes. We are encouraged by their willingness to stand outside the circle, when others would abandon God or God's call. It has prompted more than one church leader to believe he or she might be the exclusive "chosen one" who will deliver God's people. However, upon closer inspection we begin

to see that faithful and successful biblical leadership is a shared rather than a singular responsibility.

In modernity, most denominations attempted to create a top-down model of leadership based, in part, on interpreting scripture through the lens of an authoritarian hierarchy mindset. However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this authoritarian mindset is only the result of modernity. Control, power and domination have been enticements since the serpent tempted Adam and Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit and become like God, able to know and thus choose on their own between good and evil. Even the apostles argued amongst themselves over who would be the greatest in God's kingdom. (See Mark 9:33-37 and Mark 10:35-45) As we will see, Moses himself attempted to perform an impossible leadership task by taking the entire weight of the Israelite refugees upon his shoulder. He must learn, several times over, the importance of humble leadership that shares the work by empowering a core group of elders in whom he places his trust. Nevertheless, in modernity mechanical models and hierarchal charts provided the impetus to put the pastor in charge of the congregation. Further, they had little trust in the ability of laity to accomplish the task and work of God. They placed a high value on professional clergy who would distribute spiritual goods to laity and provide the church with what they perceived to be appropriate top-down leadership.

### *Elijah and David*

Looking briefly at the above list of biblical heroes, and in reverse order, Elijah is often cited as an important illustration of faithful biblical leadership, and is often seen as a solitary hero of the faith who confronts the priests of Baal. However, Elijah is not a solitary hero as many may first believe. From the following passage we discover that

Elijah believed himself to be literally the sole survivor of God's faithful people, and like Moses the emotional weight was far too much for him:

<sup>13</sup>When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' <sup>14</sup>He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. *I alone am left*, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.' <sup>15</sup>Then the LORD said to him, 'Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. <sup>16</sup>Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. <sup>17</sup>Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. <sup>18</sup>Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.' (1 Kings 19:13-18; emphasis mine)

What Elijah learns is that he is not alone. Nimshi shall be king; Elisha will be Elijah's replacement; Hazael and Jehu will be of some military importance, and there is the greater 7,000 in Israel who will answer God's call. The point being, Elijah is not a solitary hero upon whom the weight of the nation rests. He, like Moses before him, learns that God intends that a larger group of people provide the leadership necessary to move Israel forward.

David is also remembered as the sole protector of God's and Israel's honor as he confronts the giant Goliath on the battlefield. Yet, David confesses that he is not alone; the battle belongs to the Lord. As he progresses in his leadership skills David gathers around him mighty men to command the troops and offer advice. Their exploits can be found in I Chronicles 11-13. Importantly David learned that he cannot fight every battle alone. While winning a single battle may reveal God's hand upon an individual, it is an enormous leap from battling one giant to leading an entire nation. As David grows in his

competence as a leader he understands the value of relationships and the commitment of those who join in the battle with him.

While there are many lessons to glean from David – trust in God, the value of close friends, the honor of those in leadership, etc. – perhaps, for us, the most important lesson we learn from David is that leadership lived with those in battle is fruitful, while leadership separated from the trenches and those doing the work may lead to disaster. By this we mean, when David was with the men in battle God gave David great success. He did not lead from the safety of the backline, nor was he an armchair quarterback, giving orders and remaining hidden. Rather, David led from the middle of the fight, standing beside his men and confronting the enemy. However, when David chose to remain in the safety of the city, far removed from those doing the work, he fell into temptation with Bathsheba and nearly lost the kingdom. (II Samuel 11 – 12) When David stood incarnationally with the people, Israel prospered. When David chose to be the solitary King who gave orders and took whatever he desired, while others did the work, the kingdom and David suffered. Again, we believe that the lives of these heroes suggests that God blesses those who live incarnationally with the members of their congregations and invites participation from the middle rather than being demanded from the top.

### *Moses*

Moses, like Elijah and David, also learned the lessons of relational leadership. While there appears to be little argument that Moses had a unique relationship with God and that he was entrusted with the task of delivering the Israelites from slavery, there is far more to the story than just one solitary hero doing the entire work of God. Moses is entrusted with the hope and plan of deliverance, although at times he seems unaware of



what to do. He is the keeper of the forward-moving vision to one day inhabit the Promised Land. He is also responsible for the general instruction of the people concerning God's law, the selection of those to be in leadership, and the specific mentoring of these individuals to carry out the work. Yet, as we will remember, Moses takes the full weight of an impossible leadership task on himself and begins to wear everyone out.

<sup>13</sup>The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. <sup>14</sup>When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" <sup>15</sup>Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. <sup>16</sup>When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God." <sup>17</sup>Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace." (Exodus 18:13-18; 23)

This passage indicates as straightforward as any in the Old Testament the impression that leadership is to be a shared venture within God's Kingdom. Jethro's case to Moses is simple, "For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone." (v. 18b)

Later, Moses recognizes the same is true in spiritual direction as well as in judicial opinions.

<sup>14</sup>*I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me.* <sup>15</sup>If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me see my misery." (Numbers 11:14-17, emphasis mine)

It is interesting to note that some of the higher criticisms take these passages to task because the passages seem highly improbable, while other scholars seem to accept these passages as authentic because of their high improbability.<sup>56</sup> John Van Seters writes:

[That] in the presentation of Moses' office, some tasks and functions seem to be confused: Moses acts as judge (Exodus 18:13) . . . , Moses is the source of divination (Exodus 33:7-11) . . . , and Moses is the lawgiver, (Exodus 34:29-35). . . How can all these functions be reconciled?<sup>57</sup>

However, this is the very point that the writer of Exodus 11 and 18 is trying to make.

Moses can not carry all of these people by himself. It is of no surprise to us that Moses

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<sup>56</sup> Much of this scholarship is reliable and raises important questions. However, some tend to lean on highly debatable presumptions about who combined what, who had more freedom to extrapolate information, and what these authors were thinking and feeling at the time they compiled the information. Some of this seems to be neither good science, nor good literary scholarship. First, we have absolutely no way of discerning who these "authors" were and if they were individuals or bands of writers. Second, if we do not know who they were how can we have any possible way of discerning what, if anything, they may or may not have been thinking at the time they collected the stories of their people into a comprehensive narrative. I do not doubt that these individuals or groups existed; I only question the highly speculative and personalized approach taken to discuss why this passage can or can not be true based on what a particular unknown writer was thinking, feeling or experiencing at the time. This is why, as suggested early, I have attempted to avoid the conversations of higher criticisms in place of simply taking scripture at face value and dealing with these passages as at least narrative and commentary on the life that the JEDP authors, and thus the early Hebrew theologians and historians, believed God wanted for the Israelites.

Although dated, for a concise and compelling conversation from the higher criticisms about these narratives see: George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1968).

Others see these passages as wholly plausible. In view of the acceptance of Jethro's advice the JPS Torah Commentary suggests, "This extraordinary fact testifies to the reliability of the tradition to its antiquity. In light of the hostility that later characterized the relationships between the Midianites and the Israelites, it is hardly likely that anyone would invent such a story." Nahum M. Sarna, *The Jps Torah Commentary*, Exodus (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 100.

<sup>57</sup> John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 213.

was overextending himself by trying to be all things to all people, and doing very little for anyone.

He is not the first leader to take such an enormous and impossible task upon his shoulders and, unfortunately, he has not been the last. Many congregations today have still not learned the lesson of humility and the value of shared ministry. Daniel Wolpert found in his own congregation the destructive nature of professional clergy at work:

I began to realize that this dependence on professional leadership and the resulting disconnection from God were not the fault of the members of the church but rather of the church at large. The church had essentially communicated that laypeople weren't qualified enough to lead in a church setting – either with regard to basic functional decisions or in spiritual matters. This message not only is not biblical but it has had negative consequences for church communities.<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately, many perceive the solitary biblical hero, standing against the world, as the model for congregational leadership. Yet, as Wolpert asserts, this is not biblically accurate and has grave consequences for the church. It hinders the collective wisdom of the congregation and the power of God to use whomever God may choose. To believe that we are an Elijah, David or Moses who can stand alone against the world and provide adequate leadership on our own, is to fail to truly understand the fuller context of the life of these leaders and those who contributed to their success. Again, we suggest that if pastors accurately engage the stories of these biblical leaders, flatten the hierarchy and nurture key lay leaders who are empowered to: answer their personal call, cultivate intentional relationships, and nurture the congregation into a missional and incarnationally focused living organism, it might be possible to regain lost congregational health and momentum.

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<sup>58</sup> Daniel Wolpert, *Leading a Life with God: The Practice of Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2006), 154.

We now turn our full attention to Moses and the leadership lessons he learned. Primarily we will look at the lessons of: God's provision of leadership, Moses' humble acceptance of outside help, and the necessity of trust that accompanies a shared leadership style.

### **Lesson One: God Provides**

From Moses' first encounter with God, he recognizes his inadequacy to bear the weight of these people and thus fulfill God's plan without help. Moses' conversation with God at the burning bush reveals that this lesson came early. "Who am I?" "What if?" and "I can not" are Moses' responses to God's call. He recognized, to the eventual anger of God, that he was unworthy and incapable to perform the task alone. However, God is not unaware of Moses' inadequacies. Moses is promised both the presence of God and the service of his brother Aaron to manage the task. After the exodus Moses confesses again, "I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me." (Numbers 11:14)<sup>59</sup> Apparently humble leaders, if not also great leaders, need both the presence of God and the help of others.

Old sayings go, "God never calls us to do a task that God doesn't supply all that we need" or "God never calls the equipped; God equips the called." Although these clichés are based on scriptural principle, they are not scripture. The wisdom they convey is the idea that even when we don't have the resources within ourselves to accomplish God's work, God will bring to us the resources we need. It is similar to the promises God uses with Moses at the burning bush. "I will be with you. . . . I will stretch out my hand. .

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<sup>59</sup> Translation by: Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Numbers Xi: Seeing Moses Plain," *Vetus Testamentum* 55, no. 2 (2005): 216.

.. I will make them favorable to you.” (Exodus 3:12; 20, 21, NIV) As we have heard these phrases utilized, they have generally been used to mean all that we need is available to us individually and placed there by a God who will overcome our obstacles, emphasizing notably, a highly personalized gifting. The lyrical phrase, “Just Jesus and me,” comes to mind. However, in light of God’s answer to Moses at the burning bush and Jethro’s advice in regard to a judicial system, we suggest that often the strength needed is the strength of others, and the wisdom which God grants to us is the wisdom to accept the help of a community.

### **Lesson Two: Humility and Accepting the Help of Others**

<sup>13</sup>The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. <sup>14</sup>When Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, “What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?” <sup>15</sup>Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God. <sup>16</sup>When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God.” <sup>17</sup>Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “What you are doing is not good. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace.” (Exodus 18:13-18; 23)

This passage subtly indicates a test of Moses’ ability to rely upon others to carry on the ministry to the people. The question it raises is: Will Moses continue to incorporate a leadership method that is obviously bottlenecking the flow of sound judgment and spiritual direction, or will he be willing to utilize others who also have the gifts necessary to do the work? Seeing the necessity of the appropriate utilization of others within the community is an important step for any leader in realizing that God has not just called one person to do the work, but instead God has empowered an entire

community of faithful disciples to carry out the task. It is a humbling experience to realize one is not the entire solution to a community's leadership needs. In this vein, Wayne Cordeiro advises clergy, "You were not designed to do church alone. You are not a one-man band. No one is."<sup>60</sup> In regards to Exodus 18 Matthew Henry suggests, "There may be over-doing even in well-doing. Wisdom is profitable to direct, that we may neither content ourselves with less than our duty, nor task ourselves beyond our strength."<sup>61</sup> Many church leaders, clergy in particular, believe the entire weight of the church is upon their shoulders. It is not uncommon to believe that everything that happens within the life of the church is the pastor's responsibility.<sup>62</sup> Similar to Moses making solitary judgments for the people, clergy can begin to believe that there is no one who can share this burden with them. Nonetheless, as Jethro points out, disaster is just ahead, for it will certainly wear out the pastor and the people as well.

While Moses was willing to suffer for the sake of his people, "Jethro advised Moses to a better plan. Great men should not only study to be useful themselves, but contrive to make others useful."<sup>63</sup> Moses is learning the importance of being a mentor to others and the director of small leadership groups. He is discovering that relationships

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<sup>60</sup> Wayne Cordeiro, *Doing Church as a Team* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 92-93.

<sup>61</sup> Matthew Henry, *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1981), 84.

<sup>62</sup> See: Wade Rowatt, "Ministering with Ministers and Their Families," *Review & Expositor* 98, no. 4 (2001): 481-602, and, Andrew J. Weaver and others, "Mental Health Issues among Clergy and Other Religious Professionals: A Review of Research," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 56, no. 4 (2002): 393-403. Both of these articles indicate a variety of reasons why clergy suffer from burn out, but one primary reason is the level of work verses the level of appropriate resources for the task.

See also: Stanley Grenz, "Burnout: The Cause and the Cure for a Christian Malady," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, no. 26 (1999): 425-430.

<sup>63</sup> Henry, *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 84.

are integral to successful organizations, be they government, church or family. His greatness will be measured by his ability to accept the wisdom God has offered in Jethro's advice and the help God has provided by gifting others for leadership and service. We are suggesting what appears to be a God-given thread of shared leadership being utilized within the decision making process from both God's dealing with the State of Israel and God's development of the spiritual life of God's people within Judaism. In these passages we witness God's continued work with Moses to develop him into the kind of leader God wanted for God's people. This passage seems to be less about challenging God's ability to perform the task of leadership through one individual but, quite to the contrary, to be about Moses' recognition that he can't do it alone and about God's provision for a system of leadership that shares the burden.

All the same, in Exodus 18 Moses assumes that he can do the job by himself, even when it is blatantly apparent to everyone else that he can not. Either in arrogance, believing himself to be the only one capable of the task, or by ignorance, not realizing there is a better way, Moses takes the full weight of an impossible leadership task on himself and begins to wear everyone out. Whichever the case, arrogance or ignorance, Moses learns again what the Jewish community has often remembered and praised Moses for, humility. Daniel Wolpert suggests that "Without humility we are always in danger of replacing God with ourselves."<sup>64</sup> Moses accepts the counsel of Jethro, obviously seeks God's will, and institutes a form of selection, training and empowerment of people within the community to do the work. He thus takes what some may perceive to be a lesser role, but more accurately a humbled and shared role in the governance of the people.

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<sup>64</sup> Wolpert, *Leading a Life with God: The Practice of Spiritual Leadership*, 53.

Part of Moses' humility comes in the form of accepting the help of others. It is fairly obvious from the narrative that Moses needs an outside consultant and Jethro is the kind of respected outside voice Israel needs. First, it is important to note that Jethro is not just a father-in-law. "Now Jethro, *the priest of Midian* and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done. . . ." (Exodus 18:1, emphasis mine) Jethro is no common individual; he is also a priest. It is not hard to imagine that he is, therefore, one who listens and adheres to the voice and will of God and is reluctant to offer advice on a whim. As to his credibility, after the burning bush experience, Moses himself seeks Jethro's permission to return to Egypt. Moses apparently trusts Jethro's wisdom to do God's will.<sup>65</sup> Secondly, Jethro supplies his own opinion, and importantly, it is from outside the community of Israel. Church consultants often say that congregations need the external perspective of someone outside the local congregation to bring a fresh perspective on an old problem. A congregation's difficulty in moving forward is often that they can not see effectively the state of the church or community in which they have lived for a long time. Without the aid of fresh eyes to see and ears to hear what has become common place and acceptable, a congregation will most likely fail to see what may be so apparent to outsiders of their congregation. Jethro is just such an outside yet respected individual who is able to identify the problem and name it.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See Exodus 4:18. Also note that just prior to the burning bush passage in Exodus 3:1 Jethro is also referred to as, "the priest of Midian."

<sup>66</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, ed. James L. Mays, Exodus (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 198.



### Lesson Three: Empowerment and Trust

<sup>14</sup>*I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me.* <sup>15</sup>If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me see my misery.”

<sup>16</sup>So the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you. <sup>17</sup>I will come down and talk with you there; and *I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself.*” (Numbers 11:14-17, emphasis mine)

The institution of the 70 religious leaders is an important step in creating shared leadership within the spiritual life of the nation of Israel. It would appear that God’s intention is that leadership and responsibility not be placed on any one person’s shoulders. Moses is to share leadership in the faith community, just as he has in the prudent distribution of judicial decisions. Although there is a selection process for leaders, both judicial and priestly, it is evident that a balanced and shared leadership before God and with all God’s people is important to the forward movement of the nation of Israel.

“Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom *you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them.*” (Numbers 11:16, emphasis mine) Significantly, they are known as leaders and officials. Moses is not the only one providing leadership. There appear to be several, at least 70, who are working with Moses in various capacities to lead God’s people. These are not new leaders within the community. What exactly their leadership role is remains unknown. We are simply alerted to the fact that they provide some kind of official function within the community and are known to work with distinction within that capacity.

That these elders will be on a level playing field is implied in the words of God, “Gather for me . . . and let them *take their place there with you*.” (Numbers 11:16, emphasis mine). It is apparent that Moses is permitted the opportunity to select the elders who will help lead Israel, but he is not the one who will ultimately empower them for service. While Moses will retain an important position of authority in the life of the community, the elders will sit *with* Moses in the Tent of Meeting along side of him and not above, nor apparently below, him.<sup>67</sup> It is also apparent that Moses fully recognizes this outpouring of God’s power and authority as a community offering and not as an individual gift given to one person. In Exodus 11:22-29 the Spirit of God falls upon Moses and the 70 elders who themselves begin to speak in ecstatic utterance. Two elders, Eldad and Medad, are delayed in coming to the Tent of Meeting, yet the presence and power of God falls upon them equally, and they are found in the camp prophesying. Joshua complains that they should not be doing so and instructs Moses to tell them to refrain from preaching. “But Moses said to him, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!’” (Numbers 11:29) Moses learns his lesson; he has had enough of trying to lead as a lone administrator and encourages the authority of leadership to spread through those whom God has chosen. “Leadership must be prepared to hear the authentic voice of prophecy in such as Eldad and Medad who here represent the nonprofessional prophets . .

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<sup>67</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *The Jps Torah Commentary*, Numbers (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 86-87.

. the meekness of Moses is a sign of strength, and his example should be followed by kings.”<sup>68</sup>

Eddie Gibbs in his book, *LeadershipNext*, suggests that within this passage we learn that “delegation in itself was not enough; it had to be linked with empowerment of others, which in turn entailed a loss of control. . . . A leader cannot delegate what God has already empowered people to do.”<sup>69</sup> Gibbs quotes two academic and exceptional proponents of corporate leadership, John Kounzes and Barry Posner.

*Empowerment* is an important concept but one often misunderstood; perhaps it’s even an obsolete term. The problem with empowerment is that it suggests that this is something leaders magically give or do for others. But people already have tremendous power. It is not a matter of giving it to them, but of freeing them to use the power and skills they already have. It is a matter of expanding their opportunities to use themselves in service of a common and meaningful purpose.<sup>70</sup>

This style of leadership requires a healthy amount of trust. Leadership that does not trust others will attempt to micromanage the work at hand. If individuals are perceived to be untrustworthy to do the work, or do the work right, leaders and pastors will continuously look over the shoulders of staff and volunteers. Or, leaders will simply do the work themselves while quoting the old adage, “If you want the job done right, you have to do it yourself.”<sup>71</sup> Margaret Wheatley has said:

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<sup>68</sup> Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 5 (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1984), 130.

<sup>69</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *Leadershipnext: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 101.

<sup>70</sup> James M. Kounzes and Barry Z. Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Loose It, Why People Demand It* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 157. As Quoted in Gibbs, *Leadershipnext: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture*, 101.

<sup>71</sup> See: Dale, 67-73.

I have to admit that the greatest challenge for me and those I work with lies not in adopting new methods but in learning to live in the process world. . . . I'm learning to participate with things as they unfold, to expect to be surprised, to enjoy the mystery of it, and to surrender to what I don't know and can never know. . . . I was well trained to create things – plans, policies, events, programs. I invested more than half my life in trying to make the world conform to what I thought was best. It hasn't been easy to give up the role of master creator and move into the dance of life.<sup>72</sup>

Moses is learning to trust God and the work God is doing in and through others. Instead of keeping the creative reigns tightly grasped, he is beginning to loosen his hold on the day-to-day decisions and direction that he need not be involved in. By doing so, he is creating a space wherein he can begin to teach others how to live a spiritual life connected to the Law and worship of God. It is in this “empty” space that true leadership can begin to develop.<sup>73</sup> “What is called empowerment is really just taking off the chains and letting people loose. Credible leaders in this sense are liberators.”<sup>74</sup>

“As the sociologist Max Weber argued a century ago, institutions that endure thrive not because of one leader's charisma, but because they cultivate leadership throughout the system.”<sup>75</sup> Diana Butler Bass has also said as much. In her research with vibrant mainline congregations, she found no thriving congregation where leadership was being driven solely by the pastor. “[Successful] charismatic clergy disperse their

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<sup>72</sup> Margaret J. Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2005), 112.

<sup>73</sup> For a helpful discussion of this kind of empty or “nothingness” space and how God can fill it with God's own presence and the leadership of others, see his entire work: Wolpert, *Leading a Life with God: The Practice of Spiritual Leadership*, specifically 152-159.

<sup>74</sup> Kounzes and Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Loose It, Why People Demand It*, 157.

<sup>75</sup> Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 36.

charisma throughout the congregation to the laity [in leadership].”<sup>76</sup> In other words, they have discovered, like Moses, the strength of shared leadership and have rightfully shared the glory of God with as many within the congregation as possible.

### **Two Modest but Noteworthy Points**

Butler Bass suggests that successful leaders “Are story telling and narrative leaders, who weave the story of their faith between the layers of a congregation and community.”<sup>77</sup> Like Moses they are privileged to hold the collective stories of the congregation, their tradition and the larger biblical narrative, thus guiding the overall direction of the community of faith. Rightfully viewed, they are storytellers wielding the gift of narrative, not taskmasters bearing a whip. The pastor is able to weave the past traditions and present reality throughout the system and move the congregation ahead into both inward spiritual development and outward community ministries. “We saw in these ten [vibrant and successful mainline] congregations, the guiding passion to live out the redeeming power of Jesus in their community.”<sup>78</sup> Moses is such a narrative leader. With him is the story of how God delivered the nation of Israel, and he is entrusted to teach these to the elders, who in turn will teach them to their families and their children’s children.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Diana Butler Bass, “Church for the Rest of Us,” in *Leadership Summit* (Springfield, IL: 2006), personal notes.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Butler Bass, “Church for the Rest of Us.” We shall return to this them of spiritual health as defined by inward grace and outward works in Chapter VI.

<sup>79</sup> See the book of Deuteronomy for Moses’ instructions to the Israelites.

In addition, this vision of inhabiting the Promised Land is not going to happen in a single night. In fact, just getting the Israelites out of Egypt is a lengthy process of negotiation, testing, building trust relationships and eventual flight. It will take forty years of wandering in the wilderness, including the death of one generation, before there will be a people prepared to believe God is capable of fulfilling what God has promised. That is not to say that there are no moments of instantaneous success, such as the parting of the Red Sea, the water that flowed from the rock, the gift of manna, et al., but it appears that God is looking not only at the immediate needs of these people, God is very much interested in the long term sustainability of a people who are faithful and free. Leadership is therefore not about a single event or decision. Leadership is about sharing the journey of faith and looking not only to the destination but paying attention to the relationships along the road we travel.

### **Summary: Moses, Lessons In Leadership**

Moses is an important figure in the life of the Jewish community, but we have here suggested that Moses' story still holds important truths for the Church. Moses learns three important lessons. First, he learns that God will provide all he needs, including the leadership of others, to accomplish the task. Second, he learns humility and that entails the wisdom that he can not do it alone. Forward momentum in the life of his community will mean that he will have to humbly accept the word and advice of those around him and utilize wisdom from multiple sources. Leadership is a shared venture. While Moses is a heroic leader, he is not a solitary hero. He learns very quickly the reality that one person can not handle the load of an entire community. Leaders in congregations will do well to heed Moses' story and avoid either burning themselves out

or the congregation they serve by trying to do it all. Third, Moses discovers the importance of selecting good leaders for the task and trusting that the God who empowers them will do so in such a way that they will make wise choices. Those whom Moses selects have already proven themselves worthy by the unmistakable leadership roles they have already assumed within their own families and clans. Leadership is accurately seen as a gift from God, although that gift can be enhanced and encouraged by proper discipleship and accountability.

From Moses we have discovered that the selection of core leadership is rightfully the place of the spiritual leader of a community. While this can be a shared process, as we shall see with Nehemiah and John Wesley, it nevertheless remains one of the key methods for insuring that the work of God is carried forward in an intentional way.

“Jethro . . . specifies that Moses’ selection of helpers is to be made with great care. . . . from the whole of Israel, . . . to include only [those] who are able, firm, and honest and ‘who have reverence for God.’”<sup>80</sup> We are not suggesting this is a way to manipulate the system to insure that pastors or staffs achieve their preferences. What we are suggesting is that the mentoring of leaders is the primary role of pastoral leadership. This is the role Moses is instructed to assume. “Teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do.” (Exodus 18:20).

We suggest that leadership as depicted by Moses requires an abundance of trust. Leaders must trust that God is at work in the life of the community of faith, and we would add in the life of the larger community in which the congregation exists. If leaders don’t trust God to be at work, then leaders will not be able to let go of the work to be

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<sup>80</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 250.

accomplished. Top-down rules and micromanagement will be the eventual death of the living faith of a community. If, however, leaders trust both God and the people God is at work within, then leaders can begin to let go of the creative reigns and allow God's Spirit to move in extraordinary ways. This is the kind of leadership Moses begins to offer, and we would suggest it is the kind of leadership offered by many biblical leaders including Jesus himself. Jesus demonstrated his ability to trust a handful of faithful who met in the upper room and were empowered for the kind of leadership that trusts others to do the work of God.<sup>81</sup>

A shared leadership style and flattened hierarchy are not easy to assume. As we heard from Margaret Wheatley and others, leaders are trained to provide solutions, give answers and manage congregations. Denominational leaders find it hard to let go of the reigns and encourage outside the box thinking. Clergy find it hard to empower laity, and laity find it hard to assume the role of minister. However, Moses shows us the clear path forward. The people in our congregations are the ones God wants to empower, "[I] would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29b)

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<sup>81</sup> For a full discussion of Jesus' leadership style and his ability to trust others as demonstrated by the Acts 2 narrative see: Wolpert, *Leading a Life with God: The Practice of Spiritual Leadership*.



## CHAPTER IV

### NEHEMIAH: LEADING FROM A SPIRITUAL CENTER

#### **An Introduction to Nehemiah: Storms, Destination and Maneuverability**

Nehemiah is one of the concluding stories of the return and restoration of Jerusalem. He is entrusted with the rebuilding of the wall surrounding David's city. As such Nehemiah demonstrates great leadership skills in spite of the daunting task to rebuild a decimated wall and overcome major opposition by other leaders and governors within the area. Nehemiah is a man who leads from the center of his life. "No creature can fly with just one wing. Gifted leadership occurs where heart and head – feelings and thought – meet. These are the two wings that allow a leader to soar."<sup>82</sup> Nehemiah wept, prayed, investigated, planned and motivated the people to rebuild the wall. He used both his head and his heart to accomplish the call of God upon his life. He was both a spiritual and communal leader. It is of considerable importance that we are reminded that Nehemiah is neither priest or clergy, yet he has exhibited a profound understanding of spiritual formation, remaining open and useful to God's will, and willing to answer God's call upon his life. Like Nehemiah, pastoral leadership, we submit, is therefore first about learning to live from the center of our life; it is life that is connected to God. In the next chapter we will learn from Nehemiah that leadership is living incarnation with a congregation and helping indigenous people find innovative answers to their local and global problems. By nurturing key lay leaders who were empowered to: answer their

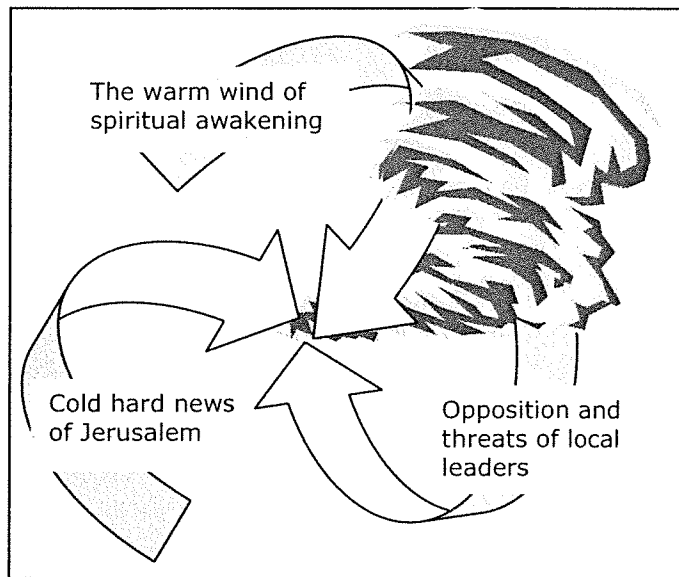
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<sup>82</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, 26.

personal call, and cultivate intentional relationships, primarily with family members in Nehemiah's case, the inhabitants of Jerusalem became a community committed to the mission of rebuilding the wall and the restoration of their spiritual and cultural life.

### *Storms*

Len Sweet has, on numerous occasions, spoken of "the perfect storm" that is threatening the Church today. By this he means the convergence of three systems that are threatening the Christian world in which we live. These systems creating the storm are post-modernity, post-scale, and post-Christendom. Although these are not a part of our current discussion, the reality is Nehemiah is in the midst of his own perfect storm. Three systems are converging to create Nehemiah's own personal and corporate tempest. The first front



**Figure 6** Nehemiah's perfect storm.

is the cold hard news that blew in from Jerusalem. It is a chilly wind that pierces his soul and echoes the loss of hope of those in Jerusalem. It initiates a chain reaction beginning with his identification with his people's pain and a desire to return and help them. Next to this wind comes the warmth of a personal spiritual awakening that brings confirmation of an undeniable call to return to Jerusalem. When these two winds combine he can do

nothing less than answer the call. First, it drives him to his knees before a Holy God which will eventually bring clarity of mind and purpose. Secondly, at the right moment, when asked by the king why he is so distressed and what he could possibly do to help, these two winds swirl into Nehemiah a clear plan of action. (See Figure 6, above) If these are the only winds that gust around Nehemiah he should have little to worry about. However, add to these the angry wind of opposition from Sanballat and Tobiah, nearby community leaders who oppose the rebuilding of the wall as well as Nehemiah's administration, and the task of leadership becomes much more threatening. The dream of revitalization, and the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem, is in danger of never surviving such a storm, but the words of Nehemiah ring a resounding hope, "The God of heaven is the one who will give us success." (Nehemiah 2:20) "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, who is great and awesome, and fight for your kin, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes." (Nehemiah 4:14)

Judith Neal, Benyamin Lichtenstein and David Banner suggest that spiritual transformation, like Nehemiah's, consists of three events in an individual's life.

For example, some of the typical 'causal factors' of spiritual transformation are: a spiritual crisis such as a life-threatening illness, a divorce, losing one's job a profound spiritual experience that is the result of a near-death experience, a personal epiphany experience . . . being alone in silence for an extended time, and being in nature. . . .

. . . the integration of spiritual transformations appears to unfold in three stages:

- (1) *Dark night of the soul*, where previous life anchors no longer have nay meaning.
- (2) *Spiritual searching*, a search for new core spiritual principles.
- (3) *Spiritual integrating*, learning to apply those principles in key aspects of one's life, including work.<sup>83</sup>

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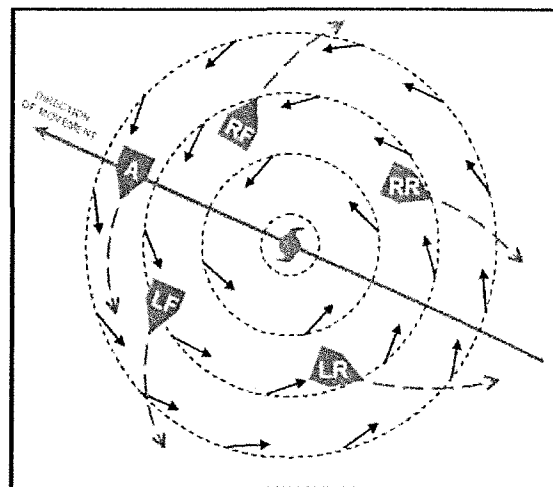
<sup>83</sup> Neal, Lichtenstein, and Banner: 178.

The work of these authors provides an excellent outline of the first few verses of Nehemiah. He is confronted with the cold-hard news of the hopelessness in Jerusalem which makes his life in Artaxerxes' court have little meaning. Nehemiah enters a dark night of the soul as he searches for a way forward. He begins to fast and pray; searching for some way to find meaning in his present situation. Finally, he integrates his new call into a plan that initiates an opportunity to request help from the king for a return to Jerusalem. "For some people the transformation process creates a severe conflict between the culture of the organization and individual needs for spiritual development. In this case people tend to leave their jobs, either physically or emotionally."<sup>84</sup>

### *Destination and Maneuverability*

The NOAA association has presented this important reminder to mariners:

Mariners must be cautioned never to leave themselves with only a single navigation option when attempting to avoid a tropical cyclone in the Atlantic. Sea room to maneuver is not too significant a factor in the wide open waters of the North Atlantic, but can become an extremely significant consideration when operating in the confined waters of the Western Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico. More often than not, **EARLY DECISIONS TO LEAVE RESTRICTED MANUEVER AREAS ARE THE MOST SENSIBLE CHOICE.** [sic]<sup>85</sup>



**Figure 7** Maneuverability of vessels in a hurricane.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Eric J. Holweg, *Mariner's Guide for Hurricane Awareness in the North Atlantic Basin* (accessed June 12, 2006); available from <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/marinersguide.pdf>.

Backing into a corner, hunkering down in a bay or failing to leave enough maneuvering room are costly and potentially deadly mistakes. Remaining or staying in the close quarters of the mainland shore line or remaining between islands limits a ship's ability to maneuver in such a way to keep the bow pointed in the right direction to maneuver through the waves and wind properly. Leaders and congregations who fail to make room for maneuverability, those who hold onto familiar territory, may well be sealing their fate. In the midst of a storm long-range plans are set aside for the immediate need to maneuver quickly and appropriately to the changes taking place on a moment-by-moment basis. In fact, it is a mistake to believe that ships only "steer into the wind" during a storm. (See: Figure 7, above)<sup>86</sup> It is not steering into the wind that will necessarily save mariners, but knowing when to steer into the wind. It is more accurately an issue of maneuverability. Maneuverability is enhanced by knowing where in the storm a ship is currently located and placing the ship in the proper direction to steer into the wind at times and with the wind at others. The point being, maneuverability is vital to the safety and survivability of the ship and crew. Steering in one direction only or allowing the shoreline to limit a ship's ability to maneuver is costly. Sticking to a single path may put the ship dangerously perpendicular to the wind and waves thus resulting in the potential for capsizing.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. (accessed). In part, the caption reads: "Vessel at A: put wind at 160° relative to the ship on the starboard side making best course and speed into the left semi-circle of the system. Vessel at RF and RR: put the wind at 045° relative to the ship on the starboard side attempting to make best course & speed to clear the system. . . . Making best course and speed to increase separation between ship and tropical cyclone."

Although Nehemiah has an overpowering call and vision for the restoration of Jerusalem, his strategy, however, is subject to change. Nehemiah is a remarkably flexible individual. He is willing to wait for the right moment, apparently three months, before the king notices his sadness and asks Nehemiah to explain his countenance. He waits three days, after arriving in Jerusalem, before investigating the wall. After construction begins and various oppositions raise their ugly head, he shifts the work hours, raises the security and realigns the workers into families or clans to complete the task. The goals remain the same, the rebuilding of the wall and the restoration of Jerusalem, but the specific details are shifted to contend with the changing threats.

### **Nehemiah: A Spiritual Leader**

#### *Beginning with God*

<sup>5</sup>I said, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; <sup>6</sup>let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned. . . . <sup>10</sup>They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand. <sup>11</sup>O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!” At the time, I was cupbearer to the king. (Nehemiah 1:5-7; 10-11)

That Nehemiah is a spiritual leader is no doubt. He faithfully obeys the calling God places upon his life, and skillfully leads the Israelites to complete the task of rebuilding the city wall in Jerusalem. This is accomplished, not through the whip of a heavy taskmaster, but through the spirit of a man connected to a gracious and loving God. Through Nehemiah we begin to understand that our search for God begins not only with God’s desire to be found, but ultimately it begins with God’s search for us. We never

initiate; we only respond. Our efforts, goals and self-centered grasping will not bring God closer. It is critical to remember that God initiates a search for us and that God is already involved in transformation.<sup>87</sup> Eugene Peterson confirms:

Prayer is not something we think up to get God's attention or enlist [God's] favor. Prayer is *answering* speech. The first word is God's word. Prayer is a human word and is never the first word, never the primary word, never the initiating and shaping word simply because *we* are never first, never primary.<sup>88</sup>

Nehemiah is about to return to Jerusalem some 30 to 50 years after others have already begun the work of restoration. He is only a part of God's plan that begins many years earlier. He is answering God's call from deep within his soul, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. As leaders we will do well to remember that God was here long before we showed up, and God will be here long after we are gone. In the middle God simply invites us to remain faithful to the work and purposes of God.

Neil Hamilton writes:

As I read the New Testament, the life of faith is drawn ahead by the Spirit rather than driven from behind by the self. Indeed, so long and insofar as the journey is driven by the self, faith is inauthentic. The self's idea of faith is so laced with illusion that its quest must be displaced by the Spirit's drawings in order for authentic faith to emerge and mature.<sup>89</sup>

First, he makes the important point that God is pulling us toward a living faith. Secondly, he point out that our agendas can be filled with unconscious, selfish motives and based on naive conjectures about future events. If our agendas lack respectable motives and the ability to effectively plan for future events, it is entirely necessary to put our agendas

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<sup>87</sup> See: Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *How People Grow* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001), 26-60. Especially relevant is their chart on page 35 that depicts the biblical difference between God and humans. The main point being: God is the source and creator, we are dependent upon God.

<sup>88</sup> Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, 32-33.

<sup>89</sup> Hamilton, *Maturing in the Christian Life: A Pastor's Guide*, 29.

aside and rely upon the God who created, the God who planned and the God who can prepare us for a future that only God knows.

Neal, Lichtenstein and Banner's research, as cited earlier, discovered that an emphasis on spiritual values and processes could only bring an organization to the brink of transformational growth. Their work affirmed the reality that there is much more to spiritual transformation than can be deduced by scientific methods.

Yet, in all cases the transformation they helped generate were sparked not through rational efforts at all: the actual "cause" of transformation, according to the data, was expressed by these practitioner/theorists in terms of "grace", "magic" and "miracles". . . . According to these case studies, there is a logical framework that produces rational actions in the first stages of an intervention effort. However, at a critical threshold it is non-linear logic and spontaneously felt action – what these individual termed "grace", "magic", and "miracles" . . . that actually supports organizational (and personal) transformation,"<sup>90</sup>

In short, there should be no cause and effect thinking or attempt to manipulate others for the goals and desires of a religious institution, no matter how altruistic they may appear. Spiritual formation, and we include leadership, is not a tool to manipulate God or others to solve our perceived problems, but it is an opportunity to embrace the mystery of God as God gives growth.

### *First, A Little Prayer*

As we can see from the opening passages of Nehemiah, he fasts and prays for several days after hearing the news of Jerusalem's condition. "Before formulating a plan or recruiting support, Nehemiah's first response [is] to go before God in prayer."<sup>91</sup> The

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<sup>90</sup> Neal, Lichtenstein, and Banner: 179-180.

<sup>91</sup> Knute Larson and Kathy Dahlen, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, ed. Max Anders, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 133.



above is evidently more of a summary of the prayer he keeps before God. Importantly, this prayer does not bring him an immediate answer. Nehemiah fills himself with the right things – openness to God, relationships, and information that give him the ability to discern the right moment and the right action when it comes. Daniel Wolpert explains that this kind of authentic prayer, like Nehemiah's, truly seeks God's will and movement instead of some preconceived idea about church growth or the latest leadership fad.

Once you begin to pray into the journey of your community, you will develop, as the Serenity Prayer says, the courage to change the things that can be changed, accept the things that can't, and the wisdom to know the difference. . . . [You will be] concerned about encouraging members of the community to become aware of their collective journey. Encouraging this awareness enables them to focus on where Jesus is leading them instead of where he isn't going.<sup>92</sup>

Nehemiah uses the prototypical pattern for prayer: 1.) Adoration and praise of God; 2) repentance, both personal and corporate; 3) the remembrance of God's promises and 4) supplications – a request for help. It is the same pattern found in Isaiah 9, in the Lord's Prayer, and in many of the Psalms and other prayers throughout the Bible.<sup>93</sup> First, Nehemiah's prayer begins with the goodness and greatness of God. Second, he confesses on behalf of the Israelites for a rebellious life. Third, he remembers God's promises to Moses and that the covenant depends upon Israel's obedience. When Israel sinned, the covenant was broken and is the current reason they are in such a terrible situation. This is a reminder that God loves the Israelites and that God is in relationship with this nation.

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<sup>92</sup> Wolpert, *Leading a Life with God: The Practice of Spiritual Leadership*, 123.

<sup>93</sup> Cyril J. Barber, *Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1976), 22. Barber sees this prayer as similar to the pattern of the Lord's Prayer. Larson and Dahlen, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 133. These authors also see the pattern as typically orthodox. However, H.G.M Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 16 (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publishing, 1985), sees the combination of elements as unparalleled; 167.

Fourth, Nehemiah asks God to grant him success in restoring the wall of Jerusalem, so that the nation of Israel will not be ashamed anymore.

Nehemiah's prayer begins with the goodness and greatness of God and a reminder of the promises God has made to Moses and, thus, to Israel. However, this should not be viewed as *reminding* God of promises, as if God needed reminded. In truth, does an omnipotent God need to be reminded of anything? This reminding is more for Nehemiah's benefit, not God's, nor was his prayer some attempt to bind God to a promise that hinged on some ritualistic behavior of Nehemiah's. Rather, his prayer is a response to God's goodness and mercy and the encouragement that God will fulfill God's promises in due time and when Israel begins to live in relationship to God again. Nehemiah mentions the covenant, but not as a business contract between two people, such as, "You promised us your aid; therefore, you must act on our behalf." Instead, he says, "[It is God] who keeps covenant *and steadfast love* with those who love him and keep his commandments." (Nehemiah 1:5, emphasis mine). The NIV interprets this phrase as "his covenant of love." Nehemiah sees the love of God and Israel's love in return as the key to the covenant. It is a covenant of love, and it is a covenant of relationships.<sup>94</sup>

Nehemiah fasts and prays for several days after hearing the discouraging words of the situation of Jerusalem and the people living there. Fasting is not rightly seen as leveraging God into submission. It is not holding one's breath or engaging in a hunger strike to get God's attention. Rather, it "serves to remind us of our dependence on

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<sup>94</sup> Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, ed. James L. Mays, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1992), 65.

God.”<sup>95</sup> It is simply, and yet profoundly, an important reminder that we are dependent upon God for all things, including our sustenance and strength. According to Marjory Thompson:

In ancient Jewish tradition, fasting had two primary purposes. The first was to express personal or national repentance for sin; fasting was a form of humble supplication before God in the face of imminent destruction or calamity. . . . The second purpose of a fast was to prepare oneself inwardly for receiving the necessary strength and grace to complete a mission of faithful service in God’s name.<sup>96</sup>

Nehemiah encompasses both of these reasons for fasting within his prayer to God.

Neither reason causes him to attempt manipulation of God for his own purposes. He fasts as an act of contrition, and he fasts in preparation to be used by God.

Spiritual formation is not a mechanical and emotionless ten-step plan to obtain what one wants but is rather a slow organic process of growth towards a deeper relationship with God. Leaders desiring to use spiritual formation to manipulate the purposes of God and the faith of their congregations toward their own personal goals and point of view are out of step with the intention of God. Through Nehemiah we become aware of our need to allow spiritual formation to alter our relationship with God first and secondly, or simultaneously, to alter our relationships with other leaders and congregations. However, this formation is not in a way that we might choose but, more willingly, in a way of God’s own choosing.

Parker Palmer speaks of a “circle of truth” which is a creation of the Quaker faith. While the rules and application of these groups are beyond the scope of this dissertation, the goal of these meetings is nonetheless a significant depiction of what Nehemiah is

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<sup>95</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 69-70.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

after. It is, first of all, not an attempt to offer answers, induce solutions, or manipulate responses. It is rather a slow and gentle listening to the presence of God, the heart and truth that exists within each of us, the inner teacher. “All that matters here is that we hold each other in a space where the soul feels safe enough to speak its truth – and we feel safe enough to become more receptive to the implications of that truth for our lives.”<sup>97</sup>

Nehemiah, through fasting and prayer, connected to the inner truth of his calling, the desperate situation of those in Jerusalem and the response that only he could make, “Here I am, use me.”

Perhaps this passage of scripture best describes Nehemiah’s and our current understanding of spiritual formation:

<sup>1</sup>The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup>“Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” <sup>3</sup>So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. <sup>4</sup>The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and *he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.* (Jeremiah 18:1-4, emphasis mine)

### **Retraditioning: Casting Our Traditional Anchors Forward**

Len Sweet suggests that our traditions are an anchor but not used as we might expect. Most people know that an anchor is used to hold a ship fast in the midst of a current. However, there is another use for an anchor; it is cast ahead of a ship and used to pull the ship forward as the hands on deck haul the anchor line. It is in this fashion that Ezra and Nehemiah recasts the traditions of their people forward and thus pulls the inhabitants of Jerusalem together and toward the goal of a restored nation.

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<sup>97</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 122.

<sup>2</sup>Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup>He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. . . . <sup>10</sup>Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” <sup>11</sup>So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” <sup>12</sup>And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them. (Nehemiah 8:2-3; 10-12)

Nehemiah connects to the inhabitants of Jerusalem’s past through the “revival of the Torah.” Although it is really Ezra who uncovers the scriptures that have long been forgotten and calls the community to listen to the Word of God, as a leader Nehemiah plays an influential role in calling the people to re-center their lives around God’s Word. Some of them have heard of these passages, perhaps, only in stories, never having heard for themselves the power and beauty of God’s holy Word. Here is the picture of a people thirsty for a connection to God through the traditions of their ancestors. Some of their traditional practices had simply been forgotten, and some had been reassigned an unfamiliar meaning from their original spiritual objective. The Festival of the Booths, for example, had apparently become a celebration specific of the harvest time. Its meaning and significance as to the celebration of God’s provision for the Israelites during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness had been lost. Ezra and Nehemiah reconnect to this exodus tradition as a way of leaning into their past to bring meaning for their present and future situation. They feel free to re-tradition the festival into the current life of Israel. They are experiencing a second exodus as God delivers them from slavery and captivity

in a foreign land.<sup>98</sup> Further, they are called again to obedience to the Law of God, just as the first exodus participants were called to obedience when the law was originally given.

By renewing the celebration of Booths, Nehemiah helps draw attention:

Away from the false security the completion of the walls may have engendered, as the people physically reenact their forebears' temporary dwelling in booths and reflect on their dependence on God for all things . . . [it] thus serves as a graphic object lesson for the people. The law does have the power and ability to order the fledgling community and can be depended on to provide the security and sense of continuity with the past they so desperately need.<sup>99</sup>

In recent years, according to significant research done in 50 vibrant mainline congregations across North America, Diana Butler Bass argues that some mainline congregations are finding life again. Her research found a common thread in every healthy mainline congregation that they studied.

Thus, these congregations both carry and craft tradition in intentional ways – “fluid retraditioning” – while the surrounding culture has disconnected itself from the moorings of a (mostly) Protestant past in a detraditioned world. All congregations bear tradition. But practicing congregations both bear traditions and transform them at the same time – they are reflexive communities. Whereas establishment-style mainline churches viewed tradition as fixed, practicing congregations see tradition as dynamic, fluid and lived reality.<sup>100</sup>

Again, Len Sweet suggests that our traditions are an anchor that can be used to pull our congregations forward. Like an anchor cast ahead of a ship and used to pull the ship forward, so too a congregation can cast their traditions forward and provide both stability and a means of moving into her future. In Hebrews 6:18-19 we read “The biblical image is clearly one of casting an anchor ahead, not behind, and then pulling oneself

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<sup>98</sup> See: Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 295-297.

<sup>99</sup> Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 99-100.

<sup>100</sup> Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church*, 53.

forward.”<sup>101</sup> In this metaphor, tradition doesn’t serve to hold us back, as much as it is used to move us forward. To live this kind of vibrant-spiritual-life, mainline congregations need to first reconnect to their past through a fluid life of present, past and future. It is by living in the present through a connection to our past, and then envisioning a future for our congregations and communities by recasting our traditions in relevant and living ways, that we will move forward effectively into a postmodern world. Retraditioning will give us both the significant weight of our past and thus provide a sense of stability that will be needed to pull us into our uncertain future.

Butler Bass uses the term retraditioning in this forward casting fashion. Retraditioning is not dependence upon the old way of doing things simply because “we have always done it this way.” Rather, these vibrant congregations are suggesting that we connect to our past traditions as a means to connect to God and community and not just a stale connection to history. It is rightly seen as reviving the old in order to reconnect to the living God. God has met us here before; surely God will meet us here again. Further, she suggests that these vital congregations have learned how to make tradition speak and sing to a new generation. They are living traditions that grow, adapt and flow.

In a subsequent work, Diana Butler Bass and Joseph Stewart-Sicking state:

For the pilgrim congregations we met in our research, renewal based only in numerical growth – in terms of fixing the building, adding to the membership rolls, or proselytizing – was not the primary goal. Rather, in every case, the pastor and people sought to create or renew a congregation that would touch the lives of spiritual nomads – serving as spiritual bridges from the nomadic life to a life of faithful discipleship. . . . resist the urge toward becoming a program of

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<sup>101</sup> Sweet, *Aqua Church: Essential Leadership Arts for Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture*, 72-73.

church growth. . . . [and] represent an encouraging possibility of Christian communal life, that of the organic body of Christ journeying toward shalom.<sup>102</sup>

Again, we hear echoed the reality that transformation and spiritual renewal is not a program that can simply be designed at the top and handed down to a local congregation. Each church is unique; every situation requires an indigenous solution. Transformation is not primarily, or even remotely, about property, keeping the door open one more year, or institutional survival; rather, transformation is, first of all, spiritual transformation within the life of a congregation and most likely occurs within the life of leadership first.

According to Butler Bass' research in mainline congregations, this transformation may occur through a connection to our rich spiritual heritage and intentionally engaging in ancient practices of the Christian faith. Namely, she suggests the practices of hospitality, discernment, healing, contemplation, testimony, diversity, justice, worship, reflection and beauty.<sup>103</sup> However, each community of faith must discern for themselves those traditions and practices that will lead them into the presence of God and back out into the world around them. As we have already argued, and will specifically suggest in a subsequent chapter, for our congregation this is obviously a retraditioning of our Wesleyan spiritual heritage through the use of small relational and accountability groups and through missional works designed to touch the life of our community and world. As we shall see, this is our rich heritage of inward spiritual holiness and outward works of faith that affects both the participant and the community at large.

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<sup>102</sup> Diana Butler Bass and Joseph Stewart-Sicking, *From Nomads to Pilgrims* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 168.

<sup>103</sup> See: Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church Is Transforming the Faith* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2006), and the chapters titled after the above list.



**Summary:**  
**No Quick Fix but Slow Organic Growth**

From Nehemiah we learn that pastors or leaders who use spiritual formation to control or elicit a particular response are buying into the vending machine, magical thinking and manipulative behavior that will try to instruct God in how to conduct business. It is an attempt to manipulate God and their congregations toward the knowledge and actions they deem necessary to facilitate growth. This, however, is not what Nehemiah was about; rather, he remembers and recognizes his dependence upon God for all things. Nehemiah's prayer is less about manipulating God into performance and far more about God's getting Nehemiah's mind and spirit prepared for the work ahead of him. His prayer is not forcing fruit from God, but it is allowing God to prepare the soil of his spirit for the seeds and work that God is about to do.

Pastors, of all people, should understand the discouragement of being treated like a vending machine. One pastor laments:

I feel like a vending machine dispensing products. Someone pushes a button, and out comes a sermon. Someone pushes another button for a solution to a personal or administrative problem. The family pushes buttons, and out come dollars or time involvement. The community pushes other buttons, and I show up at meetings, sign petitions, and take stands.<sup>104</sup>

God will have little to do with this kind of manipulation.<sup>105</sup> Spiritual formation is not about getting what we want from God as if God is obliged to deliver our request.

Spiritual formation is not about searching scripture to discover the promises of God so that God can be held captive to the felt needs of a people. Instead, spiritual formation

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<sup>104</sup> Hamilton, *Maturing in the Christian Life: A Pastor's Guide*, 18.

<sup>105</sup> For a brief selection on God's abhorrence of idols and the foolish magical thinking which accompanied them see: Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 4:15-31; Isaiah 44:8-20; I Samuel 12:20-25; Jeremiah 10:1-14; Ezekiel – various references but especially chapters 4; 11; 14; and 21; Habakkuk 2:18-20; I Corinthians 8:4-8; and 10:18-22.

and spiritual discernment are about learning to trust in a God who will surely deliver God's people from captivity and draw them closer to God's own self.

Dallas Willard astutely points out:

But the one lesson we learn from all available sources is that there is no “quick fix” for the human condition. The approach to wholeness is for humankind a process of great length and difficulty that engages all our own powers to their fullest extent over a long course of experience. But we don't like to hear this.<sup>106</sup>

In a world where we want instant relief, quick fixes and no obligation memberships we are saddened to discover this is not the case with spiritual maturity and church health. To attempt to utilize spiritual formation to immediately fix a broken congregation, or in Nehemiah's case a broken wall and nation, or any other goal that is deemed beneficial or desirable, no matter how altruistic it may appear, is to miss the point that spiritual health and maturity is an organic process that takes time. “When I [Nehemiah] heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned *for days*, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” (Nehemiah 1:4, emphasis mine) Nehemiah, clergy and other spiritual leaders are not changing light bulbs or spark plugs; they are planting seeds, tending a garden and reaping a harvest.

Spiritual growth, like organic growth, is mainly a slow and deliberate process, the change of which is typically imperceptible to the naked eye. Beneath the surface there is an entire world that is anything but static. “Don't forget that most early growth is small-scale and happens underground where you can't see it. So, enjoy the mystery.”<sup>107</sup>

Underground, roots are stretching, soaking up nutrients, and laying the solid foundation

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<sup>106</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 1988), 70.

<sup>107</sup> Dale, *Seeds for the Future: Growing Organic Leaders for Living Churches*, 32.

of an organic system that will be able to support the eventual growth above ground into the surrounding world. Nehemiah's prayer, and what we believe to be a spiritual life long before the news of Jerusalem reached his ears, is this kind of slow-soaking of God's mercy and grace that gave him the ability and boldness to accomplish the work of God.

A successful garden requires recurring and rhythmic time spent planning, sowing seeds, watering, weeding, fertilizing, and dozens of other nurturing activities. While none of these should be viewed as magical or mechanical methods of getting one's will accomplished, they can be seen properly as mystical and rhythmic. There is an important place for planning, visioning and setting goals, as long as leaders remember that God owns the vineyard, and God gives the growth. Leaders may, and should, put themselves in the right place, at the right time, with the right tools to effectively prepare and tend the garden, but God, in God's own timing and mysterious wisdom, causes growth to occur. With God's help and consent leaders assist in the creation of an environment in which spiritual growth and activity may occur, but ultimately it is God who chooses the speed, variety and path of that growth.

To this we would simply add that the soil in which God plants seeds is varied, and not every seed sown will result in growth. (See: Matthew 13:3-9) Nevertheless, the sower scatters seeds in the hope and faith that some seeds will take root in the life of a congregation and community. While some seeds will never survive, some of them will begin to take root, sprout and raise their life towards heaven in response to the grace and mercy of God's love. Yanking a plant by its stem expecting to cause growth will never do. Instead, a leader's response is faithful, slow, nurturing and methodical; giving room

for God to do what only God can do, cause growth. “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” (1 Corinthians 3:6)

However, un-manipulative, patient and slow should not be taken to mean unintentional. Spiritual formation is an intentional endeavor, as is leading a congregation. This is not a *laissez-faire* style of leadership which offers no suggestion for the future formation of the community. While leadership does not “stand over” or dominate the congregation, leadership does join the community in the discernment of a way forward and in the labor to be done. Planting seeds means that seeds are given to be sown, and a leader is offered a garden in which to become a faithful steward. As our grandmother used to say, “You can’t plant a garden if you don’t get your hands dirty.” We suggest that “getting your hands dirty” means that leaders, like Nehemiah, will live intentionally as examples of authentic spiritual disciples who are deeply connected to the call and Spirit of God, to the re-traditioned forms of spiritual practice and to the community around them, meaning both the Christian community and to the stranger who is in search of a home.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **NEHEMIAH LEADING FROM AN EMOTIONAL CENTER**

#### **Introduction**

Nehemiah is both a spiritual and communal leader. We are mindful that Nehemiah is neither a priest nor clergy. Yet, as we have seen, he exhibits a profound understanding of spiritual formation, remaining open and useful to God's will, and answering God's call upon his life. Like Nehemiah, pastoral leadership, as we demonstrated in the previous chapter, is therefore first about learning to live from the center of our life; it is life that is well connected to God. We now turn to Nehemiah as community leader. We will learn from him that leadership is living incarnation with a congregation and helping indigenous people find innovative answers to their local and global problems. By identifying with his people and their situation, by helping them to connect emotionally to the work and by creating both urgency and personal meaning in the labor, Nehemiah wins not only their physical assistance but their hearts as well. From the beginning Nehemiah creates a work of the people, for the people, and by the people. By utilizing his emotional intelligence, nurturing key lay leaders who are empowered to answer their personal call, and cultivate intentional relationships, primarily with family members in Nehemiah's case, the inhabitants of Jerusalem become a community committed to the mission of rebuilding the wall and the restoration of their spiritual and cultural life. All this he accomplished in the face of open and hostile opposition.

### **Nehemiah a Community Leader**

<sup>1</sup>In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was served him, I carried the wine and gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before. <sup>2</sup>So the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This can only be sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. <sup>3</sup>I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors’ graves, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” <sup>4</sup>Then the king said to me, “What do you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup>Then I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors’ graves, so that I may rebuild it.” (Nehemiah 2:1-5)

### **Leading with Emotional Intelligence**

While assessing the situation is necessary, getting the right plan in place is important, and casting a vision is essential; there is still more to leadership than mentally managing a group of people toward a common goal. If this is all there is to leadership then anyone could do it effectively, our congregations should be healthy and the Kingdom of God should already have been realized. While there are a multitude of factors that contribute to effective leadership, there is at least one dimension that is often overlooked, a piece of leadership that Nehemiah evidently understood and utilized to his benefit, and a piece that was crucial to his growth as a leader. His success depended upon the emotional intelligence or heart of leadership. Today, this success begins with emotionally intelligent leaders becoming aware of their own emotional health and then with the emotions of others around them. “Without a healthy dose of heart, a supposed ‘leader’ may manage – but he does not lead.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, 21.

*Nehemiah Emotionally Aware of Himself & Others*

Nehemiah is well aware of his own emotions and heart for the work of God. In the opening verse of Nehemiah's memoirs he recalls how he is told about the terrible news of the condition of the remnant of Israel in Jerusalem. Without shame he sits down and weeps. Note that in verse 2:2 the king recognizes his sadness. He was unable or unwilling to hide his grief. Further, when the king notices his grief and asks for a reason Nehemiah comments, "I was very much afraid." (Nehemiah 2:2b). His recollection is not just about the facts of the work to be done, nor the accomplishments he brings about. He remembers his feelings and how those emotions bring him back again and again to reliance upon the strength and wisdom of God. Later, in verse 2:12, Nehemiah uses an entirely appropriate phrase for emotionally intelligent leaders, "I told no one what *my* God had put into *my heart* to do for Jerusalem." (Nehemiah 2:12, emphasis mine). He does not say, "What God put into my mind," but "What *my* God put into *my heart*." He understood this was not just an academic pursuit of knowledge, nor was it a military pursuit of strength. This was a matter of the heart, an emotional connection to the work and to the people. Further, it is not just God who did this thing, but "*my* God" that put this into his heart, a subtle indication of Nehemiah's relationship to God.

Nehemiah is in touch with the emotions of others. His opening prayer is not so much for the fallen walls of Jerusalem, as one might expect, but his prayer is for the servants, the people of Israel who are obviously in distress. His plea is that God's ear would "be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel." (Nehemiah 1:6)

Interestingly, he not only described his own agenda as a "heart" matter, but he also says of the people, "So we rebuilt the wall, and all the wall was joined together to

half its height; for *the people had a mind to work*.”<sup>109</sup> (Nehemiah 4:6, emphasis mine.)

He is aware that the work is not just a work of his own intellect, authority or heart, but truly a work of the heart and mind of every one involved. He understands that true leadership is not just persuading people to do the work by simply casting a vision or offering rewards, but is made effective by helping people become emotionally involved in the work themselves. “Intellect alone will not make a leader, leaders execute a vision by motivating, guiding, inspiring, listening, persuading - and, most crucially, through creating resonance.”<sup>110</sup> This resonance is first a tuning of his heart with that of God’s and in turn also tuning the heart of the people to the heart of God. According to this verse, when it happens he is well aware that they work with their heart, not just their hands or their heads.

Nehemiah is not only aware of the emotional state of his supporters, he is aware of those who are the most critical of him as well. He says of Tobiah and Sanballat, “He was angry and greatly enraged” and again, “They were very angry,” (Nehemiah 4:1 and 7 respectively). His description of his detractors is not just mechanical; he describes the degree of their emotional hatred for the work he was conducting as growing more intense. It is an indication of his understanding of their growing frustration over not being able to manipulate the situation for their own benefit. He is well aware of the degree of his critic’s emotive level. He further indicates the motives behind their threats as, “— for they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, ‘Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.’ But now, O God, strengthen my hands.” (Nehemiah 6:9)

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<sup>109</sup> The NIV interprets this passage as, “So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with *all their heart*.” emphasis mine.

<sup>110</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, 27.



Leaders would do well to recognize the emotional health and status of both those devoted to the work and vision they are casting, but also to those in opposition to their ministry. They would do well to neither underestimate nor overestimate the level of dissatisfaction from their critics. (We will return to this matter under the section heading, *Nehemiah Criticism & Resistance*, beginning on page 96).

Nehemiah is also aware of the attitudes of those over him. When addressing the king he uses the phrase, “If it pleases the king” (Nehemiah 2:5). This is a tactful way of keeping his position before the king in mind as he serves at the king’s pleasure and not of his own choice. However, it is also an important way of connecting to the emotional intelligence of the king. Nehemiah is saying, “If it pleases him, if it makes him happy, honored, content, or gratified, then may the king allow Nehemiah to do the work he believes God has called him to do.”

Concisely put, emotionally intelligent leaders are aware of their own emotional health, that of the people with whom they will do the work, of those who are most judgmental, and of their superiors as well. They understand that we are emotional people who need to be emotionally motivated by creating positive resonance throughout a system and must also attend to the negative emotional resonance created by their detractors.

### *Nehemiah Identifies with the Community*

<sup>11</sup>So I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days. <sup>12</sup>Then I got up during the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal I took was the animal I rode. <sup>13</sup>I went out by night by the Valley Gate past the Dragon’s Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. <sup>14</sup>Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King’s Pool; but there was no place for the animal I was riding to continue. <sup>15</sup>So I went

up by way of the valley by night and inspected the wall. Then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. <sup>16</sup>The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest that were to do the work. <sup>17</sup>Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace." <sup>18</sup>I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us start building!" So they committed themselves to the common good. (Nehemiah 2:11-18)

From the beginning of the book, "Nehemiah's reaction to the trouble in Jerusalem demonstrates his close identification with his fellow Jews." <sup>111</sup> He is obviously touched by the plight of these people whom he loves. He identifies with their struggle and is determined that there must be something he can do. He is unwilling to remain distant, either physically or emotionally, from those whom he has been called to assist. "[Nehemiah] does not simply announce what he intends doing, nor force his own will on his audience. Rather, with the emphasis firmly laid on theological considerations . . . he invites the people's participation in the fulfillment of God's call."<sup>112</sup>

Nehemiah spends three days in Jerusalem before he begins his survey of the devastation. It is uncertain what he actually does during this period. Nehemiah is not inclined to include this information and we will avoid speculation. What he does inform us of is his inspection of the wall. This is a time to reassure himself that the report he is been given earlier is accurate. It is one thing to be told how terrible the conditions are; it is another thing to experience it first hand. Members of our own congregation who have returned from volunteer mission work as a result of the devastation from Hurricane Katrina in 2005 have intimate as much. One can see it on the news or read about it in the

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<sup>111</sup> Joseph Maciariello, "Lessons in Leadership and Management from Nehemiah," *Theology Today* 60 (2003): 401.

<sup>112</sup> Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 193.

newspaper, but to actually stand in the middle of a pile of debris that used to be homes and businesses and spreads out for hundreds of miles is an intense and, at times, overwhelming experience.

People need to know the statistics, they need to hear the story, but, for most, especially leaders, they need to do the assessment themselves. How often do pastors and staff provide the results of some statistical study pulled from a seminar, book or journal, or even conduct an “in house” survey with little more than a glazed look on the congregation’s face? “So what;” “Big deal;” “This can’t possibly be right;” are phrases frequently heard. People need to see and experience the lay of the land for themselves. They need to feel the severity of the situation and the call of the work that needs to be done. The more others are empowered and get to see it for themselves, the easier it will be to move them toward the call. This is not just a statistical experience; this is an emotional and empathetic connection with the work and those it will benefit. Nehemiah connects at an even deeper level with these people through his now personal survey of the devastation. As McKenna points out:

His midnight walk over the rubble of the walls signifies his personal identification with the needs of the people so that he can gather the leaders of the city together and rally them to work. Equally powerful is his hands-on labor, which becomes a model for self-deployment for priests, artisans, and heads of families to follow.<sup>113</sup>

“Emotional Intelligent leaders . . . [follow the] lasting path to motivation by evoking positive resonance: rallying people around a worthy goal.”<sup>114</sup> While the scope of the destruction and work to be done must certainly have caused the people to wonder

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<sup>113</sup> David L. McKenna, *Becoming Nehemiah: Leading with Significance* (Kansas City, KS: Beacon Hill Press, 2005), 78.

<sup>114</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, 25.

how they could possibly rebuild Jerusalem with so many enemies waiting to pick them off Nehemiah's resonance with the people and his words of encouragement, that God was already on the move, and even the king was on their side, must have put the fire back into their spirits to join God's plans and purposes for them. "This assurance of divine assistance, coupled with Nehemiah's sensitive use of the first person plural ('let us rebuild. . . that we may no longer suffer disgrace,' v. 17), by which he subtly affirms his solidarity with them, accounts for the positive response of the people."<sup>115</sup>

### *Nehemiah Cultivates Community Leadership*

Bill Easum and Dave Travis took a look at innovative pastors, some of which were in new church starts, and discovered several important factors in moving congregations forward toward a healthy spiritual life. While shared leadership was vital, they found that:

The primary leader is often the central vision caster, but he or she ensures that the vision is cast throughout the organization by multiple leaders . . . [and is] careful to craft the vision statements not around their personal stories but around the stories of their team leaders and how they are fulfilling the vision.<sup>116</sup>

Nehemiah seems quite capable of holding onto his own dreams and ideas while cultivating a community of shared vision and aspirations. The Israelites "will work with him to restore the wall, not for him. . . . He demonstrates an understanding of the truth of leadership; one is truly a leader only if one has followers."<sup>117</sup>

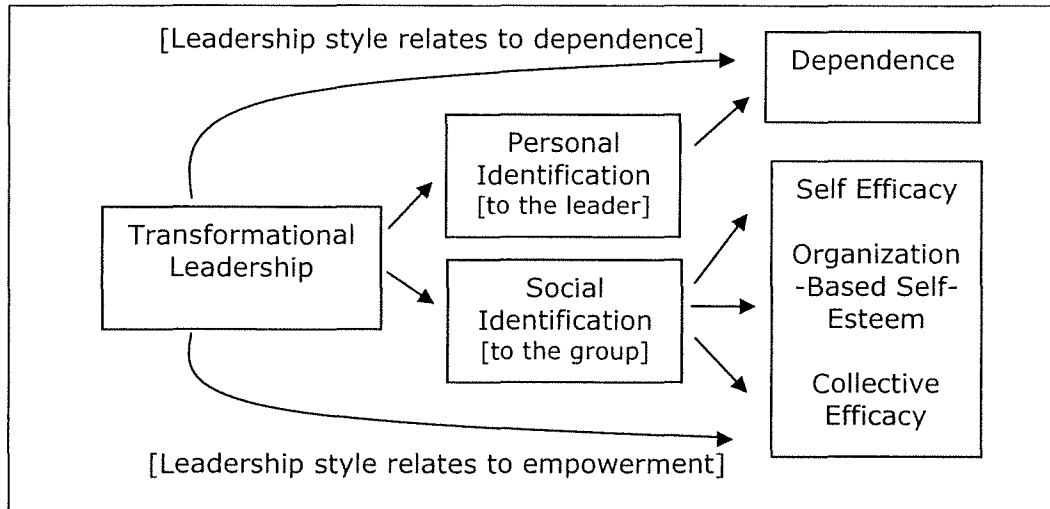
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<sup>115</sup> Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 73.

<sup>116</sup> Bill Easum and Dave Travis, *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches That Work* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2003), 35.

<sup>117</sup> Maciariello, "Lessons in Leadership and Management from Nehemiah," 402.

Ronit Kark, Boas Shamir and Gilad Chen, in a research project conducted on transformational leadership, suggest that leaders can take one of two tracks, or in rare



**Figure 8** Transformational leadership – dependence or empowerment.

instances both. (See Figure 8, above)<sup>118</sup> In either case, followers become personally identified with the leader, thus creating dependency upon the charisma and decisions leaders make, or the leader encourages social identification with the work group, thus creating self-value, self-esteem and empowerment of followers. They point out that:

“Transformational behaviors that enhance strong identification with the organizational unit are likely to empower followers by connecting them to a bigger and stronger entity, increasing their sense of self-worth and self-esteem, and raising their self- and collective-efficacy beliefs.”<sup>119</sup>

Nehemiah clearly chooses the second of these two paths. The identification of the people with Nehemiah is facilitated by the use of personal pronouns, we and us. This is

<sup>118</sup> This is a Partial figure reproduced from Ronit Kark, Boas Shamir, and Gilad Chen, "The Two Faces of Transformational Leadership: Empowerment and Dependency," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88, no. 2 (2003): 247. Some slight modifications were made to the figure in order to make it easier to understand without the context of their entire paper. Transformational leadership can choose to force personal identification with them, or they can choose to encourage social identification among the workforce.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.: 249.

not Nehemiah's work, nor is it for his personal glory. Instead Nehemiah connects with the communal structure of Jerusalem, identifying himself as one of them. He then points the group toward God, who should receive the glory and praise for the work that is about to be accomplished. "He does not rely on this royal authority to obtain commitment from the people who will have to support the work voluntarily. Instead, he gathers the facts, then meets with local officials, going to great lengths to identify with their problem."<sup>120</sup>

### *The Heroic Leadership Myth Circumvented*

Bill Easum and Dave Travis have studied several successful congregations, in particular new church starts, to discern what makes them thrive when other congregations seem to fail. An important item seems to be the kind of pastoral leadership they offer:

"Although it's true that the Sr. Pastor is a key element in the equation that leads to strong churches and Kingdom impact, the myth is that *everything* depends on him or her. Many Sr. Pastors have succumbed to the heroic leader myth and placed themselves into dysfunctional expressions of leadership because of it."<sup>121</sup>

This is not what leaders may first believe. The heroic leader is still a widely held illusion that often leads to what is referred to as the Messiah complex. That being: leaders control by having all the answers, knowing all the details, offering all the crucial decisions and doing all the important work. Current applied psychology speaks negatively of "The leadership myth – the search for a great person who is individually worthy of our trust and allegiance has far too often produced very destructive cultures. In fact, the characteristics of good leaders and good followers may be more alike than

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<sup>120</sup> Maciariello, "Lessons in Leadership and Management from Nehemiah," 402.

<sup>121</sup> Easum and Travis, 24.

generally thought.”<sup>122</sup> Nehemiah is not a king, priest or celebrity. In fact, Nehemiah with great humility continues to point away from himself and back toward the God who called all of them, not just himself, to this task.

Easum and Travis discover in what first appeared to be successful lone ranger new church starts, that after careful in-depth inspection:

“In virtually every case, God was going ahead to prepare not only a planter but also *a team of people who carry out the vision*. Therefore [they] believe a critical mindset change must occur: Sr. Pastors must lay aside their egos and the idea of being a heroic leader.”<sup>123</sup>

Nehemiah realizes the work belongs to all of them; he is not their lone deliverer or solitary savior. *Together* they will do the work; *together* they will provide the solution; *together* they will rely upon God.

David McKenna writes, “In current parlance, Nehemiah would probably be described as an authoritarian micromanager capitalizing on the motive of self-survival, but that’s the kind of leadership required to rebuild the walls in 52 days.”<sup>124</sup> Almost every other work written on Nehemiah would disagree with his assessment. Nehemiah is anything but a micromanager who leads from the top. Instead he places the authority for the work, defense and evidently the day-to-day decisions in the hands of those doing the reconstruction, namely in the hands of family leaders. “Moreover, it seems that Nehemiah allowed each group to be responsible, so far as possible, for the section of wall in which they had the greatest vested interest – because it protected their home, place of

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<sup>122</sup> Dale R. Fuqua and Jody L. Newman, "Moving Beyond the Great Leader Model," *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* (2004): 151.

<sup>123</sup> Easum and Travis, 25.

<sup>124</sup> McKenna, *Becoming Nehemiah: Leading with Significance*, 63.

business, or the like.”<sup>125</sup> To accomplish the work Nehemiah cultivates a community effort from the center, rather than from the top. He divides the work into families and clans, thus enhancing the identification they had with one another. They are laboring with more than just co-workers. The reconstruction of the wall will be accomplished by working beside their own blood relationships: brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, children, grandchildren, parents, et al.

A sequence of the words “Next to him” in chapter three is significant in describing the way in which the work is done. It indicates several things. First, each person/family/clan takes responsibility for their part of the construction. They have ownership of this part of the wall next to their business or home. They are, therefore, motivated to insure its success as they will have no one to blame but themselves if it is breached due to shoddy workmanship. Margaret Wheatley says, “A tried and true maxim of my field of organizational behavior is that ‘people support what they create.’”<sup>126</sup> Second, each person lives, for the most part, in agreement with one another and chooses not to argue over the work that needs to be done or over less important issues.<sup>127</sup> Third, each person watches over and safeguarded the other’s life.

Rebuilding the wall in 52 days requires hard work, and if the threats they receive are real, it is also dangerous work. “In general, the more emotionally demanding the

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<sup>125</sup> Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 212.

<sup>126</sup> Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 68.

<sup>127</sup> Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 78. Here Throntveit states, “This eliminated arguments as to who would work where and motivated the workers to make that part of the wall that defended them as secure as possible.”



work, the more emphatic and supportive the leader needs to be.”<sup>128</sup> By luck, or providence, Nehemiah falls into the right emotional and empathetic decision of allowing families to work together and thus protecting that which was most important to them, each other. It is for their protection and for the purpose of making the timely repair of the wall take on a whole new urgency and meaning. They are not just doing the work for some unseen reason, or for some egalitarian goals, or some institutional reason. The work has a personal and significant impact on their safety and the safety of their families.<sup>129</sup> “Nehemiah uses motivational schemes, grouping people according to family units – not to manipulate, but to increase commitment to the project by making it more evident that the work truly is for their own good, the good of their families, and for God’s glory.”<sup>130</sup> (See: Nehemiah 4:14; 4:19-20)

In our current situation, it is vital that pastors get a vision for the congregation, but that vision in successful congregations appears to be a shared passion. It would appear that if it is owned by the pastor or staff alone, the vision will make little if any impact on the congregation. Instead, a shared vision motivates not only the pastor to be

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<sup>128</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, 17.

<sup>129</sup> See Alexei Sivertsev, "Sects and Households: Social Structure of the Proto-Sectarian Movement of Nehemiah 10 and the Dead Sea Sect," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67 (2005). Sivertsev’s work leads us to believe that the utilization of family units and clans would have been a common rather than unusual practice. Nehemiah may not have developed this system of collaboration on his own, but it is apparent that he did find it extremely useful and profitable to utilize the existing relationships to motivate the workers and accomplish the task.

He further asserts that in this period of time the tribe was being broken down into the clan, and the clan into the family, and that eventually – perhaps by the time of Jesus – decisions, responsibility and salvation would be broken down to the individual level.

<sup>130</sup> Maciariello, "Lessons in Leadership and Management from Nehemiah," 406. See also 403-404.

about God's work, but it motivates all those who are now "infected" with it. This is the kind of "virus" that needs to be caught and passed on.

## **Nehemiah Criticism & Resistance**

### *Mild Resistance to Open Hostility*

Not everyone is excited about Nehemiah's calling. Not everyone is pleased about the ideas that transformational leaders like Nehemiah bring to the table. "No amount of wisdom removes the risk from ministry. There will always be [detractors] ready to challenge the integrity of the work and our right to do it."<sup>131</sup> This is not meant to be condemnation towards those who have suffered great setbacks in life or for some other psychological, personality-type or behavioral reason need long-term persuasion in order to be brought onboard with a vision or plan. However, Tobiah and Sanballat, the thorn in Nehemiah's side, do not represent those who are naturally a hard sell, need solid facts and/or need to see the idea from many different angles before they are willing to commit themselves, or the church, to action. Instead, these men represent those who will never be satisfied with the plans someone else makes. They are the kinds of people who want the authority and the power. They refuse to be led, not because the direction is incorrect, but because they are not the ones out in front. Opposition and criticism will take two forms for Nehemiah. Some will simply drag their feet, and some will openly and with increasing hostility confront Nehemiah's leadership and work.

Margaret Wheatley talks about innovative people like Nehemiah, and why they might be opposed.

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<sup>131</sup> Terry Muck, *When to Take a Risk*, The Leadership Library (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 25.

We want them to fail. This is the greatest, unspoken challenge facing pioneering leaders. Society does not want them to succeed. If we acknowledge their success, it means we will have to change. We will have to abandon the comfort of our familiar beliefs and practices. Even as the old ways fail, we hold onto them more fiercely and apply them more zealously.<sup>132</sup>

One may wonder if this is not an accurate description of what those who are ingrained into the current status quo will say of innovative pastors and leaders who buck the system in order to move congregations toward health.

Nehemiah faced his own turbulent opposition. Depending upon the severity of a storm, captains will respond differently. A gale is handled differently than a tropical depression and yet again differently from a hurricane. Each requires a different set of skills and urgency. All are taken seriously; when on open seas one should never take lightly a weather report. However, the response will vary from simply keeping informed to full scale precautionary and vigorous behavior to save the ship and all onboard.

Nehemiah encounters the mild drizzle of resistance, in this case due to pride.<sup>133</sup> Simply put, not everyone does his or her fair share. For whatever reason some of the nobles will do none of the manual labor; they share their workers but not the work itself. (Nehemiah 3:5) Nehemiah indicates that they possibly refuse because they don't want to be under the supervision of people they believe to be beneath them. Nevertheless, the work must go forward. Waiting for or trying to elicit 100% consensus can be a waste of

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<sup>132</sup> Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, 169.

<sup>133</sup> Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 196. Of verse 3:5 he comments, "Lit. 'did not bring their neck into the service of,' The image is suggestive of pride (cf. 'stiff necked') rather than lack of enthusiasm." See also Williamson 204.

Other commentators give little attention here. G. Rawlinson and G. Wood, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Ester & Job*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, The Pulpit Commentary, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), simply states that opposition of this nature is not worth wasting our time over, but requires a personal evaluation of our own work.

time and energy. That is not to say leaders can't grieve the loss of those who won't go with them, but they must nevertheless move forward. The work is far too important to let a handful of people, no matter how influential they may be, keep them from the work.<sup>134</sup> However, opposition isn't always as tranquil as a minor work slowdown. Criticism can range from simply finding fault with the work to more vicious and ferocious personal attacks on the character of the leader. While some opposition can be dealt with by simply clearing the air and providing better communication, some opposition is formidable and it frequently attempts to draw leaders into personal confrontations. This is not just a rainstorm; this is a dangerous force intent upon the total destruction of leadership and the work being supported.

Sanballat and Tobiah are the latter; a tempest in Nehemiah's life. From the moment they hear the news of Nehemiah's purpose they are agitated. The idea of change, transformation or the thought that someone else will be leading these people disturbs them. They needed to be dealt with, but Nehemiah is patient with them, at least until the end of the manuscript where he throws Tobiah's things out of the temple. (See: Nehemiah 13:4-9). From Sanballat's and Tobiah's perspective they saw rebellion instead of faithfulness. "But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they mocked and ridiculed us, saying, 'What is this that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?'" (Nehemiah 2:19) While these words

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<sup>134</sup> As a note of encouragement, not all the nobles and leaders took such a hierarchal view of things. Reading through chapter three we find that rulers over regions, their sons and daughters, plus other officials and artisans put their hands to work. Each major player and their people worked diligently side-by-side to resort the wall near their own district. Again, part of Nehemiah's genius was to encourage the personal involvement of the people by letting them work on those sections that would have the most meaning for them.

may have been less of a belief on their part and more of an accusation just to stir up descent and trouble, it is not difficult to believe that they were questioning Nehemiah's intent. At the very least, we propose that in their mind Nehemiah was there to change the power structure of the area. By allowing Jerusalem to once again become a stable community and cultural center, their own leadership over the region and how they would have to relate to the king after Nehemiah's success would necessitate change. "Whereas previously they had been pre-eminent over the defenseless Israelites, the erection of the walls poses a threat to their power and, inevitably, to their honor."<sup>135</sup> Here, there is plenty of motivation for them to oppose Nehemiah's leadership.

### *Nehemiah Responds*

Nehemiah's response is simple, yet direct. First, he shows great restraint and patience. There is a long period from the first intimations of conflict with these two dissenters to the eventual physical removal of Tobiah from the temple court.

Nehemiah responds to their jibes not with rash retaliation but with a firm expression of God's ability to prosper his cause. Rather than being deflected from his primary task, he asserts positively that "We, his servants, will start to rebuild (v. 20) . . . he is content to leave God with responsibility for the negative handling of opposition. This, too, is one of the hardest lessons for any church or individual to learn."<sup>136</sup>

Secondly, he prays that God will grant them success; however, Nehemiah doesn't just stop at prayer. As with his brief prayer before answering the king, we see Nehemiah's prayers as practical and productive. "So we prayed to our God, and set a guard as a protection against them day and night." (Nehemiah 4:9) He prays to God, but he still

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<sup>135</sup> Philip F. Esler, "Ezra-Nehemiah as a Narrative of (Re-Invented) Israelite Identity," *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3-4 (2003): 423.

<sup>136</sup> Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 193.

posts a guard. He is under no delusion that God will simply take care of their needs. He fully understands that humility before God and dependence upon God are necessary to his success, but he also realizes that God expects the people to participate in the plan of their deliverance. “In every situation Nehemiah began on his knees before God, and he ended with bold action. . . . The proper relationship between God and his creation is a joint interaction, a united purpose in which the Creator and [God’s] people work together.”<sup>137</sup>

Nehemiah is obviously upset over their threats; however, he is more concerned for the insults thrown at the builders than the personal attacks they have made upon him. “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, who is great and awesome, and fight for your kin, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.” (Nehemiah 4:14b) Nehemiah’s response is to remind others, and himself, that this is God’s work. This is God’s battle. If this work is truly of God then who can stop it?<sup>138</sup> “Opposition to the work was opposition to God.”<sup>139</sup> They are merely servants of a greater plan. He sidesteps the temptation to make this personal. Instead he keeps the work, and the

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<sup>137</sup> F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, ed. Robert L. Jr. Hubbard, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 186. “It is not a mystical waiting on Him. It is a trust and action.”

Larson and Dahlen, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 176.

This idea is similar to God’s instruction to Moses as he cried out to God for deliverance. The oncoming Egyptian army had trapped the recently freed Israelites against the Red Sea. “Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward.” (Exodus 14:15) God will deliver the Israelites, but first they will have to stop complaining and crying, get off their knees, trust in God’s plan and move through the divided waters in order to reach safety.

<sup>138</sup> See the similar words of Gamaliel to the Sanhedrin about Jesus’ ministry and the early Church movement in Acts 5:33-39.

<sup>139</sup> Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 181.

thought that God is responsible, ever before himself and the people. For Nehemiah, this is not a personal attack; this is an attack against God and against the work God had ordained. He suggests that they do two things: one, remember that God is on their side and two, that they protect their families. This is an impressive move on Nehemiah's part. He does not ask the people to rally around himself in order to protect their leader. Instead he encourages them to rally around their faith in God, their community, their families and their loved ones.

Leaders do well to remember to keep God and the work in front of them and attempt to keep criticism from becoming personal. We would comment here that we realize how difficult this task is. As clergy and leaders, we eat, sleep and breathe the church. We personally go to bed, praying for our congregations and the work that needs to be done, and when we awake, we often have a prayer on our lips for the church. When we have invested so much of ourselves and our spirits into the church it is difficult, if not to a certain extent impossible, to distance ourselves from the criticisms that are sometimes leveled against her. Often these criticisms are not from outside the camp, but, as in Nehemiah's case, these are threats and controversies raised by some of our own people and neighbors. This kind of criticism cuts deep, and the pain is incredibly real.

Nehemiah doesn't just bury his feelings. He repeatedly expresses his frustration and his anger with the critic's words and actions, but he doesn't allow his anger to keep him from the task, or from motivating others to keep working. He is well aware that his emotions and reactions affect the emotional state of those around him.

His response is not to retaliate personally, but to maintain his commitment to the work . . . Here we see still another powerful lesson . . . : In the face of opposition (which is inevitable), pray for God's help in dealing with it, but do not retaliate.

Do not let the opposition distract you from your ultimate purpose . . . continue the work – stick with the mission.<sup>140</sup>

It is important to remember that conflict is not merely a personal issue that only affects the ones engaged in the conflict. Conflict affects the system in which leaders live and work. How leaders deal with conflict may well affect the church for better or worse and, if handled inappropriately, may cause more damage than the original criticisms. “In such a grave crisis, all eyes turn to the leader for emotional guidance. Because the leader’s way of seeing things has special weight, leaders ‘manage meaning’ for a group, offering a way to interpret, and to react emotionally to, a given situation.”<sup>141</sup> A cool head and a determined heart are the tools Nehemiah uses to redirect the people back to the task at hand and the hope of a better future. He faithfully and successfully steers the vessel through turbulent waters and toward the task at hand. Today, as well as then, in spite of threatening waves and rough seas, the work must continue and the people must be preserved.

### *Measured Confrontation*

Nehemiah confronts those who are aggressively opposed to his leadership. On the gentle side of his solution to confrontation he plainly and firmly points out the lack of

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<sup>140</sup> Maciariello, "Lessons in Leadership and Management from Nehemiah," 403.

See also: Barber, *Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership*, 99. Barber says, “He knew what his priorities were and would not allow himself to be sidetracked from fulfilling them.”

<sup>141</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, from the front matter xii; see also 8; 174.



authority his detractors have.<sup>142</sup> Further, he speaks boldly, stating that those who are not onboard and who do not conduct the work have no share in it. If one stands outside of God's will and pokes a finger at those who are busy about God's work he or she should not expect to share in the blessings when God accomplishes all that God is going to do. On the more forceful side, and as a last resort, Nehemiah will throw Tobiah's things out of the temple. He shouldn't be there in the first place, and certainly not after acting the way he did. It seems likely that Tobiah is either attempting to take credit for the rebuilding of the Temple and/or walls in some fashion, or he is simply centering himself in the life of the people. Whatever his intentions are Nehemiah will rightfully not allow it to prosper. (Nehemiah 13:6-9)

This could be seen as retribution or vengeance, and perhaps there is a certain amount of satisfaction that Nehemiah gets in tossing Tobiah out.<sup>143</sup> However, Nehemiah does not grant us much insight into his feelings at this point, except that he is greatly displeased. From the verses that immediately follow this incident we can be assured of Nehemiah's zealousness for the house of God and that nothing will be permitted to defile it is at least a part of his motive for removing Tobiah. (Nehemiah 13:9-13; 30-31)

Further, Nehemiah had already warned Tobiah that he would have no claim to the rewards of a vibrant Jerusalem – the promise of God. He didn't do the work; he doesn't

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<sup>142</sup> Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 169. In this commentary Fensham suggests that Nehemiah intimates that, "Both Sanballat and Tobiah were also serving the Lord, but in an illegitimate way. They had no jurisdiction over the pure religion of the exiles... they had no legal jurisdiction over Jerusalem."

<sup>143</sup> It is a mistake to make Nehemiah's actions perfect or more than human. He is after all a human being. The justice he prayed for in chapter two is about to be served. He has been patient but the time has come to finish what he did not start. It is important to note that the "judgment" Nehemiah uses is measured. He keeps an even handedness even when he is in power.

get benefit of the rewards. Tobiah is now standing on Nehemiah's hard earned ground. Nehemiah will not allow this to be another social or political achievement for Tobiah and his associates.

Nehemiah cleans house in two respects. First, he literally purifies the temple and brings the priests and Levites back to proper protocol in the way they live and work in the temple. Secondly, he begins to root out those who have quite possibly worked behind the scenes to inform Sanballat and Tobiah of Nehemiah's efforts. A son-in-law of Sanballat serves as a priest in the temple, and Nehemiah drives him away. The father of this priest appears to be the same Eliashib who gave Tobiah space in the temple for an office.

<sup>28</sup>And one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of the high priest Eliashib, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; I chased him away from me. <sup>29</sup>Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, the covenant of the priests and the Levites. (Nehemiah 13:28-29)

Nehemiah's prayer is further indication that his actions are not just vengeful gratification. His prayer (v. 29) is not about his own justice, anger or safety. It concerns the offense these men perpetrate against the priestly office and the covenant between the Levites and God.<sup>144</sup>

### *Timing Is Essential*

When dealing with criticisms timing is crucial. It is important to note that by the time Nehemiah physically confronts Tobiah and begins to clean house, the wall is complete, Nehemiah is the official Governor of Jerusalem, and he has earned the respect of both his supporters and his enemies. He is wise in his discernment of when to remain

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<sup>144</sup> Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 267. Fensham says, "Such an act as that of Eliashib's grandson was a direct challenge to the authority of Nehemiah. So it regarded the highest form of apostasy."

actively-patient<sup>145</sup> and when to take more decisive action. Far too often leaders either act too soon against opposition or wait too long. The former puts into jeopardy what little credibility they may have gained. The latter allows criticism to fester and makes leadership look weak or perhaps worse indifferent.

Leaders can lose credibility by confronting too soon. This is especially true if the detractors have been “in country” for a longer period of time. Gary Goreham suggests that long-term and patient leadership is needed to overcome the “no hope cycle” congregations may be living in. “Long term residents have been known to say, ‘We’ve seen pastors come, and we’ve seen them go. These new ideas are only fads that we’ve tried before. They didn’t work before. This, too, shall pass away.’”<sup>146</sup> New leaders who act too soon against opposition from indigenous residents may result in never receiving a fair hearing at all, especially if people believe they are “just passing through.” Leaders like Nehemiah don’t remain passive, because there is much to be accomplished, but they do remain patient. Using the right method at the appropriate time is crucial.

Leaders with high mercy gifts can get stuck in a cycle of never confronting those who persistently attack them or the church.<sup>147</sup> Nehemiah had high mercy gifts as

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<sup>145</sup> Actively-patient, by this oxymoron we mean that Nehemiah did not just sit back and allow the attacks of his detractors to occur unchallenged. He actively denies the allegations made and continues to rally the people around the work to be done. However, he did not fly off the handle and attack his critics prematurely either. He remains patient for the right moment and the movement of God, thus leaving them in God’s hands.

<sup>146</sup> Gary A. Goreham, “Community Building: The Case of Nehemiah,” *Word and World* 20, no. 2 (2000): 166.

<sup>147</sup> See: Bill Easum and Linnea Nilsen Capshaw, *Put on Your Own Oxygen Mask First: Rediscovering Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004). Within this text they discuss the reality that clergy with high mercy gifts may be in the wrong calling. Mercy gifts can kill clergy leadership and a congregation with a never ending flow of grace. Sometimes it is necessary and beneficial for the church and the critical person if they

evidenced by his heart and passion for the people, not just the work. Nevertheless, Nehemiah uses his gifts to remain actively-patient when it is impossible to take Sanballat and Tobiah head on. However, he turns a corner at the appropriate time and avoids an entire career of unnecessary-relentless-suffering by removing Tobiah's office from the temple, a religious and cultural center. Today, leaders who recognize their high mercy gifts will need to either overcome them or, perhaps more realistically, gather people around them who can offer advice and possibly shift the task of deal with detractors in appropriate ways.

**Summary:**  
**Nehemiah, An Emotionally Centered Leader**

Nehemiah clearly shows the skills and gifts that an emotionally intelligent leader needs in order to effectively maneuver through the turbulent waters of a perfect storm. He was comfortable in his own skin and unafraid to reveal where his heart was. He knew the demeanor of his supporters, superiors and his greatest critics. He intuitively utilized this information to keep his community on course. By identifying with his people and their situation, by helping them to connect emotionally to the work and by creating both urgency and personal meaning in the labor, Nehemiah wins not only their physical assistance but their hearts as well. From the beginning Nehemiah creates a work of the people, for the people, and by the people. He continually moves himself to the background becoming incarnational and blending into the community by working side-by-side with them. In so doing he sets an example of the kind of workmanship he is calling them to.

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were appropriately confronted and if need be "let go." See the back matter in Appendix 6 entitled: "The Problem with Mercy Gifts," 159-165.

Nehemiah endures and effectively deals with the negative resonance of his detractors. We wonder what parallel there is to those who drag their feet in the church or refuse to budge toward the will of God, but instead complain, whine and become unpleasant if they don't get their way. At what point do leaders decide to confront opposition, and at what point do they simply remove the conflict by removing the person? These are not easy issues, as we have observed with Nehemiah, and we have given no absolute answers here. At this juncture we simply point back to the beginning of the previous chapter and the idea of a "perfect storm." Leaders must avoid being boxed in. They should avoid placing the broadside of their vessel open to the onslaught of criticism and controversy. Leaders cannot avoid the storm, but if they remain in a place of maximum maneuverability, keep a constant eye on the center of the storm and avoid rash decisions; they may be able to negotiate through the worst of it without losing the purpose for which God called them. Active-patience is a great necessity. Leaders do not remain passive but they do remain patient, reminding themselves and others that the battle belongs to God. Timing is crucial. Acting too soon may keep them from receiving a fair hearing, but waiting too long may cause others to question their strength and gifts for courageous leadership.

In spite of the fact that we may disagree with David McKenna's assessment of Nehemiah's micromanaging behavior, we believe McKenna does have an accurate and compelling summary of Nehemiah's overall contribution to leadership.

[Like Nehemiah] To lead volunteers, we need to *motivate* them by their felt needs, *mobilize* them by their interpersonal relationships, *organize* them by manageable tasks, *reward* them by tangible results, and *encourage* them by working the hardest of all. Thank you, Nehemiah.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> McKenna, *Becoming Nehemiah: Leading with Significance*, 64.

## CHAPTER VI

### JOHN WESLEY: FLATTENING THE HIERARCHY – A MODEL OF RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP

#### Introduction

In spite of the remarkable influence of one man, the story of Methodism is not just the solitary story of this significant individual. It is rather the story of many people, contemporaries of John Wesley, both living and dead, who contributed to the movement we know as Methodism. One man appears far more prominently than any other, mainly because he seems to embody the movement that would change the course of not one, but many, nations for the sake of Jesus Christ. John Wesley, along with his



Figure 9 Portrait of John Wesley

brother Charles and a handful of other contributors are the initiators of the movement known as Methodism. (See Figure 9)<sup>149</sup> This is a movement born out of their belief that spiritual formation required intentional relationships. We concede that John has been perceived by many as anything but a warm and intimate individual, at least in a North American understanding of what affectionate relationships involve, we nonetheless suggest that John's relationship with those in the inner circle, the Select Society, went

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<sup>149</sup> Figure 9: Portrait of John Wesley reproduced from: Holland N. McTyeire, *A History of Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1884), front matter.

much deeper than mere rules and regulations.<sup>150</sup> These were the men and women with whom he shared his deepest thoughts, darkest struggles, and solemn trust. He expected them to demonstrate lives that journeyed inward toward the heart of their spiritual life and outward toward the bands, trial meetings and the larger community in which they offered mission and ministry. He entrusted these men and women with the authority to lead others in the way of holiness, a journey of faith toward becoming more like Christ.

As we have conducted our research we believe that, on the one hand, John Wesley would surely be surprised that anyone would think of him as being this worthy of such a great amassing of information. On the other hand, we believe that Wesley would be equally surprised that the Methodist movement, in spite of great scholarship, has ceased to practice many of those things that are of true value and worth. To honor the man alone is folly; to honor the God whom that man worshiped and those practices that were inspired by his God is to find great wisdom for our day. Primarily, we suggest that leadership in the Wesleyan spirit embraces the relationships needed to mature in the faith, reflects inward spiritual formation that transforms the sinner into the likeness of Christ, and manifests itself in outward social activity aimed at pursuing the expression of God's Kingdom in this present world. We believe our study reveals that Wesley flattened the hierarchy and nurtured key lay leaders who were empowered to: answer their personal call, cultivate intentional relationships, and nurture the members of bands and religious societies into a thriving missional and incarnationally focused living organism.

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<sup>150</sup> See our argument in the summary of this chapter that John's personal letters reveal a soft and deeply affectionate man which is often overshadowed by his public Oxford don and English gentleman demeanor.

### Early Beginnings & Formative Relationships

The methodologies that would be employed by the Methodists were being forged not only early in John's life but even prior to the life of his parents, Susanna and Samuel Wesley. On Samuel's side of the family were John's great-grandfather, Bartholomew Wesley, who was an Anglican priest, and a grandfather, also named John Wesley, who appears to have been an un-ordained Anglican lay speaker and itinerant evangelist.<sup>151</sup> On Susanna's side was her father, Dr. Samuel Annesley, a Puritan minister and theologian. While it is uncertain what direct influence these forebears had on John's life, there is no question that they did influence the Wesley home. On occasion Susanna wrote to her children about her childhood upbringing in a Puritan home. In a letter written to Samuel Wesley Jr., her youngest son, she writes, "I'll tell you what method I used to observe when I was in my father's house... I used to allow myself as much time for recreation as I spent in devotion."<sup>152</sup> It is this staunch upbringing that influenced her to raise her children in the strict style and manner that she did.

"Few women, and not many men in the country, were her equals in theological knowledge, penetrating insight, calm judgment, and the courage that dares to examine and accept unfamiliar truth."<sup>153</sup> Susanna was proficient at keeping the home and family functioning in an orderly fashion. It was both a part of her upbringing and out of necessity. She gave birth to 19 children, nine of whom died in infancy or childhood, 10

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<sup>151</sup> For a discussion of Wesley's ancestral influencers see: McTyeire, *A History of Methodism*, 16-22.

<sup>152</sup> Susanna Wesley, "A Letter Written on October 11, 1709," in *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*, ed. Charles Jr. Wallace (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 70.

<sup>153</sup> John S. Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies* (London: The Epworth Press, 1921), 323.



survived to adulthood, three boys and seven girls. It was her duty, she believed, to shape the will of her children. This she began to do while they were at a very early age, teaching each of them the alphabet in one day. From there they continued to master whatever she lay at their intellect to learn.

“Although John Wesley was the founder of Methodism, Susanna Wesley gave Methodism its methodical nature.”<sup>154</sup> Susanna writes:

In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will and bring them to an obedient temper. . . . I insist upon conquering the will of children betimes [early or with time to spare], because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual.<sup>155</sup>

Toward these spiritual ends, Wesley’s mother met privately and on regular intervals with her children to speak of their spiritual health and wellbeing, thus holding them accountable to the oversight of her spiritual mentoring. Certainly these treasured times spent with Susanna lent themselves to John’s understanding of the need for mentoring relationships within spiritual formation. John learned at home what he later came to prove as practical through the Methodist societies; he “knew that we cannot go it alone, that humans need others to grow, and that the highest virtues require saintly models.”<sup>156</sup>

John’s father, Samuel Wesley, was an Anglican Priest. He was strict with his parish, which probably contributed to the congregation’s dislike of him. There is some speculation that because he was a well-educated man, he felt Epworth beneath him. Although it is likely that he would never have admitted his pride, it is all together

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<sup>154</sup> D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), 38.

<sup>155</sup> McTyeire, *A History of Methodism*, 40-41.

<sup>156</sup> Jerry L. Mercer, *Living Deeply Our New Life in Christ: A Wesleyan Spirituality for Today* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1999), 90.

possible that he dealt with his parish by delivering pastoral oversight and sermons with passive-aggressive behavior. This speculation is perhaps best left to psychoanalytic scholarship. Nonetheless, besides Susanna, there was not Samuel's equal for many miles in regards to biblical knowledge, philosophy, theology and the Hebrew and Greek languages. These he taught to his children at very young ages. By the age of 10 several of the children, including John, were proficient in the Koine Greek of the New Testament.<sup>157</sup>

It is important to note that Samuel Wesley participated in the formation of a local order of the Religious Societies of the Church of England.<sup>158</sup> The original Societies established in the 17<sup>th</sup> century were started in the hope of bringing renewal to the Anglican Church. We will return to these Societies and their rules later, but here let us note that John would certainly have been aware of these regulated rules and of Samuel's hope that the Societies could bring life to the Anglican Church. In fact, these altered rules seem much more closely aligned with the holiness of heart and life that John pursued in the Methodist movement. John would also have been aware of the underlying design of these groups, namely regular attendance, accountability and a desire on the part of participants to pursue scriptural holiness. (See Appendices I and II) Furthermore, John's ideas of faith being lived out in works within the community were bolstered by both Susanna and Samuel. Susanna gathered the servant's children for education. This was started while her husband Samuel was away on business. By the time he returned,

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<sup>157</sup> Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 31.

<sup>158</sup> The Anglican Societies of Samuel's day were referred to as a regulated Society the rules of which had evolved considerably from the original rules; found in Appendices I and II. Also, see: Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*, 10-27.

over 200 were gathering weekly to be educated in the Wesley's kitchen.<sup>159</sup> Samuel contributed to John's understanding of an intentional faith that is lived in relationship to God and with the world by his encouragement and example. Samuel wrote to his sons in regard to their decision to visit those in prison, "Go on, in God's name, in the path to which your Savior has directed you, and that track wherein your father has gone before you; for when I was an undergraduate at Oxford I visited those in the castle there, and reflect on it with great satisfaction to this day."<sup>160</sup>

Of the early influences on John Wesley's life perhaps Martin Schmidt says it best:

John Wesley was born into this remarkable household on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1703. It brought together the heritage of Puritanism, Anglican churchmanship, and the concern for the care of souls, social activity and missionary zeal, derived from the revival of the Religious Societies. At the same time it drew its sustenance from Puritan culture of family life and from the nurture of individual souls found in Romanic mysticism. To this was joined the influence of the Halle type of pietism. Finally a place was given to liberal scholarship, and the harmonious, mystical piety of Henry Scougal was held in high esteem. To all this was added Susanna Wesley's personal gift as a teacher. . . . Through all this rich polyphony one leading theme resounds like a *cantus firmus*: it is that of the love of God which empowers man towards perfection. It might almost be said that here, in the cradle, the main content of John Wesley's thought was already being proclaimed.<sup>161</sup>

It is apparent that Wesley's concept and the practice of Bands, Class Meetings, Societies and Select Societies began in his early childhood, as the author pointed out above, "in the cradle." The seeds that contained his ideas and convictions about small group spiritual formation were sown in the Wesley home and grew throughout his development as a young man at Oxford and Georgia. These seeds developed into several

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<sup>159</sup> Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 38.

<sup>160</sup> Samuel Wesley, "A letter written in 1730 to John and Charles Wesley," as quoted in McTyeire, *A History of Methodism*, 19.

<sup>161</sup> Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley, a Theological Biography*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 63.

ripe harvests that provided grist for the spiritually hungry. The idea of the blessing and necessity of accountability and community continued to develop as he experimented with various methods that would ultimately serve the early Methodist Church. This journey of both receiving and sowing seeds included his upbringing in his parent's home, the Oxford Holy Club, the Georgia Band, and the Religious Society of Fetter Lane.<sup>162</sup> The recurrent themes seem to be a commitment to individual awakening, in part through open air preaching to the masses, and to continued discipleship and spiritual formation through small group accountability.

*Practical Divinity: Orthodoxy & Orthopraxy*

Wesley's early understanding that faith must be practical began early on. From his parents he learned of practical divinity, that faith must be both intellectually sound and sincerely lived.<sup>163</sup> The true disciple of Jesus understands both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. "For him spirituality, though inward, was not a solitary thing... He felt that fellowship was vital to Christian spirituality and that there was no such thing as a solitary Christian. . . . [further] inward holiness of the heart had necessarily to find fruit in outward works and social involvement of one sort or another."<sup>164</sup> Faith must be authentic, both heart felt and well thought out, but faith must also be lived out in relationship to the larger community.

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<sup>162</sup> For a discussion of their impact see: Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), especially pages 42-49; 62-63 and 110-113.

<sup>163</sup> Practical divinity is a term Wesley used to describe his *Christian Library* as being: "Extracts from the Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity."

<sup>164</sup> Frank Whaling, ed., *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Prayers, Hymns, Journal Notes, Sermons, Letters and Treatises* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1981), 13.

Wesely described this personal and communal faith as requiring the means of grace. These means were divided into two parts, instituted and prudential. Instituted works of piety, namely, prayer,

searching the scriptures, Holy Communion, fasting, and Christian conferencing – contribute to personal spiritual formation.

Wesley argued that these must be lived out and evidenced by the

prudential works of mercy, such as

feeding the hungry, clothing the

naked, doing no harm and doing kindness to others, simply by seeking to bless all others with our life.<sup>165</sup> (See Figure 10, below)<sup>166</sup>

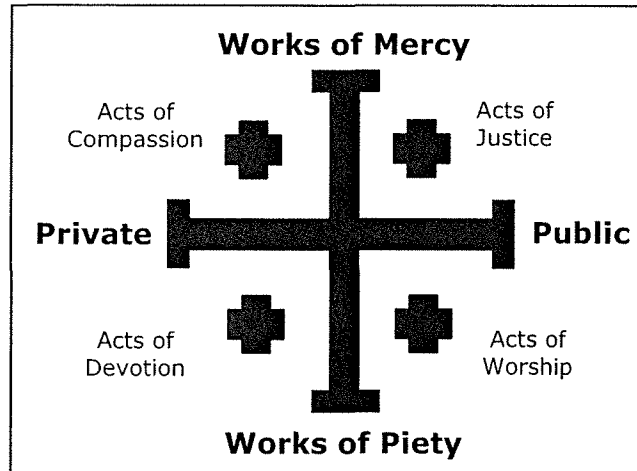


Figure 10 John Wesley's Means of Grace.

Wesley wrote his General Rules of the United Societies in 1739, and they have been included in the Discipline of the Methodist Church since the Church's inception.

His general rules are typically shortened to the following which admonish us to:

- Do no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced.
- Do all the good that you can; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible to

<sup>165</sup> For a discussion of the Means of Grace see, among many authors: H. Lovette Jr. Weems, *John Wesley's Message Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 40-45, John Wesley, "Sermon Xii: The Means of Grace," in *John Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons: Sermons on Several Occasions* (London: The Epworth Press, 1980; reprint, 14), 134-151, Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, 4 ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982), 130-140.

<sup>166</sup> This figure is reproduced from Steven W. Manskar, *Accountable Discipleship: Living in God's Household* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2000), 26.

all men (and women)...by all possible diligence...by running with patience the race which is set out before us.

- By attending upon all the ordinance of God; such are... the public worship of God, the ministry of the Word, the Supper of the Lord, family and private prayer, searching the Scriptures, and fasting.<sup>167</sup>

The Discipline of the United Methodist Church also expresses this Wesleyan understanding of both personal and social holiness. “We proclaim no *personal gospel* that fails to express itself in relevant social concerns; we proclaim no *social gospel* that does not include the personal transformation of sinners.”<sup>168</sup> In other words, leadership in the Wesleyan spirit reflects both inward spiritual formation that transforms the sinner into the likeness of Christ and manifests itself in outward social activity aimed at pursuing the expression of God’s Kingdom in this present world.<sup>169</sup>

### *Of Anglicans and Rules*

It is important to note that Wesley’s General Rules were not the creation of his own imagination. Wesley leaned upon the rules of the Religious Societies of the Church of England for the structure and content of his own Societies. Remember, Wesley never intended to leave the Anglican Church and died an Anglican priest.<sup>170</sup> However, in part, Wesley’s gift to the Methodist movement was a recovery of the priesthood of all believers. In contrast the Anglican Church had been opposed to the idea of this

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<sup>167</sup> *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004*, (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004), par. 103; 72-74.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 101; 49.

<sup>169</sup> To these some have included Wesley’s instructions on Stewardship: “Gain all you can; Save all you can; and Give all you can,” as expressions of Wesley’s understanding of both the personal and social expectations of our Christian faith. See: Weems, *John Wesley's Message Today*, 72-78.

<sup>170</sup> Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*, 9-27. Simon makes a compelling argument that Wesley was heavily influenced by these Anglican Societies.

development of laity being empowered.<sup>171</sup> As we will see the rules of the original Religious Society of the Church of England required that leadership must be provided by an Anglican priest.

There were eighteen original rules given for these Anglican Societies. That these rules were restrictive, there is no doubt (See Appendix II), which is probably why the original Societies of the Church of England didn't renew the church, as was hoped. Instead they became a "dead thing," relying upon the collects and liturgies of the church without the freedom of the individual gatherings to discuss controversial issues or even to offer extemporaneous prayers.<sup>172</sup> This early lack of inclusion of laity in leadership is perhaps one reason why the Anglican renewal movement was ineffectual and why Wesley's strong commitment to lay leadership made an important contribution to the Methodist movement's success.

The early Anglican renewal, and every institution that has fashioned such restrictive regulations, have struggled to find the results they were seeking. It appears to be a renewal through oversight and management by the professional clergy with the institutional prayers, collects and worship taking up much of their time together. It put the institutional concerns above real spiritual and church renewal. Rule IX states, "After

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<sup>171</sup> Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 67.

<sup>172</sup> In addition to Appendix I, see these rules as quoted in David L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1992), 188.

See also, David Hunsicker, *John Wesley: Father of Today's Small Group Concept?* (2003, accessed November 7, 2006); available from [http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan\\_theology/theojml/31-35/31-1-09.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojml/31-35/31-1-09.htm).

all is done, if there be Time left, they may discourse each other about their spiritual concerns, but this shall not be a standing Exercise....”<sup>173</sup>

The original Society rules IV and V state, “IV. They shall not be allowed, in their meetings, to discourse of any controverted Point of Divinity. V. Neither shall they discourse of the Government of Church or State.” This is clearly a top down method that endeavored to force institutional renewal from outside and avoid criticisms of the church that would possibly arise among the laity. This is typical institutional manipulation. The attempt is to avoid criticism that may actually bring about assessment, truth, change and a redirection of ministries. Those at the top of a well established institution and those who have a vested interest in the continuation of the status quo are often reluctant to hear what they perceive to be uneducated and naive criticisms, complaints and solutions from people at the bottom of the organization. Margaret Wheatley adeptly writes of institutions attempting to exercise control:

It is impossible to impose anything on people. We must participate in anything that affects us. We can't act on behalf of anyone, we can't figure out what is best for somebody else. If leaders or task forces refuse to believe this and go ahead and make plans for us, we don't sit by passively and do what we're told. We still get involved, but from the sidelines, where we've been told to sit and wait. We get involved by ignoring, resisting, or sabotaging all plans and directives that are imposed on us.<sup>174</sup>

Wesley, many years before Wheatley, also understood that renewal and transformation require a willingness to allow groups to dive into controversies and view the ugly underbelly of an institution. People were held accountable for the positions they took and the language they used, but they were remarkably given the freedom to speak about anything that lent itself to the pursuit of holiness, including institutional holiness.

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<sup>173</sup> Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance*, 188.

<sup>174</sup> Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, 105.



The later regulated Societies of the Anglican Church and the Methodists put spiritual renewal and accountability at the top of their list of activities, rather than at the end. The rules of the regulated Societies stated that “the sole design of this Society being to promote real holiness of heart and life . . . [and members are] to apply themselves to all means proper to accomplish these blessed ends.”<sup>175</sup> (See Appendix III) This rule and the others of the regulated Society match so closely those drafted for Wesley’s Society meeting at Fetter Lane and passed on to every society thereafter.

### **Flattening of the Social and Spiritual Hierarchy**

John Wesley’s openness to a hierarchical structure, that was not based on social status or class but simply on an individual’s willingness and desire to learn more about his or her faith, flee the wrath to come, and draw closer to God, was so appealing to the coal miners and common people of Wesley’s day that it brought about remarkable growth and spiritual awakenings. This unrestricted practice of religious involvement allowed anyone who came to faith to also serve within the life of the church. For this reason some go so far as to believe that Wesley and the Methodist movement in general saved England from the revolutionary violence that engulfed much of Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. To state the situation concisely, of 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, one could say, “the poor kept getting poorer and the rich kept getting richer.” In France the revolution

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<sup>175</sup> Josiah Woodward as quoted in Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*, 12. Woodward rewrote new rules for these later regulated Societies.

brought down the monarchy and the upper class with mixed results and at a high price to the populace.<sup>176</sup>

While it is arguable whether this small band of faithful Christians could actually have stopped a revolution, had one started in England, there is an important aspect of Wesley's praxis that would certainly have lent itself to a quiet and peaceful revolution rather than a violent one. Wesley's contribution to this spiritual and social revolution was to lift up the lower class of people to the same level as the upper classes, or perhaps more accurately, it was to raise the lower class and to lower the upper class. These early Methodists fervently preached and believed that "For there is no distinction,"<sup>23</sup> since *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:22b-23, emphasis mine) In Wesley's view everyone stood on equal footing before God and, therefore, the underclass had an equal opportunity to be in leadership along with the wealthiest man or woman living anywhere in world. For Wesley it was not a matter of economics or heritage but a matter of the heart that would promote an individual to a place of leadership and service.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> For an argument that Methodism saved England see: Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 11-13, and, William E. H. Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. III (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1921). For a good argument against Methodist's ability to halt a revolution see: Luke L. Keefer, *John Wesley, the Methodists, and Social Reform in England* (2000, accessed October 30 2006); available from [http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan\\_theology/theojrnl/21-25/25-01.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/21-25/25-01.htm).

<sup>177</sup> See: Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 40; 99-102 and 145-155.

*Intentional Leadership With Holy Intentions*

While there is an egalitarian understanding of community and anti-sacerdotalism at work in Wesley's practical theology, he still exercised considerable control of the movement. How much control and to what extent he exercised is in debate. Thomas Langford writes:

Strong leaders are seldom easy companions. Driven by a special sense of mission, such people move toward their goals with consuming intensity. John Wesley was such a leader. . . . he marked a path discovered only by tenacious and dangerous exploration. . . . Personal life was arranged by its demands; corporate life was structured to serve its goals. Christian people were a community in mission, people on the way; and Wesley was compulsive in his drive, utterly disciplined by his task, disregarding smaller matters. He was never a relaxed companion... He traveled his own way, and others could follow . . . or not. The goal was clear: to evangelize a nation.<sup>178</sup>

We appreciate Langford's work on John Wesley; however, the above quote, while accurate to some extent, we believe misses the relational aspect of Wesley's leadership and his intentions for them. Intentional relationships were developed, not for the evangelism of a nation alone, a means to an end, but for the pursuit of personal and social holiness. He was interested in spiritual formation not just spiritual conversion.

George Whitefield rightly said of Wesley that he longed to help people grow in grace, and he therefore connected them to each other and to God in a chain from beginning to end. Whitfield had maintained a style of leadership that lacked a plan to connect people for spiritual formation, accountability and support. Instead Whitfield had one revival after another, but in the end had to confess, "My brother Wesley acted wisely.

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<sup>178</sup> Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983), 16.

The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in societies, and thus preserved the fruit of his labor. This I neglected and my people are a rope of sand.”<sup>179</sup>

In a substantial way Wesley’s control of the movement was exercised by selecting many of those in the inner-circle of leadership. This was done by personal selection at the top and not by election from below. Wesley chose those who joined the Select Societies and those who served as lay pastors to the structure beneath. As with the administration of the sacraments, Wesley saw the exercise of leadership as an issue of polity and discipline, not an issue of spiritual mysticism or supernatural superiority. Further, this selection of the upper leadership was tempered by the fact that “(1) He sought the counsel of his associates for every appointment, (2) [his] guidelines for selection were published openly, and (3) he seemed to have a knack for good personnel selections.”<sup>180</sup> However, he left the choosing of class leaders, exhorters and other local leaders to those whom he had entrusted with this task. While upper leadership was hand selected by Wesley, subsequent levels of leadership were often made at the local level with one leader helping to discern leadership at the next.

### *Charting The Relational Organization*

“Wesley’s unique ‘method’ combined several interlocking group techniques to construct a ladder of personal spiritual improvement. All sincere Christians, whatever their intelligence or background could work up that ladder simply by faithful

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<sup>179</sup> This quote is recoded in various places, the earliest account seems to be from Adam Clark as reported in McTyeire, *A History of Methodism*, 204. McTyeire quotes the anecdotal story as told by Adam Clark. Clark had a conversation with a man from the Wilts Circuit, a Mr. John Pool, who received the above statement from Whitefield in a conversation with him about Wesley’s class meetings.

<sup>180</sup> Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 148.

participation from one level of spiritual maturity to the next.”<sup>181</sup>

This ladder describes the development of spiritual formation as a progression upwards toward a closer relationship with God.

The organizational

hierarchy, however, is not a

hierarchy as we may perceive it to

be at first glance. Figure 11

depicts the traditional view of hierarchy in an

organization. Wesley would be viewed as having

the top position with the Select Society, Band and

Class underneath. This is a traditional pyramid

structure that describes the early Methodist

organization, but we argue that instead of a chain

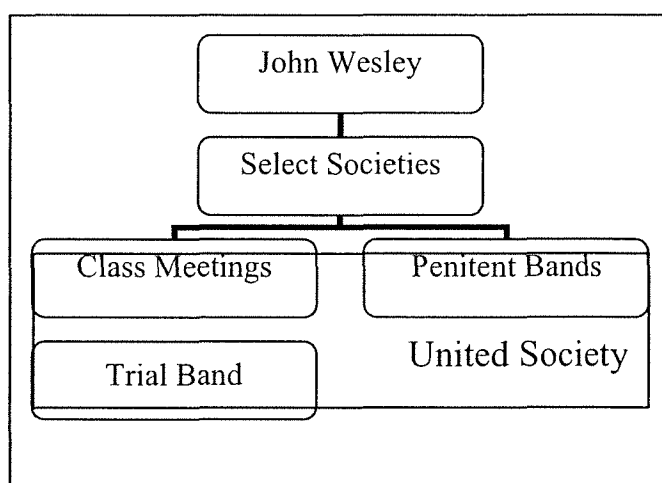
of command from the upper to the lower levels, it

is more accurately viewed as a fluid movement of

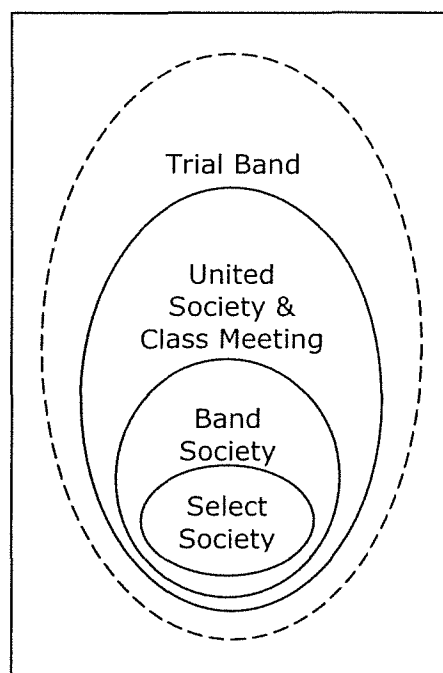
spiritual accountability and interlinking

relationships that connected the entire organism.

Tomas Albin sees this hierarchy as an



**Figure 11** Wesley's hierarchy as depicted in a traditional pyramid structure.



**Figure 12** Wesley's Societies: as interrelated and deepening relationships.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 11.

organization of concentric circles; which is more in alignment with what we have seen thus far of Wesleyan theology and praxis. (See Figure 12, above)<sup>182</sup> Each group was connected by a relationship – a Christian conferencing – that admonished, encouraged and supported one another. Each part was connected by the ebb and flow of relationships rather than connected by an arbitrary and lifeless rule or order. As Len Sweet has significantly asked, “But are we bound to one another by rules, or are we bound by relationships? Jesus argued that relationships are more binding than laws. Relationships raise the standard of discipleship higher than any external and hieratically enforced morality could ever do.”<sup>183</sup> In addition, this connection was less about dependence upon the leadership of professional clergy and more about the utilization of a large number of laity to keep the organization flowing.

#### *Front Porch, Living Room & Kitchen*

In Wesley’s structure, moving from one level to the next is dependent upon the individual’s willingness to accept the invitation to go deeper in his or her faith. Not everyone is ready for the seriousness of conversations and intimate discussions that take place in the inner circle. Congregations should not feel discouraged when people simply want a place to connect to the life of the church while they test the waters. This is, in part, why Wesley developed three distinct circles. The Trial Band was a place where

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<sup>182</sup> This is a portion of the organizational chart from: Thomas R. Albin, *"Inwardly Persuaded": Religion of the Heart in Early British Methodism*, ed. Richard B. Steele, "Heart Religion" in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements (Lanham, MA: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2001), 43. Albin explains, “The outer ring is drawn with a dotted line to indicate that there was no real boundary between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ [at the trial band level].”

<sup>183</sup> Sweet, *Out of the Question, into the Mystery*, 117.

anyone wanting to learn more about the Christian faith could come and discover the Christian faith. The Class Meeting was a place where those who had been convinced of their need for saving grace, and desired to “flee the wrath to come,” could participate in a much more intense study of scripture and sanctification. The Select Societies were where the inner circle met. Wesley only invited the core group of leaders to participate in the Select Societies, where open and honest discussions of leadership, faith, personal life, social, and personal holiness occurred.

Andy Stanley, Reggie Joiner and Lane Jones describe these as “foyer,” “living room” and “kitchen” spaces.<sup>184</sup> Joseph Myers uses four spaces being “public,” “social,” “personal” and “intimate” space to describe the different types of social interaction expected in four different settings.<sup>185</sup> We have elected to use Myers’ phrase, “front porch” instead of “foyer.” These experiences are where people feel comfortable to come and go at their own choosing. They are public areas where there is no pressure to perform or go deeper than simply experiencing a first date with the church. Living room experiences however ask a little more of us. They are areas where some invitation is usually given to gain admittance, even if it is only a perfunctory invitation. This is where “we share private (not ‘naked’) experiences, feelings and thoughts.”<sup>186</sup> It is typically where we begin to unmask a bit, but there is still a definable host and guest relationship. Finally, there is the kitchen experience. This is where most serious life happens. We

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<sup>184</sup> Andy Stanley, Reggie Joiner, and Lane Jones, *7 Practices of Effective Ministry* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 92-93.

<sup>185</sup> Wesley uses a similar metaphor to describe the experiences of justifying, saving and sanctifying grace: front porch, inside the house, and giving the title over to God – respectively.

<sup>186</sup> Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 143.

break bread, share our wine and are unafraid to let people see our dirty dishes in the sink. In fact, our friends may even help us clean up. While some vestiges of host and guest still exist, most lines between them have disappeared. This is where real family life takes place, and as Len Sweet suggests, we grant refrigerator rights. Sweet means deciding who gets permission to put items on our refrigerator door, photos, drawings, to do lists, et al, but we would expand it to mean who has the right to simply walk in, open the refrigerator door and help themselves to whatever is on the shelf inside.

Leadership in the Wesleyan spirit understands this need for graduated levels of involvement and connection. It doesn't expect everyone to be at the same level of intimacy or transparency, but it does continually seek those who have a passionate desire to go deeper in their faith and, therefore, deeper into the ministry of servant leadership. Further, this style of leadership understands the need for indigenous people (laity) to provide the kinds of leadership needed to motivate a group to consider the next level.

### *Class Leaders*

The flattening of the social hierarchy by Wesley spilt over into the selection and development of leadership within the Bands, Class Meetings and Select Societies. At first, Wesley desired that ordained clergy carry on the oversight of this ministry, but "direct pastoral oversight of the societies was . . . impossible for them. Hence this work was assigned by Mr. Wesley to his class-leaders."<sup>187</sup> There was well-defined leadership, but leadership, as we have seen, should not be thought of as over, above, or beyond the

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<sup>187</sup> Wilson Thomas Hogue, *The Class Meeting as a Means of Grace* (Online Version Published by Holiness Data Ministry/ Book Published by W. B. Rose, 1916, accessed November 2, 2006); available from <http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyctr/books/0401-0500/HDM0459.PDF>.



individuals who made up these groups. The class leader was typically one chosen from among the group, a peer who shouldered spiritual oversight, provided pastoral care and managed the administrative affairs of the group. Leaders were seen more as facilitators and servants than a separate and dominant middle manager. There was accountability, but it was a shared accountability through Christian conferencing.<sup>188</sup> Henderson points out, "It took no training or talent to be a class leader; anyone could do it... but it did demand faithfulness, honesty, and a concern for people."<sup>189</sup> The duties of the class leader were spelled out by Wesley as follows:

5. It is the business of a Leader, (1.) To see each person in his class, once a week at the least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require; to receive what they are willing to give, toward the relief of the poor. (2.) To meet the Minister and the Stewards of the society, in order to inform the Minister of any that are sick, or of any that are disorderly and will not be reprov'd; to pay to the Stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding.<sup>190</sup>

Class leaders were to meet weekly with the clergy whom Wesley had appointed to offer oversight to that Society. It was an opportunity for class leaders to give an account of the progress of their class, to submit the penny a week per member offering for the poor, and in turn to receive instruction on how best to move the class forward. In this system everyone was connected from the bottom up and from top down in accountability

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<sup>188</sup> For an updated view of conferencing see: Brian E. Beck, "Connexion and Koinonia," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books/Abingdon Press, 1998), 133-135.

<sup>189</sup> Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 101.

<sup>190</sup> John Wesley, *In a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Perronet, Vicar of Shoreham, in Kent. Written in the Year 1748* (accessed November 3, 2006); available from [http://www.godrules.net/library/wesley/274wesley\\_h6.htm](http://www.godrules.net/library/wesley/274wesley_h6.htm).

Also quoted in: Hogue, *The Class Meeting as a Means of Grace* (accessed).

Also quoted partially in: Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance*, 98.

and communication. Additionally, this became the method by which leaders in subsequent classes, groups and the church in general would be selected. By proving themselves in this capacity they were able to then be utilized in other settings.

Unless we begin to believe that from the beginning of the movement everything was in order and that no difficulty with the task at hand ever presented itself, Wesley continues:

6. At first they visited each person at his own house; but this was soon found not so expedient. And that on many accounts: (1.) It took up more time than most of the Leaders had to spare. (2.) Many persons lived with masters, mistresses, or relations, who would not suffer them to be thus visited. (3.) At the houses of those who were not so averse, they often had no opportunity of speaking to them but in company. And this did not at all answer the end proposed, — of exhorting, comforting, or reproving. (4.) It frequently happened that one affirmed what another denied. And this could not be cleared up without seeing them together. (5.) Little misunderstandings and quarrels of various kinds frequently arose among relations or neighbors; effectually to remove which, it was needful to see them all face to face. Upon all these considerations it was agreed, that those of each class should meet all together.<sup>191</sup>

There were indeed great sacrifices made and a commitment to the work and expansion of the class meetings, but these were tempered with the reality of daily life. Nevertheless, that this substantial voluntary ministry occurred on a weekly basis with laity who were unpaid is a marvel to those of us who struggle to find volunteers to teach a forty-five minute class once a week without any additional requirements of service. One might ask if monetary motivation were not a consideration, then what would prompt these individuals to volunteer for a position that would keep them engaged nearly every day of the week in some aspect of ministry? Perhaps it speaks highly of the seriousness with

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<sup>191</sup> Wesley, *In a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Perronet, Vicar of Shoreham, in Kent. Written in the Year 1748* (accessed).

which these early Methodists took the spiritual development of every disciple. This was not a social religion; this was a commitment to life-changing faith.

*Resolved Commitment to Laity in Leadership*

When challenged for his use of laity, Wesley "...met it in a style which showed how resolutely he was 'casting off the graveclothes' of sacerdotalism. 'I do assure you this at present is my embarrassment. That I have not gone too far yet I know, but whether I have gone far enough I am extremely doubtful. . . . Souldamning clergymen lay me under more difficulties than soulsaving laymen.'"

<sup>192</sup>

Lawrence Richards and Clyde Hoeldtke have argued that current biblical leadership should not be seen as "leaders over the people," but rather as "leaders among the people." As such, they describe the hierarch in the shape of a human body, much more postmodern than either boxes, lines and/or circles, in which Jesus is clearly the head, and leadership is spread throughout the organic body, sustaining and nurturing life. This is done by building people-relationships, building mutual ministry, developing a prayer-and-worship life style, encouraging allegiance, providing an example, exercising biblical authority, communicating confidence and preserving freedom.<sup>193</sup> Although this theology of leadership was developed many years after Wesley, with congregational

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<sup>192</sup> *John Wesley the Methodist: A Plain Account of His Life and Work*, (The Methodist Book Concern, 1903, accessed November 6, 2006); available from [http://wesley.nnu.edu/john\\_wesley/methodist/ch10.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/methodist/ch10.htm).

<sup>193</sup> Lawrence O. Richards and Clyde Hoeldtke, *A Theology of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 98-99.

leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in mind, it is all the same an accurate and fresh description of what Wesley was apparently striving for in the Methodist movement.<sup>194</sup>

### **The Problem with Professional Clergy**

During the progress of modernity, Methodism seems to have lost this idea of mutual accountability and the ministry of the laity. In spite of Wesley's commitment to spiritual renewal at all levels of the Christian faith and his devotion to comprehensive involvement by both clergy and laity there arose a few years after his death a hierarchy of authority with clergy performing most, if not all, of the duties of the church. Professional clergy, those sanctified, called and ordained; would provide the consumer, meaning the laity, with the commodities of the Christian faith.

### *A Twist of Wesley's Theology*

The problem of professional clergy, in some measure, happened because of a twisting of John Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification. He had preached holiness, sanctification and perfection almost synonymously. Perfection was a term that seemed to give Wesley some difficulty because of the confusion over its meaning, yet he refused to give up the expression because he believed it to be a biblical word. Some believed Wesley meant absolute sinless perfection, perfect knowledge and wisdom. However,

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<sup>194</sup> In point of fact, Richards and Hoeldtke apparently came out of the Wesleyan denomination, and it is easy to see in their work where Wesley influenced them in the development of their church leadership theology.

Wesley himself said, “sinless perfection is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself.”<sup>195</sup>

Many believe, as do we, that Wesley had more of an Eastern understanding of perfection: perfection as process. For example, a green apple is perfect in its present state, but it does not contain the same substance of perfection it should have once it is ripe. He also meant that perfection is not perfect wisdom, knowledge or action, but rather perfect love of God and humanity.<sup>196</sup> Wesley himself believed that while sanctification could be an instantaneous work of grace, it was not a finished process. The sanctified person “still grows in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, in the love and image of God; and will do so, not only till death, but to all eternity.”<sup>197</sup> “Thus in all its stages sanctification is never a static possession; rather it is maintained moment by moment in a personal relationship between God and [humanity].”<sup>198</sup>

Unfortunately, Wesley’s doctrine in the hands of Western modernity was taken as an absolute perfection and not as continual growth in perfection. Modernity also made sanctification into just another linear step of faith. Any step towards God is a good thing, but it became for many a vertical method that was separated from a horizontal connection to all humankind. It became a box on a spiritual checklist that must be marked off once and for all. Those who had been sanctified, filled, empowered and called were viewed as being on a higher level than those who were merely seeking. Only the sanctified were

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<sup>195</sup> John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), 54.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 114-115.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>198</sup> Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism, 1790-1935* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1983), 156-157.

allowed to lead, give direction and make decisions. This contributed to an ecclesiology that promoted clergy above the laity and demanded obedience from the top down instead of mutual accountability at all levels.<sup>199</sup> Bishop Carder writes that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiastical power shifted from laity as pastoral care givers to the professional clergy. He describes a lecture presented to the Council of Bishops by Dr. David Watson who says:

Made a compelling case that the role of clergy and laity changed significantly as the result of a subtle power struggle that developed between clergy and laity when the circuit riders became stationed pastors. It laid the groundwork, according to Dr. Watson, for the creation of a passive laity who receive ministry dispensed by the ordained.<sup>200</sup>

*A Needed Corrective: Priesthood of All Believers*

Were John Wesley alive he would certainly have corrected this dilemma of the professional clergy who believe themselves, and were seen by congregants, as above the laity in all things without the need to share leadership or the decisions that affected the church. As shown above, this is far from where Wesley was in understanding the priesthood of all believers.

From what we know about John Wesley he would definitely have agreed with Robert Greenleaf's model for servant leadership.

Everyone in an institution is part leader, part follower. . . . At base, its form is shaped by the incremental actions of persons who are natural servants, those who,

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<sup>199</sup> See: Kenneth L. Carder, "What Difference Does Knowing Wesley Make?" in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books/Abingdon Press, 1998), 32 ff.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 231. Additionally, see: Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1974). Norwood says almost the identical thing as Watson, "But when the preacher settled down in a parsonage as a stationed pastor, the class leader (and along with him the local preacher and exhorter) became . . . an unnecessary wheel."

by nature, want to lift others so that others become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants.<sup>201</sup>

There was from the beginning of Methodism a dual role of the leader as administrator and servant.

The leader was a peer, a *primus inter pares* (first among equals), and, on the same level with the rest of the class, but he or she was also chosen and appointed for this task in order to assume spiritual oversight and pastoral care for others. The class leader was a sub-pastor in the Methodist organizational hierarchy, and was to carry the concerns of the class through the week.<sup>202</sup>

Bishop Carder was once asked by a lay person whom he perceived as having a deep appreciation of the Wesleyan heritage of lay involvement, "What difference does knowing John Wesley make in your ministry?" His response was, "Wesley has served to deepen my conviction that pastoral and evangelical power belong to the laity, and that ministry is a shared participation in the presence of the work of the Triune God."<sup>203</sup> Wesley believed that it was the duty of every Christian to be in ministry. Prince and pauper, clergy and laity, each of them had a place of service within the Kingdom of God. While the fulfillment of each calling is different, the position is equally the same for every person; it is a position of servant-hood.

Professional clergy, providing the principal ministries of church life and presiding over the laity, was never Wesley's intention; in fact, it appears quite the opposite of what Wesley wanted for the Methodist movement. This was not to be a movement of clergy, dishing out spiritual commodities to the congregants, but a significant spiritual awakening and missional movement of the laity. Wesley wrote to a pastor who was

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<sup>201</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1977), 240-241.

<sup>202</sup> Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 101.

<sup>203</sup> Carder, "What Difference Does Knowing Wesley Make?" 31-32.

struggling to revitalize a Society, “I positively forbid you or any preacher to be a leader; rather put the most insignificant person in each class to be the leader of it.”<sup>204</sup> First, this was a strong admonition for clergy to avoid entanglement in work that was rightly the responsibility of laity.<sup>205</sup> Secondly, this was not an appeal to find the most unqualified person but rather the most humble. As we understand Wesley’s admonition, it was to find the one who is not striving for glory or fame, but the one who truly has a heart for God and the mission alone. This kind of leader works with and for the others in their organization and not for their own credit. Instead of working from the top down “the servant leader comes underneath and provides support to help others achieve their potential.”<sup>206</sup>

### *Nothing To Do But Save Souls*

Wesley believed that there was nothing more important for church leadership to be engaged in than the saving of souls and fitting them for heaven. He says:

It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many people as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord.<sup>207</sup>

However, this is more than simply coming to an altar for a prayer of repentance or the act of confirming our faith before a congregation. It is inappropriate to take at face value

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<sup>204</sup> John Wesley, *A Letter to John Cricket, London, February 10, 1783* (2001, accessed November 1 2006); available from [http://wesley.nnu.edu/john\\_wesley/letters/1783a.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/letters/1783a.htm).

<sup>205</sup> See: Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance*, 93 ff; especially 100-101. Also see: Carder, "What Difference Does Knowing Wesley Make?" 31-32.

<sup>206</sup> Richards and Hoeldtke, *A Theology of Church Leadership*, 324.

<sup>207</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *"Nothing to Do but to Save Souls"* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1990), 16.



Wesley's phrase, "there is nothing to do but save souls," without comprehending what this means for Wesley. If our idea of salvation is a simple process of repentance that culminates in a graduation ceremony that frees us from a lifetime of service and growth, we are sadly mistaken.

Wesley believed that there was a progression of faith as we encountered the grace of God as prevenient grace, justifying or saving grace, sanctifying grace and the eventual glorifying grace of heaven.<sup>208</sup> At each step along the spiritual journey of a disciple he or she is asked to prayerfully and thoughtfully step into that moment by means of a relationship with Jesus Christ and to lean upon the grace God is providing. "At the heart of it [is] Wesley's conviction that growth in grace is not accidental or automatic. One does not wander or stumble into maturity . . . [God] does not save us and then tell us to do the best we can."<sup>209</sup> Instead God provides all that we need to mature in the Christian faith and to become more like Christ. We are given gifts and challenges, blessings and trials, strength and struggles, each of which is designed to help us mature in our faith. One of the challenges every Christian is given is to be involved in the life of the church through acts of ministry, and often this includes living as an example of servant-leadership.

We should note from the quote above that Wesley is not instructing his clergy to abandon preaching or the care of Class Meetings. "It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many people as you

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<sup>208</sup> Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism, 1790-1935*, 145-157.

<sup>209</sup> Steve Harper, *John Wesley's Message for Today* (Grand rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 85. This book also offers a practical description of prevenient, justifying/saving, and glorifying grace.

can.”<sup>210</sup> Rather, he is encouraging them to avoid allowing the weekly duty of preparing sermons and the care of the organization to slip into an institutional burden or become an end in itself. The mission is clearly stated that both saving souls and building them up in that holiness are essential parts to salvation. Weekly sermon preparation and institutional care are not carried out to keep the church doors open one more week, but as a means to engage all God’s people and those “seeking to flee the wrath to come” in a process of discipleship that goes far beyond a one time event. This is a ministry of relationships, not a ministry of polishing institutional idols.

### **Summary: Wesley’s Relational Leadership**

The things we can plunder for our day from the leadership approach of John Wesley include: spiritual leadership, a pursuit of holiness as both orthodoxy and orthopraxy, servant leadership, leadership from the bottom up and as a living example, and leadership in relationships, as giving and receiving spiritual direction. First, it would seem that leadership for Wesley was primarily spiritual leadership. This is not leadership for the sake of moving an organization or an agenda forward toward some secular, personal or corporate goal. Instead this leadership is always mindful of connecting people with one another in the pursuit of holiness. This holiness is defined by a relationship with God and with one another that is pure, trustworthy and honors the God who has saved us. For Wesley spiritual leadership is not just about what we say or believe (orthodoxy) but equally about what we do (orthopraxy). Methodism, and those within the Wesleyan family, would do well to remember that his theology contained both

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<sup>210</sup> Coleman, *"Nothing to Do but to Save Souls"*, 16.

personal and social holiness. Personal holiness is an inward pursuit of faith and righteousness. Social holiness is an outward expression of that faith lived and revealed through works of piety. Second, and in connection with true orthopraxy, this is leadership that must be modeled. As expressed by Richards and Hoeldtke:

Spiritual leaders must model the truths they teach. . . .  
 . . . the basic qualification for spiritual leaders has nothing to do with skills or training or even the possession of particular spiritual gifts. The basic qualification for spiritual leaders is that they be living demonstrations of the reality of all that they teach!<sup>211</sup>

Leadership for Wesley is about finding a way to move to the backstage while others offer their verse front stage in the light of God and the world. It is always about keeping the welfare of the other in mind rather than our own ambitions or glory. Third, leadership for Wesley is about relationships. It is easy to see that relationships are key at every point of Wesley's development. In addition to his parents and grand-parents he had many other influencers; Charles Wesley, Peter Böhler, and George Whitefield to name a few. From his childhood in the Epworth parsonage with his parents and siblings to the relationships with the leaders and members of the Societies, Bands and Classes Wesley offered instruction and was challenged in his spiritual growth as well. Through these relationships his theology and life were shaped. While much of the material written speaks eloquently and with great appreciation for Wesley's methodology, it is unfortunate that it sometimes lacks a description of the depth of the mutual love Wesley and these people had for one another as they banded together in the pursuit of God.

While we concede that Wesley appears to be a rigid and demanding spiritual leader, especially to those outside the inner circle of the Select Society, we suggest that

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<sup>211</sup> Richards and Hoeldtke, *A Theology of Church Leadership*, 116-117.

his depth of compassion and intimacy with those of the inner circle is often overshadowed by his stiff demeanor. He was, after all, an English gentleman and Oxford scholar, as was his father before him. Especially in his early years, he was not prone to outward displays of affection. To some he may appear, particularly to North Americans, as brash or obstinate. We suggest that intentional relationships, as understood by Wesley, did not necessarily mean affectionate or warm as we now understand it to mean in a North American manner. However, this did not remain the case throughout Wesley's life, and may be a misrepresentation of his true nature. Readings of Wesley's personal letters reveal that his demeanor softened over the years.<sup>212</sup> Most often he ends his letters with the salutation, "Your affectionate friend and brother," "Your old friend and brother," or simply, "Yours affectionately." The content of the letters reveal a compassionate and gentle demeanor that, on occasion, prodded his pastors and friends towards a life of faithful living. One also wonders if behind the closed doors of the Select Society was Wesley more warm and compassionate than his public addresses, tracts and sermons reveal. We are informed that members, including Wesley, submitted themselves to the same intimate questions and honest soul searching. We suggest that intentional relationships for Wesley entailed honesty, trust, and a willingness to be vulnerable, but did not necessarily mean sentimental or effusive. We submit that Wesley pointed the

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<sup>212</sup> For a collection of Wesley's letters see, John Wesely, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London, England: Epworth Press, 1931). This work is now available online from, [http://wesley.nnu.edu/john\\_wesley/letters/index.htm#vol2](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/letters/index.htm#vol2).

See also, John F. Hust and James R. Joy, *John Wesley the Methodist: A Plain Account of His Life and Work* (New York, NY: Eaton and Mains, 1903), in particular Chapter XX: The True John Wesley. This work is available online from, [http://wesley.nnu.edu/john\\_wesley/methodist/index.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/methodist/index.htm). Hurst and Joy make the compelling argument that John was remarkably affectionate and loving. It was his critics who claimed him to be hard and callous.

way toward appropriate intentional relationships, exceptionally well for his day and culture, but this kind of relationship now needs to be redefined and reconsidered for a new generation, continent and postmodern community.

Leadership is, therefore, less about giving others orders and more about building relationships. It is not about picking out the music for worship, telling the choir or praise band where to stand or any other administrative duty we may feel authorized to assign some subordinate. Leadership is about taking the hand of the people God has blessed us with and making them feel comfortable enough to offer their gifts to others through acts of ministry. It cannot be overstated that this is a ministry of relationships. “The Wesleys understood that **teaching takes place within relationships**. Both John and Charles Wesley spent many hours cultivating relationships by listening, instructing, exhorting, and praying with individuals or with small groups.”<sup>213</sup>

“Members, societies and preachers were in union with Mr. Wesley and thus one another.”<sup>214</sup> John Wesley himself said in his fourth Sermon on the Mount, “Christianity is essentially a social religion, and to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it. . . . I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all, without society, without living and conversing with other [people].”<sup>215</sup> Simply put, Wesley led through relationships that had a purpose. The purpose was a plain yet profoundly serious pursuit for more of God. Nearly every conversation, letter and journal entry written

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<sup>213</sup>Sondra Higgins Matthaei, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 100.

<sup>214</sup> Beck, “Connexion and Koinonia,” 134.

<sup>215</sup> As quoted in, *Ibid.*, 134. Original quote found in John Wesley, “Sermon Xix: Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse Iv,” in *John Wesley’s Forty-Four Sermons: Sermons on Several Occasions* (London: The Epworth Press, 1980; reprint, 14), 237.

about leadership appears to push himself and others toward a deeper understanding of God.<sup>216</sup> The pursuit of leadership and holiness is a pursuit that is intent upon taking others along for the journey.

Leadership in the Wesleyan spirit understands a need for graduated levels of involvement and connection. It doesn't expect everyone to be at the same level of intimacy or transparency, but it does continually seek those who have a passionate desire to go deeper in their faith and therefore deeper into the ministry of servant leadership. It is this kind of flattening and rising, pulling down and lifting up that constitutes the best that Methodism has to offer a postmodern world. As we have already seen in Chapter IV (Corporate Leadership: A Spiritual and Flattening Hierarchy), the postmodern world desires a clearly defined mission and purpose and the opportunity to effect lasting change within the life of an organization. Current Methodist congregations seeking transformation will do well to keep the best of their Wesleyan heritage alive. Clergy should not be the hired professionals who do the work of the church. Instead, it would seem prudent to reclaim the priestly position of all believers with ordained clergy providing the mentoring, guiding and encouraging relationships of an intentional spiritual companion for the journey. It is a leadership of example and incarnation that continues to call the church deeper into the life of Christ and outwardly into the mission field of the world. It is both inwardly deeper in a personal relationship with God and outwardly into radical expressions of God's love for those in our world. Leadership in the Wesleyan

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<sup>216</sup> Along these lines we have instructed our Lay Ministry Team by telling them their relationship with those they are responsible for is a relationship with a spiritual purpose. These are not mentoring relationships – mentor being too strong a word for the more causal and less frequent conversations that take place – but these are intentional spiritual friendships with a purpose.

spirit reflects inward spiritual formation that transforms the sinner into the likeness of Christ and manifests itself in outward social activity aimed at pursuing the expression of God's Kingdom in this present world.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> See also: Larry Shelton, *A Covenant for Wesleyan Ethics*, ed. John Park, Holiness as a Root of Morality: Essays on Wesleyan Ethics: Essays in Honor of Lane a Scott (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

## CHAPTER VII

### COORPORATE LEADERSHIP: A SPIRITUAL AND FLATTENING HIERARCHY

#### Introduction

John Wesley, although not the first to advocate such a belief, understood the Church's need to "plunder the Egyptians" for the best the world had to offer.<sup>218</sup> This chapter is an attempt to plunder the organizational behavior and management world in order to introduce management and marketing that makes sense in a postmodern world. Primarily, it will focus on the new paradigm of spirituality in the workplace: including empowerment, focus, and leadership by example. Finally, we will offer a summary of implications for leadership in a key area, evangelism.

#### Changing Times and Corporate Spirituality

Most organizational behavior and management experts believe we are in a very different era of management and marketing than we were during the years of modernity, in particular the years of the 1950's through the end of the last century. Namely, postmoderns desire input, collaboration and creative license. Unfortunately, those within the Church are often use to top-down leadership or centralized authority and have frequently bought into marketing gimmicks designed to manipulate target populations for a quick sale instead of developing long-term relationships.

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<sup>218</sup>For a discussion of a Wesleyan understanding of "Plundering the Egyptians" see: Albert C. Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1974), 1-22.



According to recent leadership thought, it would appear there are mistakes the church may be making. One mistake they might make is to think that linear modern arguments and evangelistic techniques are enough to reach unchurched postmodern people. A second mistake is to use linear modern management styles to lead the church to impact a postmodern world. If our style of engaging the unchurched needs to change, then it would make sense that our style of leadership within the church would also need to change as well. If one believes that people with openness and grace are needed to reach postmoderns, it is essential that an

environment of openness and grace be established within the church through styles of management and leadership that lend themselves to establishing this kind of attitude.

Although there has been deep criticism by the secular world about Christianity being a part of a secular-workspace, recent business literature indicates that spirituality in the workplace has become an important theme in corporate management. There is also a profound appreciation for spiritual and organic systems of management which takes into consideration the individual, and how he or she works within their heartfelt frame of reference. There is recognition that spirituality not only influences the soul of an

*Necessary underlying values*

- 1 Honesty and truthfulness
- 2 Trust
- 3 Humility
- 4 Forgiveness
- 5 Compassion
- 6 Thankfulness
- 7 Being of service
- 8 Stillness and peace

*Supporting Activities*

- 1 Behavior consistent with values
- 2 Creating a climate where morality and ethics are truly important
- 3 Legitimizing differing viewpoints, values, and beliefs
- 4 Developing imagination, inspiration, and mindfulness
- 5 Letting go of expectations that are unrealistic
- 6 Acknowledgement of the efforts and accomplishments of others
- 7 Creating organizational processes that develop the whole person – not just exploiting current talents and strengths.

**Table 1** “Spiritual” values and activities cited for creating healthy organizations.

individual but can also spill out in appropriate and constructive ways at the worksite. Management is, therefore, more likely to provide a sense of workplace spirituality as defined by a strong sense of purpose, focus on individual development, trust, respect, humanistic work practices, forgiveness, compassion, thankfulness, service and a toleration of employee expression.<sup>219</sup> Corporate leadership is encouraged to see spirituality as a positive influence upon the management of personnel. (See Table 1, above)<sup>220</sup> Employees who have discovered a spiritual inner purpose for their lives are more likely to bring values necessary for economic and efficient growth.<sup>221</sup>

### *Spirituality, Church Politics and Empowerment*

“Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.’” (Mark 10:42-44)

Another integral aspect of spirituality at work in corporate settings that is mentioned in literature is the empowerment of all employees. True empowerment involves several levels, including whether employees believe they can:

- really make change;
- be a source of creativity;
- behave in a self-managing way;
- fully accept the values and culture of the organization; and

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<sup>219</sup> See: Stephen P. Robbins, *Organizational Behavior 11th Ed.* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005), 504 ff.

<sup>220</sup> Mark P. Kriger and Bruce J. Hanson, "A Value-Based Paradigm for Creating Truly Healthy Organizations," *Journal of Organizational Change* 12, no. 4 (1999): 302-304.

<sup>221</sup> A. H. Maslow, *Maslow on Management* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 83. As quoted in Kriger and Hanson, "A Value-Based Paradigm for Creating Truly Healthy Organizations," 304.

- have input into corporate policies.<sup>222</sup>

One would assume that denominations, being spiritual centers, would have grasped these ideas a long time ago and applied them to the church. Unfortunately, it is perhaps due in part to a lack of implementing the above that mainline denominations are experiencing decline. It is interesting to note that while secular corporations have taken a serious look at and have implemented a new paradigm of spiritual values in management practices, mainline churches, at the same time, have tended to adopt early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century top-down corporate models. Church polity has become more corporate while corporate policy has become more spiritual. Mainline churches have discussed the necessity for a paradigm shift in leadership but have been reluctant to adopt new policies and “spirit” in a practical manner. Some things are changing, but there is still a definite sense within mainline churches that authority and control remain in the hands of the Episcopacy.

Within the United Methodist Church, on which we will focus our statements hereafter upon, members often feel unable to make real or lasting change or have input into the corporate policies of the denomination. While the denomination does have an extensive organizational structure that includes an election process for delegates to have input into altering the Book of Discipline and thus the policies of the General Church, it is far from being easily accessible to parishioners. It is not viewed as being largely participatory. Most members have little knowledge regarding the process of introducing a resolution for consideration at the Annual or General Conference. Members do not appear to understand how to receive by election the opportunity to become a delegate to

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<sup>222</sup> John Milliman and others, "Spirit and Community at Southwest Airlines: An Investigation of a Spiritual Values-Based Model," *Journal of Organizational Change* 12, no. 3 (1999): 225.

the Annual, Jurisdictional or General Conferences where decisions are made. Therefore, most decisions are made without the knowledge or informed consent of the grassroots congregation.

The method of disseminating this information, procedures, policies, doctrines and rulings, has been through a one thousand plus page *Book of Resolutions* and an eight hundred page *Book of Discipline*. The reality is, of the latter members are only vaguely aware and of the former almost no one has any familiarity. Often local congregations neglect the General Conference's areas of concern and directives altogether. This is due at best because they are unaware of them and at worst because they do not agree with them. Policies relating to boycotts, employees, sports team mascots, gun control, abortion, gay rights, letter writing campaigns, etc. are decided upon by only a minority of the denomination's politically savvy. Members of the local congregation feel anything but empowered. In comparison:

[The Gallup Organization] recently surveyed 55,000 workers in an attempt to match employee attitudes with company results. The survey found that four attitudes, taken together, correlate strongly with higher profits. The attitudes: *Workers feel they are given the opportunity to do what they do best every day; they believe their opinions count; they sense that their fellow workers are committed to quality; and they've made a direct connection between their work and the company's mission.*<sup>223</sup>

If these employee attitudes, especially the belief their opinions count and having made a direct connection with their work and mission, are not only desirable but also beneficial, and if they correlate highly with achieving results favorable to the corporation, perhaps the United Methodist Church should consider focusing less on social issues that divide members and more on discipleship issues that bind them together. Social issues in a

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<sup>223</sup> Linda Grant, "Happy Workers, High Returns," *Fortune Magazine* 137, no. 1 (1998): 81. Emphasis mine.

world that has a very divergent view on any given topic are bound to make winners and losers out of those whose viewpoints succeed or fail, based on a vote that is out of their immediate control. If believing their opinions count and making a direct connection between their work and the company's mission are vital for a company to be profitable, then failing to hear the concerns of parishioners and focusing on social issues, which divide people into political camps, is devastating to the morale, cohesiveness and sustainability of the mainline church.

We would suggest that it is difficult for members of the local congregation to be motivated to invite others to church when they are unsure of what it really means to be active participants in the life of their denomination. When members or clergy have little opportunity to make changes in a structure that is beyond their reach, they may feel little, if any, ownership in its mission. If transformational leaders do not agree with policies, or are denied permission to lead "outside of the institutional box," or are hindered from discerning a local vision that they can believe in, it would appear unlikely that they will be able to identify with the larger organization, the General United Methodist Church in this case, and, therefore, would be unlikely to link local core leadership with the greater vision and mission of the General Church.<sup>224</sup> This again highlights the importance of the General Church creating a frame in which transformational leaders can work but leaving the actual decisions, direction, social concerns and details of that work up to the local congregation and local leadership. Without some sense of choice postmoderns simply refuse to follow. "Leader presumes follower. Follower presumes choice. One who is coerced to the purposes, objectives, or preferences of another is not a follower in any true

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<sup>224</sup> Kark, Shamir, and Chen, "The Two Faces of Transformational Leadership: Empowerment and Dependency," 248.

sense of the word, but an object of manipulation. ... followers lead by choosing where to be led.”<sup>225</sup> When corporate, denominational or even local church decisions are vastly out of the control of parishioners postmodern members feel unconnected to the church at large and her mission.

Margaret Wheatley asks the important question, “How is it that we failed to learn that whenever we try to impose control on people and situations, we only serve to make them more uncontrollable?”<sup>226</sup> Wheatley’s professional opinion, based on years of research, study and consultations within the business world is that we can not manage others into a better place by a top-down method. Instead we can only invite them to be a part of the solution. Postmoderns are not looking for parental supervision but a partnership based on mutual accountability, tolerance and authentic relationships. To invest time, energy, accountability and empowerment into the life of others is an important way forward in attempting to reorganize around a future that is uncertain. The future is uncertain, Wheatley suggests, but the relationships we develop with one another are not. “The primary way to prepare for the unknown is to attend to the quality of our relationships, to how well we know and trust one another.”<sup>227</sup>

### *Machine Parts vs. Organic Fruit*

Under the old system, called modernity, people were understood to function as machines. The model that permeated management and social existence was based on

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<sup>225</sup> Dee Hock, *The Art of Chaordic Leadership* (Winter, 2000, accessed May 3, 2005); available from [www.leadertoleader.com](http://www.leadertoleader.com).

<sup>226</sup> Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, 4.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

mechanical models. “We viewed ourselves as passive, unemotional, fragmented, incapable of self-motivation, uninterested in meaningful questions or good work.”<sup>228</sup> The reality is people have never been machines, in spite of how they may have been perceived, treated or manipulated. Models, nevertheless, took on mechanical language. People were seen as cogs in a wheel, or a mechanical part that was plugged into the system to get the results and productivity management wanted. Margaret Wheatley suggests that:

Trying to be an effective leader in this machine story is especially exhausting. He or she is leading a group of lifeless, empty automatons who are just waiting to be filled with vision and direction and intelligence. The leader is responsible for providing everything: the organizational mission and values, the organizational structure, the plans, the supervision. The leader must also figure out, through clever use of incentives or coercive, how to pump energy into this lifeless mass. Once the pump is primed, he must then rush hither and yon to make sure that everyone is clanking along in the same direction, at the established speed, with no diversions. It is the role of the leader to provide the organizing energy for a system that is believed to have no internal capacities for self-creation, self-organization, or self-correction.<sup>229</sup>

What we should have known in modernity and perhaps need to be reminded of now is that people aren't machines. People aren't robots that are waiting for someone to give them a command, an instruction or a direction to proceed. The church, as well as all organizations and institutions, are living systems, not dead machines. “The people working in organizations are alive, and they respond to the same needs and conditions as any other living system.”<sup>230</sup> They are people, filled with hopes, dreams and despair. They are people created in the *imago Dei* as much as any priest, prophet or saint. Within

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<sup>228</sup> Margaret J. Wheatley, *Innovation Means Relying on Everyone's Creativity* (Spring 2001, accessed October 16, 2006); available from <http://www.leadertoleader.com>.

<sup>229</sup> Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, 20. See also, 19-31.

<sup>230</sup> Wheatley, *Innovation Means Relying on Everyone's Creativity* (accessed).

them is the creative Spirit of God. What they do with that creativity and power is for the most part within their proclivity to choose.

Language that suggests that people are just a means to an end is inappropriate in a postmodern workplace and in the church. It is language we have heard used by denominational leaders when referring to clergy and clergy when referring to laity. Every level seems to want something, a bigger church, a larger ministry, a greater budget, or a better conference. With every increase people can be lost in the attempt to gain the greater good. People, if the church is not careful, can become a means to an end, just another cog in the wheel that can be replaced if it begins to cause too much friction. It can so easily become more about the program, ministry, conference, or church, than about the mission to touch the lives of people who make up these institutions. Perhaps it would be good to be reminded that Jesus never died for any of these institutions. Jesus gave his life for people. People are both the ministry and the church.

We agree that the church must move forward and that sometimes for the greater good of the whole that will mean moving on without some people onboard. However, that is not an excuse for simply using people as a means to get where we want to go. It is not an excuse for failing to see the value of the people with whom we are in ministry with or even the value of the people who refuse to be lead. Each person is valuable to God. Each person is made with the *imago Dei*. Each person is of worth. Although people are not merely a means to an end, they are not, in the grace and plan of God, simply an end to something, either. In true postmodern philosophy it is not a question of either/or, but of both/and. Every Christian, clergy or laity, when truly recognized as valuable and loved



by God, a potential end in itself, is responsible to touch the life of another person, furthering God's Kingdom and dominion of love and grace.

As a tree produces fruit, we are also instructed to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God, (John 15:1-17). It is significant and profound to realize that fruit is not for the immediate benefit of the plant that produced it. An apple is not created for the direct benefit of the tree that grew it, but it does contain the seeds of new life, the DNA, which are expected to be sown into the ground in order for a new tree to sprout into life. Indirectly the tree reaps the benefit of sustained species existence, but there is no direct profit to the tree for producing fruit. From this point of view Christians clearly have a purpose, the unselfish production of fruit and the development of new life.

God prunes the branches so that more fruit might be produced. (John 15:2) However, this is far from devaluing the life of an individual Christian as a cog in a wheel, a means to an end, or simply as a replaceable part. People are a living and breathing part of an organic structure. Jesus desires that the branches which produce the fruit remain attached to the vine so that life might flow through them, (John 15:5-8). Should they stop producing fruit, there are consequences, but according to another parable Jesus suggests that the tree be dug around, fertilized, watered and nurtured so that next year he might see if fruit will be available for harvest. (Luke 16:6-9) Christians have a purpose, a means toward the end of creating new life, but they are also highly valued and nurtured in loving relationships.

We question whether it is even appropriate to speak of an end. Perhaps a better expression than a means to an end would be to describe the cycle of life in a garden. There are times when a harvest is looked for and expected, but there are also periods

when no fruit is expected to be harvested. The soil is aerated; irrigation is offered, and the plants are nurtured with compost. Every gardener loves a great harvest and grows concerned when a plant fails to produce fruit in its season. However, we remember watching our Grandmother talk to her roses, encouraging them to bloom and cupping their buds in her hands as if she were praying over them. In fact we believe she was. In the gardening parables Jesus used there is the appropriate image of a gardener who expects a harvest but loves the garden he or she is working in, understanding the value not only of the fruit but the value of the vine as well.

Although we are not cogs, we are not irreplaceable, either. In fact we will all be replaced whether we like the thought of it or not, but replacing any of us, clergy or laity, should never be done with as little emotion as one would experience when replacing an oil filter or a burnt out spark plug. No one is irreplaceable, but all of us are of eternal value. If for no other reason than the fact that God loves us and we are created in the *imago Dei* we are of value. Effective leaders will recognize this by valuing the input, direction and wisdom of the individuals they are leading into the future, no matter how uncertain that future may be.

### *Application to the General Church*

From a General Church standpoint, to correct this lack of empowerment there are at least three viable options available. First, the General Church could keep the current political system but create methods through which parishioners and local congregations would feel more connected. Technology, such as the internet, E-mail, chat rooms, conference calls, satellite technology, etc., might become an important piece of this empowerment. Parishioners could have direct input into General Conference decisions

and have almost immediate clarification and feedback on issues of concern. Second, the denominational structure and political process could make a radical change and reorganize around an open system or “boundaryless” structure.<sup>231</sup> The third option is to officially, or unofficially, allow leadership at the local church level to create a safe environment that permits their church members to feel empowered within and yet somewhat shielded from General Church politics.

None of these alternatives are easy, and each comes with its own high price. First, technologies, the training to use them and the personnel necessary for upkeep, are expensive in terms of financial and human resources. It does not solve the problem of people having divergent beliefs about social issues; it only allows them to be heard, which is an important yet incomplete step in the right direction for empowerment. While it may help create coalitions, it will possibly do little to create overall cohesiveness. Second, massive reorganization efforts would drain financial and human resources from ministry and outreach and focus them inwardly toward a redesign of the political and corporate structure of the local and General church. When the church is already in need of missional and evangelistic outreach efforts, more in-reach hardly seems to be a solution. Nonetheless, it may ultimately be a necessity for survival in a postmodern world.<sup>232</sup> In addition, the third alternative requires truly innovative pastors who are

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<sup>231</sup> See Robbins, *Organizational Behavior 11th Ed.*, 466 ff.

<sup>232</sup> Frost and Hirsch make the argument that traditional congregations and denominations may be unable to make the changes necessary to become a mission minded church. In their minds, transformation may be a misuse of resources when new church starts have been the most successful way forward in developing congregations that are viable for the future. They advocate “revolution not evolution,” as the answer for Christendom’s disappointment and recent decline. As much as we believe they may well be right, it would be gross negligence not to at least try transformation for the sake of the millions of members in mainline congregations. If revolution is necessary, may God once again give

willing to buck the system and, if necessary, ignore corporate policies that hinder clear focus on the mission of the *local* church. It will undoubtedly bring reprimands from denominational leadership and peers who are enmeshed in the current corporate institution of the church. However, in spite of the high cost, perhaps the church's motivation for change will come from a need to survive, a need to truly be the Church of Jesus Christ committed to Jesus' mission and ministry.

Having a political structure that supercedes a spiritual network, which some might argue is a necessity, is not what postmoderns believe it takes to be authentically spiritual. In fact, we would argue that it is the very nature of a massive political and hierarchical structure within a denomination that postmoderns dislike the most for several important reasons. It can hinder the General Church's ability to hear the needs of the local congregation. It can become a system that requires enormous amounts of time and resources to support the institution at all levels, but in particular at the top. Further, if it fails to re-focus the church as a whole on the essential mission and ministry of Jesus Christ and in its place offers a multitude of social issues and policies, it damages its own ability to sustain cohesion and motivation within the local church. It, therefore, confirms the postmodern person's worst fear that the church is no different from the insufferable corporate and political creations of modernity in which they live. They will see the church as a modern institution that needs to be taken care of instead of an emerging movement that is engaged in loving their neighbor and transforming the world.

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passion to the faithful. See Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, 2004). Especially applicable are chapters 1 and 2.

A serious issue can be raised whether self-directed pastors and self-determined local congregations can truly bring cohesion to the General Church. With every pastor leading congregations in divergent directions, will there be a connectional system that holds the larger United Methodist Church together? These kinds of questions raise the additional question of whether our goal should be to support a static institution or to join in the creation of a dynamic, living and, at times, humanly uncontrollable movement. If so, should the idea of one large corporate church be replaced or modified by a model built on districts and local congregations rather than Conferences, Jurisdictions and General Church Conferences, thus flattening the corporate structure? Or, is there another way to view the flattening of hierarchy and the emergence of empowered autonomous leadership?

Margaret Wheatley suggests that:

We have known for nearly half a century that self-managed teams are far more productive than any other form of organization. There is a clear correlation between participation and productivity; in fact, productivity gains in truly self-managed work environments are at minimum 35 percent higher than in traditionally managed organizations. And in all forms of institutions, Americans are asking for more local autonomy, insisting that they, at their own level, can do it better than the huge structures of organizations now in place.<sup>233</sup>

Her suggestion, and ours, is that we need not lose cohesiveness from the larger institution. It may seem counterintuitive, but by letting go of control and allowing for autonomy at the local level, institutional leaders may actually find that the self-organization of systems can actually bring the organism back together. “It is one of the great ironies of our age that we created organizations to constrain our problematic human

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<sup>233</sup> Margaret J. Wheatley, *Goodbye, Command and Control* (Summer 1997, accessed October 16, 2006); available from <http://www.leadertoleader.com>.

natures, and now the only thing that can save these organizations is a full appreciation of the expansive capacities of us humans.”<sup>234</sup>

We must be willing to name our fears, the biggest of which is the fear that we might lose control. It is apparent that leadership fears that clergy might lead people astray; and clergy fear that laity who are empowered might offend the institution or God. These fears have created strict rules, regulations and official practices that have kept clergy and laity obedient to the institution but may have hindered creative solutions to the decline of church health. This commanding style of leadership:

“Undermines a critical tool that all leaders need: the ability to give people the sense that their job fits into a grand, shared mission. Instead people are left feeling less committed, even alienated from their own jobs, and wondering, How does any of this matter?”<sup>235</sup>

To allow fear to dictate the direction of our church by top-down institutional rules that punish innovative leadership does little to turn around problematic congregations. It hinders the gifts God has placed within the individual and dishonors the collective wisdom of the whole. Further, leadership that simply gives lip service to a flattened hierarchy or empowerment won’t help, either. “We can put the chairs in a circle, but as long as they are occupied by people who have an inner hierarchy, the circle itself will have a divided life, one more form of ‘living within the lie’: a false community.”<sup>236</sup>

Transformational leadership calls for authenticity in trust and empowerment by intentionally dealing honestly with our fear of losing control.

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<sup>234</sup> Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, 21.

<sup>235</sup> Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, 77. See also chapter Seven, “The Motivation to Change,” for a healthy discussion on connecting to people’s dreams and the importance of being empowered to make important change, 113-138.

<sup>236</sup> Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey toward an Undivided Life*, 25.

We must replace the oppressive nature of these demands with clarity of our mission, vision and values. Wheatley continues:

If people are clear about the purpose and true values of their organization – if they understand what their organization stands for – . . . their individual tinkering will result in system-wide coherence. In organizations that know who they are and mean what they announce, people are free to create and contribute . . . each expression a deeper coherence, an understanding of what this organization is trying to become.<sup>237</sup>

Contrary to what our intuition may tell us, by setting clergy and laity free to find localized solutions, cohesion will be created, not lost. Rather than hinder cohesiveness, an open-living-system that is well aware of its values and purpose will find itself even more enmeshed with others in the common purpose of health and growth. Wheatley suggest of organizations, “If people are free to make their own decisions, guided by a clear organizational identity for them to reference, the whole system develops greater coherence and strength. The organization is less controlling, but more orderly.”<sup>238</sup>

### *Focus, Focus, Focus*

<sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” <sup>37</sup>He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup>This is the greatest and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40)

It is imperative for a corporation, organization, denomination or local congregation to move away from being an institution that tries to do everything for everyone and in the end does very little for very few. “A lot of churches are simply

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<sup>237</sup> Wheatley, *Goodbye, Command and Control* (accessed).

<sup>238</sup> Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 87.

doing too much. . . . While they are trying to reach the world, they are losing their own communities. And instead of being strong somewhere, they are weak everywhere.”<sup>239</sup>

To succeed in creating organizational cohesion and a mutual purpose, both secular and Christian authors point to the necessity of focusing on the main thing. Some call it focus on vision, mission, or goals while others call it focus on corporate DNA. Whatever one calls it, narrow, repetitive, persistent focus is crucial to forward momentum and healthy organizations.

Congregations need to focus on the vision God is giving them as individual congregations. In comparison, Fortune magazine’s report on the top 10 companies of 1999 said:

*All ten companies at the top of our list have a single-minded focus. Wal-Mart is intent on quickly moving merchandise to 3,000 stores. GE homes in on shareholder value to create strategies for growth. Microsoft hires brilliant workers – and uses incentives to keep them – to create and market its software. Southwest Airlines promotes a culture that impels employees to deliver topnotch service on the ground and in the air. In every case, it's a matter of nurturing that unique, essential core.*<sup>240</sup>

To maximize the churches potential to succeed, church leadership must focus on the issue of discerning and sticking doggedly to the mission of the church, thus making it unapologetically the main-thing. The United Methodist Church has claimed, “The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. . . . By proclaiming the good news of God’s grace and by exemplifying Jesus’ command to love God and neighbor, thus seeking the fulfillment of God’s reign and realm in the world.”<sup>241</sup> Discipleship is

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<sup>239</sup> Stanley, Joiner, and Jones, *7 Practices of Effective Ministry*, 101.

<sup>240</sup> Eryn Brown and Lyn Costa, "America's Most Admired Companies," *Fortune* 139, no. 4 (1999): 68. Emphasis mine.

<sup>241</sup> UMC, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2004), paragraphs: 120 and 121.



about developing people who are spiritually aware of who they are and what God is challenging them to do in the world in which they live. Making disciples entails engaging them in a relationship with Jesus, the local church and their neighbor. It requires a belief and trust that disciples will live in faithful and fruitful ways. From a corporate view, “These actions are designed to create employees [disciples] with the competence, ability, and willingness to solve customer [seeker] problems as they arise.”<sup>242</sup>

### *Trust and Empowerment*

“Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples *and gave them authority* over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.” (Matthew 10:1, emphasis mine)

In a postmodern world, employees are far less tolerant of top-down decisions and are more interested in developing a system of work that is discovered and lived out in an experience of spirituality. Corporate leadership has been required to remove as many vertical boundaries as possible to facilitate a flattening of the hierarchy. “Status and rank are minimized. . . .” as upper management begins to consider all employees and leadership on a level playing field.<sup>243</sup> It has further required that corporate leaders trust in the competencies of their employees. In doing so corporate leadership must place a significant amount of trust in the presence of Human Resource Management to engage people where they live and then to help them discover how to faithfully live out their

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<sup>242</sup> Robbins, *Organizational Behavior 11th Ed.*, 502.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 466.

work ethics.<sup>244</sup> Restated for the church, in a postmodern world parishioners are far less tolerant of top-down decisions and are more interested in developing a system of discipleship that is discovered and lived out in an experience/relationship with Jesus. It requires that church leadership believe all people are on level ground with them as they stand before God. They must also trust the presence of leaders, mentors and the Holy Spirit to engage people where they live and then to help them discover how to authentically live out their faith.

Dee Hock, founder and former CEO emeritus of Visa USA and Visa

International, put the concept of trust and empowerment succinctly when he said:

People are not “things” to be manipulated, labeled, boxed, bought and sold. Above all else, they are not ‘human resources.’ We are entire human beings, containing the whole of the evolving universe, limitless until we are limited, whether by self or others. We must examine the concept of leading and following with new eyes. We must examine the concept of superior and subordinate with increasing skepticism. . . . And we must examine the nature of organizations that demand such distinctions with an entirely different consciousness.”<sup>245</sup>

Similarly, Jesus’ own words to those who desired to be in leadership are quite similar to the new corporate paradigms of empowering all employees and giving them authority that once resided in management only and is now putting them on level ground.

“<sup>42</sup>So Jesus called them and said to them, ‘You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. <sup>43</sup>But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup>and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.’” (Mark 10:42-44)

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<sup>244</sup> See: Milliman and others.

<sup>245</sup> Hock, *The Art of Chaordic Leadership* (accessed).

### *Leading By Example*

It is imperative that the kind of leadership we have been speaking of be modeled.

Even Jesus understood the importance of living what he taught so that others could see.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "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. *I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.* I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:12-17, emphasis mine.)

Similarly, Stephen Robbins in his textbook on organizational behavior and management says:

Managers should also expect that employees will look to them as models. Managers who are constantly late to work or take two hours for lunch, or help themselves to company office supplies for personal use should expect employees to read the message they are sending and model their behavior accordingly.<sup>246</sup>

As an illustration of the importance of example in church leadership, Thom Rainer conducted a research survey of more than 100 churches that were in a healthy growth mode. He then compared these effective churches, those that had a minimum of 26 conversions in the year they were studied, to congregations that had plateaued or were declining to determine what factors contributed to their growth or stagnation. While evangelism is only one key area of a church's mission, Rainer's research points out the reality that leading by example is vitally important. From one of Rainer's interviews, a Tennessee pastor said emphatically to other pastors, "Never ask the people of the church to do something you wouldn't do yourself!"<sup>247</sup> Rainer continues:

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<sup>246</sup> Robbins, *Organizational Behavior 11th Ed.*, 62.

<sup>247</sup> Thomas S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 192.

Some of the comments reported in the study by successful senior pastors were:

- “The senior pastor must model personal evangelism to the staff and congregation.”
- “The pastor should set the example by seeking to lead one person to the Lord each week.”
- “I must set the pace in personal evangelism. I can’t expect the people to do what the pastor is not doing.”
- “The pastor must be a soul winner. Personal evangelism is both taught and caught.”
- “I must establish relationships with non-Christians so that the people in the church will see my lifestyle modeled.”
- “The pastor is player/coach. He shows evangelism by example then encourages and exhorts others to do evangelism.”

We heard clearly that the pastor must be a biblical example, practicing what he preaches.<sup>248</sup>

Although Thom Rainer’s ideas and methodology of evangelism are often steeped in modernity, his understanding of modeled leadership being necessary to motivate and inspire parishioners to engage in the activity of evangelism is compelling. Rainer further discovered that “Effective leaders average five hours each week in personal evangelism. Most of the comparison group leaders entered ‘0’ for their weekly time.”<sup>249</sup> Others have voiced similar discoveries.

One of the painful conclusions I reached long ago . . . after many years of trying to help churches accept and fulfill their ministry of evangelism, is that the bottleneck in the process is often if not usually the pastor. . . . It may be theoretically possible, but highly improbable that any congregation of a so-called mainline denomination will accept its corporate evangelistic responsibility without the active leadership, support and involvement of the pastor.”<sup>250</sup>

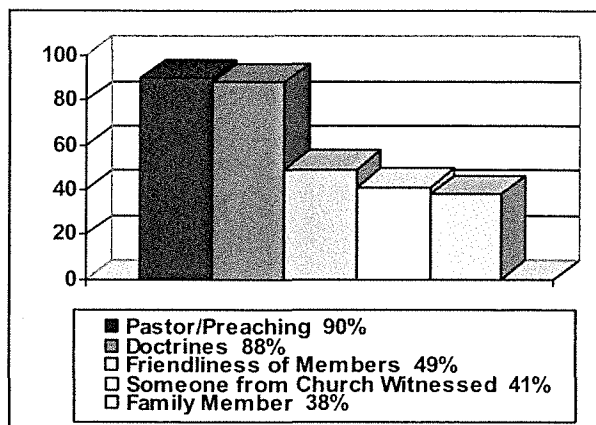
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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 192-193.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>250</sup> Richard S. Armstrong, *The Pastor as Evangelist* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1984), 13.

Special need .....	1-2%
Walk-In .....	2-3%
Pastor .....	5-6%
Visitation.....	1-2%
Sunday School .....	4-5%
Evangelistic Crusade .....	½ of 1%
Church Program.....	2-3%
Friend/Relative .....	75-90%



**Table 2** What factors led you to choose this church?

**Figure 13** Percentage of influence on people who came to Christ.

Perhaps pastors in effective congregations have not bought into the false application of a well-known statistic. It has widely been recounted that on average 5-6% of church members report that the pastor was influential as the initial reason they attended church for the first time. Up to 90% indicate that a close friend or family member invited them.<sup>251</sup> (See Table 2 and Figure 13 above)<sup>252</sup> The misguided application of this statistic is to assume that because such a low percent of church members were influenced by the pastor to attend church for the first time then pastors could better use their time in other areas of leadership. This unfortunately discounts the 5-6% of church members who are there because of a pastor's direct intervention, nor does it take into consideration the impact the pastor's example has on encouraging laity to be engaged in evangelistic activity.<sup>253</sup>

<sup>251</sup> Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Monrovia, CA: Church Growth Press, 1982), 43.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. and Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, 21, respectively.

<sup>253</sup> Rainer found some surprisingly overlooked information from the formerly unchurched. (See Figure 13, above) The pastor and his or her preaching were by far the

Although this dissertation is not about the effectiveness of preaching or evangelism, these are clearly important pieces to the overall health of a congregation. The above discussion reinforces the necessity to develop leadership within the life of a congregation that functions without the direct supervision and micromanagement of clergy. From Rainer's and Arn's studies it appears important for clergy to focus their time and energy in mentoring others to offer evangelism and appropriate leadership while the pastors focus on those elements that will most affect the life of the overall health of a congregation. At the same time, an important part of the mentoring and discipling process is for clergy to demonstrate faithful leadership in each key area by their personal involvement and actions. Perhaps the old adage of physician education is applicable here, "See one. Do one. Teach one."

### **Summary: Lessons from Corporate-Spiritual Leadership**

There is much to be plundered from the new corporate models of leadership. Perhaps the most important lesson is that secular corporations are returning to what the church gave up in modernity. Corporations are attempting to become well-run and living institutions that are able to change with the culture around them. They are investing large amounts of authority and trust in the grassroots leadership of those who are actually in the field. To be authentic and successful in a postmodern world, corporations,

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most important aspect in helping the unchurched in choosing a congregation. While the pastor may not be the most directly influential factor in the unchurched person's initial attendance or acceptance of Christ, the pastor's preaching has a 90% chance of affecting the church they choose to attend and whether they return or not. Not surprisingly, Rainer also discovered that pastors in effective congregations spend an average of 22 hours a week in sermon preparation as compared to an average of 4 hour a week in stagnant congregations. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*, 220-221.

denominations and local congregations must adopt management/leadership styles based on a spiritual paradigm that empowers parishioners to serve and values creativity, personal growth, and innovation. Institutions that are successful in this postmodern world will adopt styles that keep focused on what is truly important, offer the permission to fail and lead by persuasive example.

There appear to be four practical outcomes of our research. First, it is important to see people as living-breathing-thinking-and-feeling people of value and worth. Their value is intrinsic to their relationship with God, and not because they can “get us where we want to go.” Leadership is therefore about relationships, not just about decisions. Second, empowerment and the freedom to contribute are vital for postmoderns to join the mission of the organization and feel they are making an important contribution. Third, without clear and repetitive focus on the mission of the organization, just joining a congregation will not result in effective action. People need to identify with the vision and have ownership of it. Finally, preaching, lecturing or cajoling from the top down will never insure broad support and activity by laity. Leading by example is essential. Example does not mean taking control of or performing the ministry for a congregation as the professional clergy who are trained. It does mean viewing our mission as becoming teachers and mentors with our roles as supporting the ministry of the laity. We lead by a life of incarnation, working alongside the indigenous members of a community, becoming one of them in the work, and not by giving orders from above.

## CHAPTER VIII CONCLUSIONS

### Summary of Chapters

#### *Introduction*

We have claimed that although there are multiple reasons for the decline of mainline congregations, and the United Methodist Church in particular, congregations can become healthy and effective if pastors flatten the hierarchy and nurture key lay leaders who are empowered to: answer their personal call, cultivate intentional relationships, and nurture the congregation into a missional and incarnationally focused living organism. Pastoral leadership, as we suggested, is therefore about living incarnationally with a congregation and helping indigenous people find innovative answers to their local and global problems.

#### *Chapter II*

In Chapter II we took a look at the Trinity as an effective communal model for leadership. We again put forward that in spite of the abstract nature of theological doctrines surrounding the Trinity, the Trinity can be essentially described as a cooperative relationship, a shared authority and a fluid hierarchy. It holds profound implications not only for understanding God, but for how we understand one another and how we live out our life of faith together in community.

It implies that godly leadership is never a solo endeavor, but is part of a communion and community of faith. Within the Trinity, leadership is a mutually-shared responsibility wherein typical hierarchal charts and pyramids lack an ability to depict



both the dynamic and fluid nature of leadership based on relationship. This being true, leadership in the church will look less like the hierarchal charts of the 1950's (top-down management) and more like the images of Celtic interlocking circles (a depiction of fluid relationships). We believe scripture may well have been misinterpreted to represent God (the Creator) above God (the Son) and God (the Holy Spirit) thus requiring a hierarchy within the life of the Church; namely: priests and professional clergy at the top with laity somewhere below. While we argue that this is not the case, further research is needed in the area of apostolic and successive leadership.<sup>254</sup> Nevertheless, believing that humanity truly contains the *imago Dei*, then church leadership should reflect the same cooperative relationship as the Trinity. Clergy should not present themselves as the solitary leader of a congregation. Rather they should disseminate their “charismatic” leadership throughout the system and empower others for leadership, service and ministry. The Church and church leadership in particular are invited to have the same humble mind of Christ (a living component of the Trinity) who did not grasp at equality with God, but rather laid down his life for others.

### *Chapter III*

In Chapter III we journeyed with Moses in his leadership education. He discovers that to be in leadership means learning to share the load of the work at hand. While Moses is a heroic leader, he is not a solitary hero. He learns very quickly the reality that one person can not handle the load of an entire community. Leaders in congregations

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<sup>254</sup> For a good discussion of this see Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2004), especially pages 60-82.

will do well to heed Moses' story and avoid either burning themselves out, or the congregation they serve by trying to do it all.

Moses also discovers the importance of selecting good leaders for the task. Those whom Moses selects have already proven themselves worthy by the clearly identifiable leadership roles they have assumed within their own families and clans. As such, leadership is accurately seen as a gift from God that is given to multiple people, not just to the "senior pastor." Further, it is a gift that can be enhanced and encouraged by proper discipleship and accountability.

The selection of core leadership is rightfully the place of the spiritual leader of a community. While this can be a shared process – as we discovered with Nehemiah and John Wesley – it nevertheless, remains one of the key methods for insuring that the work of God is carried forward in an intentional way. We are not suggesting this is a way to manipulate the system to insure the agenda of pastor, or staff, is forced on the congregation. What we are suggesting is that coaching and mentoring leaders is the primary role of pastoral leadership. The selection of those who show promise is rightfully their responsibility. This is the role Moses is instructed to assume, "*Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform.*" (Exodus 18:20, emphasis mine). Leadership in transformational congregations should take serious this role of mentor and select those whom God has already blessed with leadership skills.

We suggest that leadership as depicted by Moses requires an abundance of trust. Leaders must trust that God is at work in the life of the community of faith (and we would add in the life of the larger community in which the congregation exists). If

leaders don't trust God to be at work, then leaders will not be able to let go of the work to be accomplished. Top-down rules, and micromanagement will be the eventual death of the living faith of a community. If, however, leaders trust both God and the people God is at work within, then leaders can begin to let go of the creative reins and allow God's Spirit to move in extraordinary ways. This is the kind of leadership Moses offers, and we would suggest it is the kind of leadership offered by many biblical leaders including Jesus himself. Jesus demonstrated his ability to trust a handful of faithful who met in the upper room and were empowered for the kind of leadership that trusts others to do the work of God.

This is not an easy leadership style to assume. As we heard from Margaret Wheatley and others: leaders are trained to provide solutions, give answers and manage congregations. Denominational leaders find it hard to let go of the reins and encourage "outside the box" thinking. Clergy find it hard to empower laity, and laity find it hard to assume the role of "minister." Moses, however, shows us a clear path forward. These are the people God has empowered and he proclaims, "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them." (Exodus 11:29b)

#### *Chapter IV*

In Chapters IV and V we were introduced to Nehemiah as an effective spiritual and community leader. We began with a brief introduction of the "perfect storm" in Nehemiah's life that gave him both the crucial call and the strength he needed to accomplish God's task.

Chapter IV discussed Nehemiah as a spiritual leader. In a world where we want instant relief, quick fixes and no obligation memberships we are confronted with the

reality that this is not the case with spiritual maturity and church health. To attempt to utilize spiritual formation to immediately fix a broken congregation – or in Nehemiah’s case a broken wall and nation – or any other goal that is deemed beneficial or desirable, no matter how altruistic it may appear, is to miss the point that spiritual health and maturity is an organic process that takes time. Nehemiah, clergy and other spiritual leaders are not changing light bulbs or spark plugs. It is clear that in biblical paradigms, just as postmodernists affirm, we do not live in a mechanical world; rather, it is an organic model that is needed. Therefore, the metaphors rightfully shift to planting seeds, tending a garden and reaping a harvest.

Spiritual growth, like organic growth, is mainly a slow and deliberate process, the change of which is typically imperceptible to the naked eye. Beneath the surface there is an entire world that is anything but static. A successful garden requires recurring and rhythmic time spent planning, sowing seeds, watering, weeding, fertilizing, and dozens of other nurturing activities. While none of these should be viewed as magical or mechanical methods of getting our will accomplished, they can be seen properly as mystical and rhythmic processes that contribute to healthy life.

There is an important place for planning, visioning and setting goals, as long as leaders remember that God owns the vineyard, and God gives the growth. Leaders may, and should, put themselves in the right place, at the right time, with the right tools to effectively prepare and tend the garden, but God, in God’s own timing and mysterious wisdom, causes growth to occur. With God’s help and consent, leaders assist in the creation of an environment in which spiritual growth and activity may occur, but ultimately it is God who chooses the speed, variety and path of that growth.

However, un-manipulative, patient and slow should not be taken to mean unintentional. Spiritual formation is an intentional endeavor; as is leading a congregation. This is not a *laissez-faire* style of leadership which offers no suggestion for the future formation of the community. While leadership does not “stand over” or dominate the congregation, leadership does join the community in the discernment of a way forward and in the labor to be done. As such, leaders are offered a garden to become faithful stewards of. Our grandmother used to say, “You can’t plant a garden if you don’t get your hands dirty.” We suggest that “getting your hands dirty” means that leadership will live intentionally as an example of authentic spiritual disciples who are deeply connected to the call and Spirit of God, to the re-traditioned forms of spiritual practice and to the community around them, (meaning both the Christian community and to the “stranger” who is in search of a home). Further, we suggest that kneeling in the dirt with one’s hands intimately involved in the soil of the garden, where both prayer and activity are simultaneous, is an appropriate spiritual metaphor. It is one that describes the spiritual life of Nehemiah and the life of postmodern relational leadership.

### *Chapter V*

In Chapter V we meet Nehemiah as a community leader. He clearly demonstrates the skills and gifts that an emotionally intelligent leader needs in order to effectively maneuver through the turbulent waters of a perfect storm. He was comfortable in his own skin and unafraid to reveal where his heart was. He knew the demeanor of his supporters, superiors and his greatest critics. He intuitively utilized this information to keep his community on course. By identifying with his people and their situation he helped them connect emotionally to the work. By creating both urgency and personal

meaning in the labor Nehemiah wins not only their physical assistance, but their hearts as well.

From the beginning Nehemiah understands that he can not rebuild the wall by himself. He creates a work of the people, for the people, and by the people. He continually moves himself to the background becoming incarnational with the people of Jerusalem and blending into the community by working side-by-side with them. In so doing he sets an example of the kind of workmanship he is calling them to.

Nehemiah effectively endured and dealt with the negative resonance of his detractors. We wonder what parallel there is to those who drag their feet in the church or refuse to budge toward the will of God, but instead complain, whine and become unpleasant if they don't get their way? At what point does a leader decide to confront opposition and at what point do they simply remove the conflict by removing the person?

These are not easy issues, as we have observed with Nehemiah, and we have given no absolute answers here; as the topic of conflict management deserves more study and a dissertation all its own. At this juncture we simply point back to the beginning of Chapter IV and the idea of a "perfect storm." Leaders must avoid being boxed in. They should avoid placing the broadside of their vessel open to the onslaught of criticism and controversy. Leaders cannot avoid the storm, but if they remain in a place of maximum maneuverability, keep a constant eye on the center of the storm, and avoid rash decisions they may be able to negotiate through the worst of it without losing the purpose for which God called them. Active-patience is a great necessity. Leaders do not remain passive, but they do remain patient; reminding themselves and others that the battle belongs to God. Timing is crucial. Acting too soon may keep them from receiving a fair hearing,

but waiting too long may cause others to question their strength and gifts for courageous leadership.

As we suggested, David McKenna summarizes Nehemiah's contributions to leadership quite well, "To lead volunteers, we need to *motivate* them by their felt needs, *mobilize* them by their interpersonal relationships, *organize* them by manageable tasks, *reward* them by tangible results, and *encourage* them by working the hardest of all."<sup>255</sup>

## *Chapter VI*

In Chapter VI we explored our historic roots as Methodists by diving into the legacy of John Wesley. From his leadership approach we learn three styles of leadership are important: spiritual leadership – (a pursuit of holiness as both orthodoxy and orthopraxy); servant leadership – (leadership from the bottom up and as a living example), and relational leadership (as giving and receiving spiritual direction).

First, it would seem that leadership for Wesley was primarily spiritual leadership. This is not leadership for the sake of moving an organization or an agenda forward toward some secular, personal or corporate goal. Instead this leadership is always mindful of connecting people with one another in the pursuit of holiness. This holiness is defined by a relationship with God and with one another that is pure, trustworthy and honors the God who has saved us. For Wesley, spiritual leadership is not just about what we say or believe (orthodoxy) but equally about what we do (orthopraxy). Methodism, and those within the Wesleyan family, would do well to remember that his theology contained both personal and social holiness – one being an inward pursuit of faith and

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<sup>255</sup> McKenna, *Becoming Nehemiah: Leading with Significance*, 64.

righteousness; the other an outward expression of that faith lived and revealed through works of piety.

As expressed by Richards and Hoeldtke:

Spiritual leaders must model the truths they teach. . . .  
 . . . the basic qualification for spiritual leaders has nothing to do with skills or training or even the possession of particular spiritual gifts. The basic qualification for spiritual leaders is that they be living demonstrations of the reality of all that they teach!<sup>256</sup>

Leadership for Wesley is about finding a way to move to the backstage while others offer their verse front stage in the light of God and the world. It is always about keeping the welfare of the other in mind rather than our own ambitions or glory.

Third, and equally important, leadership for Wesley is about relationships. It is easy to see that relationships are crucial at every point of Wesley's development. From his childhood in the Epworth parsonage with his parents and siblings to the relationships with the leaders and members of the Societies, Bands and Classes, Wesley offered instruction and was challenged in his spiritual growth as well. Through these relationships his theology and life were being shaped. While much of the material written speaks eloquently and with great appreciation for Wesley's methodology, it is unfortunate that it sometimes lacks an adequate description of the depth of the mutual love and respect Wesley and these people had for one another as they pursued the presence of God together. While many have portrayed Wesley to be a stiff and demanding spiritual leader, we suggest that his depth of compassion and intimacy with those of the inner circle, the Select Societies, and with his friends and family, to whom he wrote many letters, may be overshadowed by his assertive public persona. One wonders

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<sup>256</sup> Richards and Hoeldtke, *A Theology of Church Leadership*, 116-117.



if behind the closed doors of the Select Society was Wesley warmer and more compassionate. Within the Select Societies, we are informed that members, including Wesley, submitted themselves to the same intimate questions and honest soul searching. Whether these relationships were warm and effusive or not, we suggest intentional relationships for Wesley entailed honesty, trust, and a willingness to be vulnerable. We suggest that if we take from Wesley the best he had to offer, in terms of a framework for intentional relationships, we can now redefine what these relationships will be for a new generation, continent and postmodern community.

As we discovered, leadership in the Wesleyan spirit is therefore less about giving orders and more about building intentional relationships. Leadership is less about picking out the music for worship, telling the choir or praise band where to stand or any other administrative duty we may feel authorized to assign to some subordinate. Leadership is about taking the hand of the people God has blessed us with and making them feel comfortable enough to offer their gifts to others through acts of ministry. It cannot be overstated that this is a ministry of relationships. Simply put, Wesley led through relationships that had a purpose. The purpose was a plain yet profoundly serious pursuit for more of God. His pursuit of leadership and holiness was a pursuit intent upon taking others along for the journey. Clergy should not be the hired professionals who do the work of the church. Instead, it would seem prudent to reclaim the priestly position of all believers with ordained clergy providing the mentoring, guiding and encouraging relationships of an intentional spiritual companion for the journey.

In spite of the heavy emphasis on relationships, leadership in the Wesleyan spirit understands a need for graduated levels of involvement and connection. It doesn't expect

everyone to be at the same level of intimacy or transparency, but it does continually seek those who have a passionate desire to go deeper in their faith and therefore deeper into the ministry of servant leadership. As we saw in the concentric circles of Trial Bands, Class Meetings and Select Societies, there is a place for everyone to connect whatever their level of commitment and familiarity may be.

Current Methodist congregations seeking transformation should keep the best of their Wesleyan heritage alive. Leadership in the Wesleyan spirit reflects inward spiritual formation that transforms the sinner into the likeness of Christ, and manifests itself in outward social activity aimed at pursuing the expression of God's Kingdom in this present world. It is a leadership of example and incarnation that continues to call the church deeper into the life of Christ and outwardly into the mission field of the world. It is this kind of flattening and rising, pulling down and lifting up that constitutes the best that Methodism has to offer a postmodern world.

## *Chapter VII*

In Chapter VII we took a brief but important look at postmodern corporate leadership practices. We learned from the literature regarding successful corporate leadership, that in order for laity to be truly empowered, they need adequate training, direction and a mentoring relationship.

Generally speaking, ordained clergy are given tremendous flexibility in helping to determine the vision, direction and overall ministry within a local congregation. Clergy also have the ability to cultivate local congregations that are indigenous to the culture/community in which it resides. However, there is still a deep influence of top-

down leadership born of modernity that is being implemented inside the mainline institution that hinders spiritual health in a postmodern world.

In addition to top-down leadership styles are the difficulties created by some clergy who lack the fortitude to take a risk. Either they fear reprimand from their superintendent or the loss of members. While we would not advocate making foolish choices that cause a congregation or conference leadership to be rightfully angry, we do advocate and practice taking risks when those risks are clearly focused on what God is calling a congregation to be and do. Clear vision is therefore essential; otherwise risks are just wishful thinking instead of discerned direction. Empowering clergy or laity to take a risk requires a culture of trust, forgiveness and grace. Conference leadership, clergy and congregations must offer forgiveness when plans do not work the way they expected or when a program fails to meet the needs of people. Leadership requires vision; vision often demands taking a risk, and risk requires grace.

Through this literature we realize that leadership by example is important to good administration. With great urgency we need to preach authentically about God's challenge to reach those whom God loves but are outside the church. Nevertheless, our personal stories, encouragement and example are of far more value to those we are leading than simply preaching or giving a reading assignment alone.

Laity need a healthy amount of ownership in the mission of any institution. On the one hand, ownership is a positive step in the right direction in terms of feeling empowered and responsible for ministry. On the other hand, ownership can create a culture of insiders versus infiltrators. It is the latter which most congregations will fight as they transition into incarnational ministries and adopt missional values.

### **Practical Outcome for the Salem Grace United Methodist Church**

In some ways, we have perhaps overstated our case in regard to United Methodist polity and empowerment as being out of reach, at least from the perspective of being a member in full connection of the Conference – meaning fully ordained clergy. Ordained clergy are generally given tremendous flexibility in helping to determine the vision, direction and overall ministry within a local congregation. Clergy do have the ability to cultivate a local congregation that is indigenous to the culture/community in which it resides. The difficulty has often been that many clergy lack the fortitude to take a risk. Either they fear reprimand from their superintendent or the loss of members. While we would not advocate making foolish choices that cause a congregation or conference leadership to be rightfully upset, we do advocate and practice taking risks when those risks are clearly focused on what God is calling a congregation to be and do. Clear vision is essential; otherwise risks are just wishful thinking instead of discerned direction. Empowering clergy or laity to take a risk requires a culture of forgiveness and grace. Conference leadership, clergy and congregations must offer forgiveness when plans do not work the way they expected or when a program fails to meet the needs of people. Leadership requires vision; vision often demands taking a risk, and risk requires grace. Applied to our congregation, we have been willing to step out on faith to accomplish what we believe God is calling and challenging us to do. Through the use of a leadership team, the Salem Grace congregation has implemented two worship services to create the

virtual space needed to accommodate numeric growth.<sup>257</sup> While not everyone is pleased with the numeric division caused by two services, they have, nonetheless, allowed the congregation to move forward.

To begin the process of creating shared leadership, the Salem Grace United Methodist Church has initiated a Missions Team that is responsible for planning distant mission's trips every other year, and local mission's projects in the year between them. We have traveled to South Dakota and to Mississippi to provide willing hands to do the work of light repairs, roofing and cleanup. Both trips had between 22 and 24 team members in attendance. We have touched the lives of other people, and we have been profoundly affected by our time together. As one returning volunteer said, "I was proud to be a part of this team. Every one of them was tired, and every one of them sore, but every one of them pulled their weight." Like Nehemiah, we learned that sharing the work lightens the load and brings a deep appreciation for one another. Importantly, this team has been inwardly touched by the Spirit of God and is outwardly living their faith by sharing the fruit of their labor with others. They are discovering the harmony of John Wesley's means of grace and works of piety.

From this group leadership is emerging. As their pastor we offered our services, ideas and direction during the first mission's trip. However, by the second trip, we pulled back from our participation in order to create space for others to offer, and thus develop, their leadership skills. As Moses, Nehemiah and Wesley would suggest, the work rightly belongs to the priesthood of all believers. To take charge, as the professional clergy, set

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<sup>257</sup> By virtual space we mean that by going to a second worship service in our present sanctuary we have added room for growth without actually building a larger facility.

the agenda, or even to select the worksite, would take the responsibility and authority away from others who have been gifted and called to provide the ministry.

Richard Florida, in accord with Margaret Wheatley, suggests, “One of the most frustrating events is having a project dropped, pecked to death or strangled in red tape.”<sup>258</sup> As we have argued, a management style that lends itself to permission giving and empowerment is vital to create a feeling of altruism and to motivate postmodern parishioners to be actively engaged in the life of a congregation. Inviting people, for example, to be part of a mission’s trip and then controlling them by scripting their every move and words won’t attract postmodern people in the pew to boldly engage the world around them. At best they will see it as boring and a waste of time; at worst they will view it as inauthentic and manipulative.

Members of the creative class do it for the challenge, the responsibility, for recognition and the respect it brings. We do it because we long to work on exciting projects with exciting people. We do it because as creative people, it is a central part of who we are or want to be.<sup>259</sup>

Also, quoting Akio Morita, Florida makes the important point that a company is not truly led by management alone, as if their opinion is the only one that is important. “A company will get nowhere if all the thinking is left to management. Everybody in the company must contribute and for the lower level employees their contribution must be more than just manual labor.”<sup>260</sup> Simply amassing the troops, shouting out marching orders and then “taking a city for God,” almost certainly will not motivate the church,

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<sup>258</sup> Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002), 92.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>260</sup> Akio Morita, *Made in Japan* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 1986). As quoted in Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 52.

and even if it did, it would most likely fail to impact the postmodern unchurched. While lay leaders and disciples need a frame within which to work, they long to be allowed the permission and creativity to render the portrait.

Nevertheless, as the pastor, we feel that much more is needed. As we asserted earlier, programs, worship services, styles of music, and even mission's trips, are no substitute for long-term and nurturing relationships. While we seem to enjoy the front porch space offered by worship services, and the occasional living room space we enjoy in Sunday school classes, small groups and while on missions' trips, kitchen space is seldom on our agenda. It is this area we are the most in need of addressing. Therefore, we propose the following based on our study of the Trinity, Moses, Nehemiah, Wesley and postmodern corporate spirituality in the workplace:

1. A core team of leaders needs to be defined and selected from those who are demonstrating giftedness. While the selection of leadership may be seen as the responsibility of clergy, we propose utilizing current staff and other leaders, who have already been identified, to help in the selection process. It is imperative that this group model relational leadership and it should begin by flattening the hierarchy and sharing the work even in the initial selection process.
2. Core leadership will meet regularly for spiritual formation, discipleship, worship, and to develop their leadership skills. We believe that without regular contact it is impossible to develop the kind of kitchen environment needed for this level of relationship.
3. As a congregation, and more in depth with core leaders, we propose to begin a spiritual journey together in the Wesleyan tradition: a journey inward toward a pious

and personal faith, and a journey outward toward a richer and lived faith in the community. We suggest that the core team center on some of the spiritual and leadership authors that are found in this dissertation's bibliography. Butler Bass, Dale, Frost, McNeal, McLaren, Sweet, Wheatley, and Wolpert just to mention a few from the top of our list. In addition, the Illinois Great Rivers Conference of the United Methodist Church has created a workbook to engage congregations, and in particular leadership, with the topic of Wesley's means of grace and works of piety.<sup>261</sup>

4. This core team needs to engage the main ministries of our congregation by their participation as both active leaders and as servant.
5. By engaging main ministries we mean this to include the gardening metaphors of weeding, nurturing and sowing: weeding out those ministries that are detracting from the overall health of our congregation; nurturing those which are offering life, and sowing seeds where ministry needs to begin taking root.
6. Salem Grace will need to design a graded system for relationships. It will need to structure life around front porch, living room and kitchen experiences. Asking the following questions: What do we want to have happen in this space or gathering? Is this for seekers, disciples or the inner circle of leadership? Do we have non-threatening space for guests (a front porch)? Do we have place to "go deeper" in our faith, study and questions (a living room)? Do we have intimate space where we can

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<sup>261</sup> Patty Johansen, Teresa Gilbert, and Jay Regennitter, *New Streams of Living Water: Charting the Course of Christian Discipleship* (n.p.: The General Board of Discipleship for the Illinois Great River Conference of the United Methodist Church, [2006]).



talk openly and honestly with those absolutely committed to a shared journey (kitchen space)?

7. We propose to measure the effectiveness of this strategy by the following:
  - a. the number of small groups we have in one year,
  - b. the depth of relationships formed between the pastor, staff and the core team,
  - c. the depth of relationships formed by the core team and other congregants,
  - d. the depth of knowledge our congregation, and in particular the core team, has of beneficial traditions, namely John Wesley's means of grace and works of piety; determined, in part, by re-taking the survey found in Appendix V: "A Brief Congregational Survey" and comparing the 2007 results against those of 2006.
  - e. the number of missional and outreach efforts engaged in by the congregation, both locally and globally.

However, we would submit that by the nature of the work we are here proposing – a journey of faith – not a destination, and long-term nurturing of the garden in which we have been called, one year may be too soon to effectively measure what growth is occurring, especially that growth which is unseen and underground, where life is beginning to "take root." Nevertheless, over time the above measurements should reveal the depth of life or lack thereof in our congregation.

### **Benediction**

As Frost and Hirsch point out, an inner circle of leaders may well be the way forward in traditional congregations who long to be incarnational and missional to a world that has long ago abandoned Christendom.<sup>262</sup> We believe the following poem

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<sup>262</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come*, from the front matter ix-xi, and 6-16.

captures the heart of our argument for incarnational and relational leadership that helps indigenous people find innovative answers to their local and global problems:

Go to the people,  
Live with them,  
Learn from them,  
Love them,  
Start with what they know,  
Build with what they have,  
But with the best leaders,  
When the work is done,  
The task accomplished,  
The people will say,  
We have done it ourselves.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Quoted in Ibid., 64. Originally quoted in Ashley Barker, *Collective Witness: A Theology and Praxis for a Missionary Order* (Melbourne, Australia: Urban Neighbors of Hope, 2000), 52.

## APPENDIX I WHO'S IN AND WHO'S OUT

In a significant article on Ezra-Nehemiah Elelwani Farisani offers an interesting and important interpretation of these two books of the Bible.<sup>264</sup> From the perspective of an oppressed people, Farisani writes in regards to the *am haaretz*, those who had been “in county” for a long time, being excluded from service in Jerusalem and their subsequent anger and reaction.

### *Nehemiah as Exclusive*

Farisani sees Nehemiah's words “we” and “let us,” (Nehemiah 2:17-19) not so much as being inclusive, but more towards being exclusive. He sees “let us” as including the exiles who had returned with Ezra and himself, and excluding the *am haaretz* from the work of rebuilding the temple and the wall. Although Farisani doesn't quote the entire passage in regards to Tobiah and Sanballat's complaint, he has a strong argument that Sanballat and Tobiah needed to be heard. His point is that if Nehemiah, and Ezra before him, had opened his arms to the *am haaretz* from the beginning, his opponents may not have acted with such severity. If he had not only identified the emotions of his opposition but actually identified with their pain and frustration of being rejected from working, they might have become allies instead of enemies. [40] “We need to see the *am*

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<sup>264</sup> Elelwani Farisani, "The Use of Ezra-Nehemiah in a Quest for an African Theology of Reconstruction," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 116 (2001). Although the full extent of Farisani's article is beyond the scope of our discussion here, it is worth noting Farisani and other African theologians – several of whom he critiques – are suggesting that the exilic and post-exilic texts (namely Ezra-Nehemiah, and Haggai) are more in tune with reconstruction and transformational theology than the Moses Exodus narratives.

*haaretz*'s opposition to the rebuilding measures as the only legitimate means left for them to protest against their exclusion."<sup>265</sup>

While this is an interesting interpretation, the consequences of which we believe need to be strongly considered; we also believe it is debatable whether this is what Nehemiah intended. It can at least be argued that both Ezra and Nehemiah saw the need to keep the temple pure. This is symbolic of the need to cleanse the nation of foreign influences that will water down an authentic commitment to God, and their zealous love, if not fear, of a Holy God. While Ezra is more likely to have offended these people than Nehemiah (see Ezra 2:62-63; 4:1-5), Nehemiah's focus was to include the people in the work as much as possible. His use of the words *we* and *us* are not intended to exclude the *am haaretz*. While we concede that some of them appear to be slighted, it is not clear that all of them are.

From a contextual reading, Nehemiah must surely realize that the work will not get done without *these* people standing before him putting *their* backs to it. *These* people, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, must rally together if *they* are going to have success. No tribe or clan that is within the city or nearby can stand outside of the consensus and expect the work on the city wall to be accomplished. Sanballat and Tobiah are excluded because they are governing territories and living in villages that are not directly affected by the safety of the Jerusalem wall. This was not the temple, the work of which would require strict purification rights to have been adhered to. This was the wall, and people were apparently included/excluded on the basis of their geographic location, not on the basis of their social or ethnic status. At least that is a *sensible* reason for

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.: 42.

inclusion/exclusion. However, this is not completely evident, and many commentators apparently have little or no problem with excluding foreigners from the work or from the city itself based on ethnic, racial and spiritual reasons.<sup>266</sup>

### *Postmodern and Emergent Church as Inclusive*

Nevertheless, Farisani does make an important point that being inclusive is vitally important to the New Testament Church. Larry Shelton in his work asks, “The postmodern tendency to reject exclusivist truth claims may be one of the most difficult obstacles for communicating the Christian faith. How can we communicate convincingly the classical Christian messages of reconciliation and justification by faith through Christ alone in a cultural context that automatically rejects any form of exclusivism?”<sup>267</sup> The emergent church believes right relationships are more important than right thinking. Len Sweet asks the question: “Does the church lack credibility with the culture because

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<sup>266</sup> See: Barber, *Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership*, 116-118. Here Barber discusses the Jewish view of the temple and the purity needed to serve. Whether this is right or wrong, according to Barber, for an orthodox Jew there is no debate over the exclusion of those not of a pure lineage.

Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, 163-164. He also suggests the argument that Tobiah and Sanballat would have been outside the orthodox Jewish lineage and therefore excluded from the work.

Derek Kidner, ed. D. J. Wiseman, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, USA, 1979), 110. They see the exclusion of foreigners as practical, yet it “... implied a spirit of dedication rather than arrogance, for the neighboring gentiles were socially well worth cultivating (cf. 6:17f).” See also Ibid. 23.

Larson and Dahlen, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 249. The authors tie this kind of exclusion to I Corinthians 6:14-17 where Paul warns against being unequally yoked with non-believers, “The issue has never been racial but spiritual – and it is a principle that should guide us today.” See also pages 104-105 and 210.

<sup>267</sup> Larry Shelton, *Cross and Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Publishing, 2006), 2.

Christians would rather be right than be in right relationships with one another?”<sup>268</sup>

Joseph Myers comments that there is a new saying, “One must belong before they believe.”<sup>269</sup> As a proponent of this sentiment Spencer Burk believes that people may have to “opt-out” of Christianity instead of “opting-into” the faith. His argument hinges on the fact that if children are covered, especially in the practical theology of Calvinistic circles until the age of accountability, doesn’t this mean that at some point or other children must opt-out of the faith. For Spencer, this creates a new way of thinking about, and living out, an evangelistic style of ministry. For him, it is one that is far less judgmental and based on warrior metaphors, and one that is primarily seen as nurturing a garden. Brian McLaren writes, “I feel that some Christian readers may be ready to be converted into a new kind of Christian – not Christians who judge, remain aloof, feel superior, disrespect those who do not believe – but rather Christians who join Jesus and Peter in befriending others, and believing that as they do, *everyone involved* will become closer to God, closer to Christ.”<sup>270</sup> All of these quotes reveal how important relationships and inclusivity are to the postmodern/emerging church.

One may ask if any of this applies to our present congregations. In response we would submit that it sounds very similar to recent arguments in many congregations over who can serve in a church praise band. For example, do all those providing music need to be “Christians?” Can you minister to the drummer while God continues to work in her

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<sup>268</sup> See: Sweet, *Out of the Question, into the Mystery*, 92.

<sup>269</sup> See Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*, 19. Here Myers describes a seminar in which Len Sweet and Brian McLaren discuss how postmoderns want to “belong before they believe.”

<sup>270</sup> Brian McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 62.

life? Does it matter where they played on Saturday night, if they are participating on Sunday morning? Do passages like Nehemiah, Ezra and others mean that God intends that we cast out those who are not of the same faith or maturity? Obviously, not enough room exists here to argue convincingly one way or another, and we submit that one simple answer won't cover every situation. Deciding who's in and who's out must be done in the context of the local community with sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

It is entirely possible that in some situations, depending on the person being discussed, inclusion may be a benefit. Some, however, may need to be excluded if their behavior is incredibly disruptive to the life of the Church. We are suggesting that we err on the side of inclusiveness as much as possible and even go the second, third and fourth mile when need be. We are not talking about hard and fast rules here but relationships.<sup>271</sup> However, there are those moments when a person simply has no intention of honoring the community no matter how generous the community has been. In effect, they put themselves outside of the community by their own actions and foul spirit. We suggest that this is the traditional reading of the book of *Nehemiah*, and most likely, the case with Tobiah and Sanballat.

Be that as it may, we agree strongly with Farisani that a superficial reading of *Nehemiah* would slant towards exclusion rather than inclusion and must be challenged in light of the New Testament. "Biblical texts could either be used to justify the abuse of ethnicity or be critically appropriated to affirm the cultural diversities among groups

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<sup>271</sup> See: Sweet, *Out of the Question, into the Mystery*, especially his chapter "Loving the 'Others'," 123-135.

within a community as a positive song of God's creation."<sup>272</sup> Farisani rightfully stresses that we must call into question any application of *Nehemiah* that doesn't address modern sensibilities in regard to gender and race inclusion. Consequently, even if we decide *Nehemiah* is opposed to racially or ethnically diverse assistance, one must decide if this Old Testament understanding is appropriate in a New Testament ecclesiology. The Old Testament is replete with practices that appear exclusive of and hostile toward particular races, ethnic backgrounds and genders and have no place after the atoning work of Jesus Christ.<sup>273</sup>

A few of the passages in which Jesus taught inclusiveness are: Jesus said, "<sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:43-44) “<sup>1</sup>Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. <sup>2</sup>For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. (Matthew 7:1-2) He used the parable of the wheat and tares to describe the enemy sowing weeds in and among the wheat. When the servants asked if they should remove the weeds, the master said: “<sup>29</sup>“No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup>Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the

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<sup>272</sup> Farisani, "The Use of Ezra-Nehemiah in a Quest for an African Theology of Reconstruction," 45.

<sup>273</sup> That the postmodern/emergent church finds inclusivity vital one could read almost any postmodern/emergent church leader. For a short bibliography see: Frost and Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come*. Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003). McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*. Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003). Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2003). Rollins, *How (Not) to Speak of God*. See also numerous works by Len Sweet and the web site, [www.theooze.com](http://www.theooze.com) maintained by Spencer Burke.



wheat into my barn.” (Matthew 13:29-30) Jesus’ kingdom is an inclusive kingdom, at least as much as possible. He appears to suggest that God will determine the appropriate time and ultimate criteria for judgment, not the church. While we are not to cast our pearl before swine, we are instructed to forgive 70 times 7. Somewhere there is a harmony and a balance that is struck between inclusiveness and exclusiveness, between grace that influences and grace that simply is trampled underfoot.

### *Levels of Inclusion/Exclusion*

Farisani would certainly agree that this is not a simple either/or issue. There are levels of being inclusive or exclusive. There are times when leaders need to meet behind closed doors to deal with personal and corporate issues that require open and frank discussions. John Wesley had his Select Societies where only a handful of handpicked individuals were given access to the inner sanctum of his thoughts and spirit. Moses had Joshua, Aaron and the 70 Levite priests; Jesus had the 12 disciples plus Mary, Martha and Lazarus. These are the inner circle with which leaders have a deeper relationship. Farisani is not suggesting that this type of committed-core leadership circle is inappropriate, but in the larger context of the work he is suggesting that Nehemiah, and especially Ezra, drew a line that should not have ever been drawn. (See Wesley’s concentric circles and the outer circle being dashed to represent openness to anyone who was curious; Chapter IV Wesleyan History, page 123) Nehemiah, although imperfect, offers at least one appropriate way to handle conflict and a method of patiently discerning the level of response to those who are most critical of leaders and their work.

**APPENDIX II**  
**DR. ANTHONY HONECK'S RULES FOR THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES**

written sometime in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century

1. All that enter the Society shall resolve upon a holy and serious life.
2. No person shall be admitted into the Society until he has arrived at the age of sixteen, and has been first confirmed by the bishop, and solemnly taken upon himself his baptismal vow.
3. They shall choose a minister of the Church of England to direct them.
4. They shall not be allowed, in their meetings, to discourse of any controverted point of divinity.
5. Neither shall they discourse of the government of Church or State.
6. In their meetings they shall use no prayers but those of the Church, such as the Litany and Collects, and other prescribed prayers; but still they shall not use any that peculiarly belongs to the minister, as the Absolution.
7. The minister whom they choose shall direct what practical divinity shall be read at these meetings.
8. They may have liberty, after prayer and reading, to sing a psalm.
9. After all is done, if there be time left, they may discourse with each other about their spiritual concerns; but this shall not be a standing exercise which any shall be obliged to attend unto.
10. One day in the week shall be appointed for the meeting, for such as cannot come on the Lord's Day; and he that absents himself without cause shall pay three pence to the box.
11. Every time they meet, every one shall give sixpence to the box.
12. On a certain day in the year, viz. Whit-Tuesday, two stewards shall be chosen, and a modern dinner provided, and a sermon preached, and the money distributed (necessary charges deducted) to the poor.
13. A book shall be bought, in which these orders shall be written.
14. None shall be admitted into this Society without the consent of the minister who presides over it; and no apprentice shall be capable of being chosen.
15. If any case of conscience shall arise, it shall be brought before the minister.
16. If any member think fit to leave the Society, he shall pay five shillings to the stock.
17. The major part of the Society shall conclude the rest.
18. The following rules are more especially recommended to the members of the Society, viz. To love one another. When reviled, not to revile again. To speak evil of no man. To wrong no man. To pray, if possible, seven times a day. To keep close to the

Church of England. To transact all things peaceably and gently. To be helpful to each other. To use themselves to holy thoughts in their coming in and going out. To examine themselves every night. To give every one their due. To obey superiors, both spiritual and temporal.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> From the Life of Anthony Horneck, D.D. Prebendary of Westminster and Preacher at the Savoy, in Hone's *Lives of Eminent Christians*, ii, 309, 320. As quoted in Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*, 10-11.

### APPENDIX III

#### RULES FOR REGULATED SOCIETIES

A portion of “The Rules of the ‘regulated’ Societies of Popular” as reported by Dr. Josiah Woodward when he presided as the pastor of this Anglican congregation, originally written in 1678 and the forth printing in 1712 in a revised and expounded form.

- I. That the sole design of this Society being to promote real holiness of heart and life, it is absolutely necessary that the persons who enter into it do seriously resolve, by the grace of God, to apply themselves to all means proper to accomplish these blessed ends. Trusting in divine power and gracious conduct of the Holy Spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to excite, advance, and perfect all good in us.
- II. That in order to their being one heart and one mind in this design, every member of the Society shall own and manifest himself to be of the Church of England, and frequent the Liturgy, and other public exercises of the same. And that they be careful withal to express due Christian charity, candor, and moderation towards all such Dissenters as are of good conversation.
- III. That the Members of this Society shall meet together one evening in the week at a convenient place, in order to encourage each other in practical holiness, by discoursing on such subjects as tend thereunto; observing the Holy Scriptures as their rule, and praying to God for His grace and blessing. And to this assembly any serious person, known to any of the Society, may be admitted upon request.
- IV. That at such meetings they decline all disputes about controversial points, and all unnecessary discourse about State affairs, or the concerns of trade and worldly things; and that the whole bent of the discourse be to glorify God and edify one another in love.
- V. That it be left to every person’s discretion to contribute at every weekly meeting what he thinks fit towards a public stock for pious and charitable uses; especially for putting poor children to school. And the money thus collected shall be kept by the two standards of the Society, who shall be chosen by majority of votes once a year, or oftener, to be disposed of by the consent of the majority part of the Society for the uses above mentioned. And the said stewards shall keep a faithful register of what is thus collected and distributed, to be perused by any member of the Society at his request.
- VI. That any respective member may recommend any object of charity to the stewards, who shall (with the consent of the rest) give out of the common stock according as the occasion requires. And in a case of extraordinary necessity every particular person shall be desired to contribute farther, as he shall think fit.
- VII. That every one that absents himself four meetings together (without giving a satisfactory account to the stewards) shall be looked upon as disaffected to the Society.

- VIII. That none shall be admitted into this Society without giving due notice thereof to the stewards, who shall acquaint the whole Society therewith. And after due inquiry into their religious purposes and manner of life, the stewards may admit them if the major part of the Society allows of it, and not otherwise. And with the like joint consent they may exclude any member proved guilty of any misbehavior, after due admonition, unless he gives sufficient testimony of his repentance and amendment before the whole Society.
- IX. It is hereby recommended to every person concerned in this Society to consider the dangerous snares of gaming, and the open scandal of being concerned in those games which are used in public houses; and that it is the safest and most commendable way to decline them wholly, shunning all unnecessary resort to such houses and taverns, and wholly avoiding lewd play-houses.
- X. That whereas the following duties have been too much neglected, to the scandal and reproach of our holy religion, they do resolve, by the grace of God, to make it their serious endeavor:
1. To be just in all their dealings, even to an exemplary strictness (as I Thess. iv. 6).
  2. To pray many times every day; remembering our continual dependence upon God both for spiritual and temporal things (I Thess. v. 17).
  3. To partake of the Lord's Supper at least once a month, if not prevented by a reasonable impediment (I Cor. xi. 26; Luke xxii, 19).
  4. To practice the profoundest meekness and humility (Matt. xi. 29).
  5. To watch against censuring others (Matt. vii. 1).
  6. To accustom themselves to holy thoughts in all places (Ps. cxxxix, 23).
  7. To be helpful one to another (I Cor. xii. 25).
  8. To exercise tenderness, patience, and compassion towards all men (Titus iii. 2).
  9. To make reflection on themselves when they read the Holy Bible, or other good books, and when they hear sermons (I Cor. x. 11).
  10. To shun all foreseen occasions of evil, as evil company, known temptations, &c. (I Thess. v. 22).
  11. To think often on the different estates of the glorified and damned in the unchangeable eternity to which we are hastening (Luke xvi. 25).
  12. To examine themselves every night what good or evil they have done in the day past (2 Cor. xiii. 5).
  13. To keep a private fast once a month (especially near their approach to the Lord's Table) if at their own disposal, or to fast from some meals when they may conveniently (Matt. vi. 16; Luke v. 35).
  14. To mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts (Gal. v. 19, 24).
  15. To advance in heavenly-mindedness, and in all grace (I Pet. iii. 8).
  16. To shun spiritual pride, and the effects of it; as railing, anger, peevishness, and impatience of contradiction, and the like.
  17. To pray for the whole Society in their private prayers (Jas. v. 16).
  18. To read pious books often for their edification, but especially the Holy Bible (John v. 39) and herein particularly Matt v., vi., vii.; Luke xv., xvi.;

Rom. xii., xii.; Eph. v., vi.; I Thess. v.; Rev. i., ii., xxi., xxii. And in the Old Testament Lev. xxvi.; Deut. xxviii.; Isa. liii. Ezek. xxxvi.

19. To be continually mindful of the great obligation of this special profession of religion; and to walk circumspectly, that none may be offended or discouraged from it by what they see in them; nor occasion given to any to speak reproachfully of it.
20. To shun all manner of affectation and moroseness, and be of a civil and obliging deportment to all men.

XI. That they often consider (with an awful dread of God's wrath) the sad height to which they sins of many are advanced in this our nation; and the bleeding divisions thereof in Church and state. And that every member be ready to do what, upon consulting with each other, shall be thought advisable towards the punishment of public profaneness, according to the good laws of our land, required to be put in execution by the Queen's and the late King's special order. And to do what befits them in their stations in order to the cementing of our divisions.

XII. That each member shall encourage the catechizing of young and ignorant people in their respective families, according to their stations and abilities; and shall observe all manner of religious family duties.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> As quoted in: Ibid., 12-14.

## APPENDIX IV CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

It may be argued that the lead pastor starting a Doctor of Ministry program contributed to the loss of focus and momentum. In fact, we would concede that it did. However, it is important to note what areas were affected – both by the start of a D-Min program and because of “arrival” mentality – in order to properly understand the dynamics of stagnation.

1. An equal number of hours were put into sermon preparation after the D-Min program was entered into and therefore is most likely not a critical factor.
2. An additional staff person was hired to lead youth ministry and to provide leadership for the Praise Band. The quality of worship flow was enhanced as well as the addition of a lead voice. Therefore this is most likely not a critical factor either.
3. A Lay Ministry Team was launched just prior to the start of the D-Min program. This team of 15 to 19 laity calls on almost every member every four to eight weeks. Members are being contacted more often than ever before. One may question if the expectation on the part of the congregation is for the lead pastor to make these calls instead of a team of laity, and if this is a Midwest-rural value. If so, even if congregants are being contacted more often by the church than before it may be a moot point compared to the issue of who is making the call. Although this question is beyond the scope of this dissertation the fact remains that fewer members “fall through the cracks” when major life events happen. The congregation is far more aware of needs and responds appropriately as a whole.
4. Sunday night worship services were ended due to low participation, but also because the Praise Band was being utilized on Sunday mornings in the contemporary worship service. While many believe Sunday night services are an inadequate way to “disciple” members the reality is, it is one way to connect people beyond the main worship service to a discipleship study and to the church at-large. It can be a part of a system of small groups and “living room” experiences for those wishing to go deeper in their spiritual formation.
5. Small groups – those groups that were in addition to our Sunday school classes, United Methodist Men and United Methodist Women’s groups – stopped meeting. These groups were primarily for spiritual formation. Some had simply run their course and the groups were “unraveling.” The bulk of people in these

groups became the Lay Ministry Team and shifted their time towards that ministry.

6. The core group of leaders – those who had met regularly with the lead pastor and with one another in a variety of settings – was shifted into the Lay Ministry Team. Leaders began functioning more like chaplains and less like leaders. While the lead pastor continued to meet with this Lay Ministry Team twice a month, the focus of the group was on “pastoral care” not on mission and vision. For one year the Rev. Dr. Heitkamp (whom we appreciate and have the uttermost respect for) was hired to provide training for this ministry area. Dr. Heitkamp is a pastoral counselor connected with a major counseling institution in the St. Louis, Missouri area. His leadership was exceptional and the group grew in their understanding of “pastoral ministries.” The lead pastor was given the advice not to share so much of the church’s vision and mission with this group, but rather allow the group to form around pastoral care. This advice, while accurate and appropriate for a pastoral care group, hindered the group’s ability to also provide for the overall leadership of the congregation. It seems the mistake may have been in the lead pastor’s belief that this group could do both leadership and pastoral care in an effective way.
7. We led our previous “leadership team” to become chaplains. In the process we lost half of our team to either inactivity or to other congregations who were forward thinking and perhaps where their gifts of leadership were seen as being more appreciated. While a number of contributing factors caused some to leave, much of which our congregation had no control over, it is still an important question to ask: how much of shifting perceived leadership from their hands contributed to their leaving?
8. While leadership and pastoral care are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as fulltime clergy are responsible for both, laity, who are volunteering their time, may not have the training, gifts or time to provide both leadership and pastoral care in an effective manner.
  - a. An important consideration is the reality that the Lay Ministry Team focused more on “in-reach” instead of “outreach.”
  - b. The congregation was being contacted on a regular basis, but there was a noticeable lack of moving “new comers” in any effective way into the scope of the Lay Ministry Team’s arena.
  - c. As Easum and Travis point out, “The first major obstacle is that most in-the-box pastors function more as caregivers than as leaders... If you ask these chaplain-type pastors how they spend most of their time, they won’t show you hours of equipping or modeling the faith to interns.”<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Easum and Travis, *Beyond the Box: Innovative Churches That Work*, 138.



As one can imagine there are a number of other issues that contributed to the overall decline in focus and momentum of the congregation, but these appear to be the key issues for the discussion within this dissertation. Other issues can be linked to the above list and therefore will be discussed only as they apply to the overall development of the research, evaluation and suggested solution to moving this particular congregation toward health.

**APPENDIX V**  
**A BRIEF CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY - AUGUST, 2006**

<b>This survey (anonymous) is part of your Pastor-Parish Committee's annual Clergy-Church Assessment process. Please answer each question to the best of your ability. The results will not be graded, but they will be used gently to challenge the congregation in its discipleship journey!</b>	Yes			No		
	Number Answering	%	Represents	Number Answering	%	Represents
1) Do you practice prayer on a daily basis?	33	87%	234	5	13%	36
2) Do you set aside at least one portion of time each day (or most days) for personal devotions?	27	71%	192	11	29%	78
3) Do you read scripture as part of your personal devotional time?	20	53%	142	18	47%	128
4) Do you participate in at least one small group for study, sharing, mission, and/or accountability?	22	58%	156	16	42%	114
5) Do you participate in the Lord's Supper as often as possible?	38	100%	270	0	0%	0
6) Do you practice fasting or abstinence on a regular basis?	2	5%	14	36	95%	256
7) Did you attend weekly worship at least 45 weeks in the last twelve months?	36	95%	256	2	5%	14
8) Do you tithe (give at least 10% of your gross income) to the church?	19	50%	135	19	50%	135
9) Do you practice Sabbath (a day free of busy-ness for rest and spiritual renewal) on a regular basis?	16	42%	114	22	58%	156
10) Do you have a regular place of service in the life of the church? (Teacher, choir, usher, janitor, etc?)	28	74%	199	10	26%	71
11) Did you participate in a hands-on mission or ministry beyond the walls of your local church in this last year, e.g. working in a soup kitchen or food/clothing pantry, calling on the sick, bereaved, shut-in, or incarcerated, going on a mission trip, foster parenting, tutoring, etc.)?	25	66%	178	13	34%	92

12) Are you able to share with others how your faith story (or a portion of it) reveals God's ongoing work of salvation through Christ?	22	58%	156	16	42%	114
13) Do you know John Wesley's General Rules?	8	21%	57	30	79%	213
OVERALL SCORE BASED ON 35 PARTICIPANTS	23	60%	162	15	40%	108

Survey created by the Illinois Great River Conference of the United Methodist Church.

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