Developing Congregational Leadership within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

"No church rises above the level of its leadership!"

Introduction

This short resource introduces the subject of leadership at a congregational level. Based on the Board of Christian Training's Panel on Leadership report to the General Assembly in 2010, it summarises the current Presbyterian Church in Ireland understanding of leadership. Our denomination recognises with deep gratitude the immense commitment shown by so many people in providing the leadership we need. We recognise that in these increasingly challenging times we need to support and encourage and develop our gifts of leadership as we respond to our contemporary situation and follow the Lord Jesus Christ into the future to which He calls us.

Six sections looking at different elements of leadership are followed by discussion questions to help us apply the material to our own leadership – at whatever level we lead. The hope is that this resource will help us all begin to think about how we view and value leadership, how we develop new leaders and we how we ourselves can become even better leaders – as individuals, organisations, Kirk Sessions and congregations.

1. What is a Christian leader?

"A Christian leader is a person with a God given capacity and the God given responsibility to influence a specific group of God's people towards God's purpose for the group."[1]

This specifies the Christian character basis for leadership; leadership's origin in God's call; its outworking through God's gifting; its purpose being the achievement of God's purpose for a group of His people; its relational nature.

[1] J. Robert Clinton cited in *Leadership Next*, Eddie Gibbs, IVP Leicester 2005, page 20.

2. Context of leadership at the congregational level

Congregational Leadership is identified as resting in the teaching elder (minister) and ruling elders together in the Kirk Session. It must be noted, however, that leadership exists at many other levels within a congregation – organisations; new and emerging leaders - and can be both formal and informal. The minister occupies a key role in congregational leadership in facilitating the development of individual, team and congregational leadership.

3. Purpose of leadership at the congregational level

The purpose is to achieve the Church's mission by fulfilling the Great Commission of making more disciples and better disciples. This covers both mission to and conversion of non-believers (evangelism); and believers' life-long growth to spiritual maturity and unity within the congregation. Discipling, pastoring, disciplining, evangelising – biblical functions of the ruling eldership - are all included within this.

Accepting this purpose delivers the attitudes necessary to implement our congregational mission plans and to develop the believers upon whom this will be dependant. This understanding of leadership provides the framework within which vision, strategy, delegation can all take place, whilst still serving the congregation and building the Kingdom.

Leadership has been defined functionally by John Adair (Action Centred Leadership) as the process of achieving a task, by building and sustaining a team, through developing individuals. Whilst some criticise this as overly simplistic, it nonetheless offers an excellent, conceptual model, which is widely used across many organisations and sectors.

4. Leadership functions at congregational level

We can sum these up as:

- **Being the right person**, in terms of spiritual maturity, personal integrity, gifting, prayer and experience of and engagement in spiritual warfare. This will engender trust and confidence in its leadership amongst the congregation.

- **Doing the right things**, in terms of owning the mission of the church to fulfil the great Commission and the biblical definition/purpose of leadership, and having the spiritual insight to understand the times and know what needs to be done. (1 Chronicles 12:32) Vision, strategy and planning are part of this.

- **Inspiring the right cause,** in terms of identifying and communicating God's purpose to God's people with passion and conviction

- **Working in the right way**, in terms of loving, caring for and pastoring God's people, overseeing the congregation and being involved in hands on witnessing, discipling and pastoring (in the widest sense.)

5. Leadership characteristics

Leadership characteristics are founded upon and dependent upon Christ like character and spiritual maturity. Leaders must first be followers of Christ themselves, and have given proof of their character, calling and giftedness in previous ministry. This involves specific things:[2]

- **Christ follower** – lifelong learner, in accountable relationships
- **Character** – the fruit of the Holy Spirit
- **Called by God**
- **Competence** – gifted by Holy Spirit; previous ministry and life experience
- **Congregational knowledge**
- **Contextually aware** – the context of the congregation, its communities, and the culture of the contemporary world in which we exist
- **Courage** - based on faith
- **Compassionate and connected** – people focused
- **Confident** - in Christ and the Gospel
- **Conviction** – about biblical authority and doctrine
- **Collectivity** – team player
- **Committed** - to the Kingdom through the local congregation
- **Consistent** – in life and doctrine
- **Clarity** – about mission of the Church, vision of the congregation and the purpose of leadership

The core values of leadership are: God glorifying; Christ centred; Spirit filled; Bible based; prayer covered; taking spiritual warfare seriously.

Whilst all the above should be present to at least some degree in every elder, a team of elders – the Kirk Session – should possess them in a greater, more balanced degree.

6. Leadership development

We must desire to grow increasingly as leaders. Romans 12.8 identifies the gift of leadership. 2 Timothy 1.6 instructs Timothy to fan into flame his ministry gifts – he can look under God to use and develop his gifts. We must look to develop existing and new leaders. 2 Timothy 2.2 speaks of passing biblical truth onto others who are qualified to teach yet others. Paul speaks about following his example. A significant part of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ was developing the disciples to carry on His work after His ascension.

[2] This list is based partly on Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan 2002 and Eddie Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, IVP, Leicester 2005, page 113ff)

Discussion Questions

Introduction

1. Create a list of good leaders from the world of politics, business, sport, media, military, or history.

2. What attracts you to them and what can we learn from them?

3. Create a list of good leaders from the Bible, church history and the Christian world today? What attracts you to them and what can we learn from them?

(Section 1 – Leadership definition)

4. How would you define leadership?

5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement: "No organisation/church rises above the level of its leaders?"

(Section 2 – Leadership Context)

6. Identify and list the leaders in your congregation?

7. How is leadership viewed and valued in your context?

(Section 3 – Leadership Purpose)

8. How would you describe the purpose of leadership at congregational level?

9. How well do you personally and your own team provide leadership?

(Section 4 – Leadership Functions)

10. Are there any functions missing from this description?

11. Which are the areas you may need to develop and how might you do this – as individuals and as a team?

(Section 5 – Leadership Characteristics)

12. List the characteristics in order of priority.

13. Discuss the reasons for putting them in this order.

(Section 6 – Leadership Development)

14. What needs to happen to help you or your Session/organisation develop in leadership? How can you do this and who will do it and by when?

15. List some of the people in your congregation whom you can encourage and support in their existing leadership. How can you do this and who will do it and by when?

16. List some of the people you or your Session/organisation/congregation might develop as more leaders? How can you do this and who will do it and by when?

Further resources on leadership are available on the Presbyterian Church in Ireland website at www.presbyterianireland.org/boards/ct_leadership.html

This resource has been produced by the Panel on Leadership and has been approved by the Committee for Training and Resources.

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