



Presbyterian Leadership

Reflections on Leadership Renewal
in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

by Linda Valentine
and Clifton Kirkpatrick

 **The Board of Pensions**
of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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Biography (continued)

Rev. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick

For twelve years, the Reverend Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick served as Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the chief ecclesiastical officer of the denomination, and its primary spokesperson. At the conclusion of his term of service in 2008, he was elected by the General Assembly as Stated Clerk Emeritus.

On completion of his service as Stated Clerk, Dr. Kirkpatrick has become Visiting Professor of Global Ministries and Ecumenical Studies at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. At Louisville Seminary, he teaches in the areas of global ministries, ecumenical relations, and Presbyterian and Reformed polity and theology. Having long been a leader in the ecumenical movement, he also currently serves as President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), a worldwide organization of 214 Presbyterian, Reformed, and Congregational Churches from 107 nations.

His service as Stated Clerk was preceded by 15 years of service as the Director of the Worldwide Ministries Division of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), leading the denomination's ministries in partnership with churches in over 80 other nations. Prior to that, he directed various ecumenical ministries in Texas.

Dr. Kirkpatrick is a graduate of Davidson College, and received his masters in divinity at Yale University Divinity School and his doctor of ministry degree from McCormick Theological Seminary. In addition, he has been recognized with honorary doctoral degrees from Westminster College, Han Nam University, Silliman University, and Davidson College.



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- *Here is the church, Here is the tall steeple, Look inside and ...?*

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Biography

Linda Bryant Valentine, Executive Director, General Assembly Council

An ordained elder, lawyer, and executive, Linda Bryant Valentine started her term as executive director of the General Assembly Council in July 2006. Before her election, Linda served as board member, fund manager, and general counsel at Opportunity International, one of the world's largest microfinance networks, providing over a million small loans each year to poor people in developing countries.

From 1984 to 2002, Linda worked for Motorola, Inc., where she served in various capacities, including as senior vice president and general counsel for the corporation's \$30 billion communications businesses. Following Motorola, she served for a brief period as interim staff coordinator at Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, where she was an elder, trustee, deacon, and member for over 20 years. Linda has also worked as an attorney for United Airlines, Inc., Atlantic Richfield Co., a Philadelphia law firm, and a computer software company. She has served on the board of several not-for-profit organizations.

Linda holds degrees in economics and political science from the University of Michigan and a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, DC, and studied business in the MBA program of University of Southern California.

Conclusion

While there are certainly important dimensions to leadership beyond these Reformed principles (and that is why the Presbyterian fascination with contemporary leadership studies is so important), these five dimensions are crucial if there is to be a leadership revolution in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that renews our church to be what God intends it to be in the 21st century. We badly need pastors, elders, deacons, church executives, educators, and many others who are committed to and proficient in shared leadership, who have a passion to transform the world, who share the powerful holistic vision of the Great Ends of the Church, whose source and model is Jesus, and who are multiculturally proficient and at home with the diversity of our world. These are the characteristics of leadership in the Reformed tradition and the qualities that we need to encourage among all who would be Presbyterian leaders in our time.

Bold and transforming leadership is essential if we are to have a future faithful to the call of Christ as Presbyterians. A recent study by the Association of Theological Schools worries about the reality that we are training people to serve as pastors and chaplains for increasingly smaller and aging churches when what we need is leaders who are missionaries and entrepreneurs that can lead us in reinventing the life of the church to attract a new and multicultural generation. Leaders who do well what we have always done will simply end up presiding over dying organizations. We desperately need people with the courage and passion to be transforming leaders — who can draw us to confront serious challenges and envision and lead us to “adaptive” rather than “technical” solutions to our problems. We need leaders who can understand the competing values that must be brought forward and resolved if the congregation, governing body, or organization is to move into a radically changed future. We are far too timid in our leadership as Presbyterians. We need new approaches, firmly grounded in the faith, that can lead us to fresh and creative approaches to being the church in the 21st century.

We are in a time of profound change. Christianity is a religion about change. There is a cry for leadership that can inspire hope, cast vision, and lead us into a new future. The good news is that we have in the deep core values of our own Presbyterian tradition the resources and vision we need for such a time as this.

Introduction

We believe in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We have been incredibly blessed to be nurtured in this tradition, brought to living faith in Jesus Christ, and invited to share in leadership in this great denomination. Our hope for this church is not based on a naïve assumption that all is well in this church — far from it! We know better than most that our church in so many of its expressions is in a time of crisis and in deep need of renewal.

However, in spite of its problems, we are convinced that this church, at its core, has incredible gifts which are of God. We are a church that is second to none in our vision of what a Christian community is called to be. We are a church with a rich heritage of making a difference for Christ in this nation and around the world. We are a church that has institutions of great value. We are a church that is ecumenical in spirit and concerned about the well being of humankind. More importantly, we are a church with thousands of congregations where the gospel is rightly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and where people are nurtured in Christian faith. Most important of all, we are a church centered on Jesus Christ, who is the hope of the world.

If these great gifts are to come alive in our time, we must change. The patterns that we have seen in recent years will not bring us new life as the body of Christ. We cannot continue to lose members and vitality in our congregations, to distrust and be in conflict with one another, or to turn in on ourselves when the world is hungry for the gospel. We must change, and that can only happen if we empower leaders that can be used by God to renew our church and to mold us together as the body of Christ, on fire to “turn the world upside down” for the gospel.

We have been privileged to be invited to share our leadership gifts with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It has been quite a ride! In many ways we represent the diversity of our church: female and male, elder and minister, corporate and ministerial, leaders of different agencies that were once called “tarantulas in a bottle,” but in spite of all that, we have found great joy and strength in being partners in a shared leadership on behalf of the General Assembly. In fact, our differences have allowed us to complement one another in our leadership roles. Beyond ourselves, we have been privileged to share leadership with those who lead other agencies, our presbyteries and synods, and pastors, elders, and deacons across the church.

Out of our experience we want to share some deeply held convictions about the gifts that our Presbyterian tradition has to offer to the renewal of leadership in our church. We believe that we need a leadership revolution at every level in our church, and that the resources for that renewal, while they can well be sought from other disciplines, are also available by looking even more deeply into our Reformed tradition. In the pages that follow, we have sought to do just that as a small contribution to the deep hunger for the renewal of leadership all across our church. We hope you will find these reflections helpful.

We especially want to offer a word of thanks to the Board of Pensions for inviting us to share these reflections and, more importantly, for all that the Board does to support the leaders of this denomination. In addition to the Board's vital ministries in providing healthcare and retirement benefits for church workers, the Board has been an important ally in fostering leadership in so many arenas. Through efforts like seminary debt assistance grants, the Presbyterian CREDO program, colleague groups for ministers, supplemental grants for sabbaticals, support of the candidacy process, and many other ventures, we rejoice in the ministry of the Board to strengthen leadership across our church.

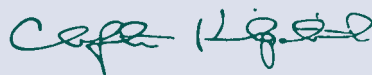
We have been pleased to work closely with the Board and its President, Robert Maggs, as the various agencies of the church have given priority to supporting leadership for the renewal of the whole church. Through efforts like the National Pastor Sabbath and Elders Conferences, we have appreciated working directly with our colleagues at the Board of Pensions in seeking to renew and support leadership at all levels across the church. We hope that this booklet on *Presbyterian Leadership* will be another helpful resource to ministers, elders, and deacons as together we seek to give leadership to the "new thing" that God is calling us to be as Presbyterians.

We are pleased to release this essay in the season between Easter and Pentecost when we find new hope in the resurrection of our Lord, and look forward with great enthusiasm to the coming of the Holy Spirit to renew our church and set it on fire to share the gospel to the "ends of the earth."

Grace and peace,



Linda Valentine



Cliff Kirkpatrick

Our commitment to diversity has not only moral foundations and biblical injunction; it actually leads to better decisions and is a valuable tradition for our modern age. We are an increasingly multicultural nation. Daily we are exposed in media, travel, and our communities to people of different backgrounds, languages, and traditions. Globalization has led us to frequent interactions with people around the world. Baby boomers are moving into the cohort once considered retirement, a time when people would largely withdraw from civic and professional engagement. But this cohort is still energetic and engaged, healthy and wanting to stay active. So, even as younger people are stepping up to decision-making positions, older people are not stepping away. Each generation brings different perspectives. And this is good. Tricky, but good. Decision making is enhanced when different perspectives are engaged.

One of the gifts given to Presbyterians over the years has been the ability to hold multiple values together in tension — like freedom of conscience and faithfulness to community norms. In a very complicated world we need to listen to multiple voices and hold together in tension values that are precious to different people and groups. Mistakes in history, business, politics, and all sorts of realms are too often made because of myopic views, group-think, and limited perspectives. Democracy is messy, it is said, but it leads to more enduring and considered decisions.

This requires leaders who are not parochial. Jesus' passion was for the entire world, and especially for those who are marginalized and oppressed. Leaders who do not challenge their members to look beyond the four walls of the church may enable a church to grow for a while, but they will not build the depth and strength that comes from a discipleship that is centered on reaching out to others and being agents of transformation in the world. In a time of economic globalization and continual immigration, leaders with a global and ecumenical vision are needed more than ever.

Our leadership style is modeled on Jesus' style of leadership, which was always that of a servant. Jesus lived simply and was passionate about the poor and the outcast, fervent in prayer, outraged about injustice, and committed to the reign of God that is breaking into human history. We should be the same. No one has ever built a movement of greater strength and power than Jesus, and he did it, not by following the leadership gurus of his time, but rather by following the wisdom of the Prophet Micah to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God." Not a bad model for 21st century Christian leaders to follow as well.

5. Effective leadership honors diversity and reaches out to the world

One of the most revolutionary things about Jesus' ministry and the early Christian movement was their commitment to diversity and inclusiveness. Jesus reached out and included the Samaritan, the tax collector, the woman at the well, the prostitute — those often despised by society — and brought them into the center of his movement. And his final wish for his disciples was that this good news be shared to the "ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Nobody is to be excluded. The Apostle Paul, who broke the exclusionary barriers of his time in taking Christianity to the Gentiles, reminds us that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). The barriers of his time based on race, economics, and gender were all broken down in Christ, and Christian leadership is to be about including all in the movement and treating them with respect and honor as we are about God's business in the world. This biblical and Reformed commitment to inclusiveness is a critical dimension of leadership in a 21st century world. Effective leaders are those that have multicultural proficiency and an ability to empower communities where diversities are seen as gifts to complement one another in making the movement stronger than it could ever be if it were homogenous.

Presbyterians are open and democratic. We believe that truth is discovered in communal discernment. When commissioners come together in General Assembly, or presbyteries and synods, and elders to session, they are not to be representing particular factions or interest groups, but rather gathering as a council, as a community to discern the will of God. Discernment comes from listening to different voices, being open to new insights, and pondering those things in our hearts and minds as we pray for guidance. This means that we need people of diverse experiences and perspectives in conversation around the table.

CHAPTER 1

A Hunger For Leadership

What a time to be writing an article on leadership. We are in the beginning days of the Barack Obama administration, a time when the hunger — and expectation — for hopeful, inspiring, disciplined, and trusted leadership is at an all-time high for our lifetimes. There is a deep yearning for leaders who will help us move beyond the economic crisis and fear that grips our nation, who will help America reclaim our sense of ourselves and a place in the world where we are known for our commitment to justice, freedom, and peace, and who will inspire us all to be our best selves.

At the same time that we have a deep distrust of institutions and leaders, we yearn for a new generation of leaders who will inspire us to live up to our full potential — to achieve the "life in abundance" (John 10:10) that God intends for us all. There is a pervasive sense that our institutions are not living up to their potential, and as a result children graduate from our schools without being able to read and write or compete in a technological world, our consumer culture is ecologically unsustainable and unsatisfying, diplomacy is faltering while military solutions and threats of violence seem all too present but fail to bring about peace, healthcare is less and less a possibility for a growing number of people, and our churches are losing members and turning in on themselves while the world is hungry for the promises and message of the gospel.

Underneath this cry for leadership is a yearning for hope and community. John Gardiner, the well-known writer of countless books on leadership, once remarked that, "The first task of a leader is to keep hope alive."¹ More than ever our society is yearning for leaders who can articulate vision, inspire hope, and make it come alive among us.

Studying the Art of Leadership

The longing for leadership is not new. Books, courses, seminars, and theories abound to serve the quest for better leadership in business, government, not-for-profit organizations, and the church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) included.

¹ John Gardiner, *No Easy Victories* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

In congregations, middle governing bodies, national agencies, and other church-related organizations, the work of several writers seems particularly to resonate.

James MacGregor Burns, biographer of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, began this modern search for the art of leadership with his book by that very name, *Leadership*,² and his framework of transactional versus transformational leaders. In more recent years Jim Collins in his best-seller, *Good to Great*,³ has offered us fresh insights into leadership with his discussion of “Level 5 Leadership,” while Ronald Heifetz has helped us to differentiate between “technical” and “adaptive” change and stressed the need in a time of great change to empower adaptive leadership because simply doing what we have always done will not work. Going back a generation, a profound contribution to leadership studies came to us from Robert Greenleaf in his notion of the servant leader, a concept that certainly resonates among those of us who follow Jesus Christ, who is the epitome of a servant leader. Let us take a moment to explore what each of these theories might offer to those of us who seek a renewal of leadership in our time.

Transactional or Transforming?

James MacGregor Burns distinguishes two kinds of leaders. Transactional leaders lead by exchanging favors or rewards with followers to gain their compliance, like a politician who champions a cause to get the votes of a particular interest group, or in the church, one who compromises one agenda to enlist agreement to another without making hard choices and setting bold, new directions. Transforming leaders lead by engaging people in such a way that both the leader and the people are raised to higher levels of community, motivation, and morality. Transforming leaders are those who connect with people at the level of their deepest hopes and aspirations and inspire them to be better people. Their lives are a demonstration of the values they proclaim, so that their words ring true at a very deep level, people believe that transformation is possible, and seek to embrace a fresh collective purpose.

Burns traces expressions of this kind of transforming leadership throughout the broad stroke of human history and shows how this kind of deep, value-centered leadership empowered movements as diverse as those led by Moses, Jesus, Martin Luther King, and Mahatma Gandhi. He worries that in a culture where transac-

² James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

³ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2001).

Contextualizing vision for a particular congregation is imperative, Diana Butler Bass discovered in her study of healthy, vibrant mainline congregations.¹⁶ Bass extensively studied centrist and progressive congregations across mainline denominations that in the aggregate have been losing members, and she debunks the impression that growth is only happening in evangelical mega-churches. She found flourishing congregations and identified that they had engaged in some form of communal discernment about who the community is in God and what God is calling that particular congregation to do. Each one found a particular call to a practice such as hospitality, healing, contemplation, testimony, or justice that became the focal point for a transforming and life-giving vision for the congregation. She has observed that similar studies of conservative and evangelical churches have made similar findings.

4. The source and model of our leadership is Jesus Christ

The ultimate leader in our life together is Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church and Lord of the world. Our leadership is subsidiary to Christ's and is for the purpose of pointing people to Christ and his way in the world, not our own. Effective Christian leadership always keeps this in perspective. It is founded and sustained through a close personal walk with Jesus. Without the spiritual power that comes from surrendering our lives to Christ, grounding our reality in prayer and scripture, and having a deep confidence in God, Christian leadership is impossible.

What better description of the servant leader than that found in Paul's description of leadership modeled on Christ:

“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. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be servant of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45)

¹⁶ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

3. The basis for our leadership is a holistic vision

The King James translation of Proverbs 29:18 speaks to us. “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Inspiring vision is a core principle of leadership — without an inviting and inspiring vision of what matters most, leadership is impossible. For Presbyterians, we have a wonderful holistic vision of what matters most in the Great Ends of the Church (*Book of Order* G-1.0200):

“The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.”

This vision, written in the language of one hundred years ago, captures the heart of God’s call to us whatever our specific location or vocation. It is the content of Christian leadership — to call communities to proclaim the gospel, care for the needy, uphold the truth, worship God, seek justice, and to “walk the walk as well as talk the talk” in our leadership roles. Such a vision does not lock us in to particular programs and practices but rather gives us a core common ground out of which a rich culture of experimentation and new ideas can flourish as we seek to make this abiding vision come alive in a very different cultural context.

It is increasingly clear that organizations — and churches — that thrive in a post-modern world are those where the core values and mission of the organization are shared by its members and all feel that they have an opportunity to participate in shaping the body. Donald Miller makes this point in his book, *Reinventing American Protestantism*.¹⁵ Miller, an Episcopalian and professor at the University of Southern California, set out to study why so many contemporary Americans have been attracted to “new paradigm” churches. What he concludes is that beyond the surface differences there are two things that make these movements so contagiously attractive to their members: they have a strong and commonly shared faith and vision and they offer a rich sense of community — realities that can only thrive in a culture of shared leadership. As has been said, “There are no solos, only choruses in God’s realm.”

¹⁵ Miller, Donald, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

tional relationships are becoming the norm, the capacity to lead from moral purpose is being lost. Burns observes that the norm in human relations is transactional leadership, but that the defining moments in human history are the result of transforming leadership.

Level 5 Leadership

Jim Collins wrote *Good to Great* in which he studied pairs of corporations, each pair in the same industry that started at a similar point. One corporation in the pair had soared in growth and industry position, while the other had not. The former he dubbed “great,” the others merely “good.” Collins identified factors that distinguished the great companies from the good ones.

Not surprisingly, one of those key factors is leadership. The great companies were led by what he calls “Level 5 Leaders,” the highest level on his hierarchy of leadership qualities. Level 5 leaders have a “paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will . . . they channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It’s not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious — but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.”

Collins found that not-for-profit leaders were reading his book and writing to him nearly as much as corporate ones. And so, he wrote a monograph called *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*⁴ discussing the applicability — with both similarities and differences — of the same factors at play in outstanding arts, government, social service, and other social sector and church organizations. With respect to Level 5 leaders, Collins writes that “they are ambitious first and foremost for the cause, the movement, the mission, the work, not themselves, and they have the will to do whatever it takes to make good on that ambition.” He describes the different dynamics in which not-for-profit chief executive officers (CEOs) must work. “Social service sector leaders face a complex and diffuse power map. . . . Most non-business leaders simply do not have the concentrated decision power of a business CEO.” Collins frames two types of leadership skill,

⁴ Jim Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* (Boulder, CO: Jim Collins, 2005).

Transforming leaders lead by engaging people in such a way that both the leader and the people are raised to higher levels of community, motivation, and morality.

executive and legislative. In executive leadership, the individual leader has enough concentrated power to simply make the right decisions. In legislative power, no individual leader, not even the CEO, has enough structural power to make the most important decisions by themselves. Legislative power relies more on persuasion, political currency, and shared interests to create the conditions for the right decisions to happen. He posits that effective leaders operate along a spectrum, with the most effective leaders being not purely one or the other, neither purely executive nor legislative, but that they have a knack for knowing when to play executive leadership chips and when not.

The “complex and diffuse power map” certainly describes the Presbyterian Church, and indeed the Reformed tradition, with its belief in the priesthood of all believers, its democratic polity, and its suspicion of power and the temptations of corruption. At the heart of our polity is an organizational understanding of the church as the body of Christ. In this body all parts are crucial and each has a vital leadership function. However, only Christ is the head of the church. Therefore, our call is to be a community of leaders where each is to share his or her gift and leadership and to be experts in complementing one another to bring out the best in each other and together to find and live out the will of Christ for our world. A different language about leadership from the secular theorists but clearly a model very parallel to many of the values they highlight.

Technical or Adaptive Solutions?

The work of Ronald Heifetz,⁵ as he discusses the differences between adaptive challenges and technical ones, and what that means for leaders, has much currency throughout the Presbyterian Church these days, and understandably so. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in a time of considerable change. We are not alone. All mainline Protestant denominations face similar challenges. No more is the western, developed world the gravity point of Christianity; two-thirds of Christians are now in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. While mainline churches have declined in membership and public influence in recent decades, independent mega-churches boomed. The flat world⁶ of ubiquitous and instantaneous communication and travel pierces through our hierarchical arrangements of governing bodies to enable people to connect in networks of particular

⁵ Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994).

⁶ Thomas Friedman, *The World Is Flat* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005).

2. Leadership that counts is about transformation

In a world where there are many transactional leaders but few transforming leaders, the Reformed tradition always reminds us that our call is to be about transformation. As heirs of Calvin we have never been at ease with the debate between whether salvation is by works or by faith. While we have always sided with the Lutherans on the priority of faith, we have been a bit uneasy about all of this because this polarity ignored the most important question, namely, why we have been chosen by God for salvation. Calvin made it clear in his doctrine of sanctification that the reason we have been saved is to live our life to the glory of God and to share in God’s project of transforming the world to resemble the reign of God where all can live together in peace, justice, and community and in a right relation to God. Leadership that points people in that direction must be transforming leadership that relates to people on the basis of their deepest values and highest aspirations and challenges them (and ourselves) to direct our lives to the things that really count.

Diana Butler Bass observes, “I have often heard people remark that churches do not like change, that they provide refuge from change, or that they resist change. . . . I cannot figure this out. In the New Testament, Jesus asks everyone to change. With the exception of children, Jesus insists that every person he meets do something and change. The whole message of the Christian scripture is based on the idea of *metanoia*, the change of heart that happens when we meet God face-to-face. Even a cursory knowledge of history reveals that Christianity is a religion about change. *The Christian faith always changes* — even when some of its adherents claim that it does not.”¹⁴

Odd, isn’t it, how resistant to change we are, we who claim to be “Reformed and always being reformed” (*Book of Order* G-2.0200)? And yet, how very human. Change is hard, uncomfortable, disruptive, and especially difficult for those of us who still hold in our minds a vision of our being successful, mainstream, and admired. That’s exactly where leadership comes in, looking forward, setting bold new directions, connecting people at the level of their deepest hopes and aspirations, believing that transformation is possible, and embracing a fresh collective purpose.

¹⁴ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), p. 24.

Sharing leadership effectively means being a collegial leader, seeking to bring out the gifts of others, be they seminary trained or not, and putting the good of the whole over his or her individual self-interest. It means keeping one's own ego in check — not unlike Collins' Level 5 leader. It may take longer to get things done through shared leadership, but when done well it promises to be done with greater strength and more lasting commitment.

Shared leadership is not just about sharing in decision making. It is also about sharing together in supporting our leaders. Leadership demands endurance. In the church, a leader must hold on course with vision for the whole, even as multiple constituents cry for attention, often publicly as they voice concerns in our open and democratic forums. The leader must convey hope, while facing and working with reality, as progress is slow and competing demands are made for resources. Given the immensity of the challenges we face today, we need support and nurture from others if we are to be sustained as leaders. A recent study of Lutheran pastors,¹³ which has been corroborated with nine other religious communions including our own, found that 20 percent of the pastors are in advanced stages of burn-out, another 20 percent are on the way to burn-out, and 30 percent are ambivalent about their work. Only 30 percent report that they “truly love their work.” This reality is not one that can produce the leadership we need for the renewal of the church and its ministry in the world. We need not only to share leadership but also to share in the support of leaders. Nothing can be more important than a common commitment to care for our pastors and leaders. To provide such a community of support is one of the main roles for sessions and presbyteries and is an urgent priority if we are to offer the kind of leadership our times demand. It is also why efforts (built on models that go back to Calvin's time) like the Company of Pastors and other pastor support and formation groups are so important. Elders, too, may find support and renewal in such groups of peers, especially in places in which they, too, shoulder considerable responsibility for leadership and because in most cases this is in addition to other career responsibilities outside of the church. Such groups center around habits of spiritual discipline, and bring people together to share concerns, joys, ideas, and encouragement.

¹³ Michael W. Foss, *A Servant's Manual* (Augsburg/Fortress, 2002), pp. 73-74.

mission interests, whether they are in congregations, middle governing bodies, national offices, international locations, or organizations outside the formal church structure. The ability and willingness to travel enables direct engagement by individuals and congregations in mission activities once conducted nearly exclusively by national offices on behalf of the whole church. Governing bodies are under financial stress and re-examining and re-casting purpose and function. The emerging church movement pushes up against our structures and traditions, and for many, our comfort zones.

Some observers of religion in America have claimed that another Reformation on the scale of the Protestant Reformation is underway. Paul Pierson wrote, “The changes in the worldwide church today are probably greater than those that took place during the 16th century Reformation.”⁷ Phyllis Tickle made similar assertions when she wrote “we are transitioning from one age in Christian history to another that is just forming” and goes on to observe preceding times of dramatic change, including the Great Reformation of the 16th century, and the Great Schism 500 years before that.⁸

Dramatic, discontinuous change requires different leadership than stable, ongoing organizations do. Heifetz distinguishes problems for which solutions are obvious, situations for which people have the necessary know-how and procedures. These he calls technical problems, ones that can be addressed with known approaches and solutions. But other problems are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures. Those are adaptive challenges, and they call for experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community. They take changes in attitude, values, and behaviors. In a more recent book, Heifetz and co-author Linsky state: “The single most common source of leadership failure we've been able to identify — in politics, community life, business, or the nonprofit sector — is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical ones.”⁹ They describe that, in leading through change, a leader needs perspective

⁷ Paul E. Pierson, “Beyond Sodalities and Modalities: Organizing for Mission in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Evangelical, Ecumenical and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation: Essays in Honor of Wilbert R. Shenk*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006).

⁸ Tickle, Phyllis, “The Emerging Twenty-First-Century Christianity” in www.TheThoughtfulChristian.com, Presbyterian Publishing Company (2007).

⁹ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2002), p. 14.

— get on the balcony, step back from the midst of the action, and sense “what’s really going on here?” But, to affect what’s happening, a leader must also return to the dance floor. A leader needs to be both strategic and practical. Leadership is an improvisational art that can’t be scripted, requiring discipline and flexibility, they say.

Too often, as leaders, our instinct is to apply technical solutions, methods that have worked on problems in the past. After all, it is often through managing through technical changes that many of us acquired the skills that led us into leadership positions. But in the face of adaptive, game-changing problems, technical changes are ineffective. An example that Heifetz and Linsky cite is all too common in the church in recent years. “Budget crises provide a good, general illustration of the pressures towards technical interpretations. . . . The people in authority might squeeze expenses here, postpone some expenditures there, or do some short-term borrowing. Those solutions deal with the problem as a technical issue. But very often the source of the crisis is a clash of values, a difference in priorities. Finding more money temporarily smoothes over conflict, but does not resolve it. Solving the underlying problem would require the factions with competing priorities to acknowledge gaps between them and work through the difference. It would require strategic trade-offs and losses. The result might well disappoint some people, perhaps many. ‘Balancing the budget’ might in fact mean refashioning the organization’s agenda and changing the way it conducts business. Thus, the task of leadership would be to mobilize people to adapt to a world with different constraints and opportunities than they had imagined.”¹⁰

Servant Leaders

In what has become a classic in leadership, Robert Greenleaf describes the servant leader. In an essay published in 1970, followed by his book *Servant Leadership* published in 1977 and republished in 1991 and 2002, he describes it as this:

“The servant-leader is servant first . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader-first*, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions . . . The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.”

¹⁰ Heifetz and Linsky, p. 59.

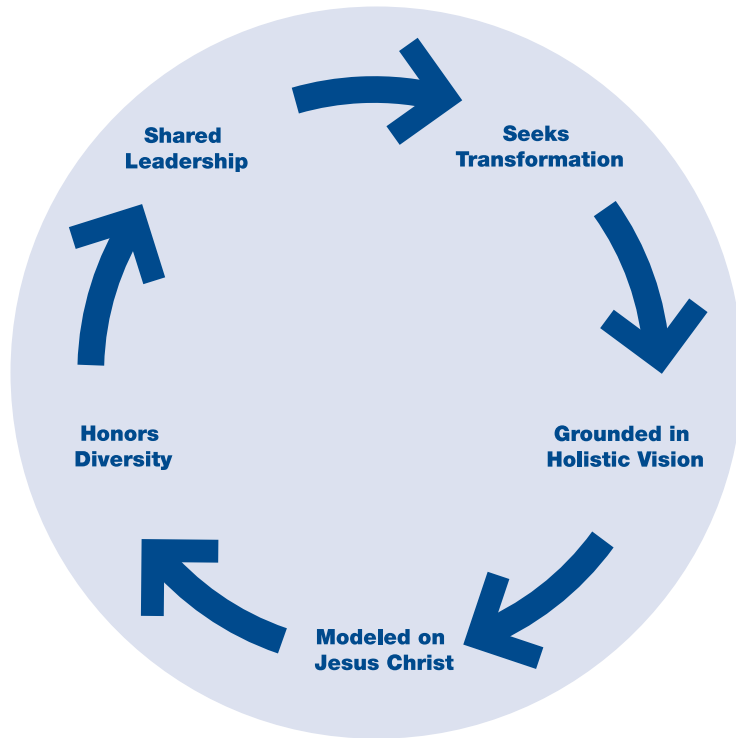
Shared leadership was clearly the model that Calvin, Knox, and Luther saw as essential for building up the church as a world-transforming institution. John Calvin, for example, is often viewed as an authoritarian, but his signal contribution in Geneva was to establish a system of shared power and leadership between the Consistory and the Company of Pastors and between four offices in the church: ministers, elders, deacons, and doctors of the Church. And while shared leadership is the emerging model in our knowledge-based world where such an approach to leadership is essential to enable the creativity of all contributors to our organizations, it’s a model we have employed for centuries.

Distinctive to the Reformed tradition is how we treasure the “priesthood of all believers” and the shared ordination and leadership of ministers, elders, and deacons. Shared leadership is foundational to Presbyterian polity, in fact the very name Presbyterian comes from the Greek term *presbyter*, meaning elder. We refer to clergy as “teaching elders” and ordained lay persons as “ruling elders.” They are peers in leadership, although we often lose sight of that principle.

Presbyterian Eugene Peterson speaks of what he calls the laity myth. He says in *The Jesus Way*¹² “‘I’m just a layperson’ is usually spoken in the same self-deprecating inflection as ‘I’m just a homemaker’ or ‘I’ve never been to seminary’ or ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?’ (Moses in Exod. 3:11) or ‘I’m only a boy’ (Jeremiah in 1:17). It is an age-old habit, endemic to the human condition: if we don’t have a socially sanctioned role, or a professionally certified position, or a recognized position in a family or community hierarchy, we feel inadequate and apologetic. . . . Within the Christian community there are few words that are more disabling than ‘layperson’ or ‘laity’. The words convey the impression — an impression that quickly solidifies into a lie — that there is a two-level hierarchy among men and women who follow Jesus. But in the company of Christians, that hierarchy of expertise simply doesn’t work. There are no experts in the company of Jesus. We are all beginners, necessarily followers, because we don’t know where we are going. On reflection, it is difficult to understand how the term ‘laity’ and the assumptions drawn from it continue to marginalize so many Christians from all out participation in following Jesus. After all, didn’t Jesus call only laypersons to follow him? Not a priest or professor among the twelve men and numerous women followers. And Paul, a tentmaker.”

¹² Eugene Peterson, *The Jesus Way* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), p. 10.

Five Characteristics of Presbyterian Leadership



1. Shared Leadership

One of the great gifts that Presbyterians offer to the world is the gift of shared leadership. Our movement was started in major part as a protest against authoritarian rule in church and society. It was based on the principle that leadership grows out of the election by the people and is carried out in the context of community. The task of leadership is to build a leadership community where all can share their gifts for the building up of the whole. It was the model of Jesus with the disciples. It was the model for Peter and Paul with the leaders of the early church who made major decisions in council. Nowhere is that better illustrated than when the early church made its world-changing decision that the gospel was for Jews and for Gentiles at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) — a gathering not unlike presbyteries or General Assemblies where a diversity of spiritual leaders came together in prayer and sharing to discern the mind of Christ.

“The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?”¹¹

¹¹ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership* (New Jersey, Paulist Press, 2002), p. 27.

CHAPTER 2

Resources From Our Tradition

What then is the unique Presbyterian contribution to the search for leadership in the complex and diffuse environment of Presbyterian polity and reality, in times of unprecedented change, and where leaders are expected to model the way of Jesus and be servants first?

Presbyterians do a good job of building systems of checks and balances, to assure that no one tells them what to do. We have a system of leadership that is shared rather than being the province of a single person. At the same time, we long for leaders and feel that we are in a crisis because of the lack of leadership in our church today — in our local congregations, in our presbyteries, and in the broader church.

Some seek a return to the “good old days” when Presbyterians were the national leaders and the acclaimed, great preachers of the time were Presbyterian pastors. Others remember when their local pastors were recognized by all as the spiritual leaders in their communities, when elders were the “establishment” in town, and when General Assembly leaders were well known and widely respected throughout the church and in the broader ecumenical and public world.

There is no absence of growing religious movements with very clear and visible leaders — the Pope, pastors of large mega-churches, and spiritual leaders in the Islamic world. Presbyterians are intentional about not investing too much power in any one person, yet they wonder, “Where are the Presbyterians?” — when the great issues of the day are under consideration.

This hunger for leadership is intense in our local congregations as well as in our denominational offices. In congregation after congregation, there is a deeply felt need for spiritual and numerical growth, for renewal, and for a strong witness to the community and the world. There is a hunger for pastors and leaders who can spark and empower that renewal — and a growing sense that we don’t have the leaders that we need.

The contributions of leadership theorists and educators like Burns, Collins, Heifetz, Greenleaf, and the others have been welcomed and embraced by countless Presbyterians seeking to provide effective leadership in our time. We applaud this move, and are convinced that the leadership renewal we need in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) benefits greatly when we take these important contributions from the social sciences and leadership studies to heart. Indeed, the Reformed traditions of leadership echo the concepts of transformational and adaptive leadership, Level 5, and servant leaders.

We also believe there is a Presbyterian perspective on leadership that has great power and may be just what we need in our time. We have resources that we use all too infrequently. Resources for understanding organizations and leadership come from the heart of our Presbyterian tradition — from scripture, from our theology, and from our polity. We commend them to you as we seek to live out our ordination vows to “serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love” (*Book of Order* W-4.4003h). These are great gifts in the Presbyterian tradition for leadership that all too often we overlook.

At its core, this tradition is one of shared leadership based on the model of Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church and the Lord of the world. It is the model that was operative in the early church when by its quality of life it literally was able to “turn the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) for the sake of the gospel. It is an approach that we have tried to model (however imperfectly) in our own leadership in the church and one that we would commend to our pastors, elders, and deacons. At its best, it is the vision of community, mission, and leadership that is deeply imbedded in our polity and theology as Presbyterian Christians. Let us highlight five characteristics of leadership that grow right out of the Reformed tradition, of which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a part: