

Leading Faith Communities

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(See *Leading Decisively! Leading Faithfully!* pages 58-64 for further development)

During the past few years, I pursued a fundamental question for Christian leaders in a faith community. How does my Christian faith inform and guide the way I lead a faith community -- local church congregation, a Christian university, a youth or children's group?

Another question flows from this fundamental question for Christian leaders: If "in Christ all things are made new," then how does my relationship with Christ convert or transform the way I view and lead the faith community for which I am responsible?

But how do pastors in local congregations exemplify a lifestyle transformation for both those we lead and our leaders? How do we communicate through the way we live and lead that the Christian faith is not just an intellectualized belief to be learned, but a life to be lived?

Ephesians 4:11-16 enunciates such a model. The passage outlines the context, task, goal, dynamic, and purpose for us as Christian leaders in our passion to equip those for whom we are responsible to shape as "Christ-like" disciples in the local church and community.

The context...is "God's people" (Ephesians 4:11). The key focus is participation.

Since all Christians are called to serve others in Jesus' name, all Christians are also called to educate others in this lifestyle of service. Learning is not limited to the students in a classroom. It permeates all the different roles and responsibilities to which we commit ourselves. All of us are on a spiritual pilgrimage and are in process of becoming what God the Father, Creator, and Redeemer envisions for us. Based on a person's testimony of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, I relate to him/her as a brother or sister in Christ who is gifted by God for effectiveness in the local congregation. This is the context and perspective within which I minister.

The task...is to "prepare God's people" (Ephesians 4:12). The key idea is formation.

Christian formation or preparing God's people means enabling the individual to grow in Christlikeness. This demands an acquaintance with the Christian tradition, an awareness of world issues, development of personal faith, competence in vocational skills, a philosophy of life, a global perspective and growth in community life.

We need guidance in developing a lifestyle of devotion to Christ, in caring for the world, nurturing our own spiritual lives, relating to other world citizens, developing personal qualities, and inculcating values by which we live and die.

The goal...is "works of service" (Ephesians 4:12). The key thought is expression.

Our "works of service" or mission is a function and expression of the entire church. Our goal is to prepare God's people to participate in this mission, which is to proclaim the kingdom of God, nurture the people of God, and serve the whole human community. We must be captured by this vision. In the local church setting, this means transcending service *to* the congregation and *for* the congregation, to service *with* the congregation and *by* the congregation.

The dynamic...is "love within the Body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:15-16). The key concept is interaction.

Interaction is defined as an intimacy or closeness of relationships between members within the Body of Christ. In every New Testament passage where the Body of Christ is discussed, there is a relational context in which this kind of mutual nurturing takes place. Passing on information does not produce a servant of Christ. Trust needs both to be explained and demonstrated in an intimate relationship context. Love and trust free us to know and reveal ourselves to one another. *Modeling, rather than indoctrinating, is the method of leadership for lifestyle change.*

The purpose...is transformation for a "holiness lifestyle" (Ephesians 4:13). The key issue is Christlikeness.

The purpose of Christian leadership is to, by grace, participate with God in the reconciling and transforming of humankind so that holy people may be equipped for a Christ-like ministry of service to others as they fulfill their vocational responsibility. This is also true in the context of a congregation. A holiness lifestyle focuses on the progressive transformation of the Christian toward the character, values, motives, attitudes and understanding of God Himself.