

Mile Marker #52

LEADERSHIP

"Come, follow me..." ~Jesus of Nazareth

"Leadership has been a great need in every age of the church, a new challenge in every generation." ~Christopher A. Beeley

In these rapidly changing times where church attendance continues to decline and the number of persons who identify as being "spiritual but not religious" grows, it is important to again ask, "what kind of leadership is needed today?"

Perhaps we first need to ask, what is leadership? Here is what some experts say:

Peter Drucker: "The only definition of a leader is someone who has followers."

Warren Bennis: "Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality."

Bill Gates: "As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others."

John Maxwell: "Leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less."

Kevin Kruse: Leadership is a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal.

I'm sure there are plenty more definitions of leadership around but I believe these highlight some key elements of leadership: vision, empowerment, influence, followers and goals. As Christians we look to Jesus as our best example for leadership. If we apply the key elements of leadership lifted up by today's experts we can see that Jesus possessed them and so much more. He had a vision called the Kingdom of

God. He empowered others through his teaching, healing, and challenges. He had the influence of unconditional love; he still has followers today and he had a goal of redeeming God's people.

When we ask, "what kind of leadership do we need today?" I believe we need the kind of leadership modeled, lived, and taught by Jesus. His was a servant-leadership style, empowering the powerless, loving the unlovable, and inviting others to follow him in living the Kingdom life where one discovers the joy and grace of God.

With not much effort one could conclude by looking at many of our churches today that we are focused more on church management and maintenance than on ministry and mission. Our goals seem to be limited to the "B's": budgets, buildings, and butts in the pew. As scripture reminds us, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." (Proverbs 29:18 KJV) The leadership that is needed today is one that Jesus modeled, taught and lived: love driven, empowering others, welcoming all with a vision of God's Shalom.

This in part is seen in the call from our General Minister and President Rev. Sharon Watkins who reminds us that we are "a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us."

As Disciples of Christ, our vision is to be a faithful, growing church that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and passion for justice (Micah 6:8); and our mission is to be and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving from our doorsteps "to the ends of the earth". (Acts 1:8)

In order to live out this vision and mission it continually takes leaders who are committed, compassionate and courageous. I believe that today's leaders in the midst of a rapidly changing religious landscape need to be adaptable, approachable and adventurous.

Leaders must be able to adapt to the current needs of our communities without compromising our Christian values but rather fulfilling them as we care for the lost, the last and the least. Leaders must also be approachable, willing to share their own places of doubt, weakness, allowing themselves to be a little vulnerable. People follow leaders who are genuine, honest, and real. Leaders must also be adventurous; not in a reckless or foolish way, but willing to take risks, try new things and even fail. Too often we are afraid to move beyond our comfort zones and the places of familiarity. Jesus' call to "come, follow me" was anything but risk free! In fact he said whoever does choose to follow must take up their cross daily.

As a Region we are committed to developing leaders for our congregations, both lay and clergy. We have and are doing this in a variety of ways and opportunities. Saturday, March 1 we are holding a learning event for Deacons and Elders at East Whittier Christian Church (go to www.disciplespswr.org) Our Region has held for several years a Leadership Apprentice Program that focuses primarily on women of color. Through our New Church Development committee we have sponsored over 40 pastors to attend Hope Partnership's Leadership Academy in the last six years. In 2013 we launched a new leadership development program called Bethany West modeled after our General church program Bethany Fellows. This program focuses on new pastors under 40 and serving in a first pastorate. It involves meeting several times a year for

networking, developing ones spiritual disciplines, prayer, worship and leader training which includes coaching and mentoring. Another new program sponsored by Hope Partnership that several of our congregations are participating in is called The Journey. The Journey is a two-year process that helps leaders shift their thinking towards helping the congregation become relevant for this new era of mission.

In order to support and strengthen the leadership of our clergy they are required to have at least 15hrs of continuing education each year to maintain their standing. We believe that good leaders are continually learning and growing. We have also had our Youth Leadership Team ministry for over 30 years where our youth develop skills, confidence, and abilities for leadership.

As our name implies, "Disciples of Christ", we are to be learners of the way of Jesus. Congregations only transform if leaders are transformed. I pray that we might continue to live up to and in to our name as disciples that together we might lead God's church into a new and brighter future.

Together in the journey,
Don & Susan
Your Co-Regional Ministers