



Visionary Leadership

Congregational leaders are those who are trusted to manage both the current needs and the future challenges of the congregation. They keep the congregation “on course.” Managing the present and the future is essential, but there is a third task crucial to leadership in the congregation – that of seeing the larger picture.

You may have heard it said, “Leadership needs to get out of the pew and up into the balcony.” In the pew, leaders see just the immediate needs and the management issues. From up in the balcony, however, leaders can see the larger picture, the bigger issues, the trends and the possibilities. This higher vantage point helps make the priorities and purposes of the congregation more clear, and it helps to separate out the concerns that are, in fact, distractions to the main mission of the church. Leaders need to be able to dwell in both the pew and the balcony.

Three Roles for Leaders: The three tasks of leaders – managing the current needs, anticipating future needs, and envisioning the larger picture – can be described in three roles. Leaders spend plenty of time in each of these roles, hopefully never neglecting any one of the three:

- **Stewards:** Leaders manage the things entrusted to their care – buildings, programs, budgets, people, projects and the like. Jesus often spoke in parables about stewardship as the faithful exercise of responsibility on behalf of another (Matthew 24:45-51).
- **Planners:** Leaders advance the mission of the church. It is not enough to just preserve what we are stewards over; we are to multiply and increase it (Matthew 25:14-30). Leaders have clearly defined plans, goals and objectives.
- **Visionaries:** Leaders spend lavish amounts of time “up in the balcony” talking about the real mission of the congregation, its God-given purpose for being, its neighborhood and community context and its abundant talents and resources for ministry. As visionaries, leaders want to know if any particular expenditure of energy or money really serves the first and best priorities of the congregation’s mission and if it is helping the congregation become more fully what God intends it to be (Luke 12:42-48).

It is easy to dwell in the role of steward – hearing reports, managing problems and overseeing programs. Once annually, perhaps, leaders become planners – looking ahead to the coming year and deciding what programs to eliminate or repeat and what new programs to initiate. But to do these two without dwelling on questions of vision, purpose and priorities is like building a building without a foundation.

Time in prayer, Bible study and Christian conversation helps bring to focus God’s vision of the future, the higher purpose we are called to fulfill and the choices we are making to help further the coming of the Kingdom.

Questions to Ponder

1. *How can agendas be restructured to give time for each of the roles of leadership?*
2. *What are the consequences of spending all your time in the role of steward?*
3. *What can you do to begin to dwell on the questions of purpose, mission, and vision?*



Writer: Stan Meyer

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