
Leadership For Christian Leaders

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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Most Christians will be called to leadership at some point in their pilgrimage. For that reason, I have delivered several presentations in the past few years on the nature of Christian leadership. Those remarks have been intended not just for Christian clergy, but for anyone called to lead a family, or a household, or a special committee, a neighborhood association, a business, a department within a business, a corporation, or a government. Whether or not these communities are explicitly Christian, Christians do, from time to time, exercise leadership in them.

What is successful leadership, anyway? The answer is trickier than we might think. Here is my attempt to define it: Leadership is the practice of growing people through change. First, it is a practice, which is to say it is a discipline and a habit. It does not occur just once in one's life, or in one's tenure. It is like prayer. Prayer is the result of practice, not the result of reading one book or having one mighty experience of God. All good Christian disciplines and habits are about practice. Leadership is the same. The discipline of leadership requires practice.

Leadership is also about growing something, like a garden. It is about growing people. Thus, the direction of leadership is outward, towards the fulfillment of other people. Leaders grow people. What are leaders growing people towards? My answer is that leaders grow people through change. There is no need for leadership if change is not occurring. People need leaders to nurture, cultivate, and guide the community through issues of change.

So, if no change is occurring, there is no need for a true leader. However, if no change is occurring, we might reasonably suspect that not much health is in that community either! Any good and healthy community is experiencing change. It is the nature of life itself.

These definitions can apply to any system or organization. What is Christian leadership? Christian leadership is leadership in the service of the gospel of God in Jesus Christ. Christian leaders grow people toward the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. Christian leadership is not always of one particular character, or set of habits. It is certainly not a set of mere mechanical activities. If only practices and techniques comprised leadership, we could devise a robot to be our leader.

Still, the closest set of characteristics I can develop which explicitly describe Christian leadership is the list of the fruits of the spirit which St. Paul develops in Galatians 5.22-23. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace; patience, kindness, generosity; faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Humility and service must also be included in the characteristics of Christian leadership.

In my presentations, I have offered thirteen other principles of leadership, which people have asked that I print somewhere. Here they are. Each deserves much explanation, but I will save that for another day!

- 1. Know yourself.** (The most important thing any of us have to offer the world is ourself.)
- 2. Have a vision,** See something. (see Habakkuk 2:2-3)
- 3. Love your people.**
- 4. Stay engaged.** (Practice what Edwin Friedman called a "non-anxious presence.")

5. **Help others to be right, not wrong.** (Help another person win.)
6. **Be careful where you focus attention.** (Where leaders focus attention is where their people will focus attention.)
7. **Spread good gossip.** (Do not be afraid of gossip. Use networks to spread good gossip.)
8. **Keep the Faith.** Stay on course.
9. **Nurture Optimism.** Enthusiasm means to be "en-theos," or "in God."
10. **Take initiative.**
11. **Whatever you want, give it away.** (Jesus said, "the one who seeks to find his or her life, must lose it.")
12. **Practice your communication styles and efforts.** (Your style is different from mine; use it!)
13. **Take yourself lightly.** ("Do you know how angels can fly? ,.Because they take themselves lightly.")

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