
Principles Of Christian Leadership

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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**(a summary of Dean Candler's presentation
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Most Christians will be called to leadership at some point in their pilgrimage. I don't mean called to leadership in churches alone. For instance, most of us will be called, at some point or another, to lead a family. A family, or a household, may be the smallest, but most powerful, Christian community there is.

But Christian communities and communities in general, are not limited to churches and families. A community might be a special committee, a neighborhood association, an extended family system, a business, a department within a business, a corporation, a civic group, a social service agency. Whether or not these communities are explicitly Christian, Christians do exercise leadership in them.

What is leadership? The answer is trickier than we might think. Good leadership is one of those phenomena we recognize when we see it, but we cannot define it!

Here is my attempt to define it generally: Leadership is the practice of growing people through change. First, it is a practice, which is to say 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.

Leadership is 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. Consider our own physical bodies; healthy bodies are always changing. It is the nature of life itself.

Here are some other ways to define leadership: The ability to encourage and enable system members to grow into maturity. Or: The ability to encourage and enable system members to grow into leaders. Or: The projection of positive, growing, healthy energy in a system. Leaders put out. Leaders give energy to systems. They do not draw energy out of systems or people. They do not expend others' energy. Rather, they energize others. They inspire.

I believe these definitions apply to any system or organization. But what is Christian leadership? Christian leadership is leadership in the service of the gospel of God in Jesus Christ. Christian leadership submits to Jesus Christ. Christian leaders are growing people towards the person of Jesus Christ our Lord, and towards the kingdom of God. 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 set of personal characteristics that most closely describes Christian leadership is the list of the "spiritual fruits" 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."

Two other guiding verses for Christian leadership are these: "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all." (Mark 10.43-44). And "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10.39)

So, here is a summary of the principles:

1. Know yourself. Practice self-differentiation.

"The power of all leaders, in sum, resides in their presence, the nature of their being, not in their storehouse of data or armamentarium of technique. The key to leadership, therefore, is not how a leader manages others but how a leader manages him- or herself." (page 3, Reinventing Leadership, Ed Friedman)

2. Have a vision. See something.

3. Love your people.

4. Stay engaged. Practice Non-anxious Presence.

5. Help others to be right, not wrong.

6. Be careful where you focus attention. Where you focus your attention is where others will focus their attention.

7. Spread good gossip.

8. Keep the Faith. Stay on course.

9. Optimism rules. Enthusiasm means "to be in God."

10. Take initiative.

11. Whatever you want, give it away. The one who seeks to find life, must lose it.

11. Communicate.

12. Take yourself lightly

(The full text of this presentation will be available in the Dean's office; and we will use portions of it at our first Cathedral Lay Leadership Summit.)

Blessings to all of you called to serve!

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