

Effective Leadership in the Church

A training tool to help congregations, pastors, and other church leaders effectively work together to accomplish God's mission.



Sustaining Pastoral Excellence
in the Christian Reformed Church
2850 Kalamazoo Avenue SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560

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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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How to Use This Training Tool

This training tool is flexible and can be used in a number of different settings, including retreat settings, adult education classes, council meetings, church staff meetings, and search committee meetings. Appendix 1 contains four models of how this training tool might be used.

The questions and comments in the margins and the case studies scattered throughout this book are designed to help readers apply the principles of this training tool to their particular congregations. Appendix 2 offers tips for using the case studies.

Collaborators

This training tool is a publication of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence initiative of the Christian Reformed Church. The team responsible for putting together this tool includes Duane Kelderman of Calvin Theological Seminary, primary author and chair of the Leadership Development Task Force that developed this paper; Duane Visser and Norm Thomasma of Pastor-Church Relations, who work daily with churches who know the need for effective leadership; and Dan Vander Ark of Christian Schools International, who supplied the case studies that illustrate the wide range of leadership challenges our churches face.

This training tool is an adaptation of a paper titled “Leadership: A Working Definition,” which was produced by a cross-agency Leadership Development Task Force that included Dan Ackerman (Home Missions), Richard Hertel (Reformed Bible College), Duane Kelderman (Calvin Seminary), Darlene Meyering (Calvin College), Jim Osterhouse (Home Missions), Kathy Smith (Calvin College and Seminary), Norm Thomasma (Pastor-Church Relations), and Karl Westerhof (Christian Reformed World Relief Committee). This paper was approved by the Ministry Council (MC) of the Christian Reformed Church as “a working statement of MC’s understanding of the nature and practice of leadership and a working guide to MC as it implements leadership development initiatives in the denomination.”

Introduction

At last count, Amazon.com had more than 75,000 titles on the subject of leadership. There is no end to the tapes, journals, retreats, courses, and even advanced degrees on the subject of effective leadership. So why does a committee composed of leaders in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) take the time to add one more publication to that long list? Because we in the CRC need to have an honest talk about leadership. We need to figure some things out.

Many CRC congregations are flourishing. They are clear about the mission to which God has called them, and they love one another as they carry out that mission. But many other congregations face challenges in figuring out their direction and purpose. Some wish their congregation had a clearer sense of direction and purpose. Others are full of pain because they are sharply divided on the matter of their church's direction.

In virtually every church, people give quite different answers to these basic questions: Who is our church's leader? Who should be? The pastor? The elders? What is leadership? And if that's not confusing enough, in the past years, agencies and institutions of the CRC have not always agreed on answers to these questions.

The Purpose of This Booklet

For two years a Leadership Development Team, consisting of dedicated CRC leaders who represent the full range of views on church leadership and work in various agencies of the CRC, has been working together to arrive at a common understanding of leadership in the church. This team produced a paper entitled "Leadership: A Working Definition" that was officially endorsed by CRC agencies (available at <http://www.crcna.org/whatweoffer/resources/index.asp?WhatWeOfferMenu>). This training tool is an adaptation of that paper and is designed for congregational use.

The agencies and institutions of the CRC have been blessed by our joint reflection on the subject of effective leadership. We hope this booklet will help CRC congregations throughout North America more fully realize God's purposes for their life together.

Case Study 1: Who's Planning Worship?

Pastor Pete was disturbed—disturbed with himself. The end of the worship planning meeting was near. He felt anxious; he guessed the other members did too. In the awkward silence, he wondered what to say.

Before he became pastor, First Church had a history of letting the pastor make almost all the decisions in the church, especially about planning and leading worship. The council had generally communicated the boundaries, but the pastor had led the way in everything.

Then Pastor Pete came and encouraged members of the congregation to help plan and lead in worship. He asked a dozen people to join him, some from the council and some not. He called them the “worship committee” and held regular meetings to tell them his plans for sermons and to ask them their ideas for music, Bible readings, and prayer. Slowly the committee began offering ideas.

In the third session for planning one particular worship service, the group was getting a bit edgy. They had planned a somewhat humorous sketch about the Ten Commandments. In a previous session, they had chosen songs. Pastor Pete now encouraged them: “This is good work. You are the owners of this plan.” But he could see frowns on some faces. One older member was plainly anxious: “I’m not quite sure about our roles here. Do we make the final decisions or do you?” Another member added, “Some of us feel we don’t have the training to make these kinds of decisions.”

Before Pastor Pete could answer, one member suggested a more familiar hymn for the concluding song rather than the new praise song he had previously suggested. The whole group brightened to the idea and wanted the change. Pastor Pete felt anxious, like something was slipping away, but nodded agreement.

Was it loss of control that bothered him? Hadn’t he said he wanted them to participate? Should he confess his anxiety? Who *did* have the final say, anyway? Was it the pastor or the committee? One thing he knew—silence wasn’t the answer.

Chapter 1

Biblical and Theological Themes Regarding Leadership in the Church

What follows are seven important biblical and theological themes that must guide any discussion of Christian leadership.

1. What is the mission of the church?

Defining leadership in any organization immediately raises questions about that organization's mission, its reason for being. In the case of the church, the Bible raises and answers two very important questions.

First, whose mission is it? God's, not ours. The church doesn't come up with its own mission. The Bible sets forth God's mission for the church.

Second, what is the church's mission? The Bible states the church's mission in many different contexts. Consider Colossians 1:15-20, Matthew 28:18-20, John 17:20-23, 1 Peter 2:9-11, Ephesians 4:11-13. It's helpful to see these various statements of the church's mission as different facets of a single diamond, each enriching the other.

Perhaps God's mission in the world can be summarized this way: God's purpose in Christ is to reconcile all things to himself. The church is the body of Christ in the world—the means by which the world will know that Jesus Christ is Lord and through which all believers will reach maturity in Christ and unity in the faith and knowledge of Christ. To fulfill the mission of God to reconcile all things to himself, God sends the church into the world to spread the gospel, to evangelize, to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, and to embody in its corporate life the message of reconciliation.

(*Note: "Mission" usually refers to one's deepest purpose or belief, while "vision" usually refers to how one will live out that mission in the future. The discussion about which comes first—mission or vision—is ongoing. By these definitions of "mission" and "vision," the passages above no doubt reflect both the church's mission and its vision.*)

"Mission" implies passion—a single-minded purpose of "getting there," perhaps even risking reputation and standing among others. Does your church have a clear sense of its mission? How would you summarize it in a single sentence?

What is the relationship between the Bible's "mission statement" for the church and a church's own mission statement?

2. What does the Bible mean when it calls the church “the body of Christ”?

To understand leadership in the church it’s important to understand a peculiar and mysterious fact about the church: the church is the body of Christ. The Bible does not say the church *resembles* or *is like* a body. The church *is* the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27)—the way Christ is present in the world. When we think about leadership, we must understand four features of the church as the body of Christ.

What would be a good answer to give to the nine-year-old who asks her parents, “Who runs the church?” If “Christ” wasn’t a good enough answer for that nine-year-old, how would you go on to describe the way Christ rules the church through the members of the body?

Christ is the head of the body.

The New Testament is clear that Christ is the head of the church. Christ’s headship is a reference not to power and the right to control, but to the source of the church’s life. Christ sustains the whole body and supplies what the body needs for life (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; Col. 1:18).

How does this reality of the church as a living organism shape the way we think about leadership in the church?

The church is a living organism.

Christians are members of a living body, not an inanimate institution (Eph. 4:12-16). The source of the church’s life is Christ himself. This implies two things: First, the church as a living organism is constantly growing, changing, and adapting to changing realities around it. This is what it means to be alive. The term for an organism that has quit growing and changing is “dead.” Second, the church is not a self-sufficient closed system, answerable only to itself. It is contingent, dependent. Like the vine to the branch, the church is organically connected to and dependent upon Christ for its very life. As a living organism, the church’s concern is not “What do *we* want to do?” but rather “What is Christ doing in and through us? How is the life of Christ being tangibly expressed in our life together as a church?”

What signs tell you that your church is a living body, with the parts of the body organically working together?

The body of Christ is one, with many parts that organically work together (1 Cor. 12:12-31).

First Corinthians 12 makes clear that each part of the body is indispensable to the healthy functioning of the whole body. Such mutual interdependence implies a mutual accountability that all members of the body of Christ, including leaders, have to Christ and to one another.

God gives to the church the gifts of his Spirit (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11; Eph. 4:11-13).

These “gift passages” make clear that God gives spiritual gifts to all the members of the body, not just a few select leaders. Moreover, God gives particular gifts to particular believers. Yet emphasis upon particular gifts given to particular individuals in the body must be balanced with emphasis upon the *giftedness* that the body as a whole possesses by virtue of Christ’s indwelling Spirit. Paul says that spiritual gifts are given for the common good. Indeed, as various members of the body of Christ realize

that they are able to serve one another and others beyond the church, gifts emerge and are affirmed by and strengthened in the body. The balance between individual gifts and the giftedness of the body is an important one.

What are two or three of the spiritual gifts God has given your congregation as a whole?

3. What does the Bible teach about “servant leadership”?

The Bible teaches us many things about the nature and quality of Christian leadership. Perhaps the most profound insight comes from the life of Christ himself and Christ’s clear teaching regarding servant leadership.

Christ is the model of servant leadership.

In his incarnation, Christ embodies the message of servant love. The cross is the ultimate message of self-giving love (Phil. 2:1-11; John 13:12-17).

Authority in the New Testament entails both power *and* servanthood.

Jesus Christ himself exemplifies both: he rules with power “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Eph. 1:21), but he also stoops down to wash the feet of his disciples (John 13). We can see this same example of power combined with servanthood in the role of parenting. In their relationship with children, parents have authority that includes right and power; good parents also love their children with a servant love, and use their authority through this love. Authority, power, and servant love, all properly understood, are not set over against each other in the New Testament—and thus should not be set over against each other in discussions of leadership (Matt. 20:25-28).

The New Testament emphasis upon servant leadership reminds leaders to be careful in their exercise of power and authority. Leaders must realize the ways that positions of leadership can inherently create an imbalance of power, and must take seriously their responsibility to exercise power as servants of the one who has all power and authority.

Give some examples of authority, power, and servanthood *all* being expressed appropriately.

The practice of servant leadership is one of the ways Christians “put on” Jesus Christ.

In John 13:14 Jesus makes it clear that those who follow Jesus must practice his servant love: “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” In Ephesians 5:1-2, Paul calls believers to imitate God in his self-giving actions: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Leadership in Christ’s church must be different from the Gentiles’ “lording it over” approach to leadership. The goal of servant leaders is to love and serve those they lead by helping them find and productively use their gifts in the ministry of the body. Leadership in the

How can you tell if the church’s leaders are following the biblical principle of servanthood?

church is essentially and radically a matter of servanthood, love, forgiveness, redemption, sacrifice, justice, and obedience.

(*Note:* For a more extended discussion of these and other biblical themes related to church leadership, see *A Theology of Church Leadership* by Lawrence Richards and Clyde Hoeldtke [Zondervan, 1980].)

4. What is the relationship between reconciliation and effective leadership?

God's mission has been summarized above in terms of *reconciliation*: God's purpose in Christ is to reconcile all things to himself. Thus, the church is called to embody in its corporate life the message of reconciliation. A church that is achieving God's purposes in the world will be breaking down barriers between individuals and groups.

More and more churches today live in close proximity to diverse racial and ethnic groups. How can your church cross ethnic/racial boundaries and manifest more deeply the reconciliation we have in Christ?

One of the greatest needs today—in North America and throughout the world—is the need for *racial* reconciliation. One of the great tests of authentic Christian community is whether that community can transcend the barriers that divide people along racial and ethnic lines. Deep racial reconciliation is one of the greatest testimonies to the power of the gospel that the church can give. Effective Christian leadership involves the intentional pursuit of such reconciliation, yearning for the vision of Revelation to become a reality—when people “from every tribe and language and people and nation” will be gathered around the throne (Rev. 5:9).

Racial reconciliation is only one test of authentic Christian community. Breakdown of marriage and family, social and economic differences, political and ideological divisions, and antagonism and hostility between parts of the body of Christ are all examples of alienation within community. One of the deepest impulses and values of Christian leadership is the pursuit of reconciliation at every level of community.

5. What does the Bible teach about suffering and leadership?

The New Testament is clear in its teaching that Christians suffer not just because they live in a broken world, but also because obedience to Christ and the gospel generates resistance and hostility, and engages the power of darkness (1 Pet. 3:8-22; 4:12-19; Rom. 5:1-5; 2 Tim. 1:8-12).

If suffering is a part of leadership, what does this suggest about the marks of Christian character that congregations should consider as they seek out leaders?

Christian leaders should expect to suffer. In fact, a person who aspires to church or kingdom leadership but has a strong aversion to suffering should look elsewhere for work. It's interesting to note that biblical characters whom we often associate with strong leadership (Moses, Joshua, David, Esther, Deborah, and other “heroes of faith” [Heb. 11]) often suffered. Sometimes their suffering was self-imposed. Indeed, all leaders struggle with temptations, and many leaders commit colossal sins that throw

themselves and the community around them into deep pain and suffering. But suffering is often the result of doing good—the natural or supernatural resistance and hostility to the gospel that creates pain and injury.

The good news is that virtually every passage in the New Testament that speaks of Christian suffering is laced with hope—hope because of the positive, character-building, community-building impact of suffering when it is embraced with faith; and hope because of the forward-looking “not-yet” perspective that is brought into clearer focus in suffering. Christian leaders know that Christ will prevail and his mission will be accomplished.

One important implication of the reality of suffering for the Christian leader and community is that “success” and “failure” are never as clear-cut as one might be tempted to believe. Sometimes the chapter of a church’s history that involves the most suffering becomes the chapter that was most used by God to form, shape, and lead that church into its most vital and vibrant chapter of ministry. To use Jesus’ and Paul’s language, churches are continually dying and rising again. Churches and leaders must be willing to endure pain and suffering—to be the seed that is put into the ground and dies—if they are to rise again and produce many more seeds. Every Christian leader (and congregation) must continually take to heart Jesus’ words when he faced his own suffering and death:

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. (John 12:24-26)

Death and resurrection are an ongoing process of sanctification for the believer. Congregations also go through death and resurrection. Are there things that your congregation is dying to, or things that it must die to? Are there signs of things that it is coming alive to?

6. How does the CRC translate these biblical teachings into a coherent theological understanding of the church?

The church seeks to reflect the biblical teaching above in its *polity*—its form of government. The most concise statement of the CRC’s polity is the Church Order. The most concise summary of the CRC’s official positions on the nature of the church’s ministry in general, and office and ordination in particular, can be found in the conclusions of the synodical report of 1973 on ecclesiastical office and ordination, and the guidelines of the synodical report of 2001 on ordination and “official acts of ministry.”

To briefly summarize, these official church positions affirm the following:

- the church’s role in the mission of the Lord, namely, to be the body of Christ manifesting his presence, proclaiming the gospel, evangelizing and seeking the lost

- a definition of leadership in the church that entails a relationship of trust and responsibility in which certain people are entrusted by Christ, the great shepherd of the sheep, to take pastoral responsibility for a part of his flock
- the purpose of ordination to set apart certain individuals for special ministries or services
- the comprehensive ministry of the church shared by all believers
- the distinction between those who serve in official offices and those who serve more generally as one of function, not essence
- the authority of office as defined primarily by service, which includes the responsible stewardship of God-given natural and spiritual gifts, rather than by status, dominance, or privilege

7. Is there a difference between leadership in the church and leadership in other spheres of society?

Is there a difference between leadership in the church and leadership in any other organization? We think there are differences as well as similarities.

There is similarity in terms of laws of human behavior, social laws, psychological laws, and organizational laws that are rooted in creation and apply to all organizations, including the church. The best of Christian wisdom discerns these deep and universal patterns to human life and community. God's common grace makes it possible for a person who may not be a Christian to be an effective leader in an organization. Reformed Christians are always aware that God has created and still works in the whole world, not just the church.

But there is also a difference. The church is a unique *organism* in which Christ and the Spirit dwell. The church has a unique source of life, is directed toward particular ends and goals, and is governed by particular commitments and practices—such as prayer, worship, study, witness, and service—that give peculiar shape to the church's life and ministry. The church cannot be explained in organizational terms alone and must guard against approaches to leadership that merely accommodate to the broader culture (see *Pastor: A Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* by William Willimon [Abingdon, 2002], p. 70).

(*Note:* A fuller exposition of many of these themes can be found in a synodical study committee report entitled "Ecclesiastical Office and Ordination" [*Acts of Synod 1973*, pp. 635-716], and in synodical guidelines for understanding leadership, office, and ordination [*Acts of Synod 2001*, pp. 503-504].)

Some churches over-emphasize the differences between the church and other organizations and miss out on valuable things they could learn from the way other organizations are led. Other churches underemphasize the uniqueness of the church. Where does your church fall in this spectrum?

Case Study 2: Hands Off, Hands On

Susan Bridge, the chair of the council, had to decide. The new pastor was strong, having implemented new programs with fire and devotion. But some people felt run over. Should the council put the brakes on—hold him back or at least slow him down?

Center Church was a big congregation with a suitably big staff. The former senior pastor was a superb minister of the Word; he had spent much time each week in his study, and it showed on Sunday. The congregation learned from his thorough study of God's Word and his apt illustrations.

However, he didn't like the administrative side of ministry. The staff carried out separate ministries as they saw fit. While they benefited from the pastor's sermons, the people thought the pastor aloof or shy because he showed little interest in them. Because he was near retirement, the council heard the criticism but believed things would change in the church when he retired.

As churches sometimes do, Center found a dynamic younger pastor to lead their congregation, the opposite of their former pastor. He took charge of the staff and gave good direction to them and the council, but was forced to quit the ministry when he suffered a heart attack and nearly died.

The church felt the loss keenly. They hired a retired pastor to help them for two years. The pastor had a solid reputation in the denomination for his good preaching, friendliness, and ability to administer a staff and start new programs. The church thought they were set, with the council and congregation happy with the choice.

Now, nine months later, clouds of trouble covered the sunny start. Some staff and council members were frustrated at the new pastor's "bulling" his way ahead with new programs. They did like his enthusiasm, his energy. The congregation loved his welcoming manner. He connected with all ages. But he virtually ignored the council, getting approval for his ideas "out and about." Although Center had committees, the pastor decided what he wanted done and told them about it.

Susan Bridge saw it herself. Others saw it too. And now the issue was before council. What to do—should it be "hands off," holding the course without change? Or should it be "hands on," intervening somehow to change the way the pastor operated?

Case Study 3: Mission, Mission, Who's Got the Mission?

Faith Church was in the middle of a muddle. Rev. Sharon Wilson was plowing straight ahead with the church's mission, but the congregation was lagging, even balking. And the council was in between, watching the spinning wheels and not knowing what to do.

Faith had been a vibrant church in earlier days but had lost some members who moved to churches nearer their new residences. Some new families in the neighborhood had joined Faith; some unchurched people were also attending. When Rev. Wilson came, she noticed that the search team had exaggerated the buy-in of the congregation for new directions that a study committee had approved.

But Rev. Wilson believed the congregation would follow if she quickly implemented the changes. Some council members had gently cautioned her, but she plowed forward with enthusiasm and full effort. Soon some members of Faith headed out the door. The council started a new round of direction setting, using a consultant, and changed its direction somewhat. Rev. Wilson survived the change and pushed ahead to carry out the new plan.

Part of the plan was to reach out to the surrounding community. God blessed that effort with more people coming to the church. But the congregation tired out, retreating in their effort, with some ministries actually throwing in the towel. This time Rev. Wilson drew together a small group of leaders to do a third round of "vision setting."

It seemed like a good plan and Rev. Wilson was pleased. She preached it and pushed; the congregation balked, criticizing her for constantly intimating that they weren't committed. Their energy ebbed; Rev. Wilson's fire was diminishing into embers. The council saw both declines and wondered: three attempts to change with no seeming good. Was it time for a fourth? Or, as some members urged, was it time to forget planning for a while and just "be the church"? One thing was sure—something had to be done. But what?

Chapter 2

The Shape of Effective Leadership in the Church

What does effective leadership look like? How does it work? How do people know whether their congregation is being effectively led? The concept of *reciprocal leadership* helps us to focus on the relationship between follower and leader rather than on certain traits a leader might possess. We can also identify “four Cs”—four factors present in situations where effective leadership is taking place.

1. What is Christian leadership?

First, a definition:

Effective Christian leadership is the process of helping a group embody in its corporate life the practices that shape vital Christian life, community, and witness in ways that are faithful to Jesus Christ and the gospel and appropriate to the particular group’s setting, resources, and purpose.

The next definition is more specific to leadership in a congregational setting:

Effective Christian leadership is the process of helping a congregation embody in its corporate life the practices that shape vital Christian life, community, and witness in ways that are faithful to Jesus Christ and the gospel and appropriate to the particular congregation’s setting, resources, and purpose.

The church has many leaders

It’s important to clarify that the above definitions do not limit the function of leadership to particular individuals or offices. The New Testament teaches and the church affirms that “the task of ministry is shared by all and is not limited to a special, professional class. . . . The ministry of the church is Christ’s ministry, shared by all who are in Christ” (from conclusions 1 and 2, “Report on Ecclesiastical Office and Ordination,” *Acts of Synod*

1973, p. 714). This point bears repeating, given our strong, historically conditioned tendency to associate leadership with the activity of pastors and other officially designated individuals.

The *essence* of leadership vs. the *style* of leadership

It's also important to clarify that the definitions above address the *essence* of leadership, not the various *styles* in which leadership is expressed. In *essence*, Christian leadership is the same in all times and places. It embodies unchanging principles and values, such as servanthood, morality, respect for all people as divine image-bearers, and so on. But the *style* of leadership varies greatly depending upon the individual leader and the situation in which leadership is exercised. A well-developed and mature leader has the capacity to exercise different styles in different situations. A crisis situation may call for an authoritarian style, a decision-making process among peers may call for a consensus-building style, and a learning situation may call for a prophetic style. Leadership styles are neither linear nor hierarchical; they are best understood as options in a repertoire circle where the situation determines which style will best serve.

How is leadership shared in your congregation? Can you think of examples of when your leaders exercised different leadership styles, depending on the need or context?

The biblical concept of “help”

Finally, it's important to clarify the meaning of the word “help” in the definition. If we don't understand the word “help,” we may see this definition as an overly weak concept of leadership. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word most frequently translated “help” usually refers to God. “I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Ps. 121:1-2). When leaders “help” people live the Christian life, they are far from weak. They are agents, albeit humble servants, of the triune God; indeed, they are acting like God.

2. What is “contextualization” and why is it so important when it comes to leadership?

Effective leadership takes into account the critical role of the *ministry context* in which leadership is exercised. Every ministry context is unique. It has its own particular history, setting, relationships, and culture.

Leadership takes culture seriously

“Culture” here refers to the common ideas, feelings, and values that guide community and personal behavior, that organize and regulate what a particular group thinks, feels, and does about God, the world, and humanity. Culture is that invisible vault where worldviews, presuppositions, and values are generated and stored.

Effective leaders understand that culture operates most powerfully when it is least visible. Consider these two images: First, culture is like the ocean. The power of the ocean is not in the six-foot

waves on top of the water; it's in the massive movement of water underneath the wave, a movement that cannot be seen. Second, as one wag has put it, "Culture is like bad breath: you smell it on everyone else before you smell it on yourself." That is, just like people don't smell their own breath, they often don't see their own cultural values at work. Culture operates most powerfully when it is least visible.

For example, it's easy for Dutch people to assume that thriftiness or cleanliness or deferral of gratification or emotional reserve—cultural characteristics often associated with Dutch—are not merely cultural characteristics of one particular cultural group, but are universal traits. It's even more dangerous when people assume that their own cultural characteristics *should be* true of everyone.

The point here is that effective leaders understand that culture, visible or invisible, functions in powerful ways in any group and must be taken into account as leadership decisions are made.

All ministry is cross-cultural

Effective leaders also understand that virtually all ministry is *cross-cultural*. The cross-cultural nature of ministry and the corresponding need for cultural sensitivity in leadership is most obvious when it involves the meeting of meanings between different races, ethnic groups, nations, regions, and socioeconomic classes. But ministry in a highly secular, post-Christian culture makes virtually all North American ministry cross-cultural and *counter-cultural*—that is, engaged in the meeting of meanings between cultures that have fundamentally different and opposing worldviews, assumptions, and values. For example, exercising leadership in the church in a racially broken society and racially diverse community will require a keen understanding of racial dynamics (cross-cultural), and a radical commitment to the unity and diversity of the body of Jesus (counter-cultural).

Every congregation is unique

Effective leaders understand how leadership must be contextualized, or shaped in its expression, in each ministry setting. Leadership must look different in one or another ethnic community; it must be exercised differently in one social structure or another; and it must adapt to the various stages in the development of a church. Knowing the times and the culture of a congregation and knowing how to respond appropriately might be called "cultural intelligence" or "contextual intelligence" and is an important mark of an effective leader.

3. What are the personality traits of an effective leader?

This is a fairly common question, but the wrong one to ask. One of the most interesting shifts in leadership theory in recent years has been away from the notion of a "leadership personality."

It used to be that CRC congregations looked very similar to each other. Today each congregation increasingly has its own particular character. Often this is because a congregation has taken seriously this challenge to contextualize its ministry. In what ways does the context of your congregation as defined in these paragraphs shape your congregation? In what ways should it shape your congregation more (or less)?

What cultural differences do you observe within your own congregation? (For example, differences between young and old, between more educated and less educated, between affluent and poor.) What cultural differences make ministry challenging in your congregation?

Peter Drucker, a leading authority on leadership, has pointed out that a single universal “leadership personality” or set of “leadership traits” simply does not exist. Name a leadership trait that seems “absolutely essential” to being an effective leader, and someone else can name ten situations of effective leadership where the leaders don’t have those personality traits.

Effective leadership is best understood not by focusing upon personality traits in the leader, but upon *the relationship between the leader and those being led*. Focusing upon the *situation* and the *relationships* shifts the question from “What are the traits of good leaders?” to “What factors are present in situations where effective leadership is taking place?” and “What do relationships look like in situations where effective leadership is taking place?”

4. What are the positive things we can expect to see in situations where there is effective, reciprocal leadership?

Four factors (the four “Cs”) seem ever-present in situations of effective leadership:

1. **Character** in the leader (which generates **trust** on the part of followers).
2. **Conviction** in the leader (which helps the congregation discern its **purpose and vision**).
3. **Competencies** in the leader (which help a congregation function as a **healthy system**—i.e., deal with the normal anxieties and conflicts of communal life in healthy and productive ways).
4. **Confluence** of leader, congregation, time, place, ministry opportunity, and resources that is a **gift of God’s Spirit** and that enables a leader and congregation to work joyfully together in realizing God’s purposes.

Three important clarifications must be made before expanding upon each of these factors.

First, notice how all four of these factors involve *both leader and congregation, the relationship between them, and the impact they have on one another*. For example, character in a congregation’s leaders helps the congregation trust those leaders, which in turn strengthens the character of the congregation, which in turn helps the leaders trust the congregation. Praise God for such an upward spiral of character and trust!

Second, it’s important to distinguish between *personality traits* and *character traits*. The focus in these four factors is not on personality—introvert, extrovert, charismatic, quiet—but on the character of the leaders and those being led. Put another way, a church can be healthy with a leader who’s an introvert, but not with a leader who is untrustworthy, arrogant, or sexually promiscuous.

Third, these four factors can be applied to diverse cultural situations. Each cultural situation will define these factors according to norms appropriate to that culture. But these four factors reflect certain realities of human behavior and community that are present and must be reckoned with across all cultural differences.

Effective leaders are people of sound character who generate trust in their followers.

For Christian leaders and for all Christians, *the foundation of Christian character* is the believer's union with Jesus Christ. In their death with Christ believers die to the old self, are raised to a new life with Christ (Col. 3:1-17), and are clothed with the character of Christ. As the branch receives its life from the vine, so Christians receive their spiritual life from Christ (John 15:1-17). Christ, by his Holy Spirit, produces in the believer the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The foundation of character for all Christians is their new life in Jesus Christ, and Christ's life in them.

The character of Christ in the Christian leader should clearly produce certain moral excellencies that are crucial to the leader's effectiveness—honesty, integrity, fairness, compassion, service to others, a life of prayer, and total dependence upon God for strength and guidance. One of the key evidences of such character in leaders is that people *trust* such leaders, and such leaders trust the people they lead.

Another dimension of character is the life experiences that form a leader. *Who a person is determines how that person will lead.* A person's character is determined, in part, by the life experiences that form him or her. Growing up during the Depression, losing a parent as a teenager, experiencing the horror of war, having parents who model generosity and service, growing up in two or three very different cultures—all these life experiences are formative of who we are at the deepest levels.

Another dimension of character is an *emotional intelligence* that is consistent with effective leadership. Emotional intelligence is the ability to manage one's own emotions, motivate oneself, reach out for emotional support in healthy and appropriate ways, recognize emotions in others and respond appropriately, handle relationships, control impulses, demonstrate empathy, listen actively, deal constructively and creatively with conflict, assess one's world in optimistic and hopeful terms, take appropriate risks, patiently persist in the face of anxiety and conflict, and respect differences among people. A key element of emotional intelligence as practiced by leaders is the ability to seek input from people at all levels on how they are performing as a leader, to be non-defensive in response to such input, and to appropriately adapt in light of such input. (See an inspiring and illuminating paper by Craig Dykstra entitled "The Significance of Pastoral Ministry and the Idea of the Pastoral Imagination" in which he develops the concept of "pastoral intelligence" and "pastoral

Isn't it interesting that God often uses our most difficult and painful experiences to equip us for service? Can you think of experiences that had a positive, formative impact on you?

It is hard to over-estimate the importance of "pastoral intelligence." When asked what single factor is the best predictor of whether a pastor will flourish in ministry, Duane Visser, director of Pastor-Church Relations, has a clear and simple answer: knowing how to get along with people. Clearly, both pastor and congregation must have emotional intelligence as described in this paragraph. We all can grow in this area. What are some areas where you as pastor and as congregation know you need to grow?

imagination.” This paper is unpublished but is available upon request to leadership@calvinseminary.edu.)

Effective leaders operate out of strong conviction, which helps a congregation discern its purpose and vision.

Effective leaders believe certain things deeply and commit themselves selflessly to realizing certain ends. Some call this one’s “vision” or a “preferred future.” For Christian leaders, these convictions must be shaped by the biblical vision of the kingdom of God. Effective Christian leaders must be invigorated by a vision of the kingdom God is establishing in the world. These convictions arise out of the leader’s relationship with God in Christ and the Holy Spirit, and God’s call to follow God in faith and obedience.

For Christian leaders, such conviction has the greatest potential for long-term good when it arises out of a strong vision of the church’s mission and a thorough grasp of the biblical, pastoral, and theological contours of the Christian faith and church. This must be combined with an ability to communicate these contours in meaningful and relevant ways through sound preaching and teaching and imaginative pastoral leadership.

The capacity for *reflexive leadership* (Carroll and Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds*, Jossey-Bass, 2002) is an important dimension of leading with conviction. Reflexive leadership involves, for example, holding in creative tension the positive value of the tradition and the challenges of the present situation. Effective leaders are capable of informing and guiding an ongoing “argument” between competing convictions. At such points conviction requires a deep grounding in and understanding of the faith tradition, as well as a lively imagination and capacity for thinking creatively. Effective Christian leaders think deeply, theologically, integratively, and creatively.

A note about “conviction” and “vision”

Because the word “vision” is easily misunderstood, we use the word “conviction” in the previous paragraphs. For many, “the leader’s vision” conjures up images of fumbled, lone-ranger attempts to introduce major changes in a congregation, painful polarization, and destructive conflict often ending in separation from the pastor and mass exodus of members.

Peter Senge (*The Fifth Discipline*, pp. 205-232) prefers the term “visioning” to avoid some of these pitfalls. “Vision,” a noun, connotes an answer, a solution to the problem. Congregations usually want, yet resist, pastors who gladly offer their vision for the church. By contrast, “visioning” refers to “a structured conversation of God’s people about what they believe God has called them to be and to do.” Effective leaders don’t impose their vision but enable a process whereby the congregation develops its vision.

On the other hand, leaders who have no strong convictions and corresponding vision are weak and ineffective leaders in congregations that desperately need leadership. It is difficult to overstate

this concern. Many CRC congregations are struggling for direction and desperately need wise, strong leadership. Thus it is important to see the overlap of conviction and vision when both are properly understood.

Effective Christian leaders have strong, biblically shaped convictions that issue forth in a biblically shaped vision. They believe certain things deeply. They have dreams and are passionate about what God's church and kingdom ought to look like. They are bold and courageous. Their strength is in the strength of their convictions and their passion to do the right thing. And they are self-sacrificial and give their lives to turning their biblically shaped vision into reality. They're risk takers. But the difference between an effective leader and a martyr is that the effective leader fosters a process whereby *the congregation as a whole* can discern and own where God is leading the congregation.

One test of whether a leader is "imposing a vision" or "leading with conviction" is to ask this question: Is the leader truly open to where a congregational process of discernment might lead, or does the leader already have a predetermined outcome in mind? At the same time, it would be incorrect to conclude from this test that leaders should never have convictions and a vision that propel them in a certain direction. While effective leaders understand the reciprocal nature of leadership (i.e., the influence of leaders and followers upon one another), they also have biblically shaped convictions regarding the church Christ is building, a church that is called to be engaging in its worship, faithful in its teaching, strong and deep in its fellowship, self-sacrificial in its outreach and service. These biblical convictions rightly propel leaders and the community they lead in a certain direction. Effective leaders make good judgments about the best way to set forth those convictions, set direction, and engage the community in achieving its biblical purpose.

But what if the convictions of the leader and the values of the congregation are at such odds with each other that the leader cannot express his or her most basic convictions without confronting and judging the congregation? In most situations, the leader who thinks this way has already guaranteed conflict and failure. By the very question, the leader has set up a win/lose outcome. He or she would do well to take a different approach: Every Christian Reformed pastor and congregation is on record as believing what the Scriptures and the confessions teach. The convictions and values all members of the CRC share in common are unfathomably great in number. The effective leader accentuates and holds up the best of the congregation's beliefs and values, and then, in a loving and safe environment of mutual trust, helps the congregation confront the gap between its own values and current realities. Effective leaders help people come to the point where they judge themselves. And effective leaders are transparent in confronting the gap between their own values and their

Some congregations have finely polished vision statements but are floundering, while other congregations have little "paperwork" to show for their vision, but have a clear sense of direction. The important thing is not what's on paper but what actually propels pastors and congregation to sacrificially serve Christ together. What's the vision that propels your congregation?

On a continuum between having a leader in your church who strongly imposes a vision or one who waits until the church arrives at its vision, how does your church function?

Most congregations want a "strong leader." What do we really mean when we say we want a strong leader? Is the strength of a leader determined by how much resistance the leader generates? By how far out in front of the congregation the leader works and how much criticism the leader is able to endure? By how much progress the congregation makes in reducing the gap between its stated values and its current realities? By something else?

own lives! Effective leaders stand *with* a congregation in learning, not *over* a congregation in judgment.

Effective leaders have competencies that help a congregation function as a healthy system (i.e., deal with the normal anxieties and conflicts of communal life in healthy and productive ways).

Leaving aside the debate as to whether leadership is a matter of natural talent or learned skills, there are clearly competencies that leaders can learn through training. We should not overstate the distinction between character and competence, or between natural talent and learned skills. However, the attributes discussed above in the section on character tend to be more deeply embedded in who a person is, whereas the competencies listed below tend to be skills that can be learned by a wide variety of persons. These skills include

- listening and encouraging skills
- communication skills
- understanding authority, including the differences between formal and informal authority
- understanding the importance of clear structures and practices of accountability
- understanding dynamics and processes of change
- understanding issues involved in cross-cultural ministry
- understanding the dynamics of conflict and how to lead through conflict
- motivating people to perform at their full potential
- building support for and ownership of a process of change
- using win/win problem solving techniques
- understanding the congregation as a system
- understanding the critical nature of *pace* when it comes to change
- understanding the difference between courage and the temptation to martyrdom
- understanding the pitfalls of charisma
- knowing the difference between solving problems and creating opportunities for learning

Congregations with leaders who possess these specific leadership skills are more likely to deal with the normal anxieties and conflicts of communal life in healthy and productive ways.

A related challenge in leadership development is helping *congregations* to be healthier and more effective in their working relationship with congregational leaders. Some of the features of healthy congregations include

- strong commitment to the church's purpose
- healthy practices of communication within the congregation and between congregation and leaders (communication that,

among other things, keeps truth and love, accountability and support together in creative tension)

- deep congregational practices of prayer for leaders and the congregation as a whole
- a congregational culture that takes responsibility for its problems and doesn't blame or scapegoat the pastor or other leaders
- the ability to constructively deal with conflict
- leadership decisions guided first of all by the church's purpose, not by a desire to keep peace at all costs

Situations in which there is effective leadership will be marked by a confluence (a convergence, a coming together) of leader, congregation, time, place, ministry opportunity, and resources that is a gift of God's Spirit and that enables a leader and congregation to move forward together in realizing God's purposes.

Leadership is exercised not in a vacuum, but in a particular time and place, with a particular group of people who have a particular history, by pastors and other leaders in particular points in their life journeys, in a particular cultural and social situation. The best leaders humbly acknowledge that they were "in the right place at the right time"—that a multitude of factors, some of them beyond their direct control, "came together" to produce relationships and events that resulted in great good. The best leaders will not claim that they could go to the next town and produce the same success story all over again. One of the principles that govern leadership is a unique and unrepeatable confluence of factors that come together in the leader/follower relationship and broader ministry situation. "Synergy," "convergence," and "luck" are words leadership theorists use to describe this phenomenon. "Providence," "gift of God's Spirit," and "answers to prayer" are words Christians use.

Understanding the role of confluence in congregational and institutional life is critical for several reasons. First, it keeps a leader humble. Beware of leaders who think the flourishing of their organization is all their own doing. Second, it keeps leaders flexible. Different circumstances dictate different leadership emphases and strategies. The effective leader constantly adapts to new challenges and opportunities. Third, it explains why the same person is not equally effective in all situations. Some leaders are fabulously successful in one setting and anything but successful in the next. All leaders and followers need to recognize that confluence is not a matter of easy formulas and steps, but of gift, grace, and surprise.

However, this reality of confluence cannot be used by leaders as an excuse for passivity: "Oh, well, things don't seem to be coming together this year. We'll see what happens next year." Effective leaders trust that as they take responsibility for matters of character, convictions, and competence that are within their

If you are a pastor or other church leader, what two or three skills from these lists do you need to enhance to be more effective? If you are a member of a congregation, what two or three skills from these lists does your congregation need to enhance to be healthier?

If your congregation has experienced the gift of confluence—things coming together in ways that are nothing short of a gift of God's Spirit—be sure to say "thank you" to God soon and often!

control, God will work in and through their faithfulness to create this confluence of factors that constitute shalom and blessing.

For Christians, all four of these factors underscore the constant need for fervent prayer and openness to God's leading. But confluence especially underscores how dependent the church is on God's blessing upon the labors of leaders and congregations.

5. Why do we call this a "reciprocal" understanding of leadership?

"Reciprocal" literally means "back and forth" or "both ways."

In any situation involving leadership, influence goes both ways. Leaders shape those they lead, but also are shaped by those they lead. In an extended definition of leadership, Jerry Zandstra points out that leaders both motivate and are motivated by their followers ("What Is Leadership?" unpublished paper, 2002). Leadership is *reciprocal*.

Thus, leadership can be understood only in terms of the leader in relationship to those being led. Such a reciprocal understanding of leadership leads to mutuality and partnership in ministry.

Rev. Rick Williams expressed this mutuality beautifully in a lecture he gave at Calvin Theological Seminary on April 11, 2002, entitled "A Glimpse of Pastoral Leadership in a Multi-Racial Church." When asked about leadership style, Rick answered,

I know of a number of pastors who articulate for the congregation where the church ought to be going, and their challenge is to bring them along. I'm not that kind of a leader. My strength is to bring people together and say, "OK, this is what I think we should be thinking about; and now let's talk about it and pray about it." I'm always amazed by two things that happen then—how much better the ideas are that they come up with together and how much more responsibility they take for advancing it. I see my responsibility as being a catalyst and making sure we are asking the right questions and facilitating the discussion.

Many congregations today say they want "dynamic" leadership. What do you think they have in mind? In what ways is this consistent or inconsistent with the view of reciprocal leadership explained in this booklet?

Some might misunderstand this reciprocal approach to leadership as being too weak, as lacking in vision and direction. But such is not the case. Being committed to good congregational process doesn't mean that a leader lacks strong convictions. Rather, he or she has wisdom in "asking the right questions" and strategically guiding the congregation forward.

6. This reciprocal understanding of leadership has also been called "adaptive leadership." Why is this concept important for congregations to understand as they think about leadership?

The concept of "adaptive leadership" is often misunderstood. Adaptive leadership does *not* refer to the pastor adapting to a congregation or a congregation to a pastor. "Adaptive leadership"

is leadership that helps the congregation see the gap between its stated values and its current realities, and then adapt in ways that move the congregation closer to its values. Adaptive leadership helps a congregation see the disconnect between what it is and what it ought to be, and then learn and adapt accordingly. For example, a congregation that understands God's call to be a caring, accepting fellowship but is dominated by cliques faces an *adaptive* challenge—adapting *from* what it is (a fellowship dominated by cliques) *to* what it says it wants to be (an accepting, inviting fellowship).

In the leadership literature, “adaptive challenge” is usually contrasted with “technical solution.” The congregation that is dominated by cliques and is cold to visitors no doubt desires to have more members join their church. But the temptation is always to reach for a *technical solution*. Examples of technical solutions are better signs on the walls, or more greeters, or a Visitor Center that gives information to visitors. Those may all be fine things to do, but they don't get at the *adaptive challenge*—namely, that the congregation itself must change. They must be more interested in the visitor than in touching base with their best friends.

Adaptive challenges by definition go to the heart of things and involve deep change. One of the biggest mistakes leaders and congregations make is confusing “technical solutions” and “adaptive challenges.” Most congregational problems are not problems that have technical solutions. If a congregation's problems were only technical, they would have been solved long ago. Most congregational problems are adaptive challenges: How do we adapt from who we are to who we say we want to be? How do we align our stated values and our current realities? Adaptive leaders don't talk about “solutions” as much as they talk about “learning”: What can we learn together? What have we learned through this?

This model of leadership is usually associated with a systems approach to leadership and lies behind much leadership training in North America today. Approaches to and theories of leadership come and go. Our goal is not to endorse a particular theory of leadership, but rather to find ways to talk about leadership that are faithful to biblical and theological principles, transcend past polarities, and give us positive models of leadership.

7. What are some ways to identify and positively describe effective leaders?

One of the main points of this study has been that leadership is not first of all a set of traits in one or more people designated as “leaders.” There is no such thing as a single “leadership personality.” Rather, leadership is a reciprocal relationship between leaders and the larger community.

Even so, leaders, no matter what their personality, act in certain ways. There are certain things leaders do, certain habits they practice, certain character strengths they seek to develop. The qualities listed below summarize many of the different points

What are some recent gaps you have seen in your congregation between your stated values and your current realities? Have you addressed these gaps as adaptive challenges or as technical problems?

If you had to pick a metaphor for church leadership, which would you choose: fireman, shepherd, CEO, farmer, architect, engineer? If you had to pick a tool for leading, which would it be: hammer, towel, club, wheelbarrow?

made in this paper. No leader has all of these qualities in equal measure. The list is not meant to make leaders feel more inadequate than they often already feel. This list is meant to be a positive checklist for all of us who want to be the very best leaders we can be.

Effective Christian leaders

- are godly in character, manifesting the life of Christ and the fruit of the Spirit
- pray fervently
- are emotionally healthy and able to function effectively in a variety of relationships
- see the world in optimistic and hopeful terms
- listen carefully
- are trustworthy
- are self-sacrificial
- create ownership of ministry vision
- utilize the giftedness of others
- acknowledge that resistance to effective leadership is normal and unavoidable
- are not afraid of conflict
- are persistent in the face of conflict
- are resilient in the face of setbacks
- are respected by all members of a group even if not always liked or agreed with
- bring people together, building consensus across lines of competing viewpoints
- get people talking about their differences in ways that promote learning, listening, and insight
- understand the importance of clear structures and practices of accountability
- stay in close contact with those who are resisting their leadership
- absorb the normal tensions and anxieties present in any community of people without overreacting and thereby escalating tensions
- understand and manage the process of change
- are humble and take little credit for the good things that happen around them

Take time to identify some qualities from this list that characterize your church and its leaders, and thank God for these qualities! Then take some time to prayerfully identify ways that you as a congregation (including leaders and congregation) can grow.

Case Study 4: Who's Wagging the Dog?

Rev. Schafer had not guessed his interim pastorate would get him in a pickle. Here he was, in the middle of a council meeting, and everybody was looking to him about what to do about Bill and Bill's beef.

Bill, a member of Lakeside Church council, had just bolted the meeting. He was mad. Few were surprised because Bill had been belligerent for a week, grumbling to others about the summer committee's owning the church. As Bill left, he let fly from the doorway, "This council has got to take charge of this church. They can't get away with this anymore. It's the tail wagging the dog. And it's not right."

For years Lakeside had a burgeoning attendance during the summer, dwarfing the regular congregation, with well-heeled folk with summer homes in the area and a variety of visitors who stayed for a week or two in cottages or motels in the area. More than a decade ago, the council had formed a summer ministries committee to plan the summer worship services, choose the pastors, and decide the beneficiaries of the offerings.

Over time this committee, with almost no changeover in membership, began making its decisions without approval by the council, selecting popular pastors for worship and choosing charities for the offerings. The offerings never included Lakeside's needs, and Lakeside, as everyone knew, was a congregation that was struggling financially.

Now the issue of responsibility and authority heated the council room. Right after devotions, Bill had burst out: "Listen, it's time to put that committee in its place. They can't be making decisions about this church. We are the council. Not them." With previous advice from Rev. Schafer, the chair had said the issue would not be discussed now but when the summer committee gave the council its report.

Bill jumped up and said he was fed up: "If we can't deal with this issue, how can we deal with other issues that are hurting this church?" He packed up his papers and said, "I am resigning right now. My wife and I will no longer be members of a church like this." Then he stomped to the door.

After Bill slammed the door, the silence was palpable. One member pulled the drape back to see Bill sitting in his car in the lot. Some wanted to go get Bill and invite him back; some wanted to send a delegation to his home in "a couple of days" and invite him back; and some wanted to settle the ministries issue without Bill or the committee "holding the council hostage."

The chair seemed flustered. He said to Rev. Schafer, "Will you advise us here?" Everybody looked at Rev. Schafer and waited for a response.

Case Study 5: The People Out There Coming In

Pastor Mike had a problem—at least he felt as if it were his. Unlike his previous church, Community Church was struggling—with him, with each other, and with the neighborhood. Evangelism, everybody believed, was important. But it wasn't easy. Some wondered if this church would survive.

At his previous church, a State university was almost next door. There Pastor Mike's ministry had gone well, with large numbers of university students involved in the church's ministries, including service and evangelistic programs in the community. These young adults and the other congregation members encouraged each other in ministry.

When Mike received a call to another church, one that also was close to a college community, he naturally expected similar results. And for ten years in this second ministry his expectations were met—the college students and other neighbors joined the church, doubling its size. But then, for no apparent reason, the church began a steady decline. Fewer college students came; some strong families in the church moved to suburban neighborhoods and chose churches nearer to their homes. The congregation that remained seemed to lose its heart for evangelism and its vision.

Pastor Mike and a few people close to him saw the demise and began to focus on neighborhood children, with clubs after school, Sunday school invitations, and more. The congregation at first went along with this emphasis, teaching and serving in the programs, but gradually backed away. One of the tensions was different expectations for the neighborhood children, who sometimes described their activities outside the church or used language that some parents did not want their own children to learn.

Now Pastor Mike had little energy to face these problems; neither did the council; and more longtime members were tired, leaving, or begging for change. Something had to be done.

Chapter 3

Leadership Challenges in the Christian Reformed Church

The CRC faces many challenges as it thinks about leadership development, particularly in the context of the local congregation.

1. The Conceptual Challenge: Figuring out what it means to be a healthy church with healthy leadership

It is vitally important for the CRC to develop sound leadership models that flow from a biblical understanding of the church. The purpose of this booklet is to help Christian Reformed congregations in that task. Far too often the leadership debate has been polarized, especially when that debate centers on the role of the pastor in congregational leadership. In this polarized debate, one extreme understates the importance of pastoral leadership, maintaining that if pastors just preach the Word and care for the flock, leadership will take care of itself. The other extreme puts too much stress on the role of the charismatic leader in setting the congregation's course.

People who represent both extremes in this polarized debate must listen to and learn from one another. When they do, they will discover two very important truths that subtly change the terms of the debate and enable us to move forward.

The church needs strong leadership.

The church needs strong leadership. Notice that the word is “leadership”—not “leader.” The focus is on the function of leadership, not on the person of the leader. Too many congregations and pastors who react against heroic leadership models are throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The church needs leadership.

The church must make a shift in its understanding of congregational leadership. A **pastor-centered or clerical orientation** of leadership—where the emphasis is upon what the pastor does to and for the laity, as if the pastor is the central actor in the church's life and the laity are essentially passive recipients—is not a healthy view of leadership. Rather, the church must develop a **congregational orientation**, where the emphasis is upon shared

Evaluate this shift from pastor-centered leadership to congregational leadership in light of the biblical teachings regarding the body of Christ as summarized on pages 10-11.

congregational leadership and congregational initiative in the creation and development of ministry.

When operating according to this new orientation, pastors understand their leadership role not as simply performing certain pastoral functions (preaching, teaching, sacraments, visitation), but as working collaboratively with the other members of the body to stimulate the discovery and use of the spiritual gifts of all members, enabling the body as a whole to engage in ministry. Such body-focused ministry doesn't happen by accident; it must be envisioned and developed by those who lead! While pastors are not the only ones who provide this leadership, they also must realize their critical role in giving shape to the church's ministry through their spiritual ministry of preaching, teaching, evangelizing, and caring for the flock.

Those who minimize the role of the pastor in congregational leadership must also understand the North American breakdown in consensus about exactly what the church is and should be—and thus the critical role pastors play in helping congregations understand their calling and mission. In a prior era, the cultural and ecclesiastical consensus about what a church was and what a pastor did was so strong that leadership in the church in some ways appeared unnecessary. The church seemed to move along on auto-pilot. Today, however, individual Christians and churches negotiate their own experience and piece together their own religious identity with little regard for the way things have been done in the past. Such situations require leadership that is theologically grounded, culturally responsive, and interpersonally sensitive. They require leaders who have **character, conviction, and competence** who serve selflessly and creatively in the full expectation of the **confluence** of God's blessing.

Strong leadership focuses upon the mission, not the leader.

On the other side of this debate, the church and those who lead the church must not put too much emphasis on the role of the charismatic leader in casting the vision and directing the congregation. Surprisingly, North American students of leadership, quite apart from any biblical teaching, are abandoning a view of leadership that puts too much emphasis upon the charismatic leader. Ronald A. Heifetz, in his authoritative work on leadership entitled *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Harvard, 1994), speaks of "the myth of leadership . . . the solitary individual whose heroism and brilliance enable him to lead the way." Such overemphasis upon the person of the leader proves counter-productive. The successes and failures of an organization are too closely tied to its leader. The organization itself escapes responsibility. (See also Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* [Harvard Business School Press, 2002]; and Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* [Jossey-Bass, 2003].)

In his book *Good to Great* (HarperCollins, 2001), James Collins analyzes America's great corporate success stories, and comes to the startling conclusion that the leaders of America's truly "good to great" companies are not big personalities who seek to build the success of the organization upon their own charisma and celebrity. Collins's conclusion is that leaders who focus too much upon their personal role, and not upon the mission itself, at best limit their effectiveness, and at worst sabotage the mission.

Peter Steinke humorously points out the hazard of overemphasizing the role of the visionary leader when he says, "Any job description that uses the phrase 'dynamic leader' more than six times is fly paper for narcissists." The point that modern leadership theorists are making, and that the New Testament stated long ago, is that leadership is not first of all about the leader, it is about the mission to which the group is called.

2. The Practical Challenge: Applying sound leadership principles to actual church situations

Throughout this booklet questions and comments in the margins and case studies have been provided to help readers apply these leadership concepts to their particular situation.

Below are four more case studies that offer readers the opportunity to apply these leadership principles to particular church situations. All nine of the case studies in this training tool have been chosen because they are representative of common leadership challenges in the church today. In fact, as you read these case studies, you may wonder whether some of them are about your church! Rest assured, each of these case studies tell the story of many churches.

Since pastors generally want to please those they serve, they are vulnerable to the temptation to take too much responsibility for a church's problems, and in so doing, harm the church more than help it. At the same time, churches are tempted to give the pastor too much of the credit when things go well and too much of the blame when things go poorly. With such powerful forces at work, what can a pastor and congregation do to avoid the pitfalls of the heroic leadership model?

Case Study 6: Let Go, Let God

Pastor John got up from his knees in his study, just having thanked God again for what had happened in this church. He pondered the past, when it had been different.

He had come to this church excited about the opportunity. Some members of a larger church had decided to start a new church, with the blessing of the larger church. Initially, the new church met in a school gym, hoping to draw people from the neighborhood into the church. But the group of families had little vision for the church other than what they were used to. They wanted to be flexible, but only a few members had a vision for it.

Pastor John led them in a vision process, including setting goals. He led the church in prayer, asking for God's leading, but he felt he was floundering in implementing the agreed-upon mission. It was during this time of treading water that the church experienced a conference on the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of God's people. More than fifty people participated, including Pastor John.

Through prayer and pondering, Pastor John began to see that God was saying, "I'm going to do something if you come to me with empty hands. Pray more for my leading. This work is not about you." Pastor John acted on this insight. He began expressing his own dependency on God, and the church followed. The congregation prayed more often and more fervently, humbly asking God for direction, sincerely expressing their dependence on him. The church soon became vibrant; its worship changed from mostly ritual to genuine praise; it reached into the community and the community came in.

What had been a church of inward focus—with people wanting training for their children and no changes for fear of offending someone—became a church of outward focus toward God and toward his world and people. Few people left for other churches during these changes.

Now Pastor John wondered again at the things God was doing here. He knew that his and others' persistent dependence on God and fellowship with God's Spirit were instrumental in God carrying out his plans. John wondered if other churches needed to take the same approach—would God then bless them too? Or did God choose him and this particular church as only one way to extend his kingdom?

Case Study 7: Jane Hears It All

Rev. Daniel Blaine was down in the dumps, but not as low as his wife Jane. He knew he was under the gun in this church, wondering if he could survive. And she was the lightning rod, taking all the criticism that members of the church didn't dare say to Daniel himself. Inside their home their family was feeling the negative effects.

They had come to this traditional church eight years ago. Things went well for a while but cracks in the relationship between Daniel and the congregation began to appear when he introduced changes in worship, including the occasional use of a praise team and even a pre-sermon drama or two. Several members had left the church after that, letting it be known that Daniel was taking the church down the wrong path.

Then some council members told Daniel that "people in the congregation" were "not pleased" that Jane was pursuing her degree in social work and was not participating enough in the congregation. This in spite of her helping out with the children and worship program and singing in the choir.

Daniel brought home the remarks about his wife; the two of them had argued about it. A couple of women in the church had made remarks to Jane directly. "So how's your work going? It must be hard to be a pastor's wife, take care of your children, and have this busy career too!" Jane had tried to ignore the remarks, but it was wearing.

More and more she felt further out of the congregation. She felt lonely at home, even resenting that Daniel could at least talk over his concerns with the council. And it didn't help when he came home from council meetings and used her as a sounding board, "Jane, I am starting to think we cannot last here. It's the same old stuff. I feel like every idea I have is suspect." She felt lonely, afraid to speak about her anger even to Daniel and concerned she would explode at somebody in the congregation.

As they sat in the family room, she was calm enough to admit, "Daniel, I'm sorry that I am not as helpful to you as I should be. I yelled at the kids today; I'm up to here with the suspicious, snide attitude in this church." They both knew their own attitudes were hurting themselves and the church. "What do we do?" she asked.

Case Study 8: To Get Along, Go Along?

George was not at his wit's end, but he imagined he would jump at a call from another church if it came. His relationship with the current senior pastor was flawed, deeply so. He didn't know if they could continue to work together.

It had certainly been a major adjustment when James had been installed as the pastor two years ago. When he arrived he had told George, the pastor for congregational life, that he wanted a strong team relationship. The new pastor was enthusiastic in the pulpit, learned, and generally appreciated by the church. But soon George realized that his relationship with James would be quite different from that he enjoyed with Alan, the previous senior pastor.

It had been a fine team relationship with Alan, who was caring, gentle, and always considerate of others. He knew who he was before God, was genuine in admitting his faults, and was modest in talking about his gifts. On the pulpit he was no different than when sharing a cup of coffee or visiting someone in the hospital.

After Alan left, George became the only pastor in the church and the congregation naturally turned to him for counsel and comfort. And, interestingly, even after James arrived, the congregation still came to George, a practice he guessed James resented. Still, George did try to support James in every way he could.

Though James persistently asked him how he was doing, George couldn't help but think he seemed insecure somehow. George thought James was overly enthusiastic, more exuberant in the pulpit than he really felt, as if he were not in touch with himself, not really genuine, sort of playing a pastor's role.

Eventually George did work up the courage to talk with James about his feelings. While not hostile, James coolly claimed he was exactly who he was, that George was "way off base" in thinking he was not genuine and only playing a part. They agreed to air their concerns with a counselor provided by their denomination, but even after several sessions and a battery of personality tests, George couldn't get over the idea that James didn't see himself clearly.

Now George wondered whether James envied his relationships with the congregation. "Might it be better if I leave?" George thought. "Would it have been better if I had gone to him earlier?"

Case Study 9: The Pastor Hangs On

The elders had received advice from the interim pastor and from the classis. But they didn't know the vivid personal loyalty and anger that the elders and the congregation felt over this issue: what to do with the former pastor whose influence was still dividing the church.

Pastor Ray, the former leader of this congregation, had been generally accepted in the small church until a few years ago when a family trauma changed his personality—at least that's what most of the congregation felt. He became defensive, used inappropriate language from the pulpit, and was accused of shirking his pastoral responsibilities by some council members and by a number of people who served on the church's committees.

When members of the congregation, including elders, faced him with these concerns, he became defensive and criticized them instead. Soon the congregation lost nearly half its membership. Eventually the elders, with the concurrence of the classis, separated Pastor Ray from his position as pastor.

Complicating this separation, however, was that Pastor Ray continued to worship in the church. He lived near the church and had taken a job in a local financial institution. Some remaining members of the congregation, especially those whom Pastor Ray had brought into the church, thought the elders had mishandled the situation. The elders granted one family's request for Pastor Ray to lead a service and baptize their infant.

To help stabilize the church, the classis recommended an interim pastor. The church took that advice and hired an individual who was able to bring a measure of healing to the congregation. But Pastor Ray continued to attend worship; moreover, he often met for coffee with a select group of friends from the congregation, where he and they aired their frustrations. The tension would not go away.

Now it was time for the congregation to think about calling a new pastor. But the elders wondered if a new person could be effective with Pastor Ray being part of the congregation. Were they ready to call another pastor? The issue of the previous pastor's influence wasn't going to go away by itself. But what could be done that would unify the congregation and move it forward in its ministry?

A Final Word

By design this leadership training tool has focused upon many of the problems and challenges churches face today in the area of leadership. The good news is that God is blessing many Christian Reformed congregations today. More and more congregations are working through the challenges addressed in this training tool and are experiencing the joy of ministry rooted in the power of the gospel and the mission of God. Good things are happening in the CRC! We hope and trust this training tool can be a small but significant catalyst that helps congregations, pastors, and other church leaders effectively work together to accomplish God's mission.

Recommended Books for Continuing Reflection

The books listed below take a variety of approaches to leadership, but each embodies the basic understanding of leadership set forth in this booklet and offers great resources to congregations and pastors who desire to learn more about leadership.

Joseph Badarracco, *Leading Quietly: An Unorthodox Guide to Doing the Right Thing* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

Arthur Paul Boers, *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1999).

Jackson Carroll and Wade Clark Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations* (Indianapolis: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (Indianapolis: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

Eugene Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

Gilbert Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1998).

Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2003).

Gil Rendle, *The Multigenerational Challenge: Meeting the Leadership Challenge* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2002).

Peter Steinke, *Healthy Congregations* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1996).

Peter Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1993).

William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002)—especially Chapter 11: “The Pastor as Leader: The Peculiarity of Christian Leadership.”

Appendix 1

Four Models for Using This Training Tool

Model 1: Leadership Retreat

Purpose

The purpose of this retreat is to help a congregational leadership group consider how their individual and group leadership strengths are expressed in congregational life. The material in the three chapters of this booklet will provide the basic framework for the retreat. Participants will use an “appreciative inquiry” process to discover their leadership strengths and to apply those strengths to new areas of opportunity and need.

Participants and Setting

This retreat is designed for a group of individuals who hold key leadership roles in the congregation. The sample retreat (below) has been designed for elders and pastors but can easily be adapted to include other congregational leaders as well.

This material is designed for a retreat setting but it could be presented—one module at a time—as part of three regularly scheduled meetings, such as three council meetings or pastor/elder meetings.

Pre-retreat Preparation

If possible, arrange to have the retreat facilitator meet with the group for about 30 minutes approximately two weeks prior to the retreat. A conference call could be used for this purpose. During this time, some rapport will be established, an introduction to the retreat will be offered, and participants will be invited to reflect on their experiences of being leaders in this particular congregation.

It will be helpful for participants to read all or parts of this booklet prior to the retreat (chapter 2 will likely be most pertinent). The facilitator may also want participants to complete Worksheet 1: “Preparing for the Leadership Retreat” (see p. 45).

Suggested Procedure for Retreat

Three main modules are included in this plan. Feel free to adapt them as you wish. This sample retreat assumes a thoughtful plan for venue, schedule, and a healthy mix of structured and unstructured time. Allow about 45-60 minutes for each of the modules below. Be sure to take a break or offer substantial unstructured time between the modules.

Module 1: Recalling a Personal Leadership Experience

Begin with a brief presentation on leadership—how it involves “individuals in relationship,” giftedness, call, and the blessing of the Holy Spirit. This could be shaped by recalling a key biblical story—Abram, Nehemiah, John the Baptist, Jesus.

Form groups of two, then individually complete Worksheet 2, “Recalling a Personal Leadership Experience” (see p. 46), which asks participants to describe a time in their lives when they felt their leadership was particularly effective. Allow about ten minutes for participants to complete their writing (it needn’t be polished and can be in outline form).

Partners should then share the information they wrote on their worksheet. Allow about ten to fifteen minutes for this.

Conclude by having partners jot on newsprint two or three insights gained from their conversation. Post the feedback sheets around the room.

The facilitator can summarize the feedback and ask what contributed to having a good conversation.

Module 2: Recalling a Group Leadership Experience

Form groups of three and individually complete Worksheet 3: “Recalling a Group Leadership Experience” (see p. 47). Stress the question on the worksheet that asks how the experience involved both leaders and followers. Allow about ten minutes for individual writing, another ten to fifteen for small group sharing.

Conclude by having each small group share one “group leadership” experience and how that experience involved both leaders and followers in a reciprocal relationship. If time permits, you could also talk about the first bulleted question on the sheet (“How might this team increase the possibility for more of these experiences?”).

Module 3: For Such a Time as This

Form groups of four and individually complete Worksheet 4: “For Such a Time as This” (see p. 48). Allow about ten minutes for writing, 10-15 minutes for sharing within the small groups. Then reconvene, asking this question:

Based on what we’ve discovered together so far, in what specific areas can we exercise leadership in our congregation? How can we strategically exercise leadership in this particular area of the church’s ministry?

Note: To shorten the time for each module, have group members omit the writing and simply reflect quietly (on the information on the worksheet) as they prepare to share with their small groups. Another possibility is to give participants a choice of writing or simply reflecting quietly before sharing their thoughts with their small groups.

Closing

If time permits, form new groups of four and share one insight, resolution, or clarification that was gained during the retreat (if the total group consists of only eight to ten members, you may want to skip breaking into small groups).

Close with prayer in the small groups. If group members know each other well, each person could give thanks for the leadership gifts and call of the person sitting to their right. An alternative is offering spontaneous prayers of thanks for God’s call to leadership and for God’s guidance of the leadership team, as well as requests for help in specific areas of leadership facing the team.

Worksheet 1: Preparing for the Leadership Retreat

During our time together we will be considering the way in which you provide leadership within this congregation. Evidence indicates that quality leadership in the church includes

- **Character** in the leader, generating trust in the followers.
- **Conviction** in the leader, helping the congregation discern purpose and vision.
- **Competence** in the leader, helping the congregation function as a healthy system.
- **Confluence** of various factors that comes as a gift of God's Spirit.

Effective leadership involves relationships—not only between a leader and followers but also among leaders. And relationships are characterized by interactions, conversations, and collaborative efforts. In anticipation of our time together, you are invited to recall times when the relational dynamics of your leadership group were apparent to you. Specifically consider the following:

1. Recall a meeting or series of meetings in which the **character** or **conviction** of the leadership group was apparent to each other and /or to members of the congregation. This could include demonstrations of courage, patience, compassion, prayerfulness, resolve, or integrity in the face of considerable pressure. Think about some of the details of that time. Who was involved? What was the communication like? How was timing a factor? How did the experience affect you personally—were you changed, encouraged, drawn to others on the team? Where would you like to see this kind of character or conviction have greater expression in the life of your team or in the life of this congregation?
2. Recall a chapter in the life of your leadership team in which you noticed significant **competencies** in members of your group. What was the context? Where did these competencies emerge? What competencies did you notice within yourself? What was the topic/issue around which these competencies became apparent? How did this experience affect your confidence as an individual and as a member of this leadership team? What else did you notice happening within you? Where do you think these competencies could be helpful to the congregation in the next year? What topics/issues could your current leadership team “tackle” in which these competencies could move your congregation toward maturity in Christ and health as a Christian community?

Worksheet 2: Recalling a Personal Leadership Experience

In the space below, briefly (and individually) describe a time in your life when you felt your leadership gifts or role was, by the grace of God, particularly effective. Reflect on how it required some level of character, conviction, and competence, and how God's grace was evident.

Was timing an important factor?

What happened within you as a part of that experience?

In what areas would you hope to have similar, positive experiences of leading?

When you're finished, please share your experience with your partner.

Worksheet 3: Recalling a Group Leadership Experience

In the space below, briefly (and individually) describe a time when this leadership team (the one you're in this workshop with today) demonstrated character and conviction. How did this experience involve both leaders and followers? What happened within you as a result of this experience?

After you've jotted down your thoughts, meet with others in your small group and share the experiences you've written down. Also talk about questions like these:

- How might this leadership team increase the possibility for more of these experiences?
- What topics/issues could we effectively tackle?
- What encouragements can we offer to each other in this venture?

Worksheet 4: For Such a Time as This

In the space below, briefly (and individually) list what you think is going well in your leadership team these days. Where are courage, compassion, integrity, and vision being most effectively expressed? What evidence of confluence do you see? (That is, what evidence of the Holy Spirit's work is apparent to you?)

Then jot some things you wonder about in terms of confluence. Where do you experience any gap between what you are hoping for and what you see happening?

Share your comments with others in your small group.

Model 2: Leadership Development Component for Council Meetings

Purpose

The purpose of these leadership development segments is to help council members understand and apply to their own congregation the principles of leadership outlined in this booklet.

Participants and Setting

These leadership development segments are suggested for inclusion as part of regular council (or pastor/elder) meetings. Each segment will take approximately 20-30 minutes and could be done at the beginning of the meeting time. The segments will basically cover the contents of this booklet. Participants will use the discussion questions printed in the margins and the case studies. Sessions can be led by the pastor or by elder/deacon volunteers who enjoy leading a discussion.

Small groups—such as adult education classes—could also use this format to discuss the book. Sessions could easily be expanded to 45 minutes. The length of segments could be adapted to the number of sessions the group wants to study the booklet.

Preparation

Participants should read and reflect on the assigned segments at home prior to the meeting. They should be encouraged to jot down their own questions as well as look at those in the margins of the chapters. Discussion leaders in particular should highlight those questions which seem most appropriate for the group.

Discussion leaders should also decide how to divide up the chapters for discussion (see sample below). If, for example, they wish to have a leadership component for, say, eight council meetings, then that should guide the number of pages read and discussed at each meeting. This can, of course, be adjusted as needed, should participants find the segments too long or too short.

Suggested Procedure

The leader should open with prayer. He or she may then want to read one or more of the Scripture passages mentioned in the part of the chapter being discussed (or call on others to do this).

The leader should then guide the group through the assigned section, using the questions in the margins as well as his or her own questions and those from group members. Before launching into a discussion of a question, the leader may want to set the context of the question by orally reviewing the relevant section of the chapter (or having participants do so, if they are willing). Those who didn't get a chance to read the chapter (or who read it too long ago to recall it) will appreciate such a review.

Please note that questions and procedures for discussing the case studies are included on pages 61-63 of this booklet. Discussing cases in small groups is often an effective way of involving everyone.

Leaders should invite comments and questions from the group, pace the discussion so that time is allotted wisely, and give everyone an opportunity to speak.

Sample Division of Chapters

Below is a sample division of chapters 1-3 into eight segments for eight meetings. You may want to go at a slower or more rapid pace, as you think best. One or more Scripture passages are suggested for each segment.

Segment 1: Read the first case study as well as the first two biblical themes of chapter 1 (pp. 8-10). Suggested Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20; Matthew 28:18-20; John 17:20-23; 1 Peter 2:9-11.

Segment 2: Read themes 3-5 of chapter 1 (pp. 11-13). Suggested Scripture: John 13:12-17; Revelation 5:9; Hebrews 11:32-40.

Segment 3: Read themes 6-7 plus the case studies that conclude chapter 1 (pp. 13-16). Suggested Scripture: John 10:11-18.

Segment 4: Read sections 1-3 of chapter 2, through the personality traits of an effective leader (pp. 17-20). Suggested Scripture: Romans 12.

Segment 5: Read section 4 of chapter 2 (pp. 20-26). This is the heart of the booklet, detailing what is meant by character, conviction, competencies, and confluence. If the group doesn't get through all of this in one meeting, please return to it later for further discussion. Suggested Scripture: Titus 1:5-9; 3:8-10.

Segment 6: Read sections 5-7 of chapter 2, including the two case studies at the end of the chapter (pp. 26-30). Suggested Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11.

Segment 7: Read chapter 3, up to case study 6 (pp. 31-33). Suggested Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-16.

Segment 8: Read the four case studies at the end of chapter 3 (pp. 34-37). Suggested Scripture: John 17:20-25; 1 Corinthians 13. Be sure to see appendix 2 (pp. 61-63) for questions and suggestions on using the case studies.

Model 3: Three Sessions for Adult Classes and Other Small Groups

Purpose

The purpose of these sessions is to help church members (leaders and non-leaders) understand the basic principles of leadership in the church and apply them to their own congregation. Such a study should result in improved support of leaders and better interaction and cooperation between leaders and the congregation.

Participants and Setting

These three sessions are suggested for adult education classes, for small groups meeting in homes, and for other individuals who want to get together to discuss this booklet. Allow at least an hour for each of the three sessions.

Preparation

Participants should read each chapter—including the case studies—prior to the meeting. They should be encouraged to jot down their own questions as well as look at those in the margins of the chapters. Discussion leaders in particular should highlight those questions which seem most appropriate for the group.

Suggested Procedure

Plans for three one-hour sessions are outlined below. Discussion leaders may want to adapt these plans to suit their time frame and the interests of their group. The plans on the following pages are addressed to discussion leaders rather than to the group as a whole.

Session 1 (Chapter 1: Biblical and Theological Themes Regarding Leadership in the Church)

Step 1: Focus on Mission

Take a moment to point out that chapter 1 begins with a focus on mission and the nature of the church. Leaders first of all are folks who recognize that it's not about them, it's about God and God's mission for the church. You may want to ask someone to read a couple of the Scripture passages mentioned on the opening page of chapter 1 (Matt. 28:18-20; John 17:20-23; Eph. 4:11-13).

Divide into groups of two or three and give each group a sheet of newsprint and a marker. Ask each pair to imagine that they are church leaders who have been given the task of describing the mission of this congregation. Because they are such capable leaders, they have just fifteen minutes to come up with something original (ask them not to just repeat the church's official mission statement, even if they know it). If they wish, they may use the first two sections of chapter 1 as reference. Their statements should take into consideration the nature of the church (section 2 of chapter 1) as well as its mission.

Have the groups tape their statements to the wall or otherwise display them, then review the statements with the whole group. End by reading (or displaying) the actual mission statement of your congregation. You may want to compare it to the statement found on page 1 (see the paragraph beginning with, "Perhaps God's mission in the world can be summarized in this way . . .").

Does the group sense the importance of the first understanding the mission and nature of the church before we talk about church leadership? You may want to discuss one or two of the margin questions on page 10 to drive this home:

- How does this reality of the church as a living organism shape the way we think about leadership in the church?
- What signs tell you that your church is a living body, with parts of the body organically working together?

Step 2: Leaders as Servants

Ask for a show of hands of those who would identify "servanthood" as a key ingredient of leadership. Have someone read Matthew 20:24 in support of this idea. (You may want to qualify this a bit by reading the comment on p. 11 about using biblical metaphors carefully.)

Then ask questions along these lines:

- When you think of Christ as a servant, what Bible passages or stories come to mind?
- When you think of Christ as Lord, as powerful, what Bible passages or stories come to mind?

Make the point that leadership in the church entails both power *and* servanthood. Ask:

- When you think of leaders in the church as servants, what comes to mind?
- When you think of leaders in the church as exercising power and authority, what comes to mind?

Comment that we've just separated the ideas of servanthood and power. In the church, as in Scripture, these two must come together. Are group members comfortable with that? To what extent do they see this balance in your congregation?

Step 3: Questions, Please

Ask group members to skim back through the remainder of chapter 1, looking for questions in the margins that they would like the group to discuss, or raising questions of their own. Work your way through sections 4-7 in this way. You may want to give a brief summary of a section, then ask for questions or take the questions in the margin that relate to that section.

Step 4: Case Studies

The chapter offers two case studies that help apply leadership principles to specific situations. Is there a case that you and the group would like to discuss now? If so, please see the questions and suggestions for using case studies in appendix 2.

Step 5: Closing

Distribute notecards or sheets of paper, and ask each person to jot down one thing that he or she will do or think because of insights gleaned from chapter 1 and its discussion. Perhaps it's something as simple as having a bit more respect for the difficult task facing leaders, or perhaps it's remembering to act more like servants in our own leadership roles.

Share the results as people are willing. Then close with the prayer of Jesus for unity in the church (John 17:20-25).

Ask group members to read chapter 2 for next time.

Session 2 (Chapter 2: The Shape of Effective Leadership in the Church)

Step 1: A Leader to Remember

Begin by asking someone to read the two definitions of effective Christian leadership from page 17. Then divide into groups of three or four. (If your group is small, having only eight to ten people, you may want to forego breaking into smaller groups.) Within their small groups, each person should talk about a Christian leader who had an impact on his or her life. That person may have been a pastor, an elder or deacon, a youth leader, a teacher. Specifically, which of the four factors of effective leadership—character, conviction, competencies, or confluence—made that person effective in that situation?

Ask the groups to pick one of their stories to share with the whole group. Note especially which of the four C's seem to be coming through in the stories.

Remind the group of the comments in section 3 of chapter 2 (“What are the personality traits of an effective leader?”). Leadership is not so much a matter of possessing certain personality traits but rather the relationship between the leader and those being led. That’s why, in this exercise, we attempted to tie our personal experiences with a leader to the four factors that are present in situations where leadership is effective. Note especially the *reciprocal* nature of effective leadership, as defined in section 4: character generates trust; convictions helps discern purpose and vision; competencies produce a healthy system; confluence enables leaders and the congregation to work together joyfully. Leadership is always a two-way street.

Take a moment to ask if the group would like to discuss any of the margin questions in sections 1-3 of chapter 2, or if they have any additional questions or observations of their own they’d like to share with the group.

Step 2: The Four C’s

The four C’s are the heart of this training tool. If participants can hang on to their meaning, they will have gained a good deal. With that in mind, we suggest a two-pronged approach that involves a fun presentation of the “C’s” and a more serious discussion of a question related to those C’s.

Divide into four groups and assign each group to one of the four C’s. Have groups use the worksheet on page 56 to guide their presentations. Give them about ten minutes to prepare, longer if they need it.

Have the groups do their presentations in the sequence that the four C’s are presented in the booklet: character, conviction, competencies, confluence. Let each group lead the discussion of the question or questions it has selected.

Note: Should you not have the time or inclination to do the fun stuff (that’s too bad, because adults do get into it!), you can have the groups highlight two or three sentences they think are crucial to their C, and select and lead a discussion of questions. Of course, an alternative is simply to walk through the four C’s with the group, using the questions in the margins and from the group to guide the discussion.

Step 3: Additional Questions and Case Studies

As time permits, look together at sections 5-7 of chapter 2 (if you’ve run out of time, consider adding an extra session and doing this next time). The questions in the margins are provocative and should produce good discussion.

Two case studies conclude the chapter. You may want to choose one that seems most interesting to your group—please see the notes for using case studies in appendix 2.

Step 4: Closing

The final “comment” on page 28 offers a good way to conclude this session. It involves choosing some qualities (from a list) that leaders in your congregation display, then thanking God for these qualities.

Invite group members to participate in the prayer as the Spirit leads them.
Ask everyone to read chapter 3—and its case studies—for next time.

Session 2 Worksheet for Small Groups

“Presenting Your C”

Your group has been assigned to one of the four “C’s”: character, conviction, competencies, or confluence. With others in your group, present the “C” to which you are assigned in a memorable and fun way. For example:

- interview your “C” as a character
- write a slogan or make a TV ad
- write a cheer featuring your “C”
- using a familiar tune, write and sing a song about your “C”
- do a pantomime and let others guess what qualities you’re trying to portray
- dramatize a situation that shows your “C” in action
- anything else you can think of!

In addition, each group should select at least one question about their “C” that they’d like to discuss with the group. These can be selected from margin questions or solicited from group members.

Have fun!

Session 3 (Chapter 3: Leadership Challenges in the Christian Reformed Church)

Step 1: Leadership Survey

Refer participants to the survey at the end of this session (p. 58) and give them a few minutes to complete it. Be sure they understand that the survey in no way represents some kind of evaluation of their pastor; remind them that it focuses on leadership, not on leaders.

When participants have completed the survey, take a few minutes to walk through it with them, using it as a springboard to further discussion. Make sharing of personal responses (such as to question 2) voluntary.

When you discuss the first item on the survey, you may want to include the question in the margin on page 32: “Evaluate this shift from pastor-centered leadership to congregational leadership in light of the biblical teachings regarding the body of Christ as summarized on pages 10-11.” This is a good point to read such passages as Ephesians 4:12-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:7-31. Which view of leadership do these—and other—passages support?

You may want to hold discussion of items 5-7 for step 3, when you can incorporate them into the closing prayer.

Step 2: Case Studies

If time permits, select one or two of the case studies that are printed at the end of chapter 3. (See suggestions for discussing the cases in appendix 2.) Try to relate each case to the leadership principles developed in this booklet.

Step 3: Closing

Take a few minutes to listen to some responses to items 5-7 on the leadership survey. You may also want to read “A Final Word” on page 39, which rightly points out that God is blessing many CRC congregations today!

Invite participants to incorporate items from their responses to questions 5-7 in a time of prayer.

Leadership Survey

Please complete the following:

1. Place an X on the continuum to indicate the kind of leadership that you think is best for your congregation at this time.

strong pastor-centered leadership

strong congregational orientation (shared leadership)

2. As a member of this congregation, I feel (a) totally involved, (b) somewhat involved, (c) not really involved much, in the creation and development of ministry.
3. "Today, individual Christians and churches negotiate their own experiences and piece together their own religious identity with little regard for the way things have been done in the past" (p. 32). Do you agree with this statement? If so, what are its implications for leadership?
4. "Leadership is not first of all about the leader, it is about the mission to which the group is called" (p. 33). Do you agree with this statement? If so, what are its implications for you as a member of this congregation?

5. One thing I've really appreciated about leadership in this congregation is

_____.

6. One thing that I think might help this congregation grow is

_____.

7. One helpful thing I've learned about leadership from this course/booklet is

_____.

Model 4: Pastor Evaluation

Purpose

Effective Leadership in the Church can be used as part of a pastor evaluation process, as described below. The intent is to encourage and motivate the pastor in specific leadership areas. The evaluation will be the most effective if it focuses separately on particular relationships in which the pastor plays a strategic part. For example, it could focus on “how the pastor provides leadership to the elders” or “how the pastor provides leadership to the congregation.”

Preparation

An evaluation team will need to be selected (we suggest five persons). The team will need to agree on a process in which the pastor has significant input and some veto power. In addition, it's assumed that both the pastor and the team have read *Effective Leadership in the Church*.

Suggested Process

Please note that this is a sample process; many alternatives could be created.

1. Pastor and committee discuss the process, agree upon its particulars, and determine what the goal of this process will be. The team should summarize this conversation in writing and retain it for future reference.
2. Team members individually complete a questionnaire that assesses the four C's of leadership and the reciprocal dynamic within the congregation. A worksheet such as the one on page 60 will serve this purpose (the focus of this sample worksheet is on the pastor as a leader for the elders).
3. The team shares the information on their worksheets with the pastor, who then writes a paragraph summarizing what he or she heard and understands about the state of the relationship. The committee writes a similar paragraph.
4. The paragraphs are shared and a composite descriptive essay is written.
5. The pastor and the evaluation team evaluate how the process worked. What improvements could be made? How does this process encourage and motivate? How does it provide helpful indications as to areas of focus for the future? How does it honor the reciprocal nature of the leadership dynamic?
6. A designated spokesman for the evaluation team provides a summary report to stakeholders, a report that has been agreed upon by the entire team.

Worksheet for Pastor Evaluation

Focus: How the pastor provides leadership to the elders.

Character

The pastor

- Describe ways in which the pastor's character generates trust and buy-in among the elders.
- Describe ways in which the pastor's character raises questions among the elders.

The elders

- Describe ways the elders create a context in which the pastor's character finds expression.
- Describe ways the elders create a context in which the pastor's character does not find healthy expression.

Conviction

The pastor

- Describe ways in which the pastor's conviction helps the elders discern their purpose and vision.
- Describe ways in which the pastor's conviction does not help the elders discern their purpose and vision.

The elders

- Describe ways the elders create a context in which the pastor's conviction finds expression.
- Describe ways the elders create in a context in which the pastor's conviction does not find healthy expression.

Competence

The pastor

- Describe ways in which the pastor's competencies help the elders function as a healthy system.
- Describe ways in which the pastor's competencies do not help the elders function as a healthy system.

The elders

- Describe ways the elders create a context in which the pastor's competencies find healthy expression.
- Describe ways the elders create a context in which the pastor's competencies do not find healthy expression.

Confluence

- What signs indicate that this relationship is creating a context in which good leadership is happening?
- What signs create questions as to the timing and fit for this leadership relationship?

Appendix 2

Tips for Using the Case Studies

This booklet includes nine case studies that are intended to help readers apply leadership concepts to particular church situations. While you may think that you recognize specific churches and situations in these cases, they are fictional and are intended only to represent common leadership challenges in the church today.

The cases include dilemmas or problems that could be solved in different ways. Don't look for any one "right answer," but instead explore the case using the questions below. Some of the cases that have a strong dilemma are best handled by small groups that look at the various angles of the case and then arrive at a "solution." Explaining why they choose a particular course of action is a helpful part of discussing a case.

Here, then, are some questions and other procedural suggestions for discussing each of the nine cases in this booklet.

Case Study 1: Who's Planning Worship?

Since this is the first case in the booklet, you may want to discuss it with the entire group, rather than in small groups. Talk about questions like these:

- Why do you suppose the committee members felt uneasy? What view of leadership do they seem to have?
- What was behind the pastor's anxiety? What view of leadership does he seem to have?
- If you were the pastor in this situation, what would you say to the committee? What steps could be taken to take to resolve the situation?

Case Study 2: Hands Off, Hands On

This case could be discussed in small groups. The groups could talk about the case, using the questions below or their own, then decide what they would do if they were in Susan Bridge's shoes. Groups can share their solutions—and the reasons behind them—with the other groups.

Some questions to guide discussion in the small groups:

- What was the new pastor's view of leadership? Would you describe him as a "servant leader"? Why or why not?
- Have you experienced this kind of leadership at work or elsewhere? If so, what were its strengths? Its weaknesses? How did it make you feel?

- Is this view and practice of leadership an appropriate one for this congregation, for the church in general? Why or why not?
- What should the council do to resolve the problem?

Case Study 3: Mission, Mission, Who's Got the Mission?

For a change of pace, groups could decide to be the council of Faith church, discussing the situation, the reasons for failure, and trying to come to a decision on what to do next.

Some suggested questions for discussion:

- How would you state Faith's problem?
- What do you see as basic causes of this problem?
- What leadership principles, as outlined in chapter 1, are not being implemented?
- What should the church council and Rev. Wilson do to resolve the problem and get the church back on track?

Case Study 4: Who's Wagging the Dog?

This case calls for both an immediate action (What should Rev. Schafer say?) and a longer-term solution (How can the issue of authority and responsibility, raised by Bill, be resolved in a way that's biblical and fair to all involved?). It's a good case to discuss in small groups and then compare answers to the questions below.

- What's at the heart of Bill's beef? Does he have a good point?
- Suppose you were on the summer ministry committee. How might you defend the committee against "Bill's beef"?
- What leadership principles are involved in this case?
- Have you experienced similar "authority and responsibility" issues in your congregation?

Case Study 5: The People Out There Coming In

This case has a strong emphasis on evangelism—reaching out to community—that's a crucial part of being a faithful church. Yet, as in many congregations, things no longer seem to be working as they once did. So what's the problem? Discuss the case, using questions like these:

- Of the four "C's" of effective leadership, which ones seem to be lacking in this case?
- Pastor Mike seems to have been "in the right place at the right time" in his first church and for the first ten years in his second. What caused things to go wrong after that? Was it Mike's fault or the congregation's or something else?
- What effect has the failure of the outreach program had on Pastor Mike? On the congregation?
- What would you advise the pastor and his congregation to do in these circumstances?

Case 6: Let Go, Let God

This case raises the question of how open we are to the leading of the Spirit in our congregations. A few questions for discussion:

- Pastor John and his congregation experienced a “confluence of leader, congregation, time, place, ministry opportunity, and resources that is a gift of God’s Spirit” (p. 25). He wonders if the experience of his congregation could be duplicated in other congregations if only they would also “Let go and let God,” or if his congregation’s experience is just one way that God works to realize his purposes. What do you think?
- What factors led this congregation to experience renewal?
- Do you sense that your own congregation adequately expresses its dependence on God and the work of the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?
- How has the Spirit worked in your congregation to enable your pastor and the congregation to “work joyfully together to realize God’s purposes”?

Case Study 7: Jane Hears It All

“The church is called to embody in its corporate life the message of reconciliation. . . . Antagonism and hostility between parts of the body of Christ [is an example] of alienation within community” (p. 12). This case focuses on the impact of hostility between a congregation and its pastor and his wife. Questions for discussion:

- To what extent is this kind of suspicion and hostility present among us, would you say? Have you encountered it in your congregation?
- What can we as members of congregations learn from this case study?
- What can pastors and their families learn from this case study?
- What advice would you give to Daniel and Jane?

Case Study 8: To Get Along, Go Along?

This case presents a situation that, unfortunately, is not uncommon—staff members can’t seem to get along. Possible questions for discussion:

- What principles of leadership are involved in this case?
- How does hostility between staff members affect a congregation?
- What are typical “sore points” between the senior pastor and other staff?
- What do you think—did George do the right thing in talking with James about his feelings? Suppose George’s feelings and accusations were just personal impressions and weren’t all that accurate. Was he still right to air them with James?
- How might James diffuse this divisive situation?
- What should George do at this point? Why?

Case Study 9: The Pastor Hangs On

Small groups, acting as council members, could discuss this case and offer their suggestions as to what could be done to unify the church and move it forward in its ministry. Groups could report their “solutions” and compare them to what others suggest. Some possible questions for discussion:

- Look again at the “character” section of chapter 2 (p. 21). What aspects of “character” do you think apply to Pastor Ray in this case?
- Are there any “conviction” or “competency” issues that apply?
- Who’s mostly at fault here—Pastor Ray or the congregation? Does it matter?
- Should the congregation hire a new pastor at this point? Why or why not?
- What should this church do to restore its unity and get on with its ministry?