

## **Leaders Who Last – Questions to Ponder**

### **Chapter 2 – Take Responsibility for Yourself**

Understanding our responsibility both in leadership and pastoral care (which are related) means knowing we are ultimately responsible for ourselves before God. We have the care of a congregation and of the individuals within it in our charge, yet if we carry them ourselves we will stumble and fall, to no one's advantage. The world may need superheroes, but I am not one and probably you are not either. Chances are you do not need an alter ego superhero. You only need to be yourself. Being yourself is sustainable. Being a superhero is not.

Here are five questions for you to consider about overfunctioning:

- In what relationships am I taking too much responsibility?
- How might I step back, at least a little?
- Did I learn to overfunction in my family? How do I understand that part of my story?
- In any given situation, how can I learn to ask, "What might help this person grow?"
- If I were to take less responsibility for others, what would I do with my time and energy?

### **Chapter 3 – Know Your Church's History**

The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (12:1). Taking the witness of the past seriously is a way of seeing the future both realistically and hopefully. As we will see next, our own family story affects our ministry profoundly. The past does not determine the future, but it has an influence. We do not stop with the past, of course, or even the present. The past is a prelude to the future. Clear thinking in the present and vision for the future are critically important to lasting leadership.

Here are ten questions to consider as you look at your church's story:

- Who carries the memory and how might I connect with them? (It can be worth mapping out on paper.)
- What was my church's focus at the founding? What stories have been passed down from that time?
- What strands do I see in the present that stretch back to the past?
- Who were the leaders, clergy and lay, official and unofficial, and what was their tenure? What were the circumstances of the departures of key leaders?
- What significant events have marked the way—big successes or major traumas?
- What is the relationship of the congregation with the wider denominational family?
- What are the issues that become the focus of anxiety (worship, music, youth)?
- What is the history of the congregation with relation to its building or buildings?
- How open is the church with regard to sharing information (about financial matters, for example)? What secrets might there be? Who knows the secrets?
- How can I use the stories of the past to strengthen the congregation, and myself, in the present?

### **Chapter 4 – Know Your Own Story**

The patterns and processes of growing up in our particular family have a profound impact on our leadership. When we can begin to view our family differently, seeing them with adult eyes, we become better leaders. When we can recognize they did the best they could with what they were given (which may have been very limited indeed), we will be able to view them with more compassion and less judgment. The greatest gift we can give to those we lead, not to mention to ourselves and our children, is this kind of emotional freedom and flexibility. The effort is tremendous, but the payoff in every area of our lives is likewise enormous. We will automatically be better leaders when we learn to relate to our family of origin with more neutrality, with a

greater repertoire of response, and with compassion. We will be better able to let go of the outcome of our leadership, yet at the same time be clearer about our purpose.

Here are seven questions to consider as you look at your family story:

- Who are the “good guys” and “bad guys”?
- Who are the matriarchs and patriarchs?
- Who are the family members no one speaks to? Or speaks about?
- Where are the divorces, the emotional and physical illnesses?
- What kind of work did people in my family do?
- When did parts of the family move away geographically?
- Where is the place of faith in the family?

### **Chapter 5 – Think in Threes**

Triangles are part of human experience, even part of creation. Luke tells this story: “Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.’ But he said to him, ‘Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?’” (Luke 12:13–14). When we, like Jesus in this story, can see triangles for what they are, and get less caught up in them, we will have more energy for ministry. We will be better able to challenge others to grow, and to grow up. We will find ourselves able to be clearer about our own goals, rather than getting caught up in goals for others that they may not share. And when we enter into the most challenging times of ministry, we will find our ability to persist enhanced by the wider perspective we have gained.

Here are seven questions about triangles for you to think about:

- What are the triangles in this particular pastoral situation?
- What relationships am I taking responsibility for?
- Where am I feeling left out because I am on the outside of a triangle?
- Who is bringing me into a triangle to manage his or her own anxiety?
- Which of my own “old buttons” are being pushed?
- How will I choose to relate to the other people in this triangle, rather than taking my automatic position?
- What can I learn about myself in this triangle?

### **Chapter 6 – Know Your Purpose**

It takes nerve for a leader to stay on course, and there is a very real risk that the voices of impatience will win out. This path is not for the faint of heart. But for those leaders who long to make a real difference in the world, even in a small way, and who are tired of spinning their wheels, this way offers more potential for growth, less unproductive stress, and a new framework for looking at the task of leadership in today’s world.

Here are five questions to consider in thinking about your own leadership:

- Where have I been pushing too hard? How could I step back?
- Where do I need to clarify my own thinking?
- Where do I need to define myself more clearly?
- In what endeavors am I most inclined to be willful: worship? a favorite program? my family life?
- How long am I willing to work on this project (whatever it is)?

### **Chapter 7 – Understand Money**

Powerful forces are at work in our society and in our churches, as well as in ourselves. Yet we and those we lead do not need to be at the mercy of those forces. As we gain a clearer vision for the ministry of stewardship in our congregations, we can challenge ourselves and others to growth and greater freedom. Our relationship with money, like all high anxiety issues, can be a

lifetime of work, but as pastoral leaders we are called to make this journey and to call others to join us. We will remember that we are not to be anxious about our lives, for “is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25). Then we will be hijacked less often by our own fears and the fears of others, because we can return again and again to the clarity of our own calling. And, over time, we will find that understanding the role of money, and leading our churches in this crucial area, becomes easier.

Here are ten questions to ask yourself about your church and money:

- How are decisions about money made?
- What do I know about the history of money in the congregation? What are the long-term patterns around money?
- How much are questions about money discussed openly in the congregation? Who knows who gives what? Who knows how much the pastor gives?
- Do people use their giving to distance themselves from the congregation or to try to control the leadership?
- How open is the congregation to receiving a challenge around giving?
- Do I notice a connection between money issues and other events in congregational life?
- How serious and emotionally intense are people about money?
- When I change my functioning around money, how do I notice people reacting? (For example, giving a more challenging stewardship sermon, asking for a raise for the first time, taking a financial crunch less seriously.)
- What do I know about my own family story as it relates to money?

### **Chapter 8 – Lead and Do Not Panic**

Shackleton never reached his goal of crossing the Antarctic continent, but he accomplished something at least as remarkable. After two years, the adventure ended without a life lost. Shackleton’s vision, stamina, and creativity were essential to the survival of the expedition party. The challenges we face are physically not as difficult as Shackleton’s adventure, nor is our physical survival at stake. But on another level, they are even more intimidating, because these challenges are constant and ongoing as we lead congregations into the future. For Shackleton, the moment of crisis was an opportunity. Despite the life and death struggle, he got that chance he had dreamed of: a great open boat journey.

This very crisis you are in right now can be a real opportunity. Here are ten questions to consider:

- Is there anything to be grateful for in the middle of this crisis?
- And how do I sense God’s presence, even now?
- Why now? (Crises usually do not come out of nowhere.)
- Who else needs to share this responsibility?
- What is the worst that could happen, and how would I handle that?
- What crises has the church faced in the past? How did it come through?
- Who are the most thoughtful people in leadership in the congregation? How can I connect with them?
- What are five options for facing this crisis?

### **Chapter 9 – Stay Connected**

Church leadership is about relationships: not just taking care of people in pastoral care, but developing relationships in the interest of leadership goals. This is not a self-serving endeavor, but one which benefits everyone, as we all move forward together. Connection with our congregation is an act of spiritual leadership. True connection with another human being means we honor who that person is: a child of God, created and gifted. We approach other people with respect, recognizing both their gifts and their potential, and the possibilities for what we can all do together.

Here are four questions to ask yourself when thinking about the importance of relationships in your ministry and congregation:

- Who are the key leaders in my church and how am I connecting with them? How often?
- How do I tend to respond when things get anxious: do I aggressively engage, withdraw, or do something else? How could I try another way to relate when conflicts arise?
- What did I learn about relationships from my family? How are those strengths and weaknesses showing up in my ministry?
- How am I relating to those above me in the congregational or denominational structure?

### **Chapter 10 – Say Your Prayers**

Leadership is sustainable. But it requires the qualities of spirit that are bestowed on us as a gift of God. We are given the Spirit of God, along with the life force given us at creation. We have a powerful connection with God, which we can develop and encourage by the regular practice of prayer and worship. As we engage in these practices, we will find it easier to discern our own leadership direction and calling. In the end, the gift that we bring to our ministry, whether it is congregational leadership or elsewhere, lay or ordained is the gift of ourselves. The more we tap into our own unique gift, the more we rekindle the fire that God lit in us at the time of our calling, the fire that is unlike anyone else.

Here are some final questions for you to consider as you continue your own ministry:

- What is the unique power that God has given me?
- What are the bottom-line values and principles that are most important to me?
- Who are the people in my ministry setting that I most need to work on relating to with love?
- Who in my family do I need to relate to with love?
- Where do I need to exercise some self-discipline or self-regulation? Some moderation?
- What are some specific ways I can put this discipline into practice? Getting up in the morning for prayer? Taking a day off? Keeping my cool at a council or vestry meeting? Saying no to someone?