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LD 0530-50

Theology of Leadership

Current understanding of leadership in ministry

My theology of leadership – how God has called me to lead – has foundational roots in building strong communities and healthy relationships. It reflects my experience that if people are not invested in the community, and do not have a trusted relationship with me, then they will not easily trust my leadership. The guidance I most resonate with comes from the work of Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, who co-authored *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change*, and who then joined with Alexander Grashow to write *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Additionally, I find myself repeatedly coming back to Tod Bolsinger's book, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. Through intentional learning and lived experience, the following are a few of the key insights that I rely on:

Do ministry with people, not for people: Ministry is not something we do alone, nor is ministry something that people should “consume,” although church as a consumer product is a prevalent issue in our culture. Ministry is relational; our people must be invested. This becomes important when we find ourselves running events simply because that's what we've always done. When we think about what we, as a community of faith, are going to put our energy into, we should first ask: Is the event still serving the original purpose? Are the people involved still interested? Is this work helping to deepen anyone's relationship with Christ? Is this work strengthening the community and building healthy relationships? If the answer to any of these questions is 'no' then the work needs to be examined. The ministry of the community should reflect the interests and passions of the community, and the leader then directs that passion and interest towards serving Christ.

It's ok to give something up; doing so can make space for something new. When we have examined our work and find that something – an event or program – is no longer serving the mission of the community, then we need to find a way to move forward. There is a grieving process for the loss of what used to be, and that must be acknowledged. On the other side of that, however, is the reality that from that loss can come new life and new opportunities to engage the passion and energy of the people towards the mission of the congregation.

Actively listen, but keep perspective. Actively listening to others means that we not only hear what is being said, but we observe the other non-verbal cues that come along with the words. We take into consideration the system of relationships around the person, and we pay attention to what they avoid saying. We practice a ministry of presence for people, but with a balance of being able to step back and see the bigger picture. Heifetz and Linsky refer to this as “being on the dance floor” and “getting on the balcony.” We need both perspectives to effectively lead.

No one can be all things - Surround yourself with people who have gifts and talents that compliment your own. It is liberating to accept that we will never be everything to everyone, and in fact, to be at our best, we need others. We all have different gifts and talents. One way to honor the gifts in others is to recognize that their gift might be something that we lack. Giving space to others, as well as to ourselves, to grow in our gifts is a way of giving thanks to God for them. A leader with perspective can see and discover how the gifts of the people can fit together like a puzzle, each able to compliment the others and ultimately accomplishing more together than they could alone.

Know how to rest, and do so. I am an extrovert; I love being around friends and family who allow me to just relax and enjoy their company. I spend a lot of time coordinating life for others, so for me to recharge, I need to do something uncomplicated. Reflecting on what recharges us is important, and equally important is that we take the time to actually do it. God rested, so we must as well.

Personal assessment of myself as a Christian Public Leader

I wrote the following section as the conclusion for my *Christian Public Leader Formation Assessment*, for “Christian Public Leadership in Context (FE 0524), which I took in the spring of 2017:

In the work I have done this semester, the overall theme I think for my growth as a Christian public leader is to slow down, listen to and include others, and most of all to listen for God. I need to be aware when God is guiding me and those I minister to in a new and different direction. We as leaders need to be open and accepting of all the new ways that God is working in our world, and be adaptive enough as a church to respond accordingly. I was drawn to the reading from *Canoeing the Mountains*: Bolsinger writes, “Leadership in the past meant coming up with a solution. Today it is learning how to ask new questions that we have been too scared, to busy or too proud to ask.” (p. 113) I have to resist the urge to try and be the one with the answers or the “fix” and instead, be the one who can be still and listen for the stirrings of the Spirit in those I work with, and in myself. Bolsinger goes on to write, “Leaders must be able to withhold interpretations and interventions long enough to be listeners who also have the vision to see the deeper systemic realities at work in the organization.” (p. 114) I need to slow down. I need to not get so caught up in the “program” of our youth ministry, and instead focus on the youth and families for the people that they are, and my role as their minister.

I appreciated all that didn’t work this semester. Peterson writes about *Askesis*, as in interference – something that knocks us out of our world of false busyness and reminds us to get our priorities straight; to be reverent before God. (p. 89) My flops this semester have reminded me that if I go about my business without listening for and dwelling with God, then my priorities aren’t in order. It was time to flop, thanks be to God.

Two goals for the next two years

As with all things, the ideal is different from the reality. I have listed some of the ideals that I have for leadership, but I also recognize that my life and my journey will always be “in process.”

Therefore, my leadership goals for the next two years are very simple:

1. I will strive to hone the leadership skills that I have developed, working to improve them and learning from my mistakes.
2. I will continue learning and deepening my understanding of adaptive leadership for ministry, seeking new knowledge and deeper understanding around how to further the mission of the church in these changing times.

Ultimately, accepting God’s call into ministry also means accepting that I have something to offer God’s church. For me, this was the most difficult thing to accept. Living into who I am, and sharpening the gifts and talents that I have, are now some of the ways that I can honor that call.

Works Cited:

- Bolsinger, Tod. *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015.
- Heifetz, Ronald and Linsky, Marty. *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change*. Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017.
- Heifetz, Ronald; Grashow, Alexander; and Linsky, Marty. *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009.
- Peterson, Eugene. *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992.

The leadership theory of Robert E. Quinn is one example of a promising research model tested in relation to the case of Meserete Kristos Church leadership in Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991. Save to Library. Download.Â Using both a religious and secular example, this article seeks to understand the intersection between authority and creativity in leadership. A hermeneutic of semantic theory guided the analysis of the early chapters of Genesis, more.