Leadership in Christian organizations: a study of Christian leadership as it attempts to implement vision and change

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Senior Project

Jepson School of Leadership Studies

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April, 1996
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SENIOR PROJECT
Leader as a Change Agent

Jepson School of Leadership Studies
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Richmond, VA

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Introduction

Who am I Lord? This is the question set forth throughout scripture as those God chose to step into positions of leadership grappled with their sufficiency for such positions. The first reaction of Moses, David, Nehemiah and other leaders in scripture is a feeling that they are inadequate to serve in their new found position. The Lord insists, however, that they rest on him, and let him be their light as he directs their leadership and makes it fruitful. The model of God choosing leaders and providing supernatural support for individual shortcomings they might have depicts a comforting picture of leadership in the church. Christian leaders wait to be “called” and, when that calling comes, they are assured that nothing they do will bring bad results because God will be with them.

Is this really what the scriptures say? Is the role in leading the church merely to act as God’s puppet? A closer examination of scripture seems to state otherwise. The Christian movement, after Christ, continued with the work of the twelve apostles. The Apostles were twelve men who ate, slept, and drank with Jesus during his lifetime. Eleven of the twelve were given the responsibility of leading the first Christian churches. These eleven had to rely heavily upon God in their work, however, they were not presented their leadership situation without training. The apostles spent three years in an intense mentorship with not only their leader, but their Lord. Jesus’ instruction during this time came both theologically and it can be assumed
from biblical references, that they also grew in their leadership aptitude due to studying first hand the ways in which Christ led.

Another example of scripture in which a formal leadership training is set forth comes in the work Paul did with Timothy. Paul kept Timothy underneath his wing as he went out to minister to the world. Even when they could not be together Paul insisted on writing Timothy with encouragement and formal leadership training such as,

Deacons, (leaders) likewise are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. (1 Timothy 3:8-10)

Paul provided this guidance through letter and personal contact. With the help of strong leadership training through mentorship by Paul, Timothy went on to become a new leader in the church upon Paul’s death.

God does call certain people to be leaders in the church and grants them the skills necessary to fill their position. However, there are also examples where the Lord used specific leadership training, in the form of letters and mentorship, in order to better equip leaders to use the gifts given to them. This paper will look at the need for leadership training in the church today. Leadership training will be studied as it relates to the Leaders ability to deal with change and crisis, specifically pertaining the problem arising from membership drops in the main line denominational churches. A lack in adequate church leadership training leads to the inability of church
leaders today to adapt themselves to current issues and provide strong leadership through times of crisis.

**Problem**

Church membership hit a peak following the end of World War II. Since that time numbers seem to have dropped. Pastors are left searching for spiritual reasons for the drop in attendance while those who study church attendance and religion's impact upon society outside of the pastorate search to define the real reason for the decline in membership.

A study was performed by Michael Holt and Andrew Greeley in 1986 that studied church trends from 1940-1984. Holt and Greeley studied gallup poll results and drew conclusions that the drop in church membership was just a myth and in actuality church attendance was remaining constant in all denominations except for the Catholic church. The gallup poll reported that 40% of Protestants attended weekly church activities in 1939 and 42% attended in 1984. The numbers for three other categories (Jewish, Other, and None) also related similar stability in the percentage of members attending church services. The Catholics dropped from a 64% attendance in '39 to a 52% rate in 1984. (Greeley, Holt 327).

Through dialogue with priests and parishioners Greeley and Holt concluded that the issue of Papal authority, and the seemingly concrete stance of the Catholic church on many issues, were the reasons behind the respective drops in rates of attendance.
These results were brought under attack in 1992 with a study performed by Mark Chaves, C. Kirk Hadaway, and Penny Long Marler. Chaves et al. found the gallup poll results troubling and decided to do their own study of church attendance. In 1991 the Princeton Religious Research Center released data from a study they performed where people where asked the question, "Did you, yourself, happen to attend church or synagogue in the last seven days?". Princeton reported that 45% of Protestants, 51% of Catholics, and a total of 42% of the entire population polled answered yes.

Chaves et al. decided to focus study on a small county in Ohio, Ashtabula County. This county was centralized enough that the number of residents that left the county for religious activities could be countered with the number that entered the county for religious services. Chaves et al. first conducted a phone poll of all residents, similar to a gallup poll, with 35.8% of the Protestants questioned answering that they had attended church. The number was significantly down from the national average of 45%. There is a Protestant population of 66,565 in Ashtabula County meaning that 22,830 should have attended church at some time during the week based upon their reported 35.8% rate. After counting the attendance at the weekly worship services in the county Chaves et al. made a high estimation that 13,000 people actually attended services. This number reveals a rate of 19.6% for the Protestants almost half of what was actually reported with the Catholic numbers being very similar.
Chaves et al. attributed the difference between their results and the results of the Holt, Greeley studies to two major factors. First, they felt there may have been a large number of non-responses to the question from the type of people who also would not attend services. Chaves et al. also surmised that due to their nature people were likely to over report their religious activities no matter if the poll was done anonymously or not.

The implication of this study was reported in two consecutive news articles in a leading Christian publication *The Christian Century*. The first report supported the results of Chaves et al. as being truthful to what today's trends seem to be saying. The second report looked closely at Greeley and Hunt's findings to refute some of the results as being obviously askew.

To refute the fact that some people might be reporting drop-in attendance at churches at various times during the week John Trinkaus did a study of that phenomena in a hospital and campus chapel. Trinkaus found that less than one percent of a membership in a chapel drops in during times without formal services.

US News and World Report reported in 1994 that there was still a strong spiritual hold on America. US News and World Report seemed to draw primarily from Greeley's study as well as a similar study performed by Finke and Stark. Once using the 40% numbers as having been steady and not falling at all due to public sentiment.

If Chaves' study is accurate, at the very least, the Church has not grown in the last 50 years. The *CQ Researcher* did a study of the churches attempt to
reach out to the baby busters. The Researcher supported the finds of Chaves et al. and showed other studies exemplifying the lack of growth in the church. In particular they performed a study of religious interest by focusing on eight indices: belief in God, believing religion can answer today’s problems, church membership, having religious preference, participation in organized religion, feeling clergy are honest, viewing religion as important to one’s life, and church attendance. The numbers from this survey of religious interest dropped from a high of 725 in 1941 to 670 in 1992. The numbers steadily dropped through the years with the numbers only maintaining previous levels in years without loss.

The CQ Researcher also found that areas of growth in the church are in the more conservative denominations with the major losses occurring in the more liberal denominations. The challenge was put forth by the Researcher as to how the church was going to move forward to incorporate new members. A significant amount of discussion was given to the fact that the church needed new leaders that would focus on evangelism and vision for the future.

Looking at the United Methodist Church it doesn’t seem as if these desires for a new leadership are coming about. A 1991 report produced results that seem to point to a membership that does not desire change in the pulpit. The members of the United Methodist Church reported that they desired a caring pastor over a courageous pastor. Cooperation was desired over competitiveness and honesty desired above imagination. The characteristics
of visionary leaders desiring to enact change were seen as secondary to the status quo.

The United Methodists also seem to desire to cut their ties to more ecumenical groups such as the National Council of Churches. This in a time were ecumenical movements are actually the one’s that seem to be on the rise. Harris, author of "The National Ecumenical Student Christian Council", reports that numbers continue to grow. As the main line denominations try to maintain the status quo the ecumenical movements have increased in membership through the eighties and into the nineties.

There are instances where the United Methodist Church, a main-line church, is actively trying to meet the needs of its members. Moorestown United Methodist Church, in Moorestown NJ, is beginning to run contemporary services on Sunday mornings in which there is less structure and more openness to new ideas in worship. Rev. Baxter, head pastor at Moorestown UMC, stated that the church is also trying to reach out through creating a contemporary worship time on Saturday nights realizing that the community and members desire more options for them to worship than just Sunday mornings. Baxter did note, however, that their new ideas are not always welcomed with open arms either from higher leadership in the United Methodist Church or his individual church.

Questions remain as to the staying power of the ecumenical movements. There are also questions of whether there is actually hope for
turn-a-round in the main line denominations so they can move to a more aggressive pursuit of members.

There are areas where the churches and para-churches (Christian organizations that involve members from various churches) are attempting to meet the demand for increased leadership training. A look at the leadership training in seminaries focuses on the beginning of a plan to integrate leadership training for pastors. Asbury Theological Seminary offers a course entitled "The Servant as Leader" and a course in their school of evangelization and church growth "Leadership and Change in the Church". Princeton Theological Seminary offers a course "Introduction to Administrative Ministry" with the course description:

This course is an examination of ministry as leadership within a voluntary association of the church. Components include an overview of biblical and theological perspectives on the church and on ministry: a consideration of models for understanding the dynamics of organizations and of leadership: ministerial leadership in areas of congregational concern such as planning for change, dealing with differences, decision making and working with others. (Princeton 114)

Duke Divinity School, however, does not seem to offer any courses directly pertaining to church leadership.

These three schools are offering selected courses and not all students are required to take them nor is there any one department dealing solely with the role of leadership in a pastor's ministry. The schools have begun, but have a great distance to go before they are really addressing the need of leadership education for pastoral students.
Membership trends show a need for change in the mainline denominations. The reason behind membership gains or losses will be examined as well as the way in which church leaders are being encouraged to meet the needs of their parishioners.

**Methodology**

This study examines the leadership in the church from the leader's perspective as well as from the perspective of the follower. The follower has been studied through surveys. 300 surveys were distributed to three different groups. The first group consists of active members of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) at the University of Richmond. The second group consists of regular members of Trinity United Methodist Church. The third group are members of Trinity UMC but those who have declined in interest and attendance over the past few years.

Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship USA is a national para-church organization. The University of Richmond Chapter is one of hundreds of chapters in universities across the country. IVCF holds Small Group bible studies throughout the week as well as a Large Group time of worship on Friday nights. The members surveyed from the chapter are all U. of Richmond students between the ages of 17 and 22.

Trinity United Methodist Church is a 3,000 member church in the West End of Richmond. Trinity is the third largest United Methodist church in the state of Virginia. Trinity holds Sunday morning worship services as
well as planned programs of a social nature throughout the week. The survey was conducted at a Wednesday night fellowship dinner to assess active members. The other survey was completed by mail to those members who have attended less than 25% of the worship services over the past few years.

In order to study church leadership from a broader perspective, and to add to the findings of the surveys, interviews were conducted with both local and regional leaders. On the local level Rev. Harlan Baxter (pastor 1st UMC Moorestown, NJ), Kevin Greene (staff IVCF at University of Richmond), and Rev. Garrison Hickman (former Lutheran pastor) were interviewed. On a more regional basis Rev. Bill Reasner (UMC District Superintendent South Jersey), Commissioner Bob Watson (Salvation Army National Commander), and Mr. Jimmy Long (Director IVCF Blue Ridge Region).

Questioning followers apart from leaders was done in order to delineate two different perspectives. Local leaders were asked how they were able or unable to meet the needs of the followers. Regional leaders were questioned as to their ability to free and encourage their local leaders to better serve their followers.
Research Findings

IVCF members, active members at Trinity UMC, and inactive UMC members were each given 100 surveys. IVCF had a return rate of 88%, the active UMC 86%, and Inactive returned 52% of the surveys distributed. The low return rate of the inactive members of the UMC was due to the method of survey, as they were distributed and collected primarily through the mail.

74% of IVCF and 78% of active UMC reported increased activity in their organization over the last four years and 63% of IVCF and 60% of active UMC thought they would increase their involvement in the future. The IVCF number is difficult to judge, however, due to the fact that as a distinctively collegiate group, upon graduation students are not connected with the chapter. 8% of inactive UMC responded with a rise in participation over the last four years and only 10% guessed that their involvement would increase in the future.

Members were asked to rank the other leaders ability to meet their needs on a scale of one to ten. IVCF ranked their leaders with a 7.3 average, active UMC 6.7, and inactive UMC 3.6. Respondents were then asked to rank the amount of vision possessed by their respective leadership, again on a scale from one to ten. IVCF responded with a 7.1 average, active UMC 5.9, and inactive UMC 3.6.

Selected questionnaires were followed with interviews to determine the reasons behind activity or inactivity as it related to the leadership of the organization. When talking to those who are considered inactive members
of the United Methodist Church three quarters of those interviewed claimed that their current lack of involvement was a personal issue and not one that could be directly attributed to the leadership of the church. These same interviewees, however, rated the visionary ability of their leaders to be quite low as compared to active members.

One eighth of inactive UMC members questioned in follow up based their inactivity directly on the leadership of the church. These members claimed that their lack of involvement was a result of church leaders inability to meet the personal needs of the respondent. One inactive UMC said, "I used to be very active attending every week, when my family grew older, however, I felt their wasn’t a place for us in the church. When I would mention the church’s inability to meet our needs as an older family I was met with a lot of talk but no action. The church did not actually do anything to better serve my family. I know of some others who went through the same situation as well". This woman’s sentiments were common among members who blamed their inactivity on the church leadership.

When interviewing IVCF and active UMC members about their membership trends in the future those that predicted a reduced activity varied in their reasons why. IVCF members commonly stated that their inactivity was going to be a result of graduation or schedule changes in the classes that they plan to take. Two people interviewed stated that they were predicting a decline in membership because they didn’t feel IVCF concentrated as hard on the upper-classmen as it did on the freshmen and
sophomores. These two did not want to pin that lack of concentration on a problem with leaders in particular, but did feel it was a leadership issue.

Many of those who felt the leadership of the church was not exhibiting vision saw that played out in the inability for the leaders to recognize and perform needed change. People responded that each had thoughts on needed change in the organization. Because leaders were not in accord with this change, the members claimed the leader was without vision.

Active UMC members concentrated much higher on the fact that they disagreed with the direction the church was going as they thought about their personal decline in membership. These members stated directly that they didn’t feel listened to and the leadership of Trinity United Methodist Church seemed to be going in areas in sharp contrast to where the members felt comfortable.

On the positive side, members of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship that did see their own membership increasing in the next few years gave resounding remarks about their leadership. These members felt that the staff members not only worked with them but personally cared about their specific well being. The IVCF members also saw their staff as having a lot of vision and being able to take the group to the next plateau in their commitment to campus ministry.

Active UMC members who saw their membership rise in the future were approximately fifty/fifty as to what they attributed this rise to. Half of those questioned felt their rise in activity would come from family situation,
as their kids developed and grew their activity in the church would grow as well. The other half interviewed stated that their rise would come in part because leadership was receptive to change and would be willing to try new things to better meet their needs in the future. One man stated, "When I have needed things done by the church they have bent over backwards to meet my need. I can only believe that this receptivity on their part will increase in the future. I am very satisfied with the way they listen to me."

**Analysis of Data**

The surveys and follow up questions seemed to back up the idea that membership involvement in the church was directly correlated to members perception of the vision possessed by the leader. The follow up interviews showed different members of the same organization can interpret their leader's vision in different ways. A member's involvement, therefore, may not be a reflection of the leader's vision and adaptability to change as much as it is a reflection of the members perceptions of the leader.

A member's perception of visionary leadership related to change. If a person could not see needed change taking place they blamed the leader. Membership involvement, hence, was correlated directly to the leaders ability to perform needed change.

Change is not the only determinant to vision. Vision often leads to change but is also much broader in nature. There are also question as to the definition of needed change. Because respondents saw vision and change intertwined, however, it is safe to say that those surveyed proved
membership involvement holds a positive correlation with the perception a member has as to their leaders ability to create vision, specifically played out in the leaders ability to enact needed change. The more vision possessed (i.e. the more satisfactory change) the more involvement on the part of the members.

Six leaders of the church and para-church were interviewed as to their reaction to this correlation between leaders perceived vision and members involvement in the church.

Vision

Each of the leaders felt that vision was a necessary component to their ministry. No one interviewed claimed that vision was anything but important. The separation between the leaders came through their ability to create and enact vision. Many leaders felt it was important but for some reason or another they were not able to enact vision.

Rev. Hickman is a former Lutheran pastor and left because he a lack of adequate leadership in the Lutheran Church. The Lutheran church’s leadership structure is constructed with a bishop that has control over several pastors. Rev. Hickman’s departure arose from ethical dilemmas he had as he tried to deal with decisions set forth by the “higher-ups”. Hickman felt that there was a great rift between the political interests of the leadership and the religious duty of church leadership. This rift squelched the ability for Rev. Hickman to enact any vision that he developed.
For example Rev. Hickman brought up a case in which the leaders of the church desired to create new churches so church growth might continue. Hickman's understanding of the gospel, however, forced him to believe that the money spent on new churches could better be spent on feeding the hungry. Hickman had a clear vision of not only how he felt the money could be best spent but in what areas the church could work in order to fully meet the mandates of the Gospel. In Hickman's eyes leaders of the church were not willing to stand up for what was right and, rather, tried to serve their followers by making the political moves that were demanded. Hickman had his vision silenced because of a lack of personal power to completely enact that vision on a large scale.

Commissioner Watson held many of the same frustrations with the squelching of vision in the Salvation Army. As National Commander he claims that he now is in a position where he can enact vision that he feels necessary. He voiced frustration throughout the years, however, as vision on the more regional levels was often squelched by hierarchical leadership situations.

Rev. Reasner is the District Superintendent of the United Methodist church for the Southern New Jersey Annual Conference. Reasner is the head of a group of church pastors and is under the authority of the bishop for the region. One aspect to Roaster's job is his ability to place pastors in certain situations. Reasner is the one to appoint new pastors to jobs that are open in different churches. When evaluating what pastor to put into what church
Reasner says vision is a heavy criteria. Reasner desires for pastors with an inordinate amount of vision to serve in some of the tougher churches. (i.e. churches with declining membership levels). Reasner has the amount of power other leaders observed was needed to develop vision in a hierarchical system.

Reasner voiced frustration at confinement in his position rather than the freedom to develop vision. Reasner considered development of vision a priority for himself but was not sure how he directly encouraged vision as he saw most of his job as being reactionary to where the needs in the area were. Vision was something he desired to work on but felt the leadership structure in the United Methodist Church prevented him from being too visionary. Reasner felt he had to spend most of his time dealing with problems rather than looking ahead to where things might be able to be changed. Leadership was very reactionary and consisted of very little proactivity.

Reasner stated that a leader with vision was an asset but also noted that many times vision could be a detriment. If the pastor did not know how to work his vision in a positive manner within the leadership structure of the church there could be tough or harder situations. Vision, in Reasner’s eyes, seemed to be an idyllic reality that would never be grasped.

These are some pictures of how “main-line” denominational leaders have struggled with vision. Each leader acknowledged it’s importance but it was not known how they could encourage the formation of vision on the lower levels and Reasner even worried about vision for himself, at his level
of power. These reactions seem to fit the trends that are occurring in the main-line denominations. When para-church leaders were interviewed they responded with a more positive outlook on vision.

Kevin Greene is the staff worker with the Inter-Varsity chapter at the University of Richmond. Mr. Greene stated that IVCF is set up in such a way that he is under one of four area directors in our region. While he does report to this director once a month Greene feels very secure in his autonomy and ability to make decisions that would specifically affect the University of Richmond. Greene originally chose to work for Inter-Varsity because of the freedom it gave him to serve that he wouldn’t have in the ministry of a large-stream denomination.

Inter-Varsity is flexible enough that Greene can change the things that he needs to change while remaining in close contact with student leaders to better develop vision. Every year Greene works with the student leadership to develop a vision for the next school year that is particularly suited to that school. Once the vision is created Greene is given the freedom to make any administrative moves necessary within the chapter to accomplish the vision and goals as long as he continues to adhere to the broad doctrine and vision of the parent organization, Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship USA.

Greene considers his freedom a result of the commitment of Inter-Varsity to be a student run organization. The students are the one’s that are able to get together and decide the areas they feel the chapter can grow. Greene considers Christ a model for this development of vision. Greene says
that Christ exhibited the master vision as God but worked with his followers to help them come to grips with their own vision underneath the master vision. Greene tries to serve the students in the same way. He encourages them to create vision, as long as it falls under the major tenants of the Christian faith, that will dictate the way the perform ministry on the campus.

Jimmy Long is the director for the Blue Ridge Region of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Kevin Greene's boss. He is responsible for the staff and work of InterVarsity in the states of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Long works directly under the President of InterVarsity USA Mr. Steve Hayner. Long states that he is given complete autonomy to make decisions and changes in his region to fit any vision he might have as long as it falls under the relatively broad doctrinal basis of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. Long was just in the process of finishing interviewing potential staff interns for the next year when questioned. Long interviews prospective staff and a major component of his decision on whether to hire or not is a staff persons vision.

Long stressed that because a local staff member has the freedom to work on his/her own campus vision is needed to be able to treat the campus with their best work. Long claims that the transient nature of the chapters, every 4 years membership changes, a staff worker must work for an overriding vision that will encompass the University for the long term. He needs staff to balance encouraging students to adopt their own vision while
creating an overriding vision for the entire school on a time frame longer than just one year.

The creation of vision was not only an element in the para-church. Rev. Baxter, pastor of First United Methodist Church, works directly under Rev. Reasner. Baxter did not feel the constraints the other main-line denominational leaders felt. Baxter claimed that he had the freedom to create and develop vision on his own. He claimed there were lots of times that he felt constrained to be reactionary but he felt that he had enough power that he didn’t have to be slave to this reactionary spirit. Baxter said delegation was very important for him as he would delegate the reactionary concerns to others when he needed to be working on vision himself.

The interviews conducted with leaders back the statement on memberships relation to the vision of leadership. The main-line denominations are loosing membership as the para-church continues to grow. The interviews found that main-line church leadership struggled the greatest with the freedom to create vision.

Change

Vision has been established of primary importance to all leaders, but it has been shown that members evaluate vision based upon an ability for a group to change. Change was the criteria members used to build their perceptions of whether a leader was visionary or not. With the activity of members directly proportional to their perceived concept of the leaderships vision and change becomes very important. Each leader was questioned as to
his/her ability to enact change and what the receptivity of particular change is in their organization.

Hickman voiced some frustration in his ability to enact change. Hickman felt that bishops would only listen to issues that were “hot” and not deal with the everyday leadership dilemmas of the local parish. The change to be implemented came from a study of the media and what it determined was necessary to change. Hickman paints a picture of a leadership that desires to be receptive to the followers needs but doesn’t go about finding these needs in the right way. The needs are seen on a political level as the leaders meet those needs that are politically correct. In doing this reacting to politics Hickman felt the leader’s sometimes would squelch their personal convictions.

Leaders in the Lutheran Church, according to Hickman, seemed all too willing to meet the members needs but did so to such an extent that vision was compromised. This statement speaks to the importance of creating change from vision and not in spite of vision.

These feelings of frustration with change were supported by Dr. Baxter. Baxter felt that change was highly idealized by his superiors but still hard to enact. 1st UMC of Moorestown’s congregation was predominantly elderly. Many youth would grow up in the church and upon graduation of High School not return until they where well along in years. Baxter just recently decided to begin a contemporary service as a result of the churches inability to reach the young adult population. This change was encouraged by the people
above him but was hindered by the current elderly members. Baxter claimed that for every ten members that would be for the change there was one loud anti-change person that would compensate them.

As a church leader Baxter claimed he could enact the change he felt his heart led him to. Unfortunately this was not always in accord with, the all too important, public sentiment. Baxter confirmed the idea that it's not change that is hard to enact as much as it is people's perception of and reaction to change.

Both leaders of main-line denominational churches voiced concern with change. One leader felt it was done for political reasons not heart reasons and the other would perform change based upon convictions but not get the political support so sorely needed and desired.

Both regional main-liners, Watson and Reasner, agreed on the difficulty they had with change. On a regional level these leaders did not have the ability to meet with members directly. Reasner commented that the only information he received on what changes were needed came through the media, pastors, or graphs. Reasner very rarely could get hands on images of the changes that were needed. Reasner also commented, and Watson agreed, that as a regional leader he was also pressured to a greater extent by those outside the organization as to his ability to meet the needs of the followers.

Reasner cites the new issue of homosexuals in the ordained ministry as an example of a current "hot" issue. The pressure he gets comes very strongly
from both extremes. He often hears from someone for and against the situation in very vocal terms. Reasner does not feel that he can rely solely upon his own convictions but, rather, must see what the charts claim as to its impact on the church. Reasner claims that as much as he would like changes to come out of a well developed vision he finds that very difficult. He often is put in a place where change must come in spite of vision in order to please, again, the important public opinion polls.

Watson substantiated many of these points. Watson did feel this feelings to a much less extreme basis, however. Watson felt the pressure to act politically but also felt the freedom to act on his own convictions. Watson claimed that the day he is forced to make a decision in direct opposition to his personal faith convictions is the day he will decide to step down from his position of authority.

Once again the para-church seemed to have a distinct advantage in these situations. The leaders in the para-church felt a much broader freedom to enact change. Greene rattled off a list of changes that were made over the last year from changing the date and times of events to changing the strategy for campus interaction. Greene claimed that he gave power to the students to change the dates, times, styles, and anything else they desired to change about their fellowship. As students enact these changes they are only encouraged to keep their eye on the vision. The vision is to be the unifying object as they go about implementing change.
Greene also felt change was easier to implement because the leadership was centered in the students. Students were better in touch with other students and could therefore really understand the desires of the members of the group.

Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship holds a nice position of not having to buck as many political issues as well. Because of their nature as a college fellowship the politics involved are greatly diminished. IVCF also deals with members with a four year age difference also providing a lack of political issues to concentrate on. UR, infamous for its lack of diversity, adds to the ability of leaders to meet the needs of members because the members needs do not come from a broad base.

Long substantiated many of Greene's feelings on the regional level. In giving the power to the staff worker Long feels that change is a comparatively small part of his position. Long desires to continue to hold vision before the ministry as his primary objective. This is not in spite of change but so the staff workers can better implement change with an idea of the vision they are working under.

Long claims he reports to his national leader but the reports are mostly on a spiritual and personal basis. Long claims a large amount of autonomy to make the decisions and changes he feels are needed for his region.

Change is necessary to be focused upon because of the high importance followers place on the issue. It seems that both the church and the para-church desire for change to be available. The difficulty comes in the
understanding of how to enact change. Leaders in the churches, where membership is slipping, seem to hold change higher than vision in many cases and as a result the change becomes political in nature so it can please the most people and receive the highest popularity ratings.

Leaders in the para-church seem to be able to put vision ahead of change. These leaders feel change is important but it always comes from well developed vision. It can be concluded that the priority for leaders as they deal with members comes in development of vision. Those leaders that hold vision can make decisions that will not only please members but lead to effective ministry opportunities for the future. The leaders who try to enact change apart from vision are reacting only to the truth that membership is related to their ability to effect member perceptions.

The interviews with the six leaders as well as membership trends tend to substantiate that trying to effect perceptions only creates new perceptions. The leader that acknowledges the importance of perceptions but continues to hold fast to a vision, sometimes leading them against perceptions is the one that seems to be successful in the long run. Perception must come from more than just public opinion polls. The leader’s role seems to be that of a visionary first and foremost and a change agent as a result of their visionary nature.

Recommendations

The correlation that exists between a leaders possession of vision and membership involvement is substantiated not only by members but by the
leader's as well. The question then arises where does the church go next. How does a church help the leader obtain vision? How can one be more actively in pursuit of enacting visionary change?

The change issue is tough due to the fact that the leader cannot please all of the followers. Members that desire change are almost always countered by those who do not desire change. The research finds that the followers define the leaders ability in the area of change as it relates to their personal understanding of what changes are needed. Acknowledging that no leader can enact the change that every member might desire much of a leaders ability in this realm may rely on public relations.

If a leader can prove vision apart from change and show receptivity to the needs of the followers the leader can better temper the change effort. This emphasis on PR is only effective, however, if the leader has vision. Without vision the leader is lost in the area of change. Change made without vision is made for the sake of change and a leader can find him/herself in the position stated by Rev. Reasner were they are in a constant state of reacting to current situations rather than being proactive in their vision.

Vision, among other things being at the root of change, is the goal for new leaders in the church. Church leaders need to be trained in vision in order to better serve the needs of their members. This training in visionary development is where seminary and other forms of formal training fit in.

Jimmy Long encourages vision through mandatory training and planning sessions that are held throughout the year. These are times when
the staff can get together with the sole purpose of hammering out their vision for their respective campus. During the visionary planning the focus is not outcome oriented but based upon the individual leaders personal value framework. The planning sessions that produce the most direction and vision for practical ministry are often the ones that deal with tangible leadership the least. Long claims that the best planning and visionary sessions are ones that are solely spiritual in nature.

This model for leadership training and vision creation is held against that of the seminaries which offer one or two optional courses on leadership. Seminaries should look into implementing a leadership development aspect to their curriculum. The course work would have to be varied in this leadership program as has been seen in the complex nature of what is needed in terms of church leadership.

Course work on the leader as change agent is a good start but, as the research shows, this course must concentrate on the leader as a visionary. Long and Greene’s experience with IVCF, however, holds that it is not enough to teach someone how to create vision. Schools must also be available to develop a leadership training program where the personal growth of the future leader is developed. A leadership program is needed that not only concentrates on leadership of a group and the creation of vision but personal leadership as well.

Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary was very interested in implementing a program of this nature. The main concern of the
administration, however, was how they could fit a leadership program into
an already compact schedule of course work. We discussed the possibility of
condensing the leadership training into two mandatory classes. One class
consisting of the personal component and the other focusing on the creation
of vision and enactment of change.

The best solution, however, seemed to be the incorporating of a
leadership curriculum into the classes already required of the students. As
the students are required to take classes on pastoral care and counseling they
can include the teaching of care for followers through the creation of vision
in the same course. Course work on personal spiritual discipleship can take
add leadership as it considers how that personal development affects the way
in which a person leads and directs those that follow his/her leadership.

Conclusion

The membership situation in the church is not in a state of growth, in
fact, it continues to spiral downward as groups such as the para-church grow.
The give and take in membership show that membership drops are not a
result of weakened spiritual desire on the parts of members. Members are
just changing where the go to find the community they desire to worship
with.

The main-line denominations in order to compete and grow in future
generations are going to have to enact some sort of change in the
development of leadership for their pastors. No longer is it sufficient to
believe that a robe and collar will imbue the respect and control needed to
keep members active within the church. Main-liners must look to train and educate their leadership on issues of leadership and change.

Seminaries are looking to meet the need for leadership training but need the help themselves to better understand how to incorporate a leadership training program into their curriculum. The next step in the development of Christian leadership needs to be training the leadership of seminaries on how they can best develop programs of leadership study.

The desire for growth in the understanding of creation of vision is heard in every area. Members are calling for it, leaders are calling for it, and teachers are calling for it. This is a necessary first step as they begin to work together to find how they can prepare the church leadership for this growth.
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Questionnaire

What religious organization are you a part of? (Circle one)

Inter Varsity / United Methodist Church

How long have you been a member of this organization? _____

Has your involvement increased or decreased over the last four years?

Increased / Decreased

Do you feel your involvement will increase or decrease in the future?

Increase / Decrease

How well do you feel your needs are met in this organization?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
not met met well

Does the organization's leadership have a high or low amount of vision?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
low high