**DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP IN THE SMALL CHURCH**

**Introduction**

Most surveys related to church, estimate that the average attendance in U.S. church on a given Sunday is less than 90 adult persons. Many of the surveys classify a small church is 200 persons or less. Regardless of the number, small congregations can be extremely vital and effective faith communities. No matter the size, effective leadership is a must if the church is to be a light in their community. An oasis is small in the desert; however, it may be small but those who run to it find refuge and refreshment. Small churches need to understand they are an oasis in their community and that oasis needs proper leadership

**Determine your Leaders motivation for service**

A professor asked a group of seminary students were asked why they had become students and why were they will to assume the responsibility of serving as leaders in the church. They gave answers like Christ said go; some quoted the great commission; others said because there are millions perishing without Christ

The professor replied by telling them those are good answers but will fail in times of testing, trials, tribulations, and possible death. There is only one motive that will sustain you in trial and testing – namely your love of Christ - out of love for Jesus we share salvation message – out of love we face trials and testing yet remain true to the faith – **II Corinthians 5:14** *“For the love of Christ constrains us…”* Leaders MUST be grounded and compelled by their love of Christ – love never fails – love covers multitude of sins.

Leaders should NEVER be chosen just to fill a position – the church will only be as strong as those who lead and there should be development for leaders at all levels – who we assign to positions of leadership will determine the effectiveness of the church.

**Identifying Leaders**

Leaders – individuals who influences and directs people toward a specific goal or mission; looks to find a better, smarter more effective way

Leaders – creates a buy-in atmosphere at every level and ensures that all members of their community know that their contributions are important. The objective is to get as many people engaged in the vision by building relationships between others and help them work together

Leaders – not necessarily born – people can learn leadership behavior

Leadership selection should never be done because of family ties or because of secular achievement. Identify persons who have demonstrated integrity and a solid work ethics – in and out of the church; good people skills; display spiritual giftedness and a desire to see the church move forward; looks to find a better, smarter more effective way. MISPLACEMENT CAN BE DETRIMENTAL TO ANY CHURCH

**Leaders specific to your church**

The real challenge for leaders is to understand the uniqueness of your church and be sensitive to the history and culture – yet bring hope for the future

Sensitivity to your church’s special characteristic will help a leader be more effective in assisting them in fulfilling the two great commandments – the commandant to love God and others and the commandant which calls us to make disciples

It’s a mistake to act like something you are not – stop operating as a “mega” church. It’s not an embarrassment or something to be ashamed of to be a small church. Jesus had a small membership but affected multitudes. It’s not about the size but it’s about the impact

Invest in your leaders – Pastors other Leaders should mentor and pour into those under you. Spend time with them and not just in church settings. Church should provide resources/training for those with leadership potential – TRAINING BEFORE ASSIGNMENT

**Know your church history**

You must become a history buff – when, where, how and why was YOUR church established. It is vital that you clearly link a future vision to historical memory

Anthony Pappas in his book *“Entering the world of the small church”* makes the statement “for small church people time goes the “wrong way” …it goes toward the good that was, or that was thought to be”

Effective small church leaders will not be so quick to initiate bold, new pie-in-the sky visions of the New Jerusalem or always talking/babbling on about a bright tomorrow. They will speak quietly about who we are on the basis of who we always have been - about how we can become even more of who we are - about what was good about the “good ole days” - about how we can even keep that good alive in our midst today as we reach toward the future

Rehearse your history as a reminder of what and where God has brought you. God encouraged Israel not to forget or eliminate their history by giving them the Passover. God even said that when your children ask what this means you tell them. It is clear that we should get to know and remember and pass on history while still moving forward. Celebrate the monumental moments in the church’s history

**Culture**

The belief and convictions; customs of a particular society, group, place; the social behavior and norms – religion (Baptist), food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, as well as their knowledge of the surrounding community.

Recognize that there are distinctive cultures within individual churches – even within churches that are only a few miles from each other with the same demographics – get in touch with your church culture. Don’t be afraid to be uniquely you serving a unique God

No leader should have the attitude of “this is how I do my ministry” and then do things regardless of the culture context of the congregation – the pastor brings in values, but they must be held alongside the values of the congregation.

The pastor may need to learn to do things against his/her natural inclination because it is what God is calling for in the setting. Leadership is not about “doing one’s own thing” with many different folks rather, it is about being God’s servant – it requires taking a congregation’s particular culture seriously

**Change**

It has been said that nothing remains the same – change in inevitable. Believe it or not that is also true when it comes to the church - we don’t worship like our parents and they didn’t worship like their parents.

Just in case you haven’t noticed, this pandemic has taught us that church as we knew it will never be like it once was. Who would have thought that one day we would be having church without being at church; wearing a mask and sitting at a social distance and words like Zoom, Facebook and On-Line Streaming have become a part of church vernacular? For many, change is often viewed negatively – small churches tend to be interested in maintenance, not transformation.

Typically change has not been a friend to the small church; however, technology and all its changes have become the norm even in the small church. The church that resists technology will do its congregation and the community a disservice

Pastoral changes may bring unwelcome variations to the worship services. Through the years political and economic changes may have unfavorable impacts. Members in small congregations often have negative feelings about change that their pastor does not understand – endurance is enough of a struggle for the small church – make an effort to understand the reason for the resistance to change – some resistance to change comes out of fear that their role, their identity will also change; having to learn something new; responsibilities are different; the fear of failure.

Question: Wilderness or Promise Land, which do you prefer? To get one you must be willing to let go of the other. You must be willing to change the way you think and function. The problem with the change is that in the Wilderness God brought food to you in the morning and evening and your clothes didn’t wear out. In the Promise Land, the land flowing with milk and honey, you must work, go after and conquer. The manna and quail stopped when they entered the promise land. Change requires effort from me in order to receive what God has given

For the leadership Pappas says “to add the burden of endurance, the burden of responsibility for change is often crushing, not liberating”

**Living in the middle**

To be a leader is to live in the middle – in tension between a future vision and current reality.

The tension is inherent if a leader becomes the steward of God’s vision for the congregation. One cannot give into the current reality and abandon the vision to which God is calling the church. Nor can one simply lift up the vision and ignore the realities

To be leader means to stay with the tension. It means to stay with the people – remember, in many cases people in the small church often are people who are living on the edge – geographically, economically, theologically and culturally - You must value people and recognize what they bring to the table. Focus on the people in the congregation and not the role you need to fill. The congregation knows whether you are living with them or not; they know them that labor among you – **I Thessalonians 5:12.** Reward and celebrate milestones and successes

**Live into new thinking**

Small church thinking is not always rational. It does not mean the people are incapable of being rational – they may find rationality not to be a very helpful tool

It is probably not realistic to expect everyone to approve something before anything can be done, yet there are those few with the pastor who are willing to see a new vision and approach it as something that is in continuity with the past

The approach to change is likely to be incremental - perhaps starting with a trial period. Rather than expecting people to “think their way into doing something new – give people a chance to live their way into change”

**Importance of hope**

Leaders have a key assignment – to be the bearers of hope – leaders who have lost hope cannot lead others to God’s preferred future

One of the major things that hinder planning for the future is that change has been experienced as negative, making people uncertain about the prospects for a better future. If people have some hope, can taste some small victories, there is a fresh kind of energy that comes with hope

Leaders must be visible – leaders who are only seen during the preaching hour are doing their congregations a disservice. Show up and interact with the people, get to know them by name – be involved in the community, be interested in what affects them – **Exodus 25:8; John 1:14**