

Six-Agency Leadership Initiative Consultation
Dallas, Texas
February 9-11, 2011

Introduction

At the invitation of the six agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),¹ thirty leaders from across the PC(USA) gathered in Dallas, Texas, on February 9-11, 2011, for a conversation about leadership for the church in the 21st century.

The thirty spanned the spectrum of the denomination in age, race, gender, culture, geography, and theology. They were ruling elders and teaching elders in urban, suburban, and rural congregations that range in age from three months to over a century. Among them were educators, attorneys, graduate students, engineers, business leaders, financial officers, pastors, and presbytery and seminary staff members. The group was in no way exhaustive of proven leaders in the PC(USA), but rather an entry point to a conversation that is becoming increasingly urgent in the life of the church.

Joining the group were staff members from the six agencies who served as worship leaders, conveners of conversations, and listeners.

In the letter of invitation to the thirty, the planning team wrote, "What it means to be church is on the table ... and it begins with what it means to be a leader."

No expectations were made of specific recommendations. Instead, the hope was expressed that what would begin to emerge are the contours of a larger, intentional, and ongoing conversation we need to be having about leadership in the church and what's at stake.

Centered in worship and using the holy-conversation model of World Café (worldcafe.com), participants shared their spiritual autobiographies and delved into conversation with one another. They focused on personalizing, contextualizing, sharing, and sustaining leadership, as well as the obstacles to and diversity of leadership. (See Appendix A for the complete list of questions used to stimulate conversation.)

While consensus was not sought, it emerged in solid fashion as the group identified the characteristics needed of leaders for the church in the 21st century. However, a few questions were raised:

- How do we dispel the confusion between the priesthood of all believers and the hierarchy of leadership?
- Are our categories of teaching elder, ruling elder, and deacon adequate enough in thinking more expansively about ministry and vocation that are rooted in Baptism?

¹ The six agencies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are the Board of Pensions, General Assembly Mission Council, Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Foundation, Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program, and Presbyterian Publishing Corporation.

- The discussion of G-3.0401 in the Book of Order revealed agreement that the “new openness” to which the church is called has great efficacy, but is a tall order. How will we get there in the present tension?

What follows are the fruits of the conversation.

The Church in the 21st Century

The word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” (Jer. 1:11a)

We find ourselves in the midst of monumental change in this country and throughout the world. Breathtaking technological advances are influencing how we interact with others, obtain information, and structure our lives. Shifting demographics are reshaping homogeneous neighborhoods into multicultural communities. Tumbling economies are erasing job security and impacting individuals and families in critical, perhaps permanent, ways in areas such as housing and healthcare. Environmental concerns and catastrophes are compelling us to reconsider our patterns of consumption. The world order itself is feeling seismic shifts as popular uprisings challenge and even topple longstanding governments.

Being in the world, the church – especially in North America – finds itself in the midst of these changes. Its position of being a “given” in society evaporated, the church is one of several institutions whose relevance has diminished. Seekers are replacing joiners; the “spiritual” are outnumbering the “religious.” Membership and giving are down, leaving an increasing number of congregations without the resources to support a full-time, installed pastor. The growing presence of different cultures and languages in every community in the country is impacting how we do mission and ministry.

Given these factors, and more, we are increasingly convinced that our Presbyterian structure and polity are hampering rather than empowering our witness to God’s work in the 21st century.

Still, we believe that with hefty challenges come exciting possibilities and opportunities. *I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (Is. 43:19).* God continues to call a people and a leadership.

Leadership for the Church in the 21st Century

[We are daughters and sons] of Issachar, those who had understanding of the times.... (1 Chron. 12:32)

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.... (Eph. 4:11-12)

What are the characteristics considered necessary for effective leaders for the church in the 21st century?

Leaders who go deep...

plumbing the depths of faith in God and God's people;
setting the church's story and individual stories
 within God's story of grace, redemption, justice, and mercy
 through Jesus Christ;

...and leaders who stretch wide:

reaching beyond comfort zones;
bumping into and embracing the complex and wondrous dimensions
 of all of God's people;
claiming in word and action that relationships are foundational to results.

Leaders who ask questions...

Why do we do what we do?
Where is God in our midst?
What's out there?

...and leaders who live into answers:

letting ideas and vision ferment;
listening for what bubbles up;
trusting the wisdom of the community.

Leaders who let go...

giving up the need to control;
sharing power;
risking failure;

...and leaders who take up:

moving beyond the idea of being open to that of actively pursuing openness;
starting with the gifts of the community rather than the needs of the institution;
going out into the world instead of waiting for the world to come in.

Leaders who lift up others...

encouraging and empowering;
mentoring and serving alongside;
equipping people to find the joy of their work in the world;

...and leaders who maintain self-awareness:

honing strengths and admitting weaknesses;
checking biases and norms;
nurturing a spiritual life that responds humbly, "Here am I."

Leaders:

coaches,
midwives,
storytellers,
entrepreneurs,
critical thinkers,
wave riders.

Leaven for the World

The Church is called to a new openness to the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God's activity in the world.
(Book of Order, G-3.0401c)

Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love? (Directory for Worship, 4.4005)

What then shall we say to this? What will happen when effective leadership is paired with the church of the 21st century?

The 'possibilities and perils' of the church in this present time are very real. An effective leader will need to have an appreciation of both.

Perhaps one of the most important leadership characteristics will be the courage to invite all of us to live into the heart of our anxiety – especially the fear of letting go of the familiar and the need to control – and to help create the space to discern and articulate God's vision for us, call forth gifts, exude hope, and joyfully trust in the redemptive power of God and the movement of the Spirit in and through the community of faith.

What is emerging is larger than we can envision, and is guided by the One who is able to do more than we dare to ask or imagine, the God who is ever moving over the face of the waters.

Nimble, faith-filled leaders who shape the evolving, flexible structure we call church will best support the quest to be responsive and obedient to God's call from up ahead and deep within.

The structure and characteristics will change with each new generation; what we do now in this early part of the 21st century will be seeds for what is to come. Yet, the work of sharing the gospel in word and deed is always before us – as is the abiding presence and power of God through Jesus Christ.

To God be the glory.

Appendix A
Six-Agency Leadership Initiative Consultation
World Café Questions
(worldcafe.com)

Session one: Qualities of leaders the church needs

Table one: **Personalizing leadership**

Reflecting on your own leadership style:

1. Who/What inspires you in leadership? How is this inspiration conveyed – reading, music, personal discussion, etc.?
2. What images express your leadership style? (coach, shepherd, servant, etc.?)
3. How do you measure your effectiveness as a leader?
4. What are the products or result of effective leadership? How do you measure effective leadership in others?

Table two: **Contextualizing leadership**

1. How is your leadership style adapted to address your present context?
2. What factors in your present context challenge your ability to provide leadership?
3. What factors in your present context enhance your ability to provide leadership?
4. In your present context, what do you utilize as benchmarks for assessing effective leadership? (Problem solving? Consensus building? Goal attainment?)

Table three: **Sharing leadership**

1. With whom do you share in leadership responsibilities? How were these persons identified for leadership and by whom?
2. Describe the ways in which leadership is shared. Is there a delegation of tasks or mutual agreement about assignments? Are planning activities explicit or intuitive?
3. How are new persons nurtured for leadership responsibilities? How frequently are leadership roles changed within your present context?

Table four: **Obstacles to leadership**

1. Within your context, what makes leadership difficult to sustain? Do you find the challenges to leadership to be institutional? Cultural? Episodic? Continual? What fosters such challenges?
2. Are there particular aspects of your context that provide unique challenges to leadership of your community?
3. Are partnership activities with other persons and organizations a resource you use to overcome obstacles?
4. Are there church institutional behaviors that thwart leadership development in your context? How does the middle governing body relate to the obstacles you can identify?

Table five: **Sustaining leadership**

1. In what ways do you consciously seek to nurture your own leadership abilities? From where or whom do you receive assistance with this? What kind of assistance do you receive?
2. Are there church institutional practices that enhance your capacity for leadership? What are they?
3. How do the middle governing bodies in your context encourage you in your leadership role?
4. In a crisis situation regarding your leadership, to whom do you repair? Where can you turn for help and guidance?

Table six: **Diversity of leadership**

1. In your ministry context what degree of diversity of leadership styles are you able to observe? Do these forms of leadership compete or complement each other and in what ways?
2. Are church institutional structures and practices more able to affirm some styles of leadership but not others? How might church practices adopt a more affirming approach to diverse leadership styles?
3. Are there practices that privilege particular qualities of leadership and devalue other leadership qualities? How do these patterns influence ministry in your context?

Session two: Church's call in 21st century

Book of Order, G-3.0401 – Called to Openness

The Church is called

- a. *to a new openness to the presence of God in the Church and in the world, to more fundamental obedience, and to a more joyous celebration in worship and work;*
- b. *to a new openness to its own membership, by affirming itself as a community of diversity, becoming in fact as well as in faith a community of women and men of all ages, races, and conditions, and by providing for inclusiveness as a visible sign of the new humanity;*
- c. *to a new openness to the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God's activity in the world;*
- d. *to a new openness to God's continuing reformation of the Church ecumenical, that it might be a more effective instrument of mission in the world.*

How does G-3.0401 hold up to your experience in leadership and how do you as a leader hold up to its expectation?

Appendix B
Six-Agency Leadership Initiative Consultation

Participants

Mindy Douglas Adams (Chapel Hill, NC)
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Diana Barber (Eagan, MN)
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Sue Cornman (Arvada, CO)
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Erika Funk (Philadelphia, PA)
Magdalena Garcia (Chicago, IL)
Cynthia Gervais (Washington, DC)
Bridgett Green (Madison, TN)
Delaina Gumbs (New York, NY)
Katharine Henderson (New York, NY)
Shawn Kang (Houston, TX)
Ben Larson-Wolbrink (Beacon, NY)
Slade Lewis (Greensboro, NC)
Adel Malek (Mission Viejo, CA)
Felipe Martinez (Indianapolis, IN)
Emily McGinley (Chicago, IL)
Deborah McKinley (McLean, VA)
Clive Neil (Brooklyn, NY)
Paul Roberts (Atlanta, GA) *unable to attend*
Max Sherman (Austin, TX)
Mary Elva Smith (Louisville, KY)
Byron Wade (Raleigh, NC)
Landon Whitsitt (Liberty, MO)
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Launch team

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