

THE SEARCH FOR COHERENCE

SOUNDINGS ON THE STATE OF LEADERSHIP AMONG EPISCOPALIANS

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OVERVIEW

For as long as human beings have traveled by water, they have taken soundings of what lay beneath the surface. For centuries sailors used a weighted plumb line to determine depth, assess currents, and probe the bottom. Plumb lines provided general impressions, not detailed views. The development of sonar in the mid-twentieth century, and later satellite technology, offered the first clear images of the ocean depths and made navigation precise.

Like navigators crossing unfamiliar bodies of water, Episcopalians constantly take soundings of the state of their church. Often these soundings occur informally as lay leaders and clergy consider what they hear from parishioners in casual encounters. Like the soundings that occur with the release of a plumb line, such incidental impressions vary in their accuracy and rarely offer a detailed picture. Often local Episcopal leaders enhance the impressions gleaned from their own congregations with what they hear of other congregations or the diocese through chance conversations or at church meetings. Reports from the news media about conflict in the church widen the range of soundings without proving more accurate. Such soundings are incomplete and sometimes erroneous. Like ancient plumb lines such soundings are accurate only in limited ways. They record immediate safety or threat, but fail to describe the topography beneath the surface, that is, the deeper dimensions of the church's situation.

Nevertheless Episcopalians persist in taking soundings and the motivation is apparent. More than avoiding the shoals of one or another issue, Episcopalians seek faithful direction for the church. In other words, Episcopalians assess the state of the church to find better ways to lead it. They long for a focus on mission. They envision innovative patterns of evangelism and education; they want fresh attention to families, children, and people in need. As they search for ways to address such issues, Episcopalians long to renew their unity and vitality as the Body of Christ. They seek leadership that will bring tangible hope.

This report assesses the state of leadership in the Episcopal Church. Seeking to probe the hopes of Episcopalians for their church and the obstacles they encounter, we have taken elaborate soundings across the church. More than dropping the occasional plumb line, we have developed a broad, informed view of life beneath the church's surface. Not surprisingly, while storms may rage on the surface, at the depths of Episcopal life important, long-term changes in the church's shape are in process. In this report of what our soundings revealed, we describe these changes and consider their implications for the Episcopal Church's identity and vocation.

We will explain how an emphasis on spirituality, rather than institutional identity, is increasingly important for Episcopalians. We will depict the impressive energies for building the church that this spiritual emphasis has brought. We will describe how the spiritual focus of Episcopalians has refocused the exercise of leadership and produced new ideas about mission in the church. Broad spiritual energies encourage an emphasis upon building the church as a community rather than maintaining it as an institution. Inherent in this interest in spirituality is renewed energy for enhancing the church in its

locality more than beyond. We will see such approaches to spirituality at various points in our conversations across the church. As we do, we will be attentive to what Episcopalians mean by “spirituality,” and how “spirituality” shapes views of the leadership the church requires.

This report builds upon previous research by the Episcopal Church Foundation. In conversations held in parishes and dioceses throughout the United States, Foundation researchers interviewed dozens of laity, clergy and bishops in local focus groups and regional forums (see Appendix for details). This research revealed how Episcopalians understand themselves as Christians and view the context in which they practice their faith. Apart from church size, geographic location or theological orientation we found new vitality in many congregations. In general this is due to the well-documented awakening of spiritual seeking throughout the culture. In particular it reflects the quality of religious life Episcopalians find in their congregations. But what forms of leadership invite this vitality? Also, in what sense is there a uniquely Episcopal/Anglican approach to effective religious leadership?

The liveliness we have identified faces inherent challenges. Awakenings fizzle without direction; spirituality stagnates if it is not developed in seasons of conversion and prayer. Faith communities do not expand without clarity about mission. Christians forget who they are and how they must be without times of renewal and reconciliation. What practices of leadership enable such deepening of faith? Is there consensus on the purpose toward which those practices move? These questions loom large because we have found a paradox of leadership among Episcopalians: there are abundant initiatives and fresh energies for mission, but the connections between leadership ends and means are unclear. There are signs of energetic leadership, yet uncertainty about how to identify basic goals and to find consensus on achieving them. Episcopalians do not often mean the same thing when we talk about leadership and mission.

While not exhaustive, the research that supports this report has revealed issues surrounding leadership in the church that demand attention. Some voices are not specifically assessed – deacons, total ministry contexts, people of color and various ethnicities. Such gaps hold the seeds for future inquiries. But this report follows general comments on Episcopal leadership today with discussions of the church’s principal leadership roles. The insights we gain will inform our assessment of the emerging character of the church’s leadership. Although the principal leadership roles in the church are consistent with its tradition, the exercise of leadership in the Episcopal Church is changing markedly.

What is religious about religious leadership?

Across the Episcopal Church we continually asked, *what is religious about religious leadership?* One participant offered this perspective on the question: “*It is about prayer and transcendence and meaning.*” Discipleship was identified as a key quality as well as the perception that a religious leader would help others probe the question, *what deeply held values are we connecting with.* In an address to the Fund for Theological Education/Lilly Forum, The Very Rev. James B. Lemler captured the salience of

such questions as he reflected on changes in culture and church life. “One of the major issues of post-modern life and culture is how human beings discover meaning through our seeking and searching. This is an issue directly related to the question of call. To discover meaning is to discern something about one’s call as a human being, and especially as a Christian.”¹

When speaking about the religious dimension in church leadership, participants in our gatherings found general agreement about what is distinctive about religious leadership:

- o *“It has something to do with reconciliation.”*
- o *“Part of leadership is putting people in touch with their holy life.”*
- o *“It also includes the telling of stories.”*
- o *“A good leader has an authentic self; this implies the person has wrestled with transcendence.”*
- o *“Theological skills are essential.”*
- o *“A kind of longing and tension in seeking a coherence.”*

A religious leader empowers others and upholds mutual respect of followers. Religious leadership is humble and loving; it invites people to participate in the sacredness of this universe. It encourages people to see God not only as transcendent “Creator,” but also as immanent in all things; to see all creation infused with the divine. Religious leadership is crucial to the “birthing process” of faith, and to the gestation of the authentic self. Religious leadership thrives in the unknown, because it knows that is where, in the words of one focus group participant, *“you meet Christ.”* Leadership must allow for failure. There should be a humble inward confidence both to lead and to make mistakes.

The characteristics of religious leaders parallel those in other sectors of society. Our findings indicate that what is religious about religious leadership has less to do with *what* religious leaders do; it is about their understanding of the *why* of their activity, its meaning. The significance of what religious leaders do is framed in sacred constructs, and so we heard people engaged in “meaning-making” as they reflected on the implications of what they do. One group said that its outreach work *“... is about prayer and transcendence and meaning.”* *“We are ‘walking’ our faith.”* In discussing their parish’s involvement in community activism, a lay leader said, *“It’s one way that (this congregation) is seeking the kingdom.”* Both lay and clergy leaders view the ends toward which their leadership is directed, and the practices it entails, as religious ones in fresh, energetic ways.

For the Episcopal Church, one religious influence comes from liturgical practice. The 1979 Book of Common Prayer re-established the centrality of baptism. For many Episcopalians the theology and practice of lay ministry as the fulfillment of one’s baptismal promises has become formative. They see

¹ James B. Lemler, “‘Jesus Calls Us, O’er the Tumult...’ Call, Recruitment, and Leadership in the Episcopal Church of the 21st Century,” Good Ministry – Theological School Programs for Strengthening Congregational Leadership, FTE/Lilly Forum, January 8-9, 2002.

their ministry as activity in the world and in the church. Often they bring to their ministry talent gained from their lives outside the church. But finding that baptism is the basis for new life in Christ, they deepen in understanding and exercising their abilities. A sense of discipleship unfolds.

Leadership in Context

The persons we interviewed insisted that religious leadership is shaped by the context in which it is practiced. The message preached and the message lived must have coherence. The community in which one leads shapes the ministry that is practiced. That context, then, calls forth the particular skills and styles of leadership that we find. In Restoring the Ties That Bind² Tom Holland and Bill Sachs identify four types of leaders that have developed over time in the Episcopal Church – reformers, activists, guardians, and spiritual guides. Each of these is formed by the context in which it is practiced.

It is the fourth type of leadership, that of the *spiritual guide*, that is central to this report. Because of decline in denominational loyalty and a focus on church community closer to home, we found that Episcopalians, like many spiritual seekers, are engaged in their faith life as a spiritual quest. Sociologists have postulated that the sources of this phenomenon lie in the increasing multi-culturalism of American society, a growth in the number and kinds of spiritual seekers, the communications revolution inaugurated by the Internet, and a loss of relevance in mainline Christianity. People in our focus groups speak of the spiritual journey and the religious quest. They are searching for new forms of community in networks produced by ministry specialties, spiritual interests, para-church and self-help groups based on spiritual compatibility rather than denominational affiliation. What defines religious leaders in this circumstance? As spiritual guides leaders must steer their followers through a number of religious options, not all of them necessarily good for the soul. “The religious leader must be a spiritual guide who draws individual journeys together into life-giving patterns of shared discovery and social responsibility.”³

Various leadership styles are necessary to the church; none is qualitatively better than another. The style that emerges depends upon the context. It offers direction and balanced response to tensions. Leadership that serves the community, builds the mission, deepens individual values, calls forth the best in people, and facilitates encounters with the Holy, is truly religious leadership. Our research confirms that Episcopalians know it when they see it, and long for it from those whom they would follow.

Leadership Is Formed in Community

In a shifting social and religious landscape, many people look to their congregations as sources of identity and community. Many Episcopalians today say that the leadership in which they are engaged –

² William Sachs and Thomas Holland, Restoring the Ties that Bind: The Grassroots Transformation of the Episcopal Church (Church Publishing Incorporated: New York, 2003), 160.

³ Sachs and Holland, 171.

both within and beyond the congregation – is centered in a strong sense of spiritual community rather than in particular functions reserved for formally defined institutional offices. Leadership is called forth based on gifts discerned, not roles occupied. While ordained leaders and canonically designated bodies such as vestries remain, a view of leadership rooted in the ministry of all the baptized has emerged. This sense of lay leadership in local churches has been a major shift in how congregations go about ministry.

In a parish in California, a wide range of activities involved the congregation with other organizations. When asked how these were coordinated, the rector responded, *“The Vestry began empowering leaders to take on various projects, involve others, move them forward, bring us budget requests, and keep us informed of their progress...The whole idea is to open up roles and opportunities for people to follow through with their concerns, engage others who share those concerns into a team, and go to work.”*

Context influences the ministries in which congregations involve themselves. In a small inner-city congregation in a southern diocese, the rector persuaded his parishioners to start a latchkey program for neighborhood children. It drew resources from secular groups and aided the church with much-needed capital improvements. But the most important effect was to engage this ingrown congregation with the community surrounding it, benefiting the congregation as much as the neighborhood.

Marks of Effective Leadership: Best Practices

In the congregations our researchers visited, abundant marks of healthy leadership were apparent. We found that a crucial factor is a synergy comprised of a collaborative style of leadership, a mission-oriented focus, a strong sense of community in the congregation, and deepening spirituality. Additionally, effective leadership is flexible and adaptive. The Episcopal Church, like the society in which we live, is increasingly diverse. The center we as Anglicans espouse to hold needs broader definition, all the time. Across an increasing number of polarities, leaders in the church must be able to negotiate the tension between tradition and innovation. For example, in talking about liturgy many respondents affirmed the strength of the tradition, the nurturance of rituals and religious practices of the church, because these offer a sense of groundedness, security and reliability. More importantly, in the words of one GenXer, *“the tradition provides an avenue to the possibility of transcendence, or at the very least, hope in a vehicle for getting there.”* At the same time, innovation is prized for it promises to re-form participants in the tradition. Leaders who invite questioning minds and seeking hearts point church members to joy and abundance, even in the midst of the tension. In the words of one young adult, *“The Episcopal Church is open-minded, promoting and supporting one’s individual spiritual journey.”*

What, then, can we say about the marks of effective leadership? In the language of business, can we begin to identify “best practices” of effective leadership in the Episcopal Church? Do people know it when they see it? What is *it*? What do people look for in those whom they would follow?

Much of what is written in contemporary business literature about leadership can be applied to the church. Ronald Heifetz says that “exercising leadership mean(s) providing a vision and influencing others to realize it through non-coercive means.”⁴ Kouzes and Posner, in the most recent edition of their influential work, The Leadership Challenge, talk about leaders as “ordinary people who guide others along pioneering journeys.”⁵ For Kouzes and Posner the issue is not that there is anything magical or innate about leadership, rather it is a set of skills that can be learned. They identify certain practices that capable leaders hold in common: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. These practices are as applicable to the church as to any other organization. In their own words, participants in our research consistently identified such ideals for themselves and their congregations. They want the church as a whole to aspire to them as well.

Respondents in a variety of venues were consistent in describing the work church leaders must do. Leaders must know the mission and have clear goals, formulate work plans, conduct assessments, evoke and encourage the ministry of others, recognize and celebrate successes. A group of articulate, college-age people shared their ideas about the characteristics of effective leaders. Conversant with the church, these young people were formed as Episcopalians through youth programs, camp experiences, and active participation in home parishes. They offered keen insight when identifying effective as well as ineffective instances of leadership. With specific examples they talked about leadership they observed and that which they practiced, echoing descriptions of effective leadership in secular organizations.

Leadership Formation

If effective leadership can be learned, as many organizational writers argue, the logical question is: how does one learn such things? However, leadership, we have begun to see, entails more than learning. How are leaders formed, many Episcopalians now wonder? The matter of leadership formation in the church came up often in our interviews. It is a question of great concern to many Episcopalians, one that transcends ideology, geography, age, gender and order of ministry. A layperson in a diocese in the south articulated this quite comprehensively: “*The mission of the church has to be leadership development. It is crucial to build new leaders. This must be done by the vestry and key lay leaders and the rector must be involved.*”

Mentoring for leadership was frequently identified by both clergy and laity as an essential aspect of formation. It has long been recognized in the private sector that this is both a means of forming new leaders, as well as a responsibility of those in positions of power. Ideally, field education and internships in seminary, and post-seminary programs like Fresh Start and CREDO should provide such opportunities

⁴ Ronald A Heifetz, Leadership Without Easy Answers (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1994) 15.

⁵ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, The Leadership Challenge, Third Edition (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2002) 13.

for clergy mentoring. It is less structured for lay leadership formation, even haphazard. Unless lay leadership formation is intentional, it becomes more like “on the job training.” We often heard in focus groups that persons became involved in a project because the clergy or a fellow parishioner asked them. *“Someone picked up the phone and asked me to get involved.”*

Mentoring, however, doesn’t end with the “ask.” In the most successful ministries, training was offered or required, sometimes from outside groups that provided linkages to specific programs. People worked along with experienced others, being coached until they were ready to assume more responsible roles. The liveliest dioceses are also making ongoing lay leadership development a high priority. Many dioceses throughout the country have adapted The Clear Vision model developed in the Diocese of Texas. At least three of our research dioceses had participated in Clear Vision conferences and credited these, along with new episcopal leadership, for renewed vitality in the diocese.

The role of seminaries came in for much comment, as did diocesan structures responsible for the ordination process, particularly Commissions on Ministry. For some critics problems arise with the discernment process. *“We need more black clergy and more young people going into the ministry,”* stated one person in a Midwestern parish. Room also needs to be made for those the process might screen out – the innovative, quirky, entrepreneurial types. Some felt that not only do we not train pioneering leaders; we do not even do a very good job of identifying them. A clergyperson in one regional meeting asked, *“Does our system screen out leaders who are creative or in some way (even racially) different from the norm?”* Concern was also expressed that *“there needs to be more discernment about what individual seminarians need to help them be effective leaders. Who is responsible for doing this?”*

Many church members are critical of what they think is a preoccupation with ideology at the national level, and ineffective guidance from the dioceses. Throughout our research we have heard this criticism voiced, particularly in reference to seminaries and the national church. One priest in charge of diocesan deployment said, *“Training seminarians is the first thing I would fix.”* On the other side of the country, another group we interviewed expressed similar concerns: *“We don’t identify and train transformational leaders.” “Leadership formation is seriously lacking in the seminaries.”* There was recognition that leadership development requires lifelong learning and conviction that the church should be supporting this development, particularly for clergy. *“Competency comes as leaders are formed, and leaders need continually to be developed as leaders throughout their lives.”*

Confusion about Roles in the Midst of Transition

While there is a consensus about the *need* for leadership development in the Episcopal Church, for clergy *and* laity, our research revealed confusion about leadership roles. All mainline Christian denominations are in the midst of a shift in the theology and practice of ministry. A generation ago, the corporate model dominated the way Americans did church, as well as the ways in which clergy were

formed and expected to operate. It was a professional model, with the clergyperson's expertise as the defining calculus of congregational life. Now, we see a movement from this top-down leadership in which the clergy are responsible for all ministry and worship to a collaborative style that builds teamwork between clergy and lay leaders. Calls abound for mutual support between clergy and laity and a broad understanding of ministry beyond the church and into the daily life and work of all believers. We hear that instead of conducting ministry on behalf of others, clergy must become the mentors of the ministry of others – helping them to discern their gifts, to train for ministry and to support laity in the practice of their ministry. Such a transition is difficult not only from the clergy side. Lay people are challenged by this fresh responsibility. They say they are uncertain how to live into their baptismal promises and must feel their way into more active leadership roles. This is a prominent instance of the confusion that surrounds leadership roles in the church. It has its roots in a shift in the balance of power between clergy and laity, effected by the church's recovery of the ministry of all the baptized.

Confusion about role and authority often leads to frustration. Our research has revealed the aggravation many Episcopalians feel when they seek practical help from diocesan and national resources and find it lacking. While most respondents saw their congregations increasing in strength, they were critical of judicatories and the national church. They described their links with wider structures as ineffectual and growing weaker. *"We don't feel very connected to the diocese but we don't like to talk about it,"* said one woman in the Midwest.

Often the negativity expressed by both lay people and clergy, was laced with dependency and passivity. From a priest, the desire to be sought after rather than take initiative: *"Why can't the diocese be attentive to our wisdom, to what we've learned?"* A midwestern group of lay people were offended by a diocesan Christian Education consultant who *"was trying to tell us what to do."* When pressed, they acknowledged that sometimes they could not be self-sufficient. Their language took on a tone of helplessness and dependency: *"The diocese keeps telling us to just tell them what we need. Well, why don't they tell us what is out there? Why don't they help us to think about what we're trying to ask for, then tell us what our options might be?"*

Many respondents expressed distrust of diocesan and national leaders. National and diocesan conventions were singled out for being irrelevant to congregational concerns and prone to invite controversy. A senior leader in one congregation who had participated in several diocesan and national conventions asked, *"Who plans those agendas, and what in the world are they thinking? Can't we spend the time on what we really care about in congregations? We are searching for good ideas about developing missions and carrying out ministries, about engaging newcomers and teaching our children, about leading and serving and growing. I hope we can find ways to learn practical things from each other and grow together in faith, instead of debating right versus left political issues and voting things up or down. That certainly has nothing to do with us."*

It is often the case these days that lay people bring leadership experience from their professional lives. When they find ineffective habits and behavior of those in positions of church responsibility they become frustrated. One respondent, an executive, said (perhaps with Robert Greenleaf or Max DePree's principles of servant leadership in mind⁶), "*Businesses are recognizing the importance of servant leadership and teamwork, but the church hierarchy seems stuck in the past and incapable of change...They don't have a clue about what we are facing or learning or needing.*" Such criticism was heard often. It reflects concern among people who love the church. Most participants in our discussions were lay leaders who expect high ideals and practices that befit religious leadership.

II LAY LEADERS

"A School's Commitment to Diversity, Community and Spiritual Formation"

In one community in a southern diocese Episcopalians are exercising effective leadership that derives from a compelling call to mission. They have founded a school on principles that embrace diversity, faithfulness, community and collaboration. The school's story is one of struggles and successes inherent in every scholastic community. More importantly, it is the story of a faith community that employs a capacious definition of community.

An Episcopal priest in a local parish first envisioned this school ten years ago. Barriers soon appeared as skeptics complained that yet another private school in the area was not needed. Several years passed until two of the largest Episcopal congregations in the city began to collaborate on the vision of an inner city Episcopal school. The laity in these two churches was vociferous in their support. They formed a planning committee and focused their efforts on serving the area's children. They linked themselves with other churches and community groups to develop the idea.

Commitments to diversity, community and spiritual formation are the values of the school. School supporters said, "*We want the students to look like the population of (the city).*" "*The community is our campus,*" was a sentiment often voiced in discussion, as was the importance of the children's spiritual formation. One participant stressed, "*I really felt called to do this, right from the start.*"

Despite the lack of episcopal support and funding at the local and regional level, the congregations of these two churches held fast to their vision of giving the community an inner city private school and to its mission to serve the area's children. The laity networked outside diocesan structures. They recruited a consultant from the national church who instructed them on how to form a board of directors and created committees to manage tasks like raising money, finding land, and securing staff, including a headmaster.

The vision began to materialize when they hired an Episcopal priest as headmaster. He set about recruiting excellent staff and faculty. Supporters and parents in the school witnessed an ever-expanding

⁶ See Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1977), and Max DePree, *Leadership Jazz* (New York: Doubleday, 1992)

ownership of the vision with the entrance of each new member to the school community. One parent commented, *“Back when we heard about what was being planned we investigated it and came to the conclusion that the mission, plans and commitments fit our family’s values perfectly.”* The collaborative approach to the curriculum by the board, parents, and faculty exemplified the school’s values set forth by the founding community. The new curriculum produced a positive reputation for the school. In one year enrollment doubled and the school continues to see increases in applications.

The school’s leaders face a constant challenge in negotiating the complex relationship between diversity and funding. So steadfast is their conviction to diversity that it has meant turning away paying students. The board is committed to allocating 10% of the budget to scholarships, helping to insure the mandate that 20% of the student body reflect the city’s ethnicity and class diversity. *“Sometimes it’s very difficult to decline the paying ‘bird in hand’ and hold out for one that may well require financial aid to diversify a class. But that’s our commitment, and we’ve stuck to it.”*

The school is known for its inter-denominational and community partnerships from which it gains the use of a chapel, recreation facilities and art lessons. Students use the local “Y” and library, and attend nearby churches for chapel services every week. By pursuing its mission through partnerships, the school builds positive relations with community groups.

Throughout the formative stages of the school’s establishment, the board and committees experienced funding and real estate setbacks. Reflecting on the initial disappointments, respondents felt the benefits were greater than sacrifices made in the process, even if the result was not what they had foreseen. By prayer and deliberation they practiced fidelity to their vision and recognized opportunities appearing in their path. The lay leaders of two Episcopal congregations, along with community members and groups, galvanized around one vision: an inner city private Episcopal school with a mission to serve the children of the area. From committed lay leaders emerged a scholastic community devoted to Christian education.

Who are effective lay leaders and how do they lead?

Effective lay leaders are individuals who understand their identity as disciples set apart by their baptism, to grow in Christ and bring him to the world. Their understanding of religious leadership is rooted in their Christian identity and exercised in the ministry they covenanted with God and the Christian community to do when they made their baptismal vows.

Effective lay leaders exercise religious leadership by:

- actively sharing leadership with the clergy
- initiating and sustaining a hospitable and open community
- identifying their own and others’ gifts for ministry
- partnering and networking within communities to do mission

The “lay movement” has been influenced by the liturgical renewal of the twentieth century. The 1979 Book of Common Prayer “reflects the theological and liturgical legitimacy of increased lay participation.”⁷ As one respondent stated, “*Who we are is defined on page 855 of the Book of Common Prayer. We are the ministers of the church: laity, deacons, priests and bishops.*” The rise of emphasis on the ministry of all the baptized, and the shift from institutional loyalty to individual spiritual pilgrimage, encourages the laity to take responsibility for their own spirituality and ministry.⁸ The Episcopal Church Foundation researchers found empowered lay people in search of tools to increase the efficacy of their ministry in the world. As one respondent noted, “*I’ve become more confident about the ability of communities to take charge of their own destinies; it strengthens and confirms your faith.*” Lay people “taking charge” of their spiritual and communal lives represents a major shift in Episcopal life.

The church follows a trend that is already present in corporate America. Lay people in interviews reported that in their jobs they find old corporate patterns replaced by an emphasis on teams, quality circles, and front-line decision making. Many Episcopal laity become dissatisfied because denominational structures lag behind this trend. They are suspicious of diocesan structures, except in dioceses where the bishop articulates a clear vision, asks for input, listens and demonstrates congruence between actions and words. Thus, one finds lay people most engaged where teamwork and shared leadership are common.

- **Effective lay leaders exercise religious leadership by actively sharing leadership with clergy.**

When Episcopalians pause to consider the nature of their accomplishments, they are clear about what accounts for it: effective leadership from both laity and clergy. Laity and clergy can share leadership only when each is comfortable with its own identity and role. Effective lay leaders are individuals who are clear about their identity. As one respondent said, “*We are called to be disciples of Christ, to love everybody and find ways to serve them, including this community and all around us, especially those who are poor, vulnerable, needy, handicapped or lonely.*”

In the school’s case, the vision to create a private Episcopal school serving the inner city was urged by an Episcopal priest. However, the vision languished until two lay groups assumed ownership of it. It became a composite vision of parents, faculty and community leaders. Shared leadership between the clergy headmaster and the school’s lay people (board, faculty and parents) furthered collegiality between them. From the project’s inception, collaboration has distinguished the school’s life.

Leading effectively is arduous when shared leadership between laity and clergy is not an ideal upheld by all. Such instances remind us that there is still one foot in the old hierarchical tradition even as we step into the new paradigm of shared leadership. This reality was clearly evident as one church member noted

⁷ Fredrica Thompsett, “The Laity,” in The Study of Anglicanism eds. Stephen Sykes, John Booty and Jonathan Knight (London: SPCK, Holy Trinity Church, 1988) 285.

⁸ Thomas P. Holland and William L. Sachs, The Zacchaeus Project (New York: The Episcopal Church Foundation, 1999) 51.

the style of leadership practiced by his rector. *“He still insists on being the boss, telling everyone what to do and think. That’s a source of deep tension around here.”* Another group of lay leaders commented on their experience with an intractable clergy person committed to the hierarchical model, *“We wanted to be the sort of leaders who would involve others in mutually owned directions. Acceptance, involvement, engagement of everyone—that’s how you lead effectively. But the guy who was supposed to be the true leader just didn’t see it that way. He “knew” he heard the voice of God, and that was it.”*

With direction from clergy, it is the responsibility of the laity to grow into their identity as disciples and assume roles of shared leadership with the clergy. It is apparent that when laity become empowered and their identity elucidated, their preference is for collegiality and shared leadership. However, the movement away from a hierarchical mindset to that of a community ministering with and to one another is difficult to envision at times. The engagement of everyone through shared leadership is a means by which the most vital congregations operated, as Episcopal Church Foundation researchers found. Dennis Campbell in *Congregations as Learning Communities* asserts, “The church needs teams of clergy and laity, who will consistently and effectively recruit, train and empower people to carry out the ministry of the church in the community beyond the Sunday worship service.”⁹ Increasingly, people are realizing ministry cannot be reserved for clergy alone.

- **Effective lay leaders exercise religious leadership by initiating and sustaining hospitable, open community.**

Lay leaders see themselves as the ones responsible for keeping things open and moving. As one lay group announced after emerging from a period of dissatisfaction with their previous rector, *“We learned that we are the church, and that we aren’t dependent upon a priest for survival.”* A respondent in another parish offered this experience with an interim priest, *“He was into control with a capital “C” and that triggered so many problems among us...We really struggled to learn about and practice effective leadership....We tried to minimize the damage the interim spread.”*

Learning to live in community and learning to lead are life-long processes. “In our rapidly evolving religious scene, congregations that seek only to achieve some degree of stability, rather than constantly opening themselves to learning and responding to external change and internal change, will surely die or, at best, exist at a marginal level with little mission or ministry.”¹⁰ Effective lay leaders like those mentioned in the school narrative negotiate the complexities of living in community well. They opened themselves to non-profits, various churches and the immediate community while inviting others to join in the work of the school. A welcoming group in one parish understood implicitly its hospitable role: *“We get people engaged in a wide variety of projects. This is also a great training ground for leadership. We*

⁹Dennis G. Campbell, *Congregations as Learning Communities* (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 2000) 10.

¹⁰Ibid., 1.

want everyone to feel empowered to do the ministry they see as important.” Parishes with strong lay leadership never cease being persistent inviters of others.

- **Effective lay leaders exercise religious leadership by identifying their own and others’ gifts for ministry.**

Effective leaders see and call forth the natural gifts of others. Gift discernment by the school’s leaders was indispensable in order to recruit individuals for specific tasks and committee work. The headmaster exercised acumen when hiring faculty and staff. The faculty designed the school curriculum. The parents association chose parents within their group to volunteer and fund raise based on ability and interest.

Baptismal ministry has been crucial to a heightened awareness among lay people regarding their role and gifts for religious leadership. When people are empowered with clarity and definition about their identity, they are encouraged to offer their gifts. Formation is central to this process. Through Christian formation Episcopalians see that what they offer the church is necessary to its mission. Formation involves not only education, but also awareness about how God works in one’s life. Once there is an interior understanding of one’s relationship to God then one can encourage and recognize the gifts of others. A mark of an effective lay leader is that one implicitly knows the value and distinctiveness of one’s gifts. Effective lay leaders recognize their own Christian identity as disciples. They not only are formed continually themselves, but encourage this process in others.

- **Effective lay leaders exercise religious leadership by partnering and networking within communities to do mission.**

Verna Dozier and Celia Hahn, in The Authority of the Laity, raise the question of mission and ask, “What are we about? To what are we called? And what does that say about our basic understanding of ourselves?”¹¹ Our research revealed that effective lay leaders pursue networks and demonstrate initiative in search of solutions for community needs. They are open to fresh ideas and alternative solutions that will expand their vision of God working in their lives. One such lay group reflected on its journey: “*We’ve learned a lot about Christian leadership.... We’re seeing God at work here and experiencing grace. The Holy Spirit brings a bigger vision.*”

Networking is not new to Episcopalians. The Foundation’s 1999 *Zacchaeus Project* found evidence of networking throughout Episcopal congregations.¹² A variety of special interest networks exists across the Church. These develop lateral communication and offer forums for innovations. Many respondents commented on their history with other Episcopal churches in local and international initiatives and ecumenical partnerships. Collaboration and networking enable churches to have deeper and more sustained influence than when acting alone. Effective lay leaders challenge themselves to find deeper and more sustained influence in their communities, utilizing a variety of community resources. Leadership

¹¹ Verna Dozier and Celia Hahn, The Authority of the Laity (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 1982) 3.

¹² Holland and Sachs, The Zacchaeus Project, 41.

guru Ron Heifetz calls such strivings “adaptive challenges.” To make progress, not only must there be initiative to align reality with values, but the values themselves may have to change.¹³ Such efforts by lay leaders empower individuals and local churches to network in ways which suit the needs of individuals and communities. This flexibility enables them to re-vision intractable situations into opportunities.

How do we form lay leaders?

¹⁴ In her essay, “The Primacy of Baptism: A Reaffirmation of Authority in the Church,” Frederica Harris Thompsett argues that local experience and grassroots community play pivotal roles, contouring people’s understanding of mission and their formation as religious leaders. We have found that Episcopal lay leaders are faithful people. They hunger to go deeper in their faith. The emphasis on baptismal ministry in the last twenty-five years has expanded the role of laity in the church. “The formative identity conveyed in baptism provides the foundational and sustaining base for exercising authority within the local church and the world. [...]The primacy of baptism provides an ecclesiological identity for Anglican authority.”¹⁵ However, people express uncertainty about how to share leadership with clergy and how to confidently accept the mantle of religious leadership in community. Questions lay leaders raised included, how do we know when we are doing the right thing? How do leaders act? In other words, where and how do religious ideals meet concrete circumstances? Lay leaders in our interviews expressed explicit concern about insufficient attention to leadership formation from the church. As one respondent confessed, “*Developing stronger lay leadership is a major need. We want to be more effective leaders in the church and the world, but where is the preparation? I don’t think we’re just supposed to be junior priests. We have different roles.*”

Lay people often desire direction on how to manage the differences between leading in the church versus leading in their professions. The same western respondent said, “*But how do I practice my faith in my job, where power and authority are such issues? How do I practice my faith in my neighborhood and right here in church programs? I hope there will be resources to help us become better leaders.*”

Historically, churches have been repositories of opportunity for people to learn about civic engagement and acquire leadership skills. “Religiously active men and women learn to give speeches, run meetings, manage disagreements and bear administrative responsibility.”¹⁶ Today, however, instead of working within the confines of the local congregation, diocese or national church, Episcopalians consult other denominations, conferences, and networks for ideas and resources. Networks of small groups

¹³ Heifetz, 35.

¹⁴ Frederica Harris Thompsett, “The Primacy of Baptism: A Reaffirmation of Authority in the Church” in Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century eds. Ian T. Douglas and Kwok Pui-Lan. (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2001) 255.

¹⁵ Thompsett, 251.

¹⁶ Robert D. Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 66.

gathered around a common ethos or program such as Total Ministry, Stephen Ministry, Alpha, Cursillo, Faith Alive and Lydia Prayer Groups empower their members by offering direct experience, specific skills training, and by displaying models of shared leadership and reciprocity.

Nancy Rosenblum in Membership and Morals says about small groups: “This is ‘grassroots’ organizing and taking into account the ceaseless proliferation of new groups, leadership is astonishingly widespread.”¹⁷ The grassroots organizing of these networks in congregations connect people gathered around a common interest, provide community and offer leadership formation. Small groups are constitutive of religious capital because they invite lay people to assume leadership positions in safe, non-judgmental environments. Extending the invitation to someone to deepen his or her involvement is crucial to leadership formation. Interviews reveal people are more empathetic, and bolder, when speaking about their faith and spirituality because of their involvement in small groups. They employ skills learned in small groups in their workplaces and at home. One Stephen Minister offered, “*Stephen Ministry makes one step outside the boundaries, outside of the church and outside of old behavior.*”

Christian leadership formation concerns from laity in the Episcopal Church are focused around learning to live within a new vision of community in which there is consensus on the identities and roles of all ministers of the church. Lay leaders long to integrate Christian faith with daily life in their contexts.

III PRIESTS

“We Are God’s Children First”

Just across the road and 100 yards from each other in a city in the southeast, stand two Episcopal churches – one historically black and the other white. The white church is over 150 years old and has a membership of about 400 families, while the black congregation is 80 years old and has a membership of about 75. The rector of the older church has been there eight years.

The black church is directly adjacent to a state university, a historically black institution whose first president was an Episcopalian. He led the development of this church as a resource to the students of the university, and soon this congregation drew the elite of the local African-American community. From about 1940 to 1960, a Caucasian priest served both congregations, although members of either group rarely attended services of the other. The present rector is an African-American priest from the Caribbean who has worked in other U.S. dioceses.

Soon after the rector arrived at the white church efforts to develop closer relationships between the two congregations were renewed. However, such activities expanded notably when his colleague came to the black church 3 years ago. A deep commitment to scriptural admonitions to live in unity and love among all Christians motivates both priests. *“We are called to be examples of reconciliation to*

¹⁷ Nancy Rosenblum, Membership and Morals (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 361.

others through our own behavior and relationships with one another. We are God's children first and only then members of other groups. The Bible tells us to love one another. There is just no way that the sin of racial prejudice and separation is acceptable in God's sight," they agreed.

Members of both congregations have joined these efforts with enthusiasm and hopefulness. Their vestries have met together periodically for the past three years, and Lenten services and meals are held together, alternating each week between sites. The congregations collaborate in providing a community soup kitchen, and they are developing a shared youth program. The larger white church is recruiting physicians and nurses to join their counterparts in running a free health clinic at their neighboring church across the street. The two priests fill in for each other as needed, and they are planning regular pulpit rotations. Newspaper ads for holy day services include information about both churches, and soon the Episcopal Church signs on roads coming into town will include both places. The two congregations intend to demonstrate Christ's love to others in the community through loving one another.

Members of both churches hope to jointly establish an Episcopal K-12 school. Each congregation is taking steps to purchase adjoining property that will allow plans to proceed. Meanwhile they plan an after-school program that will include volunteer mentors and teachers for local children. The experiences with these programs will lay the groundwork for efforts to establish a school. In the coming year, both congregations also intend to collaborate with other churches in the community to establish a homeless shelter, work on Habitat for Humanity houses, and develop a recovery center for persons with addictions.

The diocese has been very supportive of the collaborative efforts of these two congregations. The diocesan bishop has stressed unity, emphasizing that the body of Christ should not be torn by the "divorcementality" of the popular culture. *"Each of us was invited into the house by God's grace,"* explained the African-American rector, *"so none of us has any right to tell another he shouldn't be there too."* These two congregations together nominated the diocese's suffragan bishop to that position because of his work on behalf of racial reconciliation, and they have appreciated his support of their efforts in this community.

Who are priests?

In the past thirty-plus years, beginning perhaps with Terry Holmes' book, The Future Shape of Ministry¹⁸, the nature and theology of priesthood and the practice of ordained ministry have been the subject of increasing scrutiny and debate. Confusion about identity and role seem to be the institutional manifestations of this conundrum: "There is abundant conversation and question about the meaning of call, especially call to ordained ministry. People have a sense of God calling them [...] but people are not sure what that call means or how to heed the voice itself."¹⁹

¹⁸ Urban T. Holmes III, The Future Shape of Ministry: A Theological Projection, (New York: Seabury, 1971).

¹⁹ Lemler, "Jesus Calls Us, O're the Tumult..."

One complaint in the debate is that the professionalization of ministry has created reliance on social science categories for understanding priestly identity and activity. Moreover, popular fascination with the ideas and methods found in secular leadership literature runs the same danger – if that is the only point of reference for regarding leadership in the church today. However, there is a deeper locus for debate and it has to do with the theology of priesthood and its underlying ecclesiology. “...No ordained Christian minister can function without an ecclesiology. As clergy or ministers we receive our authority for ministry from Christ through the Church. Therefore we must grasp the theological credentials – the defining ecclesiological characteristics – of the Church that has bestowed on us the authority to minister word, sacrament and pastoral care in the name of Christ.”²⁰ Many Episcopalians today are asking serious questions about the meaning and identity of ordained ministry. Concerns are particularly acute when young people, people of color and non-European descent, are so under-represented in the ranks of the ordained. Who shall be invited to consider a call to ordination? How is that call nurtured and formed? What identity will it assume in active ministry and how can it continue to grow and develop so that God’s mission in and through the church is advanced?

In an issue of The Sewanee Theological Review devoted to the topic of ministry, Leander Harding offers the opinion that “a chief reason why the church and its ordained ministry are having trouble responding effectively to changes in society is a lack of clarity or conviction about the nature and meaning of holy orders and the church.”²¹ Harding thinks we are confused about salvation, which is the point, after all, of the church’s existence:

We do not know what salvation is, and yet we are looking for it almost everywhere except the parish church. We expect almost anyone to be its minister except the parish priest. The result is that we inhabit the forms of the church without understanding their meaning....The church ceases to be a matter of God saving us by sharing the divine life with us. Instead, the church becomes the organization for those who have been saved and are Bible-believing, or those who believe in empowerment and liberation, or those who are on a journey.²²

In considering priorities in the development of an Anglican polity, Daniel W. Hardy suggests that the church ought to order itself for the sake of mission. “... (T)he Church must identify and refine its priorities if it is to be true to itself in its mission to the world today. It is vital to recognize that it can do so only through the fullest engagement both with the gospel and with the multiple dimensions of life in the world today – material, biological, social, economic, political and cultural – and not by self-enclosure in its own frame of reference. The Church is most itself where the most intensive understanding of the gospel meets the world as it is now known and developed.”²³ Anglicans emphasize that the transformative

²⁰ Paul Avis, The Anglican Understanding of the Church: An Introduction, (London, SPCK, 2000), 7.

²¹ Leander S. Harding, “The Power and Dignity of the Priesthood,” Sewanee Theological Review 43:2 (2000), 200.

²² Harding, 200-201.

²³ Daniel W. Hardy, Finding the Church (London: SCM Press, 2001), 151.

activity of the Eucharistic community orders the church's priorities and establishes the imperative for ordained leadership: "Those who preside over this fourfold operation (of the Eucharist) are those appointed to be servants to it. From a deep wisdom of God's purposes, they guide corporate behavior within the Eucharistic enactment of community for the mediation of God's purposes in and for the world. In such 'celebration' of God's life among them, the 'servant leader' exercises a priestly role..."²⁴

While full discussion of these matters is outside the purview of the "soundings" offered in this report, points at issue in the theological debate surrounding ordination and ecclesiology need recognition because the debate is part of the context for our reflections. It relates to this study because often in our interviews people seem to think of the church and its ministry as good and important ends in themselves, but not as a means to the end of their own and the world's salvation.

Who are priests as leaders?

People who are active in Episcopal churches often share with us their excitement over awakened vitality in their congregations and describe how their clergy lead them in building deepened religious community. These clergy do so by telling stories about things they have accomplished. As they interpret the meaning of the ferment we are reporting they give particular examples of the leadership that made a difference. James Lemler says: "Ordained leadership requires many gifts to be called forth. There are traditional gifts of intellect, insight, and theological depth which are necessary. There is a need for the foundational gifts of faith, hope and love at the core of leadership."²⁵ And, Lemler says, there are particular gifts for leadership that are also required: a passion for mission and an entrepreneurial spirit, relationship building, vision negotiation and conflict management skills, spiritual vitality, sensitivity to context, mutuality, a learning stance, communication capacities, flexibility and servanthood.²⁶ Many of the gifts for leadership that he cites are ones that have been corroborated in our research. We heard them described in cramped church basements and beautifully appointed parlors, in Sunday school classrooms and rector's offices, in every region that we visited and in nearly every gathering of faithful Episcopalians who gave us their time and shared with us their thoughts. Setting aside the gamut of church politics, they told us of the leaders they need, having experienced this need through either deficit or abundance.

- **Priests lead by example, inspiring parishioners to take risks and attempt new ministries.**

The two churches in our opening vignette might have been across the country from one another, rather than just across the street, so scant was their affiliation until just a few years ago. It was through the

²⁴ Hardy, 156-157.

²⁵ Lemler, "Jesus Calls Us, O're the Tumult..."

²⁶ Lemler, "Jesus Calls Us, O're the Tumult..."

efforts of their respective clergy, and the convictions these men held about unity in Christ's Body, that enabled each congregation to begin relating to the other. Both priests had strong views about the sin of racism, beliefs that when publicly stated, were threatening to others and put themselves at some risk.

Led by their two rectors, these congregations have ventured into a rich relationship that strengthens each one. Shared adult education, outreach projects, youth ministry, health clinic, and advertising demonstrate that they are stronger together than either would be separately. They have each retained their autonomy and identity, yet through cooperation they witness to the unity to which God calls the whole church. These clergy lead by example, demonstrating to their congregations by collaboration with one another that ancient prejudices can be reconciled in Christ.

- **Priests lead in context. They are aware of the communities in which their congregations dwell and see mission to these communities as essential ministry.**

These priests are located in an urban setting in the Deep South where the history of their congregations mitigated against cooperation, yet they risked being Christ to one another and to the needy community in which they live. As these priests built a collegial relationship, their congregations responded in kind, with enthusiasm and hopefulness, engaging in a variety of shared ministries.

Knowing the complexities of race in America, the two congregations are not naïve about the work that still lies before them. *"The recent immigration of numerous Latin Americans and Asians have added to the racial, ethnic, and class tensions, all highlighting how far short of God's will for us we continue to fall,"* a participant in one focus group observed. *"There are some people of every race who are elitists and will never trust or accept anyone from another, whatever our efforts."* Rather than letting this stop them, these parishioners, like their clergy, are remarkably self-differentiating, shaping the viewpoint they espouse in a theological frame: *"Rather than criticizing anyone else, our task is to deal with the fears and shortcomings within ourselves, find forgiveness, and then demonstrate how to live as God wants. Each of us fears losing our identity and security, being overcome by those different from us. Only in Christ's love can we find the foundation of security that will enable us to overcome such limitations."*

- **Priests encourage, support and build upon lay initiative.**

In another parish focus group in the same diocese, members described themselves as *"traditional Episcopalians,"* comfortable in passive repetition of familiar customs of deference to leadership exercised primarily by the clergy and a few senior businessmen. Soon after the arrival of their current rector, a couple of parishioners attended a Cursillo weekend. When they returned with a desire to involve other parishioners and to exercise more leadership themselves, the rector encouraged them. He was not threatened by their initiative; rather, he built upon it, channeling their awakened awareness into leadership and spiritual development programs that opened new possibilities for growth to others in the parish.

- **Priests are engaged in Christian formation as teachers and spiritual guides, helping parishioners discern vocation, gifts, and ministries suitable for those gifts.**

The experiences of renewal from Cursillo and faithful follow-up to the weekend, together with a series of workshops on leadership by the rector, brought new vitality to these Episcopalians. Our priest “*is a great teacher and guide on practical skills of leadership,*” they agreed. “*He focuses on helping us identify our spiritual gifts and apply them to developing the ministries we are called to do.*” The vestry enthusiastically decided to make his course on lay leadership a requirement for service on the vestry. The course includes biblical examples of leadership, Christ’s example of mission and service, gifts discernment, responsibilities and skills of leaders, demonstration of one’s faith in the practice of his or her ministry, and the need for ongoing learning and growth. One participant described her efforts to develop a soup kitchen as an example of how the leadership formation facilitated by her priest has resulted in concrete ministry efforts. “*As I completed the course on spiritual gifts, I came to the realization that (the soup kitchen) was my calling,*” she explained.

By virtue of this priest’s teaching he is forming Christians, helping them identify, define, and live into their call to be Christ’s presence in the world. He uses practical steps – adult education classes, gifts discernment, identifying ministries, inviting parishioners into these endeavors and helping the community do this for one another. Nine other ministries in this congregation developed as a direct result of the Cursillo experience, the ongoing practice of its spirituality, and the rector’s leadership workshops. The parish now has a full-time coordinator for lay ministry development. Church attendance has increased, and most importantly, these lay folks are living into their baptismal covenant in new and vital ways.

How do priests lead?

In most congregations the clergy leader remains pivotal. This is particularly the case in pastoral or program size churches, the size of most Episcopal congregations. Generally people are fond of their clergy. We heard many stories of appreciation, admiration, respect and confidence from parishioners about their priests. However, we were interested in getting beneath such generalities to understand how these clergy lead. What is it that priests do that represents effective leadership? To date our research has focused on situations where full time, paid clergy serve a single congregation. Where models of shared ministry/total ministry/mutual ministry prevail, different data may emerge on how priests in these congregations function as leaders.

- **Effective clergy create opportunities for ongoing leadership formation.**

One person in a parish focus group was prescriptive about the need for clergy to be catalytic in leadership formation. “*The clergy need to give guidance, direction, but not to be a dictator. The laity have to make it happen but the clergy have to keep you on course.*” In speaking about how linkages were made, a second person responded, “*The clergy and the diocese should help us find our commonalities.*” In another group, someone observed that with a new clergy start in a congregation, the sense of possibility

opens in a unique way. *“When clergy are new they help you to take a fresh look. The clergy have to spot talents and help people realize them. It is a form of discernment.”*

- **Exemplary clergy leaders prize guidance over control.**

Respondents in a western diocese related their epiphanies about shared leadership: *“One great thing she (our Rector) said was that the job of the pastor or the priest was not to pastor, that’s the job of the laity. The job of the priest is to teach us how to do that...for me it was like a big ‘a ha’.”* In some places clergy said they felt exhausted by the demands and projections of parishioners. These were often congregations with dependency needs focused on their clergy leaders. However, in places where clergy felt vital and engaged, and not exhausted, the difference was seen in good self-care, a sound relationship with their bishop and other colleagues, shared leadership with others, an ability to let go control and be willing to let some things fail. Apart from egregious misconduct, difficulty between congregation and clergy often has its root in a dictatorial style. This can happen regardless of church size or style.

- **Priests in leadership roles influence the relationship between the congregation and extra-parochial structures.**

Clergy are also very influential in shaping the opinion congregations have of the diocese and/or the national church. A group in a southeastern diocese told a sad tale of a retired priest and his wife who were so divisive of a group trying to establish a congregation that the budding group split apart. This priest voiced his doubts about interactions with the bishop’s staff, telling the group that the diocesan staff was *“harmful to our people and their faith.”* Characteristic of the bullying, controlling style that not only turns lay people off but is actually abusive, he exploded publicly at one of the leaders of the effort to build a new congregation, telling her to *“stop trying to get people to follow the bishop’s party line. We know our situation and he doesn’t.”* The congregational meeting turned into a “show-down,” leaving the founding group wounded, but still together, and floundering now for direction.

In a large discussion group of leaders from parishes throughout one diocese, the question was posed, “In what ways do clergy influence the congregation?” Three breakout groups came up with the following attributes: it is the priest’s job to provide inspiration and empower others; priests need to communicate with the diocese and to “know the ropes;” parishioners want their clergy to know them on a deep level, to address the needs of individuals and families and to be motivators.

- **Capable priests stress partnerships in the community.**

In congregations that have connections to other Episcopal churches in the same geographic area, or significant involvement in their communities, it was most often the clergy who initiated the contact and nurtured the relationship. When asked about their linkage to a Lutheran congregation, one responder in a Midwestern focus group said, *“Our parish builds links through our rector. She’s busy. For example we are beginning times of co-worship with a Lutheran church.”*

In a southern diocese, three churches in the same geographic area had a history of competition. A member of one of the churches described an *“atmosphere among the three churches (that) was one of suspicion, distrust and competition. Many people seemed to assume that if any one church was strong, it was a threat to the other two because it would siphon off their members.”* This scarcity thinking turned to abundance thinking when, in a short period, all three congregations called new clergy. The new priests encouraged strong lay leaders in each parish to take on leadership roles. When the bishop suggested that the three congregations in ailing health might combine into one large one, no one wanted any part of that idea. It was the catalyst to begin building successful relationships among the three congregations.

Formation Concerns for Priests

Most people in groups throughout the country say that an important skill they look for from clergy is the training of other leaders. The related question that repeatedly comes up is where do clergy learn to do this essential training of leaders? Leadership as science or art is not taught in most seminary programs. More entrepreneurial clergy will find non-church resources, or continuing education opportunities and/or professional reading, making adaptations from the corporate world to congregational settings. However, we are left to wonder, if this skill is so important to the leadership clergy provide in congregations, why, then, is it not a priority in the training of clergy? “People who sense a call must be allowed to probe that call with all of its passion and yearning by considering its manifestation in the work of leadership. The Church itself no longer has the luxury of assessing call without rooting that assessment in the framework of leadership.”²⁷

In 2000 the Episcopal Church was one of 41 faith groups participating in the Faith Communities Today (FACT) study conducted by Hartford Seminary. The study surveyed over 14,000 congregations, claiming to represent 90% of worshippers in the United States. Over seven-hundred Episcopal churches participated in the study. Among fourteen attributes of clergy, Episcopal clergy rated strongest on care giving, which is not highly correlated with strength and growth in a congregation. “The things that Episcopal church leaders do best are *not* the things that are most associated with church strength. Episcopal clergy tend to provide the basics of pastoral leadership rather than the qualities that help a church become very strong.” The FACT Study identifies a relationship between strong congregations and knowing how to get people to work together and having a clear vision for the congregation.²⁸

The Episcopal Church Foundation’s research corroborates this. We have developed extensive data from interviewing parishioners who have described what leadership qualities of their clergy are most important to the congregation. It is true that clergy who have a vision for ministry and the ability to get

²⁷ Lemler, “‘Jesus Calls Us O’re the Tumult’...”.

²⁸ C. Kirk Hadaway, “A Report on Episcopal Churches in the United States” (The Office of Congregational Development, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, the Episcopal Church, April, 2002), 73.

things done are in strong congregations. However, our research indicates that size is not a *necessary* correlate of vigor. We have found that congregations large and small, characterized by vitality within and connectedness without, have clergy who identify the gifts of others, recruit, motivate, encourage, and support them in deepening their spiritual growth and focus on mission. They share leadership, attend to relationships, model the behavior they invite from others, and encourage ongoing leadership formation.

Despite current fascination with church size, bigger does not mean healthier. It is true that larger congregations have more resources. Nevertheless, the health of Episcopal congregations and the capabilities of their leaders are functions of more factors than knowing how to get people to work together and having a clear vision. These are necessary, not definitive.

We believe that clergy must be catalysts and vision casters, set goals for mission, and model cooperation. Healthy clergy tend their relationship to God and others. Priests must have a clear sense of vocation – their own and their parishioners. They must connect the activity of their ministry with a theology of all the baptized and ground it in a meaningful theology of priesthood. The vocations of lay and ordained must be reciprocal; the gifts of all God’s people in their ministries convey Christ’s love.

IV BISHOPS

“Failing and Succeeding Together as a Community”

*“Fail forward. If we're going to fail, we'll do it in the right direction,”*²⁹ is a certain bishop’s beloved refrain often repeated in the diocese he serves. Though a relatively new bishop, he is a disciple of the mission strategy of Bishop Claude Payne, and he has been a parish priest who knows the benefits of the community failing and succeeding together.

An emphasis on leadership training and development is a hallmark of his style. Initiatives such as the College for Presbyters and Diocesan Rally Days were praised by respondents as critical to effecting change and empowering present and future leaders. These gatherings encourage a new culture of mission in the diocese, a culture founded on one church, not 53 churches. His equal emphasis on lay and clergy leadership development is evident in the endorsement people express. As one layperson remarked, *“Then there’s the importance of our bishop’s leadership retreats. He invites vestries. His remarks help to set the framework and to clarify what we need to do and why.”* His leadership conferences gather parishes of similar sizes to share stories and to offer ideas for surmounting similar challenges. It is a built-in support network. Clergy praise the bishop’s efforts as well. One rector commented, *“The College for Presbyters is the best thing in this diocese... (The bishop) is taking it to the next level. He is bringing in good people from the outside. It says to me if you’re gonna transform the diocese, you gotta get the priests.”*

²⁹ Carol Barnwell, “Sense of Urgency Reflected in Third Clear Vision Conference,” Episcopal News Service, November 2000 <<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ens/2000-213.html>>.

Creating a wide sense of ownership in the diocese is integral to his vision of service to local churches. As one respondent said, *“The bishop emphasizes that we are all one church together, sharing resources and ideas to serve the larger mission of evangelism and outreach. We have Marys and Marthas, and all the gifts are important to the overall effort.”* His vision for the diocese is of one, faithful, mission-oriented church, committed to transforming lives and reaching out to the “unchurched.” People recognize and affirm the transformation: *“There is a new culture of service to parishes that is really appreciated... There are a lot of new opportunities for us to share with each other.”*

Lay and clergy alike see the bishop setting a positive model. The familiarity people displayed with the bishop’s activities and persona reflects his accessibility. The diocesan staff echoed these same sentiments: *“People have started waking up. The bishop is going everywhere... People have a real sense of who the bishop is - he is approachable.”* People say he models faith. He stresses expectation, articulating personal and corporate transformation in the diocese. He emphasizes shared responsibility as all members work to change the culture from one of maintenance to mission. The style is reminiscent of creative nonprofit and corporate leadership. It emphasizes diversity, relationships and reaching marginalized populations.

Who are bishops?

In an article in *The Anglican Theological Review*, The Very Rev. James C. Fenhagen suggests that bishops’ roles today are fraught with ambiguity and confusion, not unlike their cohorts in lay and priestly ministry. But it is clear that the bishop’s “role grows out of, not apart from, the community.”³⁰ Bishops are called more than ever to build community on the basis of the church’s faith and tradition.

The primary task of an effective episcopal leader is to re-envision and build religious community. Bishops change the diocesan culture by fostering a culture of service to congregations, a culture that expects personal and communal transformations.

Bishops exercise religious leadership and build community by:

- casting or supporting a vision
- modeling a confident identity in Christ
- nurturing the Christian and leadership formation of diocesan members, believing and expecting to see the work of God in people’s lives
- communicating the full panorama of Christian mission and identity

Bishops re-envision community first by initiating relationships with those individuals who may feel or have historically felt marginalized. Bishops achieve this in part by listening to the peripheral voices and sending staff out to people on the geographical and theological outskirts of the diocese.

³⁰ James C. Fenhagen, “The Bishop and the Diocese in a Time of Change: Reconnecting Function and Symbol in the Episcopal Church,” *Anglican Theological Review* LXXVII.1 (1995), 49.

Every bishop with whom Episcopal Church Foundation researchers spoke, articulated the need for a more mature and intimate version of community. Building and re-defining community are central to the work of episcopal leadership today. Congregations and diocesan staff throughout the country repeated this necessity. One Midwestern staff member said, *“Building up the whole diocesan household/family”* is the bishop’s emphasis. *“That means... every one of us must learn to care for others, learn how to be collegial and caring.”* This particular bishop, a woman, bolsters the family atmosphere by including the deanery deans in baptisms and confirmations. Sacramental celebration is truly a diocesan family affair. Other diocesan staff expressed similar sentiments about concerted efforts to change the culture: *“We’re trying to build local networks of mutual engagement.... People at greater distances tend to feel they receive less attention. We are being very careful to travel there often, repeat invitations to them to serve on committees, listen to them, show we care, go when asked and other times too. But it’s just a part of the culture to be distrustful to people who are far away.”* Entrenched cultural biases and mistrust do not dissipate without recovery work within congregations. Feelings expressed such as the following plainly transmit the acute need for cultural changes in many dioceses: *“The previous bishop tried to be an authority figure, and that just generated backlash and distrust. The new bishop is very different. He recognizes what he has to overcome, and he is really trying to be a resource for us, not a controller.”*

Cultural changes begin in relationships. Attending to the specific concerns of *all* ministers in the church is a means by which bishops change the culture. Time spent with bishops results in noticeable differences in the way people perceive their situations and their abilities to change their circumstances. A layperson in a Midwestern diocese commented on the culture shift resulting from the bishop’s efforts: *“I sense a big change. The diocese is making an effort. It is trying to include. The diocese tries to vary where meetings are held.... So there is a big difference now.”* Some bishops promote a family atmosphere by convening groups of priests and/or lay people for discussion on local situations they face. Events such as leadership conferences and the Diocesan Rally Day mentioned in the introductory narrative promote community and aid in the disintegration of barriers between congregations. Other bishops, specifically women bishops, rely on one-to-one exchange, or work within small groups to build community.

Another bishop spoke of her commitment to priests: *“I spend a lot of time with the clergy, individually and in groups....I bring them together several times a year to build a stronger sense of community among them. The attitudes of the clergy really set the tone of relationship with the diocese.”* When people feel the bishop has heard and met their concerns then support is reciprocated. Priests support the bishop by encouraging diocesan participation among lay people. Clergy support of the diocese is crucial since researchers found clergy attitudes strongly influence lay people’s opinions of the diocese.

Bishops who are transforming cultural realities are building community by serving local congregations. They lead by communicating a shared vision, modeling a Christian identity, emphasizing in word and action Christian leadership formation, and urging people to embrace mission.

- **Bishops exercise religious leadership by casting or supporting a vision.**

Two distinct approaches to vision emerged from the research. The opening story illustrated one approach to vision shared by bishops who practice the Clear Vision model. These bishops cast a vision for the diocese. In the story, the vision of the diocese was based on a missionary model of the church, of becoming one church not however many churches are in the diocese. Other dioceses communicate this same vision, following in the model of The Rt. Rev. Claude E. Payne, retired bishop of the Diocese of Texas. Many times a means to fulfilling this vision is through capital and growth campaigns. In one western diocese a layperson said, *“Currently the diocese is running the capital campaign. The bishop has a church growth plan. He gives the tools to the local congregations. Now the diocese asks how it can help us.”* This style of vision casting is independent, visionary, direct, and more often, characterizes the style of male bishops.

Another perspective on the vision-holder is the bishop who acts as a fulcrum for the vision. Bishops hold up the vision and support it instead of casting it diocesan-wide. In this model bishops serve as discerners of the vision they hear “bubbling up” from the diocese. Our conversations with women bishops indicate that they tend toward this style. They listen for the vision from the grassroots. One bishop who exercises this style said about her election as bishop: *“It certainly wasn’t that I brought any sort of specific plan or vision for their future; rather, I focused more on building strong relationships, better understanding, and bridges among people. I’m aware that some other candidates offered a specific plan for what they’d do and what they proposed as a future of the diocese. That wasn’t my approach at all.”* Another bishop said she is a listener for the vision that is already there. She holds it up, repeats what she is hearing and asks if her version resonates with the diocese’s version. *“Does this sound like us?”* she asks them. She adds, *“My vision is that we will discover it together.”* This approach is relational, collaborative, communal and representative of an emergent leadership style seen in our sample of women bishops.

- **Bishops exercise religious leadership by modeling a confident identity in Christ.**

James Lemler reflects on the interior and personal character of the leader: “Leadership emerges from the passionate beliefs and values of the leader and of the community. It is rooted in the meaning and attunement of the leader’s own inner self.”³¹ Inner work and spiritual practice is essential to religious leadership. “... The leader must give evidence of personal authenticity, and must suggest strategies for finding spiritual vitality.”³² One bishop commented on spiritual practices in her role as leader, *“I pray for every church and every priest in the diocese by name every day, and when I’m with them, I try to practice active listening and attentiveness.”* In another diocese members remarked on the bishop’s self-awareness saying that he knows his strengths and limitations and fills in the gaps where necessary. The personal modeling of faith by these bishops characterizes religious leadership.

³¹ James B. Lemler, “ ‘Jesus Calls Us, O’er the Tumult’ ...”.

³² Sachs and Holland, Restoring the Ties That Bind, 171.

Religious leadership must reflect the fruits of spiritual practice, self-awareness and wholeness that are born from “deep radical play” among the shadows and light within. Jay A. Conger, in Learning to Lead, claims that there are two priorities associated with a leader’s credibility – the degree to which leaders can motivate people around a shared vision, and how they model the behavior expected from others.³³ People expect leaders to personally model their faith. In an issue of The Anglican Theological Review devoted to the episcopal office, Bishop Fred Borsch argues that clergy no longer blindly follow bishops based on the office. “They will be expected to show integrity of life (of word and action) that goes with the profession of their office and to demonstrate the effectiveness of their learning.”³⁴ Interior work deepens the nexus between personal modeling and spiritual practice. The relationship between these two is the authentic expression of personal identity.

- **Bishops nurture leadership development and the Christian formation of diocesan members, expecting to see the work of God in people’s lives.**

Bishops teach, create opportunities for people to share their conversion experiences, and serve as spiritual directors for the diocese, helping members understand who God is calling each of them to be. As teacher, the bishop must encourage Christian formation, through the process of life-long theological education and reflection by all the baptized. “By virtue of office, symbol and function, bishops are called to be teachers and exponents of the faith [...] a bishop shares with all human beings the need to articulate the ineffable experience of God, but is called and ordained to aid others in that articulation in the mode of theological dialogue, not monologue.”³⁵ Bishops intend to ensure that lay and clergy leaders understand their roles, give freedom to exercise informal and formal authority, and cultivate new generations of leaders. Emphasizing this teaching office of the bishop, particularly as it is exercised in conversation with other members of the diocese, modulates the potential of inappropriate use of power and control.

Bishops also cultivate leadership and spiritual formation by creating opportunities for people to share their transformational and conversion experiences. Formation begins with conversion and it is nurtured and enriched over a lifetime. Within this crucible of conversion the religious leader is developed. It is a place where spiritual formation and Christian leadership development are so tightly bound that they become almost indistinguishable. Schools for ministry, lay leadership training and colleges for presbyters are means by which bishops empower and support people in their ongoing conversion. People recognize and value opportunities to augment their own skills and competencies: “*The diocese has good ideas on engaging people and supporting them in carrying out their calling.*”

³³ Jay A. Conger, Learning to Lead: The Art of Transforming Managers into Leaders (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1992), 100.

³⁴ Borsch, Anglican Theological Review, 24.

³⁵ Craig B. Anderson, “Theological Method and Episcopal Vocation,” Anglican Theological Review LXXVII.1 (1995), 33.

Directing the growth of diocesan members by encouraging ongoing conversion requires the religious leader to act as spiritual guide; it is a form of leadership many clergy are called to exercise today. In fact, one bishop calls herself the “corporate spiritual director” for the diocese. The work of spiritual direction demands personal and corporate discernment. Attention to one’s own soul directly informs patterns of spiritual discernment in the diocese. No leader can begin to assist in another’s liberation before beginning the work for one’s self. Katherine Tyler Scott, President of Trustee Leadership Development emphasizes the “inner work” that is essential to the efficacy of the religious leader: “Effective leaders take journeys of self-discovery and growth, and serve as guides for others. They understand that they cannot lead where they have not gone [...] Who am I? Why am I here? What am I called to do? Who am I to serve? These are universal, spiritual questions—questions in need of processes that engage individuals and encourage them to go deep within.”³⁶

- **Bishops exercise religious leadership by communicating the full scope of Christian mission and identity.**

In The Future That Has Come: New Possibilities for Reaching and Growing the Grass Roots, Kennon L. Callahan reminds us that “Luther is grassroots. Calvin is grassroots. Francis of Assisi is grassroots. Wesley is grassroots. They all learned it from Jesus. Jesus is grassroots.”³⁷ Effective bishops cast and support vision that is grounded in a strong sense of mission; mission is largely carried out by those at the grassroots. As one respondent announced, “*your ministry is not with this congregation; your ministry is where ever you are.*” Effective bishops understand that each congregation’s mission should be a manifestation of gifts within a specific community.

As Callahan asserts, the power of the church is vivified at the grassroots. “Mission is grassroots because God’s grace is grassroots. God’s grace is not top-down. Mission is not top-down. Mission is serving and encouraging, not controlling and dominating.”³⁸ It is the work of the bishop to continually point to a wider view of what mission can look like in an inclusive church. Effective bishops challenge the diocese to realize the far-reaching implications that their words, personal modeling, and ministry have for the whole church. A respondent in the diocese featured in the opening story said, “*And I would say that our bishop has also set the tone for us. He has encouraged us to reach out to the “unchurched,”*” and another commented, “*The bishop is pushing us to be a living church, that’s a good thing.*” The bishop must challenge himself or herself to always uphold the most expansive view possible of Christian identity and mission. The bishop is the overseer, the steward of the “bigger picture.”

³⁶ Katherine Tyler-Scott, Trustee Leadership Development 6.4 (2001), 6.

³⁷ Kennon L. Callahan, The Future That has Come: New Possibilities for Reaching and Growing the Grass Roots (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 190.

³⁸ Callahan, 128.

Mission is about being part of a movement and not about hierarchical leadership or institutional structures. Movements encourage relationships, flexibility, initiative and mission. Respondents have named these same attributes as marks of effective leaders.

Formation and Challenges

How does one prepare to lead within a movement? Bishops begin by listening; accurately assessing people's needs and responding to them. Bishop Borsch asserts, "What people are clearly much less interested in are squabbles over standing or kneeling, turf battles and name calling. What they evidently will respond to are communities of sufficient trust and care, where, although voices may be raised out of deep concern and conviction, they will not find themselves or their own efforts to be faithful belittled."³⁹ Episcopalians repeatedly told researchers that they are least concerned with resolutions and diocesan conventions and most concerned about mission and the attention of the bishop to their needs.

A pertinent challenge for bishops is the exercise of their episcopal authority as outlined in the Ordinal, at the same time that they attend to a new paradigm based on shared leadership and authority. Of course, the locus of all authority, including episcopal, is in baptism:

*Authority grounded in baptism is also theologically formative for considering the exercise of episcopal authority. As noted in "Belonging Together," the Anglican Communion has inherited various models for episcopacy, including the "monarchical episcopate," and practices still vary widely throughout the Communion. One way ahead for bishops is to underscore the implications of baptism for the exercise of their authority. Bishop Sykes advises that *episcopate*, like all other expressions of Christian service, "must be first understood in relation to baptism."⁴⁰*

James Fenhagen maintains that confusion around the bishop's role is a result of spending substantive time and energy on a new theology for the laity and the priesthood apart from any companion work on the theology of the episcopate.⁴¹ The tension between the vision and the reality is most difficult to negotiate, particularly for newer bishops. The culture change mentioned earlier is about these competing paradigms. Bishops, it seems, especially new ones, must be increasingly mindful of when they slip into a "fix it" mode, characteristic of the hierarchical paradigm roundly criticized by respondents in this research.

Other challenges posed to bishops are specific to the geographic and demographic composition of their respective dioceses. One western diocese's biggest challenge is growth, people are arriving in droves. Understandably this bishop's leadership is focused on management, organizational structure and accommodating new realities. Other dioceses are in economically challenged areas, or are in periods of recovery due to past bishops' malfeasance or gross exercise of authority.

³⁹ Borsch, 17.

⁴⁰ Thompsett, "The Primacy of Baptism," 263.

⁴¹ Fenhagen, 49.

It seems no one is without an opinion on the competencies of their religious leaders. This respondent's criticism of his bishop strikes a familiar chord: *"Don't misunderstand—his emphasis has really been helpful in dealing with organizational growth, but the theological dimension is weak. Maybe it's too much to expect to have it all."* People in Episcopal dioceses know effective leadership when they see it. It is grassroots and mission focused. All of the bishops we interviewed are striving to place their relationships with local congregations at the center of their episcopal ministry, and from that contextual center build community anew in order to carry out the mission of the church.

V. THE NEW IDEALS OF LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

An important finding is apparent in this discussion: a new set of leadership ideals has emerged among Episcopalians. The historic roles of lay leader, priest and bishop are acquiring new meaning. We have uncovered fresh emphasis on the person of the leader, on the leader as one who acts within and for a Christian community, and as one who encourages the Christian formation of others. But do such ideals form a coherent approach to leadership? We believe the best perspective on the changing ideals of leadership, and how these ideals cohere for Episcopalians, comes from women's leadership. The impact of women on the church's life is profound. How women exercise leadership today reveals the strengths and shortcomings of the current approach. To understand women's influence, we must ask what women leaders bring to the church? Is there something distinctive about how women exercise leadership in their contexts? Or is their style an emergent one practiced by both men and women that has become more prevalent as systemic changes have allowed women to assume positions of leadership in all orders?

In her essay, "The Future of Religious Pluralism and Social Policy: Reflections from Lambeth and Beyond," Episcopal priest and scholar, Paula D. Nesbitt, reports the findings from her study of gender dynamics among Anglican bishops at the 1998 Lambeth Conference. She writes about the feelings of both men and women regarding the presence of women at Lambeth and the inherent changes women's inclusion has on leadership and relational dynamics:

The men thought that the women would bring a more egalitarian and collegial style of leadership which they also tended to prefer for their own leadership practices. They recounted how, over the past twenty or thirty years of their ministry, they had moved steadily in that direction from the hierarchical style traditionally prevailing in the church, and they regarded the presence of female bishops as a symbolic opportunity to change the leadership norms in a more relational direction. The female bishops perceived themselves and their female colleagues as bishops first and foremost, rather than "women bishops." They did describe their style, as a group, as being collegial and relational, and beyond that their use of such a style had something distinctive to offer the dynamics of the Lambeth meetings. They attributed this leadership style to a result of both gender socialization and the strategic experience of having to work in nontraditional ways on

their path to the episcopate. Both men and women saw this movement in a relational direction as redistributing the locus of power and facilitating social change.⁴²

Sharing reflections like these from the 1998 Lambeth Conference and posing the above questions to ourselves as a church is critical as more women actively pursue positions of lay and ordained leadership.

The Benedictine style of one female religious leader whom we interviewed communicates the centeredness and attentive listening often mentioned by members of the diocese she serves. Pressed for a summation of her approach to leadership, she replied, *“I see myself as the corporate spiritual director.”* Encouraging people toward a deep understanding of being God’s people is the heart of her ministry. *“I believe that the biggest issue we face is developing a clearer understanding of ourselves as God’s people in the midst of other difficult issues in society.”*

This bishop prescribes no formal vision for the diocese that is solely of her own making. Her approach focuses on being in relationship with people. When visiting congregations throughout the diocese she frequently invites the vestry and priest to a meal together and inquires about their vision for their community’s future. She said, *“It has been interesting to me that not one vestry has had clear answers to my questions about their own mission and vision. So, I continue to invite them into reflection and dialogue, looking and listening for their own answers, their call from God for their congregation.”* Her trust in local congregation’s competencies is evident. *“The vestry is composed of the leaders who should be leading the process, identifying that call and then acting on it consistently.”*

Her presence is a supportive one that embraces community and inclusiveness. According to diocesan staff, she has poured much of her time into reviving the deaneries and positioning them as the link between herself and the congregations. *“We’re doing confirmations at the deanery level now, and that is helping in some places to strengthen the idea that we are a corporate body, not just individual churches.”* Diocesan staff stated that her effort at strengthening the deaneries is another means by which she is building the diocesan household. They said, *“It will increase understanding of who we are and how our concerns are shared. We try to stress that we work for you, not impose on you.”* Building better relationships with clergy is especially important to her. Staff said, *“Improving the views and attitudes of clergy about the diocese is a great influence on the attitudes and actions of local members.”*

A fairly new bishop, her work in the diocese thus far has been defined by recovery and reconciliation. There is an undercurrent, both implicit and explicit in interviews, of distrust toward the diocese for past negligence. However, among staff and in communities where she has initiated fresh relationships there exists a spirit of hope and optimism. She is focused on the long term because, as she sees it, growth is difficult to perceive. *“My work is not to produce results so much as to be faithful to the process.”* Instead, she looks for *“energy, vitality, engagement, clarity of purpose and direction.”*

⁴² Paula D. Nesbitt, “The Future of Religious Pluralism and Social Policy: Reflections from Lambeth and Beyond” in *Religion and Social Policy* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2001), 251-252.

This bishop is a confident individual with high levels of personal awareness and intuition. Her self-assurance is evident in the invitations she extends to people for dialogue: “*A good example of all this is the controversy over homosexuality. Many of our people are divided over this issue and can’t get beyond it. I get criticized for not condemning it and my response is to invite dialogue and reflection on what our foundation is all about.*” The leadership of this bishop is rooted in a theological view of who she is as bishop and a relational style that expresses her sense of vocation.

Is women’s approach to leadership different from their male colleagues?

In Choosing to Lead: Women in the Crisis of American Values, Constance H. Buchanan examines the distinctiveness of women leaders, arguing that as their numbers increase in the public sector society will reap the benefits:

... (I)t is commonly argued that as women enter positions of authority in society and politics, they will bring new integrity and humanity to institutions, strengthening public sensitivity to social welfare obligations. Such popular claims find support in academic studies, hotly debated by scholars, which argue that women possess distinctive ways of reasoning morally, of knowing, of managing and leading, of thinking, and even of speaking.⁴³

Women may bring different emphases and sensibilities to leadership; however, gender specific modifiers of (now recognized) generic roles evoke resistance. Descriptors such as “*women bishops*,” create artificial distinctions in the minds of many. Clearly this reaction was evident in one eastern bishop’s response: “*I am not a woman bishop. I am a bishop who happens to be a woman....*”

Many women leaders in the church face a tension between acknowledging differences in the ways men and women lead and striving for an ideal of leadership that transcends gender or distinctions made on the basis of demographics. This report suggests that such patterns might be revealing if explored more deeply. The church’s experience with women in ordained ministry is recent and our sample is small. But the women we interviewed impressed us with these particular traits. It is not to say that men in leadership *lack* these characteristics. In fact, we spoke with men, specifically bishops, who claim for themselves leadership practices that are relational, collaborative and emphasize spiritual qualities such as listening.

That said, we have found that women religious leaders often listen intently for the spiritual voice and yearnings of the individual and community. They see themselves as spiritual leaders and seek authority as one who is “beloved” and work to help others claim this identity.

Women often exercise religious leadership by:

- emphasizing the healing power of relationships and inclusiveness
- applying their natural affinity and gifts as spiritual leaders

⁴³ Constance H. Buchanan, Choosing to Lead: Women in the Crisis of American Values (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 115-116.

- supporting the local authority in the diocese through listening and attentiveness

Carol Becker, author of Leading Women, interviewed women in thirteen Protestant denominations. Her study asserts that since women's entrance into the various echelons of church hierarchy *multiple* and *varied* styles of leadership exercised by women have emerged. Becker's research with women suggests there is resistance to a gender-defined leadership style. The comments of various male Episcopal bishops and the following words of one female Episcopal bishop implied the same. *"Those under 50 have grown up in an education system that expects people to work collaboratively. We need the gifts of everybody; women may bring a different constellation of gifts to the group... Biology is not destiny. Maybe the word generational isn't the right word for the difference I'm trying to identify; maybe it is a paradigm shift."*

However, the multiple styles, though different, share certain commonalities. Becker argues that women "are searching for the attributes of their own style and *naming*."⁴⁴ Similarities Becker noted from her interviews are: many women are process oriented, focus on the whole experience, practice participatory management, exhibit a willingness to share information and have a deep concern for human relationships.⁴⁵ The bishop in the narrative at the beginning of this section spoke of her focus on the whole experience when she declared that the challenge before the church is helping people ascertain a clearer understanding of who they are. Her words suggest her emphasis is not on best practices intended to achieve numerical growth, but rather on relationships and the personal spiritual growth needed to develop whole persons. Lay and ordained women leaders in interviews consistently mentioned their concern for relationships, many times explicitly stressing their desire for reconciliation and community.

- **Religious leadership emphasizes inclusiveness and the healing power of relationships.**

The fact that today women stand alongside men celebrating the Eucharist, voting in the House of Deputies and in the House of Bishops, and participating in vestry meetings is a testament to women's networking and relational abilities. Pamela Darling, in New Wine: The Story of Women Transforming Leadership and Power in the Episcopal Church states: "Women moved from auxiliary and unofficial roles into the official governmental structure and the ordained ministry of the church not through the heroic efforts of solitary leaders but through the sustained and shared efforts of many women across several generations."⁴⁶ Historically, networks of relationships have served as women's currency in the church.

In The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership, Sally Helgesen supports an argument highlighted by the authors of The Managerial Woman who contend that women "assume without thinking that the priority of relationships is [their] most important priority."⁴⁷ The words of several women bishops

⁴⁴ Carol Becker, Leading Women: How Church Women Can Avoid Leadership Traps and Negotiate the Gender Maze (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 54.

⁴⁵ Becker, 38-40.

⁴⁶ Pamela Darling, New Wine: The Story of Women Transforming Leadership and Power in the Episcopal Church (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1994).

⁴⁷ Sally Helgesen, The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 21-22.

echo such emphasis on the bonds that link us. One bishop said she advocates a shared episcopate and teamwork. “Only as Episcopal women used their countervailing strengths – skills in sustaining relationships, nurturing groups, and building networks – did they slowly amass the power to be seen and heard by the institution.”⁴⁸ Many men express the essentialness of relationships; however, it is the priority of relationships that represents the legacy of women in the church. “Emphasizing interrelationships, working to tighten them, building up strength... is a strategy that honors the feminine principles of inclusion, connection...”⁴⁹ This approach is less focused on external goals. It hearkens back to the bishop whose strategy was to listen and be open to the vision emerging from the grassroots.

Personal, meaningful connections with people are the means by which some barriers to women’s leadership, such as personal prejudices, disintegrate. When women religious leaders place a premium on people and relationships, not structures and power, they increase their own visibility and the chances for what one woman bishop calls incarnational encounters. She said, “*I have been told that there were some people in this diocese who just couldn’t imagine a woman bishop. It wasn’t until they met me that they could begin to see it. It’s like a conversion experience in that way.*”

- **Religious leadership applies one’s natural gifts as a spiritual leader.**

After World War II, the limited roles of women as spiritual leaders were increasingly challenged: “The history of women’s spiritual leadership, being neither official nor tangible, is hard to trace. Despite their actual roles in forming and sustaining congregations, often motivated by deep commitments and experience, women necessarily yielded to clergy who were trained to teach and preach, authorized to administer the sacraments, and paid to provide spiritual care.”⁵⁰

Women are “often motivated by deep religious commitment and experience,” which explains why today, most religious women leaders in positions once reserved only for men express natural ease with their role as spiritual leader. The profound religious commitment and inner experience that forms the spiritual leader is not new to women. One woman bishop articulated her desire as bishop and religious leader to “*be used as a spiritual instrument*” through prayer, consultation, continuing education and mentoring. A colleague in the House of Bishops expressed the priority she places on the integration of spirituality and leadership, “*Spirituality and leadership is something I’ve been thinking about for months. I think it is the most important thing I do, I can raise the issue, model it. That’s what baptism is about.*” The spiritual leader is a comfortable role for our respondents, since it is a role that requires accessibility to intimacy, intuition, and vulnerability. This same bishop said, “*Vulnerability, [is] not assuming that you have the fullness of the truth in your own self, rather knowing it is in the body gathered.*”

⁴⁸ Darling, 3.

⁴⁹ Hegelsen, 58.

⁵⁰ Darling, 101.

The spiritual leader typically is dedicated to the ongoing maturation of her own spirituality, requiring not only reflection but also attention to spiritual practices. The bishop in the opening vignette explained how she prays, meditates and regularly makes personal retreats. Another bishop relies on writing, saying, “*I integrate things best by writing... but it takes more than that to make things whole.*”

- **Religious leadership supports the local authority in the diocese through listening and attentiveness.**

Listening, along with relationships, has been mentioned in previous sections by both men and women as marks of effective religious leadership, and women leaders in our small sample repeatedly said they value listening. Literature on women’s leadership styles highlights listening as something women do exceedingly well. Women bishops have said they listen to hear what and who people say they are; they describe the acquisition of knowledge and formation of opinions using the terminology of listening for the people’s vision, in contrast to some of their male colleagues who speak of casting their own visions. Hegelsen writes that the authors of Women’s Ways of Knowing compare the metaphor of vision and voice. “We found that women repeatedly used the metaphor of *voice* to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined.”⁵¹ Because *voice* is essential to vocational discernment and the advance of women religious leaders, it is critical that we remind ourselves of the enduring, systemic stifling of voice, despite considerable strides. Paula Nesbitt maintains in Feminization of Clergy in America that, “...to date, women leaders remain challenged by both continued passive and active pressures against the successful articulation of their voice and influence within the stable network of male leadership.”⁵²

Listening for the voice is not simply listening for opinions or information; it is listening for the spiritual and personal development of the individual in community. A woman bishop stated, “*An ability to listen, in the broadest sense, to listen for the voice of God, the community, and one’s own heart,*” is a characteristic of the leader. She elaborated on the value of listening in an address to the ECW, “*Listening is an attitude of openness and vulnerability. If we’re really paying attention, it means we’re willing to hear something other than we expect.*” This bishop believes that Christians must listen in a posture of the greatest possible openness: “*Vulnerability has to do with humility ...Humility is intrinsic to the work of servant leaders, who exist to serve God’s mission or dream. Humility means knowing truly who we are and from where we’ve come....*” Listening for the voice of God is an opportunity to see ourselves in our Christian identity. For women, listening for the voice of God centers them in a leadership defined first by being and only second, by doing.

Through listening, leaders gather information about their own and other’s identity; and by listening leaders make others feel their ideas are valuable. “...So in recent years women and others,

⁵¹ Hegelsen, 222.

⁵² Paula D. Nesbitt, Feminization of Clergy in America. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 161.

whose predecessors might at first not seem to have played that great a role in the Bible or tradition, have helped bring a hearing of other voices within tradition.”⁵³ Voice is inextricably tied to a personal sense of authority. As Suzanne Hiatt said in reflecting on her journey as one of the “Philadelphia Eleven,” the first women ordained as priests in the Episcopal Church, “Instantly I realized...that my vocation was not to continue to ask for permission to be a priest, but to be a priest.”⁵⁴ A woman in one diocese said of her bishop, “*The bishop is willing to claim her power...She is clearly the leader.*” Voice, authority, and power are all connected to freedom and independence. Another bishop named independence and personal freedom as marks of effective leadership. She added, “*A leader needs to be free to be present, know who she is, can respond to people where they are...*”

How do women become religious leaders?

“You can learn leadership; one is not born with it. We’ve experienced a shift in our cultural understanding ...from identified gifts that were formerly stereotypically masculine to seeing gifts that are broadly held in common, that are human.” The bishop who offered this opinion would agree that learning to be a leader is a life long process. Critical to the formation of leaders is their involvement in ministries that equip them with skills and training. The Women’s Auxiliary, the first formal women’s organization in the church, is an apt model for understanding the development of women’s leadership. The Auxiliary was about grassroots leadership. It was flexible, adapted itself to local contexts, and empowered women.

The endeavor of laywomen in a southern diocese is illustrative of flexible, inclusive, and shared grassroots leadership developed within the throes of major decisions. At the time of the interview their congregation was divided about whether to use a gift of land to build a sanctuary or sell the land and use the money to continue their mission work. This was not the first time they had experienced divisiveness.

Early in their history, organized by a single woman, they met in people’s homes until tempers flared over some members’ (including a retired priest’s) distrust of the diocese. The division resulted in a split that left remaining members confounded and distraught. However, in a year’s time the group was larger than before the split, and its members were involved in a host of mission activities. Now they found themselves faced with yet another hard decision, to accept the gift of land or to use the money for their thriving mission work. One woman in the group argued, “*Aren’t we really here to follow our Lord’s example in caring for each other, growing disciples, and reaching out to those in need?...Shifting our vision to a building is just the wrong priority for us.*” Another woman, remembering the hurtful division in the past pleaded: “*We’ve come through too much to let this split us apart.*” Someone else in the group asked: “*Can we wait and hold ourselves together until we are clearer about this?*” Women leaders in the

⁵³ Frederick H. Borsch, “The Ministry and Authority of Bishops in a Changing World and Church,” Anglican Theological Review LXXVII.1 (1995), 23.

⁵⁴ Darling, 123.

group were willing to admit they did not have the answer. They listened to each other and endured periods of uncertainty until a clear answer emerged from their community.

Another formative process that empowers women is mentoring, mentioned by both men and women as critical to the development of leaders. One bishop reflected on her first parish job and the priest who guided her, by engaging the staff in discussion on leadership. This bishop continues to be mentored by her colleagues in the House of Bishops, “*We have this arrangement that connects more experienced bishops with new bishops.*” As The Zacchaeus Project revealed, “Younger women also note the importance of seeing women in positions of liturgical leadership.”⁵⁵ The growing visibility of women in all orders bodes well for younger women engaged in the search for their own voices.

Central to the formation of the woman leader is finding her own voice and authority. Relevant to not only the struggle for ordination, but to the journeys of all faithful women, Darling says, “...They stopped asking permission and started making demands. They stopped being respectful toward their “fathers in God” as sole interpreters of divine will, and claimed access to God through the authority of their own consciences within a faith community of other women.”⁵⁶

The emergent style of women’s leadership needs further research. Women’s leadership has been singled out because the church now has the experience of a generation of women in ordained ministry and because women embody the tenor of leadership change in the church. Our research revealed that the collaborative, relational mutuality we discern among women leaders is sometimes practiced by men. What we stress in this report is that this style of leadership has been emphasized by women. Constance Buchanan explains the impact of this emphasis: “Women represent a tremendous new resource for institutional, civic, and political leadership in American society, and what is happening to them in the workplace is to a significant degree determining what difference their leadership will make in American society”⁵⁷ and so in the church.

COHERENCE AND INCOHERENCE

Given the soundings contained in this report, how might we assess the state of leadership in the Episcopal Church? We conclude that there is widespread **creativity** in leadership among Episcopalians. We have encountered repeated instances of vitality in congregations and dioceses as a result of new styles of leadership emerging in these places. This vitality not only manifests itself in expanded ministry but represents enriched patterns of personal and shared spiritual life. There is broad consensus that leadership is a principal formation concern for laity and clergy alike. In many places exciting church ventures are contributing to the development of leaders. Energetic references to “mission” and “outreach” surface

⁵⁵ Holland and Sachs, The Zacchaeus Project (New York: The Episcopal Church Foundation, 1999), 17.

⁵⁶ Darling, *New Wine*, 125.

⁵⁷ Buchanan, 92.

readily among Episcopalians. There is fresh energy and initiative to enhance the church's life and to extend the impacts of its ministries.

As we have seen, much of this burst of energy can be traced to a fresh interest in spirituality. In particular, Episcopalians have told us that authentic leadership centers on the "being" of the leader. It is a product of the individual's ongoing spiritual formation, and it is the basis of collective purpose. From this perspective, leadership is an art not a science. The way one person leads inevitably proves as distinct as one person is from another, even though the things different leaders do (practices) may be similar. The "doing" of leadership can be duplicated; we can learn from one another's experience. The "being" of leadership can be modeled but cannot be copied because it concerns *why* leaders do what they do, *who* they are as persons in the doing and the motivation for *what* they do. It is at this point that the discussion of leadership formation becomes one of spiritual formation.

The emphasis on spiritual formation can be traced to broad interest in spirituality in the culture. Increasingly people who consider themselves spiritual seekers are becoming active in Episcopal churches. The appearance of large numbers of seekers in Episcopal pews is bringing fresh energies for church life. It offers the church an historic opportunity to extend its mission. But the absorption of people motivated by spiritual interests also creates adaptive challenges. Since spiritual seekers generally view the church as a spiritual community, a source of enhancement for their spiritual journey, rather than solely as an institutional locus for religious membership, their view of leadership is different. They seek to inform and to express a deeply personal quest by rooting it in community. What they seek from those who would lead has more to do with finding spiritual guidance than ingesting institutional processes or guidelines.

What are the implications of this spiritual emphasis in the church's life and leadership for mission? The question is central to our concern, and not only because "mission" is frequently cited by Episcopalians today. As The Very Rev. Titus Presler explains, "mission" generally refers to "questions of identity, purpose, and function: Who are we? What are our goals? What are we supposed to be doing?" The root of "mission" means "to send" and this accurately captures the Christian understanding of "mission." Presler maintains that Christians must regularly ask "what has God sent us to be? What is God's purpose in sending us? What does God seek to accomplish through us in the world?" In general, Presler notes, 'the mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.' As he further explains, such affirmations of Christian intention must give rise to specific questions of purpose and function: how are we to go forth in service? To what ends must we give ourselves? What patterns of common life are likely to advance the ideals that have brought Episcopalians vitality and possibility?⁵⁸ In a word, to what extent is there **coherence** between ideals and practices,

⁵⁸ Titus Presler, Horizons of Mission (Cambridge: Cowley, 2001), p. 4ff.

means and ends in Episcopal approaches to leadership today? Are the ideals of spirituality and community that are prominent being translated into **coherent** approaches to mission?

Typically “coherent” means consistent, understandable, cohesive, and coordinated. By these definitions leadership among Episcopalians today often is **incoherent**. We have found that frequently there is an unclear relation between the “being,” or inner, spiritual focus on leadership and its ends, and the actions or practices to which those ends should give rise. The spiritual dimension is not clearly fused to practical dimensions of church life. Nor do current spiritual energies reflect coherent grounding in historic Christian, and more particularly, Anglican, belief and practice. It is not that we have heard nothing about practicality or activity. We have encouraged people we interviewed to describe what ends Episcopal leaders seek and answers have been forthcoming. They act to fulfill their baptismal vows and live into the calling of being Christ-bearers to the world. They act because God loves them and compels them to love one another. They act to fulfill the Gospel. Religious leadership is a call to embrace an identity and vocation, to attend to Christian formation, and to be faithful in mission. Our calling as faithful people should encourage a culture of service to one another and to the world in Christ’s name. Contemporary references to mission are not aimless; there are impressive levels of activity to advance mission among Episcopalians in most places.

How do such intentions to advance mission reflect traditional approaches to leadership practice in the church? Historically leadership practice has entailed the performance of certain basic duties and roles, such as celebrating the Eucharist, preaching, and offering pastoral care. Inevitably leadership practice also has encompassed various managerial tasks that reflect the church’s organizational life, such as chairing meetings, training volunteers, and guiding programs. These varied tasks remain central. In each case forms of good practice are apparent across the church. But a key question begs for a clear answer: in what sense do the leadership practices of ordained and lay ministry reflect the new spiritual currents surging through the church? In other words, how is a prominent emphasis on the person of the leader, integrated into revised understandings of leadership practice that encourage mission in practical ways? We have heard various responses to that question. But there has been insufficient coherence among them.

Moreover, if Episcopalians increasingly rely upon vaguely spiritual criteria for the church’s identity and vocation, in what sense do such criteria represent an authentic appropriation of the Christian faith and Anglican practice? Alarming, there seems to be no theology of leadership among Episcopalians, as evidenced by the popularity of secular organizational literature that makes broadly spiritual references. Despite the creative energy generated by references to spirituality, the implications of this interest for the church’s identity lack clarity.

Such incoherence magnifies the impact of conflict in the church. Conflict in the church primarily results from uncertainty over mission and tentativeness in leadership. When Episcopalians disagree, confusion over means and ends is the most likely cause. Put starkly, while spirituality proves to be a key

motivator, by themselves spiritual criteria are insufficient to clarify appropriate ends and the practices that might attain them. Of itself, spirituality offers little guidance for addressing profound differences in the church, other than proposing alternative forms of process. Many Episcopalians tell us they prefer forms of church governance that center on collective discernment not debates and yes-no votes. Such longing is laudable, and there are increasing signs that churches and dioceses approach meeting formats from a more spiritual basis. But such an approach does not suggest how clarity about the church's mission, and what leaders do to advance it, can be achieved.

Thus, we conclude, there is no consensus on how to lead; rather, there is **creative incoherence**. This report offers no declarations about how to renew the church. We offer a set of perceptions and ideals that need further testing. Our work describes remarkable, grassroots vitality in Episcopal congregations that promises, but to date has not achieved, more effective realization of mission among Episcopalians. Channeling this vitality is the church's greatest challenge. We hope this report inspires the sorts of conversations that will facilitate much needed clarity about the means and ends of mission and the leadership we need to accomplish it.

Appendix

The Zacchaeus Project Opens the Door

In 1999, The Episcopal Church Foundation published a landmark study entitled “The Zacchaeus Project.” Its core research purpose was to “search for what it means to be Episcopalian and how this Church actually works at the grassroots where its foundation lies.”⁵⁹ Noting that most examinations of the Episcopal Church’s identity up to that time were based on the perspectives of bishops and other clergy, the Zacchaeus Project proposed to conduct research among the church’s lay members. Through focus groups and interviews with nearly 2,000 Episcopalians in nine dioceses in the U.S., The Zacchaeus research confirmed a paradoxical vitality in local congregations and, in many places, a disconnect with national church and diocesan structures. Conflicts with clergy, confusion about the role of bishops and criticism of national church leaders were among the most pronounced examples of ineffective leadership criticized by laity in focus groups. At the same time, the research identified a deep longing for spiritual growth that is formed in and by the local community, particularly as that community gathers for Eucharist. The Book of Common Prayer continues to shape Episcopal identity and inform individual and congregational spirituality.

The Zacchaeus conversations also identified many examples of innovative leadership, particularly at the diocesan and parish levels. Healthy practices that demonstrate shared leadership between laity and clergy, networks centered in ministry interests rather than denominational loyalty, responsibility grounded in teamwork, all characterize the most vital congregations. The Zacchaeus researchers found that lay leaders exercised extensive influence and clergy roles were undergoing dramatic changes from centralized to shared decision-making. These congregations had developed strong partnerships with other churches, community organizations, and diocesan staff, drawing upon external resources effectively and openly sharing their own. These new patterns of leadership hold great promise for the future health of the church.

The Emmaus Project

As a result of the Zacchaeus findings, The Episcopal Church Foundation has undertaken another phase of related research – the Emmaus Project – to identify how these new forms of leadership emerge, what characterizes them, how they are sustained, and in what ways they enhance congregational life.

A pilot phase of the project conducted interviews and focus groups in two dioceses, Indianapolis and Louisiana. As methodology was refined, two more dioceses were added, San Diego and South Carolina. Current research is now active in the dioceses of Maryland and Western New York. As we look at the changing cultural and religious environment, questions such as the following came into view:

- o In what ways are traditional styles of Anglican community and leadership adapting to changing expectations? What new forms, roles and practices are emerging?
- o What are the most appropriate and effective models for lay and ordained leadership both in the present and in the future? How will successful transitions be made?
- o What skills and resources prove to be most effective in strengthening congregational life? Where are the gaps and how might they be remedied?
- o What obstacles must leaders now confront, and how are they dealing with them?
- o What lessons about effective religious leadership can be drawn from exemplary sites and how might these be disseminated and applied more broadly?

In extending the Zacchaeus research, The Episcopal Church Foundation is interested to see if some commonality of meaning can be identified, as Episcopalians seek to define leadership in the church today, to ask what is religious about the leadership they recognize, and begin to identify best practices of lay and clergy leadership in the Episcopal Church today.

⁵⁹ Thomas P. Holland and William L. Sachs, The Zacchaeus Project: Discerning Identity at the Dawn of the New Millennium (New York: The Episcopal Church Foundation, 1999), 11.