

Leadership Formation in Congregations

By William S. Craddock, Jr.

Congregations form the largest and most important community groups in the fabric of American society. **Our senses of identity, faith, practice, and learning are deeply impacted by the life of the congregations to which we belong.** With over 350,000 congregations gathering together weekly for worship, fellowship, and mission-oriented outreach, the character of our pluralistic nation continues to be shaped by what we believe and how we relate our faith to daily actions and to one another.

Since the advent of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, Episcopalians have become increasingly more aware of their baptismal covenant and the importance that covenant has in their lives. The implications of this legacy call for the baptized to be more intentional about their discipleship (learning) and apostleship (doing) as they seek to live and minister in a community of faith.

Leadership is the capacity to discern and practice the reign of God.

Over ten years of Cornerstone **research confirms a need for Episcopal congregations to identify and form leaders to guide them in their precarious journey as faith communities.**

Cornerstone has been exploring an open-ended process to develop new patterns of mission-oriented leadership and to establish an environment for open conversation about the practice of Christian life and health in Episcopal congregations. Integral to this process will be an opportunity for leaders, both clergy and lay persons, to address four fundamental areas of their congregational life:

• **Identity** - Who are we as God's people?

How do we understand our identity within and outside our Church community?

• **Discernment** - Who is God calling us to be? How can our congregations discover their vocation as communities of faith?

• **Practice** - How are we responding to God's call? How do our congregations practice ministry with affirmation, accountability, and constructive feedback in a learning process?

• **Transformation** - How are we changing as God's people? What are we learning as we engage in Christian ministry?

This action-reflection model will link congregational leadership theory with practice and encourage adaptation and application in the local congregational setting.

The first step in this four-point process is to address our Episcopal identity. In celebration of its 50th Anniversary, The Episcopal Church Foundation is funding *The Zacchaeus Project*, a broad, extensive study of the Episcopal Church. This one-year project is exploring what it means to be an Episcopalian in today's society and how we renew our sense of identity in communities of faith. It is examining emerging trends and patterns of leadership as well as issues and challenges faced by our diverse ministries. **Its findings will serve the ongoing conversations and planning efforts of the Church and suggest possible future directions for work to enable the Church to thrive in the next millennium.**

Building on the conclusions of *The Zacchaeus Project*, Trinity Institute's 30th National Conference in September will be titled "Roots and Wings: Episcopal Identity and Vocation in the New Millennium." "Roots" speaks to the primary question of identity covered in the

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Vestry members are elected by their peers to lead the congregation and to set the vision for the future. How they exhibit leadership and formulate vision is of great importance, not only to their own congregations, but to the Church at large. This issue of Vestry Papers offers examples of how two vestries tackled the task of leadership, it offers some simple guidelines on how vestries can lead, and it provides insights about how collaborative partnerships within the national church are approaching leadership development as we approach the next millennium.

Does Your Staff Receive a Living Wage?

An issue for vestry review

At the 1996 Annual Parish Meeting of Trinity Episcopal Church in Santa Barbara, California, a Sunday school teacher raised an issue that caught the rector and vestry off-guard - the parish's secretary and sexton were not being paid a living wage. Although rector Mark Asman and the vestry had been exposed to the living wage issue through the media and diocesan communications, they hadn't realized it was on their own doorstep and they did not know the issue would be raised at the meeting.

For an urban parish like Trinity that daily lives out its commitment to justice through its various ministries, the possibility of this injustice was a serious matter. Not knowing if it was true or not, the rector and vestry decided to take action.

.....
liv'ing wage', *n.* a wage on which it is possible to live at least according to minimum customary standards.

Webster's College Dictionary
.....

A diverse, skilled committee was formed to study just what a living wage would be in the Santa Barbara community. A questionnaire was sent to ten churches in the surrounding area to determine how they approached this topic. The committee members talked with many people and gathered a great deal of information. A lot of time was spent in determining the costs associated with every aspect of daily life - rent, car insurance, medical insurance, child care, going out to dinner and to the movies, clothing.

Three scenarios of what life is like and what it cost to live were formulated - for a family, for a single parent with a child, and for a single person. A report was presented to the vestry in the fall. It established that a living wage in Santa Barbara was \$12 an hour, and below that, it was difficult to live with dignity. Trinity's pay scale fell well below that mark, as did most of the churches interviewed.

The computation of what it would cost on an annual basis to raise the salaries of these two valuable employees to a living wage was more than they had budgeted. That fact initiated a long, "friendly" argument among the vestry.

One vestry member suggested making the living wage issue part of the annual stewardship drive. Other members worried that the congregation would not accept the idea. Others didn't want to raise the salaries at all. 'We pay what we can' was their reasoning. 'If someone can't live on that wage, they should not be in the job.'

Finally, an alternative proposal was made to phase the raises in over a three-year period. The vote on this proposal was 6-6. Asman broke the tie by voting for the proposal.

According to vestry member Nora Gallagher, this vestry conversation was interesting to say the least. It pointed out how difficult it often is to get at the business of discussing money. "It was a hard conversation, somewhat scary, and very energetic," she said. "Yet at the same time, **it was good to work through this issue, and there were no bad feelings. The vestry exhibited real leadership in its commitment to listen to each other and explore all possibilities.**"

.....
To be a leader means, especially, having the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who permit us to lead.

From Leadership is an Art
by Max Depree
.....

Trinity is now in the third year of the phase-in, and the outcome has been good. Stewardship efforts have been more successful because of the congregation's commitment to justice and their desire to help the church's employees. The vestry feels good about its decision to implement a living wage scale, and the staff members affected by these changes are enormously grateful. It has made the difference in whether they could remain in their jobs or were forced to resign to look for higher wages. *Nora Gallagher, former vestry member of Trinity Episcopal Church, Santa Barbara, California in the Diocese of Los Angeles, contributed the information for this article. She is the author of Things Seen and Unseen, A Year Lived in Faith (Knopf, 1998), a book describing her journey from the secular life into the world of faith at Trinity.*

"Come to the edge, he said.
They said, we are afraid.
Come to the edge, he said.
They came.
He pushed them . . .
And they flew!"

Guillaume Apollinaire

To lead the people, walk behind them.

Lao-Tzu

Be sure to watch for the April issue of Vestry Papers which will offer practical information on a variety of financial issues, including endowments, sound budgetary practices, planned giving, stewardship, capital campaigns, and more.

Comfort with Ambiguity

A path to new growth and life in one congregation

Darien, Connecticut is, in many respects, a suburban community with its share of young, monied, high profile executives who commute daily to New York City. St. Luke's Episcopal Church is a large congregation in Darien with over 775 pledging units, many of which fit the above-mentioned profile. These busy young executives attend St. Luke's, often first because their children have pulled them into the life of the congregation. Yet they have become involved, teaching Sunday School, singing in choirs, chairing committees, and serving on the vestry.

In 1993, St. Luke's called a new rector, The Rev. Dr. James A. Kowalski. Over a period of time, with the support and endorsement of the vestry, he began many new initiatives in this active, thriving congregation. A functioning worship committee was established, a study was begun to learn why their parishioners attended church, and a highly successful capital campaign resulted in a refurbished and expanded beautiful facility. Things were going well. **Yet there seemed to be a sense of yearning in the congregation - a feeling that there must be something more. Were they merely "peripheral Christians?" Who were they and what was God calling them to be?**

Long-time parishioner and senior warden, Judy Holding, began to explore with the rector what "next steps" might be on the horizon. Perhaps it was time for the congregation, as a community in Christ, to begin to go deeper - to seek out answers to these troubling questions.

An additional vestry retreat day was scheduled for the vestry to think and pray together and to focus more fully on the congregation's future. With the help of a skilled retreat leader, several hours were spent in spiritual reflection. For many of these task-oriented executives unaccustomed to such activity, it was a wonderful

first step. They really engaged in the process.

Since that weekend, many things have begun to change. The size of the vestry, which had become unwieldy, has now been cut by four members. Vestry functions have been reorganized under umbrella committees, including a Pastoral Care Committee, and each of these umbrella groups meets monthly with the clergy staff. **The vestry now spends half of each vestry meeting in reflection. Because of this restructuring, it now has the time to ask itself the hard questions and grapple with possible answers.** What is the definition of a good church? How does St. Luke's fit into the community? How do we become more spiritually based? How do we discern God's call?

As a result, the vestry now feels it has a better sense of who the congregation is, and this is communicated to them regularly in many ways, including the senior warden's monthly column in the parish newsletter. The vestry has become more intentional in welcoming and shepherding newcomers. Parishioners are energized, and there are many new faces doing much more of the work. There is a sense that it is okay to grow larger as long as the "center" is not lost. In the words of one parishioner, "This place is becoming more caring."

According to Holding, who passed on the gavel last year, they still have a way to go. "The biggest change is that the laity feels really empowered. Jim Kowalski facilitated that," she stated. "We still have more questions than answers, but that's okay - it's part of the process of discernment. And we are now more comfortable with ambiguity."

Judy Holding, former Senior Warden of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Darien, Connecticut in the Diocese of Connecticut, contributed the information for this article.

Transformative leadership engages others in such a way that all raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus has a transforming effect on both.

James Macgregor Burns

Six characteristics of leaders . . .

- they think longer term
- in thinking of the group they are heading, they grasp its relationship to larger realities
- they reach and influence constituents beyond their jurisdictions
- they put emphasis on the intangibles of vision, values, and motivation
- they have the political skill to cope with the conflicting requirements of multiple constituencies
- they think in terms of renewal

*On Leadership
by John W. Gardner*

Resources on Leadership . . .

- *Vestry Resource Guide* - published by Cornerstone and available through Forward Movement (1-800-543-1813)
- *On Leadership* - by John W. Gardner (The Free Press, ISBN 0-02-911311-3)
- *Leadership is an Art* - by Max DePree (Michigan State University Press, ISBN 0-87013-254-7)
- *Handbook of Leadership Development* - The Center for Creative Leadership (Jossey-Bass, Inc., ISBN 0-7879-0950-5)

- *Leadership and the New Science* - by Margaret J. Wheatley (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., ISBN 1-881052-01-X)
- *Leadership without Easy Answers* - by Ronald A. Heifetz (Harvard University Press, ISBN 0-674-51858-6)
- *In Praise of Congregations* - Charles E. Bennis, Jr. (Cowley Publications, ISBN 1-56101-151-7)
- *The Once and Future Church* - Loren B. Mead (Alban Institute, ISBN 1-56699-050-5)
- *Ministry for a New Time* - James C. Fenhagen, (Alban Institute, ISBN 1-56699-156-0)

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Zacchaeus materials, and “Wings” represents the question of vocation - who is God calling us to become - which will be addressed by Trinity Institute. This project is best summed up in one of the core questions of *The Zacchaeus Project* in asking, “How can we embrace new spiritual forms (wings), while preserving the best of our Episcopal traditions (roots)?”

Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold is strongly supportive of these efforts because he sees the ideas emerging in *The Zacchaeus Project* and the Trinity Institute as basic to his theme of rebuilding the Church, which he described in his address at his institution. Because of his belief in these themes and his desire to involve the whole Church in this conversation, this Trinity teleconference will be a collaborative partnership between the Office of the Presiding

Bishop, The Episcopal Church Foundation, and Trinity Church, Wall Street.

Materials will be mailed in early spring to all bishops, clergy, and congregations about Zacchaeus and the Trinity Institute encouraging congregations to form teams to engage in this ongoing dialogue by participating in the Trinity Institute Teleconference, September 27th and 28th. It is our hope that vestries will take an active leadership role through their own participation and by making sure it has the support and involvement of their clergy and congregations as well.

William S. Craddock, Jr. is Director of Cornerstone, a ministry of The Episcopal Church Foundation. Cornerstone is committed to strengthening the personal and professional lives of those called to lead Episcopal congregations.

A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to project to other people his or her shadow, or his or her light. A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to create conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being – conditions that can either be illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what’s going on inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.

*Leading from Within
by Parker Palmer*

Guidelines and Suggestions for Vestry Leadership

By The Rev. Frederick Stecker

There are actually few canons that have to do with parish structure, and the vestry is the only organization that is mentioned by name. Vestries are charged with responsibility for property, insurance, and the finances of a parish. They cannot, however, buy or sell property or encumber themselves financially without the approval of the Bishop in consultation with the Standing Committee of the Diocese.

Vestry membership and service, by tradition and custom, is on a three-year rotating basis so that at least two-thirds of the vestry each year has had experience with vestry service. Wardens and treasurers often have different lengths of service that should be spelled out in the by-laws of the parish.

Typically the vestry has the following responsibilities:

- Exhibit faithfulness in worship and interest in the activities of the parish.
- Lead in the financial support of the parish.
- Evaluate parish direction annually.
- Function as a sounding board and an impartial source of support for the rector.
- Assist the rector in staff evaluation.
- Maintain upkeep of church property (the rector determines use).
- Maintain liability and other forms of insurance.
- Establish short term goals and create a vision for the parish that will require long range planning.
- Maintain a working list or digest of parish policies, records, and vestry decisions.

The Rev. Frederick Stecker is rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in New London, New Hampshire. These are excerpts from a leadership training course he developed in the Diocese of The Virgin Islands.

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Questions to consider about vestry leadership . . .

- Has our work begun, continued, and ended in prayer?
- Does each vestry person feel they are adequately informed to make a decision?
- Is work being delegated to committees when possible?
- Does the vestry have a healthy self-criticism and an ability to laugh in their work together?
- Are there any follow-up meetings occurring in the parking lot or over the telephone?
- Are the activities of the church being effectively communicated to the congregation?
- Does the vestry regularly communicate with the Diocesan Office?