

Editorial – The Role of the Leadership Team

We have just had our church AGM, when one group of lay leaders relinquish office, and another come into office. In our church it is possible for leaders to stand again for another three-year term, but once they have served six years, they must stand down for at least a year. The theory behind this practice is that it encourages new 'blood' onto the leadership team. The so-called 'sabbatical' also gives an opportunity for rest to those who over the last six years have borne the heat of the day. Having said that, the term 'sabbatical' is unhelpful, implying that leaders, having been stood down for a year, automatically allow their names to go forward for re-election. But this is not necessarily healthy, either for the individual or for the church.

This year, as for the last couple of years, we have been having great difficulty in getting sufficient people to stand for the leadership team. In the not so distant past elections would often be 'contested' - there might be as many as twelve members standing for the five or so places. This year, however, there was no contest. We had seven vacancies, but only two people stood. So for yet another year our leadership team will be under strength.

Leaders walk into the future

One could well argue that this is providential, in the sense that a leadership team comprised of fifteen 'deacons' (the traditional Baptist term for lay leaders), three ministers and one church administrator is overlarge. At one stage we considered creating two separate and distinct groups, the first of 'leaders' and the second of 'managers'. 'Leaders', it was suggested, 'walk into the future', while 'managers' deal with day-to-day and so 'walk in the present' Instead we created a smaller 'strategy' group within the larger team. We went for that second option, believing that the first option risked creating a hierarchy and would make communication more difficult between the two groups. But, however we divide up our leaders, in a church our size we need a good number of leaders, for there is an immense amount of work to do. As it is we are struggling to find people prepared to serve.

One comfort in this situation is that we are not alone in this struggle. There seems to be a nation-wide dearth of people willing to serve in leadership positions. In part this reflects the mood of this so-called 'post-modern' age where long-term commitment

appears not to be the name of the game. It also reflects the pressures of a society where those in employment often work ever longer hours. Furthermore, it reflects the changes of work-patterns for women - not only do most married women go out to work, but many are pursuing demanding careers. Add to this the demands of bringing up children, and the result is that many churches are lucky to see their people as often as once a Sunday. Indeed, whereas in the past 'twicers' were those who attended morning and evening on one and the same Sunday, 'twicers' today tend to be those who turn up to church just twice a month. In such a context for many any idea of taking on positions of leadership is just unthinkable.

But let me not be too pessimistic. There are still those willing to serve as leaders in the church - and a good number more willing to serve in less high-profile roles too. Furthermore, they are not just the early retired. I am amazed and humbled by the many volunteers we have as a church. And yet, for all this, we still have difficulties in finding leaders.

Recently I went to a day consultation on leadership. Theologically the participants were very mixed. Yet all agreed on the importance of leadership. The following points were affirmed:

- leadership is not optional - 'without a vision the people perish'
- leadership is always disturbing - we need uncomfortable 'prophets', not just establishment 'priests'
- leadership always involves change - where there is no change there is no life
- leadership is always costly - the first head above the parapet always gets the flak
- leadership always involves risk - this inevitably means failure from time to time
- leadership needs to be rooted in spirituality - only thus can we be sure that we are going God's way and not ours.

I am sure that the above is true. Sadly, this demanding role makes it all the more difficult to attract people to positions of leadership.

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