Theological and Philosophical Foundations for Leadership

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The purpose of this paper is to develop more clarity on leadership development by laying a theological foundation and building up a philosophical framework for leadership development in the context of the local church and the diocese. It would be a mistake to focus prematurely on the “how to’s” of leadership development as the underlying issue has less to do with methods and more to do with a biblical and consistent understanding of what leadership is and how leaders are developed.

Paul, in 2 Timothy 2:2, makes the case to Timothy that the multiplication of capable leaders is critical to the mission of the church. Following the charge to reproduce leaders, Paul then gives his protégé three illustrations of faithful gospel ministry: a soldier, an athlete and a farmer. He then concludes this section of Scripture with his own mission statement; “Therefore, I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (verse 10). Paul stresses a relationship that we often miss: training and developing gospel leaders is inseparably connected to mission effectiveness.

The “who?” of ministry equipping and leadership development isn’t vague in the Bible. Ephesians 4:11-16 clearly defines roles: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers equip the saints for the work of ministry. But the “how?” is far less precise. It would seem from Paul’s Pastoral Epistles there are at least three categories of development: life and doctrine (I Timothy 4:16) and ministry practice (i.e. I Timothy 5:1-2 and 2 Timothy 2:2). We might state accordingly that our strategy is to raise up leaders for ministry service who live out the gospel in every day life and lead others from a perspective of healthy doctrine and best practices. These categories would form the three lanes of vocation.

We also must recognize that we face vastly different needs based on the roles ministry leaders fill. The greeter who welcomes guests to the gathering has a different job description than the one who leads those same guests in worship. Again, borrowing from Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus, we can deduce that a minimum of three tiers of service exist in the church: members, deacons and elders. Accordingly, we could take the three aforementioned lanes of development (life, doctrine and best practices) and apply them across roles in the church (members, deacons and elders).

Leadership development is a crucial component of a healthy church. However, most church leaders either spend little time thinking about leadership development or fall into one of two common traps when they do think about it.

The first is the “Natural Leader” trap. Many church leaders are “natural leaders.” God has gifted them with the abilities and skills necessary to lead. They tend to lead from the gut or the hip and tend to organize leadership development in the same manner. Because much of leadership is intuitive, development for the approach is usually relational (starting a community group for potential leaders) and model specific (leadership development is limited to essentially imitating how that church leader leads). There are positives that come with being a “natural leader.” The relational and model aspects of leadership development are key aspects of good equipping. However, this trap keeps leadership development bottlenecked with the church leader; therefore, only a small number of leaders are actually invested in compared to the actual number of potential
leaders that are within the church. Reproducibility suffers. Also, leaders who fall into this trap tend to recruit and find (intentionally or not) only potential leaders who look like themselves, because their understanding of leadership is based on their own abilities and experience. These leaders often miss out on the potential of “unnatural” leaders that God has brought to their church. The smaller a church is the more intuitive and informal leadership development can be due to the fact that the church leadership can be personally invested in the majority of the members, yet as a church grows larger this trap begins to stifle the development of the church.

The second is the “Program” trap. Often in a larger churches or institutions the initial solution to a problem is a program: an event or process. We need more leaders so we need a better process. We need leaders who can do X so we set up a weekend training event or program or process for X. This trap gives the illusion that people are being developed because you can count the number of people in the program. However, no program or process will actually develop a leader. You remove relational connection and experience, and substitute program participation. Seminaries, for instance, have fallen into this trap for decades. They believe they can produce clergy through an education program. While processes and events are necessary and usual tools for the development of leaders, they are not solutions.

What is needed to overcome consistently falling into these traps is a theology and philosophy of leadership development. Theology drives philosophy, which in turns determines methodology. Often we mix up the order and start with the methodology (how) before answering the questions of what and why (theology & philosophy).

Foundation = Theology: Every house starts with a foundation. Depending on how well that foundation is laid, the house will either stand firm or have problems. The same is true when laying a foundation for leadership development. As believers, we must do all things based upon our knowledge of God through Jesus Christ and Scripture (II Peter 1:3-4). If our foundation is anything other than our knowledge of God through Christ and Scripture (I Corinthians 3:10b-11), then we are simply building on sand (Matthew 7:26-28). Theology gives us the Rock on which we build our house (Matthew 7:24-25).

In order to lay a proper foundation for leadership development, we must determine our theological understanding of who a leader is from Scripture. There are two ways in which Scripture has been used to determine a biblical view of leadership. The first is looking at individual leaders in Scripture, most recently and primarily Jesus, to determine how they lived and led and then create a model for leadership. There are definitely benefits to this exercise. Paul told the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitated Christ (I Corinthians 4:16; 11:1), so looking at men and women who led in Scripture does provide some leadership wisdom. After all, we do want to model our lives after Christ’s. Three clarifying questions will help provide a proper biblical understanding of leadership through the model approach:

1) Who is leading in the Bible?
2) How did they lead?
3) By what power did they lead?

When we use these three questions we see that the leaders in Scripture did not all lead the same way: they ranged in personality types, but the one thing they did have in common was the power by which they led; namely the power and authority granted them by God through Christ. Though models for leadership are extremely helpful, they do not provide a holistic view of biblical
leadership. Therefore, I suggest that a better way to form a more holistic biblical view of leadership is to examine how Scripture speaks of leadership (roles, traits, and actions) rather than focusing on individual leaders.

Scripture speaks of leadership as both **positional** and as **influence**. Positional leadership is perhaps the most common way most church leaders understand leadership. Acts 20, I Timothy 3, Titus 1, Hebrews 13, and I Peter 5 sum up how positional leadership should be understood. Positional leadership is for some. It is a role that God has ordained and calls particular people to.

Those given positional leadership within God’s Kingdom and over his people are men and women whose character is that of Christ’s (I Timothy 3), whose behaviors reflect their identity (II Corinthians 5:14-17), who have the necessary skills and abilities to lead the church (Ephesians 4:11, Titus 1), and who have been called by God (thus empowered by his Spirit) to do so (Acts 20, II Corinthians 5:14-21, Hebrews 13:17). The positional roles of leadership within the church are deacons, priests, and bishops. These persons should lead in a way that reflects how God has led his people throughout history: through his Word, by the power of his Spirit, and as selfless servants.

A second way in which leadership is described in Scripture is that of influence. Similar to those who lead from a position, those who lead through influence are called by God to himself and participate in his mission to reconcile all things to himself (II Corinthians 5:17-18; I Peter 2:9). These leaders are empowered by the Spirit and equipped by those in positional leadership (Ephesians 4) to be ministers of reconciliation in whatever sphere of life they operate.

The consistent elements are calling and character, with some overlapping competencies. What differs is role within the body and immediate context. Some are called to lead the church. Others are called to lead as the church.

“The Mission” of God is to glorify Himself through the reconciliation of humanity—of every tribe, tongue, and nation (Revelation 5:9)—and creation (Colossians 1:20) to a right relationship with Him (II Corinthians 5:12-21) through the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1: 9-10; Colossians 1:20). Christ then is the hope of the world. The Church is simultaneously a goal and means of the mission as God’s reconciled people given the ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18-20). If Christ is the hope of the world, the Church is the instrument by which this hope is made manifest (Ephesians 3:10; II Corinthians 5:20).

This is reflected powerfully in the prayer for mission (BCP, 816-817):

> Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

A Christian leader is...A person **called** by and reconciled with God, given and pursuing the **character** of Christ, so as to influence people towards living in relation to God, others, and the world as God originally intended.

A Christian leader is first called by God out of darkness and sin and into life as a new creation given the ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:14-21). A Christian leader is then given and pursuing the character of Christ (II Peter 1:1-11). A Christian leader is to influence – through the
authority of Christ and the power of the Spirit for the purpose of fulfilling the mission of God (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 2:9).

A Christian leader should be leading people toward Jesus and his Good News. The deepest message of the Bible is the grace of God for sinners and sufferers, so a biblical leader should be leading people to trust in that grace given us through Jesus. A Christian leader is someone who has personally experienced knowledge of forgiveness and the hope of eternal life. A biblical leader should embody reliance on the gospel and lead others into it. A leader’s words and actions should never convey the message of “do more, try harder and then you’re now acceptable,” but instead “Jesus did it all, you’re accepted, come join the party!” The key is that a Christian leader is influencing people with gospel hope and joy, not legalistic requirements. Those who are recipients of grace become agents of grace. The same grace that brings forgiveness from sins is the same grace that empowers holiness and obedience.

Proceeding from the above biblical understanding of leadership, we can lay our theological foundation for leadership development.

Leadership development is the mandated role of church leadership (those in positional leadership). Ephesians 4:11-16 states,

> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Leadership development is about building up the body, each individual part functioning, as it should: to glorifying God, and living holy and righteous, joyously and abundantly in every aspect of existence.

Leadership development is first and foremost about raising up people to be instruments of hope within the church body and to the world. This is the theological foundation from which we can build a philosophy of leadership development.

Now let's turn to the philosophy of how we can do this. Our philosophy does not need to be the only way to do leadership development but is rather driven by convictions on a theology of leadership development.

**The Framework = Philosophy:** By “philosophy”, I do not mean a way of thinking that is autonomous, but rather one that is informed by the scriptural foundation discussed above. A philosophy is a comprehensive manner of viewing leadership development based on our theological understanding of the subject. A philosophy of leadership development helps us begin to move from the “what” to the “why”; which in turn provides a grid through which to make decisions on what we do and do not do regarding leadership development.
Like the framing of a house, a philosophy of leadership development is built on the foundation. Our philosophy provides the boundaries (walls) in which Scripture allows us to do the work of developing leaders.

**Load-bearing Walls:** Load-Bearing Walls are those walls that support the structure of the home. The load-bearing walls in a house are pivotal. If they are not set correctly then your house is bound to sway, crack and eventually crumple. These walls are non-negotiable and unchangeable regardless of the context of ministry.

Scripture determines the boundaries in which leadership development must function. Therefore, leadership development is about people, maturity, and mission.

1. **People:** Scripture is clear that church leadership is to equip “the saints” for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11). Leadership development is not primarily a process or an event. It is about equipping people for what God has purposed them for and who he has created them to be for his glory. Leadership development must stay focused on individual people and not get caught up in the massive flow of a fast moving and growing organization.

Leadership development being about people also means that it is for every believer in the church. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, encourages the Corinthians that they have every spiritual gift needed within their local body to be faithful ministers and a healthy church (I Corinthians 1:4-9). Admittedly, they were a confused people, yet Paul could say that they had amongst them all that they needed to be a faithful church because of Christ.

Our theological understanding of leadership gives us the perspective that every believer is called to Christ and is called to be messengers of reconciliation to one another and the world (leadership as influence). Christians are objects of grace and agents of grace. Therefore, church leadership has a biblical obligation to develop all the believers within their church body to be leaders; even ones that do not look like them or meet the cultural characteristics of a leader.

To summarize:

1) God does the reconciling and we are objects of reconciliation.
2) The church (as a community and as individuals within the community) is an agent of reconciliation, making it known to the world & calling people to accept the reconciliation God has already accomplished.
3) Leadership development develops men & women to participate in this mission as leaders within the church and to the world.

2. **Maturity:** Scripture is clear that leadership development is about maturity. Ephesians 4 argues that we develop people for the purpose of ministry so that they may be grown up/built up into maturity in Christ Jesus. Leadership development is not primarily about filling ministry needs; it is about equipping people to grow into maturity in Christ. Specifically, leadership development is about helping people mature in:

   1. **Calling:** God has called all believers to himself through Christ and into ministry. He has also given each member of the body specific roles to play (Ephesians 4:7, 10-16; Romans 12:4-8; I Corinthians 12:12-30). Leadership development is about helping people mature in their understanding of these truths and how they function in the family of God.
2. Character: All leaders are called to have the character of Christ. Leadership development is helping people mature in their character, identity in Christ. From this character flows how they will lead (whether by their own ability or as Christ did: humbly, with meekness, powerfully, and courageously in and by the Spirit).

3. Competencies: Leadership development is about equipping the saints for the work of ministry. In order to be effective ministers of reconciliation there are certain competencies that are needed including having right doctrine and the wisdom to know how and when to apply it, and how to gather, lead, and influence others, and what they need to fulfill their role within the body.

3. Mission: Leadership development is about equipping the saints for the work of ministry, so that they might be instruments that make the name of Jesus famous (Philippians 2:10-11). Leadership development is about releasing people to be ambassadors for God in their specific contexts (within and outside of the church). It is about taking risks, expecting God to lead, work, and move as we release his people for his purpose. Therefore, leadership development cannot just focus on training people for service within the systems and structures of the church. It is not less than that, but it is much more.

All three of these must remain in focus in order to stay faithful to biblical leadership development. For instance, if leadership development is primarily about mission and not maturity or people, then what is produced is a bunch of shallow doers who are tossed to and fro by various doctrines and have no real love for the people they are engaging. They may be on mission, but soon that mission will be off the mark, as they have no mature foundation. Or, if leadership development is primarily about maturity over mission and people, then what is produced is an insulated organization that eventually does a better job of keeping the “wrong” people out then engaging the context in which they are in as they tread water waiting for Christ to come again. Finally, if people are the primary focus of leadership development it is impossible to lead but only cater for you have nowhere and nothing to lead people to.

Leadership development is about people, maturity, and mission. None can be sacrificed or emphasized more than the others.

Interior Walls: While a house may be able to stand with only load-bearing walls in place, it is not complete until the interior walls have been put installed to finish out the floor plan. We call these interior walls “distinctives”. What this means is that interior walls are distinguishing marks that separate what guide Mars Hill Church in how and what we do, and what might guide how other churches and organizations do leadership development. These distinctives help us define what we are about and what we are not about. They define the rooms in which we do the work of developing leaders.

Interior walls are no less grounded in Scripture than the load bearing walls. However, Scripture is not prescriptive in every subject and interior walls reflect the descriptive nature of the Church. Each local church is in a unique context, made up of unique people, and led by leaders with unique personalities and gift sets. The interior walls can only fit on the foundation and within the confines of the load bearing walls. The foundation comes first, the load bearing walls are raised up; after which, the interior walls, call be finished out.

There are three interior walls; three guidelines for leadership development that are consistent in every church; three guidelines that distinguish how we develop leaders. These three interior walls are:
1. **Leadership Development is about raising up mission leaders not hospice keepers**: Leadership development is about moving the mission forward, about a continual evangelistic thrust toward reaching more people. The moment leadership development shifts to maintaining the status quo, is the moment that we stop participating in the mission of God and start waiting to die so we can see Jesus. *This means that leadership development is about taking risks with people, about making mistakes, about going big, about saying sorry when we mess up, about expecting God to move powerfully for his name sake, about not just believing the bible but using it as helpful and foundational, and about not just believing in Jesus but enjoying him as we serve him on his mission.* Leadership development is about creating this culture within each church in the diocese of Central Florida.

2. **Leadership Development is for every believer not just for super-Christians or merely for specific roles**: Every Christian should be a leader in the sense that he or she is called to be a minister of reconciliation. All Christians are called to influence others to live rightly with God, others, and creation. Not every believer is designed for every role of leadership, but every believer should be developed as a leader. Therefore, we must intentionally, overtly, and creatively invite and recruit the believers in our churches to participate in leadership development. *It should not be for a select personality type or gifting, but should be for a select person: a believer.* Self-nomination for ordination is biblical and beneficial. However, when we talk about leadership development it is a broader audience than ordination candidates; therefore, we must make a broader appeal. We must cast a vision that compels people to be who God has created them to be.

3. **Leadership development is a lifestyle not only a program or an event**: Programs and events are important tools and methods for leadership development; however, they are not in and of themselves leadership development. We must lead and structure our churches to incorporate leadership development as a lifestyle, a normal rhythm for how our church life operates. In order to create a culture that regards leadership development as a lifestyle, it is helpful to embrace the concept of “Evaluate – Equip – Experience.”

Evaluate – Equip – Experience is a way to think about developing people (leaders) within our churches. Rather than thinking of leadership development as a paper process or an educational process, Evaluate – Equip – Experience argues that people are best developed in relationship, overtime, and while being empowered to do ministry.

Evaluate: church leaders should be the best evaluators of their people’s maturity, abilities, and potential. Evaluation assumes relationship and discernment. Evaluation incorporates to components: Identification and Assessment. Identification is based on qualifiers for a specific leadership role. We look for people who seem to meet the qualifications for leadership, but the evaluation does not stop there. Once a person is identified, he/she is then assessed. Assessment assumes relationship and a season of observation in order to confirm a person’s leadership potential and areas he/she should continue to develop.

Equip: the role of the church leadership is to develop and equip the saints for the work of ministry. Equipping should be something that is done on a continuous basis from multiple angles, not just on the front end of leadership. Equipping is also holistic, engages the Head, Hands, and Heart of the potential leader. Finally, equipping is best done while a person is being empowered to do ministry. Think it of it like on the job coaching and training.

Experience: People learn best when they are doing. Through evaluation and equipping we are able to send (release) people into leadership. However, *we continue to evaluate and equip leaders as they are*
growing in leadership experience. We do not have to wait for people to be "fully" ready to empower them to lead. We need to be wise, but we must be willing to take risks on people. Our goal as leaders is to train up and send out leaders to do the same. We evaluate and equip leaders as they are growing in leadership experience.

**Furniture=Methodology:** It is difficult to live in a house without furniture, and while furniture helps distinguish style and enhance a room’s function, it should not be the controlling factor in a house. Like good furniture that is designed to make a room or home function well, so too are methods for leadership development designed to help the Church function well. Methods, like furniture, only last for so long. While the foundation and the framing of the house remain virtually unchanged over time, the furniture needs to be replaced and re-upholstered. We must guard against the common practice of making furniture the determining factor in how a house functions, rather than the foundation and framework. When all three components are put together correctly then a house can function properly, and it is the same with leadership development.

**Finishing Out the House**

Our hope is not to completely build the house, but rather ensure that how each church develops leaders is built on firm foundation and fits within the framework of our theological distinctives.

We need our leaders in each church to finish out the house. Specifically, we need our leaders to do the following:

1. **Finish Out the Floor Plan:** Not all the interior walls are built. Each local church is in a unique context, is made up of unique individuals, and is led by people who have diverse and unique personalities, strengths, and abilities. The diocese is available to consult as you finish out the floor plan. In the meantime, a few questions that will help determine what these additional interior walls could be are:
   a. What understanding and/or practices of leadership development within your context (people & culture) parallel but are not explicitly connected to a biblical view of leadership development?
   b. What understanding and/or practices of leadership development within your context are in opposition to a biblical view of leadership development?

2. **Assess the Furniture:** Programs, processes, events, and all other methods for developing leaders need to fit and function in our house. They must be run through the grid of philosophy to determine if they fit within our framework of leadership development. Some of the current methods will need to be replaced or re-upholstered. What furniture are we using? How does it fit in the house?

3. **Bring in New Furniture:** The hope is for some furniture to be provided and consistent in each house, but also that each local church would have the ability to create furniture as long as it fits with the framework of the house and allows the rooms to function as they should. Rectors will do this by creating leadership development plans for their churches with help and accountability from the diocese.

What attitudes and characteristics are important for leaders to buy into, in order to really create a leadership development culture?
Moving Forward

To create a leadership development ministry leaders should be empowered to champion leadership development. Empowerment is not letting someone run freely. Rather, empowerment involves four things:

1. Trust: Empowerment can only happen when diocesan leadership trusts the rectors and rectors trust diocesan leadership. Ultimately, this can only happen when both trust the Lord to build his church (Matthew 16:18), and are walking in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:15-21). Without trust, empowerment cannot be given nor received.

2. Communication: The second component of empowerment is communication. Communication empowers in that it invites people into decisions and allows them to feel that they are a part of what is going on. Communication goes two ways. From the diocese, communication looks like involving rectors in conversations about what is being developed, casting clear vision, and providing strong boundaries for ministry. From the rectors, communication looks like asking for guidance when needed, running things up for others to speak into often, and doing the work of informing the diocese of plans with consistency.

3. Accountability: Empowerment without accountability is independence. Accountability provides connection, but it also provides clarity for direction. There is freedom that comes in knowing one is leading others in the right direction. Relational and consistent accountability fosters trust, encourages communication, and keeps both parties focused on the vision and mission.

4. Equipping: Often the most overlooked component of empowerment is equipping. What is assumed in empowerment is releasing, but if we fail to properly train and resource our current leaders then we are sending them out to struggle or fail rather than setting them up for a win. What ways can the diocese serve current leaders so they are prepared, resourced and supported to develop more leaders?

Final Takeaway

1. We are not processing cattle but knowing the sheep. Your processes can’t be pragmatic but must be specific. Create those value questions in your church that all are ready to answer: who are you developing and discipling?

2. Intentional apprenticing. This is not done because it is easier to just do it yourself. That may be but it is harder on the development of leaders and the trajectory of your church.

3. Leadership development does take lots of time and money, but not developing leaders takes lots and lots and lots of time and money.

4. Your responsibility is to constantly be looking behind you and pointing at specific people and then assessing them to develop.

5. It is not your job to be an expert and fill someone else’s cup, it is your job to empty yourself.

6. MED: Model, Explain, Demonstrate.