

# RURAL EVANGELISM NETWORK

*This paper is an extract from our website at [www.ruralevangelism.net](http://www.ruralevangelism.net). It is part of a series exploring issues for small churches. You will find other helpful articles within the “Knowledge Exchange” section of the website. These articles are contributed by members of the Network who seek to encourage best practice in rural evangelism through sharing their insight and experience as practitioners.*

## MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP David Spriggs

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### Introduction

‘Let’s be clear about one thing, we are not simply thinking together about leadership, not even Christian leadership, we are focusing on leadership in small and rural churches’. Even with this sentence, I have exercised leadership: I have taken some decisions, I have communicated those decisions clearly I hope, and I have attempted to ‘take you with me’ by using language like ‘we are thinking together’ rather than ‘I am going to be telling you about leadership...’

But I’m uncomfortable about one thing. There is something in the tone of voice implied by ‘Let’s be clear about one thing...’ maybe it sounds too bossy for my liking so I want to soften it. I might therefore start by saying,

‘Leadership is something every one of us is involved in whether we choose it or not. This is partly because in some situation or other we will act as the leader and partly because we are either the leader or the led and both are intimately involved therefore in the effectiveness of leading. But with small congregations whether rural or urban every person is likely to need to function as a helper as well as a leader. In this section that is exactly the issue we will focus on. We will be thinking together not simply about leadership, not even Christian leadership, but leadership in our kind of world’.

### Christian leadership - what it looks like!

Christian leadership wherever it happens, if it valid, is an aspect of our discipleship. This means we are intentionally following Jesus and that means all our leadership is servant leadership. This has lots of ramifications including:

- We lead because Christ calls us to do so and we do it in his name and his kind of way
- We will always seek to lead in ways that respect other people and affirm them rather than sideline or belittle them. We want to enhance their ministries and empower and equip others.
- We will work to help individuals and the whole group carry out God’s mission - in the end we are God’s servants and not other peoples.
- We recognise that no task is too menial for us and we will look out for unexpected ways of modelling Christ’s compassion and commitment to all
- We will expect that leading this way will often go unnoticed, un-rewarded and even cause us pain and suffering. This is for us to cope with and not to project onto others by aggression or arrogance.
- We are not leading for our benefit or affirmation but for the glory of Jesus.

- We may well get things wrong - leading like this is a tough call - then we will be honest and seek forgiveness from people as well as God. We will also do all we can to put things right.

## **Jesus was a ‘small church leader’**

Once we recognise that our leadership is about following Jesus, we also stumble across a rather amazing fact: Jesus was primarily the leader of a ‘small church’. His really vital ministry was working with twelve men and some women who followed him around and helped him cope with life.

***Here are some scriptures to read, reflect on and pray about.***

### 1. Some key qualities of Jesus leadership

‘He was humble....’ - Philippians 2:8 and Matthew 11:29

He was compassionate - Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 20:34 (compare with Luke 10: 33-34; 15:20). This means Jesus felt deeply and shared the pain of others and this moved him to helpful action.

He was courageous Luke 4: 28-30; 8:22-25; 14: 25-27; 22: 50 - 54,63-65

He was a servant - John 13: 12 - 17.

Maybe ask yourself, friends you trust or God which of these needs to grow in your life - ask for them in prayer.

### 2. Some significant passages about leadership from the New Testament

Prayer - Ephesians 3: 14 -19

Service - 1Peter 5: 1- 4

Integrity - 1Timothy 3: 1 -15

Commitment - 2 Corinthians 6: 3-10

Example - 1Thessalonians 4: 1-8

## **What leadership in a small church requires:**

‘Leadership’ is not an abstract noun! It may be so technically but it isn’t in reality. It is about helping other people do what God wants and doing it in a godly way. I find it helpful to break it down into different functions. You might want to score yourself out of ‘5’ for how much of your leadership fits each category (i.e allow up to 5 points for each section so that a pattern of your leadership emerges).

### ***Doing things***

In small churches this means being willing to do anything that you possibly can (not just the things you might like to do - whether because they fit your gifts or are high profile and bring acknowledgment etc) - on occasions, and often those occasions are determined not by what suits us or even when it suits us but by the needs that arise. In small churches everyone has to ‘muck in’. This means we have to be realistic and accept that we can’t do everything perfectly but will try and be ‘good enough’. We also need to recognise this for everyone else we are leading (and help them become comfortable about it too).

Some of the things we might do are:

- Listening to people’s complaints, anxieties, sufferings, joys and follies!
- Planning a service, readings, prayers, songs - even preaching
- Washing up, putting out the chairs, sorting out blockages in the toilets

- Supporting people who are ill or feeling overwhelmed by visits, phone calls, or sending a card and praying both with them and for them
- Seeking to be 'peace makers' when someone feels overlooked and unappreciated or when there is conflict
- Designing the materials for the notice board or ordering the Christmas leaflets
- Adding to this list all you do....

The important thing here is *flexibility* - being willing to do anything we can if there is a need but also *firmness* (primarily with ourselves) that we will not do anything that some one else can do - we need to keep ourselves as free as possible and not become trapped into thinking that unless we are manically busy we can't be doing the job right. Leaders need ceaseless to seek give away their jobs to others (particularly in small church contexts), so they have the space to do the job of leading!

### ***Discerning***

We need to constantly be discerning what God wants us (i.e. both me as leader and us as his people) to be doing. Different leaders have different ways of discerning, but here are some components

- Becoming as clear as we can about the facts - which, strangely, often include peoples' feelings! We can do this by observing and asking pertinent questions, as well as by listening carefully
- Having some kind of 'advisory group' people who we trust and who respect us enough to tell us what they are learning and how they see things
- Reading scripture with our ears open to God for our situations, but also being aware of possible resources - people who can help us as well as print and media based ones
- Praying (both alone and together with others) - God does show us what is going on, perhaps at a deeper level, and the way forward
- Making a list of the challenges, opportunities, confusions and bottlenecks and working out how to best handle these
- Recognising and affirming people's needs and gifts; together these can often suggest what God is wanting us to do

### ***Decision making***

An inevitable role of leading is decision making. This depends upon discerning - if we are going to get it right. Please be clear, though, not all decisions are for the leader to take - some and it depends on the kind of church you are - require the church to take decisions. So be aware what decisions you can take and which involve others. The advantage of involving others is that it can increase ownership; one disadvantage is that it slows decisions down. When others are involved the leader's task is to help then know what decisions need to be taken and help then make then in an informed and godly way.

When we take decisions we will carry especially heavy responsibilities and may experience the burden of carrying confidentiality and loneliness. But even when it is a decision of the church, as the leader, we still have the responsibility to ensure it is carried out.

### ***Direction giving***

Once decisions have been reached they need to be communicated effectively to all who need to know. This will mean using different kinds of communication for different people. The purpose of this is so people know and understand what has or is going to change and are encouraged to be part

of the change and not part of the problem. They need to know with whom they can talk to work through issues which emerge for them.

But direction giving is also about keeping the change on track. There is an inbuilt tendency for people to return to their familiar ways. So the leader needs to keep monitoring progress and pointing to the next step while affirming achievements. Good leaders help to keep refocusing people but also remain flexible and adaptable as the situation develops. Sometimes the decision is to keep things as they are and then the task may well be helping people remain involved who have been investing in the possibility of change.

### ***Developing people***

Another key role is developing people or helping them develop themselves. This may not mean you doing the training but it means raising their horizons and helping to resource them with the opportunities they need. People need supporting when they move into new tasks or responsibilities. But for all of us developing trust between people (especially the leader and the led!) is fundamental to success and comfortable working. Encouragement and stimulation are also vital to sustain people. It is also vital not only that we accept that others often don't do things 'my way' or apparently as well as we could, but that people know we are OK with this. We need them to play their part as well as they can and we are truly grateful to them. For many people, finding ways to affirm them and celebrate achievements for individuals and the group is important

### ***Dreaming***

Leaders need to give themselves permission to dream or rather to catch God's dreams for his people and their future. Think of Joseph (in the Old Testament). Think of Mary - Jesus' mother. Visitations from God were vital for shaping their lives and with them the future of all. We need this capacity to solve problems and to know where we are meant to be going, but even more so that we know we matter to God. We do well to keep our eyes on God's future and his plans for us. This helps us encourage wise decisions and show others the way.

### ***Devoting***

One last thing: leaders need to be devoted (see Acts 2:42 - here applied to all). We need to be devoted to God - so our inner core is constantly growing and our vision is in tune; we need to be devoted to our people and we need to be devoted to our call to serve God with and through his people. Leadership requires stamina!

### **Additional Resources**

There are, of course, many books available about leadership, and Christian leadership in particular - please visit your Christian Bookshop to find out more. For those who wish to find out more there are two books I have written.

*Christian Leadership*, Bible Society 1993 (190 pages) - £5 including p&p

*Becoming an Empowering Leader*, Healthy Church UK 2004 (A4 magazine style 27 pages) - £5 including p&p.

To purchase these send a cheque for the correct amount to David Spriggs, 7 Frankpledge Road, Coventry CV3 5GT.

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