



Congregational Life

A Family Welcome

by Clair Woodbury

November 2009 Contents

A Family Welcome	1
We Are Companions On the Journey	2
Governance & Ministry	3
I'm Not Religious, I'm Spiritual	4
Leadership for Today	5

We had friends over for dinner last week. Getting ready began with sending invitations to people we knew would enjoy each other's company. Then came the menu planning. We found a great recipe on the internet for marinated leg of lamb. The day of the dinner, it was my job to do the vacuuming and clean the bathrooms. An extra leaf stretched the table to accommodate everyone. When set with flowers, the Blue Willow china and freshly polished silverware, its visual message to our guests was "You are very special and are most welcome."

At church the next day I got to thinking. We talk about wanting new people to join our congregation. When they come through the door for the first time, they need to know they are special guests and that they are appreciated for just being here. We want them to experience a warm welcome and their time with us to be a rich and meaningful encounter. It's not that different from what we wanted for our dinner party.

Let's start with the invitation. One church we know distributes carefully printed brochures in the community when they are having a special event. You can go and experience the setting without making a permanent commitment. That is important in this era when people want to try out a number of congregations in order to find one that really fits for them.

Another congregation works hard to make their lawn sign truly inviting. They avoid words like *Sexagesimal Sunday* or *Eucharist* and use only vocabulary that people with little or no church experience can readily understand. That is after all who they want to reach.

I live on the fourth floor of a condo building. When people arrive I like to go out and meet them in the hall as they get off the elevator. It's just a little more special than

waiting until they find the suite and knock on the door. Perhaps the church equivalent would be a parking lot attendant, or at minimum, someone outside opening the door for people as they arrive.

That doesn't mean there is no one inside also greeting. Actually when my guests arrived, some did not know everyone there and it was a matter of doing introductions. Not just names, but letting people know something about each person so they had a way of starting a conversation. That reminds me of a church I was visiting where the greeter recognized me as new and learned I was a church consultant. Three minutes later, he was tapping me on the shoulder and introducing a member of the congregation who was also a church consultant. I was impressed.

Bathrooms are a place everyone visits. My award for lavatory luxury goes to two congregations I know who have sparkling clean facilities with art on the walls and a basket of lotions plus a box of tissue beside the sink.

We know people feel much more comfortable with a drink in their hand. That's why many congregations offer people a coffee as they walk in the door. A warm cup of coffee puts real warmth into the welcome.

Then there is the menu. We try to make the food at a dinner party special in some way. That should be the case with the "menu" when people participate in a congregational event, whether it is Sunday worship or a mid-week gathering. Food for the soul needs to be as nourishing and as tastefully prepared as the fare at the finest of dinner parties.

I know our dinner guests look forward to coming back. With the right welcome, church guests will feel the same way.



We are Companions on the Journey

By Judith Coates

This morning, on my way to mass, a Lutheran church service was playing on my car radio. The pastor was telling the story of a man who had moved to a new city and was unsure which church to attend.

In all, he attended 18 churches, sat in the front row and attended the coffee fellowships after the services. The result was the same in all. Not one person came and talked to him or made him feel welcome.

This reminded me of an incident that occurred several years ago in church. As usual I slid into my seat, knelt to say my prayers then sat back to read the weekly bulletin. There was a brisk tap on my shoulder.

"Young lady, do you know who I am?" inquired the elderly grey-haired lady behind me. Startled, I turned around, probably looking very confused.

"Every Sunday I sit here. You come in, sit down but you don't see anyone. You don't smile nor do you acknowledge I am here," she said.

I was stunned. The truth was I had not paid any attention to who was sitting behind me. How long had she been there? What was her name?

Each of us travels our own journey through life. Our paths converge in one place, our church. We form a community unlike any other as we share our faith journey. We join in the common purpose of worshipping, seeking forgiveness and petitioning for God's blessing. We pray together; young, old, rich, poor, healthy, infirm, employed, unemployed, the broken and the healed. Our presence binds us together providing strength, comfort, support and courage.

Do you know who is accompanying you during this phase of your journey? Each Sunday I sit in the same place as do those around me. We are comfortable together. Often, when returning from communion I am surprised by the long lines of fellow parishioners awaiting their turn. I am not even aware they are sitting behind me. This is what the elderly lady was telling me. "I am here. You are here. The least we can do is acknowledge each other."

One of the complaints I hear in our parish is that our church doesn't have a sense of community. When mass is over, each goes their own separate way until the next week. Although we pray together, we do not work toward a common purpose.

Participation provides ownership. Ownership allows us to feel a part of something bigger than ourselves. Each of us needs to contribute then feel our contribution is important. When the subject of money comes up, we wiggle and squirm in our seats. We don't want to hear there is a need. When volunteers are required for lay ministries or to assist with the children's ministries, no one steps forward. Our thinking is "I am too busy. I don't know enough, others are more qualified than I. I don't have time those particular days." What we fail to realize is that our small contribution adds value to the whole.

The simplest way is making the choice to take an active role in the church community. I mean participating, welcoming, sharing and acknowledging. Smile. Be a friendly face to newcomers. Introduce yourself first.

As in all things, we go where we are wanted and stay because we feel welcome. We each have been given a gift or talent we can use to benefit our church. If you are not comfortable in the forefront consider volunteering in the background. Maybe you could cook for the fall supper or sell a book of raffle tickets for a fundraiser. Maybe you could sing in the choir, help clean the church or type the weekly bulletin.

This common meeting place in our faith journey provides us a place to worship, a sense of belonging and togetherness because we invest part of our selves. Some of us can't do a lot, but everyone can do a little. Summed up, it is the knowing, loving and serving each other as we travel our journey together.

By the way, her name's Johanna. Several weeks later we both laughed when once again she leaned over my shoulder and said "Isn't this better?"

"Yes, Johanna, it is. Thank you for opening my eyes."

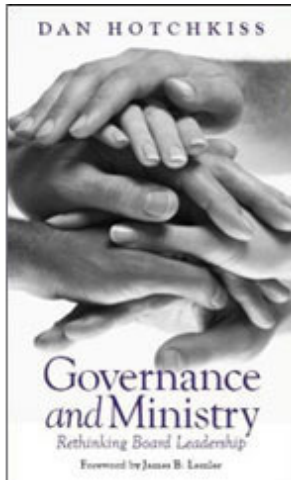
*Do you
know the
worshippers
sitting behind
you?*

Judith Coates is a parishioner of Holy Family Catholic Church in Grimshaw.

Reprinted from the Edmonton Journal, Oct. 24, 2009, with permission of the author.

Governance and Ministry with Dan Hotchkiss

Presentations to Edmonton & Yellowhead Presbyteries



Dan Hotchkiss, the Alban Institute consultant, has a new book about church governance. He shared some of his insights with Edmonton and Yellowhead Presbyteries.

Dan made the point that a governance structure is like a furnace. “If you have it well maintained, you don’t have to worry about it. If you don’t have it well maintained, you can have problems.”

He began his presentation by asking, “Who owns the church?” People had all kinds of suggestions: members, the national church, God, or the congregation. Dan made the point that the clue to the ownership of the church lies in its mission. What a congregation or a court of the church does is determined by its mission. What is important is to be clear about that mission and ensure that it truly names what the congregation needs to be about.

Delegation

A lot of our current structure in the church “is redundant, labour intensive, and needlessly resistant to innovation.” Partly this is because people naturally prefer what they have become used to, and that means no change. Another reason is the lack of trust when authority is delegated in the church.

The process of giving a committee a task and then making sure they have to come back for approval is not delegation. A great deal of time is wasted that way. When you delegate, you say in advance what you are looking for, then when the work is done give feedback so the group can do an even more effective job next time.

Effective Structure

Dan shared a generalization that was articulated by Lyle Schaller some years ago: “Church groups that are flexible about theology tend to be rigid about organizational structure and behavior. And churches that are rigid about theology tend to be more flexible about structure.” What that means is if you are clear about your theology, and conservatives are quite clear,

you can be flexible about the ways of achieving that. Being flexible in theology as main-line congregation tend to be, there is a natural tendency to cling to the way they do things organizationally.

Dan outlined what he feels is an effective structure for a Presbytery or a congregation. On one hand there is the Board who give guidance and periodically evaluate how well the church body is doing. On the other hand, an Operations Team carries out the work that needs to be done, delegating aspects of the work to sub-teams.

Presbyteries waste a great deal of time when the whole meeting has to deal with every issue brought by Committees. Time is a precious commodity. One important function of the Board — which in this case would be the Presbytery Executive — is to decide on the two or at most three issues which would benefit from having the input of Presbytery delegates. All other work would be assigned to Operations Teams to just do.

Governance, Hotchkiss maintains, has an impact on church growth. In the preface to his book, he writes:

As an Alban Institute consultant, I have worked with congregations that grew rapidly while streamlining their decision-making process, and with others that tried to maintain scores of committees while their membership declined from thousands to hundreds to scant dozens. In time, I started to suspect that outdated, overly complex and inward-focused structures might be one cause of decline in congregations. As I watched more systematically, I came to believe that often-mentioned trends like “the decline of the Protestant mainline” might have as much to do with governance as with theology.

Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership by Dan Hotchkiss. The Alban Institute, Alban No. AL370. 2009
ISBN# 978-1-56699-370-8



Dan Hotchkiss

I'm Not Religious, I'm Spiritual

James Strachan

*For what are we created?
Is there a purpose to our living? Most of us are filled with passion. Where should it be placed?*

"I'm not really religious...but I am a spiritual person." Many of us feel that way and express ourselves in just these words. The sentiment speaks of the disinterest or discomfort that many people have with religious organizations or overtly religious practices such as worship or prayer. "Spirituality" seems to mean "I have feelings and awarenesses that I can't label any other way than as 'spiritual.'" They come from deep inside myself."

I understand human beings in a slightly different way. Every person is a 'spiritual' person. Spirituality is a part of who we are. It is that part of our psyches that allows us to be moved by music or by holding a newborn. Suddenly we are aware that there is more to life than just ourselves. There is something beyond us which inspires awe in us when we catch a glimpse of it.

Many of us look upon the negative aspects and actions of religious organizations over the centuries and say, "That's not for me."

Some folks however express their spirituality, at least partly, through religious convictions or actions or associations. "We are," as John Dominic Crossan wrote, "hard-wired for religion." That means, to me at least, that each of us 'spiritual beings' has the capacity for religious sentiment, association or action.

What about the possibility that our need for a religion of some kind might be focused on another aspect of life? Those matters that draw and consume the greater part of our time and interest might be a replacement for a traditional religion. I recently watched a documentary that revealed the lengths to which some computer gamers go in their obsession or passion. Fourteen hours a day was a regular pattern, including withdrawal from the family and work. Could we describe that as a religious commitment,

with virtually all of life given to the "god of the game?"

Over the last three decades, researchers have gradually come to see that a central passion in our culture is consumerism. We buy to be happy. We shop for entertainment as well as for socializing. The mall has taken the place once played by the cathedral in the Middle Ages. The cathedral was not only the central place of worship, but all

the market and the community healers were there as well. Life revolved around the cathedral then, just as life revolves around our favorite mall today. For thousands of people, a day without the experience of looking at, admiring and purchasing something is an empty and lonely day.

The Stanley Cup finals capture the attention and passion of many and they reach a frenzied climax. A commentator

said in a recent broadcast; "Hockey is Canada's religion in winter."

The Old Testament prophets frequently railed at the Israelites because of their frequent turning to idols – something that replaced the God of Israel. Although their strong language would be repugnant to most of us today, ponder for a moment the underlying truth of what they were saying. For what are we created? Is there a purpose to our living? Most of us are filled with passion. Where should it be placed?

These are all religious questions, and every young person asks them in one form or another as they move from high school into the world of higher education or work. Older folks are often forced to wrestle with them again when a major change brings with it new directions, for example when a job is lost, when disability demands that new tasks be undertaken, or when all the children are gone and life assumes a completely new aspect. Welcome to the world of religion, and to the struggle to find resources with which to answer those questions and redirect your life.



Congregational Life

Nov. 2009

Vol.16 No.2

is published by the
Congregational Life
Centre

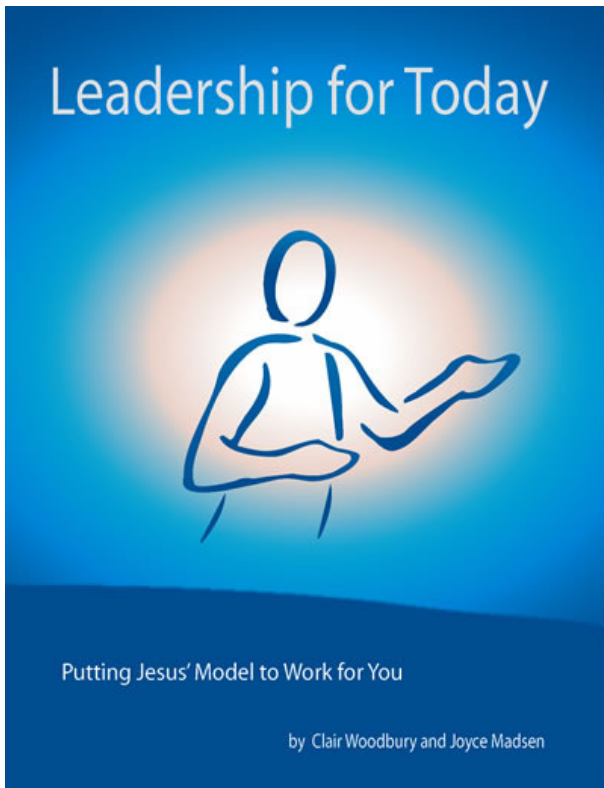
#1405, 5328 Calgary
Trail, Edmonton AB
T6H 4J8

Phone: 780-619-0386
or 780-438-6016

CongregationalLife.com

Staff Team:

Joyce Madsen &
Clair Woodbury



Leadership for Today: Putting Jesus' Model to Work for You

By Clair Woodbury and Joyce Madsen

This book looks at Jesus' three years of ministry with new eyes. It explores the eight key facets of leadership that made his mission so effective. His leadership was spiritual, visionary, flexible, story-centred, team-based, risking, action-oriented, and authentic. There are stories and more stories, because we Christians are above all story people. It has some specific "how-to-do-it" advice, recognizing that every situation is different and requires a unique approach.

But above all, this book is a prayer for the church, that it become the place of spiritual support our grandchildren need as they take on the challenges of a future world we can hardly imagine. That is the way we hope people will read it — with a candle burning as a reminder of God's presence, and a passion burning in their hearts for a church that is dedicated to the primary task Jesus left his followers — transforming lives into everything God intends them to be.

Jesus leadership was so effective it changed the world. What kind of leadership did he offer? Would that leadership model be effective today? Our answer is YES!

Cost: \$24.95 per copy.

ISBN: 978-0-9688358-5-2.

Contents

1. The New Culture
 2. Experiencing God
 3. Knowing Where You're Going
 4. Initiating Change
 5. Communication is Key
 6. Multiplying Leadership
 7. Overcoming the Fear
 8. Making It So
 9. Being Authentic
 10. The Last Word
- Appendix: Six Steps to Success

Leadership for Today

Putting Jesus' Model to Work for You

Order from the Congregational Life Centre,
#1405, 5328 Calgary Trail, Edmonton, AB T6H 4J8

or on line at www.congregationallife.com
Phone: 780-619-0386

Cost: \$24.95. Make your cheque for \$24.95 payable to the
Congregational Life Centre.