

# TORONTO UNITED CHURCH COUNCIL

## Connecting Resources with Ministry

### Church Development Discussion Papers

**TITLE:** The Leadership of Change

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In the leadership of change, as in any other ministry, a servant attitude must underpin everything else. Servant leadership is empowering, equipping leadership. It is, in part, the exercise of gifts given and brought to maturity by the Holy Spirit and such gifts are given to individuals to be used for the common good (I Cor 12:7) and to serve others (I Peter 4:10). Servant leadership expresses itself in many ways – it must serve the future of the church as well as its present; it must serve the church's mission as well as its existing members.

#### **Vision**

Vision is a prerequisite for leadership. Robert Greenleaf, author of the book *Servant Leadership*, asks, "Why would anybody accept the leadership of another except that the other sees more clearly where it is best to go?" In presenting the possibility of a new future to a person, group or organization, vision also provides the motivation and the high energy levels that are required to work the changes which will challenge the status quo and make the new future a reality. While vision is primarily orientated toward the future, it has a number of aspects.

The first task of vision is interpretative. The interpretative aspect of vision enables the leadership of an organization to discern and define the present reality of the organizational situation. Thus Max DePree, in his book *Leadership is an Art*, maintains, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality." Like most organizations churches are adept at avoiding or denying their own realities. But continued avoidance or denial of reality is neurotic. A leader who is really serving the church will carefully confront the church with the truth of its situation.

The second task of vision is creative. Based on their interpretation of the present realities, leaders use prayer, reflection, imagination, intuition and reason to envision and thus to create a new future. This creative aspect of vision is what makes leaders refuse to resign themselves to what others would see as inevitable and which energizes them to confront business as usual attitudes. Creative vision is always seeing new and better ways – new opportunities, new ways to increase effectiveness, new ways to understand, new ways of helping ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results.

It was because Paul had envisioned a better way for the gifted and troubled church at Corinth that he could write to say, "I will show you a still more excellent way" (I Cor 12:31). In the midst of the many things, some good, some not so good, with which churches and Christian organizations become involved and which sometimes become embedded in their traditions or culture, the preeminent task of the Christian leader is to envision and declare "a still more excellent way".

### **The ethical implementation of change**

A number of ethical issues surround the leadership of change. Firstly, we need to recognize that, in a sense, all change is destructive – it is destructive of someone's or some group's accustomed way of doing things. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves what right we have to make these changes, what needs to be changed, and what are the appropriate change strategies for this situation. These are ethical questions which servant leaders must consider.

This involves a number of leadership behaviours. In the immediate situation it will involve a careful listening to the church membership – a listening which includes the whole constituency, not just parts of it. We will not be able to please everybody but we can listen and respond appropriately to people's concerns. It will also involve lavish communication of the issues. A less immediate but equally important leadership behaviour is continuing professional development of leadership skills. To fail to undertake such development is ethically questionable since it may well result in an inability to carry out one's responsibilities in an adequate way.

The difficulties and hard work associated with the leadership of change cause some to hold back from it. But this too may be viewed as an ethical failure since the collapse of a ministry (or church) may well reflect the earlier unwillingness of the leadership to take action while there was time and freedom to act. Leaders who refuse to act in time are like people who will not go to the dentist until a toothache becomes so bad that they are driven there. By then often it's too late to save the tooth and the dentist has no option but to remove it. The refusal to act in time is an ethical failure because it postpones difficulties in the present only to accrue a greater future loss. It's no use arguing that congregations are sometimes (often?) equally unwilling to confront the need for change and may, in fact, unwittingly conspire to avoid it. The role of leadership is to define reality – and to lead!

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