

## LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY SELECTION AND DEPLOYMENT Dr. Don Nations and Rev. David Herman, 2005-6

The quintessential characteristic needed by pastors who will lead transformation in otherwise declining mainly church systems is leadership. It is granted that all pastors need a clear conversion to Christian faith, a strong sense of call, adequate training in theology and biblical studies and a familiarity with the polity of the denominational system in which function. Leadership will make the difference between systems that continue to decline and those that aggressively pursue and achieve transformation.

Leadership in a Christian context encompasses several things:

- an ability to make positive things happen in the local church and get things done
- casting a compelling vision and building a team to make it a reality
- an ability to prioritize actions to maximize results
- sufficient attention to detail so that the most important things get done (instead of slipping through the cracks)
- the courage to embrace change when it is unpopular
- an ability to function at a high level in spite of stress, personal attacks, hurt feelings, etc. (thick skin)
- a passionate pursuit of godly character
- the ability to help people take significant and meaningful steps in their spiritual journey (spiritual midwife)

Successful Christian leaders are not identical. There is not one specific profile of a transforming pastor. God gifts people in many ways and many pastors have used their gifts in ways that have led churches to transformation. While differing at some points, they tend to share certain skills and abilities:

- good preacher who is personally revealing, entertaining, dynamic, enthusiastic and able to connect the biblical text to everyday life
- relatively high energy person with a history of starting and/or trying new things
- functions better as a specialist than a generalist; develops a high skill level in ministry areas related to transformation
- tend to tithe and/or invest heavily in the ministry of the church

Every judicatory system has a process by which it selects clergy. The body that does this selection (such as a Board of Ministry) uses a set of selection criteria. Sometimes these are clearly spelled out while

other times they are assumed or passed down or simply “understood.” These selection criteria may or may not be related to transformation. Some selection criteria may relate to completing a specific educational program, participating in a particular ministry process, taking certain psychological assessments with results within a specified range and/or completing other steps specific to a denominational system. This process has been in place for decades with occasional tweaks made in the process. While this system has seen many nice people become clergy, it has not led to transformation across mainline denominations. Part of the solution to change the declining church system is the overhaul of clergy selection criteria and anchoring them to behavior and characteristics most likely to lead to church transformation.

The current system is filled with subjectivity and considerations not directly related to transformation: who knows the candidate, who is related to the candidate, who mentored the candidate, where did the candidate attend school, what is the age/gender/ethnicity/race of the candidate, how “hard” the candidate has worked, how long the candidate has been “in the system,” considerations of how others will respond if a negative comment is made about a candidate and others. The injection of additional objective material about each candidate can only strengthen the current system. This material should be linked to the characteristics most often found in pastors with a track record of leading transformation in local churches. Examples of the kind of objective material that could be utilized include the following.

1. A formal assessment by someone outside of the system. This may include the use of personality/behavior profiles, leadership inventories and/or a structured behavioral interview. A formal report listing strengths and areas of concern could be presented to the selection team for their review and consideration.
2. Use of the DISC personality/behavior profile. This profile helps identify tendencies in behavior so that people can become more self-aware, better use their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. A majority of pastors have “S” as their strongest characteristic. “S” personalities tend to be caring, kind, shepherding, of moderate energy, relationship, not fond of radical or quick change, sensitive and have a few very close friendships. There is nothing wrong with these characteristics. If a system is declining, however, it must recognize that these characteristics are not highly associated with persons who lead transformation in churches. Those more likely to lead transformation were described earlier with words dissimilar to those that describe an “S” personality/behavior profile. The

Alban Institute issued a call in the book, *Transforming Regional Bodies*, that only one out of four newly ordained pastors be a person best described by these "S" characteristics. I would echo this call strongly.

3. Use of one or more leadership profiling tools. These tools, such as LEAD, TEAM, Dimensions of Leadership and Energize2Lead, provide information related to preferred styles of leadership, the leadership environment preferred by the candidate, potential strengths and blind spots of leaders and much more.
4. A structured behavioral interview. This is an interview in which candidates are asked about how they have acted in the past. The interview typically lasts about two hours. No hypothetical or "what if" questions are asked. The questions are the same for every candidate and each is presented with a copy of the questions prior to the interview. Initial answers to the questions are submitted to the interviewer several days before the interview. The interview is conducted by a trained interviewer and follows the questions provided to the candidate. The premise of the interview is that the best predictor of future performance is past performance. This interview does not take the place of the standard interview by the selection group. Instead, it is conducted to provide additional information for the selection group to consider.

Transforming declining systems is no easy task or simple undertaking but it can happen. It will require pastors who can lead churches through the journey of transformation. And these pastors will only be available if the qualities they possess become clear selection criteria for newly credentialed pastors. Whether the four steps outlined above are handled by those inside the system or by contracting with an outside organization, their inclusion can only strengthen the selection process for new pastoral leaders.

This reflection on making great appointments is a resource from DNA Coaching. Dr. Don Nations is the founder and serves as the Lead Coach. He coaches churches and leaders in over 25 churches across the country and has worked with many annual conferences. He also serves as the Director of the South Sarasota Teaching Parish in the Florida Conference. The web site for DNA Coaching is located at [www.dnacoaching.com](http://www.dnacoaching.com). You can email Don at [don@dnacoaching.com](mailto:don@dnacoaching.com).

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