

Central Christian Church
Waco, Texas
September 7, 2008

Rev. Richard Roland
"It's About Leadership"
2 Timothy 4:1-8

Sometime ago a study was done about effective, growing churches. The objective was to determine what made the difference between thriving, growing congregations and those less active, not as effective and declining. Location was considered and found to be important. Worship and music were looked at and deemed to make a difference. Christian Education for adults, youth and children was relevant. All of these and other aspects were considered. When the study was finished, the deciding factor was effective pastoral and lay leadership. I am confident that if this research was done again today, the outcome would be the same.

The question then becomes what are the qualities of this leadership? On this Sunday as we choose leaders and reaffirm our commitment to excellence, I suggest four characteristics of dynamic church leadership.

The first characteristic is relationship with God and Jesus Christ.

Church leaders must have a personal, active, growing relationship with God. This would seem to be obvious but it often gets lost in the shuffle. "You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3) The first and greatest commandment is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength." (Mark 12:30) Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me. If you know me, you know my Father also." (John 14:6-7) Paul writing to Timothy says, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, I give you this charge." (2 Timothy 4:1) For the church to be the church, the family of God in the world, it must be rooted in God and Christ. There is no other way. For the church to be rooted, its pastoral and lay leadership have to be the pace setters in the spiritual realities.

During my ministry with the First Christian Church in Noblesville, Indiana, I was invited to a church Christian Education Conference in French Lick, Indiana. It was a cold, snowy winter day and I was delayed arriving. I found my way into the session and listened for about 45 minutes. God and Christ were never mentioned. When it came time for questions, I asked, "What kind of Conference is this? Is this a group from General Motors, Ford, US Steel or some other group like this?" The leader responded that it was a meeting of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) about Christian Education. I then asked, "What happened to God and Christ. I would never have known this was a Christian gathering if you had not told me!"

Leadership today demands vision.

The ability to see the unseen, to believe the unbelievable, the willingness to think outside the traditional faith box distinguishes the leader who creates and innovates from the manager who just presides over what already is. "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

(Proverbs 29:18 KJV) One of the most startling statements of Jesus is found in John. Jesus said, "He who believes in me will do the works that I do. Greater works than these will he do because I go to my Father." (John 14:12) Jesus, the Son of God, saying that the disciples, imperfect men, will do greater works than he has done.

In the 1970's, men and women of the Central Christian Church in Waco had a vision. They thought outside the box. Some of you here this morning were part of that group. Central had a wonderful ministry at 11th and Washington but what about the future. They found this place, relocated, moved all of our church programming here, and began to fulfill the vision. Central today needs leaders who will dare to vision again, to see the unseeable, to believe the unbelievable to move us forward in ministry.

Two weeks ago from this pulpit, Kristin called us to the future. She shared her vision of the church in 2010. Included in that were 15 kindergarten children in Sunday School, 3 nursery and preschool rooms with 6 paid workers and 6 volunteers, 12 workers in this area of our Christian Education life. She saw so many children in worship that we needed more than 50 activity packets. There were 4 rows of teenagers in our worship attendance of 250. Can you see it? Do you believe it can happen? With God, all things are possible. But WE have to see it and believe it for it to happen!

Leaders are enthusiastic.

The energy of the Christian faith is joy, celebration, excitement and enthusiasm. "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Come into his presence with singing." (Psalm 100:1) "There is great joy in heaven when one sinner repents." (Luke 15:7) Paul wrote in 2 Timothy "I long night and day to see you, that I may be filled with joy!" (2 Timothy 1:4) Ralph Waldo Emerson penned "The world belongs to the energetic!" Thriving, growing, serving churches are filled with joyful people led by enthusiastic, energetic, positive leaders.

At the close of a large church growth workshop I was leading for the Lutherans in Pennsylvania, a lady came up to me and said, "I want to thank you for this day. I came this morning discouraged and really feeling down about my church. Your enthusiasm and excitement during this event have given me hope. I'm going back to my church and try to generate some energy and excitement. Thank you for making my day!"

The final quality of leadership is endurance.

One of the hardest faith lessons to learn is patience, endurance. "With patience a ruler may be persuaded." (Proverbs 25:15) Luke writes, "Hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart. And bring forth fruit with patience." (Luke 8:15) Paul to young Timothy "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race (endured). I have kept the faith. Now (after I have done all

of this) there is a crown in store for me.” (2 Timothy 4:6) Some faith successes come immediately. Others come quickly. Most come with patience, endurance and long suffering.

John Maxwell, writing about leadership, says, “Few worthwhile things in life come quickly. There is no such thing as instant greatness or instant maturity... We are used to instant oatmeal, instant coffee and microwave popcorn. But becoming a leader doesn’t happen overnight. Microwave leaders don’t have any staying power. Leadership is more of a Crock-Pot proposition. It takes time, but the end product is worth the wait. Leaders need to remember that the point of leading is not to cross the finish line first; it’s to take people across the finish line with you. ...This is why God called us to ministry-for the sake of others. God is in the people business, and so are we.”

How are we with patience and endurance? The last year and a half have been a rebuilding time. Lots of things have seemed immediately important. As we look to a new year, choose leadership, and gather for planning, it may be time to take a longer look and realize that God’s mission is long term, not short.

The National Cathedral in Washington, DC is the sixth largest Gothic cathedral in the world, the second largest in the United States, smaller only than St. John’s in New York City. Construction of the Cathedral began on September 29, 1907 when the foundation stone was laid in the presence of President Theodore Roosevelt and a crowd of more than 20,000 people. Construction lasted 83 years. It was finished in 1990 in the presence of President George H. W. Bush.

Effective leadership, pastoral and lay, working in partnership builds great churches. Some of the ingredients of this leadership are personal relationship with God and Christ; vision and seeing the unseeable; enthusiasm and joy in the task; and endurance, patience. Our challenge is to recommit ourselves to these values as we move ahead in the ministry to which God has called us.