



# Where Does the Church Find Leaders?<sup>1</sup>

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Ted Ward

Where does the church find leaders? From the same place as the early church—they grew them. Potential leaders were in the church, being raised up by the ministries of others in positions of leadership who saw it as their responsibility help people mature into responsible leadership.

How many leaders does a church need? The difficulty in answering that question is that leadership responsibilities have been so centralized that everyone else views themselves as followers and passive participants.

The church of Jesus Christ was intended to be a group of people contributing to a common cause, and in many different ways, gifted by the Holy Spirit so that *each* can provide some kind of leadership responsibility.

How many of you have helped another person to become part of your fellowship? In other words, you took personal responsibility to help that person get acquainted, find their way around, be comfortable, and find a place of service in that church. That is leadership. How many of you have ever led the people of God in reflection and worship of Jesus Christ? That's leadership. How many of you have ever taught a Sunday school class? That too is leadership. How many of you have ever invited someone else to come and help out because help is needed to serve lunch? That's leadership.

We could go on all night. Leadership is diverse; it's momentary, experiential; and we can move in and out of roles of responsibility. Sometimes we as Christians overstep our leadership by cutting out a territory, raising a flag, and daring anyone else to get close.

Leadership in the church has to be shared. Not even the pastor dare carve out some kind of citadel on the mountain, dig in the flag, and announce, "I run this place." First, we have but one leader, and we all are following that same leader whose name is Jesus Christ.

The second reason why we are the church is so that God can minister through us. God is not running an entertainment center. The church is not a happy club. The church is not even a retirement home. The church is a place for people to be used by God in ministry.

So then, where does the church get its leaders? It is us, folks. Many of us, when looking back across our lives, can find incidents that we recognize as important, perhaps in ways that we did not recognize at the time; turning points in our lives that made a difference in who we are and what we have become.

As I have grown older, I have become more aware of the importance of an event that occurred when I was 15 years old. One summer, in the middle of World War II, a group of us teenagers from three different churches in a small town decided that what our town needed was a young people's revival. For half the summer we prepared for this young people's revival. We called it "Youth Revival." With permission from the banker and drug store owner on opposite sides of the street, we hung a big banner across Main Street. "Youth Revival: High School Auditorium, August such-and-such." This was in South Florida—no air conditioning. The 12 of us, teenage kids, worked together; and we saw that high school auditorium filled with young people from miles around for four

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nights straight. The adults of the community thought we had really done something. So did we. God was pleased to give us a great sense of his presence, and evidence of his salvation as we saw many of our schoolmates come to Christ. As I have reflected on that event throughout my adult life, I have come to realize how important it was. At the time, it was a summer activity. It was a lot of fun. We took a risk, we asked a lot of people to help us, we learned much about recruitment, we learned how to share leadership, and we were in ministry. Of that group of 12, four became missionaries. Three others became pastors. I was the renegade, I guess. I ended up as a professor.

There was something about that experience that to this day ties us together. We had engaged in an experience that convinced us that being in ministry to Jesus Christ is not something out there, sometime way off. Ever since that time I have been sensitive to the ways we sometimes hold each other back, waiting until we mature: "Now don't go too far with this. In a few years, you'll be able to do that." Or when we say, "Look, you really haven't had the benefit of much education yet. You get to college, get some education and background, then you take that on." Worse yet, some of us who are preaching or teaching might say, "That was a nice little talk you gave us, but someday you'll be able to preach a real sermon. You'll get to go to seminary and get prepared for ministry."

It worries me that so many theological seminaries print in the first several pages of their catalog something to this effect: "The purpose of this institution is to prepare people for ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Sounds great, except for one thing. It's wrong. I don't think we ought to be teaching anybody who isn't already in ministry. What do you mean "prepare them"? I don't think anybody ought to go to seminary unless they are already in ministry. Everyone of us has the possibility of ministry to friends, family, neighbors, people in the work place, people we come in contact with day after day, people among whom we can be ministering spirits.