

THE EDGE

Leadership or Servantship?

By Dr. Roland G. Kuhl

Over ten years ago I found myself on the other side of the pulpit. What I discovered from this vantage point about pastoral leadership has had a profound impact upon me. I realized that too many pastors were more influenced by business models of leadership than biblical ones – and these approaches did not connect with me in the pew, nor with those sitting next to me. What was even more startling was the realization that this was the way I had led in pastoral ministry.

But the issue goes even deeper. *Jesus never identified himself as a leader, not even as a servant leader.* Whereas over the past two to three decades, the concept of leadership has primarily shaped our pastoral identities, we are confronted with Jesus, who merely identified himself as a servant. What are we to do with a master who is no more than a servant?

For years George Barna, the renowned Christian pollster, attempted to raise the leadership quotient of pastors and we, as pastors, responded by reading anything on leadership we could get our hands on, paying all kinds of money to attend another conference to hear from the latest leadership guru. But all this frenzied pursuit only frustrated us more.

Yet, after years of trying to get pastors to become the kind of leaders that will make the church successful, Barna has all but given up. He regards his ten year strategy to revitalize church leadership as having failed and he blames it on the lack of pastoral leadership.

"The strategy was flawed because it had an assumption. The assumption was that the people in leadership are actually leaders. [I thought] all I need to do is give them the right information and they can draw the right conclusions. . . . Most people who are in positions of leadership in local churches aren't leaders. They're great people, but they're not really leaders."¹



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Could it be that Barna has focused on the wrong thing? What if it is not about leadership? What if it is about something else? If most pastors are not leaders, does this mean that God has not adequately gifted the pastors of his church?

I think that leading happens, after all it is a gift of the Spirit, but not primarily by focusing on the concept of leadership. It is my conviction that Christ's church will be led in the power of the Spirit when we take the time to discover what it means to be servants in the same way as Jesus.

As church pastors we have been encouraged to lead, to take charge, to be out front – but Jesus calls us to serve. Jesus admonished his disciples,

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with

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¹ Tim Stafford, "The Third Coming of George Barna," *Christianity Today* (Vol. 46 No. 9 August 5, 2002), 34.

Farewell to Dr. Phil Zylla - Principal of ACTS Seminaries



Dr. Phil Zylla has been the principal of ACTS Seminaries since Fall of 2001. Previously he served for 17 years as a pastor in various churches across Canada.

Courses taught at ACTS include *The Spiritual Formation and Discipleship In The Church* and *Theology of Pastoral Care*.

Dr. Zylla is leaving for Hamilton, Ontario where he will join the staff at McMaster Divinity College as Academic Dean and Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology beginning July 1, 2007.

Dr. Zylla will be the keynote speaker for this year's graduation to be held on April 21, 2007 in Delta, BC.

Our best wishes go with Dr. Zylla and his wife Melody, and daughters Amanda and Chelsea.

you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10: 42-45).

we will find ourselves being among, with, and alongside the people we are called to serve, rather than taking charge of them.

So if our focus on leadership has been misdirected, then what is the alternative? I propose that it is servanthip. Our unpacking of servanthip will require the same kind of time, energy and passion that we have given to exploring leadership for us to discover what servanthip entails. Much of what we understand of servanthip does not run very deep; often we talk of servanthood in order to define leadership, rather than permitting it solely to shape our identity as pastors.

I believe as we become servants like Jesus we will find ourselves being among, with, and alongside the people we are called to serve, rather than taking charge of them.

To be servants like Jesus is:

1. to discover that our calling as pastors is not to set the agenda for ministry just as Jesus never set the agenda for ministry. His ministry was to do what he saw the Father doing (John 5:19-20). So too, we do not have a ministry of our own, but only participate with God in the ministry that God is already doing. As God's people we are called to discern and

continue the present ministry of Jesus.

2. to realize that "being shepherds of God's flock" (1 Peter 5:2) is a calling to come alongside a people to help them develop "ears to hear" and "eyes to see" that God is active in the world accomplishing his redemptive mission. There needs to be less "selling" of a vision to motivate people to ministry because the Holy Spirit has already cast a vision among us. Rather, we need to better develop eyes to see what God is already doing.



3. to become more sensitive to the people with whom God has formed his church. People are not to be "used" to fulfill some ministry task, but their passions and giftedness are an indication of the ministry for which God sends the church out into the world. We recognize that God uniquely gifts his church with people in order to carry out his redemptive mission in our local contexts.

4. to understand that ministry is not about us (cf. John 3: 30). We serve God by guiding God's people to attend to God in all the daily routines

of life – by learning habits of ongoing prayer, by embodying and living out Scripture, and seeing everyday things and everyday relationships through the eyes of God, so that we become a people, living out our lives under the reign of God, wide open to the activity of God in the everydayness of life.

These are just some of the shifts that come to mind when I think of Jesus' life and ministry as servant among his disciples. There is so much more we need to discuss and learn. I have a hunch that as we discern what it means to "feed my sheep" (John 21: 17) from a servanthip perspective, we will discover more deeply to what we have been called in the life of the church, than our constant focusing on the concept of leadership ever will.

We serve God by guiding God's people to attend to God in all the daily routines of life.

Dr. Roland Kuhl is working on a number of writing projects, including a book entitled, Pastoral Servanthip. He maintains a web log entitled, Center for Pastoral Ministry at <http://centerforpastoralministry.blogspot.com> He and his wife Lynne live in Round Lake, Illinois. They have two daughters, Heather, 21 and Hilary, 17. Dr. Kuhl is a candidate for the position of Dean at Canadian Baptist Seminary.



Thoughts From Vietnam

Day one is done...traveled in a sea of motorcycles again . But now they have added buses. BIG ones. Bikes and buses all crammed together honking at each other. We made it safely...Work went well today and heard more incredible stories of people and their lives. People seem to appreciate the work we do and the stuff we talk about...



To be continued in next issue.



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