

Leadership Philosophy Document

Leadership is defined at its foundational level as influence. Are leaders born with this influence or are leaders made? Before the Fall, men and women were given the Dominion Mandate in Genesis 1 and therefore created by God to be leaders. In this sense, it can be said that leaders are born – every human is a born leader.

However, since sin has marred the image-likeness of God in man, leaders must be nurtured. **Leadership for the unsaved** is a function of *common grace* mediated through personality, background and experience, all of which can be used to nurture or hinder leadership potential. **For the believer**, leadership is a function of both *common grace and special grace*. **Therefore, leadership in the church is ultimately made!** It is made by the miracle of salvation (special grace) and nurtured through a biblically defined view of personality, background and experience (common grace). Added to these are the critical components of Spirit-filling and Spirit-gifting.

The Spirit of God fits and fills men and women for roles in the church primarily through a single source, the Bible. As such, the first principle in providing resources to develop leaders in the church is the conviction that leadership springs from a prayerful growing understanding of the Bible. The leader in the church will be a humble, thankful lifelong learner of the Word of God.

Secondly, it is our conviction that this lifelong learning process is best achieved in the context of the local church. In the local church, God has provided elders, deacons, and priest-believers as proper spiritual authority to guide and direct future leadership. In addition, it is in the context of the local church that appropriate discipleship and Titus 2 relationships are available to nurture future leaders for the church.

Leadership for the church may be developed outside the context of the local church; however, we consider this to be a risky exception to the rule of the primacy of the local church in the development of leadership for itself. It is only in a local church context that the future leader enjoys the proper authority and relationship that gives him or her the depth and the breath needed for future ministry influence.

Unfortunately, this is no longer the normative path of leadership development in American Christianity. The church has neglected the Lord's command in 2 Timothy 2:2. Our weakened understanding of the biblical function of the local church has reaped unintended consequences, and we have surrendered the task of leadership development to parachurch ministries. Colleges, universities, seminaries and the Christian media (whether radio, blogosphere, or social media) have acquired the ultimate affection and allegiance of God's people rather than their local church and its leadership. We have fallen prey to the idea that outsourcing for leadership is somehow safer and better.

Due to colossal shifts in culture within and without the church itself, the church has felt more threatened by its youth rather than desiring to nurture them in leadership development. We have seen the generational gap wholly as a negative rather than a positive. We have failed to help our young people see what part of the generational gap is unbiblical and what part is a necessary positive that will enable them to serve their generation effectively.

The defensive posture created by colossal cultural shifts has also created an adversarial atmosphere when it comes to change within our local churches. Our young potential leaders sense that resistance, but a defensive posture does not answer their questions. We need high theology and accompanying wisdom to help our young people understand the difference between good biblical change and bad unbiblical change. This necessitates leaders who are continuing to grow and learn personally; but this perspective has given way to frustration and threatening charges in the face of legitimate and authentic questions from our young people.

Church leadership has been too busy doing other things less important than developing the future leaders of the church. Darling doctrines, para-church ministry participation, and empire building have replaced the critical discipleship responsibility of leadership in the local church. In our independent church movement, without the support of denominational structures, pastors often have not managed their own personal lives well. Unwise stewardship of finances and time result in leadership positions being maintained out of necessity rather than a ministry heart. The job must be held on to at all costs as long as possible because the leader depends on the income. This reality sees up-and-coming gifted men and women as threats rather than blessings.

At Grace Church of Mentor, we have the exciting opportunity to reverse this trend in the fulfillment of the 2 Timothy 2:2 command. The local church **rightly ties the process of leadership development to the eternal destiny of the individual**. The local church disciplines not for the less critical issue of failing in a leadership function, i.e. firing someone for not showing up for a meeting or failing to accomplish an assigned task, although that may be important. **The local church has the authority granted by Jesus Christ to look out for the deeper issue**. It disciplines according to the character issues of the individual observed in patterns over long periods of time. Although details are important, it has a greater concern for the matters of the fruit of the Spirit “against [which] there is no law.” In addition, the **local church never severs its relationship**. Even church discipline is restorative in nature, unlike the firing or expelling that occurs in para-church organizations, who might even hope the individual never comes back. Spirit-filled men and women in the church are **best** able to train other Spirit-filled men and women for the church. The church is the best place for developing leaders for its work because it develops those leaders in a way prescribed by Jesus Christ.