



You Can Make a Difference

as a Leader in Our Congregation

- We have chosen you for a future that is God's.
 - Lead us beyond what we are already doing.
 - Help us make a difference.

Our congratulations, best wishes, and continuing support to you! We appreciate your willingness to take on important tasks. As fellow members of our congregation, we have chosen you for a leadership responsibility because we have confidence in you. We trust you to seek the challenges and opportunities that will make a difference—in our community and in our congregation. We know you will seek to discover God's will for your work—and that you will act to make a difference all can see.

How do you feel about your new responsibility? You may be uncertain about what to do. Or you may feel qualified for the tasks ahead. We all have such feelings sometimes. But we have confidence that you will seek resources and training to help you do your best. We will hold you in our prayers and work with you.

You are joining many others who through the centuries have sought to express through leadership their commitment to Christ's ministry and mission. Who do you remember for their leadership, their ministry? In their times and places, what they contributed was important and made a difference; but what you do as a leader is because you are you. Each leader acts using his or her own mix of styles and skills, blending them to fit particular places, needs resources. What you do will be different from previous leaders with similar responsibilities. And those who come after you will act still differently.

What difference can you make?

Do you wonder what you can accomplish through your leadership? You could do only the minimum—have a few meetings, continue a few ongoing projects, maybe begin some new ones, just do what you are told, or what is expected.

OR ... you can use your time and energy to change things that should be changed. You can act to make a difference in your community, so God's love can break through. It's up to you.

How could your leadership make a difference?

- In one congregation the chairperson of the Board of Trustees used her influence to change building-use policy. Now nonprofit community groups are using the church facilities every weekday and evening.
- In another congregation, the work area on worship, under the leadership of its chairperson, polled persons with disabilities in the community. Based on their findings, they made large-print Bibles available in the narthex and added a ramp up to the lectern area. Now more people can participate in worship—and they do.
- One coordinator of youth ministries has recruited volunteers so that the congregation can sponsor Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops for children and youth in the neighborhood.

Choose and act

Take some time to imagine what life would be like if God's will were done in your community. As a leader, your first responsibility is to clarify your vision.

Describe your vision in words that bring vivid pictures to the minds of others. Use positive terms in outlining the future. Describe what is possible and achievable—and not just the easy answers. Reach out to connect with the aspirations of others in our community, including people in other organizations. Invite others to join you in working to fulfill the promise of your vision.

If you don't know what to do, here are some questions to consider. Or if you think you are ready to act, use these to test your plans. In answering these questions, take time to pray, to look around you, to talk with others. These are not easy questions; the temptation to give simplistic answers or to rationalize is great:

- What do you hope for and dream about for our community?
- What are the hopes and dreams of your neighbors? Of people you meet at work, school, or play? Of people you never meet because you don't go where they are?
- Of all of these, which hope or dream stirs you the most?

- What would our community look like if this hope were to become real?
- Is your hope big enough to create a difference—but not so big that it is impossible?
- In our community and congregation, who already shares this dream?
- What is God's will for your actions and this dream?
- How could you act on this hope or dream through your new responsibility in our congregation?
- Whom can you invite to share in deciding and acting? How does your area of responsibility relate to this dream? How could a group with which you work help make it come true?

Once you decide, take some small first steps toward making a difference. You may succeed! And these small successes will encourage you to take larger steps.

If you make a mistake or even fail, that's okay—as long as you learn from your mistakes, and don't let the failure defeat you.

And, when you waiver—as we all do sometimes—you may gain strength through ...

- Praying;
- Reading;
- Trying a different approach;
- Talking things over with your pastor or a fellow worker;
- Participating in workshops;
- Finding a friend who can be supportive, open, and honest;
- Creating a small group for training and support—or using an existing group.

Leaders develop leaders

As you lead, think about the time when you will want to pass your torch of leadership along to someone else. Provide opportunities for others to practice their leadership skills, to grow in ministry. Support them—whether they succeed or fail—so that they will continue in ministry. Help them grow in commitment to God's will, compassion for others, and competence in their tasks.

We are all called:

To bring good news to the poor, . . . to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19, NRSV).

***What a difference a leader makes!
What differences will you make?***

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

PRINT

Available from Discipleship Resources, 800-685-4370, www.discipleshipresources.org.

The Buck Stops Here, Mary Logan

The Christian Small Group Leader, Thomas R. Hawkins

Covenant & Call, Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore

Cultivating Christian Community, Thomas R. Hawkins

Designing a Single Adult Ministry, William J. Cox

Designing an Older Adult Ministry, Richard H. Gentzler

Faithful Leadership, Thomas R. Hawkins

The First Three Years, Mary Alice Gran, Editor

The Heart's Journey, Barb Nardi Kurtz

Job Descriptions & Leadership Training for Local Church Leaders 2001-2004

NextChurch.Now, Craig Kennet Miller

Out of the Basement, Diane C. Olson

Teaching Young Children, MaryJane Pierce Norton

United Methodist Youth Handbook, Michael L. Selleck

Vital Ministry in the Small Membership Church Series:

Biblical Virtues, John M. Freeman

Christian Education, Myrtle Felkner & Jack Gilbert

Mission, Betty C. Whitehurst

Worship Matters, Vol. 1, E. Byron Anderson

Worship Matters, Vol. 2, E. Byron Anderson

Available from Cokesbury, 800-672-1789,

www.cokesbury.com:

Guidelines 2001-2004 (set of guidelines for 26 different local church leadership positions)

ONLINE

www.gbod.org (esp. Congregational Leaders pages), General Board of Discipleship

www.discipleshipresources.org, Discipleship Resources

www.umc.org,

Homepage of The United Methodist Church

www.cokesbury.com, Cokesbury

www.leadnet.org, Leadership Network

www.ltn.org, Leadership Training Network

www.urbanchurchnetwork.org, Urban Church Network

Adapted from a leaflet written by Evelyn M. Burry for Discipleship Resources.