

Making Disciples, Making Leaders  
*Leader Guide*

SECOND EDITION

A Manual for Presbyterian Church  
Leader Development

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# Introduction

*I*n our seminars throughout the country, we have asked teaching elders, ruling elders, and deacons “What has changed around the church in the past twenty years?” The answer: everything!

- youth sports on Sunday
- blue laws
- declining membership
- decreasing budgets
- aging church members
- dual career families
- increasing biblical illiteracy
- higher divorce rates
- removal of prayer in schools
- technology and communication
- more church scandals
- lack of trust in institutions
- growing secularism
- increased mobility
- the death of “American Christendom”

Wow! Is that all?

Who is leading the Church? Where are they leading it? How will they get there? What is being done in leadership development? Why make this a priority when there is a so much more to do?

Three-fourths (77 percent) of PC(USA) churches have two hundred or fewer members. More than half (55 percent) have one hundred or less (<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/research/10faq/>).

So it stands to reason most sessions are small. That means there are very few people within those small congregations from whom to choose deacons

and ruling elders. The same few people rotate on and off the session or diaconate. So why do any training? They've all been there before and know what to do. Run the church, run the committees, raise the money, set the budget—but is there more?

When we ask Presbyterian ministers around the country what they are currently doing in training newly elected deacons and ruling elders, the number one answer is “Nothing!” That is followed by “Very little.” Rarely have we found someone who has made this a priority in their ministry. We're curious as to why.

There are hundreds of books available on leadership development, but what we offer is leadership development within the church. We propose a shift from perfunctory management to spiritual leadership, from information to formation, from membership to discipleship. We provide an assortment of tools for developing leaders who can:

- grow in their own faith and discipleship
- function as a team with clergy
- cultivate and equip members of the congregation to be in ministry
- have a working knowledge of “the Presbyterian way”
- gain a functional understanding of Reformed theology
- know what business the church is in and be good at that business

These types of leaders do not fall out of the sky. Just because they are leaders in business, education, health care, government, or the judicial system does not mean they will be effective leaders in the church. Anyone can manage a church with budgets, buildings, programs, and staff; but leadership in the church is first and foremost about discipleship with Christ.

We offer more than a training program for newly elected deacons and ruling elders. This system of leadership cultivation is interrelated, ongoing, and can be designed for any size congregation. All churches need leadership. You can custom fit our resources to your current situation.

Teaching elders have an opportunity here to teach. Rather than clergy functioning as the “church chaplain,” they can develop a team to join them in ministry. This model treats ruling elders and deacons as colleagues rather than employees or volunteers. This is an intentional move from a “membership model” to a “discipleship model.” This will expand your vision from management to leadership.

When we made this shift, ruling elders and deacons completed their terms with comments such as: “I'm going to miss the fellowship and being on the team.” That's a huge shift. But this isn't magic; it's hard work. It takes years

of being consistent and committed. You are raising the bar. Expect some resistance. The payoff is worth the effort.

Chapter 1 provides biblical principles for leadership development in the church. Chapter 2 puts the spotlight on the Nominating Committee. Choosing good leaders is half the battle. Chapter 3 lays out the framework of our training model.

Chapter 4 explores strategies and activities for teaching in light of recent research on the brain. Chapter 5 argues for worship as a foundation for Christian leadership development. Chapter 6 gives you options to design a course that will work for you.

Chapter 7 explains “The Orientation Meeting” and provides helpful tips for setting up your course. Chapters 8–11 outline our four-part workshop model for training.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in the middle of approving an additional confession to the *Book of Confessions*. The 221st General Assembly (2014) sent a proposed amendment to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s *Book of Confessions* that would add the Belhar Confession, which has its roots in the struggle against apartheid.

Before it can be added to the denomination’s confessions, the Belhar first had to be ratified by 115, or two-thirds, of the denomination’s 171 presbyteries. It easily succeeded being approved in 2014–2015. A new confession must be approved by two successive General Assemblies, and so the final step in the adoption of the Belhar Confession will be decided in the 222nd General Assembly in the summer of 2016. There are many resources available for study of this confession on the denomination’s website. If and when it is adopted, this book will be updated to reflect the new confession.

Chapter 12 provides a structure and suggestions for conducting the session examinations of new leaders. Chapter 13 invites you to evaluate and possibly renovate your current session or deacon meetings. Why do a great job at training to bring leaders onto an inefficient council? Chapter 14 offers other opportunities for leadership development beyond the training program.

This book can be either a resource to enhance the good things you are already doing or a radical shift in the way you cultivate leadership within your church. Either way, its an effective tool.

Every church in America is facing significant changes in our culture. Those changes affect the church. How will the church affect culture? That’s a question for leadership.



# Biblical Principles for Church Leadership

According to Genesis 2:18, the only thing in all of creation that was “not good” was that humanity was alone—disconnected, isolated, having no one to share the burdens and joys of life. Even God apparently does not enjoy working alone. God chooses to work with folk like us. Think of the great leaders of the Bible: Abram, Sarai, Moses, Gideon, David, Mary Magdalene, and Simon Peter. None of these were exactly star players, but God chose to work with them, which is no small detail. When we work alone, it’s not good. Even God chooses to work on a team!

## Leadership in the Old Testament

Perhaps the most prominent example of team ministry within the Old Testament is that found in the account of Jethro’s advice to Moses:

<sup>14</sup>“Why do you sit alone, while the people stand around you from morning until evening? . . . <sup>18</sup>You will surely wear yourself out. . . . For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. . . . <sup>21</sup>You should also look for able [people] . . . who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such [people] over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. . . . <sup>22</sup>So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure.” (Exod. 18:14, 18, 21, 22–23)

It is not good to “sit alone” (v. 14). How many clergy, ruling elders, or deacons do you think are “sitting alone,” or feel they are? According to clergy burnout statistics, the percentage is pretty high. If the goal, as Jethro states it, is “to endure” (v. 23), then leadership has to be shared. That’s the “Jethro Principle.”

The Jethro Principle does not really belong to Jethro. His comment to Moses was, “If you do this, and God so commands” (v. 23). The implication is that God has observed Moses operating in solo fashion and has assessed that this leadership style cannot provide what is necessary. Thus God instituted shared leadership and team ministry as a provision of grace. The alternative was for Moses to continue operating alone and “wear [him]self out” (v. 18a). The apparent motive behind Jethro’s (and God’s) advice was to ward off failure, to secure success. A record of Moses’s prayer reveals his frustration and hopelessness in operating alone:

<sup>10</sup>Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents. Then the LORD became very angry, and Moses was displeased. <sup>11</sup>So Moses said to the LORD, “Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child,’ to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? . . . <sup>14</sup>I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup>If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me see my misery.” (Num. 11:10–12, 14–15)

This is a “Kill Me Prayer!” In other words, “I’d rather be dead than to be in ministry this way.” Many a person has prayed this prayer.

Moses prayed, and God responded. Rather than kill Moses, God directed him to recruit seventy of the ruling elders of Israel and bring them to the tent of meeting, where God would do the rest:

I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself. (Num. 11:17)

*God empowers leadership, but we have to get to the tent of meeting.* We have to position ourselves for empowerment. Empowerment is not a program or even a training course. It’s a gift from God. Though we cannot achieve it, we do need to receive it. Our posture for receptivity is critical.

*The team was empowered together.* God didn’t select the seventy and empower them in the privacy of their homes. Moses selected the seventy, and God empowered them with the spirit at the tent of meeting—together, in one place. Leadership is communal. By God’s design, human leadership is recruited and equipped to participate with God in the task of leading and

guiding the people. God’s covenant with Abraham was a sharing of leadership. Israel’s history of judges, kings, and prophets reflects God’s choice to work with others toward the common goal of retrieving a lost humanity. In the Old Testament, God clearly chooses not to act alone, and God does not intend for human leadership to act alone either.

## Leadership in the New Testament

If I had been Jesus, I would have definitely chosen to work alone! The disciples seem to have been in the way. But God chooses to work on a team, even if, and perhaps especially when, the team is dysfunctional. There’s hope for any session!

Christ called twelve students. He intentionally recruited each one of them. All of them were busy. None of them had previous skills in being a leader in the church. They weren’t volunteers. They were disciples, students, people going to school to obtain skill and knowledge. They weren’t clergy. Jesus took fishermen, tax collectors, political activists, and businessmen to build his team. He took people with the potential for learning. He saw that potential in them and called it forth, even when they didn’t see it themselves. Jesus charged the twelve with the task of leading the church, but always in the context of partnership with him.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always.” (Matt. 28:19–20)

A prime example of the team ministry philosophy of Christ is found within the story of the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:30–44). Jesus has taken the disciples away to rest, but, when they get out of the boat, they are met with more demands and needs. The disciples immediately draw up a plan to dismiss the crowds because of the late hour and the probability that food could be found in nearby villages.

Note Jesus’ response to their plan: “You give them something to eat” (Mark 6:37a). Everyone sees the obvious impossibility of this task. Nevertheless, Jesus puts the privilege of ministry on the twelve. They respond with apparent sarcasm: “Are we to spend a year’s salary on this group?” (v. 37). Jesus replies: “How many loaves have you? Go and see” (v. 38). Jesus looks to them to provide the base resources from which a miracle will grow.

Once they surrender their meager resources—five loaves and two fish—to Christ, it is by the power of God that provisions are made for the five-thousand-plus people who are present. Christ takes the resources, looks beyond the human realm to heaven, and then “bless[es] and [breaks] the loaves” (v. 41a); but the twelve gathered the resources in the first place.

Notice Jesus’ next move. He gives the multiplied fish and loaves “to his disciples to set before the people” (6:41b). Jesus uses the disciples, in team fashion, to serve the people. Again, he pulls his followers into the experience. Jesus’ floating the food out to the folk would have been quicker and more impressive. Using human resources took a lot longer, but the disciples/students would have missed the experience had he not.

When all had eaten, they took up twelve baskets of leftovers. That’s one basket per disciple. Their own personal needs were provided for in abundance, just as they provided for others. But Jesus makes number thirteen on the team. The others had to feed him out of their own baskets. Imagine that!

Some may read this story and marvel at the ability of Jesus to multiply fish. An underlying and perhaps more significant lesson is revealed if you watch the interrelatedness of Christ with the world (the five thousand), with his disciples, and the disciples with the world. The story begs us to ask of ourselves: *What are our resources? What do we have to offer that Christ can use?*

### Implications for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

As Presbyterians, we ordain people to the ordered ministries of deacon and ruling elder. They are called to ministry. We lay hands on them. They take vows. We are a team by God’s design. It is a gift! We need to utilize it. Working alone is neither biblical nor effective. Working on a team is energizing and life-giving. It’s a gift!