

Transformational Leaders

Introduction to <i>Being Reformed: Faith Seeking Understanding</i>	3
Introduction to <i>Transformational Leaders</i>	4
Session 1. Presbyterians in Changing Cultures	5
<i>Kenneth J. McFayden</i>	
Session 2. Worship	12
<i>Mindy Douglas</i>	
Session 3. Congregational Life	19
<i>Steven P. Eason</i>	
Session 4. Education	25
<i>Mark D. Hinds</i>	
Session 5. Using Social Media	32
<i>Bruce Reyes-Chow</i>	
Session 6. Mission and Ministries	39
<i>Carol Howard Merritt</i>	
Suggestions for Further Reading.....	46

Presbyterians in Changing Cultures

Scripture

Ephesians 4:4–7, 11–16 Unity is a gracious gift from God that allows us to celebrate a variety of gifts that equip people for the work of ministry and build up the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:4–7 The variety of gifts is a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for the abundant gifts you lay before us: the gift of life in a beautiful creation; the gift of faith, nurtured by people who have believed in you and served you; and the gift of relationships, which deepen our joy and purpose as we live each day. Stir within our gratitude a desire to follow you. Embolden us to bear witness to your transformative work in a world too often marred by brokenness. Empower us to work transformatively as you so call and equip us, that other people may experience your redemptive power, grace, and love. Amen.

Introduction

Transformational leadership is a popular topic in today's church and culture. Our search for transformational leaders is fueled by deep yearnings for new sources of hope and energy, renewal and revitalization. Amid significant cultural change and church decline, we despair over an apparent dearth of effective leaders and a leadership crisis.

Given our concerns and yearnings, we need to understand the implications of transformational leadership in relation to the congregations and cultures in which we serve. Here are a few key points to consider about this critical topic.

First, leaders are not merely doers. Where there is a leader, there is a vision and followers of that vision. Without vision, followers, and movement toward the vision, there is no leadership.

Second, leadership implies a dynamic relationship between leaders and followers. Unfortunately, we sometimes lose ourselves in the tasks and outcomes that are part of leading and put aside the relationships that are central to the exercise of leadership.

Third, transformational leadership centers on deep and substantive change. What is transformed likely includes our identities and the values, norms, attitudes, and actions that express and reinforce those identities. Understanding *transformational* in this way, we must ask, “Are we ourselves willing to be transformed by our leaders?”

Fourth, when we think about transformational leadership in relation to culture, do we aspire for the church to transform culture? Or do we seek to bring culture into the church to make the church more relevant? These questions center our attention on our views on how the church and culture relate to each other.

Fifth, we are quite limited in our capacity to transform the church, the cultures around us, and the world more generally. God transforms. As we receive and respond to God’s grace, we are being transformed. As we bear witness to God’s transforming power and work in the world and in our lives, we may have some capacity to offer transformative ministry. As others respond, they follow our lead and respond to God’s initiative. As such, church leadership is an expression of followership—or better said, of discipleship.

Our Purpose in Engaging Diverse Cultures: What Drives Us?

I am a native of Raleigh, North Carolina. After completing seminary in 1986, I moved to Alliance, Ohio, an old steel town of 25,000 people. While I had no idea I was in a different cultural context, its residents knew I was from a different culture. I spoke with an accent. Their worship services, with a blue *Worshipbook* instead of a red *Hymnbook*, had their own accent. As winter arrived, I clearly was in a foreign land as I searched for and eventually found grits on the international food aisle in a grocery store.

As I settled into Alliance, I needed to learn the uniqueness of this culture to minister effectively in the congregation and community. I had energy, enthusiasm, and a desire to do well. I knew I had much to learn.

I remained in Alliance for four years. Over time, my accent diminished and I came to a deep appreciation of the culture and climate of ministry in northeast Ohio. I grew deeply attached to the congregation and community. We had formed, it seems, an alliance

that heightened my appreciation of cultural differences—whether mild, moderate, or strong—in relation to church and community norms, customs, and traditions.

I since have traveled to churches in various parts of the United States and the world. I have become more appreciative of cultural differences, whether nearby or far away. Increasingly, these travels have come during an era when many Presbyterians want to engage diverse cultures. I wonder why?

Perhaps the deep expressions of others' faith in worship, education, and service inspire us. Maybe their commitment and vitality stir our hope. Perhaps we see God at work in a variety of contexts that rekindles our imaginations of what is possible in God's world. Whatever the reasons, we appreciate more the beauty of diversity at a time when our neighborhoods are changing, recent immigrants are becoming our neighbors, and familiar ways of being are shifting for social, economic, and technological reasons. As we imagine how to engage diverse cultures and cultivate leaders who can help us in casting new visions, inspiring followers, and generating new movements, I wonder, why? What is driving us toward new initiatives and relationships?

Many congregations would love to grow. Fewer are willing to change in order to grow. For most, growth will come by developing the capacity to adapt and engage changing cultures as contexts for ministry. I wonder, are we open enough to God's gift of diversity to change? Might new relationships, new alliances with others who differ from us, offer new sources of hope and energy, renewal and revitalization? Do we believe our calling, mission, and purpose are to engage the rich cultures with which we interact, anticipating that we may uncover within our diversity the redemptive presence of God?

Our responses to these questions will shape our vision and ministry and affect how others relate to us. How we respond will bear witness to our faith. *Why* we respond is a fundamental question of leadership.

Do we believe our calling, mission, and purpose are to engage the rich cultures with which we interact, anticipating that we may uncover within our diversity the redemptive presence of God?

A Purposeful Shift: From Engaging Diverse Cultures to Engaging People in Diverse Cultures

As we envision what it means to be Presbyterian amid changing cultures, we often celebrate diversity as a gift of God and aspire to deepen our knowledge and appreciation of the beauty and richness of other cultures. We seek to learn about the norms, values, and stories of other people and to identify ways in which we and those from other cultures may mutually enrich each other.

In these engagements, we often focus on relating to diverse cultures rather than to *people* within different cultures. I believe our task centers on how we engage people in changing cultures in mission and ministry. This nuance is critical so that we do not lose sight of individuals, families, and groups. Perhaps the conversation is richer when we reframe the question and ask, “How might people in the church adapt and engage people in diverse and changing cultures?”

When I conducted a word search of *culture* in the *Book of Order*, I found it only in our Directory for Worship. Its preface states that “a rich heritage of traditions and a diversity of cultures in the Presbyterian church are reflected and encouraged by this directory.”¹ In describing the language for worship, the directory acknowledges that “the Church in every culture through the ages has used and adapted biblical symbols, images, stories, and words in worship”² and emphasizes the measure of their appropriateness in relation to the biblical witness to God in Jesus Christ. Additional references to the richness of cultural diversity are located in our principles for the ordering of worship and in describing elements that compose a worship service. Clearly, we aspire to celebrate the richness of various cultures as we praise God in worship for the gifts of diversity and unity that allow for multiple languages, music styles, and symbols.

Similarly, a word search in the *Book of Confessions* locates *culture* predominately in the Confession of 1967. This seems to align our confessional engagement with culture in relation to God’s ministry—and our ministry—of reconciliation. Consider this passage:

The members of the church are emissaries of peace and seek the good of man in cooperation with powers and authorities in politics, culture, and economics. But they have to fight

1. *Book of Order*, Part II of *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A], 2011), Directory for Worship, Preface, a. Reprinted with permission of the Office of the General Assembly.

2. *Book of Order*, W-1.2005.

against pretensions and injustices when these same powers endanger human welfare. Their strength is in their confidence that God’s purpose rather than man’s schemes will finally prevail.³

These word searches within our constitutional documents suggest that church and culture meet most visibly and formatively in relation to God. God calls and gathers diverse peoples to worship. God calls and gathers diverse peoples through reconciling work. God engages people in diverse cultures. Following God’s lead, we are called to do likewise.

Church and culture meet most visibly and formatively in relation to God. God calls and gathers diverse peoples to worship. God calls and gathers diverse peoples through reconciling work. God engages people in diverse cultures. Following God’s lead, we are called to do likewise.

These connecting points between church and culture, as we gather to worship and in our witness to God’s reconciling work, are realities through which God’s transforming work is evident. As such, they are expressions of God’s work to which church leaders bear witness to God’s transformative power in people’s lives.

A Vision for Leadership: Transforming, and Being Transformed

“Where there is no vision, the people flounder.”⁴ This version of Proverbs 29:18a reminds us of the importance of vision. The second half of the verse emphasizes that any vision we cast must be aligned with God’s vision for the church and world.

Here is my vision for leadership as we seek to engage people in changing cultures.

First, we must acknowledge that God alone is able to transform the church and world. As beneficiaries, we are called to bear witness to God’s transformative work and engage in relationships with diverse peoples who stand with us in appreciating and enjoying the richness of God’s redemptive work.

Second, we are called to transformative ministry that lies within our human reach. While we are not able to transform the church,

3. *Book of Confessions*, Part I of *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A], 2007), 9.25. Reprinted with permission of the Office of the General Assembly.

4. Kenneth J. McFayden, *Strategic Leadership for a Change: Facing Our Losses, Finding Our Future* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2009), 67.

we have the capacity to transform the church's structures, patterns of interaction, and expressions of mission and witness in church and culture. As such, we are responding to God's transformative initiatives and leading those willing to follow as we transform what we are able.

What might we be in a position to transform? What is within our power to change? Consider the following topics in this study.

Worship: We have the capacity to envision new expressions of worship that remain faithful to God, adapt to changing cultures, celebrate diversities, and invite people to praise God with us.

Congregational life: We have the capacity to reorder our congregational life in ways that remain faithful to the church's mission, reinforce the purpose of communal life, pursue our visions for ministry, express our identity within a particular context, and relate hospitably to members and neighbors.

Education: We have the capacity to pursue new visions for educational ministries in the church that transmit the essence of our faith, form and develop disciples of all ages, and use models of teaching and tools of technology that facilitate our growth as people of God.

Communication: We have the capacity to clarify our message, communicate it with passion, develop our abilities to speak and listen, and use diverse media to build and deepen relationships with people of diverse ages, backgrounds, and contexts.

At the heart of our transformative efforts, we will encounter God's continuing, inspiring, and renewing presence. God's presence will increase our vision for the church in the world, our capacity to bear witness to God's redemptive work, and our determination to follow God's lead, even to places we might not envision on our own.

Mission and ministries: We have the capacity to identify the needs we face in the church and world, prioritize our responses as stewards of precious resources with which God has entrusted us, and work with existing and emerging communities of faith and practice.

At the heart of our transformative efforts, we will encounter God's continuing, inspiring, and renewing presence. God's presence will increase our vision for the church in the world, our capacity to bear witness to God's redemptive work, and our determination to follow

God's lead, even to places we might not envision on our own. Along the way, we will experience anew the richness of faith and our resiliency amid periods of significant change. And we will grow in our relationships with God and neighbor, including those who seem different but with whom we have more in common than we ever could have imagined.

Spiritual Practice

Read a story that involves a person, family, or group from a culture dissimilar to yours. Reflect on the differences you perceive between you and the other(s), the richness of diversity that reflects God's creative power, and the basis upon which you might engage the other(s) if given the opportunity.

Questions for Reflection

What new perspectives do you have about *transformational leadership* as a result of this session?

What might motivate your church to engage people from different cultures in a new way?

How might your church's engagement with diverse people have a transformative impact on you and your congregation?

Transforming Actions

1. Take a cultural treasure hunt. Listen for one language other than your own. Discover one tradition different from yours. Search for something in a store that appeals to a different culture than yours.
2. Review your church's worship bulletin, newsletter, or website. What does it communicate about the church's mission and ministries? How effectively does it reach out to engage others? What changes could you suggest?
3. Pray for openness to God's transformation. Offer a prayer to cooperate with God in all that God is seeking to accomplish.