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Leadership Perspectives: Making a Difference with Spiritual Leadership

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In the first article of this trilogy on leadership, we examined the need for leadership in our ever-changing society (Stueber, 2000a). We imagined ourselves peeking into a shoe box diorama at the concept called "leadership." As we looked in one end of the shoe box, we were introduced to the first perspective on leadership—making a difference with 20/20 vision. Visionary leaders make the success of the learner, service to others, and collaboration integral to their personal mission. They include these as undergirdings of the school's mission and vision. This vision provides the impetus and power to achieve success.

In the second article, we saw another perspective on leadership. We saw that leaders make a difference as servants. Servant leaders make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. They bring foresight, commitment to the growth of people, listening, empathy, and healing to their school (Stueber, 2000b).

This article opens up a new dimension to

leadership: Lutheran educators make a difference as spiritual leaders.

Characteristics of a Spiritual Leader

Time to take a peak inside our shoe box from another opening. As we continue to look closely inside the leadership shoe box, we will see nine characteristics of a spiritual leader (see Table 1).

A spiritual leader *studies God's Word*. Plants need nutrients to survive. Lutheran educators need to study God's Word regularly. The Bible contains spiritual nutrients for a spiritual leader. Spiritual leaders read their Bible daily. Spiritual leaders participate in small group Bible studies. They maintain a daily time of solitude for spiritual growth. They participate in weekly worship services at their church.

TABLE 1: Characteristics of a Spiritual Leader

• Studies God's Word	• Acts courageously
• Shares personal faith	• Equips God's people for service
• Applies Law and Gospel appropriately	• Cares for others
• Exhibits a passion for ministry	• Prays
• Demonstrates integrity	

A spiritual leader *shares personal faith*. Spiritual leaders have a passion for sharing their faith in Jesus Christ with others. They share their faith story with fellow staff, students, parents and board members. They share their faith story in staff devotions, classroom devotions, school chapel services, and in their family setting. They proclaim God's grace using their personal faith story. Their proclamation of God's grace comforts others.

A spiritual leader *applies Law and Gospel appropriately*. This leader uses God's Word to show people their sins and to show Christians what to do to lead a God-pleasing life (Law). This leader also uses God's Word to share comfort and promise, to assure others of forgiveness and the gift of heaven (Gospel).

A spiritual leader *exhibits a passion for ministry*. This educator demonstrates unfailing patience when it comes to the ministry of her school. She displays urgency

for the mission and ministry of the school. She is driven by a zeal for God and His message of hope for all people. Her mission is to proclaim Christ to students.

The spiritual leader *acts courageously*. When Moses died, God appointed Joshua to be the new leader of Israel. In Joshua chapter 1, four times God reminds Joshua to "be strong and courageous": "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you." (Joshua 1: 5b). A Lutheran educator knows what God wants him to be. He has a personal vision and boldly acts accordingly. He lives in the light. He has the end in mind—God's plan. Pleasing God governs his actions. He is not deterred by the tough times. He does what is right regardless of the consequences. He does not sit and whine, but trusts that God is there with him.

A spiritual leader *demonstrates integrity*. This Christian leader is known for an unwavering faith and commitment to the Savior. She conducts her personal life above reproach. Others view her personal life as worthy of the highest respect. Her reputation both within and outside the school community is highly regarded.

Lutheran educators, spiritual leaders, integrate the faith and its values into their daily curriculum. Their desired outcomes are infused with God's values. His message of forgiveness permeates the spiritual leader's classroom and school. Students experience God's touch in math, science, music, and physical education.

A spiritual leader *equips people for service*. You will recognize this person as the teacher on your staff who inspires others to serve God and His church. He influences others to pursue a growing relationship with God. He nurtures the faith development of others so that they are led to serve Him, also. This is the mark of an administrator whose staff and board are nurtured to better serve others.

A spiritual leader *cares for others*. This Lutheran principal demonstrates love and concern for her staff and students. She uplifts those in need of strengthening. She treats each member of her staff as an individual with personal needs. She applies policies and procedures with concern for the individuals affected. The classroom teacher demonstrates the same care and concern for her students in her

classroom.

A spiritual leader *prays*. This leader prays for himself and his family on a daily basis. He prays for his staff and the board on a daily basis. He makes a time of prayer a central part of his day. He raises up the needs, joys, and thanksgivings of others to God in prayer.

Research On Spiritual Leadership

A group of effective Lutheran high school principals (N=19) participated in a research project using a spiritual leadership survey to determine to what degree they demonstrated these nine characteristics of a servant leader. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest rating, they had self-scores of at least 7.70 on every characteristic. The mean rating on three of the characteristics was above 9. Others who know them well also completed the survey. They rated these effective high school administrators at 8.25 or higher on these characteristics. These effective Lutheran high school administrators exhibit spiritual leadership characteristics

Table 2: Mean Scores for Spiritual Leadership Characteristics

Characteristic	Self	Others
Study God's Word	7.70	8.38
Share personal faith	8.34	8.43
Apply Law and Gospel appropriately	8.28	8.65
Exhibit a passion for ministry	9.01	8.46
Act courageously	8.78	8.59
Demonstrates integrity	9.01	8.57
Equip God's people for service	8.04	8.63
Care for others	9.11	8.87
Pray	7.91	8.25

"usually" or "very frequently."

Using Spiritual Leadership

A Lutheran school and its classrooms will thrive when led by a spiritual leader. The spiritual leader focuses on both the desired ends (the what) and the process to reach these ends (the how). Each Lutheran school identifies and communicates specific Christian goals. Those who establish these schools have certain expectations (desired ends) in mind when they agree to sponsor and support such a school.

Most schools have similar desired ends. They want their first graders to be able to read. They want their graduates to be able to succeed at the next level of education. They want their students to be positive contributing citizens to their community. You can fill in the other desired ends found in these schools.

In a Lutheran school, however, there are at least two measures of added value. All schools desire to teach values. A Lutheran educator focuses on *Christian* values. These Christian values are not add-ons in the Lutheran school. These values are not limited to the daily devotions and prayers. Lutheran educators—spiritual leaders— integrate the faith and its values into their daily curriculum. Their desired outcomes are infused with God's values. His message of forgiveness permeates the spiritual leader's classroom and school. Students experience God's touch in math, science, music, and physical education. The spiritual leader, the Lutheran educator, will pray with her students, demonstrate integrity in all her actions, and share her faith story with her students throughout the school day.

The "how" of spiritual leadership focuses on relationships. By sharing personal faith, demonstrating integrity, exhibiting a passion for ministry, caring for others, and equipping others for service, the Lutheran school educator provides a framework for success.

The Lutheran educator brings a second added value to the classroom. Spiritual leadership is about "how" we do things. The love of Christ motivates the Lutheran educator. God's Holy Spirit calls her to serve. She knows that she is about more than desired ends for this life. She is about sharing a message of eternity for

believers in Christ. Linked with Christ and empowered by His Spirit, the Lutheran educator demonstrates the "how" of education through spiritual leadership. She exhibits all the characteristics of a spiritual leader.

The "how" of spiritual leadership focuses on relationships. By sharing personal faith, demonstrating integrity, exhibiting a passion for ministry, caring for others, and equipping others for service, the Lutheran school educator provides a framework for success. The greatest happiness can be achieved because the foundation for success has been established.

Ken Blanchard underscores the importance of servant leadership and spiritual leadership in effective leaders:

> As effective leaders, we need to look beyond ourselves to a higher purpose and direction. Faith, more than anything, impacts the inner core of people. Jesus was very concerned about our inner core. He wanted us to be servants of one another. That means once the vision, values and direction are set, leaders should work for their people, not for their own power, recognition or gratification. When He washed the feet of the disciples, He was answering their questions, "How do I lead?"—by following, and "How do I become first?"—by being last.
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> Unless you have faith and know that your main goal is to serve and honor God, effective leadership is difficult. Why? Because your ego will get in the way. Ego stands for Edging God Out and people who are ego-driven are concerned about power, control, recognition, and all the temptations that move you away from helping a team and toward self-gratification. Through faith we understand that self-gratification is not going to lead us to our goal. Effective leadership is getting everyone to believe in the vision, even when the end is not in sight (Hager, 1999, pp. 4,12).

Conclusion

We have peeked inside the shoe box of leadership. Each peek gave us another view of an effective leader. We looked in one side and saw the visionary leader. In a second view we saw the servant leader. In this view we saw the spiritual leader. There are other perspectives on leadership. Research indicates, however, that these are three key perspectives on leadership.

What are the characteristics of an effective leader? For the pragmatist the answer is found in the results. For the process-oriented leader, the answer lies in how we reach our goals. To serve the greatest good, the most effective leader will be process-oriented. Lutheran school educators are most effective when embracing and

implementing a visionary, servant, spiritual leadership role.

The visionary leader—

> Leaders search for opportunities to change the status quo . . . Leaders passionately believe they can make a difference. They envision the future . . . Leaders foster collaboration . . . Leaders establish principles concerning the way people should be treated and the way goals should be pursued . . . leaders celebrate accomplishments. They make people feel like heroes. (Kouzes, 1997)

The servant leader—

> The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (Greenleaf, 1970)

The spiritual leader—

> As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. (Joshua 1: 5b-7a)✞

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