

## **LEADERSHIP IN DIFFICULT TIMES**

### **Thoughts for Consideration**

For pastors and others called to lead congregations through sometimes difficult times, this A-Z list of characteristics of good pastoral leadership may be helpful.

- A. Keep the shared mission, ministry and vision in front of the congregation.
- B. Recognize that disagreement and anxiety are normal. In difficult times, expect a degree of suffering, in yourself and in others.
- C. Recognize the significant transformative potential in the midst of difficult conversations and decisions. Keep disagreements constructive and life-giving.
- D. Have patience that encourages the community to allow time for deliberation; do not try to eliminate tension and disquiet too quickly by going for a quick fix.
- E. Recognize that in times of stress, people are frequently more sensitive and reactive, with decreased patience, trust, flexibility, and imagination. Help the congregation cultivate imagination, ponder alternatives, and live in hope.
- F. Discourage either/or, win/lose, good/bad thinking that encourages people to take sides, compete with one another, or judge one another.
- G. Model a calming presence and emotionally well-differentiated leadership. Control your own anxiety that would seek to manipulate or intimidate others, that motivates others to do what you want them to do, or that controls outcomes.
- H. Keep communication fluid and transparent, staying in touch with others even as tensions may increase. Give information as needed, without betraying confidences.
- I. Take responsibility for yourself, without blaming.
- J. Exhibit warmth, humor and energy; be relaxed, resilient and spontaneous.
- K. Do not coerce or threaten others, either directly or indirectly. Do not be coerced or threatened by others.
- L. Keep the focus on issues rather than people, on information rather than feelings.

- M. Be clear and congruent in your conversation and communication (self-defined).
- N. Speak with integrity, representing all sides with accuracy and fairness.
- O. Pray frequently and fervently, as Luther admonishes, without arrogance. Pray for wisdom and understanding, for the process rather than for one's own will to be done.
- P. Foster honest communication and compassionate truth-telling. At the same time, see that a safe environment is maintained in which differences are honored and respected. Protect the voices of those not being heard.
- Q. Pay attention to your own well-being – spiritually, socially/interpersonally, intellectually, emotionally, vocationally, and physically.
- R. Know the congregation – its history, traditions, and how it exhibits anxiety in difficult times.
- S. Seek to reduce anxiety and fear so that energy can be invested in genuine conversation and discernment.
- T. Put thoughtful time and energy into fundamental ministries, including worship, faith formation/education, and outreach. Do not let the most anxious people get all your time and energy.
- U. Know yourself, your convictions, your tendencies, your emotional snags, your faith and values.
- V. Speak, act, and listen to others with humility, honesty, openness, respect and care. Seek to understand others deeply.
- W. Find someone with whom you can regularly confess and hear words of forgiveness.
- X. With compassion and understanding, hold all of God's people (those who mourn and those who dance, those who weep and those who laugh, as well as those who don't know what to do) in your heart.
- Y. Return deeply and often to God's Word, listening for God's voice.
- Z. Be a witness to Christ in the world in how we treat one another.