



Becoming a Spiritual Leader **By Bishop John R. Schol**

"The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers," said Max De Pree in his book *Leadership Is an Art*. He also added, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor." Even though he is writing primarily to secular leaders, Max De Pree is describing "spiritual leadership."

Spiritual leadership combines the spiritual – deep faith, discipleship, and the heart and mind of Christ (Philippians 2:4-8) – with the leadership competencies of vision, organizing, strategic thinking, and servanthood. It is not enough only to be spiritual. It is not enough to lead only out of one's competencies. Spiritual leaders combine both of these qualities to transform people and effect change. Without this combination, the church will falter, stumble, and fail.

Jesus clearly demonstrated this type of leadership. Jesus had a clear vision of the kingdom of God, organized and taught people around the vision, and made strategic decisions (choosing the twelve disciples). Jesus also prayed before making decisions, read and studied Scripture regularly, worshipped, fasted, went on spiritual retreats, and fellowshiped with other believers. Jesus regularly combined an inward spiritual journey with outward leadership competence.

Faith, Fire, and Fruits

Spiritual leaders also exhibit *faith, fire, and fruits*. John Wesley identified these three things as the hallmarks of spiritual leadership. (*Works of John Wesley*, Volume VIII, 323-325)

Spiritual leaders exhibit *faith* through their *conviction*, their *character*, and their *understanding* of the theological and cultural context of ministry. Conviction is evident in a spiritual leader's strong faith, clear beliefs, and respect for the convictions of others. Character is what makes others want to follow a spiritual leader. Spiritual leaders are Christ-centered, authentic, compassionate, and exhibit moral integrity. They are purposeful, dedicated, punctual, and have a good work ethic. They are open and flexible, willing to accept criticism, and able to think and act multi-culturally. Spiritual leaders have the ability to motivate and inspire others (charisma). They equip, support, and lead others in ministry, working as part of a team. And they possess a positive, joyful, celebrative attitude. Finally, spiritual leaders have a broad theological and cultural understanding that enables them to dialogue with the culture, and present faith and theology in culturally relevant ways.



Spiritual leaders exhibit *fire* in the *calling, passion, and vision* required for ministry. They experience and recognize that God has called them to help a congregation understand and fulfill its calling. Spiritual leaders have a deep and burning desire to give themselves completely and humbly to the purposes of God's ministry in the congregation and community. Spiritual leaders have a profound love and concern for people, a longing to develop new disciples, and a determination to improve a congregation's ability to make disciples. They have a hunger for excellence in ministry, aspiring to be their best for the sake of the church and the world. They are compelled by the hope of becoming Christ-like and by the vision of God's reign.

The *fruits* of spiritual leadership are evidenced in *competency* for ministry as well as the *results* of ministry. Spiritual leaders demonstrate competence by discerning a compelling vision and leading people to follow it; by identifying and developing other leaders; by communicating in ways that teach and excite people about the vision; and by organizing the church to carry out its mission.

Finally, spiritual leaders achieve results. Scripture provides a measure of fruitful leadership in Acts 2:41-47:

So those who welcomed his message were baptized and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the good will of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Accordingly, spiritual leaders lead people into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ as evidenced by confessions and reaffirmations of faith. They organize and lead a congregation to attract disciples evidenced by increasing worship attendance and starting new congregations. Spiritual leaders engage disciples in ministry in the community as evidenced in ministry that addresses the conditions and systemic issues of the poor, engages a high percentage of worshipers in ministry, and financially supports mission beyond the local church. And they lead churches to live and act by faith as evidenced by signs and wonders in the congregation and community.

Bishop John R. Schol (bishopschol@bwcumc.org) is resident bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Area of the United Methodist Church. These articles are based on material first published in the Baltimore-Washington Conference's *UM Connection* and on its website www.bwcumc.org.



Spiritual Leaders and Vision

By Bishop John R. Schol

Spiritual leaders are compelled by vision. Out of their love of Christ and their hope in God's coming reign, they work to help a congregation discern a compelling vision for itself. Spiritual leaders help others to follow that vision.

In leading toward a vision, spiritual leaders do three things:

Spiritual leaders honor the reality of the current situation.

They do this for the sake of the vision. Even while envisioning a preferable future, spiritual leaders care about those whom they serve. They respect people's past experiences and support them through changes. By honoring where a congregation is and where it has been, they develop deep trust and stronger relationships.

Spiritual leaders disrupt around the vision.

They cast a bold vision that disrupts patterns that are not moving people and the church toward the vision. Disruption challenges people, the church, and the world to change their lives to become more like Christ. If there is no disruption, we remain within the status quo.

Spiritual leaders align everything with the vision.

Spiritual leaders use the vision to organize their own time, gifts and activities – and those of the congregation. Leaders often fall short because they cast a vision but never align all the resources (ministries, budgets, and people) with that vision.

The Right Question

Leaders do not need answers. Leaders must have the right questions.

Kenichi Ohmae maintains that a good strategist makes a habit of challenging prevailing assumptions by relentlessly asking the same question about the current way of doing things. That simple question is:

Why?

The domain of leaders is the future.
James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner