



Lewis Center  
for Church Leadership

# Leading Ideas

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## **Congregational Integrity** by Lovett H. Weems Jr.

We rightfully expect personal integrity in our leaders. Should we not also ask whether our congregation has integrity? The behavior of organizations is as important as that of individual leaders. What a church *is* as an institution may very well have more impact on people than what it *says* to them. This may be all the more critical as we seek to reach younger and more diverse disciples who notice inconsistency quickly.

Integrity requires congruence. The goal is not so much congregational perfection as consistency. Within a congregation, the ideal is to have three views of the congregation aligned:

- what you say about your church
- what people perceive your church to be
- what an objective analysis of your church would reveal

Where there is lack of alignment, integrity is hard to achieve. Such lack of integrity leads to weakness. A church finds power when what the church says about itself, what people perceive as reality, and what objective observers say are all one.

Imagine a church where the slogan on the bulletin says, "In the heart of the city with the city on our heart." A visitor attending that church asks a church member to describe the church, and the response is, "We care about and serve our community." A visiting church official after working with the church says, "The most striking feature of this church is the commitment by everyone to serve this neighborhood." In that church there is strength.

The relationship of belief and action, words and behavior, cannot be stressed too much. No matter what we say, people only pay close attention to what we do. Inconsistency is devastating. More coherence between belief and action could make many of our spoken and written words far less necessary.

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