



Lewis Center  
for Church Leadership

# Leading Ideas

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## **Leading with Energy, Intelligence, Imagination, and Love** by **Kenneth J. McFayden**

*Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?* This question is asked in the service of ordination and installation of church officers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). But there is nothing uniquely Presbyterian about this question or the identification of church leadership as servant leadership.

When I hear this question asked, I find myself wondering if some have heard this question so many times that they are deadened to what it is asking. Leadership requires much of those who accept its mantle. Those who follow leaders deserve the best they can offer.

Leadership requires *energy* — physical and emotional, psychological and spiritual. Leadership calls for active engagement and considerable amounts of energy. It requires stick-to-it-iveness and stamina, since there are no quick fixes in leadership. Leaders are wise to seek sources to renew their energy within the congregation and the community in which they serve.

Leadership demands *intelligence* — conceptual and emotional intelligence, social and contextual intelligence. Leadership demands multiple intelligences to see the opportunities, challenges, and choices before a congregation. Possessing multiple facets of intelligence increases the likelihood that leaders will respond effectively in the context of change and loss, grieving and attaching anew.

Leadership calls for *imagination* — but unfortunately, imagination is often a casualty of loss in congregations struggling with change. The pain of loss, concerns over congregational survival, and pressures to restore the status quo threaten creative ministry and leadership. Many congregations going through change want leaders who are more able to repackage the past than to visualize the future. A lively imagination in leaders expands their capacity to be energetic, intelligent, and loving. Imagine that!!

Leadership requires *love* — love for the congregation, for the members and other leaders, for neighbors near and far, and for God. Leaders participate in a web of caring relationships. Therefore, attention to relationships is a core function of strategic leadership. Leaders without love for each of these are less able to serve, at least in the tradition of the servant ministry of Jesus Christ. Leaders with love for each of these will be followed for a long time.

*Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?* When I reflect on this question, I recognize that the congregational leaders I will follow are seekers. They yearn to grow as leaders in response to God's calling and the needs of their congregations. They hold several convictions.

First, they believe *congregational leadership is an expression of discipleship*. They understand themselves primarily as followers who respond to God's call, presence, and empowerment. They know that faithful following and service precede effective leadership.

Second, they believe that *congregational leadership is grounded in relationships*. These leaders recognize that healthy relationships are a key to effective ministry. They realize that their effectiveness is measured by how they assist others to embrace change and move forward together.

Third, they believe that *congregational leadership is contextual*. They grasp that an effective style of leadership in one congregation will not necessarily be effective in another where histories, members, and needs are different. Leaders who comprehend the distinct qualities and needs of their current congregations are likely to serve well.

Fourth, they believe that *the behavior sciences, leadership theories, and other secular resources contribute important perspectives for congregational leadership*. Yet they assess these perspectives through the "eyes of faith," identify their contributions and limitations, and incorporate their best practices to strengthen ministry.

Finally they believe that *leadership is learned*. Whatever natural gifts they bring to ministry, they realize that there is always more to learn about leadership. They understand that learning to lead increases their capacity to serve.

The call to lead is before you: Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

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### **The Right Question**

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

When a pastoral change is forthcoming for a congregation, Lawrence W. Farris suggests that the outgoing pastor and some insightful church leaders, especially some who have been active throughout the departing pastor's tenure, come together to review the church's recent history using these questions.

How are we different today from how we were when the pastor came?

What accomplishments in ministry are we most grateful for?

What challenges have we overcome and what did we learn from those situations?

What do we wish we might have done had time and resources allowed?

**BOOK REVIEW****Leadership for a Change: Facing Our Losses, Finding Our Future****By Kenneth J. McFayden, Alban Institute, 2009****Reviewed by Lewis Parks**

Church leadership literature often seems lacking in psychological depth. It feels Machiavellian in its world view and behaviorist in its focus, particularly if your seminary preparation and your daily practice of ministry focus on the care of souls. Does the Jerusalem of your education and practice really have nothing to do with the Athens of the pressing contemporary call to church leadership?

Ken McFayden argues convincingly that one of the most common pastoral practices — helping people who grieve — can be a source of wisdom for congregational leaders. Drawing principally on the writings of British psychiatrist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby, McFayden analyzes our lifelong and instinctive practice of attaching ourselves to people, places, and things. Attachments give us a secure base for growth. When objects of attachment are threatened, we are thrown into anxiety. When they are taken away, we succumb to grief.

McFayden applies attachment theory to the corporate behavior of congregations. He coaches the leader to study the congregation's losses — the occasional losses of favored leaders and beloved buildings, but also the more insidious losses of membership, standing in the community, and the centrality of the church to its members. What is the impact of these losses on the congregation? How is the congregation grieving its losses, knowing that grief is neither as clean nor as linear as we would like it to be? "A key challenge for leaders," writes McFayden, "is guiding a process through which congregations can grieve their losses and develop a capacity to attach anew." Only when that capacity emerges will the congregation be ready to embrace a new vision of itself.

McFayden's insights about congregational transformation resemble those that Ronald Heifetz and John Kotter have applied to other organizations. Congregations do not like change and will try to avoid it. Congregations prefer easy answers to facing the anxiety of real change. Pacing is everything in leading change. A congregation's viability is measured by its capacity to let go and take up. McFayden provides a credible "why?" to such behavior and draws a meaningful connection between good care of souls and good transformational leadership.

Lewis A. Parks is professor of theology, ministry, and congregational development at Wesley Theological Seminary. His most recent book is *Preaching in the Small Membership Church* (Abingdon, 2009).

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If we lose a generation in the church, that loss won't be because we failed to entertain them, but because we failed to dare them — to take the words of Jesus seriously and to do something about the things that are wrong in the world.

*Shane Claiborne*

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