

Leadership is a Necessity

I Samuel 3:1-9, 19-21 and Romans 12:9-21

by Patty Friesen and Ben Buhler (Sept 3/17)

Leadership is necessary for the well being of any society. Without it there is chaos and moral crisis as in the time of the first prophet, called as a child, named Samuel. The time of the Judges had digressed into moral crisis in political leadership with tribes fighting a civil war with each other and the Philistines taking over Israel. The very existence and identity of God's people is on the brink and will fall into oblivion without strong moral leadership. Religious leadership is struggling as well. Eli the prophet's sons are embezzling and sleeping around and the word of the Lord is silent. In this barren political, religious landscape, a barren woman, Hannah cries to the Lord for a son and God rises up a prophet from childhood, Samuel.

I believe God calls each child into relationship. I believe children are uniquely attuned to the voice of God because they don't carry the doubts that the rest of us carry and God dearly loves their wholehearted responses: Here I am. If we listen to our lives, we may remember that our first experiences of God were in childhood. Because this is such a tender formative stage in our relationship with a divine being who cares about us, we invest in Sunday School and Bible School and teaching our children at home about God.

God calls us and gives each one of us unique talents – not for our own benefit but to bless other people. But like Samuel, we may not recognize God's call in our lives and the gifts God gives us, especially in leadership. We need elders and mentors to help us identify what we are good at and help us live into our calling. "As Samuel grew up, the

Lord was with him and let none of his words all to the ground and all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.” Samuel is uniting Israel from Dan to Beersheba and his number one leadership skill is trustworthiness.

Ben Buhler was the trustworthy mayor of Osler for many years and this leadership was a calling and gifting by God, I believe. Ben will share about his mentors and the gifts of leadership he learned about while in office...

The fact that someone in a committee, organization, municipality, province or country has to lead makes sense. Who, or which people are chosen or have volunteered, makes a difference.

I look over our church membership list and am amazed at the number of people that have had an impact in their leadership roles not only locally but provincially and across the globe.

Our parents showed leadership to each of us. The kind of leadership they provided, to some extent formed the basis of how you and I see life today. Naturally, our friends, as well as all levels of education, be it secular or bible-based, have and are making us who we are.

I have always thought of myself as a volunteer in my different roles working with people, be it with youth or municipal governance. A close colleague, Ron Osika, a former RCMP officer, shared these thoughts at a SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) board meeting. He said, “Make your life matter. Be of use, serve as many people as possible with integrity and vision. This is how each of us can shift from the ordinary and walk amongst the best who ever lived.”

I confess that as an academic I was a terrible high school student, and teachers would flatter me on my report card by saying that Ben could have much better marks if he would only apply himself! Unfortunately, my best subject was “social” studies. I regret that now; but during my adult life I have had opportunity to learn so much because of workshops and leadership courses in many forms.

I want to share about a pastor/deacon workshop that had 106 people spend an entire week together from 9 to 5 every day. This workshop was led by John Savage, a Presbyterian pastor, and professor. After a short introduction to what would take place during the week, he invited us to leave our seats and mingle with everyone in hopes of finding a partner to work with for the rest of the week. We were allowed one hour for this process. If someone asked you to be a partner you could refuse if you so chose. Well, my partner was Don Unger, then pastor of Rabbit Lake Mennonite Church. The rest of the first day of the workshop we got to know each other. Dr. Savage had told us that we would likely know each other better after that week than we knew our spouses—and that was the case for most of the people there. It is amazing what you can say about yourself as well as listen to your partner’s life story when forced to sit together for 4 hours. We built confidential trust! Next day we were asked to do many exercises, including mock

visitations to parishioners who hadn't been in church in awhile. Look for signs that indicate non-attendance, boat in driveway, kids' hockey gear' etc. We also practiced hospital visits, etc. We would critique each other. These exercises then progressed to two people visiting two others in the group and on and on. It might be said that true leadership is servanthood. That we need to put interests of others at the center of our decisions.

Lau Tzu said, "Go to the people, learn from them, live with them. Start with what they know, build with what they have. The best of leaders when the job is done, when the task is accomplished, the person will say, we have done it ourselves." I see MCC and Lau Tzu getting along well.

I have had the privilege of working with wonderful local people on town council. From our congregation—Susan and Dick Braun, Sarah Hiebert who is not with us anymore, as well as John Gascho and Sandra MacArthur as employees of the town. On SUMA board I was representing the Northwest Region of the province and chaired the Environment Committee. I worked closely with 5 different Environment Ministers during my time with SUMA, and found that leaders differ a lot. Sometimes I wished I could have been the leader that Rosalynn Carter talked about when she said, "A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go but ought to be!"

I learned so much from many bright people. A few summers I had the opportunity of attending Mayor Summer School where mayors from across the province would meet in a dorm setting at Regina University. Listening to other leaders with communities of similar populations and how they dealt with governance was beneficial. Naturally inspirational speakers always seem to inspire us to keep going when we feel the need to re-charge, find new ideas, enter meeting rooms with new zest for getting work done. I remember discussion praising strong individuals in the community--not on town councils--that took care of events and happenings in communities. This is what makes communities, organizations viable; we need willing hands with positive mindset to make us strong. Leadership is based on inspiration, not domination, on cooperation, not intimidation. George Patton said "Never tell people how to do things, tell them what to do, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity".

Let me close with a few quotes: Remember the difference between a leader and a boss. A boss says GO! A leader says "let's go".

Leaders don't force people to follow; they invite them on a journey.

The challenge of leadership is to be strong, but not rude; be kind, but not weak; be humble, but not timid; be proud, but not arrogant; have humor, but without folly.

Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality!

In closing, I can't help but say that this congregation has always been my rock. We have had, and continue to have, great leadership. We are fortunate!

Closing comments and prayer: Gracious God, you have shaped us by your hand and have called and gifted each one of us for the benefit of our families, our church, and

our towns. Thank you especially for the way you speak to children and draw them to yourself. Amen.