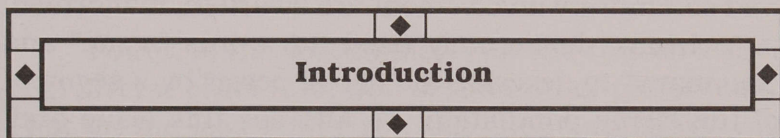


How to Be a Powerful Church Leader*

II Corinthians 12:1-10



From the beginning of time the use of power has been a major problem. Having observed situations relating to ministers and their exercise of authority, it is unfortunate that too many clergy view ministry as the license to be authority figures and exalt themselves to the point of practicing religious quackery.

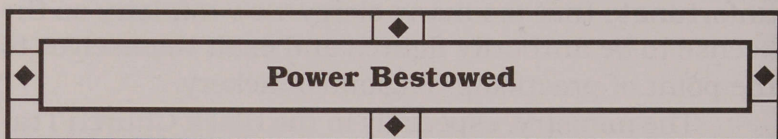
The ministry, especially in the Black Church Tradition, expects charisma from those who occupy the pulpit and presupposes God's grace as the basis for this gift. Instead of effectively utilizing this resource for ministry enhancement, many of us rely on theatrics to demonstrate power and control. Persons are used as objects for manipulation rather than as divinely created human beings in need of loving care—the recipients of God's grace. Regrettably, many ministers acclaim their own importance, interpreting personal understandings as reality. Consequently, orality, for instance, is whatever they say. The authority of the ministry is confused with the power of the minister.

These distorted views of power cause clerics to hunger for public exposure. A large crowd, even one attracted by the performance, rather than any semblance of spiritual depth, is proof of their ministerial

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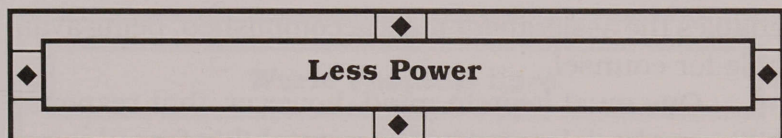
prowess. Expertise, however, in too many instances, is a borrowed "hoop" mastered at the last denominational convention. Skills in counseling, church management and community involvement are dwarfish, malformed.

I have deliberately used the words "some" and "too many" to describe the use of power by a segment of the clergy population. To address this issue and, hopefully, to establish general guidelines for ministerial ethics and etiquette, I share seven digests that will enable one legitimately to become a powerful church leader.

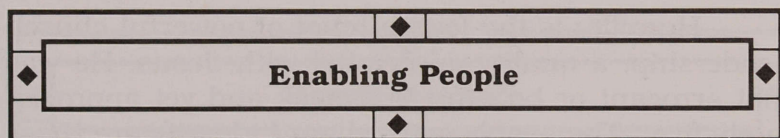


Power Bestowed

First, real power is bestowed upon the leader. It is akin to grace—unearned and not merited. It is the result of trust, demonstrating self-control over small things. It is evidence that one knows the bounds of protocol, that one has a level head and does not misinterpret procedures because of one's position. The bestowal of power is an affirmation of love. The congregation or governing board, on the one hand, expresses its love and appreciation by increasingly giving the pastor additional authority. The pastor, on the other hand, affirms love for the congregation by being a faithful steward of their confidence. Thus, power is conferred upon a church leader in direct proportion to the capacity to handle it responsibly. The wise religious leader does not assume that power is inherent but is a loving gift not to be abused.



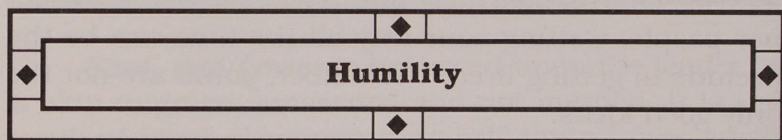
Power, in the second place, for the church leader is in inverse order from that of some other professions. That is, the less power you use the more power you have. A wise pastor avoids power-play episodes. Win-lose situations are hazardous to health. It is human nature, I suppose, to be suspicious of those who are awesomely powerful. Unbridled use of personal power, even when self-conferred, tends to confuse its user and demeans those over whom power is held. Churches and church institutions know how to reclaim authority. Use control sparingly and try not to use it to corner people. Getting your way all the time can be the prelude to getting fired. Remember, yours are not the only good ideas.



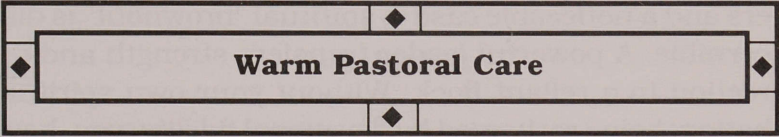
A third characteristic of a powerful church leader is becoming a channel to enable others to be effective Christians. The difference between strong and weak churches, strong and weak colleges, strong and weak seminaries is the extent to which persons are enabled to be more productive in their Christian vocation. An outstanding church leader trains, empowers and supports large numbers to be doers of the Word and not merely hearers. The leader assigns a task and then steps back and

enables the assignment to be accomplished, being available for counsel.

One must keep in mind, however, that responsibility can be delegated but accountability for outcomes resides with the leader. Each task, successfully completed, enables one to move to more demanding pursuits. If you want to be powerful, surround yourself with capable people. If you want to remain ineffective, surround yourself with non-thinkers. King Frederick of Austria, it is said, loved music. But not all music, just music played on a flute. But not all music played on a flute, just music played on his flute. But not all music played on his flute, just the music that he played on his flute.

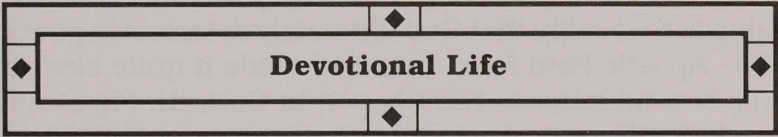


Humility is the fourth tenet of powerful church leadership, a quality associated with Jesus. He was not arrogant or boastful but meek and yet appropriately firm. The people with whom I identify are those who are humble, secure in their being, confident of their own worth and willing to affirm the value of others. Ministers whose warmth invites participation, whose openness encourages freedom, and whose serenity fosters confidence, become contagious church leaders. Humility enables one to compliment the good deeds of others. True humbleness recognizes that persons are capable of problem-solving; this means that your solutions may not be those utilized by the congregation.

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Warm Pastoral Care

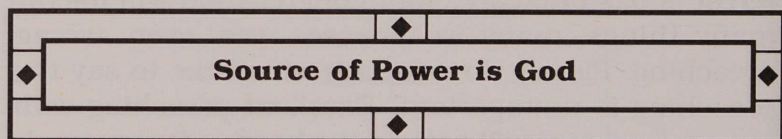
Contrary to popular opinion, really powerful church leadership is not primarily the result of dynamic preaching but of warm pastoral care. If you aspire to be a powerful church leader, I encourage you to “feed the sheep and lambs,” visit the sick, care for the bereaved, counsel the young and the old, relate to the Boy Scouts, the Camp Fire Girls, the star athlete and the wallflower. Share your durability with them, even as they share theirs with you. Let your stance be one of warm humanity rather than false piety. If your interest is pastoral care, your congregation will tolerate many things, many weaknesses, yes, even average preaching. Please, do not understand me to say that preaching is unimportant. Excellent preaching without pastoral care will not win the hearts of your people.

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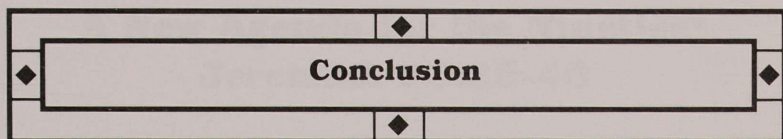
Devotional Life

A sixth dimension of powerful church leadership is a fervent devotional life. A minister without this is as transparent as cellophane paper. The demands of ministry are so numerous and draining that one needs a resource beyond oneself, resident in a loving and caring God, to propel one over the obstacles of service. Unless there is regular contact with God, the source of all power and strength, the light of effectiveness flick-

ers and a noticeable case of spiritual "brownout" is discernible. A powerful leader transfers strength and direction to a reliant flock. Without your own spiritual battery being recharged by devotional fidelity, you have nothing to share except empty platitudes which are quickly discovered and resented. Since coming to ITC eighteen years ago, I have noticed that the graduates who have special interest in worship, Bible study and experience occasional spiritual retreats, are prone to encounter steady church growth. You cannot continue to give without replenishing the supply of spiritual energy. When one runs out of facts, the tendency is to filibuster. A devotional refueling each day keeps fuel in the "generator."



The seventh dynamic for eventful church leadership is the reality that God ultimately determines power. The Apostle Paul knew this and made it quite clear in his second letter to the Church in Corinth. Physically racked with pain, personally unattractive, shipwrecked, snake bitten, jailed, flogged, misunderstood, plotted against, distrusted by friends, suspected by foes, this stalwart of the faith still could say triumphantly that God's grace was sufficient. He could say with conviction that power is made perfect in weakness. God takes our extremes and they become means to the fulfillment of Divine will in our lives.



Conclusion

You need not be beautiful or handsome, eloquent of speech or demeanor. Your lifestyle may be plain and simple. Your service in ministry may be rural or urban, pastoral or institutional, full- or part-time. When God places the mantle upon you and you accept it with seriousness and preparation, you have the best credentials for powerful church leadership. *Wear* the mantle with thanksgiving and humility. *Wear* the mantle with appropriate recognition of the fact that the object of ministry is God and not you. *Wear* the mantle realizing that if you walk in God's light your shadow will be lengthened. *Wear* the mantle in such a way that all can say that through you they saw God more clearly. No greater compliment can be paid.

...the first thing you should do is to pray for your people...

...and then you should be a good example to your people...

...and then you should be a good example to your people...

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