

2013/3: Spiritual Leadership

by BS Poh

[An interview on church leadership given by the Editor to a college student in June 2013.]

1. Describe what the duties of a Pastor in a church are, to the church members as well as to the society.

The duties of a pastor consist of two main areas: (i) the spiritual ministry of teaching the Bible and prayer, and (ii) the practical ministry of governing the church, together with the other elders. Unlike the other elders, the pastor, who is the leading elder, is set aside fulltime to prepare messages and to pray for the church. He also leads the other elders in decision-making, the decisions of which are presented to the members for their consideration and consent.

The aim in all these is to build up the church spiritually and numerically. Spiritual edification comes mainly by teaching and applying the Bible to the members. Numerical growth occurs by souls being won to faith through the hearing of the gospel, which is the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. The outcome, of course, depends on God who gives the increase.

In common with other men, the pastor has responsibilities as a husband, a father, and a member of society. He has no direct responsibility to society by virtue of his office, since he is directly accountable to God through the church. He focuses on his work as a servant of God who does not “entangle himself with the affairs of this life”. By building up the faith of the members and ministering comfort and strength to others, he contributes indirectly in no small measure to the welfare of society.

2. In what ways are the leadership roles of a pastor different from leaders of secular organizations?

The differences are in three areas. Firstly, the sphere of concern of the pastor in the church is primarily the spiritual realm. The focus is on spiritual and eternal issues, as in contrast to the temporal and material concerns of secular organizations. Secondly, the Bible constitutes the infallible rule by which the pastor’s responsibilities are defined and regulated. The aim of the pastor is to be faithful in teaching and applying the Bible to himself and the lives of the church members. Secular organizations are not bound by any rule of conduct that transcends the authority of everyone in the organization. Thirdly, the pastor sees himself as fulfilling a divine calling rather than earning a living or engaging in a professional career. He must have the necessary biblical qualifications to hold office, which largely concern his character and the ability to fulfill the responsibilities of the office. This contrasts with secular organizations in which academic qualifications, promotions and financial incentives are primary considerations to the leaders.

3. In what ways are they similar then (continuation from Question 2)?

Firstly, both the pastor and the leaders of secular organizations have to handle human beings, with all their strengths and weaknesses, and their varied personalities. Human resources should, therefore, be valued, with the aim of drawing out the best from them. Secondly, both the pastor and the leaders of secular organizations require qualities that are necessary to relate to others, and to inspire them – qualities such as self-discipline, setting the example, approachability, selflessness, etc. Thirdly, both the church and secular organizations have goals, be they long-term or short-term, and spiritual or secular. The leaders, therefore, need to define the goals and motivate the members towards those goals.

4. What are some of the challenges faced being a pastor of a church?

One challenge is to remain faithful to the teaching of the Bible in the face pressures to compromise – pressures coming from the trends in society, and the practices in other churches. Another is to remain focused on the primary matters, without neglect of secondary but needful matters. Another challenge is to see setbacks and disappointments – in people and in work – in the light of eternity, so as not to be unduly upset by them. Yet another challenge is to trust God for all needs – whether financial, personal, or work-related.

5. Do you think that leaders are innate or groomed?

Largely innate, although grooming will make for better leaders and make little leaders out of those who are not born leaders.

6. What do you think is your greatest strength and weakness as a leader?

I have a clear sense of God's calling into the Christian ministry, which has helped me in times of trials. Others are able to see the sense of purpose in what I do and how I live. My weakness is the continuing need to grow in Christian graces, including the need for patience with those who are fickle-minded, self-centred and untrustworthy. I have a low tolerance for unreasonableness and hypocrisy in others.

7. What advice would you give to aspiring young leaders?

Be faithful in the little that you are entrusted with, and you will develop to be faithful in much.

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