

# The Areopagus:

## Conversations on the Mission Frontier

The question came at a forum on a new Congregational Constitution. “Pastor John, you seem more interested in & do better at parish administration than other pastors, & this new constitution & by-laws show your interest in those administrative, leadership, planning, & team-building kinds of areas. But what do we do if we get a pastor somewhere down the track who doesn’t share your interests & would prefer the congregation to handle all those things like other pastors have?”

My answer was correct, but incomplete. I said, “We’re a large congregation by LCA standards & we would be poorly served by a pastor who wasn’t actively engaged in the administrative areas you just named. Our size & the ministry opportunities in our community demand that the pastor be able to see the big ministry picture & lead the congregation so that planning, team-building, leadership-development, & the host of other administrative issues are handled well.”

How was that an incomplete answer? Have another look...I addressed that excellent question solely from the perspective of the institutional needs of the congregation & not at all from the perspective of the mission of the congregation nor of God’s vision for us as his people.

God’s vision is not simply the survival of His people, but of their participation in His plan to redeem all creation.

A better response would have focused on two critical areas:

1. Pastoral leadership must be consistent with God’s leadership.
2. Issues of leadership are integral to the pastoral office.

First, our God who reveals himself through the Word is a visionary God. He has a vision & a plan that has

existed from “*before he made the world.*”<sup>1</sup> Scripture records the repeated expression of that vision.<sup>2</sup> God’s plan moves through all of history but uniquely through Jesus Christ. Today this plan is carried out by the Holy Spirit through each of his baptized people & the congregations of his church. A better answer would have also reminded the group that God chooses & equips leaders for his people with intentionality & puts teams of people into the service of his vision.

A pastor who is not seeking, catching, casting & leading toward a God-inspired vision for the congregation is essentially only doing whatever it takes to keep the wheels on the congregational bus going ‘round & ‘round. They’re just surviving...only just. God’s vision however is not simply the survival of his people but of their participation in his plan to redeem all creation. Pastoral leadership in a specific congregation must reflect the God who leads us toward the completion of his vision & plan for all people.

Secondly, it’s easy for us pastors to put visioning, planning, administration, leadership, team-building, & the like in a different file drawer than we do our obvious office of Word & Sacrament ministry. It’s tempting to think about those other functions as somehow derivative of or ancillary to leading worship, preaching, & celebrating the Sacraments.

But when we look at Biblical leaders, we see that leadership (and the various tasks we would put under the leadership heading) is intrinsic to their call. There is no segmenting of their vocation; no primary versus secondary roles. It is all part of living out their call. Take Nehemiah for example. Nehemiah is captured by the God-inspired vision of restoring the wall around Jerusalem. This vision of restoration is not simply for Jerusalem’s sake. Listen as Nehemiah casts this vision for the people in Jerusalem:

*“Let's rebuild the wall so we will no longer be a reproach.”* (Neh. 2:17b)

Not just for their own safety & sense of self-worth is the wall important (for the sake of the institution called “Jerusalem”). “Israel was not just another nation. Their role was unique among the nations. God had established Israel as the nation through which he would demonstrate his power & glory & grace.”<sup>3</sup> They were to be a “*light to the nations,*” “*God's own vineyard*” & the decay & disrepair & dereliction were a stench in God’s nostrils & an abandonment of their divine purpose. They were “*a reproach*” by continuing to live in such a state of disgrace & dishonour. Living beneath or living to be less than what God had called them to be made them an embarrassment.

Nehemiah's vision is linked to God's divine design for his people. It isn't just about a wall, but about God's purposes in human history. Certainly there were "leaders" in Jerusalem, but without a God-inspired vision that tied their current circumstances into the plan of God for their destiny, there was no leadership worthy of the God who had first made promises to childless Abraham & Sarah so many generations before. Remember too, Nehemiah didn't rebuild the wall by himself. He cast & kept the vision of the rebuilt wall & the significance of that wall in front of the community of God's people, and lead decisively, courageously & hopefully toward the completion of that vision.



A pastor's chief role is to lead the congregation forward in hope in its pursuit of God's mission to the world.

If my service as a pastor lacks that intersection between the specific context of God's people now & God's providential hand in human history...if I carry out my pastoral duties without seeing & sharing with those I lead how this specific congregation is a participant in God's plan for "*making all things new*," no matter how dutifully I fulfill my function as Preacher of the Word & Presider at the Sacraments I fall short of what the Bible reveals as the role of a real leader of God's people.

So...how would I answer that excellent question now?

A pastor's chief role is to lead the congregation forward in hope in its pursuit of God's mission to the world. The New Testament describes that work chiefly in the language of "architecture"<sup>4</sup> or "environmental design."<sup>5</sup> The pastor is responsible for building a fellowship that carries out mission; for designing an environment where the people of God can best offer their gifts in service to Jesus' mission to those who live as strangers to his grace. This "architectural" responsibility is inseparable from the Word & Sacrament role. Visioning, planning, administration, leadership, team-building, & the like are essential parts of the pastor's serving Jesus' mission.

It should be clear by now, after reading this second volume of *The Areopagus*, that I am convinced pastors need to cast a vision for their congregations linking the congregation's ministry with the mission of Jesus to redeem the world & then to shape everything the congregation does to bring that vision to reality. If you're wondering how that vision casting is accomplished & how a vision is translated into steps that lead toward its being achieved...keep reading the next editions & perhaps join the conversation with your questions.

*Please make use of with the listed resources & the discussion questions that follow. Then offer your missional stories & feedback to keep the conversation alive. Soon there will be a blogsite or on-line forum where we can carry on this exchange more directly! Please pray for that new development. - John Guilfoyle*

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:4

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:15; Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 25:6-9; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Revelation 21:1-2...to list just a few examples

<sup>3</sup> Visioneering by Andy Stanley

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:10 for but one example

<sup>5</sup> New Designs for Church Leadership by David Luecke

#### Some Resources:

Visioneering by Andy Stanley (if you haven't bought this yet, you should)

New Designs for Church Leadership by David Luecke – Concordia Publ.

Growing Spiritual Redwoods by Bill Easum & Tom Bandy

#### Questions for congregations:

1. If you are a pastor, have you publicly articulated a vision (a preferred future or the kind of church God would have you become) for the congregation you serve? If you are not a pastor, have you asked your pastor about his understanding of God's vision for your congregation?
2. How well does your pastoral leadership give attention to the full range of Biblical "architectural" essentials?
3. Is the unstated goal of our church "to survive?" If so, what changes would we need to make to orient ourselves toward mission in the name of Jesus?
4. Read Ezra 3:7-13. When the foundation of the new Temple is laid, why do the "older priests, Levites, & other leaders" weep while the rest of the people are "shouting for joy"? What is it about the "new" that saddens those who remember the "old"?
5. Read Isaiah 43:18-19. What 'new thing' does God want to do in me? What 'new thing' does God want to do in the congregation of which I am a part?

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