Volume 24
Issue 1 *Leadership into the 21st Century*

Article 6

5-1-1998

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Recommended Citation

Weigel, Arnold D. (1998) "Inspiring Worldmakers," Consensus: Vol. 24 : Iss. 1 , Article 6. Available at: http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol24/iss1/6

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Inspiring Worldmakers¹

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Consider this case. Cecile is a highly respected teacher in an elementary school. In the eight years that she has taught, her students and peers have been virtually unanimous in hailing her as an excellent teacher. Her philosophy of education, she says, is simple and straightforward: Each pupil is a wonderful gift with whom learning needs to be imaginative, intentional, focussed and fun. She sees herself as a creative guide to the children entrusted to her. As this creative guide, she is diligent in spending much time and energy in preparing her lessons and in constructing what she calls "a friendly and open learning environment". To her this philosophy of education embraces at least four basics: 1) the physical environment known as the classroom needs to be bright, lively and inviting; 2) the classroom furniture needs to be arranged to facilitate group process and collaborative learning; 3) each student needs to be affirmed, challenged and encouraged to grow; 4) the teacher as friendly presence is an important and intentional shaper of the learning environment and process.

Cecile, although quite busy and engaged in her full-time teaching responsibilities at school, has decided to serve as coteacher with Pastor Doris for first year catechetics at Faith Lutheran Church. The co-teachers, in consultation with the nine catechetical students, 12 and 13 year olds, have decided that the most convenient meeting time will be on Sundays be-

tween the two worship services.

In preparing for catechetical classes, Cecile and Pastor Doris have agreed that the principles with which Cecile teaches at the elementary school will be the principles shaping this catechetics educational approach. Together with a couple of the

confirmands, Cecile and Pastor Doris devote themselves to transforming the basement classroom into a lively and inviting learning centre. The walls become bulletin boards for current events. The furniture gets re-arranged to form four different learning centres, each furnished with specific textual and creative resources. Banners the congregation already has get hung strategically and decoratively from the ceiling. An appealing music centre is created with the use of a portable AM/FM stereo cassette-recorder and a fine collection of cassette tapes.

With the teaching/learning commitments and the class-room preparations in place, Pastor Doris and Cecile spend another whole day together in specifically planning the first class and in generally shaping the first three months. Naturally, they will want to engage the students in collaboratively shaping the curriculum; but that will have to wait until the first few class sessions. At the end of these imaginative-teaching preparations, Cecile found herself saying to Pastor Doris: "I think we're going to have fun learning together. Maybe we can help these confirmands become inspiring leaders not only in today's world but into tomorrow's world!"

Help these confirmands become inspiring leaders not only in today's world but into tomorrow's world. What an exciting purpose for confirmation! What a challenge! Especially if we recognize—as I believe we must—that to fulfil this noble purpose will basically call for what I have called leadership's "art in context": 1) naming basic beliefs; 2) identifying vision; 3)

engaging creativity; and 4) being courageous!2

Cecile and Pastor Doris appear to be well on their way to fulfilling this creative and constructive challenge within their collaborative leadership. In fact, the metaphor which they have chosen for their self-identity and for their leadership practices is reminiscent of how Matthew Fox characterizes preferred qualities and styles of leadership through "dancing Sarah's circle" (Genesis 18:11–15; 21:1–4, 6–8) as opposed to "climbing Jacob's ladder" (Genesis 28:10–19).3

Of course, metaphors and modifiers abound through which leaders are identified, characterized, and described: shepherd, catalyst, steward, servant, organizer, visionary, charismatic, facilitator, coach, cheerleader, transformer, innovator, traditionalist, crusader, producer, encourager, trainer—to name but a few.⁴

I focus on the metaphor which emerges in conjunction with Cecile's and Pastor Doris' perceptions and experiences in coteaching; within the context of the congregational confirmation class they see themselves as and indeed are INSPIRING WORLDMAKERS. Personally, together and in concert with the confirmands, they identify and describe themselves as transformational worldmakers.⁵ I see this metaphor as an appropriate and engaging way of claiming complexities, challenges, commitments and competencies intrinsic to what it means to be involved fully and effectively in leadership as an "art in context".⁶

Leadership can never stop at words. Leaders must act, and they do so only in the context of their beliefs. This claim raises two profoundly stirring questions: What is central for me in the practice of leadership? What informs and shapes my viewpoint? Leadership is always concrete, situational and contextual. It does not occur in a vacuum.⁷

We Are Worldmakers In A New Era

It is somewhat daunting to realize that as leaders within context, we are worldmakers. I suppose there is a sense in which everybody dreams at some time or another of becoming a heroine or a hero. But this metaphor has less to do with becoming famous or popular through heroic acts and feats than it has to do with what theologian Walter Brueggemann calls a "legitimated and ordered patterning of experience".8

I suppose it is even more daunting to recognize that to be an inspiring worldmaker is to participate in that which is *constitutive*, not simply *responsive*. To be an inspiring worldmaker is to be a participant in constructing a world, often as an alternative to what already exists or is perceived to exist.

Walter Brueggemann makes the convincing case that through formal reality and practice of liturgy, Israel is engaged in "world-construction". Worship is world-making. "Israel constructs a very particular world that is different from and in direct tension with other available worlds." 9

On a parallel basis with Brueggemann's claim, I believe that as leaders we are worldmakers. As congregational leaders, we are—or at least ought to be—inspiring worldmakers. Karen Lebacqz discerningly characterizes what this identity might mean. She writes:

Professionals have the power to define reality... The professional defines how some aspect of society is to be thought of and how policy is to be formulated around it... "[A] new social reality is created by the professional"...The minister does not simply heal or help or console. She defines reality by offering a new language, a perspective on hidden meanings, a transformation of ordinary symbols, a hope in the midst of seeming hopelessness.. The social construction of reality is at the heart of the minister's vocation. 10

To the extent that leadership is constitutive rather than simply responsive, Brueggemann rightly emphasizes that "awareness of this constitutive element will permit greater intentionality and will permit the agents [leaders—clergy and laityl...to be more knowingly critical of what they themselves do" 11

As congregational and community leaders we are worldmakers. We are called to be inspiring worldmakers in context; we are literally called to "breathe life anew" into the context, whether that be structural, organizational, systemic or interpersonal. Like Cecile and Pastor Doris, we are called to be transformational worldmakers in context.

Of course, the context of the nineties, of the twenty-first century, is frequently referred to as a new era—"a different world". 12 How this world is different concerning leadership qualities and styles, I believe, is identified helpfully by Celia Allison Hahn in her claim that what is needed today, especially in the Christian church, is not a controlling leadership but rather a collaborative leadership which respects and honours the freedom, integrity and dignity of the other. 13 Collaborative leadership recognizes and calls into action the gifts of the many so as to situate leadership not solely within the one often the pastor—but within the whole of the community.

"Today," writes Stephen Baetz, "people want to be involved and participating they are looking for fewer top-down answers, and they want to be valued for the contributions they do make."14 Rather than controlling the lives of those being led, among leadership's challenges today, and into tomorrow, are creating space, setting free, liberating others to become more and more who they are called to be! Cecile and Pastor Doris noted: "Maybe we can help these confirmands become inspiring leaders not only in today's world but into tomorrow's

world!"

Hollis R. Williams, Jr., in a recent article entitled "What Does It Take To Lead A Congregation Today?", helps us to understand how it is that we as leaders are called to be inspiring worldmakers in congregational context.

Leadership in the context of today's congregation requires vision. .It is developed out of the partnership in the Gospel between pastor and people. The process involves laity and clergy praying, studying and working together in community to discover what God is calling them to be and do. .Authoritarian leadership, the old top down kind of management, doesn't wear well in these times. People want to be involved, to be invested. .No one organization can be dependent on one person to bring all that is needed. People seek to be included in shaping the institutions and organisms of which they are a part. .Leadership is more important than ever, but a different style of leadership is what is needed in the church. For a congregation to grow spiritually there needs to be a partnership between pastor and people. Each respects the other and brings gifts, vision, and effort to develop and carry forward the mission of the church in that place. Strength builds on strength. 15

"The art of leadership is liberating people to do what is required of them in the most effective and humane way possible." ¹⁶ Walter Brueggemann is correct in claiming that we are worldmakers in a new era. As leaders, what kind of world are we making in context? What are the basic values shaping that world? What kind of world is our language constructing? What kind of a world is our leadership creating?

We Are Worldmakers For The Gospel

The art of leadership challenges us to change the "business-as-usual" environment. "Leaders must join groups not to tell them what to do but rather to help them fulfill their own missions." ¹⁷ The art of leadership begs us to hear and to heed Celia Hahn's invitation to search for renewed meanings in Jesus' prophetic and pastoral words: "It shall not be so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10:43). ¹⁸

Hahn suggests that Jesus here is calling for a different kind of leadership—not a controlling leadership which squeezes the life out of participants, nor a consumer-oriented leadership which lacks a centre and a compassionate heart, but a collaborative leadership which focuses on co-learning, with an integrated authority which honors the freedom, integrity, and dignity of both the self and the other.¹⁹

If I understand Hahn's emphasis correctly, she is highlighting the importance of Jesus' request for a paradigm shift in leadership. Jesus is calling for a leadership responsive to people in their everyday experiences and needs, and which helps people identify and explore their questions so that faith and life may inform and transform one another. Jesus is calling for a leadership which supports people in the expansion of their horizons and in the broadening of their perspectives, and which is instrumental in creating space for open dialogue rather than filling the space with ready and quick answers. Jesus is concerned about a leadership which is less desirous to be served than it is to serve others. As the embodiment of God's living grace, Jesus is urging leaders to be gracious and graceful in their leadership—all for the sake of the Gospel. Jesus is calling leaders to be inspirational worldmakers.

Here is a vision for a gospel-centred leadership. That effective leadership is vision-driven is supported throughout leadership literature, inclusive of Proverbs 29:18(KJV), "Where there is no vision, the people perish", and affirmed in daily experience. Yet, "Vision is not imposed; it is proposed. It is even discovered in our midst." ²⁰

One way to speak of the vision which ought to drive leadership is to regard ourselves as "worldmakers for the gospel". 21 Loren Mead in *The Once and Future Church* as well as in *Transforming Congregations For The Future* encourages us not only to claim this identity but to recognize that in these modern times this identity means an engagement with a paradigm shift—a paradigm shift from an imperialistic, patriarchal, exclusive Christian community to a co-equal, wholistic and inclusive Christian community. His challenge to Christians is to re-invent the congregation for contextual mission work in its own setting and community. 22 His challenge too is for us to become inspirational worldmakers.

Such a contextualized leadership, rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, will necessarily contend with the living tension between "maintenance" and "mission". "Too often...organizations are focussed more on maintenance and preservation of the institution than on fostering Christ's mission." ²³ Mead contends that far too frequently congregations and their leadership opt for a maintenance ministry, while what is needed today is

truly a mission ministry. The difference may be noted as follows:

MAINTENANCE

- buildings more important than people
- tradition treasured for its owns sake
- tradition rooted in tradtionalism
- budget primarily directed toward self
- structures ingrained as permanent "furniture"
- ministry judges others as wrong
- a "we" / "them" framing for ministry
- to keep the church going
- to "put out fires"
- to keep peace in the family
- to preserve our future
- to foster and maintain a clergy/laity split
- to pursue leadership as: Who's in charge here?

MISSION

- people more important than buildings
- relationships treasured amidst traditional and non-traditional values
- people's life/faith stories explored in tradition
- budget's ministry directed towards others
- structures regarded as a means to an end
- ministry invites and accepts others as sisters/brothers in Christ
- co-learners, co-servers
- to proclaim the gospel
- to name and claim diversity
- to process conflict creatively
- to live trustingly into the future
- to be the people of God in ministry
- to pursue leadership as: Who's authentic?

to be concerned with:
Who has authority over whom?
to be anxious about holding others in check
to equate power with control
to ask: Who's in control
to be concerned with:
Who liberates whom?
to be anxious about being faithful to the gospel
to regard power as energy
to ask: What do we need

here?

Although any one of us might configure this listing somewhat differently, perhaps even claim that what is presented here constitutes an over-statement which diminishes the tension between maintenance and mission, I suspect, however, that in all honesty we desire a congregational leadership which enables us simultaneously to be and to become personally and congregationally "inspiring worldmakers for the gospel". That is, mission developers.

to learn here?

But how to do that? How to be that? These are the hard questions. And these are the particularly hard questions which will need to be faced candidly, openly and through discussion within each congregational context. Leadership literature notes that making shifts in strategy from control to openness, from certainty to searching, from preservation to experimentation, from status quo to innovation can help both in facing and in facilitating the processing of these hard leadership questions in context.²⁴

David Whyte specifically and strategically captures what's involved in facing and in processing this challenge when he writes:

the corporation [congregation] demanding creativity from its own employees [members] has as much changing to do as their workforce [membership]. Like water flowing from an underground spring, human creativity is the wellspring greening the desert of toil and effort, and much of what stifles us in the workplace is the immense unconscious effort on the part of individuals and organizations alike to dam its flow.²⁵

We are worldmakers for the Gospel. Since "leadership is always concrete, situational and contextual", ²⁶ we are these worldmakers within the context of congregational and communal ministries. Within congregations—as indeed within any organization—controlling leadership stymies mission; collaborative leadership which acknowledges partnership and respects creativity and diversity generates and fosters the emergence of mission; congregations need to be liberated for ministry in their own context within these changing times. A leadership which is collaborative, creative and co-operative rather than controlling, coercive and confrontational has a better chance of accomplishing this liberation.

Cecile and Pastor Doris in their creative approach to catechetical ministries recognize that "business-as-usual" will not be enough to mobilize the confirmands; they need to experience the riches of being co-learners in connecting faith and living.²⁷ This is a proactive model for leadership—How do we encourage and support one another to be in mission?—rather than a reactive model—How do we hold one another in check? This is constitutive leadership, not simply responsive leadership. The Gospel calls all believers—clergy and laity—to be inspiring worldmakers for the Gospel opening windows of opportunity to grow and to serve with one another.

portunity to grow and to serve with one another.

We Are Worldmakers Called To Open Windows of Opportunity

"The best leaders inspire us to see new possibilities." ²⁸ They do this as they claim their identity in being transformational worldmakers. "From a leader's perspective, the most serious betrayal has to do with thwarting human potential, with quenching the spirit, with failing to deal equitably with each other as human beings." ²⁹ "Good leadership consists of motivating people to their highest levels by offering them opportunities, not obligations." ³⁰

Dorothee Soelle writes in The Window of Vulnerability:

We need light so we can think we need air so we can breathe we need a window open toward heaven.³¹

In order to experience the "window of vulnerability", says Soelle, we need to resist the temptation for security. We need to learn how to ask the right questions and how to ask the

questions rightly.

Cecile and Pastor Doris asked themselves three questions: 1) Who are we as co-teachers? 2) Who are they—the confirmands? 3) What do we need to learn here? What do we need to learn here to help the confirmands be inspiring leaders for today and into tomorrow? The first class session started to address questions 1) and 2). In defining themselves as co-leaders, Cecile and Pastor Doris included comments like: We see ourselves as worldmakers—shaping with you how we will learn together in this class. We will be less interested in telling you that you're wrong and we're right than we are to engage one another in collaborative and mutual learning and leadership. Your questions are important. Your opinions count. Your beliefs need to be named and explored. In shaping the learning environment as a creative and constitutive one, Cecile and Pastor Doris hoped that the confirmands would feel encouraged to participate openly in class proceedings.

At the end of the first class, Cecile pointed out to the confirmands that next week they would to look at question 3); in preparation for this class, she challenged each person to come with their special question and/or concern as to what needed

to be learned here.

The following week, the students did indeed come with their questions and their interests. Surprisingly, the questions were quite clustered and inter-related. There were four students who expressed an interest in learning more about other religions, especially Judaism, Islam and what they called "New Age Religion". There were three students who indicated that they hoped for some project through which they could be of help to children suffering from poverty. With all the government cutbacks on social programs, they wanted to study child poverty and explore constructive ways of reaching out. Two students voiced discontent with the "boring worship services" and expressed a desire to work on "more creative worship" which included "more of our music, and language and ways of doing things".

Although tempted to pick up on any one of these within class, Cecile and Pastor Doris hung in with their commitment

to respect collaborative leadership and learning. Hence, they worked with the confirmands in sorting through some helpful ways to address these questions and interests.

In fact, the input was tailor-made for three "learning groups" to work on their designated areas of interest. A plan was developed for continuing work within each group, with field trips included within each, and for sharing learnings with the whole group. Cecile and Pastor Doris also made suggestions for involving resource people from within the congregation and the community, and for sharing findings, learnings and actions with the whole congregation, possibly at one or both of the worship services.

The present transient, troubling, turbulent, transitional times call for leaders to be worldmakers in a new way, in a different way, in a contextual way which truly recognizes that leadership is an art in context. As an art, leadership is called upon to see, to interpret, to interact with reality so as to help people to perceive and claim new possibilities. The best leaders indeed help us to see new possibilities!

It has become increasingly clear...that reality is not fixed and settled, that it cannot be described objectively. We do not simply respond to a world that is here, but we engage in constituting that world by our participation, our actions, and our speech. As participants in the constitutive act, we do not describe what is there, but we evoke what is not fully there until we act or speak...Or, as a chemist has put it..."The world is not a crossword puzzle to be solved, but a symphony yet to be written."32

Cecile and Pastor Doris identify and describe themselves as contributing authors to "a symphony yet to be written"—as "transformational worldmakers". And so they are. Shapers of contextual ministry. Engagers in an educational process. Leaders in the best sense of the word.³³

As Transformational Worldmakers themselves, Cecile and Pastor Doris vividly remind us that we too are called to be inspired worldmakers—in a new era, for the gospel, opening windows of opportunity. As part of this God-given calling, transforming worldmakers "elevate, envision, mobilize, inspire, exalt, uplift…"³⁴

Notes

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented at a Conference on Congregational Leadership, sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

Canada, Eastern Synod Parish Life Committee, on 28 September 1995. This conference was intended to provide a forum for conversations on

congregation leadership in the 1990s.

² Cf. Arnold D. Weigel, Congregational Leadership: An Art in Context (Vancouver, BC: The Centre for Study of Church and Ministry, 1993). Cf. "Context may be defined as the whole background or environment relevant to a particular circumstance or event. Contextuality means that the social situation in all its uniqueness informs the thought and action of the reflection of the Christian community." John Patton, Pastoral Care in Context (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 39.

³ Matthew Fox, A Spirituality Named Compassion (New York: Harper SanFrancisco, 1979/1990) 37-60.

⁴ See further James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, "Seven Lessons for Leading the Voyage to the Future" in Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith and Richard Beckhard, eds., *The Leader of the Future* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996) 99–110.

⁵ I am deeply indebted to Walter Brueggemann for this metaphor of "worldmaker". Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), especially Chapters 1 and 2. Also Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), especially Chapter 13 "Welcoming The Stranger", 290–310. "Transformational worldmaker" embraces the notion that leadership is always involved in some kind of contextual actualization.

Weigel, Congregational Leadership: An Art in Context. Leadership is an art of "liberating people to do what is required of them in the most effective and humane way possible...Learning is an art. something to be learned over time, not simply by reading books." Max DePree, Leadership Is An Art (New York: Dell. 1989) 1.

7 Ibid. 6. Cf. Max DePree, Leadership Jazz (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

8 Brueggemann, Israel's Praise, 14.

9 Ibid. 29. "Dramatically, experientially, realistically, this liturgic formula, 'the Lord reigns', is not a remembering, but is an enactment, a making so" (34). "Responsible theology must...be a constitutive act, in which our discernment of God must be reconstituted in wholly new ways" (23). Cf. "Theological reflection is the process of seeking meaning that relies on the rich heritage of our Christian tradition as a primary source of wisdom and guidance. It presumes the profoundly incarnational (God present in human lives), providential (God caring for us), and revelatory (source of deepening knowledge of God and self) quality of human experience." Patricia O'Connell Killen and John De Beer, The Art of Theological Education (New York: Crossroad, 1995) xi.

10 Karen Lebacqz, Professional Ethics: Power and Paradox (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985) 116-117, 119-120. Cf. "The first responsibility

of a leader is to define reality." DePree, Leadership Is An Art, 1. "The way we see the problem is the problem." Stephen Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (New York: Fireside, 1989) 40. "Issue framing is one of leadership's most critical tasks." Robert Terry, Authentic Leadership (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993) 106.

11 Brueggemann, Israel's Praise, 7.

12 Cf. Lyle Schaller, It's A Different World (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987).

- 13 Celia A. Hahn, Growing in Authority, Relinquishing Control (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1994) Chapters I, II and III. Cf. "Collaborative leaders do not act in isolation. They are inclusive rather than exclusive in approach. They are willing to listen to and collaborate with those whose views and style may differ from their own." Loughlan Sofield and Donald H. Kuhn, The Collaborative Leader (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1995) 38.
- 14 Stephen Baetz, Change Is... (St. Jacobs: Charles Nathan Publishing, 1991) 38.
- Hollis R. Williams, Jr., "What Does It Take To Lead A Congregation Today?", Congregations, March-April, 1995, 18-19. Cf. Sofield and Kuhn, The Collaborative Leader, "Effective collaborative leaders focus on the development of team and community...The leadership role is significantly altered. It is much less 'top down' and much more a 'with you' or 'I support you' approach" (97).
- 16 DePree, Leadership Is An Art, 1. Cf. Walt Kallestad, The Everyday, Anytime Guide to Christian Leadership (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1994).
- 17 Paul R. Stevens and Phil Collins, The Equipping Pastor (Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1993) 4.
- 18 Hahn, Growing in Authority, 30. On leader as servant see Robert K. Greenleaf, Servant Leadership (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

19 Hahn, Growing in Authority 29-42.

- 20 Terry, Authentic Leadership, 193. Cf. Sofield and Kuhn, The Collaborative Leader, "Visions which remain unchanged lose their vitality. It is through use and redefinition that they are kept alive and energizing... Too often, visions formulated in the privacy of a staff or team meeting or, even worse, in isolation by a leader, languish as unfulfilled dreams because the people they are to motivate do not own them. The only effective visions are those built on the contributions of as many people as possible" (59, 57).
- Walter Brueggemann, Living Toward A Vision (New York: United Church Press, 1976/1982). "Our faith comes to fullness as we are teased to think new thoughts, as our imagination is lured beyond 'business-as-usual'" (11).
- 22 Loren Mead, The Once and Future Church (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1991); Loren Mead, Transforming Congregations For The Future (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1994).

- 23 Sofield and Kuhn, The Collaborative Leader, 59. Cf. Michael C. Armour and Don Browning, Systems-Sensitive Leadership: Empowering Diversity Without Polarizing the Church (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 1995). "We never know when the world's spiritual casualties will end up at our door. Ideally they will find us ready to respond with care, truth, and grace. But what if they discover the hospital in disarray, its workers so preoccupied with their own trauma that they have no energy for others?" (1).
- ²⁴ Cf. Terry, Authentic Leadership, especially chapters 4 and 5; Mead, Once and Future Church, chapters V and VI; Mead, Transforming Congregations, chapters 2, 3 and 6.
- 25 David Whyte, The Heart Aroused (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 21.
- 26 Weigel, Congregational Leadership, 6.
- 27 C. Jeff Woods, We've Never Done It Like This Before (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1994).
- 28 DePree, Leadership Jazz, 49.
- 29 Ibid. 34.
- 30 John Heider, The Tao of Leadership (New York: Bantam Books, 1985) 135.
- 31 Dorothee Soelle, *The Window of Vulnerability* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) vii.
- 32 Brueggemann, Israel's Praise, 12.
- Although the case put forward in this article is grounded in catechetics, this case needs to be seen as one experience in the fullness of ministry and in the wholeness of leadership. Other areas of congregational ministry are equally illustrative of what is presented here.
- 34 Robert D. Dale, *Good News From Great Leaders* (Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1992) 6.