



The role of a church leader

TN78 Training Notes series: Leadership

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What exactly is the role of a church leader? These notes are written out of two frustrations.

First there is too often a lack of clear definition. This confusion opens doors for both ineffectiveness and abuse of power.

Secondly there is a tendency today to go to the opposite extreme and produce an unwieldy shopping list of everything a leader might do. This hides the real purpose of leadership and can create a monster.

What I have done in these notes, somewhat as an experiment so please feedback your comments, is to take something called the Ordinal and work from that as a base.

The word 'Ordinal' is the name given to the book of services of ordination of deacons and priests/presbyters (and the consecration of bishops) in the Church of England. That may well not be your tradition, but the services make for a refreshing overview of leadership.

The following takes the wording of the ordination service for priests/presbyters and freely adapts it in layout, in the grouping of phrases and by introducing headings to create something that will be recognised as being close to normal job description format.

The aim is to use this wording in a logical and clear way to get to the heart of what Christian leadership is all about. I have deliberately rewritten it so that it would fit any denomination or tradition, but I have tried to restrict myself to what it covers, resisting the temptation to incorporate examples and concepts from the complexities of modern life.

This means that this is a foundation for your own attempt rather than being useable as it stands as a role definition for a given church. It includes ideas that you might not have considered yourself and excludes others that you would have tried to cover.

It is simply one way of trying to describe church leadership. See what you think.

A church leader

Your role

Your role is to lead God's people in the offering of praise and the proclamation of the gospel. You share with others in the oversight of the church, delighting in its beauty and rejoicing in its well-being. You are to set the example of the Good Shepherd always before you as the pattern of your calling.

You are to be a servant and a shepherd among the people to whom you are sent. You are to be a messenger, watchman and steward of the Lord. You are to work with your fellow servants in the gospel for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Your responsibilities

1 **To proclaim the gospel**

You are to lead Christ's people in proclaiming the gospel, so that the good news of salvation may be heard in every place. You are to search for God's children in today's world of temptation, to guide them through its confusions, to call your hearers to repentance and to declare in Christ's name the forgiveness of sins, that they may be saved through Christ forever. You are to tell the story of God's love. With others you are to proclaim the word of the Lord and to watch for the signs of God's new creation.

2 **To baptise new disciples**

You are to baptise new disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and to walk with them in the way of Christ, nurturing them in the faith.

3 **To teach the Scriptures**

You are to teach and to admonish, to feed and provide for God's family. With others you are to make clear the Scriptures, to preach the word in season and out of season, and to declare the mighty acts of God. You are to faithfully minister the doctrine and sacraments of Christ so that the people committed to your charge may be defended against error and flourish in the faith.

4 **To lead in worship**

You are to preside at the Lord's table and, with others, to lead his people in worship, offering with them a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. You are to bless the people in God's name.

5 **To minister to the world**

You are to resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor and intercede for all in need. You are to minister to the sick and prepare the dying for their death.

6 **To foster people's gifts**

Guided by the Spirit, you are to discern and foster the gifts of all God's people, that the whole Church may be built up in unity and faith.

7 To stir up your own gift

You are in, the strength of the Holy Spirit, continually to stir up the gift of God that is in you, to make Christ known among all whom you serve. You are to know yourself to be reconciled to God in Christ, and so strive to be an instrument of God's peace in the Church and in the world.

8 To accept discipline

You are to accept the discipline of this Church and respect authority duly exercised within it and, when necessary and with others, to minister such discipline yourself.

9 To order your life

You are to be diligent in prayer, in reading the Scriptures, and in all studies that will deepen your faith and fit you to bear witness to the truth of the gospel. You are to fashion your own life and that of your household according to the way of Christ, that you may be a pattern and example to Christ's people. You are to devote yourself wholly to his service, following the rule and teaching of our Lord and growing into his likeness.

Remember always with thanksgiving that you are entrusted with the privilege of leading Christ's own flock, bought by the shedding of his blood on the cross. It is to him that you will be accountable for your stewardship of his people.

You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God. Pray therefore that your love of people and your understanding of the Scriptures may grow daily. Pray earnestly for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Adapted freely from Common Worship Ordination Services © Archbishops' Council 2013
For source see <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/ministry/common-worship-ordination-services>.

Notes

- 1 This is a generic role definition which makes no attempt to address local issues or specialities of a particular leadership post. The idea is that it forms the basis on which to draft something which is specific.
- 2 It comes across as an individual role whereas leadership should normally be within a team. In a properly formatted role definition there would then need to be a middle section of how the leader relates to others, including the team. Or the wording here could be adapted to fit all members of a leadership team together.
- 3 There is nothing about tasks that may take up a considerable amount of a working week for many Ministers such as funerals, issues to do with finance, the legal requirements of running a complex church and the administration that goes with this, or managing and training staff and others.
- 4 For a different approach to writing a Minister's role definition in the specific example of a larger church, see Training Notes TN6 on this website, *The Minister's role in larger churches*. These notes act as a contrast to the approach adopted there.

- 5 The language has been updated a little from the service wording but you may prefer to adapt it further. It does not seek to avoid biblical terms like 'repentance' and 'sin'.
- 6 Whether you relate the word 'church' to the one local church the leader serves in or to a wider understanding of God's people will depend on how this paper is used. In the above a lower case 'c' for church relates to a local body of Christians and an upper case 'C' to a wider body.
- 7 If these notes relate to a 'role definition', see also the idea of a 'person profile' as written up in Training Notes TN87 on this website, *What to look for in your leaders*. This has a wider application than just Ministers.
- 8 Scripture passages to read alongside this include: Acts 20:25-31; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 2 Timothy 3:10 – 4:5.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN78. See also Training Notes TN6, *The Minister's role in larger churches*, TN18, *A leadership team checklist*, TN87, *What to look for in your leaders*, TN112, *Set my leaders free!*, and TN132, *What you look for in your Minister*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN78 under Leadership (with a link to Structures).

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