



ILLINOIS Focus

Editorial



JOHN GRYS,
PRESIDENT

A delightful portal into the passion of Jesus is found in John 12:20-36. Normally, when considering the theme of leadership, this passage doesn't get much coverage. And yet, for those invited to steward leading, this passage serves as a laser-like reminder: our focal direction for leading centers around leading people to Jesus. There is a social weblike network (think non-digital for a moment). Greeks come to Philip. Philip goes to Andrew. Andrew takes the Greeks to Jesus. Wow! What a story. The responsibility of Philip was not to take the Greeks to the immediate presence of Jesus. Their responsibility was only to take them to Andrew. This was the limit of their leading. There are some called only to lead people to other people. And yes, perhaps, those other people are the ones tasked with leading them into the immediate presence of Jesus. All that leading and it was toward one end: get them to Jesus. That is it. The arranging of the "meet Philip to meet Andrew to meet Jesus" was quite the organizing. Perhaps the life of Philip placed

him in closer proximity to those who were not part of the twelve. And because of that proximity, the Greeks went to what was closest: Philip. The organizing network of the twelve placed Philip in a space where he could then lead them closer to Jesus. So, he takes them to Andrew.

No matter where the roles of life may take us, leading people to Jesus remains our first path. And

swept up in the moment, in the Zeitgeist of the day, and mission drift away from this one purpose: bring people into the presence of Jesus. Whether it be our Pathfinder Ministry, our Women's Ministry, our Educational Ministry, our Pastoral Ministry, our Hispanic Ministry and all other ministries in-between: we exist to lead people to Jesus.

And notice this, notice the

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Issue Focus

Leadership

yes, sometimes that may mean leading, as Philip did, people to another person. No...it does not mean that we don't lead to Jesus. It does mean we must recognize the context and how that context shapes our steps in the leading. However, whatever it may be...we are to organize to lead people to the immediate presence of Jesus. And there, in that place, Jesus will do His work. And the ever-abiding Spirit will be intimately involved in that leading. I am so grateful those early followers did not organize just to organize! They organized to bring people to Jesus. It can be so easy to get

response of Jesus. When He beholds the fruit of mission pursuit and He observes a people from another race there as a result of an organized effort to satisfy a desire ("We would see Jesus"), the response of this God of the Universe is overwhelming: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

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Principles of Servant Leadership

Matthew 20: 20-28 paints a vivid picture of what servant leadership should look like. The mother of James and John was determined to secure positions of authority for her sons in Jesus perceived kingdom. Jesus invited the other 10 annoyed disciples to gather for a vital lesson on leadership. The leadership cup to bare looked more like a cross than a crown. The selfless love of the cross is the ultimate expression of service to others.

Jesus knew the disciples' flawed leadership model focused on personal edification and control over others. Jesus patiently yet firmly stated that "it would not be so among you." In God's kingdom the greater the service to others the greater the honor in His kingdom. Those who aspire to lead must first become servants.

Spiritual leadership is about inspiring others to embrace God's agenda. Jesus reminded the disciples that their leadership request was not His decision but His Father's will alone. Jesus' example of leadership is best reflected in these words: "I can do nothing on my own" (John 5:30). Henry and Richard Blackaby's book *Spiritual Leadership*, shares that "good leaders are also good followers" (p. 47). The key to Jesus leadership was His intimate relationship with His Father. To be effective leaders, we need to know and understand the Savior we serve.

Jesus' life provides a myriad of leadership principles well worth exploring. (226) Mark 1:33-38 gives us valuable insights into leadership priorities. The story describes "a whole city" (Capernaum) that gathered to meet with Jesus.

Jesus love for people allowed him to heal many throughout the night. As word spread, one can imagine a potentially larger crowd awaiting Jesus the next day. The disciples searched frantically for Jesus without initial success. When they finally found Jesus, He was praying in a "solitary place." As leaders, the greatest gift we can give others is our time spent with Jesus. Empty leaders will have little impact in guiding others. Jesus is demonstrating how practicing self-care is necessary and essential. Spiritual and physical renewal is the starting point for effective leadership. It seems surprising that Jesus didn't return to Capernaum to continue His healing ministry. Jesus was demonstrating the necessity of setting healthy boundaries amidst the busyness of life. We cannot be all things to all people. Creating space for God allows us to Hear God's voice and ultimately His agenda.

One of Jesus greatest leadership qualities was His humility. Despite His authority, power, and Lordship, He emptied himself "by taking the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2:7). While he knew His divinity, he came to serve man in human likeness. The book *Lead like Jesus* (Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges) describe the humility of Jesus as "realizing and emphasizing the importance of others. It is not putting yourself down but lifting others up" (p. 67). The demonstration of true humility is a safeguard against the temptation of pride often manifested in leadership roles. As we reflect on the life of Christ, it remains important for us to ask the question of What mattered most to Jesus? The overwhelming conclusion is that people mattered most to Jesus.

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PETE BRAMAN,
MINISTERIAL DIRECTOR





The Spork Ruined My Life

MATTHEW LUCIO,
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR COMMUNICATIONS

I cannot tell you how many million-dollar business ideas I've had. As a kid, I got excited at the prospect of combining a fork and a spoon. This was heady stuff. My friends were excited about tricking out their bicycles, but I could tell I was made to change the world. I was a born leader... until I met the spork.

I thought a leader was the person who thought of the thing no one else did. The true original thinker. My problem wasn't that I didn't have original ideas, it was just that other people happened to have the same ideas before me.

Looking back, it's obvious that I put too much emphasis on being original. I was caught up in our cultural restlessness for innovation and technological revolutions. We've been conditioned to associate new ideas with economic and social progress—and with good reason. But that thirst for revolution-through-innovation can be used against us. Internet click-baiters are always teasing that “life will never be the same” and some new thing “will change everything.” You know very well you're being baited into disappointment, but every once in a while we click anyway. Why? Psychology Today reminds us that “we forage for information much in the way our ancestors foraged for food.” We

can't afford to miss out. The next revolution to change our world might be around the corner.

I think even the ancient philosopher Heraclitus, who claimed that “the only constant in life is change,” would be surprised at the amount of change we face. The printing press was a technological revolution, like the stirrup before it. But for most of human history these were relatively few and far between. A revolution, by definition, is not merely change, but a radical and sudden change. In one generation, we've had the personal computer, the Internet, and artificial intelligence – just to name a few technological revolutions – each of which are more impactful than the printing press. If our

society are (arguably) addicted to revolutions as a means of progress today, how might leaders lead amidst constant, institutionalized change?

Here are a couple of thoughts: First, we can offer perspective for those we lead. Marshall McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride* responded to the advertising and entertainment industries with a simple premise: “Why not assist the public to observe consciously the drama which is intended to operate upon it unconsciously?” Rather than being complicit in the methods and manners by which people are enticed or coerced towards particular ends, let leaders be truth-tellers: Don't overhype.

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How to Lead like Jesus

Every leader has an image of what they believe makes a leader great. It comes from a model somewhere, usually from leaders they respect and admire. As leaders, we definitely learn from other leaders. In this article, I would like to propose that the best model of leadership to follow is rooted in the life of Jesus. You may be thinking that Jesus was not a leader, he was our Savior! It is true that Jesus makes the way for our salvation, but it is precisely for that reason that it makes him a great leader. He had a purpose, and he carried it out to completion. Great leaders have clarity about their purpose and create a life to faithfully fulfill their purpose.

Jesus once said to His disciples, "Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant." (Matthew 23:10,11) Jesus makes it clear that truly great leaders are actually followers of Jesus. Following Jesus is good news. Throughout the Bible, we read story after story of how God led His people. God led the Israelites through the wilderness into safety. God led the early Christian church through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus has shown himself to be a trustworthy guide for our lives. In following Jesus, there are at least three things we can emulate from His life as leaders.

First, Jesus made time for His inner life. We read that Jesus would wake up early in the morning, while it was still dark to spend time in prayer

with His Heavenly Father (Mark 1:35). Prayer was so important for Jesus that He would often spend the entire night in prayer. At the height of Jesus' ministry success, when thousands were following Him and wanting to make Him king, He withdrew from the crowds to deeply root Himself in the presence of God through prayer (Matt. 13:23). If you want to follow Jesus prioritize strengthening your inner life through prayer.

Secondly, Jesus was clear about His purpose. Before Jesus was arrested He said, "My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour." Every great leader will have clarity of purpose. A "why" or personal mission for your life that extends beyond organizational goals and focuses on a deeper purpose for your life. As a follower of Jesus, you must be clear about your purpose and then build a life that will help you faithfully carry it out to completion.

Thirdly, Jesus had relationships that sustained Him. Jesus chose 12 disciples to do life together with. They were His community. They kept each other accountable and worked side by side for the mission of God. The Bible tells us that He had other relationships, too, like Mary, Martha and Lazarus, that helped to sustain Him. Great leaders don't work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week; they need time to reflect, rest, and be renewed, which often happens in the context of their most important relationships.

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PASTOR DAVID OCEGUERA,
BOLINGBROOK CHURCH

LEARNING TO LEAD LIKE *JESUS*

In the Youth Department, we believe strongly and deeply in ministering to and with our youth, but anyone who has served in this ministry knows what a rollercoaster it can be. It's both incredibly rewarding while also being notably challenging. One of the more difficult elements we as youth leaders are forced to sit with is the reality that we don't always see the fruit of our labor, which often leads us to question whether or not our efforts are doing any good. That then tends to send us down a path of wondering what kind of leaders we are and whether we're cut out for this ministry. We get it- we've all been there.

Over the years, there are a few things we've learned along the way pertaining to youth ministry and leadership. Maybe you'll resonate with them too.

#1 NOTHING YOU DO FOR A CHILD WILL EVER BE WASTED

On the days when your youth test your patience and make you feel like everything you say goes in one ear and out the other, remind yourself that this ministry has a cumulative effect. It's a slow burn and a long haul, but it will always be worth the time you put in. Make the moments count. Every time you show up for a graduation or take the extra time to go out of your way to pick up your young people for Pathfinders, you're creating moments that will be important in their development.

#2 LEARN HOW TO BE A MODEL

No, we are not talking about America's Next Top Model. We're talking about learning to lead like Jesus did, by falling so deeply in love with the Father that your leadership becomes a byproduct of your relationship with Him. You can't expect to lead young people to Jesus if you're not rooted in Him yourself. You have to do it first.

#3 FALL IN LOVE WITH GARDENING

We have a unique calling and opportunity to plant the seeds of the gospel in the lives of our youth so that when the time comes for them to "fly the coop" their faith will continue to bloom and grow. It's more than the lockins and youth Sabbaths. It's building meaningful relationships that challenge our kids to discover Jesus for themselves. You want to be an effective youth leader? Be a leader who cares, who loves, who shows up for the kids they serve. Be kind to yourself and give yourself grace. Love Jesus fiercely and let that be what flows out of you.

Lead like Jesus.

ILLINOIS CONFERENCE YOUTH DEPARTMENT



WELCOME TO THE TEAM



ROBERTO GONZALEZ,
ASSOCIATE YOUTH DIRECTOR - YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

I was born in Geneva, Switzerland. I moved to Spain where my family is originally from at age 12. I graduated with my BA in theology at the Adventist Seminary in Sagunto, Spain; and my Mdiv from Andrews University. I have worked as a head dean, assistant chaplain, P.E teacher and coach at Newbury Park Adventist Academy in Southern California Conference. I began my pastoring as a youth pastor and senior pastor in Michigan Conference, associate youth pastor in Florida, and Potomac Conference. I worked in both Spanish and English speaking churches.

I always say how important my youth pastors were in my call to ministry. They cared so much for children and youth, that their example motivated me to listen to their sermons, spend time in church activities and outreach ministry, and gradually that call to ministry was set in my heart. It was not an easy journey but here I am! I always say God has a plan and His timing is perfect. My passion has always been youth ministries, and I thank God for the opportunity to be able to continue in this field at the Illinois Conference. I will continue to work to bring young people to JESUS, I will work to motivate, empower and prepare them to be able to finish the mission we have been called to do.

WELCOME TO THE TEAM



MATTHEW LUCIO,
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR COMMUNICATIONS

Raised in Toledo, Ohio, Matthew attended Southern Adventist University followed by the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. He has served as a pastor in several conferences and hosts the popular Adventist History Podcast. His wife, Laura, is a native of Romania and together they have two children, Aerith and Arwen. Matthew enjoys doing creative ministry, THE Ohio State Buckeyes, reading, and exploring the world.

LAURA LUCIO,
WOMEN'S MINISTRY COORDINATOR

My Purpose is to strive to create a lasting impact by embracing God's plan, remaining true to my values, following Christ's example, and fostering an inclusive community where I'm proud to belong.

As a Romanian immigrant, my sister and I emigrated to the United States to reunite with our mother and third sister after 17 years of separation. For a while, I wandered aimlessly until I recommitted my life to God at the age of 24. It's been an adventurous journey since then. I'm a recovering people-pleaser with abandonment issues and C-PTSD that I'm working through.

I'm passionate about psychology, religious history, and theology. One of my favorite books is Try Softer by Aundi Kolber, and I often recommend The Body Keeps the Score by Dr. Bessel van der Kolk. Currently reading Reading Genesis by Marilynne Robinson and I'm always on the lookout for great books, so please feel free to share your recommendations.

As a Director of Customer Experience Management, I contribute to paying our bills, but serving in ministry alongside my husband nourishes my spirit. Marriage, parenting, and ministry have inspired me to heal and break many harmful generational cycles. I'm honored to serve as the Volunteer Women's Ministry Coordinator in Illinois and look forward to supporting my fellow Adventist women as we navigate life's ups and downs together. In my spare time, I love reading with a good cup of hot-something, traveling, cooking, and gardening.

WELCOME TO THE TEAM



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And it is this leading people to Jesus that contributes to the glorification of the God of the Universe. The mission pursuit of leading people into the immediate presence of Jesus (and particularly for us, in the context of a very hostile endtime environment) brings glory to God. Brothers and sisters, may we never miss this. May our attention not sway from this incredible collaboration. We steward organizing and leading for the purpose of bringing glory to God through the Way to Jesus. And Jesus will continue His work. I rejoice and take great comfort in this. What about you?

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The vast majority of time Jesus spent in ministry was centered on healing, discipling, mingling, and loving people. Matthew 15:32 describes a teachable moment with the disciples. With a crowd of 4000 plus, Jesus said “I hurt for these people, for three days now they have been with me, and they have had nothing to eat.” Jesus initiated the miracle of loaves and fishes. In Mark 6:30-31, the disciples returned from a missionary journey with great enthusiasm. Jesus realized that they were tired and hungry and took them across the lake to a “quiet place and get some rest.” Following the relaxing boat ride across the lake they were met with sea of people both physically and spiritually hungry. Jesus “had compassion on them.” Influential leaders are most concerned about the well-being of those we serve. Effective spiritual leaders understand the needs of those we serve.

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It is clear that if we follow Jesus’s leadership model, we will be connected to our Heavenly Father and have the inner peace that we need to lead well and in a healthy manner. Being rooted in Jesus will clarify the purpose for which God has called you, too. When you combine all of this with life-giving relationships, you will experience the joy of the life that God created you to live.

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Second, leaders can lead at sea level. A sea, of course, is never at sea level. Waves crest above and dip below that invisible line, but sea level represents the sea at rest. Instead of riding on the crests or troughs of our changing world, lead at sea level. The old Chinese story of the farmer whose horses broke free illustrates this well. His neighbors came to commiserate with his poor fortune, but the farmer replied: “Good or bad, who’s to say?” The next day, his horses returned with some wild horses. This time his neighbors came to celebrate, but the farmer replied: “Good or bad, who’s to say?”

We are in this world and must shake the conceit that we can swim in this ocean of ideas without getting wet. But good leaders also transcend the moment they are living in by taking a longer view of things. To borrow a gem from the late Eugene Peterson, they encourage their team towards “a long obedience in the same direction.”

DEPARTMENTS

President	John Gryś
Executive Secretary	Michael Campos
Treasurer	Douglas Reeves
Education	Katrina Baun
Hispanic Ministries	Ruben Bullon
Ministerial	Pete Braman
Trust Services	Arkadiusz Bojko
Stewardship	Arkadiusz Bojko
Youth	Josant Barrientos Jr.

CONTACT US



619 Plainfield Road,
Willowbrook, IL 60527



(630) 715 3560
info@ilcsda.org
www.ilcsda.org



@illinoisconferencesda