

PLURAL LEADERSHIP MEANS MORE THAN NUMBERS



It is a theme that is dominant throughout Scripture. It is a conviction that is held in many churches. In fact, it is a regular practice in communities of faith associated with the Brethren movement. What is this theme, conviction and practice? *Plural Leadership*.

In most Brethren assemblies the biblical message on plural leadership is understood and practised as far as numbers are concerned. More than one person is responsible for providing leadership. However, plurality in leadership relates to much more than the number of people involved.

PLURALITY AND GIFTEDNESS

The New Testament affirms the variety of gifts within the body of Christ. By implication, the appointment of elders will result in a team that is comprised of individuals who have different strengths and abilities. In a sense the elders are a microcosm of the church they lead. Some local churches create difficulty for themselves by selecting a group of leaders who are identical in terms of giftedness. Real plurality allows for a diversity of gift.

PLURALITY AND MUTUALITY

In traditional pyramidal structures the person at the top is dominant and in control. This can often lead to an unhealthy obsession with power and authority. In a team of elders where plurality is understood, control and power do not become the dominant strategy. Decisions are made through mutual struggle and respect so they do not represent the conviction of one person. One individual may have the most education, experience or expertise but this does not presuppose that their position is always best for the group or the church. Real plurality allows for mutuality.

PLURALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY There is no place for "lone rangers" on elder's boards. No individual has the right or privilege to make decisions and set direction without due process and consultation. An individual elder should not use force and coercion or silence and withdrawal as leverage to achieve certain ends.

Within the context of plurality, elders can confront, challenge and sharpen one another so that there is mutual nurture and responsibility. Extreme ideas become softened and unwarranted prejudices are challenged. Real plurality allows for accountability.

PLURALITY AND PERSONALITY When groups meet together one personality style can dominate. At times the verbal, outgoing person gets their own way. At other times the quiet, retiring person will use silence to accomplish their purposes. Stubborn and hostile leaders can manipulate and bully as a way of achieving control.

In the context of plural leadership there is a commitment to a 'character ethic' and avoidance of the domination of one personality. Real plurality allows for a diversity of personalities.

PLURALITY AND EXPERIENCE While all elders may have the New Testament qualification, they come with varied background experiences. Some have operated in contexts where they own their own business and are used to "calling the shots." Others may be private practitioners and they are most experienced in making decisions on their own. Others have worked in environments where they are used to others making decisions and they are most comfortable deferring. This can lead to situations where some in the group do not know how to make decisions communally and others do not want to.

Healthy discussion on background experience can help overcome this barrier. Real plurality allows for a transcending of background experience.

Most brethren assemblies do not struggle with plural leadership from the perspective of numbers. The real battle is waged around the attitudes, experience and communal spirit that are brought to bear when the group of leaders meets together.

Dr. Rod Wilson
Vancouver, BC