
BOOK REVIEW**TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP:
NEW VISION FOR A CHURCH IN MISSION**

BY: NORMA COOK EVERIST AND CRAIG L. NESSAN

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Norma Cook Everist and Craig L. Nessian give us a practical and incisive guide to leading the transforming process of the local church in their 2008 work, *Transforming Leadership: New Vision for a Church in Mission*. In a traumatic time for mainline Protestantism in the United States, Everist and Nessian offer rich resources to tackle difficult problems and move the congregation into a transforming and transformed future. The authors' primary emphasis is on the process and systemic change that is necessary to reach the ends, or *telos*, that are responsive to the mission of the church. They recognize that God's life-giving power undergirds transformation in both process and purpose.

Everist and Nessian begin the transformative process in chapters titled "Community Formed" and "Identity Claimed." They discuss the creative resistance that develops in the process of change in the third section "Integrity Tested." Built upon the foundation of the first three sections is the culmination in "Opportunities Unleashed." The opening comments in the latter section acknowledge that the methodology focuses on the gifts God has already provided within the congregation, not an assessment of the deficiencies. This is a hopeful approach that brings together the activity of God and the response of the congregation, and aligns congregational systems to create missional opportunities for the church as a congregation and for daily living in vocation.

Everist and Nessian begin with the essential work of establishing trust and then they move to the importance of honor. It is refreshing to find authors who will deal directly with the wounds of the church and identify the

spiritual practices that will re-connect the congregation and wider church within the bonds of trust in God and each other. In developing the aspects of leadership that encompass authority, servant leadership, powerful partnerships, and leading theologically, the importance of these virtues is abundantly evident. Trust and honor are established as essential virtues that promote ethical practices and the integrity of the church's witness and community.

In my own experience of pastoral ministry, there have been many struggles about the purpose and mission of the congregation and the wider church. Everist and Nesson remind me that within each of these there was always an issue of the use of time and the sense that our time is not our own. The authors reflect on the essential nature of time that is reflected in the opening of Genesis, and they discuss the place of Sabbath. Often discarded as outdated and a threat to the gods of productivity, in the authors' view Sabbath practice is focused on the Word of God and a re-centering and refreshment in that Word. As I read this section (beginning p. 152), I was a bit amazed that the authors focused on Sunday as Sabbath; for many pastors and laity Sunday is a day of worship and spiritual commitment, but it is also a day of work. In pushing the essence of this chapter, it seems that developing a Sabbath that renews the spirit and essential relationships may not be best exercised and aligned with the church life that is now the Sunday pattern. Perhaps this is the challenge offered in this section. Perhaps it will require us to revisit the habits of the early Christians who maintained the Sabbath as well as celebrating the resurrection on Sundays.

Everist and Nesson write for a practicing church audience. They integrate theological, academic, and popular approaches. Each chapter has "helps" that focus the learning gleaned in the spirit and practice of the congregation. The authors provide questions to guide personal reflection, group conversation, spiritual practice, and transforming action.

Transforming Leadership helps us to understand the dynamics of congregational ministry and the essential foundations and practices for change. These are key aspects of congregational life which need to be the constant attention of its leaders. The subtitle of the book, *New Vision for a Church in Mission*, begs a companion piece that explores more fully the alignment of the foundations and practices with the mission, vision, values, and narratives of a transforming church. Everist and Nesson draw together the resources in the field in this excellent guide to foundation and process. A similar volume will deepen and quicken the church's capacity to fulfill the transforming *missio dei* as envisioned by the prophets and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

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