

VOLUME INTRODUCTION

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The *Journal of Religious Leadership (JRL)* seeks to provide excellence in scholarship for theological educators and leadership practitioners around the broad issues of leadership, administration, and finance. In this regard, the 2005 double-volume of the *JRL* focused on the question, “What are the primary resources that those teaching religious leadership tend to draw on in carrying out their work?” We were interested in discovering whether there was any type of common canon of source materials being used for the teaching of religious leadership. It became clear from this exploration that there was an important question that needed to be addressed regarding the ecclesiastical formation of leaders in relation to the role that denominational church polity played in such a process. This 2006 double-volume picks up on this question through seeking to focus the conversation more directly on the issues of leadership and polity.

Polity has to do with the organizational structures and the formation and exercise of leadership in the church. Every denomination has some type of formal polity in place to give direction to these matters, but it is clear that various denominational polities treat organizational structures, leadership training requirements, and the practices of leadership differently. This is evident both in their formal requirements and also in relation to their informal practices. This edition of the *JRL* examines the influence that both these formal polities and informal practices have on shaping organization and leadership in denominations and their local congregations. Specific

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attention is given to the leadership development; the procedures and requirements used in calling, forming, and credentialing new leaders; and the organizational structures that put these processes into operation. This development of leaders includes persons who are being prepared to serve in church leadership roles, whether ordained, credentialed leaders or as lay leaders.

To set the stage for the five polities explored here—Quaker, United Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, and Roman Catholic—the editors offer two introductory articles. The first one by Craig Van Gelder considers the historical development of denominations in the United States that constitutes what might be referred to as their DNA. Beginning with the Colonial period and coming forward all the way to today's complex array of denominational organizations, this article examines several key questions about the challenge for leaders working in the context of the denominational church, including: Where did they come from? How do we explain their origins? What do they share in common? How are they unique? Questions such as these are foundational in seeking to come to further clarity regarding polity, especially in its relationship to ecclesiology. This article ends with the suggestion that the recent emergence of a missional ecclesiology provides a helpful framework for rethinking leadership and polity within the denominational church.

Building on this discussion, David Forney's article explores what a missional approach to polity might look like. Given the contextual nature of polity and the variety of ways in which denominations anticipate and participate in God's mission, this exploration is intentionally suggestive. The aim is to provide denominational and congregational leaders with a substantive metaphor, that of the city, by which to think about their respective polities from a missional perspective. Using the Epistle to the Hebrews as a guide, the essay suggests some of the implications arising from the city metaphor for thinking about a missional approach to polity.

The intent of these two opening essays is to provide a framework from which to interact with the five different articles on specific denominational polities. The writers of these articles focus on their particular polity traditions by: (1) examining both the formal requirements and the current informal practices of leadership development and exploring how these are congruent and/or how they differ; (2) summarizing the biblical/theological foundations that are used in the formal polity to support leadership development and organizational practices; and (3) thinking through some of the implications of the city metaphor for polity today.

The six book reviews at the end of this edition provide an assessment of the current literature related to church polity. These reviews offer a complementary perspective to the articles in this edition in helping the reader think more fully and more carefully about both leadership and polity in the church today.