What suggestions do you have for identifying new directions for the development of faithful leadership for the mission of Christ?

GREGORY SAYS:
Elona and I are excited about the Matthew 25 Initiative. The synod of Lakes and Prairies and Fellowship Presbyterian Church have both signed on. We believe this initiative helps to set us on a faithful trajectory into the future that will engender fruitfulness for years to come.

A critical component of making this go is leadership development.

In Acts 6, we are told of a complaint that is brought by the Hellenistic widows about being neglected in the daily distribution of food. In a stroke of spiritual genius, the apostles effectively create a new office in the church by counseling the aggrieved widows to choose from among themselves “seven men who are in good standing, full of wisdom, and full of the Spirit.” Notice how leadership isn’t imposed from the outside but rather emerges out of the womb of the community. The apostles simply fine tune their vision by laying out the criteria to help them see what is already in their midst. Incidentally, the most recent issue of Presbyterians Today lifts up the vital role of deacons in caring for the people.

Going forward, we must fine tune our vision to see the people in our midst whom God has called to lead the faith community in redemptive and transformative ministry in the church and world. And then employ processes and practices that will edify, enhance and equip them to be even more effective in living out God’s call.

Dr. Tod Bolsinger reminds us that leadership is disappointing our people at a rate that they can absorb. And in order to do this, we must start with conviction, stay connected, stay calm, and stay the course. Another way of saying this is to begin with the end in mind, maintain a non-anxious presence in the midst of chaos and conflict (be a thermostat rather than a thermometer), and to keep on keeping on.

ELONA SAYS:
This question is so very important as we adjust to the changes in how the 224th General Assembly will take place and why it will be a virtual assembly. Gregory and I did not hear this as a question about setting new directions, but about the key importance of developing faithful leadership.

The global losses ushered in just since the beginning of the year by COVID 19, increase the urgency of the PCUSA to address the conditions pronounced by Matthew 25. Faithful leadership must be equipped and empowered to deepen their faith and be actively engaged with their community and the world, to break down the systems, practices and thinking that underlie discrimination, bias, prejudice and oppression of people of color and to work to change laws, policies, plans and structures in society that perpetuate economic exploitation of people.

In the face of uncertainty, it is the courage and boldness of all caregivers and responders, the creativity of staff transitioning home space to work space, the dedication and imagination of pastors to lead worship and bring comfort to members, the persistence of teachers to inspire and encourage students, that identifies new directions for leadership development in the PCUSA.

With so many incredible models, I hope we will empower and equip leadership to build inclusive and accessible structures, policies and practices ensuring equity and belonging across
communities separated by distance, economics, national interests, and ideologies. Deep in this hope is a call to be the living church made from the hands and feet of Christ’s ministries.

When the disciples asked Jesus what they should do, Jesus answered, “Seek first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness.” Walter Brueggemann teaches that the word righteousness concerns public policy and the proper administration of social goods, social power and social access. So here, Christ directed the disciples’ interests to the common good and well being of the community. Today, he might have told them, simply, to be the unity in the community.

Nurturing the energy, curiosity, commitment, and relations of our leadership will strengthen their ability to learn, adapt, adjust and serve in the midst of change. This is not a time to reduce our development resources, but to equip and empower all those who serve. The next generation has arrived and it is time to offer hope for now and action for the future.

We must support Christ’s call to Matthew 25 around the world.

11-12 Because we know that this extraordinary day is just ahead, we pray for you all the time—pray that our God will make you fit for what he’s called you to be, pray that he’ll fill your good ideas and acts of faith with his own energy so that it all amounts to something. 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12