

# Something to Talk About

## A conversation guide for church leaders

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### The Best Gifts Church Leaders Can Give

Oh no!! Not another Christmas article!

Relax – This is another *Something to Talk About* article and the real topic is church leadership. Specifically, the topic is “what are the best gifts church leaders can give to their churches?”

This is my gift to you. What follows is based upon my years of experience in leading in churches and organizations as well as things I’ve learned from others along the way, including through my current work since 2013 with EFCA churches. I’m assuming you already have the God stuff as a foundation, you know, a vibrant walk with Jesus, appropriate spiritual disciplines and health, you are not trapped in a sinful lifestyle, etc. What would be the best gifts we could give to any church entrusted to our leadership? What are some gifts from leaders our congregations hope to see under their tree? Here are some things to consider for yourself and to talk about with your team.

- The gift of *relationship*. People want to have relationship with their leaders. They often don’t ask for our time because they think we are too busy, but they want us to see them and know them. Church leaders often are ensconced somewhere in prayer 15 minutes prior to the Sunday gathering and emerge just before the service starts. Can we pray for 15 minutes 30 minutes before the service starts so we can spend those precious 15 minutes before the service intentionally mingling with the congregation we serve? Can we mingle afterwards? Is the best place to mingle standing at the front, standing at the exit door, outside, or mingling in the auditorium? Where can we best be to spend a few precious moments with some of the sheep we shepherd? Most people want their church leaders to give us their best work and to also give us a bit of ourselves – at least the best that circumstances will allow.
- The gift of *clarity*. People want to know what leaders want them to do. They appreciate clarity in a church’s purposes, core values (guiding principles) and key strategies. What are we trying to accomplish, what behaviors are important to us, how are we going to accomplish them and what role can I play are important questions we and our congregants need to ask and answer. The answers need to be clearly and frequently communicated to those we lead. How are we doing with our own clarity on these things as well as the frequency and clarity of reminders to those we lead? When did we last talk about them?

- The gift of *calm*. People do not thrive under constant stress or continuous dramatic change (intentional incremental change is unavoidable and generally healthy). Anytime believers are gathered can be a great time for them to experience and give the gift of peacefulness. It's in the quiet times that people tend to hear God's voice and feel the moving of the Holy Spirit. It's frequent these days for conference speakers and authors and church leaders to cajole and guilt Christ-followers into living radical, world-changing, pedal-to-the-metal lives until we succumb to death or burnout even though Paul encourages us to pray for those in authority over us so that we may live *peaceful* and *quiet* lives in all godliness and holiness.<sup>1</sup> How can church leaders help those we lead to experience peacefulness and quietness in their lives and in their service to Jesus and the church? How are we doing in experiencing peace and quiet ourselves?
- The gift of *teaching*. The gift is teaching, not preaching. The difference is preaching is proclaiming, while teaching infers that what has been proclaimed is being learned, not just heard. Pastors spend hours preparing for their sermons – what can we do to ensure that our preaching results in learning and not just hearing? How can we help those we lead to think about what they heard in the weekly sermon long enough to facilitate life change? I love this saying attributed to D.L. Moody: “God didn't give us His word to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives.”
- The gift of *example*. People want their leaders to give them a real-life example of doing real life well. They don't want the sanitized “Facebook post” kind of leader that is always doing bigger and better and having the times of their lives doing things more fun than other people get to do. No, they want to see their leaders confronting the same life issues they are facing; they want to see us navigating life, triumphs and failures, joys and heartaches, warts and all. They learn more from our example than from our words. I'm challenged by Peter's exhortation to the churches' shepherds to be examples to the flock and the exhortation in Hebrews for people to “remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”<sup>2</sup> People cannot imitate our faith if they don't see it in action – real action. How are we doing in being appropriately transparent with the people we serve as leaders so that they can see the outcomes of our faith through the example of our lives?
- The gift of clearly articulated *reality*. A favorite leadership adage of mine is attributed to Napoleon – “The leader's role is to define reality and then offer hope.” I'm surprised by how often people tell me they knew there were problems in a church while its leaders continuously minimized or denied it until it became a crisis that could no longer be hidden. All of us want to put our best feet forward. Yet those people we want to follow us question our competence and trustworthiness when we minimize or deny problems rather than admitting they exist. They can see the problem – and they wonder why their leaders apparently cannot see them for themselves. We don't need to publicize details that should be confidential, but it is refreshing when a leader shares that there will be turbulence ahead and then offers hope in successfully navigating through it. Are there some issues facing our church that we have been minimizing or denying? Why are we doing so – is it pride? How

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<sup>1</sup> | Timothy 4:2

<sup>2</sup> | Peter 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:7

can we effectively define our current realities for the people we lead and then give them a sense of hope as we face and work through them?

- The gift of *finishing well*. We too often learn of church leaders that do not finish well. It's a predictable path they follow whether they embark upon their journey of destruction from a starting place of want or of plenty. They fail to take care of themselves physically, emotionally and/or spiritually resulting in burnout, failure to give required attention to their marriage, or failure to live out the things they teach to others. Church leaders can finish well whether their tenure in a ministry is relatively short or spans several decades. Finishing well includes saving for retirement; leaving your role when you can no longer perform it well; steering clear of disqualifying sin and compromising behaviors; equipping our teams so that they can lead well when we are gone; and serving and living in accord within the varied seasons of life God allows us to travel through. Whatever your current season, are you preparing to finish well or just hoping to finish well?

There you have it. Seven potential gifts to give to those we lead. Are there any you or your leadership team may need to give this year? The best earthly reward from leading others is to have been a blessing in other's lives. How we can bless others through the ministry of leadership is something to talk about.

*Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.  
Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at [bob.osborne@efca.org](mailto:bob.osborne@efca.org).*

*This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.*

*Prior articles can be found at <https://efcawest.efcadistrict.org/something-to-talk-about-archives/>.*