

Sierra Leadership Network Curriculum: Month 11, Year 2

Participation in the Sierra Leadership Network (SLN) is a process of adult learning. It is the responsibility of the participant to do their assignments and seek out the necessary accountability. It is the responsibility of the participant to schedule time with their mentor, not the other way around. Here is a checklist of this month's exercises and space for comments. All useful generated materials should be placed in your Sierra Leadership Network binder. The mentor will look over the exercises and be given opportunity to add their own comments. Be sure you take your binder to the meetings at Granite Springs Church to also be available to the SLN directors.

Month 11, Year 2

Date Completed

____/____/____ Keeping Up with Church Trends
[Estimated time: _____]

Mentor Comments:

____/____/____ Organizing a Prayer Event:
Mentor Comments [Estimated time: _____]

____/____/____ Prayer:
Mentor Comments [Estimated time: _____]

Participant Signature

Mentor Signature

I. Keeping up with Current Church Trends

The Teacher in the book of Ecclesiastes utters “there is nothing new under the sun.” At the same time we live in a very creative, dynamic culture where churches and church leaders are constantly trying new things: different ways of doing church, different ways to training people, different ways of caring for people, different ways to manage small groups, etc. There is an endless stream of seminars, books, and ideas vying for your attention. One of the most difficult aspects of church leadership is how many areas of life your vocation touches on. You need to stay in reasonable contact with current events, changes in culture, changes in social sciences, changes in medicine, changes in politics, plus all of the changes and trends that are within the church. It is a daunting task that all of us can only do our best at. As a wise church or ministry leader you will need to have a strategy for keeping up with many of these different areas. Strategies will likely include some or all of the following:

1. Reading new books: Books are constantly being written. Leaders read, but no one can read everything. A big challenge in this area is finding the best books to spend your time reading. The best way to do this is to always be on the look-out for recommendations. Nose around the libraries of pastors and peers you respect; ask them what they are reading and what they are finding helpful. In any church you work for if at all possible ask for a book allowance of at least a few hundred dollars a year. This will give you “permission” to go out and buy books to build your library and be available for when you have the time to read them.
2. Subscribe to magazines you find helpful: Magazines can be a good source for keeping up on specialized areas and getting news that won’t be picked up by the secular media. Find a source you find credible and helpful and subscribe, making it a discipline to read. Leadership Journal by the people at Christianity Today is a popular source with many church leaders.
3. Work your peer group: Every church leader should be a part of an ongoing peer group. For some it may be the staff at your local church; for others it may be other pastors and leaders of other congregations. This is a vital group for mutual support, prayer and encouragement. It is also an excellent source of new ideas and book recommendations. Find out what people are reading, talking about and learning. Spend some time at your peer meetings to work on this.
4. Online resources: There are increasingly helpful online blogs, e-mail groups, websites and magazines that can be a good source of news, trends and book recommendations. Many of these things are what you make of them. The one that I use is CRC Voices (<http://www.crchurches.net/subscribe/CRC-Voices/online/thisweek/>). Like any online community you will get your amount of yelling, arguing and bad behavior, but you can also find other wise and godly people struggling with similar things and many who are willing to give advise or share resources.

Assignment:

1. Write a one page book report on a book of your choice on contemporary church trends. The choice of book or area of ministry are your choice. It may be a book that you've already read in the last year not assigned by the Sierra Leadership Network. In your report make observations on what you've learned and why it was a helpful (or not) book to read. Share this with the other Sierra Leadership Network participants by posting it online. This is a good way for you to share resources with the rest of us.
2. Talk to your mentor about how they do their ongoing education and keeping up with trends.

II. Organize a Prayer Event

We so quickly forget that prayer is not roping God into our agenda, but God moving us to get with his. The church is the work of God in the world not the other way around. Prayer gets much lip service but often little practice. Healthy churches are churches that pray and there are times when church leaders need to call special meetings for prayer. It may be in response to a national tragedy like we experienced on 9/11. It may be to respond to a crisis or a tragedy within the congregation. It may be to help launch a new initiative within the church. Many churches will have some kind of special prayer event once a year. Your assignment is to take the initiative on this when it is appropriate with the advisement of your senior pastor. You may not be able to do it this month but over the next 6 months keep this assignment in mind.

Prayer events are not necessarily simple things to plan and execute. Most of us are weak when it comes to extended prayer and undoubtedly the people you will be leading in this event will need help in praying for an extended period of time. There are a variety of practices that can be employed for such an event: 5 minute focused prayer schedules, break out prayer groups, request and response formats, etc. A major prayer event requires planning. If you are unsure of how to go about it talk to some people and do some research. Lots of things have been tried in a variety of places. Leadership in a prayer event should:

1. Enable people who tire or wander during extended prayer to stay fresh and focused
2. Give the event direction and focus so that the participants can maintain a sense of purpose
3. Give the events appropriate breadth so that often forgotten elements are not ignored

After you have led your prayer event write a brief (one page) report on the occasion, what you did and how it went. Share it with others.

III. Prayer

Time for a prayer check up. Have a heart to heart with your mentor about your prayer life.
Suggestion questions:

1. What things are dominating your prayer life lately?
2. What things are you avoiding praying about?
3. How has your prayer life been “feeling”? Are you feeling close? Far away? Frustrated?
4. What have been your most helpful disciplines in your prayer life? Where do you pray?
When?
5. What disciplines do you want to try out in your prayer life?
6. What disciplines do you need to adopt to help your prayer life?