

Servant Leadership: A biblically compatible model for future deployment in the Church of Ireland?

Jonathan Cockerill

Abstract

In the 1970s Robert Greenleaf introduced the concept of Servant Leadership to corporate America. The subsequent decades have witnessed the growth and evolution of Greenleaf's original ideas to the point where, today, Servant Leadership is accepted as a credible approach to organisational leadership in a range of settings. Recent research has succeeded in refining the characteristics of Servant Leadership and has equipped it with a defined set of traits and greater credibility. However, to date, the Church of Ireland has not actively incorporated leadership approaches that have been developed outside the boundaries of the church. This dissertation explores how Servant Leadership theory, with its deep-rooted ethical basis, might make a contribution to the future growth of the Church of Ireland as it adapts to future demands. Through this investigation the origins and development of Servant Leadership will be examined to establish whether its strong emphasis on servanthood is compatible with the biblical call to serve, as a response to Christian faith in Christ. The biblical theme of servanthood is further considered, primarily within the New Testament, with consideration given to the teaching of Jesus as he modelled servanthood in his conduct and leadership. Additional reflection is given to the importance of an attitude of servanthood to the early church. Finally, the core attributes of Servant Leadership are given consideration within the context of the Church of Ireland through the mode of a questionnaire issued to curates-assistant. The questionnaire investigates whether Servant Leadership is compatible and applicable to contemporary leadership in the Church of Ireland. Final consideration is given to these findings with conditional recommendations made.