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Prepared for Leadership?

An exploration of Church of Scotland parish ministers' attitudes towards leadership.

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Abstract

Do Church of Scotland parish ministers today see themselves as leaders?

Having set this question in context, and using data derived from quantitative research this article argues that these ministers do see themselves as leaders.

It then explores what kind of leadership ministers aspire to offer and identifies five characteristics: collaborative, facilitative, enabling, servant-like and adaptive. Thirdly, it notes evidence for the existence of toxic leadership within the Church. It concludes by suggesting that the Church needs to stimulate debate about the kind of leadership which the church requires today.

1. Introduction: Leadership Ambivalence

'There is great value in strong directive leadership in the church but there is a reluctance to own it.' This comment was made by one of the facilitators at a Place For Hope training day in April 2017. The speaker was articulating an ambivalence about leadership within the Church of Scotland which I had been aware of for some time. On the one hand, people are looking for leadership. While it might be offered by different people, on the whole, ministers in particular are expected to lead. On the other hand, ministers appear to be reluctant, hesitant or unwilling to offer this.

I was particularly conscious of this apparent ambivalence when I was convener of the Church's Ministries Council between 2011-2015. One of the things I consciously tried to do was to argue that the role of the parish minister in the Church of Scotland needs to be seen as a leadership one. If the traditional understanding of the parish minister is that of the pastor-teacher who leads, I wanted to turn this round. The role of the Church of Scotland parish minister in the 21st century is to be a leader who pastors and teaches.

This proposal appeared in different guises in various Ministries Council reports to the General Assembly. For example, in 2012, the Council argued 'another way of stating this reality is to say that Parish ministers play a critical leadership role' and continued, 'the Council believes that *leadership* has now become an even more significant aspect of the role of the Parish minister' (Ministries Council 2012, 4/18).

These proposals were neither enthusiastically received nor overtly rejected. This response, seemed to me, to be further evidence of an ambivalent attitude to leadership within the Church, particularly in relation to parish ministers. When I enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry Program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 2015 I took the opportunity to explore what might lie at the root of this ambivalence. For my final project, I chose to look at parish ministers and leadership. My research question was: *How prepared are Church of Scotland Parish Ministers for the leadership role that the General Assembly expects them to play?*

The key word in the question was prepared. It was chosen because I wanted to discover three things. First, to what extent were parish ministers aware of what the General Assembly had said about ministers offering leadership? Second, to what extent had they accepted this role? Third, to what extent did they feel equipped to play this role?

A piece of quantitative research provided me with data that helped me answer all three questions. This paper outlines the responses and offers an insight into parish ministers' own perception of themselves as leaders. It begins by outlining some of the attitudes towards ministers and leadership which can be discerned in the Church of Scotland during the last fifty years and notes how these correlate with views on leadership in wider society. This provides the context for my survey of parish ministers in 2017. Finally, I conclude that the critical question the Church needs to address is, what kind of leadership should ministers offer?

2. Attitudes towards leadership in society and in the Church of Scotland.

Barbara Kellerman describes a fundamental shift in attitudes towards leadership which was sparked by the 1960's cultural revolution. 'By the end of the twentieth century, leading by commanding and controlling was dead and gone, and leading by cooperating and collaborating was famously in fashion' (Kellerman 2012, 31). The 1960's were tumultuous years which transformed many aspects of western societies. Hierarchies were dismantled, authorities challenged and assumptions overthrown. Increasingly command and control leadership, which had been widely practised, was rejected. Traditional top-down power structures were replaced by more egalitarian ones. The obedience of followers could no longer be assumed. People expected to be consulted and their views taken into consideration.

A similar shift in attitudes towards ministers acting as leaders can be detected within the Church. One minister, Stuart Louden, in the Cunningham lectures of 1963, argued that within the Church, government should be corporate and representative. 'It must never be allowed to become ministerial deliberation and leadership alone' (Louden 1963, 43). He used the phrase 'the whole people of God', which would become increasingly significant as the 1960's progressed, when he said, 'the ordering of the Church's affairs should be carried on by a responsible body as widely representative as possible of the whole people of God' (Louden 1963, 43) and he argued for the continuation of shared rather than personal oversight in describing the Kirk Session as 'the church court charged with the pastoral oversight (episcope) and the discipline of the congregation' (Louden 1963, 44).

Pronouncements by the General Assembly tend to follow rather than set trends so it was some years before these sentiments began to appear in Assembly reports. Eventually, they did. I offer two examples. First, in 1976, in the *Ministry* section of *A Statement of Christian Belief* the egalitarian nature of Presbyterianism was asserted: 'Those called ministers have been given equal status' and 'the Church has governed itself through a series of courts, consisting of minister and elders' (Panel on Doctrine 1976, 153). Second, the following year the Committee of Forty said: 'The ministry of all God's people is dominated by the ministry of the whole-time servants of the Church. This seems inevitable, but it needs changing. Ministry means service, the opposite of domination; so how can we say that the ministry of one class *dominates* the ministry of others?' (Committee of Forty 1977, 501).

Writing in 1984, Stewart Todd, a Church of Scotland minister, raised questions about the leadership often provided by, or expected of, ministers. 'Professional leadership is increasingly questionable: leadership ought to emerge from local membership. The minister's very professionalism is a disincentive to the growth of a congregation it is claimed: his mode of leadership is also inherently inflexible and impervious to social change and new conditions' (Todd 2009, 218).

The importance of shared rather than individual leadership within the Church was expressed most clearly in a General Assembly report in 1989.

> The nature of this leadership is of vital importance. It must reflect the pattern of Christ's own ministry. It must be leadership in fellowship, a corporate leadership. Its authority must reflect Christ's, who took the form of a servant. This means that the authority of power structure, of privilege and rule are not appropriate models of leadership. Christ called his disciples 'friends' and this provides us with the pattern of his leadership. It is one which encourages the responsibilities and responsiveness of the whole people through promoting the gifts of togetherness and friendship.

> In the Church of Scotland the basis of this kind of leadership is already present in the leadership offered by the Kirk Session, which is corporate leadership within each congregation and is represented in the corporate leadership of Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly (Panel on Doctrine 1989, 192).

This passage sounds a number of egalitarian notes. Rather than individuals exercising leadership, leadership is shared. The phrase *corporate* leadership is used three times. Leadership is by representative groups rather than an individual who has a special position. There is also distaste for authority. Authority and servanthood, power and empowerment are polarised.

If the 1960's witnessed a questioning of traditional patterns of leadership, a further reassessment occurred during the 1990's, largely sparked by the seismic cultural shifts which were occurring across western society. What we are living through is not just an era of change but one of discontinuous change. 'Continuous change develops out of what has gone before and therefore can be expected, anticipated and managed'. In contrast, 'discontinuous change is disruptive and unanticipated; it creates situations that challenge our assumptions' (Roxburgh and Romanuk 2006, 7). John Naughton captures the essence of the latest cultural earthquake in the title of his book, *From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg*, in which he argues that it is the invention of the internet which has been the catalyst for this (Naughton 2012, 43-109). While change is always a feature of life, what makes this period different is that rather than simply it being an *age of change*, which is a universal experience, it is a *change of age*.

> We are not simply living through an "age of change" as all generations do to some extent. More unusually we are living in a **"change of age"**. By that is meant that the *modern* age, which began with reformation and the enlightenment and itself superseded the medieval period of European history, is itself coming to an end (Ministries Council 2012, 4/11) .

In virtually every sphere of society rapid, constant, discontinuous change has become the norm. Patterns, which once were effective, have ceased to be. Foundations, which were thought to be secure, have been shaken. One consequence of this has been a renewed interest in leadership across society. For example, in 1996 there were about 300 leadership development programmes at US post-secondary institutions. By 2000 this had increased to 600 programmes (Sorenson 2007, 20),

and to 1000 programmes by 2003 (Christensen, et al. 2004, xxxiv). In the corporate world, Kotter reported a change that began in the 1990s. Companies, that were used to operating in a climate where 'change occurred incrementally and infrequently', found themselves thrust into a highly competitive, rapidly changing, global economy and began urgently looking for leaders to help them adjust and prosper in it (Kotter 1996, 19). Warren Bennis and Joan Goldmsith offer a striking example of this trend, which they tie to one particular tragic and seismic event. 'Interest in leadership surged after the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11th 2001, and continued to increase as a result of the tragic, almost unstoppable violence in the Middle East and the ballooning world economic crisis' (Bennis and Goldsmith 2010, 37).

The rapidly changing nature of life, since the turn of the millennium, has led to increasing calls for leadership in many different sectors of society. When people feel lost and unsure of the future, they look for a leader who will offer them guidance and reassurance.

There is some evidence of this trend among congregations in the Church of Scotland who appear to be increasingly recognising that they need leadership and are hoping that their minister will offer it. This is reflected in the adverts for ministers in the pages of Life and Work (the monthly magazine of the Church of Scotland). The adverts during 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017 show a steadily increasing number articulating a desire for a new minister to offer leadership.

Table 1: Life and Work Adverts (Life and Work 1992-2017)

Year	Adverts containing 'Leader'
1992	4%
1997	9%
2002	33%
2007	43%
2012	53%
2017	64%

In 1992 only 4% spoke of leadership, the figure rose steadily reaching 64% in 2017. While on its own this evidence is suggestive rather than definitive, evidence from the Church of England supports this conclusion. 'Many, even most, advertisements for new Anglican incumbents seek a minister who is gifted in "leadership"' (Coakley 2008, 7).

Towards the end of the 1990s the need for Church of Scotland ministers to offer leadership began to be heard. This is how four Church of Scotland expressed it.

First, Derek Browning:
> We need leaders at all levels of the Church, but crucially at Presbytery level and within the Presbytery at Business Committee … Some might balk at such a strong approach to leadership style, but the Church in recent years has been bedeviled more by indecisive weak leadership than ever it has by autocratic despotism (Browning 1997, 76.7).

Second, Marjory Maclean:
> Harry Reid is right to worry that the Church of Scotland lacks the quality and depth of leadership, and the courage of distinctiveness, which must be guarantees and marks of a spiritual organization. For these we look – rightly or wrongly – to the ordained ministry (including the diaconate) and the eldership (Maclean 2002, 56).

Third, Susan Brown:
> What is ministry about? Yes, empowering the people of God, but that doesn't mean doing yourself out of a job. I've come to recognize that even the most active, most integrated, most effective congregation (perhaps especially the most active, integrated and effective congregation) needs to have someone in place whose job it is to keep everything in perspective; someone who always has at his or her heart, the bigger picture, the wider vision and most importantly of all, someone who has a strong sense of what the church is about and whom she seeks to serve (Brown 2003, 58).

Fourth, Finlay Macdonald advanced the argument that Presbyterian polity is not 'in principle anti-leadership. The fact is that, within such a framework, those with the gifts of leadership can and do emerge' (Macdonald 2004, 203).

These views began to be reflected in reports to the General Assembly. A significant change of tone is evident in the 2000 report, *Ministers of the Gospel*. The way it described ministry and leadership was markedly different to that of the 1989 Panel on Doctrine Report, quoted above. *Ministers of the Gospel* contained thirtyone references to ministers leading or being leaders. While it was firmly of the view that this needed to be 'collaborative leadership' (Board of Ministry 2000, 17/13) it was equally clear that ministers were required to exercise leadership. For example:

> Alongside the search for co-operative people, however, a strong desire is expressed for ministers who can exercise appropriate forms of leadership. Allied to the emphasis on the need for teamwork, then, is a strong affirmation of the ordained minister as a person with a sense of vocation to leadership, exercising special skills in motivating and encouraging the service of the whole people of God (Board of Ministry 2000, 17/17).

The following year, another Church body published *Church Without Walls* (Special Commission Anent Review and Reform 2001), which was unapologetic about calling for leadership to be exercised in every part of the church by different groups of people. The words lead, leading, leader and leadership occur sixtyeight times.

Looking back, it is clear that *Ministers of the Gospel* set the church on a new trajectory. The need for parish ministers to offer leadership has been a consistent thread running through reports about ministry in the Church of Scotland since. Following an internal re-organisation in 2005, the body charged with oversight of ministry has been the Ministries Council. In almost every one of its annual reports to the General Assembly it has, in some way, spoken about parish ministers offering leadership. Four examples illustrate this.

In 2007, in answer to the question, 'What is distinctive about the ministry of Word and Sacrament?' four things were suggested, 'the preaching of God's word; the administration of the sacraments; pastoral leadership; and giving leadership and vision to the people of God' (Ministries Council 2007, 3/3).

In 2011, the Council reported, 'In this context, the Parish ministry has more and more been seen as a ministry of leadership – in many places, specifically leadership of a ministries team' (Ministries Council 2011, 4/46).

In 2013, the Council connected ministry, leadership and change, 'Those in ministry, by virtue of the leadership role they play, inevitably find themselves at the forefront of dealing with change' (Ministries Council 2013, 4/2).

In 2016, the Council identified an inherent weakness in the accepted paradigm of parish ministry, that of pastor-teacher. 'The Hub model also requires a shift for Parish ministers, who in the settled pastor-teacher model have not necessarily seen themselves as called to a leadership role in the parish. With the decline of that

model, leadership has become an essential characteristic of ministry' (Ministries Council 2016, 14/9).

In 2017, when I conducted my survey, the policy of the Church was clear. It expected its Parish Ministers to give leadership. Nonetheless, as the comment, 'There is great value in strong directive leadership in the church but there is a reluctance to own it' makes clear, there appeared to be considerable reluctance amongst ministers to give that leadership. The purpose of my survey was to produce data which would establish whether or not this was the case and suggest what some of the reasons for this might be.

3. Survey of Church of Scotland Parish Ministers

In June 2017 I invited all Church of Scotland parish ministers to participate in an on-line, anonymous survey, which was hosted on the Ascend website and promoted by the Ministries Council. The survey consisted of twenty-four questions. Twenty-three were closed, though five included the option other – *please specify.* **The final question was open ended and asked participants to described how they understood the relationship between being a leader and a parish minister. This final question is the source for the comments which are included in this paper.**

19% of the total population participated. At the 95% confidence level, this produces a margin of error of 7.3%. This falls within the generally accepted parameters which means that the results are generalizable (Rea and Parker 2005, 142-154). They can be said to reflect the views of the entire population of Church of Scotland parish ministers at this time.

From the results I was able to form three conclusions. First, ministers are giving leadership. Second, this leadership has some discernible characteristics. Third, a majority believe that there is (or has been) misuse of leadership in the Church.

3.1 Ministers are leading.

The survey began by exploring ministers' self-identity. Participants were offered thirteen words and asked to choose all those that described them. The words that received the highest response encompass an understanding of the ministry as that of the pastor-teacher (see Table 2) with preaching, leading worship and offering pastoral care being selected by over 90%. It is, however, striking that leader was the fourth most popular word, chosen by over 87%. The response to this one question alone indicates that seven out of eight ministers see themselves as leaders.

Table 2 - Ministry Roles.

Description	Response
Preacher	98%
Worship leader	94%
Pastor	93%
Leader	87%
Teacher	86%
Chaplain	82%
Administrator	80%
Manager	64%
Counsellor	58%
Evangelist	54%
Chief Executive	45%
Community worker	41%
Prophet	39%
Other	19%

Participants were then restricted to three words and asked to select from the same list the three words which best described their understanding of their vocation. Although pastor-teacher remained dominant, *leader* came third, *displacing worship leader*, (Table 3). This indicates that while the most common lens through which ministers view themselves is that of a preacher and pastor, being a leader comes next.

Table 3 – Essential Ministry Roles

Description	Response
Preacher	59%
Pastor	55%
Leader	42%
Worship Leader	34%
Teacher	32%
Manager	13%
Administrator	8%
Community Worker	6%
Chaplain	6%
Evangelist	6%
Chief Executive	5%
Prophet	5%
Counsellor	2%

One participant commented 'I want to be a servant-leader focusing on preaching, teaching and pastoral care' (#30). Another said, 'I think in addition to good pastors and good preachers our congregations seek leaders' (#36); while a third remarked, 'I see myself as a pastor and a leader in the sense that I am trying to guide people' (#54).

The significance of leadership within people's practice of ministry was explored. Participants were asked to describe how significant leadership was in their role as a minister. Their responses are detailed in Table 4. The result was overwhelming, with 95% saying that it played either a significant or a *very significant* role in their ministry.

Table 4 – Significance of Leadership

Option	Response
Very significant	61%
Significant	34%
Neither significant nor insignificant	4%
Insignificant	0%
Very insignificant	0%

The Church of Scotland is often described as a broad church, by which it is meant, there is a broad range of views on virtually every subject. It is almost unheard of to discover something where there is almost unanimity of opinion. The reality of being a leader, however, is the exception to the rule. Participants comments reflected this. One said, 'The Parish Minister is expected to lead' (#10); another remarked 'There is both an expectation and a duty to lead for the parish minister' (#81); a third stated, 'Congregations look for leadership'(#105); a fourth was unequivocal 'Ministry must involve a degree of leadership'(57); while a fifth explained, 'The parish minister is a leader, if the parish minister does not exercise this role it leaves a vacuum' (117).

As discussed earlier, since 2000, the General Assembly has been stressing the leadership role of ministers. One question sought to discover the extent to which this message had been heard.

In response, just less than half (48%), said they were aware of what the General Assembly had been saying with a further 16% stating they were very aware, that is a total of 64%, or a little under two-thirds were either very aware or aware. The majority viewed this positively. One minister, said, 'In post-Christian Scotland, the Church of Scotland desperately needs confident and able ministers - I suggest even more so than that they be preachers and pastors' (#57). Another commented, 'Parish ministers need to be on the cutting edge of contemporary society in terms of keeping up to date with theories and ideas in church development. They are best placed to do this and to implement change and development where they are' (#83). While still another described the position ministers hold as being pivotal: 'Ministers are in a pivotal position within their parish. It is an ideal position from which to offer leadership. It is difficult for others to offer leadership if Ministers won't' (#116).

A minority, however, dissented. Some were reluctant leaders. One said, 'Being the Minister is a job. Being the leader is a role. Mostly Ministers are having to cover roles simply because there is nobody else to do it' (#7). Another commented, 'I lead, but want to lead less' (#118).

If ministers are expected to lead, the majority feel both confident and equipped to lead. Just under half, (48%) said that when it came to offering leadership, they described themselves as being *quite confident*, while a further 30% described themselves as being *very confident*. A total, therefore, of 78% described themselves as being quite or very confident.

Levels of confidence to offer leadership will be affected by many things, including, whether or not people look to ministers to offer leadership; the extent to which ministers feel their leadership is affirmed or challenged; the time and space ministers have to offer leadership; and their sense of having the knowledge and skills needed to offer leadership.

The positive picture is clear in some comments. 'If you don't keep leading your Kirk Session and congregation nothing will get done because they do rely on you to help them see the vision for the future!' (#43). This was balanced, however, by the proportion of ministers who are struggling with this role. One said, 'I feel a bit left

behind these days. You have to give a lead and the buck stops with the minister. That is really hard to live with at times' (#67). Another remarked, 'I feel more leadership is required of me than [is] ideal' (#74). A third said, 'Expectations on ministers to be able to lead in all spheres of church life are too high' (#115).

The data on feeling equipped to give leadership is very similar to that on confidence. The largest group (49%), again just under half of all participants, were quite positive and declared they felt they were *reasonably equipped*. A further 26% said they felt they were *well equipped*, meaning that a total of 75% gave some kind of positive response.

One person said, 'A parish minister has the time, focus and big picture to give a lead but he needs to take others with him and always be open to learning from and being corrected by others' (#11). Another said, 'There is a need to recognise the type of leadership needed in each context, to use and develop the skills needed for that context, and (if necessary) learn to back off when you recognise that a different skillset is required' (#91).

Some of those who do not fit into this group appear to be at sea. One said, 'I was selected a long time ago when different criteria applied. I would not want to come into ministry now and would not be accepted' (#35), and another, 'I feel what we trained for in ministry has changed so much that I don't feel equipped to fully lead my people at the moment' (#59).

Taken together these results offer a clear picture. Parish ministers in the Church of Scotland see themselves as leaders. Offering leadership is a significant aspect of their ministry. Further, two-thirds feel both equipped and confident to play this role.

3.2   Characteristics of leadership

The results of the survey offered clues to the nature of the leadership which ministers seek to offer. The data suggests that the majority of ministers aspire to exercise leadership which is collaborative, enabling, facilitative, servant-like and adaptive. In using these five words to offer an interpretation of the data I acknowledge the element of subjectivity I have introduced. I recognise that another person might draw different conclusions from the same data.

3.2.1 Collaborative

Two of the principles of Presbyterianism is that oversight is exercised through representative bodies, rather than individuals; and that both lay and ordained people play an equal part in these bodies (Leith 1977, 147-156).

The Kirk Session, the governing body of a congregation in the Church of Scotland, is composed of the parish minister and elders. One of the peculiarities of it is that the minister is both a member of the Kirk Session and separate from it (MacDonald 1976 , 116). Together, and separately, the minister and Kirk Session are accountable to Presbytery. This is a structure which is designed to promote collaborative leadership. However, in practice it is possible either for a minister to operate autocratically

reducing the Kirk Session to a rubber-stamp, or for the minister to be unable or unwilling to exercise leadership through the Kirk Session.

This is not, however, how ministers perceive their role. 69% of ministers said that they *shared leadership with elders*, with another 12% specifying a pattern of leadership which involved a degree of sharing with others in the Kirk Session or the congregation. Thus, a total of 81% aspire to a practice of collaborative leadership, which was reflected in some of the comments.

One said, 'A parish minister can be a leader, but such leadership should be shared' (#17). Another commented, 'I have a very gentle understanding of leadership that is consensual and discursive' (#45). A third explained, 'My model is very deliberately aimed at working as collaboratively as possible' (#62); while a fourth remarked, 'Parish ministers should be part of a leadership team. It can't be up to us to change the Church, we need to work together with our elders and wider congregations. It should be a team effort!' (#110).

3.2.2 Facilitative

In response to a further question which explored how Kirk Session meetings were conducted, most ministers indicated that they saw themselves as having a facilitating role. 65% said that their role was 'to set the agenda and to create space for debate and decision', with another 13% describing a pattern which included other people in the task of agenda setting, for example, 'agenda setting is shared' and 'I enable discussion and decision making'.

A number of comments bear this out. One person said, 'It is the minister's job to lead but that means enabling the Kirk Session to develop and support a vision appropriate for the context and the gifts of the people' (#28). Another stated, 'I think ministry is about enabling, equipping and encouraging each person to be missional in their own context and supportive of others in theirs' (#45). A third explained, 'The role of leader/parish minister is to see that the ship gets to its destination - that others are enabled to be the best that they can be, in order that everyone can work together collectively' (#78). A fourth commented, 'It is about discerning the gifts, skills and talents of the Elders and people then determining how 'we' move forward' (#121).

3.2.3 Enabling

Another question asked participants to imagine a shepherd with their flock. The shepherd might be at the *front* with the sheep following, in the *middle* with the sheep around them, or at the rear sweeping up. The largest response (48%) was for the middle position, and the second largest one (27%) was for a dynamic role, which changed depending on the situation, and which therefore included being in the middle. This would suggest that three quarters of parish ministers aim to exercise enabling leadership, that is leadership which empowers others.

The complex nature of effective enabling was expressed in some comments. One said, 'That will sometimes mean taking the initiative and taking people with you. At other times it will mean providing encouragement for people to take the initiative' (#24). Another commented, 'The minister should be prepared to set an example but that doesn't always mean leading from the front' (#28). A third explained, 'I lead from the front, at other times I am in the middle encouraging/enabling folk to keep going and at other times I am at the back wiping tears and listening' (#44). A fourth stated

> Leading is about walking the way with others. It means sometimes that at certain junctions you have to stop and point out the direction of travel. At other times you can walk at the back keeping an eye out for all that is going on. At other times you can simply be part of the crowd secure in the knowledge that those who are in front are guiding the rest (#122).

3.2.4 Servant-like

The characteristic of servant-leadership was explored by referring to Jesus washing his disciples' feet as described in John 13. Participants were asked to indicate which of a series of statements they agreed with. The data is contained in Table 5, where the statements have been ranked in descending order.

Table 5 - Servant Leadership

Option	Response
It offers a different way of understanding and using authority	73%
It defines how ministers should lead	53%
Leadership means meeting the needs of others	24%
Leadership is a function and should carry no status	20%
It creates a tension	17%
It is a contradiction	2%
It means that ministers should only serve and not try to lead	1%

The option selected by the largest number was *it offers a different way of understanding and using authority*. There is an inherent paradox in the phrase servant-leader which can be lost. 'Sometimes the use of this servant concept has resulted in an abdication of leadership' (Gibbs 2005, 23) with people believing that to be a servant-leader requires that you divest yourself of all authority. Most parish ministers do not think so. Rather than abdicating authority, they think it creates a different perspective on what authority is and how it should be used. This interpretation is supported by the only other option to gain support of more than half, namely that servant-leadership *defines how ministers should lead*.

One person said, 'Sometimes you lead, sometimes you serve' (#1). Another explained, 'Ministers are not to lord it over people - they are to serve their people' (#24). A third expressed the underlying paradox, 'Called to lead by serving, called to serve by leading' (#34). A fourth commented, 'Servant leadership requires both humility and confidence' (#93); while a fifth said, 'Ministers are in a position of exercise leadership but must do so carefully, patiently and sensitively and in ways which are God honoring, reflecting the servant leadership model of Jesus' (#105).

3.2.5 Adaptive

'Adaptive leadership focuses on the *adaptations* required of people in response to changing environments. Simply stated, adaptive leaders prepare and encourage people to deal with change' (Northouse 2016, 257). What makes adaptive leadership distinctive is that, instead of leaders doing things for people, it focuses on empowering people to do the work themselves.

The application of adaptive leadership to ministry within the Church of Scotland has happened recently. I wondered, however, whether it was a form of leadership which, to some extent, ministers were already exercising. Participants, therefore were asked: *Some people say that the role of the leader is not to provide the solution and the vision but to create space, encourage questions and help people work out what they should do. To what extent do you agree that this is what the Church of Scotland needs at the moment?*

Table 6 – Adaptive Leadership

Option	Response
Strongly agree	25%
Agree	51%
Neither agree nor disagree	14%
Disagree	7%
Disagree strongly	3%

The responses (Table 6) indicate that more than half *agree* with the principle of adaptive leadership, and that a further quarter *agree strongly*. This suggests that, whether knowingly or unknowingly, about three-quarters of parish ministers aspire to practise some form of adaptive leadership.

This was reflected in some of the comments. One said, 'A parish minister can be a leader, but such leadership should be shared, and should be encouraging and enabling others to lead and shape the direction of the church, helping voices to be heard' (#17). A second explained, 'Ultimately the vision for a congregation has to reside with the elders and members' (#32). Another commented, 'One needs to be flexible and understand the principles and challenges of adaptive leadership' (#53).

A fourth stated, 'I think leadership is a crucial element of parish ministry. It requires having and helping the congregation discover a vision about life as God intends us to live' (#56).

3.3   Destructive Leadership

The results discussed above paint a very positive picture. The data suggests that the majority of Church of Scotland are endeavoring to offer leadership which is collaborative, facilitative, enabling, servant-like and adaptive. This is, however, a partial picture. First, the survey focused exclusively on ministers. The scope of the project did not allow for research among elders and church members about the kind of leadership which they experienced from their ministers. Second, it invited ministers to describe the ideal they aspire to, rather than asking them to critique the reality of their practice.

That a darker side of leadership also exists is evident from the responses to this statement and question. *Someone has said, 'Leadership is a toxic word in the Church of Scotland'. To what extent do you think that we have a problem with individuals acting as leaders in the Church of Scotland?*

Table 7 – Leadership Problems 1

Option	Response
A significant problem	50%
Leaders are valued and encouraged in the Church of Scotland	18%
It was never an issue	12%
It was an issue in the past, but things have changed	11%
A very significant problem	10%

As Table 7 shows, half of parish ministers believe there is a *significant* problem with leaders who misuse or abuse their position, with a further 10% stating that it is a *very significant* problem. These responses suggest that whether through personal experience, institutional memory or anecdote, for nearly 60% of parish ministers leadership has a negative aspect. Inevitably this will colour their approach to discussions about leadership and may help explain some of the ambivalence I have mentioned.

A subsequent question offered those who had said there was some kind of problem with leadership in the Church, some possible reasons for this. (Participants were asked to tick all that applied).

Table 8 – Leadership Problems 2

Option	Response
Domineering leaders who misused their power	68%
Proud leaders who loved their status	65%
Manipulative leaders who abused their power	57%
Presbyterianism believes in shared leadership not individual leadership	24%
The tall poppy syndrome	17%
A belief that we are all equal before God	14%
A rejection of all forms of authority	14%
Christians are called to serve not lead	8%

As Table 8 shows, the three most common causes of leadership being misused are *domineering leaders, proud leaders and manipulative leaders*. At the root of this is the improper use of power, position and status.

Some of the comments reflected people's difficult experiences of leadership. One person said: 'I believe that an over-reliance on parish ministers as leaders has contributed to the problems of decline and selfish kingdom building' (#41). Another explained, 'The friction between the minister as leader and local elders who "think they run the place" can be a toxic mix' (#101). A third spoke of their experience in another parish: 'I had a very different experience where there was huge disrespect for the role of minister and where the term 'whipping boy' would be the best term to describe the view by elders of their minister' (#119). A fourth put it like this:

I have always understood that the parish minister is the leader in the congregation in many ways. That being said, there are members of the Kirk Session who seek to undermine that leadership and interfere where they should not, who think they know better and do not accept that leadership. As a woman I have had to put up with what I call the alpha male syndrome where I am tolerated - it leads to unnecessary tension (#14).

These experiences of destructive leadership offer evidence for a statement made to the General Assembly in 2012, 'Some within the church are wary of the term leadership because they have experienced poor or even damaging expressions of it' (Ministries Council 2012, 4/18). It also goes some way to explain the ambivalence about leadership which prompted this research. Since there is good and bad leadership, it is not sufficient to simply talk about leadership. It is essential to describe the sort of leadership which the church is looking for and which is expects its ministers to offer.

A number of ministers suggested that this kind of clarity was missing. One said, 'Leadership is a word like "mission" and "vision" - much overused with no meaning other than what is attached to it by whomever is using it at the particular time' (#22). Another said, 'Parish Minister is by definition a leadership role - although "leadership" can mean different things (#102). A third summarized the issue very clearly, 'We need a clear paradigm of Christian leadership' (111).

4. Conclusion: What kind of leadership should ministers offer?

When I designed this project my working hypothesis was, that for some reason, parish ministers in the Church of Scotland were reluctant to offer the leadership which the General Assembly was expecting and congregations were looking for. The survey data demonstrated clearly that this hypothesis was wrong. The majority of ministers were happy to describe themselves as leaders. 95% indicated that offering leadership was a significant aspect of their ministry. Three-quarters said they felt both equipped and confident to play this role. While there were a few dissenting voices, the majority understood the importance of this role and seemed to be playing it willingly.

I had formed my working hypothesis because of an ambivalence I had detected amongst ministerial colleagues about leadership. The survey results enabled me to discover that the ambivalence I had detected stemmed more from confusion than reluctance. The term *leadership* is very broad. The Ministries Council recognized this in 2012 when it said, 'Many models of leadership exist and it is clear that not all leadership philosophies are in tune with gospel values' (Ministries Council 2012, 4/18). It is time therefore for a discussion within the Church about the kind of leadership which the Church is looking for and which ministers (and others) should offer.

At the same time, the survey data offers a clear indication of what many ministers believe the answer to this question should be. The Church needs its ministers to offer leadership which is collaborative, facilitative, enabling, servant-like and adaptive. As one of those ministers, I would contend that these five words offer an outline for a pattern of leadership which is contextually and theologically appropriate. That is, it is firstly, a pattern which will enables the Church to participate faithfully in the mission of God in twenty-first century Scotland and, secondly, while not proscribed by Christian scripture, it is in harmony with scriptural patterns and principles.

It follows, therefore, that work needs to be done on two fronts, first to offer more detail about what a pattern of leadership which is collaborative, facilitative, enabling, servant-like and adaptive might look like, and second to demonstrate why this might be considered contextually and theologically appropriate.

In order to stimulate discussion on both these fronts I have written another paper entitled *Ambivalence about Leadership: Leadership and Ministry in the Church of Scotland*, which will be published in the Spring 2019 Edition of the Journal of Religious Leadership.

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