

Workshop for Lay Leaders  
based on

*Serving with Grace: Lay Leadership as a Spiritual Practice*  
by Erik Walker Wikstrom  
(Skinner House Books, 2010)

Workshop created by Erik Walker Wikstrom

**Duration:** 2 hours

**Pre-workshop Assignment:** Ask all attendees to read *at least* the Introduction (pp. ix-xii), The Spirituality of Service (pp. 1-9), and Bringing It All Together (pp. 77-83) before coming to the workshop.

**Preparation:** Choose the room carefully. It should be large enough for the group you're expecting to sit comfortably in a circle and still have room to move around.

Set up chairs in a circle. In the center of the circle, place a small table with a nice cloth. Put a chalice and matches on the table and, perhaps, some flowers, shells, or other decorations.

Choose one spot on the circle and remove two or three chairs. Place an easel with newsprint and markers of at least two colors in the opening. This will be the facilitator's spot. Choose it carefully so that whatever is behind it is not too distracting to participants. Choose a pleasing backdrop if at all possible.

Make enough photocopies of the handouts (pages 8-11 of this guide) so that every participant can have one of each.

---

**FIRST HOUR: SELF-DISCOVERY**

**Gathering (2 minutes.):** Invite participants to find a seat. Welcome them and thank them for caring enough about their work as leaders, their congregation, each other, and themselves to invest their time in this workshop. Explain that over the next two hours you hope that together you will begin to explore – because you never stop exploring an idea like this – the idea of lay leadership as a spiritual practice. And you're doing this not so that you can add one more thing to the long list of things you're already busy doing, but so that you might change the *way* you're doing those things that you're doing--so that you might begin to *experience* lay leadership as one of the spiritual practices your congregation offers to its members. Starting with the people in this room.

**Chalice Lighting (1 minute):** Ask someone to light the chalice. If you have words that you traditionally say in worship at the lighting of your chalice, please say those. If not, consider these (with the group repeating after you):

*We light this chalice . . .  
To illuminate our path . . .  
As we seek to find a spark . . .  
That will re-ignite our own passion . . .  
For the work that we do . . .  
And the time that we share . . .  
In this special place . . .  
With these special people.*

**Opening Reading (2 minutes):** Thank your chalice lighter and the group, and then ask everyone to get comfortable while you read a passage from *Serving With Grace* to set the stage for this workshop:

Two different ways of looking at the world—the way of the world and the way of the world’s religions. What if the world’s religions are right? What if it really *doesn’t* matter whether you win or lose? What if the most important thing *is* how you play the game? Then is it possible that it doesn’t really matter if you get through the agenda in record time if, to do so, you ignore your congregation’s commitment to inclusiveness and shut people down so that you can be more efficient? Is it possible that it doesn’t really matter whether you decide that thorny issue tonight, that what really matters is the quality of your discussion? Is it possible that it doesn’t even matter if you make your stewardship goal and fully fund your budget, that what really matters is the heart and the faith and the generosity that went into the effort?

This is for some a new—and possibly even heretical—way of looking at things. If the church were a business, of course, efficiency, productivity, and the bottom line really would matter. Perhaps the most important thing to a small business, even a non-profit, is to accomplish the goals of the organization as effectively and efficiently as possible. Completion of tasks matters. Balanced budgets matter. Success, however that’s defined, most definitely matters.

But churches are not small businesses, even though they often act that way. They are not even typical non-profits because they are, first and foremost, communities. They strive to embody the ideals represented by the familiar term *beloved community*. South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said that the church should be “an audiovisual aid for the sake of the world,” showing how the world should be. And so here, despite the many similarities with traditional businesses, different rules apply. There is, so to speak, a new bottom line and the measure of success is entirely different. (pp. 8-9)

**Getting Started (10 minutes):** Using the newsprint to take notes, ask the group to free associate around the following questions:

- What is/has been your experience of doing church work?
- What is/has been your experience of work in your occupation?

- How do you explain the differences and similarities?
- What do you think of when you hear the word *leader*?
- Are you a leader?

Have the group take a moment or two to summarize the contributions and look for any important themes. Ask if anything in the discussion surprised them or especially stood out. Note that you will return to the discussion of church work, but for now you're going to stay on the topic of leadership.

**Leadership (25 minutes):** Remind people that the English verb *lead* comes from the Old English *lædan*, which means “cause to go with.” A leader is someone who can get other people to go with her. And in the religious realm, the classic model of a leader is the minister, who leads by serving. (Etymologically, *minister* means servant.)

Ask participants to break into small groups. Groups should not be smaller than three nor larger than five if at all possible. Self-selection is fine, but feel free to use any method of dividing the group if a purpose is served by having some control over the grouping. Be aware that, if everyone in a group is on the same committee or task force, this exercise may go more quickly than if several different committees are represented in one group. When the groups are formed, say something like:

One benefit that derives from nearly all spiritual practices is a deeper sense of self-awareness, a clearer understanding of one's self. This is a possible benefit of your time as a church leader too. There are a number of tools available to assess a person's leadership style or temperament. Some congregations even make it part of their leadership development program to invest in a fully given and properly scored personality assessment as a part of the process new leaders go through. We're not going to do that today. [Pass around Handout 1, one for each participant.]

We're doing an incredibly simplified personality assessment here. You each now have a handout that shows the four polarities that make up the famous Myers-Briggs Type system. This system was created to help women who were entering the wartime workplace discover for themselves the kinds of work and work environments they might most enjoy. Every person falls somewhere along each of these four spectra, and together this creates a pattern or type. There are sixteen different types – INFP, ESTJ, ENFJ, etc. The letters stand for I-introvert, E-extrovert; N-intuition, S-sensing; T-thinking, F-feeling; J-judging, P-perceiving.

We're now going to do three things. First, take a moment and write on your handout where you think you and each of the other people in your group fall on each spectrum. [Wait 5 minutes.]

Now take a few moments to go around your group and share with one another how each of you answered that challenge. It might be interesting to note where other people put you on each spectrum. [Wait 5 minutes.]

Now that we've gotten a sense of what personality types we have in our groups, we're going to take about 10 minutes to for you to talk about what types you think might be really helpful to have for the kind of work you're doing at church.

**Re-gather (5 minutes):** Bring everyone back together. Ask if there were any surprises for anyone. Remind people that the actual Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is considerably more complex and nuanced than this, and that people shouldn't feel they now know their type because of this exercise. This was just a taste.

**BREAK (10 minutes)**

## **SECOND HOUR: LAY LEADERSHIP AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**

**Re-gathering (1 minute):** Invite participants to return.

**Perspective (11 minutes):** Tell the participants that you are about to pass around another handout, this one with a hypothetical scenario in a typical congregation. In the interest of time and a more lively discussion, you are going to ask the participants to break into two groups and have each group take 5 minutes to discuss the scenario and determine a course of action. After the 5 minutes, you'll come back together and have each group report their suggestions.

Divide the group into two groups. Make sure that there is enough distance between the groups that they can't easily overhear one another. Give one group copies of Handout 2A and the other group copies of Handout 2B. Let the groups talk for 5 minutes before calling them back together.

When the groups have come back together, ask a representative of each to describe their group's response to the scenario. Because the two scenarios have been framed in such different ways, the two groups *should* have very different responses. Don't let either group comment on the other's until both have reported.

**A Story (3 minutes):** Note that different perspectives can make a dramatic difference in experiences of the same event. What one person sees as a crushing defeat another might see as a challenge or an opportunity. Tell the following story:

A man was sitting at the train station, watching as the trains came and went. A stranger got off the noon train, obviously someone coming in to town. "Howdy," the stranger said. "I'm new to these parts. Would you mind telling me what the people around here are like?"

"Well," said the man, "what were they like were you came from?"

"Oh it was terrible," the stranger replied. "Everyone was out for himself and would cheat you as soon as look at you. I tell you, you had to sleep with one eye open half the time. That's why I left."

“Sorry to be the bearer of bad news,” the man said, “but I’m afraid you’ll probably find folks pretty much the same around here, too.”

Around five o’clock the evening train pulled in. The man was still sitting there, watching. A young woman got off, also obviously a newcomer to town. “Hello there,” she said. “And excuse me. Could I bother you for a moment and ask what sort of town I’ve found myself in?”

“Well,” the man replied, “what sort of town have you come from?”

“Oh,” the young woman almost gushed, “it was the best. Nearly everyone you met was like a neighbor. Even people you didn’t know. It was as if you could trust everyone. I mean, I guess there were some people you shouldn’t. It’s just that I never met any of them. Nope. Where I came from people were as good as could be.”

“Well,” said the man, “you’re in luck. I think you’ll find people just about the same way here, too.”

**Lay Leadership as Spiritual Practice (10 minutes):** Invite participants to join in brainstorming, reminding them that during a brainstorm there are no right or wrong answers, just responses that may turn out to be more or less helpful. Here are four questions to explore:

- What specific things do you think of when you think of *spiritual practices*?
- What makes these things spiritual practices? What are the qualities, the dimensions, the effects they have on you that make these things spiritual?
- What is done here at <name of congregation> that could be called *lay leadership*? (Keep in mind the conversation about leadership from earlier.)
- Can you see how those spiritual qualities might be present – or be brought to bear – on the way these things are done?

**Moving Forward (15 minutes):** Building on this last exercise, invite people to look back at everything they’ve learned and experienced during this workshop and try to give an answer – as specific and concrete as possible -- to the following question:

- What will we have to do differently in order for our members to experience lay leadership as a spiritual practice?

**Closing (5 minutes):** When there are only 5 minutes left, call “time” and remind people of their commitment to spend 2 hours together in this workshop and your commitment to honor this time frame. Remind them that the work will be ongoing and congratulate them on a tremendous start.

If the group is not sitting in a circle, ask that it regroup so that you are all sitting in a circle. Invite reflection on all that’s been done during this workshop. Ask if anyone has had any major epiphany or “aha” that’s really changed the way they’re seeing things now. Then, one by one, in

turn, have people say one (brief!) thing that surprised them, that touched them, or that they will take away from this workshop.

When all have spoken, extinguish the chalice with words of your choosing or, if you wish, these words:

*We lit this chalice this morning to illuminate our path . . .*

*We lit this chalice for the work that we do, and the time that we share, in this special place, with these special people.*

*We extinguish it now, knowing that its light and its heat are in each of us and can never go out. So may it be.*

*In the name of all that is Holy, and in all the Holy Names, and in our names made holy by what we do together, Amen and Blessed be.*

# HANDOUT 1: LEADERSHIP TYPES

Place yourself and the other people in your group where you think they fall on each spectrum below. Don't try to be polite or complimentary because there are pros and cons to every position on the line. And remember – everyone else in the group is doing this for you too!

**Extraversion** \_\_\_\_\_ **Introversion**  
*I gain energy most when I'm with others ..... I gain energy most when I'm by myself*

**Sensing** \_\_\_\_\_ **Intuition**  
*I trust most what I can taste, touch, and smell ..... I trust most what's in my gut*

**Thinking** \_\_\_\_\_ **Feeling**  
*I make most of my decisions based on logic ..... I make most of my decisions based on emotion*

**Judging** \_\_\_\_\_ **Perceiving**  
*I tend to be organized and follow my plan ..... I tend to be flexible and improvise*

More information about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator can be found in innumerable books and at [www.myersbriggs.org](http://www.myersbriggs.org).

## **HANDOUT 2A: WHAT TO DO?**

The following is a scenario that might occur in any typical congregation. The task for your group is to try to figure out how best to handle this situation for the individual involved and for the good of the church.

Mrs. Jones is a long-time member of the congregation. She always seems to be on the other side of every initiative the church tries to get started. Some people call her “prickly.” The last couple of years have been especially difficult. As a final straw, she announced to the choir director that, if the choir sang a song she didn’t like during Advent, she would quit the choir and probably the church as well.

What are you to do?

## **HANDOUT 2B: WHAT TO DO?**



The following is a scenario that might occur in any typical congregation. The task for your group is to try to figure out how best to handle this situation — for the individual involved and for the good of the church.

Mrs. Jones is a long-time member of the congregation, yet some people find her hard to get to know. The last couple of years have been especially difficult—her parents both died and now she’s caring for her husband, who has Alzheimer’s. She seems to be on the other side of every initiative the church tries to get started. She’s a traditionalist in an experimental church, for instance, or a UU Christian in a church of mostly Humanists. As a final straw, she announced to the choir director that if the choir sang a song she didn’t like during Advent, a parody of a Christian hymn that she particularly loved, she would quit the choir and probably the church as well.

What are you to do?