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# RUPERT'S LAND – WE EQUIP AND EMPOWER EACH OTHER AS LEADERS!

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Everybody is an expert at something. While we often take it for granted, because “it comes easy to us”, each of us excels in some areas of living. It might be singing or story-telling; welding or wind-surfing; carpentry or computing – we all have areas of strength that are well enough developed that they should be shared for the benefit of others. And to be sure – we have the expertise we do because others took the time and patience, and had the passion and confidence in us, to help us develop our gifts of leadership.

Thirteen years ago last November, I was certified as a Fitness Instructor at the YMCA in Regina. I became a fitness leader. I had to achieve at least 80% on a physiology/anatomy exam, design and deliver a muscle conditioning class, and satisfactorily design and teach an aerobics class to earn certification. I followed an interesting path to reach that end. First of all, the Instructor Training course had to be offered, and at a time that I could complete it. But equally important, someone had to “plant” the idea inside of me that this was something I *could* do – that it was attainable. The local YMCA offered the course. But the personal empowerment came from an innocent conversation I had with an instructor before a step aerobics class. She had seen me several times in her class and one evening she asked me, “So what classes do you teach?” I was initially taken aback and muttered something about “only being a participant”, but the fact that another instructor could see in me the potential to become a leader, “lit a fire” in me and empowered me to make the effort to reach that goal.

Then I had a few insecurities of my own that I had to overcome. My image of an aerobics instructor at the time was a perky little, twenty-something, woman with a dancing blond pony-tail pulled through the little hole at the back of her Nike cap. I was a tall, skinny, forty year-old male who was already losing his hair! And then there was my first pair of black spandex shorts ...

I smile when I think of it now as a successful Step aerobics instructor who, over thirteen years later, still teaches a challenging class on Mondays at 4:45 pm at the downtown YMCA in Winnipeg. But there were two very important aspects without which I could not, and would not, have developed leadership in this area. One of these was an institution that was constantly looking for, and providing for, the equipping of its members to become leaders and to offer their gifts in the organization. The YMCA regularly offers Fitness Leader courses and makes them available at a nominal cost to their members. The second was both a leadership and membership culture that promoted an interest in noticing others’ potential and giving guidance and encouragement to challenge them to fulfill it.

This is what our Church is to be. The New Testament Scriptures, given to us by the ancient Christian Church, lay down the foundational principle that *all* of the baptized members are anointed and gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry – in all different walks of life. (I don’t think Step aerobics was around then!) In that Church, the whole Christian community created a culture of learning and growth – of encouraging each person to become all that God was calling them to be. And then, as now, the Church needed to have prophets and teachers to help people discern their gifts and then to receive the necessary learning and guidance to develop excellence in those areas.

This is the kind of Christian community we are called to be and to become in Rupert’s Land. Direction #3 in The Way Forward Diocesan Action Plan reads:

**Equip and empower lay and clergy leaders to lead us faithfully and creatively in an ever-changing environment.**

It is becoming increasingly clear that our local congregations need to be communities where the members are constantly discovering, encouraging and challenging each other to develop their gifts and offer leadership in their areas of expertise. Parishes need to offer, or make available through neighbouring churches, courses to help people explore and grow in their understanding of the Christian faith, in the application of the gospel to issues of social justice and evangelism, and in development of the skills of quality pastoral care. Theological resources such as the Faculty of Theology at St. John's College, the Centre for Christian Studies (both in Winnipeg), local Education for Ministry groups (out of University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee) and theological courses offered at the other Colleges in and around Winnipeg, provide accessible and relevant training for non-ordained and ordained ministries. But it's up to us to develop the necessary passion and vision to challenge each other, together, to the leadership to which God calls us.