



The Web of Women's Leadership: Recasting Congregational Ministry

Susan Willhauck, Dr. Jacquelyn Thorpe

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Leaders have long realized that hierarchical models of ministry and organizations have little place in the church. For congregations dedicated to the principle that all God's people are called to share equally in mission and ministry, the notion that "some are more equal than others" is absurd. Yet, in spite of this awareness, churches often default to hierarchical structures of authority and organization, with decisions and initiatives coming "from the top" and passing down "through the ranks" with, at best, mixed results.

In this book the authors propose an alternative model: the web of leadership. Unlike traditional hierarchical understanding, authority and power in the web are circular and interdependent. The principle tools of effective ministry are access and dialogue. Where it comes into contact with the world, the web is flexible and resilient; it is able to adapt faithfully to change and engage in new ministries and forms of outreach, because it is anchored to and in constant conversation with the center. The source for this understanding of authority and ministry is the tradition of women's leadership in the church.

The Web of Women's Leadership calls for women in the church leadership to recognize the potential of female styles of authority and ministry and lay claim to them as a way to move beyond the hierarchical models that have dominated our understanding of how the church practices its mission and organizes its life. It offers detailed, practical steps for how to work with laity, other clergy, and congregational leadership groups to achieve this transformation in the way the church organizes itself for ministry.

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