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## Community and Leadership

Shirley Freed

*Andrews University*, [freed@andrews.edu](mailto:freed@andrews.edu)

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## EDITORIAL

# COMMUNITY AND LEADERSHIP

I grew up in a small farming community in western Canada. Living in this community meant I was surrounded by people who cared for one another and worked together for the best of the community. For example, if one farmer wasn't able to get his wheat harvested in a timely way, others would come in with their equipment and help reap the grain before the snow fell. On many occasions, I've seen farmers help one another with ideas, resources and time.

In my community, the school and church were central to our lives and bound people together through various activities. A yellow school bus, driven by our parents, made a circle around the community, picking up children as they waited beside the road. In the winter, the skating rink was flooded with water by volunteer parents; it became the community gathering place for Saturday night skating parties. I will never forget the feeling of having my uncles holding me cross-armed and teaching me how to skate. With one of their arms under one of mine, there was no way I could fall. Christmas programs and summer picnics occurred at the school with the whole community participating. There was always lots of great food and much laughter at these events.

The church was a place where everyone, even children, were encouraged to participate—often in leadership roles. And each week someone planned an activity in which we went into the community to provide encouragement to the elderly or out in nature to discover the marvels of God's creation. Important events occurred at church—weddings, funerals, and corn roasts in the summer. Yes, we played together as well as worshipping and working together.

The farm where I grew up was a family farm where five brothers, one of them being my dad, farmed together. Since my house was located in a yard with three other homes, I had 10-15 cousins to share work and play. We often played a game of softball after the evening chores were done—cows milked and livestock fed. One of my best memories was the summer we cousins were given the task of painting the exterior of the houses. It was a big task—we

Shirley Freed, Ph.D., is Professor Emerita of Leadership and Qualitative Research in the graduate Leadership Program at Andrews University. She is also Executive Editor for the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*.

didn't have a lot of supervision, but we had a lot of support. Grandma made Swedish food every day for lunch and we loved the responsibility of painting the houses! I think the general mindset of the adults was that this would be a good learning experience and we wouldn't be able to do much damage.



Photo thanks to my cousin, Mary Lane Anderson.

One picture indelibly printed on my mind is of five combines moving down the wheat field together, each one picking up a swath of grain. And then the grain truck would come and pick up the wheat from each combine. And when it was time for lunch, the yellow school bus would come, bringing the most amazing food for all the men, women and children. I think this picture means so much because it shows cooperation and teamwork.

As I grew up and went away to school, married, and travelled to many countries, including Pakistan, the United States, Peru, Brazil and China, I noticed differences in the cultures where I lived and worked. But when I stopped and thought about it, I often realized that in my head and heart and even in my behaviors, I was always trying to reinvent the farm. I know I feel most comfortable when working in collaborative environments.

Then the research came. I'll only mention three major contributions that influenced my thinking, although the idea of cultures and how they relate to community is a complex topic. A book called *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 2007) helped me understand the individualistic nature of American culture. And Geert Hofstede's ongoing research identifying dimensions of national

culture, including the individualism dimension, continues to unfold layers of explanation of how my upbringing continues to influence my life and leadership. Hofstede is a Dutch social psychologist who has data regarding the culture of 76 countries. You can check out his web page at [geert-hofstede.com](http://geert-hofstede.com) if you'd like to learn more. I did that a few minutes ago and this is what I found about the individualistic tendencies of the countries where I've lived and worked: On the individualism dimension (on a scale of 1 to 100, with 1 being highly collectivistic and 100 being highly individualistic), the United States is rated at 91; Canada, 80; Brazil, 39; China, 20; Peru, 16; and Pakistan, 14. No wonder I've noticed differences as I've travelled!

Finally, there are the recent GLOBE studies (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness). Led by Robert J. House, the GLOBE studies identified nine cultural dimensions—including two related to community (in-group collectivism and institutional collectivism)—in 62 cultural groups, and provided further in-depth description of 25 groups. From a leadership perspective, these studies raised my awareness of the cultural habits I was bringing into my environment; they also alerted me that, as I travelled and worked in other countries, I needed to recognize that my habits may not be shared nor appreciated!

I'm quite certain there is a lot of variety within countries and also that this factor (individualism/collectivism) is on a continuum, with individualism sometimes being stronger and other times community or collectivism being stronger. But what does all this mean for Christian leaders? I'm not certain! What I do know is that the notion of "community" can be found easily in Scripture: consider Jesus' ministry and teaching, descriptions of the early church, and even the reality of God as a unity of three in one.

So as you read this issue of *JACL*, I think you'll find some fresh ideas for leadership in community. The Biblical Reflection article focuses on Elisha and the many different ways he connected to his community. This is followed by two responses to Mike Toupin's article in the last issue of *JACL*, sharing research about fundraising in the Bible translation community. These responses are informative and timely because they help us understand how to acquire the needed resources for outreach into the community. And it is all about participation in the community!

The next four articles may seem tangential to the idea of community, but let me try to make some connections. The first feature article describes a community of Adventist female pastors and their call to ministry. The second feature article asks a couple of important questions: How can Christian leaders find a balance between leading and serving? What happens when they put the Gospel commission and their community needs and desires above their own

wishes? The two articles in the Leadership Lived section offer unique perspectives about leadership. Beth Armstrong describes the role of language in leadership and community, and Brenda Boyd makes connections between two rather different communities, those of photography and leadership. Both articles show the value of reaching beyond our typical perspectives and seeing through the experiences of others.

After that, we round out our treatment of community with an interview. When you hear Hyveth Williams describe how a church can thrive only when the community around it thrives, you'll be asking how churches can help communities thrive.

Finally, our book reviews and dissertation abstracts are meant to keep you informed with some of the latest research and writing in the field of leadership. I trust this issue of *JACL* will benefit your own leadership and the community you serve.