

HOW **WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP** CHALLENGE OUR STEREOTYPES

# WOMENTALITY

**e**KERK  
Jesus - sigbaar, voelbaar, verstaanbaar



# INTRODUCTION

*“If you want something said, give it to a man. If you want something done, give it to a woman.” — Margaret Thatcher*

We live in an era where all the boundaries are becoming less visible. No matter if it is economic, political or cultural boundaries, it is getting tougher and tougher to discern between different groupings. Nowhere is the lack of boundaries more apparent than in the areas of gender and the stereotypical roles between women and men.

It is almost as if we are being carried along by cultural trends to a community that is both more homogenous and more diversified when it comes to the different genders. Although this situation can lead to a regression to conservative and traditional approaches, it also holds unique opportunities for the local congregation. Indeed, churches and non-profit organizations right across South Africa are being confronted by issues like that of female leadership, and how that impacts us in this changing world.

In this report we want to consider:

1. The local and international factors that gave rise to a renewed interest in female leadership.
2. The implications this holds for local congregations and non-profit organizations.
3. Possible applications and ways in which we can navigate and direct these changes.

# INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

It is not only on local terrain that we see a boom in female leadership roles. This trend is obvious right across the globe. It is also not a change that is limited only to the Western or first-world countries — in many cases African communities and developing countries are taking the lead!

Everywhere in international press and media the message blares: the right women in strategic leadership roles is the answer to many unsolved problems.

In one of her most recent articles, Women and Leadership — ten steps forward for women and men<sup>1</sup>, journalist Irene Becker writes the following:

*“The writing is on the walls of our lives, our communities, our organizations and our world; it is time for women to lead forward. You cannot light a fire with wet wood. The future lies in the hands of those who can empower and enable the best in others. The most important fire we can light is the fire of human potential, and I believe that women have a critical role to play. It is a role that takes courage, resiliency and the ability to stand tall. It is the most important role we can play.”*

The leadership magazine, Forbes, recently published an article that deals with the higher number of women in leadership roles, specifically women in and around Africa.

In the article, entitled The Twenty Youngest Power Women In Africa<sup>2</sup>, Faria Gundan writes:

*“As Africa continues to rise, so do African women. With the upward economic, social and political trajectory of the continent, a new breed of African women continues to emerge. So much so, that the African Union christened the years 2010 to 2020 as the “African Women’s Decade”.*

Gundan’s article also touches what is happening here on the local front, when she mentions that:

*“For the first time in history, the African Union voted an African woman to its helm. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, South Africa’s Minister of Home Affairs and a medical doctor, will lead and usher the 54-nation organization into a new era of possibilities for the continent. In her keynote address honoring her as the first female chair of the African Union, Dlamini-Zuma said: “African women make up over fifty percent of the continent, and let’s not forget that they produce the other fifty percent—men.*

We see particularly how women are making their mark in the area of political leadership. Right across Europe, Africa, and even the Middle East, it was not uncommon over the last decade to encounter high-profile female leaders — a definite change in trend.

<sup>1</sup> <http://switchandshift.com/women-and-leadership-10-steps-forward-for-women-and-men-part-1>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2012/12/06/the-20-youngest-power-women-in-africa-2012/>

# LOCAL TRENDS

As with all inclinations and trends, it is not only important for us what is happening on the other side of our borders, but what is happening here is even more relevant.

In many ways South Africa is the front runner when it comes to the world-wide trend of female leadership. Whether in the areas of sport, culture, entertainment, technology or politics — here we encounter formidable women who are leading their communities in an authentically female way.

The most obvious of these terrains is surely politics, where we have female leaders like Helen Zille, Patricia de Lille and more recently, Mamphele Ramphele, who challenges the status quo and are making significant progress in their specific areas of influence.

Concerning the church: during 2012 and 2013 we have also seen a large rotation in how church leaders think of women in leadership roles.

During October 2012 Norma Rossouw made double history when she not only became the youngest moderator of a regional synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, but also as the first woman in this role. Following this historic event, the Afrikaans daily Die Beeld reported as follows<sup>3</sup>:

*Unlike a previous generation of women who encountered much resistance in the church, Rossouw says that she has never felt that she was being discriminated against. She is excited about the future of the church and about a transition process in the Western*

*Transvaal that will make the church there function in a new way. “I believe God is leading the church into new terrain.”*

Within a week of Rossouw’s election, another lady made the record books when she was appointed as the first female moderator of the United Reformed Church of Southern Africa. We are referring to Dr Mary-Ann Plaatjies van Huffel, who is also the first woman who was appointed as a minister by the Dutch Reformed Church years ago.

In an interview with her, Neels Jackson wrote as follows in Die Beeld<sup>4</sup>:

*“She is the first woman who to occupy such a lofty position in one of the large Southern African churches. When asked, she said that it is not only for herself that she took the position, but also for so many women who could not even become ministers. She realises that her election was pure grace. Plaatjies van Huffel was chosen in a domain that has historically been dominated by men and she knows how difficult it is for a woman to work there. She is against the mere symbolic election of women into high positions.”*

It is not only on political and church terrain where women are making their mark these days. In retail the emerging role of women is also being seen and acknowledged in interesting ways. For instance, you can nowadays find a tool set designed, made and marketed especially for women in Mr Price Home!

Thus, it is clear that, not only on the international level, but locally also, there is a clear trend visible of women moving into positions and areas traditionally dominated by men. Also, women are very able to master these tasks and to sometimes even fare better than their male predecessors. Consequently we had to ask ourselves — what gave rise to these changes and what factors play a part in the influence of our perceptions and attitudes in this regard?

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.beeld.com/Suid-Afrika/Nuus/Moderator-eerste-vrou-en-dalk-ook-die-jongste-20121018>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.beeld.com/Suid-Afrika/Nuus/Vrou-moderator-maak-geskiedenis-20121001>

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# CAUSES

There are many things that could cause the rise of female leaders to the top. In this regard, we can certainly look back at a few of the previous ekerk trend reports that points to a fast changing world in all fields — including technology, culture, sport, economics and politics. Wherever we look we see a totally different picture than ten years ago.

The world in which we live today (see previous ekerk trend reports on a variety of subjects at [www.ekerk.org](http://www.ekerk.org)) is:

1. Not limited by geographical and linear time boundaries.
2. Characterised by constant change without any pauses to asses change.
3. Created and shaped by both global trends and local contexts.
4. Virtual, distributed and permanently connected.
5. More homogenous than ever, but at the same time also more individually inclined than ever – people live in the extremes of their own self-expression.

There are many other causes we could mention here, but in the end we live in a world that is no longer willing to subject themselves to a 'comand-and-control' type of leadership- or lifestyle. The young professionals of today already have access to all the answers and the best resources — they need more than that.

# THE WORLD IS HUNGRY FOR COMPASSION!

Those types of leaders who offer compassion are those who can lead the world in a way that it wants to be led. The best characteristic of emerging leaders is their ability to firstly lead themselves, to care for others, to act emotionally intelligent, and to navigate the routes offered by technology and digitality seamlessly.

Generally speaking, a new leadership style for a fast-changing world fits in very nicely with the natural inclination, abilities and needs of women. It is almost as if ladies have an inborn aptitude to transform this culture of flux (or fluidity) in a gentle manner, without sacrificing their faith or values.

Women did not climb the ladder of leadership merely because we were forced by dogmatic or political convictions to implement a quote system. This trend is also not the result of a new awareness of gender-equality or -rights. It is much rather a mere consequence of a world that is slowly but surely busy to rediscover the meanings of brokenness, caring for others and living as true humans.

# APPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

We can easily lapse into a type of quota approach when it comes to the issues of male and female leadership. However, that is not the aim of this study. Our goal is not so much see the same amount of male and female faces around the table, but rather to develop a leadership style that is not only effective in a fast-changing world, but that is also in line with our deepest spiritual convictions. The church cannot afford to be overwhelmed by a gender-equality debate at the expense of effective and life-changing leadership.

However, here are a few things that we can do in and around local congregations that will help us be better pioneers for those who look up to us for spiritual guidance.

## **1. Give female voices a platform**

We need to ensure that communities of faith are sufficiently served by female voices, regardless of whether those voices are in leadership positions or not. We need to create more opportunity for the opinions that are characterised by caring, vulnerability, humility, and a willingness to be proven wrong.

## **2. Develop all types of leaders**

Get rid of any stereotypes or preconceived ideas when it comes to the identification of future leaders. Leadership style varies greatly, and our ever-diversifying world requires a diverse leadership.

## **3. Reconsider the goal of spiritual leadership**

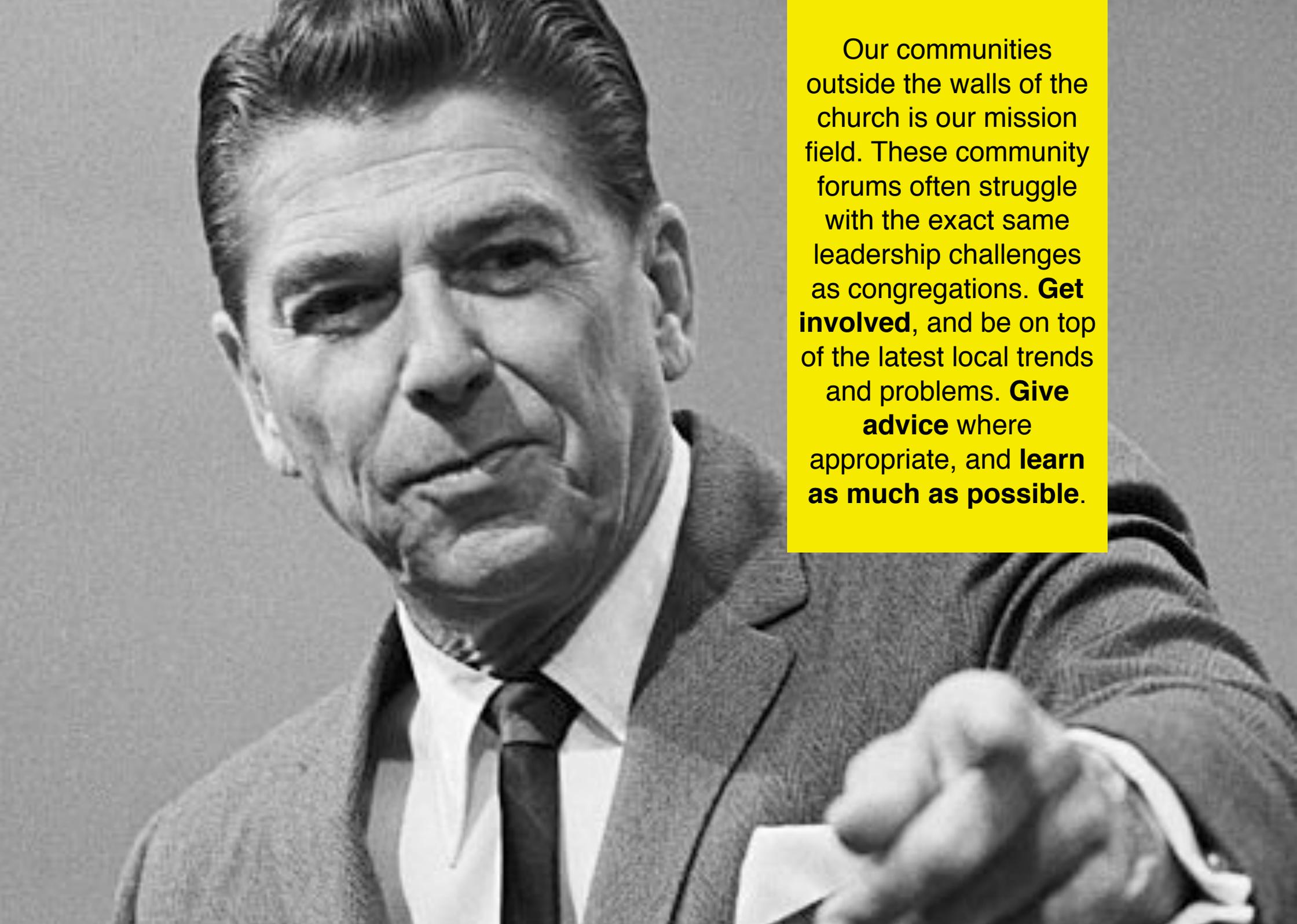
It is a good idea to talk to the leadership about the why and how of our local congregations' spiritual leadership. What is the goal? How do we reach it? How do we measure the success of leadership? Also ensure that the congregation's input is gathered here.

## **4. Invest in young leaders**

A new generation of leaders do intuitively what many of us who have occupied church leadership positions for years are trying hard to learn. Invite emerging leaders of both sexes into the congregation's leadership discussions. Consider their opinions, implement their ideas and regularly share the public platform with them.

## **5. Be involved with community leadership**

Our communities outside the walls of the church is our mission field. These community forums often struggle with the exact same leadership challenges as congregations. Get involved, and be on top of the latest local trends and problems. Give advice where appropriate, and learn as much as possible.

A black and white photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a suit, white shirt, and dark tie. He is looking slightly to the left and pointing his right hand towards the viewer. The background is a plain, light color.

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# CONCLUSION

It is our prayer that not only local congregations, but our whole country, gets characterised by leaders who love people, have the ability to care for others, can connect to groups and individuals on an emotional level, and who, above all, allow themselves to be guided by the soft voice of the Holy Spirit.

It is a caring leadership style rather than a demanding one, which, in general, comes more naturally to women, but can be applied just as successfully by men.

Join us in leading the leaders, congregations and people of our country on a more spiritual journey — closer to the heart of God.

# MORE ABOUT ECHURCH RESEARCH

Echurch prioritises the development and support of the leaders of the local church by means of training, resources and relevant research. With research reports, trend briefings and other material, we look at the world through the lens of Scripture. All the echurch research and trend publications are available for download from [www.ekerk.org](http://www.ekerk.org), free of charge.

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If you want to become more involved, or if you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact Mynhardt at [mynhardt@ekerk.org](mailto:mynhardt@ekerk.org), or at 082.853.6483.

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Thanks for reading!

