

# Community Involvement and Leadership Development



In every city, a need exists for visionary leaders who establish and sustain positive trajectories for community growth. Such leadership in both the civic and corporate communities is essential to a city's success. In the past decade, leadership development has shifted from strictly academic and personal to operation and connection to the broader community. As a result, emerging leaders must understand the dynamic histories and cultures of the cities where they have chosen to live, work, and play.

For the City of Memphis, the singular histories of music (Beale Street and the Blues, Sun Studios and Rock and Roll, Stax and R & B, WDIA) and entrepreneurship (Piggly Wiggly, Holiday Inn, AutoZone, and FedEx) serve as excellent examples of lasting, visionary leadership that originated in this city and spread far beyond the bounds of Shelby County. As we look ahead and seek ways to strengthen our community, it is important to re-establish our city as a new kind of distribution center: one of informed, capable, caring leaders successfully moving Memphis into the twenty-first-century global marketplace.

## Community Leadership Assets:

Many organizations in the Memphis area already realize this essential need as a component to rich programs and services. To include all such organizations would be impossible. Therefore, this research focuses only on organizations (or programs within larger organizations) whose primary mission is that of leadership development for adults. More specifically for the purposes of this study, the Shalom Community Involvement and Leadership Development Committee reviewed information on those agencies with a primary focus on community involvement. Thus, programs and/or agencies classified in this area are those whose main focus is the development of future community leaders.

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## Leadership programs may be classified into three categories:<sup>1</sup>

### Community Involvement

Programs designed to encourage new leaders in the community.

### Personal and Organizational Growth

Programs designed to enrich the leadership, team building, and organizational growth skills of participants.

### Education

Programs designed to provide educational opportunities for leadership development. Although many programs listed have elements of all three, classification was made based upon the primary focus of the program/agency.

## Leadership Memphis

The work of Leadership Memphis is focused on increasing the capacity of this city to become great by being resilient. We do this by identifying and challenging innovative leaders to become more engaged in the civic leadership of the community. Innovative leaders are an important part of the equation, because they have to take on the status quo - those who would prefer things stay as they are. Staying the same is not a viable strategy for any city in today's economy.<sup>2</sup>

Leadership Memphis offers three development programs to support this mission: (1) Executive Leadership, (2) Fast-Track Leadership, and (3) Grassroots Leadership. A major emphasis of theirs is bringing about innovative change by advancing diversity and inclusivity in the leadership of the city.

### Leadership Academy

The Leadership Academy’s vision is a greater Memphis continually transformed and renewed by a diverse community of fully developed leaders. Their focus on building strong community leadership for Memphis has led to an infusion of empowered leaders taking action in this city.<sup>3</sup>

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### MPACT Memphis

MPACT Memphis engages and supports today’s diverse, creative generation of young professionals who want to connect with each other and contribute their unique talents to the community.<sup>4</sup>

The program has three ways for young professionals to get involved: (1) Social networking, (2) Community Service, and (3) Civic Engagement.

### NEXUS

Second Presbyterian Church and MPACT Memphis jointly developed NEXUS in 2003 as a vehicle for the development and improvement of leadership skills, as well as a means for participants to make valuable connections with leaders in the Memphis community. Relationship is the key component of the NEXUS experience. NEXUS is unique in that it seeks to duplicate the experienced leader and develop the young, emerging leader through mentorship and relationship.<sup>5</sup>

### Memphis Leadership Foundation (MLF)

MLF exists to empower urban individuals and families through creative, innovative, and effective ministry and leadership. A heavy emphasis is on equipping and training indigenous leaders to effect change in the communities around them. MLF has a history of connecting communities of resource with communities of need.<sup>6</sup>

### DownLine Ministries

DownLine Ministries exists to train and equip believers in Biblical disciple-making, enlisting them into a Great-Commission lifestyle. (The Great Commission refers to Jesus’s words to His disciples in Matthew 28: 19-20: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the

very end of the age.”) DownLine hosts institutes for men, women, and emerging leaders. This ministry aspires to reach the world through intense disciple-making. It is their goal to train spiritual leaders who are determined to make a difference in the wider world.<sup>7</sup>

### Urban Youth Initiative (UYI)

UYI seeks to equip, empower, and support dedicated youth ministers and the local church/Christian community to effectively reach unchurched urban young people with the hope and love of Jesus Christ, and nurture their development into purposeful adulthood.

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### Memphis Center for Urban Theological Studies (MCUTS)

MCUTS exists to provide affordable, accessible, Christ-centered theological education for leaders in the urban context in order to transform Memphis and the Mid-South for the Kingdom of Christ.

The following challenges impede greater use and success of the aforementioned programs:

- **Awareness:** Many of the leadership programs and agencies incur great expense to promote their offerings. Unfortunately, they remain unknown in many areas of the city where their services are needed.
- **Access:** While the programs and agencies identified are readily available, due to limited resources such as transportation, individuals who may benefit from the services are not able to access them.
- **Funding:** The programs that have experienced a measure of success could possibly serve significantly more potential and emerging leaders if properly funded to expand.



### Recommendations:

The Shalom Community Involvement and Leadership Committee has identified ways the church might address the need to cultivate and increase the number of leaders in Memphis. Many bright high school students populate our city, students very capable of high achievement at the college level. Under-resourced students can gain access to school via various scholarship programs available through direct financial aid. In addition, a means to come alongside these collegiate students must be developed. We recommend that there be a greater church emphasis on leader development. This single recommendation has a three-pronged approach:

#### The church should work to recognize and identify ALL of the community's potential leaders.

We believe there are a number of individuals in the vulnerable areas of our city who, if identified, could be connected to leadership development opportunities and programs and thrive there. This should lead to an increased number of effective leaders.

#### The church should commit to youth-leader development.

We believe that many of the potential and emerging leaders of our community may be found in those who work with at-risk youth in vulnerable areas of the city. Here again, we see an opportunity for churches to identify and support local youth leaders. Churches can also serve as connectors to urban youth-leader development programs. A commitment to the support of youth leadership will enable the church to further establish and sustain relationships with the next generation of leaders.

#### The church should commit to theological training within the urban context.

We believe that the message of the gospel is essential and relevant to meet the current challenges of our city. However, the church must be intentional about developing its leaders to apply this message in a specifically urban setting with a culturally sensitive, humble approach.

### Conclusions:

An army of potential and emerging leaders throughout the city of Memphis awaits the call. Shalom should explore church-sponsored programs for identifying and supporting leaders. Existing parachurch ministries with a focus on urban-leader development should be engaged to discuss how site-based work in neighborhood churches could be developed and enhanced. A pilot project should be developed to match the resources of volunteers from the broader Memphis area with a neighborhood church that has a passion for cultivating the leadership population in existence there. This local church should connect with an experienced parachurch organization in a neighborhood (where present) to focus on the specific skill sets required to meet the needs of that area.

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- 1 Compilation of the Christian Brothers University, Center for Ethical Leadership
  - 2 <http://www.leadershipmemphis.org/aboutUs.aspx>
  - 3 <http://www.leadershipacademy.org>
  - 4 <http://www.mpactmemphis.org>
  - 5 <http://www.nexusleaders.org/about>
  - 6 <http://www.mfonline.org>
  - 7 <http://www.downlineministries.com>