

Something to Talk About

A conversation guide for church leaders

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Of Titles and Tasks

Note: This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at www.efcawest.org. Click on the Church Leadership tab to get to the archive.

Sometimes I come across a quotation I cannot get out of my mind. It has happened again. This one has been on my list of potential Zipline articles for some time. I'm sharing it with you hoping that you will share it with your leadership team, and let it get stuck in their minds, too.

In the fifth century AD, Augustine of Hippo (also known as Saint Augustine) wrote *The City of God*. It contains this sentence:

"No man can be a good bishop if he loves his title but not his task."

As with most such quotations, my first reaction was to apply it to others. It was easy to spot others who seemed to me to love their titles more than their tasks. Then I realized that the real power from this type of thought comes from self-evaluation. What's *really* going on in me? What are other people seeing in me? What are they seeing in our leadership team? And that's something to talk about.

I have to confess that I like titles. Titles help me understand the roles people carry out in their life and work, they help me understand who is responsible for what, and they help me explain these relationships and responsibilities to others. I embrace the truth that all Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ, we all should be serving as Christ has gifted us, one gift is not inherently "greater" than the others (the eye is not more important than the nose), and we are equal in God's eyes. But, I still find it helpful when introducing a Sunday morning guest to the man I know as "John" to identify him as our lead pastor. I see no reason to hide his role and work within the church family from a guest by merely identifying him as "John."

And, yes, sometimes I like my title because of the sense of prestige I think it confers.

The issue addressed by Augustine is not *having* a title, but *loving* one's title rather than the work that the title-bearer should be doing. For me, it comes down to pride – loving the prestige and perhaps privileges of the position more than the obligations of the position. I Peter 5:2 reminds elders to do our

work eagerly. We are not to do our work because of the money, or because of any prestige, but we are to do it voluntarily, eagerly, as examples to the flock. We are leaders, shepherds, and servants.

Here are some questions to jumpstart your conversation:

- Every church and community has its own culture. What role do titles play in our local context and church culture, and how did that come to be? What titles do we use and why? For clarity? For status? To assert authority? How should we use titles, and how should we not use them?
- Do we love our task? What do we love about the work of shepherding, overseeing, and managing the flock of God? What about it energizes us? What tires us?
- What can we do to ensure that our love of the tasks of church leadership stays strong and matures? How can we bring back that love if it has begun to fade?
- How do we ensure that potential elders and church leaders aspire to the office of elder and will voluntarily and eagerly perform their tasks? How do we ensure that potential elders are eager for their tasks rather than the title?
- What should we do when a teammate's or our own love of our leadership tasks fades?

We church leaders are sinners saved by grace, friends, neighbors, spouses, parents, brothers and sisters, foodies, artists, travelers, readers and so many other things. Let us be careful that our job titles do not become our identity. Let us be careful that we do not love our titles but not our tasks.

Let us know how your conversation goes. Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at bob.osborne@efca.org.