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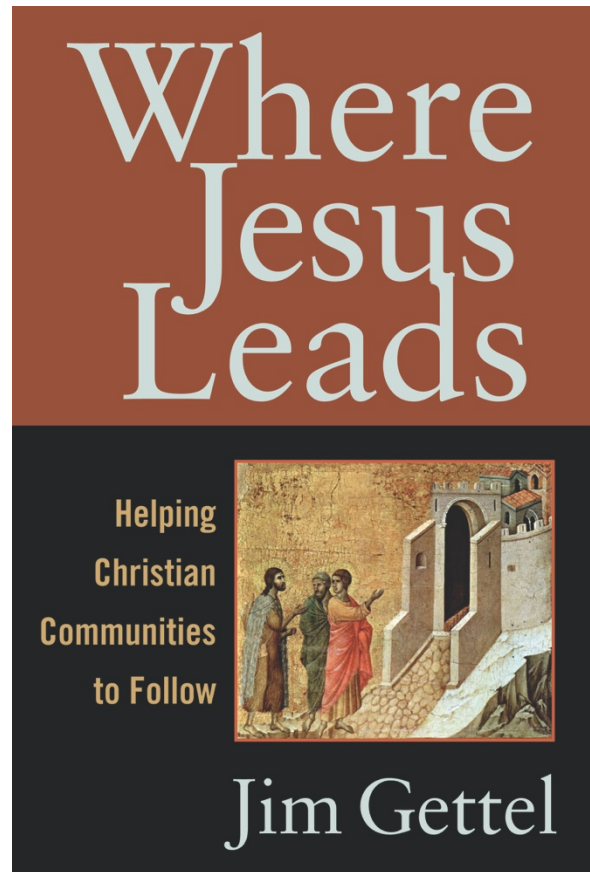
# WHERE JESUS LEADS

**HELPING CHRISTIAN  
COMMUNITIES TO FOLLOW**

**JIM GETTEL**

What is the difference between a thriving church and one that's static—or even crumbling? The right kind of leadership journey and practice can make all the difference. And the right type of journey and practice doesn't start with the leaders themselves, but with Jesus Christ and his kingdom.

Christian leaders must continually follow Jesus and learn to lead alongside him. In *Where Jesus Leads*, Jim Gettel draws on Scripture to prepare readers to truly follow Jesus, build communities, make and strengthen disciples, and serve others. He starts by reviewing basic kingdom truths, giving leaders a solid theological foundation upon which to grow. Then he gives practical tips on how best to love and disciple people within the Christian community, as well as the greater communities. Finally, he equips leaders to nurture and guide other leaders, just as the earliest disciples did. Each chapter includes questions for personal reflection and group discussion.



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*Deep River*  
B O O K S

# About the Author

## **Jim Gettel**

Jim Gettel serves as the Canon for Congregational Life for the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan, helping Christian leaders to lead loving, fruitful communities that make a difference in the world. He has helped lead businesses, nonprofits, and churches, and holds a BA in philosophy from Northwestern University and both JD and MBA degrees from the University of Illinois.

## Connect with the Author

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# *What Others are Saying About* **Where Jesus Leads**

*“Jim Gettel writes from the perspective of someone who has accompanied many churches on the journey into deeper and more faithful discipleship. He believes that the fundamental method for learning to join in God’s mission is apprenticeship. We learn to follow Christ more faithfully by our companionship with others on the journey. It has been so from the beginning and in this book **Jim offers us a way to practice walking that journey in the midst of the changing realities of our own time.**”*

—The Rt. Rev’d Jeffrey D. Lee, Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Chicago

*“Clergy, lay leaders, and anyone engaged in congregational development or passionate to enliven the Jesus Movement within their church community will find this book thoughtful and thought provoking. **Jim Gettel asks the right questions and carefully guides us to the fundamental reality that relationships matter—especially relationship with Jesus.** In a time when “brand loyalty” seems to have no relevance, this book provides a clear and convincing argument that relationship with Jesus is the paramount statement of loyalty that will breathe spiritual life, transformation, and growth into our own lives and into the lives of others. If you want to be a better disciple and/or foster discipleship in others, you must read this book!”*

—The Rt. Rev’d Wendell N. Gibbs, Jr., 10th Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Michigan

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# Suggested Interview Questions

For Jim Gettel, author of

*Where Jesus Leads*

*Helping Christian Communities to Follow*

**Q: You've noted harsh criticisms about today's Christian churches. What needs to change?**

**A:** I don't want to be a church critic. Much of what is written about Christianity today is a reaction to what is wrong with the church. We can be more proactive and more effective by focusing first on following Jesus rather than changing the church. There is greater value in learning what to do than in learning what to undo. Then, when we do change our churches, we can make our communities more effective in acting like Jesus, following where Jesus leads and leading with Jesus.

We do need to recognize and accept how much mainstream Christian churches have declined since the peak of the "church movement" around 1965. Our times are described as "post-Christian" and many people are inclined to reject both the active movement and the inheritance and traditions of Christianity and to look for other life experiences. Even people who describe themselves as Christians are more likely to see their faith as an individual choice or concern, rather than a Way of life that is nurtured in community. There is a big gap when nearly 7 in 10 Americans identify themselves as Christians and less than 1 in 10 were in church on Sunday. Many people are not seeing the value of participating in religious communities to help support their spiritual journeys, and this is the gap described as "spiritual but not religious." If Christian communities are going to be relevant to people, they need to help people actually experience the value of journeying together in community. And that is not necessarily by just continuing to replicate church experiences from earlier times. The decline of churches has led contemporary Christian leaders to grapple with the relevance of the church and their roles in it, and to begin to discover new paths.

It's not so much what churches are doing wrong. It's how the world has changed around them, particularly that churches are no longer at the center of most of our lives and cultures.

**Q: Would you like to see the church back at the center of our lives and cultures?**

**A:** Yes and no. I think people had some wonderful opportunities to experience Christian community and meet Jesus when Christian churches were more central to our culture. I am certainly a product of that culture. But I think some churches began to act like there was a programmatic way to become Christians: Come to church and we'll teach you what it means to be Christian and we'll make you like us and then send you back out into the world. A missionary model is very different and it's much more like what Jesus or the apostles were doing or what

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St. Patrick or other missionaries were doing: They were going to where people are and living with them and seeing how God is already acting in their lives and affirming that and going along on a journey together. I think that elements of this journey can happen in the institutional church, but it doesn't necessarily happen because of the church. It happens because people are following Jesus and journeying together with Jesus. To fully support a Christian journey, you don't have to have the institutional church but you really do need the "Body of Christ" St. Paul speaks about in I Corinthians 12.

**Q: What do you need then to have the "Body of Christ"?**

**A:** St. Paul points out that the "Body of Christ" isn't happening when people in community are judging other people or fighting among themselves. In response to these kinds of behaviors, Paul describes the Body of Christ as unity – even with all of our individual differences – and love. In the last verse of I Corinthians 12, he says, "And now let me show you a better way." And he goes right into I Corinthians 13, which is the chapter about love that is so often read for weddings. It's true for marriages of course; it's true for all loving relationships. But Paul is talking there about Christian communities. Christian communities need to become the very best at learning to create and share loving relationships! So much of the Gospels and the Epistles is about this. At the very heart of God's kingdom is God's love for us, and our love for God and one another. Christian communities have a role of sharing God's love through close, deep and caring relationships.

There are many ways that Christians can share their love with one another in community: These are actions like the "one another" verses in the Bible: Treat one another as we would like to be treated (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31; Luke 10:25–28). Be at peace (Mark 9:50). Live in harmony (Romans 12:16). Welcome (Romans 15:7). Encourage (Hebrews 10:24). Teach (Colossians 3:16). Confess to and pray for one another (James 5:16). Do not judge or condemn (Luke 6:36–37). Forgive (Ephesians 4:32). Reconcile (Matthew 18:15–22). Take care of one another. I believe these kinds of sharing and caring experiences are the real reasons why people who consider themselves "church people" want to belong to Christian communities; and I don't think we've done as well as we need to with helping people who don't consider themselves "church people" to experience the value of belonging to a Christian group or community to support their spiritual and life journeys.

**Q: You've been talking primarily about following Jesus. Isn't this book really about Christian leadership?**

**A:** Yes it is. And because our focus as Christians is on Jesus, we need to be good followers first. Jesus wants us to be like him so that we can lead with him. John 13:3 says Jesus got up from the table at the Last Supper to serve and wash his disciples' feet, knowing that he had come from God, that he was returning to God and that God had placed all things in his hands. I ask followers and leaders whether they know that God also loves them in these three ways? God has created you, God is journeying with you and God is empowering you to do what he is calling

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you to do. Jesus says he does this, but it may take a lifetime for us to more fully experience and know the depths of this love.

Yet at the same time we need to go ahead and lead others to this love. We have the most amazing model in Jesus. Consider just a few examples how lovingly and effectively Jesus leads. Jesus brings his disciples with him and is with them (Matthew 28:20), knows and understands them, loves them (Mark 10:21), and is actively involved in their lives and ministries. He calls each one into ministry (Mark 1:16–20), encourages them (John 15:11), supports Peter when he is about to sink into the sea (Matthew 14:28–31), shares vision and expectations (Matthew 5), teaches them how to do ministry (Matthew 10), directly explains why they sometimes fail (Matthew 17:15–16), teaches them to pray (Matthew 6:8–13; Matthew 21:21), prays for them (John 17:6–19) and for their followers (John 17:20), and reconciles with them and restores them to ministry when they fall away (John 20:19–31; John 21). Are we leading our communities like this?

**Q: You work in the institutional church. And yet you're calling for changes in churches. How does that work?**

**A:** I'm the congregational development officer for churches in the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan and I've consulted with other churches around the United States. There are, of course, a number of churches that just want to keep things the way they've always been, and what I'm saying at this particular point in our common journey doesn't really speak to them. Many are grieving for "the way it used to be." But there are many more churches that realize that the world has changed and that Christian communities will not be the same either. It's freeing for them to know that it's not their fault; it's just different. They also begin to see that God is not calling them to be entirely different from who they are: God is calling them to be more fully who they are. Many or most of them want to be in loving relationships with one another and with more people and to reach out and serve the world. They're excited to follow Jesus. Of course, they're grappling with how to do this in new ways. But there's also great joy and freedom and creativity in helping people experience the transforming power of God's love and doing this together and with the support of one another.

This book is designed to help these leaders of Christian communities have conversations about this journey together. I can't tell them specifically what their particular communities need to do, but they can figure it out by engaging with Jesus and one another. There are lots of questions in this book, and they don't need to answer them all or even that many of them. My experience is that the Holy Spirit brings together the people who need to be in the conversation and empowers and energizes them if they pay careful and prayerful attention. I hope more people will see and accept themselves as Jesus' disciples and as leaders of Christian groups and communities. Their journeys will go further than any of us can imagine.

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**Q: Then you have a lot of hope for Christian communities today and in the future?**

**A:** I do! I see a lot of communities that are discovering new life, new life in Jesus. I agree with scholars who see this point in history as a new Christian reawakening or reformation. It's so much more than organizational changes or program changes or process changes or even changes in beliefs, although some of these may be needed to support this movement. These vital communities are finding effective ways to be involved in God's work in their particular contexts.

At the same time, we're being reminded of the radical importance of being followers of Jesus and leaders with Jesus. I hope the time that Christian leaders and Christian communities spend around the conversations with this book will help them become new and stronger manifestations of the ongoing Jesus movement.

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