



Microsoft, Adobe and web solutions  
for non-profits at up to 80% off retail prices.

Kingswood  
COMMUNICATIONS



Member Login | E-mail:  Password:  [▶ Not a member? Join now!](#)

[home](#)

Search:

browse by topic

browse by publication

[help](#)

[Leadership](#)  
[Building Leaders](#)  
[Community Life](#)  
[The Pastor](#)  
[Preaching/Worship](#)  
[Current Trends](#)  
[Help Us Help You](#)  
[Church Resources](#)

## Leadership

Leading isn't just a one-person job.  
Here's how it's getting done today.  
[Spring 2008](#)



Leading isn't just a one-person job.  
Here's how it's getting done today.  
[Spring 2008](#)



[Church Life](#) [Community Life](#)

Subscribe!



[Risk-free trial issue](#)  
[Give a gift subscription](#)

### ARTICLE TOOLS

- Find similar articles
- Print this article
- E-mail this page
- Bookmark this article
- Toggle highlighting

### Seminary & Grad School Guide

#### Search by Name

[▶](#)

or use:

[Advanced Search](#)

to search by major, region, cost, affiliation, enrollment, more!

## Tending or Processing?

*Maybe sustainable agriculture is a better model for church life than a feed lot.*

Jeff Hawkins

May 30, 2008

Polyface Farm is best described as "a gathering of many faces around the table." Owned and stewarded by the Joel Salatin family, Polyface hosts a variety of creatures in natural symbiotic relationships, with food as the natural attractor. Managing a farm around food honors William R. Inge's observation that "all of nature is a conjugation of the verb 'to eat,' in the active and in the passive."

On Salatin's farm, made famous in Michael Pollan's bestseller *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, cattle graze to prepare for the movement of floorless chicken pens over the pastures. The chickens eat clover, bugs, and other feed to produce manure that fertilizes the grass the cattle eat. Humans eat the meat of both animals, then compost the offal from the butchering process, and spread it back on the land to feed the grass. Each creature fits into the system by doing what it does best: eat. Salatin's genius is that he patiently observes the way things eat together in nature and structures his farm accordingly.

Salatin's farm is not a factory fueled by money and governed by a global economy. It is a living household of flocks, fields, and families nested within God's Creation.

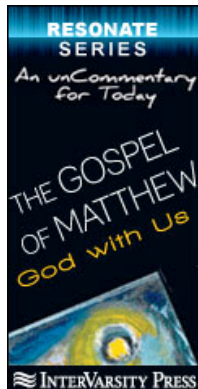
It's a helpful picture of the church. Centered in the Eucharist, the church is a place of diverse creatures in natural symbiotic relationships with food—Jesus, the Bread of Life—as the natural attractor. The church's leaders are "pastors," who steward the flock around the food of its creatures.

Twenty years ago, as a small-town pastor who lived on a small family farm, I became interested in raising a few meat chickens, so I bought Joel Salatin's booklet explaining floorless chicken pens. I built three pens to his specs, populated them, used his suggested feed recipe—and it worked.

Eventually I bought more of Salatin's books and began attending workshops on sustainable agriculture. I wanted to better understand how to manage my hobby farm with *health* as its goal.

It soon became apparent that I was farming differently than my neighbors. I kept my animals outdoors, while they confined theirs indoors. I built fences to make small fields, while they tore theirs out to create larger ones. I refused to use chemicals and pharmaceuticals, while they studied how "purchased inputs" might increase their production.

My farming neighbors thought I was woefully misguided—until they tasted my chicken. Then they started asking questions (in the roundabout way of country folk) about what I was doing and why. I noticed my responses were similar to those I gave when asked about my work in the church. Turns out I was using a



### Member Services

[My Account](#)  
[Contact Us](#)

### Related Sites

[ChristianityToday.com](#)

[Christian Bible Studies](#)  
[Sermon Illustrations](#)

Your bank  
deposits can  
do more  
than just  
earn interest.



similar paradigm with all my "flocks," methods based on health rather than production.

**Chickens and churches react to change in much the same way.**

Likewise, in the church, my eyes were on the qualitative aspects—maturity in faith, resilience in life, and balance in relationships—rather than quantitative—producing more dollars, more members, more programs. I realized I'd been studying farming to learn about working in

a congregation.

For example, one day I noticed that my chickens and my congregation both react to change in much the same way. Each day, we move our floorless pasture pens forward eight feet, providing access to fresh grass. The birds learn they must walk as the pen is pulled forward. Even so, several factors determine their willingness to cooperate. One factor is my own anxiety level. If I am anxious for the chickens to hurry, they sense it and do the opposite. If I jerk or kick the pen or yell, they stand still or crowd into a corner, making movement impossible. But if I remain patient and calm, they walk together rather well.

Even then, there's a wide range of response to this daily change. A few birds rush to the front of the pen as soon as the pulling chain is attached anticipating the new clover and bugs to come. A larger group hangs back to watch the early birds, and moves only when the pen moves. About a third of them delay a bit longer, until the movement is well underway; another third delays until there seems no choice but move ahead or get run over. Inevitably, a group remains along the rear wall of the pen, staring backwards.

Even chickens have Innovators, Early Adopters, Early and Late Majorities, and Laggards. Just like every church.

Such comparisons have caused me to ask deeper questions about the strange similarity between modern farming and modern churching. Is it a coincidence that Old McDonald farms are being replaced by large Confined Animal Feeding Operations, while family-sized congregations are being replaced by megachurches? Is the modern church favoring behaviors attributable to a preference for production rather than health, a way of life fundamentally inconsistent with the church's organic nature?

I began to wonder: does our church life reflect a gathering of many faces around the table, working toward holy health, or a disciple-producing machine pursuing greater numbers?

As I moved my own congregation toward this model, it has meant not only that we eat well (having the pastor donate his pasture-raised turkey for the November dinner is a unique benefit, of course), but that we describe our work differently. Instead of using mechanical metaphors for a church that "runs smoothly," "programmed" to produce "quantifiable results," we use organic or ecological metaphors.

We "tend." We understand that in Creation nothing is wasted; rather, the "waste" of one member serves as a valuable resource for another. What the world considers waste, we recognize as blessing, including the cross of Christ.

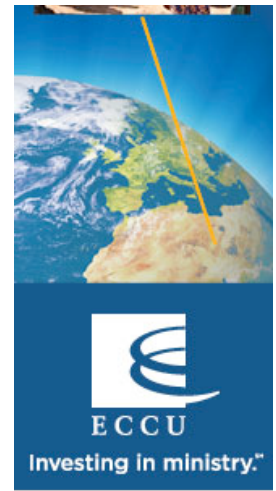
For example, some of our elderly shut-ins often consider themselves "waste," because they can no longer participate as they once did. But we see them as valuable for their stories of abiding and tested faith, which our young people need to know.

For a time, we arranged visits between our homebound and our 8th graders to gather at the kitchen table and share juice and cookies. Listening to stories was fun, of course. But more significantly, by sharing tales of tithing during the Depression, walking to church (even in winter), and following God in everyday life, our elderly members participated directly in the health and life God so generously gives.

The church *is* many faces gathered around the table—the Lord's table. Only when we understand who we are can we hope to accomplish the work we are called to do.

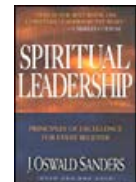
**Jeff Hawkins tends a family farm in North Manchester, Indiana, and HOPE CSA, Inc., a ministry for clergy continuing education.**

Copyright © 2008 by the author or Christianity Today International/*Leadership* Journal. [Click here](#) for reprint information on *Leadership* Journal.

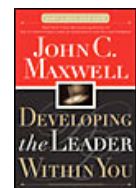


Shopping  
[ChristianBook.com](#)  
[Books](#) | [Music](#) | [Videos](#) | [Gifts](#)  
[Bible Studies](#)  
[Leadership Training](#)  
[Small Group Resources](#)  
[Librería Cristiana](#)

#### Featured Items



[Spiritual Leadership, Revised](#)  
 by J. Oswald Sanders  
 Reg: \$12.99  
 Now: \$11.99



[Developing the Leader Within You](#)  
 by John C. Maxwell  
 Reg: \$14.99  
 Now: \$9.99

Free Newsletter

**Sign up for the Leadership Weekly newsletter today!**  
 Each week, you'll receive illustrations, resources, practical advice, and a devotional for the leader's soul. All fields required.

Try an Issue of *Leadership* RISK-FREE!



**Name**

**Street Address**

**City/State/Zip**

**E-mail Address**

**Subscribe**

No credit card required. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery. Offer valid in U.S. only. [Click here for International orders.](#)

If you decide you want to keep *Leadership* coming, honor your invoice for just \$22.00 and receive three more issues, a full year in all. If not, simply write "cancel" across the invoice and return it. The trial issue is yours to keep, regardless.

**Give Leadership as a gift**  
[Buy 1 gift subscription, get 1 FREE!](#)

FREE Newsletter

Sign up for Leadership's e-mail newsletter, **Leadership Weekly.** You'll receive illustrations, resources, practical advice, and a devotional for the leader's soul every week! All fields required

[XML](#) [RSS Feed](#) [RSS Help](#)

Easily find high-quality, well-researched materials that provide a Christian perspective on topics ranging from headlines to history.

Start using this invaluable tool TODAY for preparing your Bible studies, presentations, class lectures, sermons, meetings, and more.

**It's easy and quick to join:**

- [2-for-1 Deal. Two powerful resources for 1 great price!](#)  
**SIGN UP!**  
 A 1-Year Membership to CTLibrary & a 1-year print subscription to the magazine of your choice! Enjoy your first 7days online FREE!  
**Only \$49.95**
- [1-Year Membership](#) **SIGN UP!**  
 Plus your first 7 days are **FREE!** You won't be charged until after your free trial.  
**Only \$49.95**
- [1-Month Membership](#) **SIGN UP!**



**FREE e-Newsletter!**



Even if you're not a member you can take advantage of the free "CT Library" twice monthly e-newsletter!

Includes automatic renewal each month.  
**Only \$9.95**

- **1-Year for Print Subscribers** SIGN UP!  
Special offer if you are currently a print subscriber to *Christianity Today*, *Leadership Journal*, or *Books & Culture*.  
**Only \$29.95 first year**

Brought to You by [Christianity Today International](#)

**Sign up today for the FREE e-newsletter!** All fields required.

**Full Name:**

**Zip Code:**

**E-mail Address:**  
 

*Note: Members also automatically receive this free e-newsletter.*

## CHRISTIANITY TODAY.COM

**Magazines:**

Books & Culture  
Christianity Today  
Church Law & Tax Report  
Church Finance Today

Leadership Journal  
Men of Integrity  
ChristianityTodayLibrary.com

**Resources:**

BuildingChurchLeaders.com  
ChristianBibleStudies.com  
Christian College Guide  
ChristianHistory.net  
Christian Music Today

Christianity Today Movies  
Church Buyer's Guide  
Church Safety  
PreachingToday.com  
Seminary/Grad School Guide

**Microsoft, Adobe and web solutions for non-profits at up to 80% off retail prices.** 



[www.ChristianityToday.com](http://www.ChristianityToday.com)

Copyright © 2011 Christianity Today International

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Advertise with Us](#)