Movies are a terrific source of inspiration for leadership. They help us engage with our culture. They give us conversational points with our neighbours. The best movies resonate with our longing to be part of a bigger story that seeks to make the world a better place – being part a tribe, persevering in struggles, overcoming injustice, finding the love we long for and the cause to give our lives to. Often movies need critique – you can’t accept their values uncritically. But I reckon every leader can learn and be inspired in courageous directions from movies. And apart from what we learn, they are good fun and enjoyable anyway – and church leaders need enjoyable outlets as much as anyone.

“The Women on the 6th Floor”, a 2010 French film, shows a rich conservative couple in 1960s Paris who have their lives turned upside down by getting to know Spanish maids. Monsieur Jean-Louis Joubert (Fabrice Luchini) is a share trader who lives a comfortable bourgeois lifestyle with his socialite wife Suzanne while their boys are at boarding school. When the family get a new housemaid, Maria from Spain (Natalie Verbeke), Jean-Louis becomes fascinated with how Maria and other housemaids live. They are literally above him, on the sixth floor, in one room tenanted bedsits. Previously he hardly knew what they maids did when they weren’t cooking his breakfast egg and ironing his clothes. But he comes to realize they have challenges in life greater than ensuring his comfortable existence.

Jean-Louis starts on this incarnational journey of getting to know their culture, advocating for their rights and becoming friends with them as people. He enquires where they come from. He pays a plumber to unblock their communal toilet. Realizing they have money saved but hidden under their mattresses, he offers investment advice. Seeing one of them is battered by her husband, he arranges alternative accommodation. When they want to celebrate as a group, he joins in with their dinner party. He becomes fascinated and attracted to their simple love of life and enjoyment of friendship. The romantic fantasy of the movie is that he is also falling for Maria, sadly dissatisfied with the upper class existence of his marriage. But aside from that mixed motive, the beauty of the story is in his interest and care for this group of women as people of worth.

The challenge of the movie for me is how and where can we really get to know, and care and advocate for, and learn from people who are so different from us? This is a challenge of courageous leadership in advancing the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom-focused challenge is to engage authentically with our neighbourhoods and especially our neighbours who live close. It takes courage to step outside our own comfort zones, but isn’t that the journey we are invited on – as followers of Jesus and as Victorian Baptists.