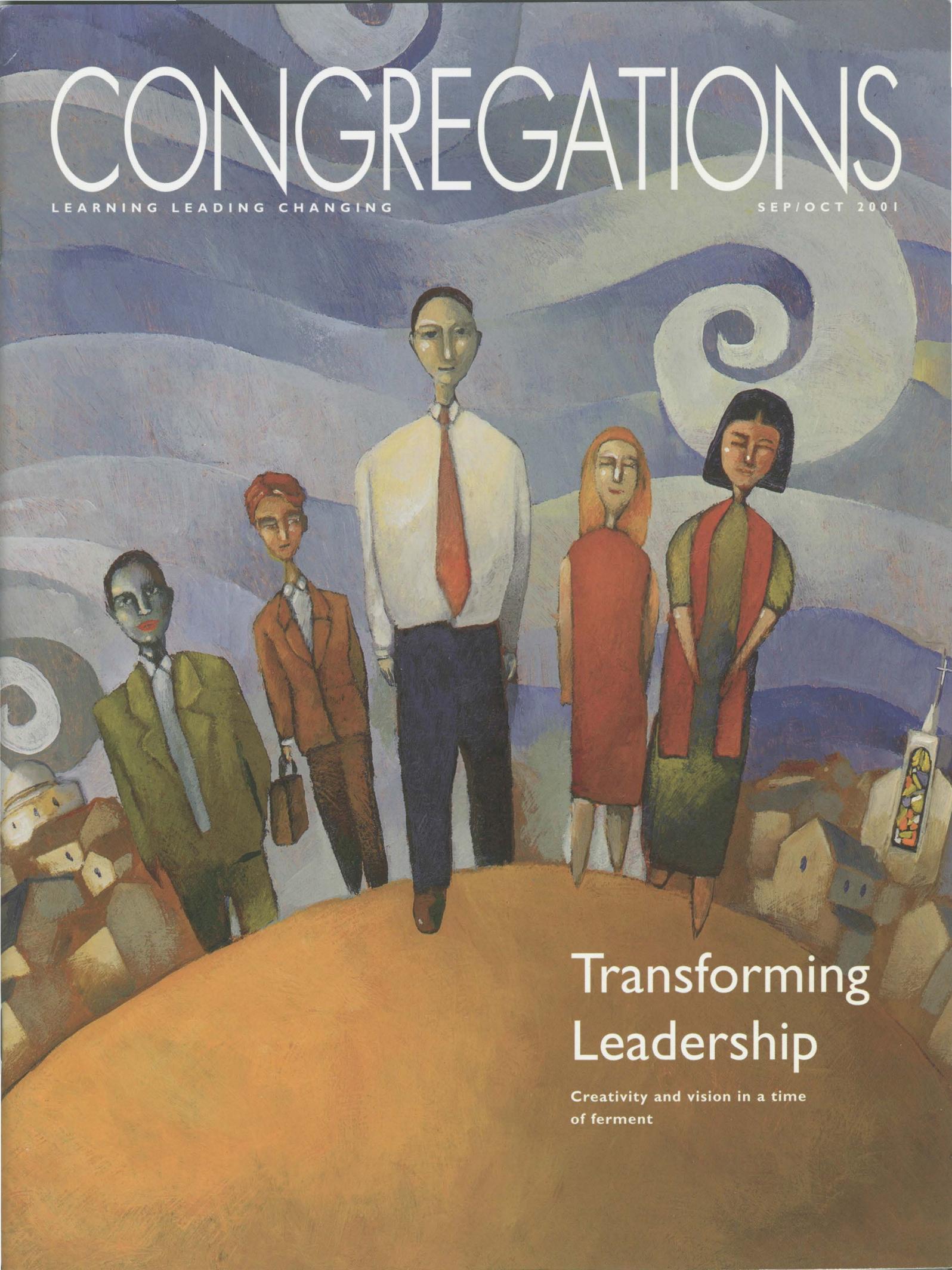


CONGREGATIONS

LEARNING LEADING CHANGING

SEP/OCT 2001



Transforming Leadership

Creativity and vision in a time
of ferment

New Funding for Leadership Research



I am writing to tell you some important, exciting news for the Alban Institute. In June 2001 the Henry Luce Foundation presented the Alban Institute with the first payment from a \$500,000 grant to enable the Institute to begin work on our Leadership Initiative. This grant is a twofold milestone for us: It is the first we have received from the Luce Foundation and it is the first given specifically to support our Leadership Initiative.

In the coming months you will hear much more from us about the various elements of our Leadership Initiative. (As the old-time advertisers used to say, "Watch this space.") For now, it is enough to say that the Alban Institute is making a major new commitment to build the leadership resources of American congregations. As the Initiative unfolds during the next few years, we intend to produce new publications, offer new services, shape new learning environments, and link congregational leaders in new networks.

As a first step, this grant from the Luce Foundation will enable us to lay a foundation of research that will, among other things, lead to a new set of Alban books on key issues related to congregational leadership. It will also assist us in developing new kinds of educational environments and experiences for congregational leaders. We are grateful to the Luce Foundation for this generous grant and we look forward to an ongoing partnership with them as we move forward with this Initiative.

For the last year and a half, the Alban Institute has committed itself to focusing on leadership, and this issue of CONGREGATIONS provides some of our earliest findings. Specifically, "A Leadership Story" on page 17 describes some of the highlights from our Alban Institute Special Report on Leadership, which is available for free download from our Web site.

This Initiative is all about people who lead congregations. As tested leaders you are key partners in what we intend to do. We look forward to working with you and learning from you as together we strive to build the leadership capacity of American religious life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "James P. Wind".

Rev. Dr. James P. Wind
jwind@alban.org

CONGREGATIONS

LEARNING LEADING CHANGING SEP/OCT 2001

Transforming Leadership

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Scott Eblin is the president of Scott Eblin Associates, Inc., an executive coaching and consulting firm in Herndon, Virginia. Mr. Eblin helps executives to identify and act on strategies that lead to sustainable positive results in their personal and professional lives. He also works with church pastors and lay leaders in strengthening leadership capacity within congregations. Mr. Eblin is a certified lay speaker in the United Methodist Church, and is a member of the board of the Leadership Development Institute of the Virginia United Methodist Conference.



Rev. S. Chapin Garner was recently called to be senior pastor of United Church of Christ in Norwell, Massachusetts. He is also a professional playwright who works primarily with faith-based themes and stories. Rev. Garner is cofounder of Christ Clarion Fellowship, an organization of young mainline Protestant clergy (www.christclarionfellowship.org).

Rev. Dr. Theodore W. Johnson is a priest of the Episcopal Church who has specialized in developmental transitions in congregations, particularly during the interim period between installed pastors. He currently serves a congregation in southern Maryland, and is a consultant and leadership developer for congregations in transition. Dr. Johnson worked closely with Arlin J. Rothauge and continues to develop his theories, particularly as they relate to congregational size and transitions.



Rev. Jacqueline J. Lewis-Tillman is the Cultural Boundaries project consultant at the Alban Institute. She is also a consultant at the Indianapolis Center for Congregations and advises congregations, judicatories, and religious organizations in a variety of areas. Rev. Lewis-Tillman currently is a Ph.D. candidate at Drew University in Psychology and Religion.

Rev. Dr. Gil Rendle is the director of consulting and education at the Alban Institute. His areas of expertise include strategic planning, change management, coping with congregational conflict, team building, and leadership. The author of several books, Dr. Rendle is featured in a new Alban Institute videotape, *Living into the New World: How Cultural Trends Affect Your Congregation*.



Rev. Dr. James P. Wind is the president of the Alban Institute. Before coming to the Institute in 1995, Dr. Wind's previous positions included program director at the Lilly Endowment's religion division, director of research and publications at the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics, and pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in River Forest, Illinois. Dr. Wind is the author of three books and numerous articles.

CONGREGATIONS

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Theology vs. Technology?

YOUR MAY/JUNE ISSUE OF CONGREGATIONS, "The Connected Community," provides fine discussion material. Ian Evison's question ("The Digital Revolution," page 20) as to whether innovations have changed anything is helpful but needs to be deepened. The use of various technical media does affect the shape and theology of the church. Print has done this so well that most of us are unaware of its effects: biblicism, doctrinairism, individualism, and fundamentalism. Technological versions of media impact the church in still other ways. Television has brought back story, a gift to the doctrinalized church. Computers and the Web open the world to many and reveal the foolishness of believing that researching all the data will lead to the truth.

In the early 1980s I wrote "The Church as Electronic Ostrich" for *The Christian Century*. While my argument focused on television, it can be applied to all new media. I said that the church related to TV like the proverbial ostrich in three ways: (1) we stick our heads in our prayer books or scholarly books, saying "I never watch it"; (2) we kick it around and complain about it; or (3) we swallow it whole, using it without understanding its consequences. However, I contended, we should use our heads at least as much as does the real ostrich, which is not quite as stupid as we think, to ponder the appropriate use of media.

The primary medium of the gospel is the people of God gathered around Word and Sacrament and scattered in Service and Word. Ian's note that preachers will preach before a physically gathered congregation is right on! It is even more true that the preacher is called to eat the meal at the table, too. Did Jesus use the meal to make sure that the gospel would always be rooted in that physical community? Henri Nouwen's term "wounded healer" is more appropriately applied to the community of faith who "comfort (strengthen) with the comfort with which they themselves are comforted." Or, to put it yet another way, the corporate medium Jesus gives to the fear-filled, fledgling people of God is Spirit-powered forgiveness. Sociological, psychological, and technological studies may be helpful, but without sound theological grounding we will be blown, willy-nilly, not by the breath of the Spirit, but by the winds of technological invention. They will not be our tools, but we will be putty in their hands.

Burton Everist

Grace Lutheran Church
East Dubuque, Illinois

Editor's Note: We always appreciate and look forward to your comments. When submitting letters, please remember to include your church affiliation and contact information (including a telephone number and e-mail address).

The Leadership We Need

NEGOTIATING UP, NOT DOWN

Gil Rendle

Perhaps, when Abraham sought to save Sodom by interceding on behalf of the city, his attempt was rooted in the Hebrew tradition of trusting in the presence of 50 righteous men to provide salvation. But he was not assured that the full count of righteous ones could be found, so he negotiated down: "Suppose 5 of the 50 righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of 5?" And he (the Lord) said, "I will not destroy it if I find 45 there." Pressing his advantage, Abraham negotiated further, asking for reprieve if only 40 were found, then 30, then 20, and then finally 10 until the Lord answered, "For the sake of 10 I will not destroy it" (Gen. 18:22-33).

Minimizing Expectations

A number of voices in the American religious landscape would suggest that Abraham might be the model for what has happened in congregational leadership over the past years as we have negotiated our expectations down to minimal levels. Indeed, have we negotiated our expectations of congregational leadership down to such a minimal, or at times and in places, less than functional level that the leadership no longer serves our congregations well?

In recent months, the Alban Institute

has surveyed the landscape and uncovered a good deal of episodic research that suggests that the news is not good. In many quarters major clergy shortages are being reported, and the stream of seminary graduates who actually intend to serve as parish leaders will be insufficient to replace those planning to retire.

Questions are also being raised about the quality and competence of those, both clergy and lay, who are serving as leaders in our congregations. When compared with applicants to other graduate professional academic programs, seminary applicants register some of the lowest test scores. Even our healthiest leaders do not feel equipped to address the spiritual questions and concerns of their people; a large percentage of professional clergy evidence symptoms of burnout or depression. Our most gifted lay leaders often feel a stronger call to serving on community boards and participating in non-faith-based programs where they feel a clearer sense of purpose and accomplishment.

More complete reports on the state of congregational leadership and our processes for preparing people for leadership are offered elsewhere in this issue of CONGREGATIONS and in the Alban Institute Special Report on Leadership. I propose simply that we consider our own loss of

the meaning of spiritual leadership as a contributing factor to the current situation. I would argue that we, like Abraham, have negotiated our hopes and expectations down because we have not been assured of the high calling of leadership in a faith community.

Diminished Leadership Roles

The feared and frustrating description that I learned early in my own parish leadership was the trap of being "overworked but underemployed." Do we have people who do not rise to the challenge of congregational leadership because they understand that "busyness" is not an indicator of importance? More troubling, do we have people who do respond to this call because they understand that nothing of measurable importance will be asked of them, and the congregation therefore feels like a safe place to step forward in the leader's role?

I would suggest that the role of leader in the faith community has been diminished in several ways, of which I would point quickly to three. **First**, spiritual leadership has been trivialized into institutional management, a role beleaguered by the multiple preferences and factions that exist in congregations unable to find satisfaction. **Second**, we have placed our

The Alban Institute Special Report on Leadership is available for free download from the "What's New" screen at www.alban.org.



spiritual leaders in a false intermediary position between our own needs as we have defined them and a God whom we assume to be available but increasingly insignificant in a world dominated by the promises of technology. And **third**, we have limited our spiritual leaders by expecting them to be the models and personification of civil behavior and cultural moderation that others feel free to choose or reject in their daily lives.

Our expectations about spiritual leadership have become unclear; we project onto them, as we do onto the therapist's professional neutrality, all our indi-

vidual wants, needs, preferences, and complaints. This lack of clarity regarding our expectations of leaders becomes mirrored in the confusion of those who feel called to that role. Reflecting the experience of other faith traditions, the recent report of the Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi notes,

A decreasing number of rabbis and rabbinical students, in all streams of North American Judaism, intend to seek positions in congregations. They cite concerns about schedule, boundaries in personal and profes-

sional life, employment security, compensation, the complex nature of the diverse responsibilities that comprise congregational work, and the consequences for physical and emotional health of being on-call at all times... The work of the congregational rabbi has evolved in ways that make the job simply overwhelming and unworkable for many rabbis.¹

Unclear roles and expectations make our leaders subject to everything without significant responsibility for anything.

Unclear roles and expectations make our leaders subject to everything without significant responsibility for anything.

Valuing Spiritual Leadership

Have we negotiated our expectations down because we have not known what to ask of importance from our spiritual leaders? We have asked for trivial, unrealistic things. We have not valued spiritual leadership and therefore have rewarded our leaders poorly. We have ended with calls for leadership in which the workload is great but the challenge is small.

Perhaps the adventuresome, worthwhile response would be to negotiate our expectations of leadership *up*, not down. What if we risked an assumption that spiritual leadership is important? What if we believed that faith centered on a relationship with God has something significant to say to us in our work lives, families, marriages, friendships, and communities? Such a belief would certainly be countercultural—it would mean standing independent from many current cultural assumptions and adopting a perspective

different from the prevailing scientific worldview.

Truth with Meaning

“There is arguably no more important and pressing topic than the relation of science and religion in the modern world,” says philosopher Ken Wilber in the opening lines of *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*. “Science is clearly one of the most profound methods that humans have yet devised for discovering truth, while religion remains the single greatest force for generating meaning.”² Yet ours is a moment when we seek ways of holding both truth and meaning. This then, is a time to assert clear expectations that leaders who can frame meaning have a word of importance to say.

In order for meaning to stand equal to truth we need to call, prepare, support, and reward leaders who can speak the word of meaning in the midst of multiple, and often competing, truths. This is, in fact, the role of prophetic leadership in the Old Testament sense of seeing what everyone else sees but identifying and pronouncing the hand of God where others seek simpler explanations.

Using Wilber’s culturally forced dichotomy of science

and religion—of truth and meaning—we can see also the related but distinct leadership roles of specialist (science) and generalist (religion). If we are to negotiate up our expectations of our spiritual leaders we will need to call and respond to people who are “deep generalists.” Corporate consultants Jagdish Sheth and Andrew Sobel define a deep generalist as “someone who has a core expertise onto which he or she layers knowledge of related and sometimes unrelated fields.”³ While that may sound a bit dry and detached, it speaks of having a very deep knowledge of one’s own truth but also having sufficient insight, maturity, experience, and wisdom to be able to maintain an informal, generalized approach to complex situations. For a spiritual leader it means being able to stand deeply in one’s faith while functioning broadly across multiple areas and experiences of life to bring new understanding, direction, and hope to those who are led.

Seeing New Realities

I consider Harrell Beck, who taught Old Testament wisdom literature at Boston University School of Theology, to be such a deep generalist spiritual leader. A friend and mentor to me in my early years of ministry, Harrell taught classes for which one needed to be a middler or senior at the seminary in order to gain a prized place on the roster. But despite the limit to the number of class participants (usually around 20), the room was routinely filled with an additional 25 to 40 students who would come simply to hear Harrell’s opening prayer before the teaching began. The prayer would focus on the life of the seminary but reach out to include issues of the city and events of the nation and world. At the conclusion of the prayer a few moments would be given to allow non-class members to file out, and then the teaching would begin.

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Always amazed at his prayers and the response that he evoked in so many of us, I remember asking Harrell how he understood so many things so clearly that he could address not only our own community but also issues and events that it took whole newspapers to chronicle. His response was the simple but disciplined truth of the deep generalist spiritual leader. Harrell quickly admitted that he did not understand all that I ascribed to him. "But I do understand wisdom literature," he said. "And I can talk about what the world looks like when you look through the lens that God has given us in the Old Testament." He stood deeply within the discipline of his faith, but he was able to move broadly across life experience. I wonder what our congregations would be if we had more such leaders who stood deeply in their understanding of the faith and had the ability to help us see new realities in our own experience of life.

Valuing New Gifts

What if we negotiated our expectations up and called deep generalists of faith as our leaders in congregations? Costs and challenges would be involved. We would need to move outside of cultural norms to value the strange gifts our new leaders would bring. Those leaders would need to be exceptionally mature and able to stand outside of cultural norms, knowing that their gifts are valuable.

For example, our culture gives time, place, and speech to the specialist who holds some word of truth. Consider how one must go to the office of a physician even for visits requiring none of the equipment at that office, and how waiting rooms are often filled with people whose time is assumed to be less important than the physician's. In a recent visit to a medical specialist I was interrupted whenever my answers did not go where the physician felt necessary, and the physician only

If we are to negotiate up our expectations of our spiritual leaders we will need to call and respond to people who are "deep generalists."

gave clear information when challenged. Clearly, speech was assumed to belong to him.

To the contrary, deep generalist leaders must be mature and centered people who understand that they are to listen as the more important part of conversation and that speech belongs to the one who has the need. Deep generalist leaders understand that they must go to the place where the person is faced with need—to the hospital bed, the home, the lunch meeting, the committee meeting, the unexpected confrontation in the community. Deep generalist leaders understand that timing belongs to the other and that the word of meaning cannot be spoken until the time is ripe for listening.

There is a personal and relational cost to be paid by deep generalists of meaning who can stand maturely and securely in a culture that more naturally rewards specialists of truth. There is also the cost of preparation that must be paid by those called to this most unique of leadership roles.

Seminary training for clergy and adult Bible and faith study for laity are only the entry points for these leaders. They learn the faith deeply not just to teach others but, more importantly, to be able to stand deeply within a perspective that allows them to see and announce the world from the very different perspective of faith.

But the learning must continue. Leaders must learn the culture in order to

speak to it, a task with purpose much deeper than market research and sensitivity. They must learn the particular congregation in order to vision with the people. They must learn the lives, the professions, the events of their people in order to bring faith meaning to their experiences. Perhaps most difficult, they must learn themselves in order to stand in relationship with, but free of limiting dependence on, others. To call, prepare, and support such spiritual leaders bears the heavy cost of rethinking and redesigning the ways in which we will train and evaluate them.

Abraham negotiated his expectations down in the hope of saving Sodom. We too have tried this with our expectations of congregational leadership, only to discover that we too have lost what we hoped to save. Hope comes not in negotiating down to meet minimal requirements. Hope comes in raising our expectations of spiritual leadership. Hope lies in challenging gifted and risk-taking people to a place of leadership of meaning based on faith. Hope lies in our own willingness to receive and reward leadership that may, in fact, change us. ❁

Notes

1. *The Rabbi-Congregation Relationship: A Vision for the 21st Century* (Philadelphia: Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi, 2001), pp. 1–2.
2. New York: Random House, 1998, p. 3.
3. Jagdish Sheth and Andrew Sobel, *Clients for Life: How Great Professionals Develop Breakthrough Relationships* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), p. 87.

New Life for Dry Bones

LEADERSHIP IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH

Jacqueline J. Lewis-Tillman

The prophet Ezekiel tells of a vision in which he is sent into a valley of bones by the Lord. The dry bones symbolize the people's despondency in their time of exile, and God asks Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?"

The late Rev. Dr. Samuel Proctor believed that we are again living in a valley of dry bones. It can certainly be said that this is a dry-bones time for African Americans. The Children's Defense Fund reports that every 44 minutes a black baby dies; every seven minutes a black baby is born to a mother with late or no prenatal care; every 85 seconds a black child is born into poverty; and every 40 seconds of the school day a black child drops out.¹ Dr. Proctor wondered, as do I at times, "Can these bones live?"

Dr. Proctor believed that the answer lies in five separate efforts that need to be blended: individual involvement, family rejuvenation, specialized teacher training for public schools, a national program to recapture falling and lost youth, and *more committed church leadership*.²

Even at a time when many mainline churches are seeing declines in membership, church attendance, and giving, studies show that churches are still the central institutional sector in most African American communities.³ How effective is the church in addressing the real needs of African American communities? What kind of leadership is required in such a time as this?

I recently had the pleasure of talking with two great thinkers and religious leaders—Rev. Dr. Cheryl J. Sanders and Rev. Dr. Robert M. Franklin—who are renowned for their commitment to the African American church and the church at large. We spoke about signs of strength and markers of hope; about challenges for leadership and unfinished agendas in terms of the well-being of God's people; about the church as a national and global citizen. Here are their insightful and prophetic comments.



Rev. Dr. Cheryl J. Sanders
Professor of Christian Ethics,
Howard University Divinity
School, and Pastor, Third Street
Church of God, Washington,
D.C.

Dr. Sanders, as you observe the work of the African American church, what do you see?

Well, I see a mixed picture. I see signs of people being empowered—led by gifted and empowering leaders. But I also see people who are weary. There is a struggle to stay motivated, and there are so many challenges black leaders face. There are such high expectations of black church leaders—activism, community work, et cetera. They have full plates. But I see breakthroughs.

Where do you see those—are there any in your church?

I see breakthroughs everywhere I look. For example, in our church we minister to the poor. We do it with a humane, affirming mutuality rather than the soup kitchen approach. One thing we have been able to do is hire a full-time social worker. People can make an appointment with the social worker to talk about drug treatment, job searches, things like that. Ministry partners help pay the social worker's salary, but we are the point of contact. I see signs that people's lives are changing. But you have to

be in it for the long haul. This means being committed to be who we are called to be, in season and out. When season is in, you look for a breakthrough. When it's not, you hang in there.

You talked about people being empowered for ministry. What do you see in terms of lay leadership?

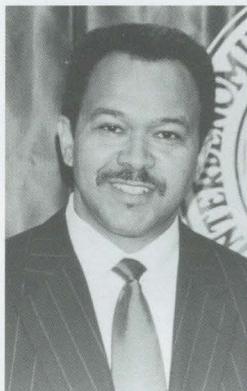
In some clergy I see a desire to up the ante *and* to up their titles. For example, in my denomination we have a strict congregational polity. But many individuals are becoming consecrated bishops. Is the increase in power a way to diminish the power of laypeople? I'm not saying this necessarily means that laypeople are not empowered. But it looks like further empowering the people who have had power all along. We need to ask ourselves: What kinds of governance will serve the needs of the church? What best serves the community at large? Why are we here, to encourage individuals to have power—or to facilitate our organizations and bring the power of God to bear in the lives of people?

What can the African American church do to lead the church at large?

I am doing a Bible study on Genesis and Exodus. One thing we are discovering is how difficult it is to convince people to want to be free. Empowerment of people, liberation of people—these are the issues that should matter to African American people who are still discriminated against. We are not free; we are an oppressed people. The empowerment of African American people is critical for them to see that, morally, when we fight for justice we must implement justice. We need to see this in church leadership and secular leadership also. This means moving toward equity and reconciliation. Let's not pretend that it didn't happen but repent. Let's take responsibility for the stuff we have done wrong, for the benefit of the next generation. In slavery times, people prayed for a better future for the next generation. We are blasé about education, blasé about health care. The black church has not distinguished itself as a place that gives priority to the children. We need to take responsibility for the future.

Where are signs of hope?

Dr. Delores Carpenter has a new book, *A Time for Honor*.⁴ She has a lot to say about what African American women are doing in ministry. The empowerment of these women for leadership is one of the most meaningful signs of hope for the African American church. Women bring more of a focus on the family in ministry. In true partnership, then, we can move forward as a family of God rather than as one group pitted against the other.



Rev. Dr. Robert M. Franklin
President, Interdenominational
Theological Center, Atlanta,
Georgia

Dr. Franklin, as a public theologian, what do you think are the challenges facing the African American church today?

Part of the challenge for the black church is reconciling the unfinished agenda of the civil rights movement. This means eradicating economic injustice, which includes helping people who are at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. Dr. King would invest his energy here in terms of ethical commitment. It means the alleviation of poverty. We must help people move from dependency and welfare to self-sufficiency. But the mission of public theology isn't simply the social gospel agenda. It includes the larger responsibility of vision, imagination, and discourse that will move us toward an inclusive, just, and beloved community. At a time of dramatic demographic change, we must reckon with the fact that we are one nation on a tiny globe. How are we global citizens, and what is our responsibility in that global community? Bringing the values of the Christian faith to engage that vision means sharing prosperity, reconciliation, forgiveness, and responsible race relations. Ultimately, the question is what kind of world will we bequeath to the children, given the wretched condition of public education, the large numbers of our youth who are incarcerated, the public health crisis of HIV/AIDS, and the disturbing manner in which we've reconciled ourselves to violence in public and private life? These symptoms of a deeper spiritual crisis ought to keep mature Christians awake at night. Vision and imagination are works of the Spirit; what is locked inside them can be released and give us a plan from which to work.

What gives you hope?

I am encouraged by the tentative but determined actions taken by denominations, local congregations, and individuals to reckon with America's most difficult challenges, for example, the determination to speak the unspeakable. When denominations

continued on page 31



The Good Life

CELEBRATING THE PASTORAL VOCATION

Martin B. Copenhaver

A large handful of my friends have left the parish ministry in recent years. It has gotten my attention. There are times when I feel a bit like a character in an Agatha Christie story. As people all around me are getting bumped off, I can't help but wonder, Who will be the next to go?

Although each friend's circumstances are different, there are commonalities as well. All were very able pastors; none left with bitterness. They have not ceased to believe in the church, but over time the demands of the pastoral life began to seem too great and the rewards too few.

When I shared this concern with a seminary president, he responded that in his view, the greatest leadership crisis facing the church today is not the number of under-qualified pastors serving congregations but the number of competent, faithful pastors whose congregations are prospering under their leadership, who are loved by their congregations . . . and who want out.

Indeed, a consensus seems to be gathering that pastors are a beleaguered lot—overburdened and underpaid, overwhelmed and under-appreciated.

I have spent 20 years in the pastoral ministry—too many years to be able to dismiss the challenges. There may be ways to make pastoral ministry significantly less challenging, but somehow I doubt it. Many of the challenges are intrinsic to the vocation.

What seems urgently needed is a revival of the pastoral imagination. I am convinced that only a deepened sense of call will enable pastors to fall in love once again with our strange and wonderful vocation, in spite of its challenges. Such a revival would help us see that those

aspects of the pastoral life commonly viewed as most demanding are the very ones that, when viewed and approached differently, make the pastoral life a good life.

The Last Generalists

Today pastors often feel a glaring lack of expertise. We are among the last generalists in a culture that draws people into ever narrower areas of specialization. For the most part, generalists are viewed as those who have neither the time nor the expertise to do anything particularly well. In the increasingly mobile employment world, expertise means job security because you can take it with you. But what is the pastor's area of expertise?

Pastors' lack of specific expertise may be felt all the more keenly because we are trained largely by experts. In seminary, we learn biblical interpretation from biblical scholars, pastoral care from psychologists, and preaching from those who spend more time on the preaching circuit than in a local church. It is not surprising, then, that when pastors serve their first churches they can feel inadequate in virtually every pastoral duty. For example, it is telling that in many congregations psychotherapeutic terminology has virtually overwhelmed the language of the church in descriptions of the human condition. No wonder, then, that pastoral care is often viewed as little more than the preliminary ministrations of those who arrive first at the scene of an accident. The best that can be expected is to hold on until the experts arrive. Likewise, after having been trained in the scholarly tools of the academy, pastors often feel unqualified to interpret Scripture in their preaching without recourse to commentaries by scholarly experts.

The generalist role, as practiced by pastors, may be increasingly rare, but that may be all the more reason to revel in it.

I am convinced that only a deepened sense of call will enable pastors to fall in love once again with our strange and wonderful vocation.

Certainly, there is more variety in the tasks one performs. More than this, a pastor's work is not simply distinct tasks performed at different times. Rather, the various tasks relate to each other in dynamic ways, setting each one into a richer context. In this way the pastor's various roles—worship leader, preacher, teacher, prophet, administrator, caregiver—inform and enhance one another. The pastor's work becomes not only more interesting but also more effective.

A Unifying Role

The lineups at most preaching conferences do not feature many local church pastors. But a sermon is not a general and disembodied religious discourse. A sermon is an embodied word spoken to a particular body—the congregation. So the most effective preaching usually is from a local congregation's own pastor. The sermon may take its final form in the pastor's study, but it has been taking shape all week long, in every encounter, in the midst of lives that are shared, as the pastor asks, What might the scriptural Word have to say, at this point in our life together, to these people I care so much about?

Pastors are given privileged access to the lives of people, but not in a mere therapeutic sense. Our interactions with parishioners are not confined to 50-minute appointments in a well-ordered office, on a fee-for-service basis. Our parishioners cannot be described in clin-

ical, two-dimensional terms such as *clients* or *patients* because we see them in too rich a variety of contexts and relate to them in too many different ways. The pastor who listens to a parishioner's account of his life also shares in that life in important ways. The person who is counseled by the pastor may be the same person who, later in the week, takes part in a prayer group and presides at a church meeting—not to mention all the other settings, from supermarket to soccer game to dinner party, in which the pastor may interact meaningfully with the same parishioner. The pastor knows the parishioner's family as well, and in a similarly rich variety of contexts. Out of these interactions can develop a thickly textured relationship that is nothing short of unique.

It is because God cannot be confined to any one area of life, even the one commonly deemed the "spiritual life," that the pastor cannot be anything but a generalist. The pastor brings unifying questions to every encounter and setting, as diverse as they may be. Those questions are, Where is God in this? What might God say to us here?

For similar reasons, the pastor is called to be a generalist by the wide range of concerns in which he is engaged. In addition to matters that are considered sacred or churchly, a pastor must attend to economics (on personal, congregational, and societal levels), politics and civic life, health, education, the workplace,



family life, culture, and the arts. This is why most pastors read widely, across a variety of disciplines, in a way that is rare in our culture. Our reading is more than a mere foraging for sermon fodder. Rather, our involvement in this broad spectrum of disciplines is required for us to be faithfully attentive to God in everyday life. We do not seek to be experts in any of these realms, but neither can we do our job well if we are not attending to the ways they interact and shape the lives we live. This requires deep reflection and keen discernment.

To be sure, that is a tall order. So for a pastor, the role of a generalist is not an invitation to an intellectually languid life. Quite the contrary: intellectually, the pastoral life is potentially demanding and substantive.

If a pastor engages with this rich variety of roles and realms in a manner that is both reflective and discerning, she can develop a kind of understanding that would not otherwise be possible. Indeed, if only a specialist can acquire expertise, perhaps the gift that is given over time to the generalist is something like wisdom.

An Integrated Life

The pastoral life resists being contained in other ways as well. There are fewer boundaries between work and family and between one's private life and public life. Pastors are not issued "off duty" signs when they simply want to pick up a quart of milk at a local store. There is no escaping the pastoral role. It follows one around relentlessly.

Even though this characteristic of the pastoral life can be a source of stress, it also contributes to an integrated life. People observe "Take Your Child to Work Day" so their children will have some notion of what their parents do with most of their waking hours. By contrast, the children of pastors know the people their

parents work with and are known by them as well. Pastors' children are familiar with the principal places where their parents work. Often pastors practice hospitality in a way that makes the household a site for ministry and engagement with the outside world. In other words, this way of life can offer a coherence between one's private and public life that is extremely rare.

It is telling that the old English term for person, *parson*, came to be used to describe a pastor, as though the person and the vocation were so completely integrated that they had become synonymous. Today we may not refer to "the legal life" or "the medical life," but we still speak of "the pastoral life," because even in our time it is a way of life that can be more fully integrated.

Freedom in Space and Time

Inherent in the pastoral role is an unmistakable fluidity, even freedom, in time and space. In a given week the pastor will find himself or herself in many and varied settings: the office, the living room, the booth at a local diner, the parking lot, the hospital room, the sanctuary, and the classroom. All of these are natural settings for the work of a pastor. None of them could be considered "off site."

Unlike people in other professions, pastors can seize any opportunity and use any setting to conduct their work. A physician who cannot be without her beeper when having dinner with friends and an attorney who must take a cell phone to the beach while watching his children swim may express resentment about the ways in which their work lives seem to seep into and overwhelm their personal lives. This is far from the kind of integration that is possible in the pastoral life.

Freedom also characterizes the pastor's use of time. Most pastors work long hours, but in most instances they are

It is because God cannot be confined to any one area of life, even the one commonly deemed the "spiritual life," that the pastor cannot be anything but a generalist.

given a rare freedom to structure their use of time. To be sure, a pastor must meet certain expectations and even perform routine tasks, but there is nothing approaching the constraints on the use of time found in other professions. A pastor does not need to deal with quotas, billable hours, or the number of patients seen or the amount of goods produced. Pastors who fulfill basic expectations are largely free to interpret their own sense of call. The schedules of no two pastors are alike. How each pastor spends time is largely a reflection of that person's unique gifts. I have known pastors who have integrated their own interests into their ministries by writing hymns, producing plays, reading Calvin, or even making pottery. Many in other professions can only imagine having such freedom in retirement.

Blessed by Confinement

There are ways, of course, in which the pastoral life is quite constrained. It is confined to the life and practices of the church. It is a life anchored in text, font, and table, and in a particular community of faith. Perhaps it is the communal aspect of the pastoral life that can seem most confining, at times even oppressively so. There is no freedom from the congregation—no escaping the people. Every day a pastor must live with the foibles, failings, needs, and demands of people. The pastor might not choose to associate with many of these people, at least not at such close range, were it not for the inescapable fact that pastor and people are tethered together in the community of faith.

What is sometimes experienced as confinement, however, provides a distinctive rootedness. Over time there can grow a depth of relationship, not only with people but also with God, which arises out of the very given-ness of the community of faith. It takes shape in serious, extended engagement with both the story and the people.

So we have reason to challenge any implication that the deepest theological reflection must take place away from the local church in seminaries and universities—a notion that would certainly seem strange to the likes of the apostle Paul. It is not a coincidence that America's greatest Christian thinkers have all been local church pastors: Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushnell, Walter Rauschenbush, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Martin Luther King, Jr. This speaks to the ways in which theological engagement is more than a disembodied discipline. Rather, Christian theology is doggedly incarnational. It is in the church, as the story touches down in the lives of actual people, that theological engagement is deepened and enhanced. It is true that life in a parish—particularly among parishioners!—can be confining. There is no escaping it: pastors are stuck with this story and this people. But when one is not allowed to roam more widely, one is often permitted to dig more deeply.

Pastors are also expected to integrate spiritual practices into their lives—practices such as worship, prayer, the study of Scripture, visiting the sick, and aiding the poor. Christians who work in non-church settings sometimes struggle to find ways to fit these practices into their full lives;

I have come to delight in the realization that being a pastor makes no sense in a functional world.

for pastors, these practices are our lives. We are supported by the church, both financially and otherwise, so that we may engage in them. Of course, we do so to build up the church. Nevertheless, as a kind of blessed bonus, these are precisely the practices that nurture a relationship with God.

The Gift of Preaching

Perhaps nothing is more central to the pastoral life than preaching. At the same time, perhaps nothing can seem more anomalous in a culture that prizes productivity and efficiency. The process of sermon preparation is inefficient, often in the service of indeterminate results. It requires that time and space be set aside weekly, if not daily, for a pastor to be immersed in ancient texts. Numerous hours are invested for a 20-minute oration that usually is delivered but once. The practice would probably not stand up to the scrutiny of a standard cost/benefit analysis.

Nevertheless, there is yet great power in preaching. For the preacher, sermon preparation can be a devotional discipline like no other. As the pastor engages the text, she can find herself called to attention. The pastor's life and thought become concentrated by the engagement. She can find herself attending to interactions with people and circumstances in the world with a heightened sense of awareness. Moments that might otherwise remain opaque or unnoticed become transparent and revelatory in surprising ways. This kind of work is unique to the pastoral life. That a community of people would ask someone, their pastor, to enter

into this kind of engagement on a regular basis on their behalf, and make it possible for the pastor to do so, is nothing short of a great gift.

The ancient and odd practice of preaching manages somehow to be a gift to the congregation as well. There is still power in someone plainly telling others what has been seen and heard in that person's engagement with the ancient story of God's interaction with the world. Preaching still has the ability to nurture and nourish a congregation, in ways that cannot be measured and for reasons that remain mysterious. In fact, the preacher may be the one who is most aware of the mysterious power of preaching. The preacher knows what he has put into the sermon and also hears from the congregation how much they have gotten out of it—a loaves and fishes miracle reenacted on a weekly basis. On such occasions preachers can be overcome with something like awe that amid their own words something else, another Word, has been communicated. They realize, too, that they can no more take credit for what has happened than a wick can take credit for a flame or a cello accept praise for a sonata.

Nevertheless, the mystery at the heart of preaching means that it is efficacious in ways that are difficult to trace, particularly in a culture that demands quantification and efficiency.

The Benefits of Not Fitting In

I have come to delight in the realization that being a pastor makes no sense in a functional world. The pastoral life is not good for anything in any way that a con-

sumerist culture might be expected to appreciate. We pastors do not produce anything that this culture would want. In fact, we don't produce anything at all. Even the fact that pastors are highly educated and yet not notably well paid not only makes us something of an oddity in a materialistic culture, but also something of an affront.

So being a pastor is increasingly countercultural. That is one of the reasons it seems so difficult and also why it is worth doing. If, indeed, the pastoral life seems out of favor, there is great opportunity in that. It means that we no longer need to bear the burden of our culture's expectations. No longer will we be tempted to pose as something that the culture deems more worthwhile—as counselors, managers, or agents of social change. Much of what is described as clergy burnout may be the result of pastors trying to assume roles and take on tasks that are not central to our vocation but that the culture might value. To be without prestige and power is to be free to respond to our unique call. This is not the kind of work one would choose at a job fair. The appeal of pastoral ministry is not evident, or even available, to all. Nevertheless, to those who feel called to this work, it can be the most glorious of all vocations.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, on the occasion of his retirement from the pastoral ministry in the middle of the last century, reflected on the unique joys of the pastoral life by saying, "If I had a thousand lives to live in this century, I would go into the parish ministry with every one of them." That is the statement of someone who has an unassailable sense of call.

As pastors, we need such testimonies. We need to remind ourselves and one another that being a local church pastor is a difficult job—and can be a wonderful life. ❁

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IN SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY



Matthew Baek

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A Leadership Story

ALBAN INSTITUTE PRESIDENT JAMES P. WIND
SEES HOPE IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS

Not too long ago I stood in Explorers Hall of the National Geographic Society's headquarters in Washington, D.C., staring at the *James Caird*, a 22-foot whaleboat. Eighty-five years ago, six men sailed this boat 800 miles across open, brutally cold, unforgiving seas. After 10 months on board their larger icebound ship, the *Endurance*, the full party of 28, led by Sir Ernest H. Shackleton, abandoned their original goal of accomplishing the first crossing of Antarctica and instead crossed great stretches of ice in their search for a way home.

As I looked at the boat I pondered the elusive meaning of the word leadership. Shackleton had led his group on the riskiest of adventures, and they failed to meet their objective. But out of this failure came one of the twentieth century's most striking examples of leadership.

After months of dragging three small boats they later abandoned and a week of sailing the open sea, Shackleton's crew reached Elephant Island. It was the first time they had been on solid ground in 497 days. After making a safe new camp, Shackleton and five of the party, navigating with only a sextant and charts, sailed the *James Caird* for another 16 days to a new landfall. Leaving three men behind in another carefully constructed camp, Shackleton set out with the others to cross the uncharted territory of South Georgia. After 36 frigid hours traversing rugged, mountainous terrain, they found help. Still not finished, Shackleton returned to both camps to retrieve the crew he had left behind. Amazingly, of the 28 men who set out on this adventure, 25 survived.

As I looked at Shackleton's worn-out boat, I pondered all the things that he

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did, all the decisions he made, and the risks he took to get his men home alive. Maintaining hope against the bleakest of odds, keeping his crew busy and healthy, selecting which things to leave in the doomed *Endurance* and which to take along (the whole Bible was too heavy, so he cut out two pages of the Book of Job), and skillfully plotting a course across unknown territory, Shackleton provided the kind of elemental leadership that makes the difference between life and death.¹

Defining the Mystery

The mystery embodied by Shackleton still eludes us. When, in 1978, James MacGregor Burns set out to provide a definitive analysis of leadership, he noted that "leadership as a concept is dissolved into small and discrete meanings,"² acknowledging that a recent study had counted more than 130 different definitions for the term.

There is an enormous leadership industry that touches almost every sector of our society. Bookshelves groan, continuing education programs are glutted, and waves of gurus wash through our institutional lives, all promising to help provide leadership. But we continue to cry out about its absence.

The world of religion—the world of congregations—is no different. We have our own booming literature about leadership, or at least about the need for it. Pull a book about congregational health off the shelf and see how long it takes to find that leadership is essential for a congregation

to flourish. But even in our own sector, we face Burns' problem. We want clear, compelling definitions of leadership, and we find the word dissolving before our eyes. We may not be seeking the kind of leaders that Shackleton was, but we do sense a deep need for leadership that goes beyond what we frequently see.

For the past year and a half, the Alban Institute has been taking a fresh look at the matter of congregational leadership. What we have learned both frightens us and inspires us to do new things. We have interviewed key leaders and experts from around the country, we have assembled a large number of studies that touch upon various aspects of our current leadership situation, and we have tested our preliminary conclusions with a sizable number of clergy and lay leaders.³

Dysfunction and Ferment

Here is a snapshot of what we have learned: The clergy system in America is seriously troubled. While the word crisis has been overworked in religious circles and in the culture at large, we nevertheless heard from many people about the crisis they see.

Denominational studies point to a growing clergy shortage. This is a Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish fact of life. Part of this shortage is due to a declining pool of new candidates for ministry. Another part has to do with the growing number of small congregations that cannot afford to support a full-time clergyperson.

This shortage indicates several other important realities. The ministerium of America is aging. People are entering ordained ministry later in life and serving for shorter periods. Also, a serious under-supply of clergy under the age of age 35 is a sign that the old feeder system of church-related schools and the old mentoring system by which established clergy selected and groomed young people for ministry have both become increasingly obsolete.⁴

There are other ominous signals. The seminaries that train the majority of clergy are receiving significant criticism, both for their lack of rigorous selection criteria and for the relevance of the education they provide to real-world congregational leadership. A large number of denominational executives, seminary professors, clergy, and lay leaders express growing concern about the quality of new seminary graduates and the students who will succeed them.

In addition, many reports give painful evidence of malaise and low morale in the ministry. One study estimates that 30 percent of a particular denomination's clergy love their work and are thriving, while another 30 percent feel strong ambivalence about their callings, and a full 40 percent are either "well on their way to burnout" or already in the stage of "advanced burnout."

These reports indicate that for many clergy, ordained ministry is a lonely life. The systems that once supported clergy now are perceived by many to be unsafe places for openly confronting the deepest challenges before them. Several reports indicate that clergy—especially women clergy—feel that the people and structures that were intended to supervise and support them are caught in dysfunctional patterns. A recurring theme is the tension between supervision and support in denominational structures. Many clergy

wonder how they can talk honestly about the most personal and most troubled parts of their lives with colleagues who compete with them for positions, or with supervisors who will place them in their next position.

We heard a great deal about the economic and health burdens of clergy (one of the lowest paid professions in the nation), about the stresses on their families, and about the problematic status of the profession itself. Repeatedly throughout the research studies clergy voiced their hunger for safe places to form genuine learning environments among communities of authentic peers. Even more deeply, they yearned for new spiritual resources to refresh their parched souls.

That's part of the story. Another part has to do with the ferment we encountered outside of America's denominational clergy system. When we looked at the local level and at individual congregations, we saw much that was encouraging.

We learned about a whole new group of leaders that is emerging in American religion—some call them lay pastors or lay ministers—and of the educational programs that have been created to prepare them for roles once filled primarily by clergy. We met countless lay people who have drunk deeply from the twentieth-century theologies that proclaim the ministry of the whole people of God and who look to their congregations for support in their daily vocations. At the institutional level we found stunning evidence of congregational creativity; small and large churches and synagogues are creating alliances, forming not-for-profit organizations, and initiating countless programs to respond to the deep wounds in our society. We also noted the emergence of "new paradigm" congregations and networks of support among them. Underneath all of this abundant evidence of ferment ran a powerful and pervasive spiritual hunger.

A New Awakening?

What do we make of all this? Increasingly, we at the Institute find ourselves employing the metaphor of awakening to comprehend the paradox of dysfunction and ferment. Several prominent historians, economists, and other observers of American life have discerned a rhythm of awakenings in American life. Most commonly known are the culture-wide First and Second Great Awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some have seen another awakening at the end of the nineteenth century and others suggest that we are in midst of one now.

Awakenings occur when a society encounters so much change and turmoil that old ways of organizing life break down. Simultaneously, innovators bring forth a whole host of new ideas, new interpretations of old texts and traditions, new moral concerns, and new proposals about how to shape our lives. These awakenings are times of revitalization in which dysfunction and ferment are always intertwined.

For now, we hold this word awakening tentatively. Awakenings are not inevitable. As the past century reminds us, sometimes dysfunction and ferment interact to create chaos and lead to drastic, even totalitarian, solutions. The jury is still out on whether or not we are in the midst of a real awakening. But in this in-between time, the challenge is to provide leadership.

To be sure, this leadership will not be exactly like what Shackleton offered on the Antarctic ice. In fact, it should not be. We live in very different times and in very different circumstances. Most of the readers of this magazine are leaders of congregations in an environment not of extreme cold but of extreme change and choice. But we must be as innovative and resourceful as Shackleton was. We must learn to read the realities, to change our

plans, to build up lost and frightened people into purposeful communities, and to value the life entrusted to our care.

As I pondered the now empty and very old *James Caird*, it occurred to me that what I valued most in Shackleton was his response to failure. Locked in the ice packs, he faced the fact that his original vision for himself and his crew was unrealistic. Rather than clinging to that vision and dying, he let go of it—at least for a time—and formed a vision that saved almost all of their lives. He tried Plan B and then improvised his way to safety.

Part of our challenge, if this is to be a genuine time of awakening for our religious communities, is to let go of some old and cherished visions and to form new ones that may be even more inspiring than those left behind. We must face failure not by trying harder to do the old things but by risking experiment and attempting the previously unthinkable.

My colleagues at the Alban Institute have been thinking intentionally about the appropriate response to this new leadership situation for almost as long a time as Shackleton and his crew were stranded in Antarctica. Our journey has, of course, not been as dramatic or as dangerous. But we feel it is time for us to find new ways to help American congregations muster new leadership. We look forward to thinking together with you about our reading of the situation and working with you on new initiatives that we will soon announce. ❁

Notes

1. The story is told by Kim Heacox in *Shackleton: The Antarctic Challenge* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1999).
2. *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 2.
3. To review a detailed account of our research, download the new Alban Institute Special Report on Leadership from www.alban.org.
4. See CONGREGATIONS, March/April 2001.

Followers Wanted

AN ANTIDOTE TO SELF-HELP

S. Chapin Garner



William Carragher

As I browsed through my local Barnes & Noble bookstore recently, thumbing through books that piqued my interest while wondering if it would be too indulgent to get a second Mocha Frappuccino from the attached Starbucks, I found myself lost in an enormous section entitled “Self-Help.”

Perhaps you have found such a section in your local bookstore. Self-help is one of the most popular and fastest-growing areas of interest in our society. You can find how-to books on everything from building a deck for your home to psychoanalyzing your disobedient pet. Volume after volume can be found on leadership, taking control of your life, how to be your own boss, and how to “Swim with the Sharks” and “Awaken the Giant Within.” The designation “self-help” itself speaks to what we value: “No, no I don’t need help, I can handle it all myself—I just need a good book.”

Which One Are You?

Needless to say, I have never located a “Following” section in that same bookstore. I wouldn’t even venture to ask a salesperson where I might find books on following, because I know the only response would be a blank stare. Barnes & Noble bookstores don’t have “Follower” sections because there is little interest from either writers or readers on the subject. However, give us countless biographies on self-made men and women, offer us best-selling rags-to-riches stories, publish books that teach us how to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, and we keep pulling out our wallets in hopes of living that life.

I clearly remember a conversation my father had with me countless times when I was a teenager battling peer pressure. (I suspect that many of us have been a part of similar conversations as either a parent or a child.) My father would sit me down, stare intently at me, and say, “Chapin, there are two kinds of people in the world. There are leaders, and there are followers. Which one are you going to be?” In all the times we had that conversation, not once did I ever consider responding, “Dad, I’ve given it some thought, and I think I’d really like to follow the crowd for a while.”

Our desire to lead, to take control of our lives, to navigate our course in life without having to ask for directions, is captured completely in the way products are advertised in our society. Look at the advertising campaign Volkswagen has been using for the past couple of years: “On the road of life there are passengers, and there are drivers.” Who’s wanted? Drivers are wanted!

They’re great commercials; they feed on our desire to take charge, to own the road, to pilot our destiny. Choose to be a passenger? Is that even an option? Passengers are nothing more than luggage with appendages. How dull. How utterly lacking in self-motivation. In our world, drivers are wanted; the message comes through loud and clear.

A More Excellent Way

But that is not the Christian calling. Our calling is radically different. We’re called to be passengers, followers, people who defer to the will of Another. We’re a people who believe that our best intentions aren’t all they’re cracked up to be. Our motivations are

flawed. Our will is not quite as pure as we would like. We're a people who know that we cannot navigate our own way to salvation. Self-help will not get us to the place we are called to be. We rely on Jesus Christ, our living Lord, to guide, teach, and lead us. We recognize our need to follow, to take a back seat, and to surrender ourselves to the One who can show us a more excellent way.

There are two stories about Peter in the Gospel of Mark that speak directly to the natural human tendency to value leadership over the ability to follow. In Mark 8:27-33, Jesus asks the disciples who people think he is. What are people saying? The disciples respond, "John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets of old." Then Jesus puts them on the spot: "Who do you say I am?" They're silent until Peter lays it out there: "You are the Messiah." Boom! Peter shoots to the head of the class. He said what none of the other disciples had the courage to say. As the story is told in the Gospel of Matthew, this is when Jesus says, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."

But then Jesus goes on to tell the disciples of how he must suffer and die but will rise from the dead. Peter is still feeling pretty good at this moment; he's the A student. So he decides to take Jesus aside and rebuke him. What does Jesus do? In front of all the disciples, Jesus scolds Peter: "Get behind me, Satan!"

In the space of five verses, Peter went from being star pupil to being called the devil by his teacher. What happened? What did Peter say for Jesus' reaction to be so severe? The Messiah is the anointed one, the King of Israel. Peter knew that. He was saying, "What do you mean you're going to suffer, what's this about dying? Jesus, you're going to be King. You're going to rule Israel. See the thousands of people who gather around you wherever you go? This is a movement. We're going to change the world." Peter had plans for Jesus, and when Jesus began to deviate from those plans, Peter leaped in to take the lead, prompting Jesus to respond, "Get behind me, Satan! You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

In Mark 9:2-8, on the heels of the previous story, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up to a mountaintop to pray. He is suddenly transfigured before them. His clothes become a dazzling white, and Moses and Elijah appear next to him. They begin to have a conversation. Moses and Elijah, two of the most significant figures in the Hebrew faith, are talking with Jesus. What does Peter do? He interrupts them. He says, "Jesus, it's really a good thing we're here; we can build dwellings for the three of you." You can almost see Moses, Elijah, and Jesus turning and looking at Peter as if to say, "Can't you see we're busy?" However, that didn't stop him from opening his mouth.

In both stories, Peter makes the mistake of trying to gain

control of the situation. Circumstances have suddenly exceeded his comfort level: Jesus suffering and dying, Moses and Elijah appearing on the mountaintop—that's not part of Peter's design.

Peter's instinct was to take the initiative, and both times it was inappropriate. He would have done better to simply sit down, shut up, and take in the moment. But he couldn't. He instead took the opportunity to try to guide Jesus. In attempting to manage the situation, he forgot his position. He was seduced by desires and motivations that were far more human than divine. Peter charged in to take the lead, entirely forgetting his call to follow.

A Different Set of Rules

As a Christian community of faith, we are called to do and be something that our world does not endorse or value. We are called to follow. We are followers. What is most prized in our faith—the ability to surrender our will and take on the will of Another—stands in direct conflict with what our society believes is important. The world we live in values leadership—the ability to command, manage, control, influence, and amass power.

The Christian church's central function is to try to discern the will of God for our lives as individuals and as communities of faith and then to attempt to follow that will. We are disciples who approach the Lord's table each week, weary of the teachings of our world, longing for other words to live by. Simply put, as Christians, we live by a different set of rules. On the path of faith, there are leaders and there are followers.

Followers wanted. ❁

This article was adapted from a sermon Rev. Garner delivered at the United Church of Christ in Norwell, Massachusetts, where he serves as senior pastor.

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Pastors and Managers

AN EXECUTIVE COACH ASSESSES LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Scott Eblin

Last year, after 15 years in management and a lifetime in the church, I left my job as a human resources vice president in a Fortune 500 company to answer a call that had been forming for several years. Through prayer and self-assessment, I realized that my gifts and passions centered around helping leaders identify their most important goals and create action plans for reaching them. I am now an executive coach working with leaders and managers in companies such as Capital One, NiSource, and Pfizer. But there is a twist to my coaching practice: I spend about 30 percent of my work time in churches with pastors and lay leaders.

As a coach drawing on both business and faith experience, I am struck by how lessons learned in one arena can be applied to the other.

The Shared Risk of Burnout

I have a theory that most pastors did not go to seminary because they had a desire to lead complex organizations. They went for reasons of call and from a desire to serve God through ministry. It is hard, though, to think of a more complex leadership challenge than pastoring the average church congregation. In *Personality Type and Religious Leadership*, Roy Oswald and Otto Kroeger¹ point out some of the myriad roles that pastors are expected to play: leader, communicator, teacher, comforter, public relations manager, administrator, conflict resolution special-

ist, counselor, fundraiser, social coordinator, strategic planner, and trainer. That is an overwhelming list of responsibilities. When you add roles not mentioned by Oswald and Kroeger—such as manager, team leader, and coach—the list is even more daunting.

Most corporate managers are allowed to specialize and focus a bit more than the average pastor. Their jobs, however, are demanding in their own way. I have found that the overriding emphasis of managers is on achieving results, in areas like completing a project, reducing costs, increasing market share, or meeting earnings projections. In today's financial markets, results are framed in terms of calendar quarters, annual budgets, or three-year plans. Too often, the effect of this short-term focus is a sense of burnout and lack of purpose. Many managers are looking for a larger meaning in what they are doing, and most do not find it in the next quarterly earnings report.

Pastors, on the other hand, are working in the exact space where the burned-out manager should look for deeper meaning. As opposed to the manager's emphasis on results, the focus of most pastors is on relationships—at the most sublime level, on the quality of the congregants' relationship with God. Skilled and experienced pastors also seek to establish and strengthen relationships among their congregants. In relationship with God and others, the pastor's flock

has the opportunity to find purpose and meaning in life.

But what of the pastors? The Alban Institute estimates that a large percentage of pastors suffer from emotional and career burnout. Many more experience some level of frustration in their work. Undoubtedly, there are many reasons for this. A common source of frustration for pastors is the feeling that they are not making the difference through their ministry that they had hoped they would. Put another way, they are not satisfied with the results they are seeing.

Relationships and Results

Many executives could benefit from stronger relationships, while many pastors could benefit from stronger results. Relationships and results both come from God. If we are in alignment with God's will, we can expect both strong relationships and positive results. As in most things, though, success is achieved through experience. In the areas of relationships and results, pastors and executives can learn from each others' experience. First, let me address what pastors can teach executives about relationships.

Ironically, the specialized knowledge and results-orientation that help most managers and executives rise to their positions are not enough to sustain them. Long-term success in the business world is based on fully applying one's talents to the accomplishment of meaningful goals.

To do that, managers must show a sincere commitment to building relationships in the workplace. The best pastors model this relational orientation. They demonstrate it by viewing people as ends in themselves rather than means to an end, by listening for the hidden needs and hopes of others, and by helping people understand that they are loved and they are here for a special purpose that utilizes their God-given gifts and potential.

The ultimate role model in this regard is Jesus as a leader of his disciples. Think for a moment about how Jesus led the Twelve. He provided an inspiring purpose: "I will make you fishers of men." He took time to teach them through instruction and example. He modeled the behavior he expected of them. He gave constructive feedback and built them up. He was clear about what was most important. In the larger community, he included those who tried to do better and corrected those who limited the potential of others. In this way, Jesus built strong, empowering relationships with his disciples.

Learning from Managers

Pastors can learn from some common practices of successful, results-oriented managers. First, managers are very clear

A well-grounded approach to achieving results combined with a sincere relational orientation is the foundation of both healthy businesses and healthy congregations.

about goals and objectives: They understand what they are trying to accomplish and how they will measure the results. Second, they communicate these goals and standards, so that everyone is clear about expectations and accountability. Third, good managers understand that their role is to set direction and coordinate the work of others rather than to do all of the work themselves. Fourth, when problems or issues develop, effective managers address them sooner rather than later. Finally, the best managers provide feedback to their team members. When things are done well, they point that out, applauding actions that support the goal and encouraging the team to stay the course. Conversely, when a team member's actions do not support the goal, effective managers explain why a change in approach is required.

The steps that successful managers take to get results are not necessarily at odds with the relationship-building skills shown by the best pastors. To the contrary, I believe that a well-grounded approach to achieving results combined with a sincere relational orientation is the foundation of both healthy businesses and healthy congregations.

Goal Setting

Goals provide focus as well as guidance in resource allocation. In setting goals together, a congregation defines its priorities. Like leaders in business, pastors must guide their congregations in setting priorities. As part of the goal-setting process, the pastor should ask questions of the staff, lay leadership, and other congregants that will help everyone prayerfully determine what success looks like.



Dale Rutter

Clarifying questions might include:

- What opportunities has God put before us?
- How do our gifts and resources equip us to address those opportunities?
- What do we need to accomplish to fully meet those opportunities?

By involving a representative cross-section of the staff and congregation in goal setting, pastors can build commitment and accountability around the church's priorities. Likewise, it is vitally important for pastors to actively involve the congregants as the church's priorities are addressed.

The list of pastoral roles presented earlier in this article match up fairly closely with the various spiritual gifts Paul discussed in his letters. It is important to remember that while all of us have gifts, none of us has all the gifts. This is as true for pastors as it is for laypeople. By involving the laity in accomplishing congregational priorities, pastors free themselves to play from their strengths while enabling others to grow in their own gifts.

Constructive Feedback

As people work together to accomplish a goal, they need to hear regularly what is going well. Pastors can play an invaluable

role in spiritual and leadership formation by unhesitatingly and publicly offering sincere praise as congregants and staff achieve results and build relationships.

On the other hand, very few undertakings go smoothly from start to finish. Making adjustments and corrections is part of the process. Because of their relational emphasis, pastors are sometimes reluctant to call for or take corrective action as soon as it is needed. But, when offered in the spirit of Christian love, correction can be a valuable component of spiritual growth. Again, Paul provides strong examples of this in his letters to the church at Corinth. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul takes the believers to task for their infighting and lack of focus on what is most important. As chapter 12 concludes, he writes, "And now I will show you the most excellent way." From there, of course, he writes a beautiful description of the behaviors that together compose Christian love. In these chapters, Paul provides a model for giving good feedback in a tone that is firm yet loving.

In following Paul's example, pastors should offer constructive feedback in private and in a timely fashion. A reliable method is to point out to the recipient the behavior that is impeding progress, note

its impact, then assure the person of your support going forward.

Lessons to Be Learned

When intent is pure and purpose is clear, pastors can sustain and even strengthen relationships while seeking results. In the end, sustainable results, whether in the business world or the world of faith, are facilitated by rich communication. Goal setting, role clarification, accountability checking, and constructive feedback are all functions of good communication. When practiced with love and compassion, this kind of communication always builds up relationships.

Pastors can learn from business executives to intentionally apply communication tools to achieve results in Kingdom work. Executives can learn from pastors how to be more relational as they strive for results. When leaders in any field bring together a relational orientation with a results orientation, good things begin to happen. ☪

Notes

1. Bethesda, Md.: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1988.

The author offers special thanks to Rev. Tom Berlin of Floris United Methodist Church in Herndon, Virginia, for his valuable insights in the preparation of this article.

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Building Blocks

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO CONGREGATIONAL SIZE

Theodore W. Johnson

Ever since Arlin J. Rothauge published *Sizing Up a Congregation for New Member Ministry*¹ in 1983, mainline Protestants have been using the terms *family, pastoral, program, and corporation* to identify congregations by size, starting with the smallest.² A sociological axiom underlying this typology is that size determines organization. Each type of congregation has its own unique leadership structure and relationship style that match its numerical size. I call this match *congruence in congregational size*³ and believe it is necessary for a congregation to be healthy and effective. Thus, a congregation with the numerical size of a pastoral church will be dysfunctional with the leadership structure or relationship style of a family church.

“Aha!” Moments

In my work as consultant and leadership trainer for congregations in transition, I have come to expect “Aha!” moments when I describe family and pastoral churches to clergy and lay leaders of those congregations. However, those moments do not occur as frequently with leaders of program and corporation churches. “We have the numerical size of a program or corporation church,” they say, “but our relationship style and our leadership structure are really more like a pastoral church.”

I encounter such identity confusion primarily among leaders of congregations

with Sunday attendance above 150 and below 1,000. Leaders of congregations with attendance over that number seem comfortable with the leadership structure and relationship style of a corporation church.

Perhaps the most serious consequence of the confusion in the 150 to 1,000 range is that congregational leaders attempting transitions from pastoral to program size encounter frustration and failure because they do not fully understand what they seek to become. A transition in size is not so much about changing the number of people in a congregation as it is about changing the ways they are in active relationships.

Leaders of program and corporation churches (as well the leaders of pastoral churches seeking to become program churches) need to understand that members must have opportunities to be in relationships in different ways and in multiple groups, whereas members of family and pastoral congregations can relate to each other in a single way and in one group. It is not a matter of personal preference or of superimposed congregational design. It is simply that the human capacity for active relationships is limited to certain group sizes.

Congregational Building Blocks

Using information about group size based on anthropological research,⁴ I defined three basic building blocks that are used

to construct all congregations. Family and pastoral congregations, consisting of a single cell, use only one of the building blocks. Program and corporation congregations, consisting of multiple cells, use all three building blocks in various configurations.

Small Group. The smallest building block is the small group, with 12 to 15 people. It is in this setting that relationships of the greatest intimacy and mutual care and support occur. Anthropologists call the small group a “sympathy group,”⁵ based on the fact that most people, when asked to list the people for whom they will profoundly grieve when they die, list about 12 family members and friends; rarely does the list exceed fifteen.

We almost never see a true small group in family or pastoral congregations. However, it is an important building block for program and corporation churches. In such churches the small groups consist of people who gather for study or prayer, for mutual support (single parents or bereaved or recently divorced people), and the like. Each group has its own leader, who serves as both convener of meetings and connecting agent between meetings.

Family Group. The next building block is the family group, which is larger than the small group but has no more than 50 people. In other settings, this is sometimes called a “primary group.” An intergenerational unit that functions like

Congregational Size and Characteristics

Type	Size	Relationship Style	Leadership Structure
Family	1-50	One group consists of tightly knit extended families or "clans" that center on matriarchs and patriarchs.	Family matriarchs and patriarchs make decisions. Pastor (part-time, retired?) functions as chaplain. Board conducts business and ministries in support of matriarchs and patriarchs. Other staff—usually a musician—is part-time and performs a limited but essential function.
Pastoral	51-150	One large group centers on the pastor, with some members in loosely knit functional or friendship circles.	Pastor is the hub of the wheel, master coordinator, chief minister. Board members are short-term task-doers, micro-decision makers. Ministry coordinators are permanent task-doers who value close working relationship with the pastor. Other staff—usually a musician and a secretary—is part-time and performs limited but essential functions.
Program	151-350	Two or more distinct worshipping congregations include one-third of all members (in small groups of 5 to 15 people) that center on skilled and empowered staff or lay leaders.	Program groups/teams/committees have their own empowered lay leaders and plan and implement programs and activities. Board members are managers, policy-makers who oversee but do not lead program groups/teams/committees. Pastor functions as the executive. Other staff (one or more ordained) includes full- and part-time assistants to pastor, program resources.
Corporation	351+	More than two worshipping congregations include half of all members coalescing by affinity into small "congregations" of 30+ people.	Pastor is chief executive officer, with mythic qualities. Staff (several ordained) includes full-time executives in charge of program areas. Program groups/teams/committees with virtual autonomy operate programs as almost independent organizations. Board functions as board of directors.

a family, this group entrusts its leadership to respected elders. Members receive rights and privileges based on their age, relationship to the elders, family position, and often gender. The family group may be an actual extended family, a clan whose members are related by birth and marriage, or a sort of tribe, with more than one extended family. It even may be a group of unrelated people formed by common circumstances that continues over time.

The family church is a stand-alone family group. Pastoral churches usually do not have family groups, but they are crucial building blocks for both program and corporation congregations. The early worship service in larger congregations is often a family group, as is the choir, the corps of Sunday school teachers, the youth group, and the Sunday morning Bible class.

Fellowship Group. The third building block is the fellowship group, which is larger than the primary group but has no more than 150 members. In other settings it is called a "community group" or "village group." Anthropologist Robin Dunbar⁶ determined that this is the largest possible group in which human beings can be in active relationship with each other.

Dunbar believes that in primates, the number of relationships an individual can manage is primarily the consequence of neocortex size. The neocortex portion of the human brain, although significantly larger than that of other primates, is only large enough to handle the complexities of active relationships in a group of less than 150 people. Other primates cannot manage this many.

When the group is at its maximum size, most of the members of the group need a facilitator who can help them maintain their many active relationships. Members seem most comfortable when

From *Size Transitions in Congregations* © 2001, The Alban Institute, Inc.

the group numbers around 100—perhaps the ideal fellowship group size.

The pastoral church is a stand-alone fellowship group. The pastor facilitates the relationships of the group members, making it easy for them to be in active relationship with the others, even if they do not have complete knowledge of all the active relationships in the group.

Obviously, the fellowship group cannot exist in the family church, but it is a building block for program and corporation churches. The principal worship services in many program and corporation churches are fellowship groups, with worshipers having active relationships only with those at their particular service. Another fellowship group in program and corporation congregations includes the children and teachers in the Sunday school.

A program church, depending on its size, may be constructed of 10 to 20 small groups, fewer than 10 family groups, and only two or three fellowship groups.

A corporation church has more of each type of building block. The fellowship groups and family groups in corporation churches enjoy high levels of autonomy to manage their affairs, possessing many characteristics of completely independent mini-congregations within the larger church. Each of the main worship services may be subdivided into two or more fellowship groups whose identities are shaped by activities other than worship. Further, a significant number of worshipers are not in active relationships with other members of the congregation. Unique to a corporation church is a fellowship group that has total responsibility for a major activity, such as the operation of a hospital in an economically undeveloped country.

It is easy to understand the single-cell structure of the family church and the pastoral church. On the other hand, the



program church and the corporation church, consisting of multiple cells, are highly complex. It is probably true that no two of these churches assemble their building blocks in the same way.

When church leaders of congregations in the 150 to 1,000 weekly attendance range see that their churches consist of three building blocks in various configurations, some of the identity confusion subsides. They start to realize that they must change their leadership structure and relationship style to be more appropriate to program and corporation churches and that they need to create new groups of different sizes for members to be in active relationships. Similarly, when the leaders of congregations seeking a transition from one size to another take the building blocks into account, the transition becomes not just a matter of increasing membership or starting a new and different worship service, but of changing the ways existing and prospec-

tive members of the congregation are in active relationships. ☛

Notes

1. New York: Seabury Press, for The Education and Ministry Office of the Episcopal Church.
2. Family: average weekly worship attendance of up to 50; pastoral: 51–150; program: 151–350; corporation: 351+.
3. Theodore William Johnson, *Congruence and Transitions in Congregational Size* (Evanston, Ill.: A thesis submitted to the faculty of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry in Congregational Development, 2000).
4. Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000).
5. C. J. Buys and K. L. Larsen, "Human Sympathy Groups," *Psychology Reports* 45 (1979), pp. 547–53 (cited by Gladwell).
6. "Neocortex size as a constraint on group size in primates," *Journal of Human Evolution* 20 (1992), pp. 469–93 (cited by Gladwell).

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BOOK REVIEW

If It Wasn't For The Women

BLACK WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE AND WOMANIST CULTURE IN CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

Cheryl Townsend Gilkes
Marykoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000

Whenever their voices and authority are challenged within their communities of



faith, black women often respond with an assertion of their significance, which is summed up in their oft-used statement, "If it wasn't for the women, you wouldn't have a church."

Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, a professor of sociology and African American studies at Colby College in Maine, has researched (through interviews and oral histories) "the place of black women's agency, centrality, importance, and indispensability to their churches and communities."

The book's essays uncover and bring to the foreground aspects of black women's experiences with an eye toward explaining the depth and breadth of what it is that women do within and for their churches and communities.

Believing that experiences of gender and race have been underplayed in analyses of religion, Gilkes explores the concept of black "womanist" theology as distinct from white feminist thought in terms of its dual focus on racial as well as gender issues and its fundamental com-

mitment to "survival and wholeness" for the entire African American community, both male and female.

The book also outlines the effects of racism, sexism, and the stereotyping of African American women's roles and identity within both church and the wider society, and goes on to show how the religious traditions and institutions created by and for black women (women's days, prayer meetings, women's boards) have sustained them within their male-dominated churches and within a society that devalues their work and worth.

Other topics addressed in the book include shared power; the prayer tradition; the musical tradition; race, class, and women's agency; issues of gender, biblical language, and worship; labeling and institutional racism; the womanist challenge to cultural humiliation and community ambivalence; and hearing and empowering "poor" black women.

Just as black women's contributions have been indispensable to their churches and communities, *If It Wasn't For The Women* is an indispensable read for anyone wanting to learn about the vibrant faith and life of black women, who continue to struggle for justice and dignity within both church and the wider society.

Rev. Karen M. Ward
Churchwide Office, Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America
Chicago, Illinois

BOOK REVIEW

Trusting the Spirit

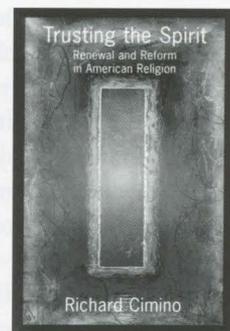
RENEWAL AND REFORM IN AMERICAN RELIGION

Richard Cimino
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001

"Attempting to renew religious institutions is thankless work," writes Richard Cimino in *Trusting the Spirit*, an examination of the three main categories of renewal and reform that are active today: evangelical and charismatic, liturgical and contemplative, and progressive or liberal. The book takes a journalistic approach, telling the stories of six reform or renewal groups that have emerged from Christianity or Judaism. Each story combines a political understanding of the organization with the personal stories and experiences of its participants and leaders.

Cimino presents snapshots of Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Biblical Witness Fellowship (United Church of Christ), Call to Action (Roman Catholic), Taizé (ecumenical contemplative), Jewish Renewal, and movements within the Lutheran Communion (American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, Evangelical Catholics, and Society of the Holy Trinity). He then draws out common themes or trends to help the reader understand what makes for a successful renewal effort.

Trusting the Spirit provides an overview of these movements, emphasizing experience over theological underpinnings or distinctions. The book's strength is Cimino as voyeur—a visitor who



observes the behavior and emotionality of those gathered for renewal. It is an excellent resource for clergy or lay leaders who may feel bewildered when people say they want "a more spiritual experience." By painting a picture of renewal worship practices, Cimino's book may help mainline church leaders' understanding of them. Also helpful is the description of reform groups whose agenda is to gain control of an untended corner of congregational life and thereby build a conservative presence.

Although it provides stories about the experiences of renewal organizations, *Trusting the Spirit* does not focus on the theological or spiritual motivation for them. Further, the stories do not describe unmitigated successes. Many of the groups are already decreasing in popularity. Perhaps additional exploration of why reform or renewal is needed or sought would help both the congregations that people are leaving in order to be "renewed" and the movements that are attempting that thankless work.

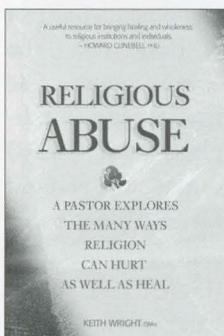
Patricia Carol
Field Consultant
The Alban Institute

BOOK REVIEW

Religious Abuse

A PASTOR EXPLORES THE
MANY WAYS RELIGION CAN
HURT AS WELL AS HEAL

Keith Wright
Kelowna, B.C.: Northstone Publishers, 2001



The church has done much good, but it has also been a destructive force in the lives of many people. We need to acknowledge the existence of abuse in the church and give up

the idea that religion is perfect. We must make the religious community aware of its deviant behavior, encourage it to repent, and compel it to change.

This is the heart of the message heralded in *Religious Abuse* by Keith Wright, a retired Presbyterian clergyman. In this declaration he sometimes seems like the boy in Hans Christian Andersen's story of the emperor's new clothes. When the child cried out, "The emperor isn't wearing any clothes!" he was dead on. Everybody knew it, yet most were in denial. So it is, Wright muses, with the explosive issue of abuse in the church.

Gradually, though, the facts are starting to seep out. Abuse has been far more widespread than assumed, and a slow, intentional consciousness-raising is taking place in society generally and in the church specifically.

Much of what Wright has to say is difficult to express, as well as to read, but it is truth spoken in love. Tragedy is predictable when the human dimension of the church, the visible institution, ignores

its own brokenness, denies its need for forgiveness, and seeks to protect itself at all costs.

Many people, sensing duplicity, have grown distant from faith organizations. This book is written for those of us who care about organized religion but live with the uneasy awareness that in spite of the positives there has been significant negative fallout.

Just what kinds of abuse are we talking about? The less obvious types are a predictable outcome of authoritarian leadership. The author encourages us to be alert when authority figures play God with tender consciences; we need to distinguish between what the church may demand and what God actually requires.

The more blatant violations include the abuse of children, women, clergy, and clergy families. Recently, statistics have begun to appear that pinpoint those priests and ministers who have taken advantage of children and others under their care. The numbers are devastating. Don't assume that any clergy person is above abuse, Wright says. Background checks should be standard procedure for all clergy and laity who undertake leadership roles in churches and schools.

"Religious" parents, says the author, can use religious precepts as justification for manipulating their children abusively. And to devalue women in any way, he adds, is to rob everyone of value. Wright says little about abuse directed against males by males or females. But because abuse is most often committed by people who have been abused, we are ill advised to focus on only men as potential abusers.

Clergy of either sex who challenge long-held positions can themselves be victimized. There are great risks to assuming a moral, prophetic role, and pastors, caught between their people and their authorities, are frequently hurt by the institutions to which they have given

their lives. The collateral damage to spouses, children, next of kin, and close friends can be disastrous.

There are times when it is necessary for those who have been abused to remove themselves, temporarily or permanently, from treacherous situations. For some of us, that time comes when the pain we experience in the church of our birth becomes too great to have a meaningful relationship with God there. What some need, in such circumstances, is the assurance that God's presence and comfort are not limited to a particular church or the institutional church itself.

The book closes on a positive, hopeful note. Wright believes that healthy religion helps us move beyond "belief systems" to a transforming experience with God. It encourages us to discover a faith reality that transcends all religion.

Conservative readers may question Wright's charges of misinterpreted scripture and institutional failure. Those with more liberal inclinations may criticize the extent to which he seeks conciliation in situations they may feel defy resolution.

On balance, Wright places the emphasis where it should be—on realism. Religious organizations need to humbly confess to have misinterpreted God, sometimes misusing Scripture and claiming sole possession of the keys to the Kingdom. Only then can dialogue with the alienated and hope for their healing begin.

Rev. Dr. Wayne A. Holst
University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta

This book is available in the United States from Words Distributing, Oakland, California. To order, call 1-800-593-9673.

BOOK REVIEW

Our Lives as Torah

FINDING GOD IN OUR
OWN STORIES

Carol Ochs
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001



There are 613 commandments (*mitzvot* in Hebrew) in the Torah, from "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) through "And now, therefore, write this song for yourselves" (Deut. 31:19). None of these, however, appear to have much relevance to Carol Ochs' meandering, philosophical tome *Our Lives as Torah*. In fairness to Ochs, whose credentials as a scholar and Hebrew educator are impeccable, she interprets theology to mean lifestyle and Torah to mean finding God in the everyday events of our lives. She lays a noble course as she explores personal theology through the life-shaping concepts of love, suffering, work, body, prayer, community, death, and confronting God.

Using life stories of witnesses identified by first name only, Ochs attempts to demonstrate to her readers the influence of God on everyday affairs. Among the hosts of confessors are Jennifer the Teacher (who loses her job), Jonathan the Convert, Marcia the Rabbinic Student, Ruth the Colitis Sufferer, Ollie the Nurse, and Elaine the Physicist. Their stories are religious, mundane, experiential, and sometimes confused. Ochs sometimes makes wild generalities to which the reader may respond with a shake of the head rather than a nod. In the section on

suffering, for example, the author quotes Esther the Poetess, who has composed a series of cat poems, one of which is "On Being Taken to the Vet." Ochs uses this poem to show that "only God can understand suffering."

The author's prose can be vague. For instance, to her frequent philosophical question, "Who am I?" she answers,

It has become clear that in order to know God, we must know ourselves; conversely, true knowledge of the self requires knowing God. We should move beyond defining ourselves in terms of our various roles, relationships, place or origin, or other allegiances. We are God's creations, and our definition should be anchored in our conscious, deliberate relationship to God (p. 192).

Yet, she can get beyond imprecision and deal directly with both Torah and the Torah of one's life when she reminds the reader that, as stated in Genesis, we are created in the image of God (*tzelem Elohim*).

Despite drawbacks such as the metaphors that do not quite work, some trivializing of the Torah, and the through-line that appears to wander like Moses in the desert, Ochs should be applauded for the introduction and epilogue, wherein lies the meaning of her book. There, she had her subjects pair off and listen to each other's life events in order to find the divine spark in them. This is not a bad message for the reader. It may not be the mountain-shaking revelation of Moses at Mount Sinai, but it is a way to recognize the *tzelem Elohim* in all of us.

Stan Levin
Temple Emanuel
Kensington, Maryland

Lewis-Tillman

continued from page 9

apologize for their role in slavery, I see that as a sign of hope. I see hope also at the local level, where congregations work on racism and on intragroup relations. To see black leaders in our community who have been shy about speaking about sexuality and disease speaking tentatively but determinedly on doing something about HIV/AIDS and committing resources to do so—this is a sign of hope. As one who resides in a seminary setting, what I see in students who will be leaders in three to 10 years is very encouraging. I see black, white, and Latino seminarians coming on the scene. They have fewer hang-ups and are willing to experiment. They are willing to be taught by different people. I am very encouraged.

What resources do we need for the future?

Howard Thurman used to teach that personal spiritual renewal was a precursor for effective social ministries. He would say that we need to retreat from the “traffic of daily life” to find moments to “center down”—to reflect, pray, discover, and read. There will always be a critical need for all clergy to practice the rituals of spiritual renewal and spiritual empowerment.

Toward New Life

In order for dry bones to live, church leaders must work in coalition with others to raise valleys and make crooked places straight. They must daily share power with the laity and renew their own spiritual power. Signs of hope, such as speaking of what was previously unspoken and the development of new and encouraging mutual ministries that serve the whole person, point to true liberation for God's people. ❁

Notes

1. See www.childrendefense.org.
2. Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African-American Faith* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), p. 202.
3. See C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990).
4. *A Time for Honor: A Portrait of African American Clergywomen* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).

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RESOURCES ON LEADERSHIP FROM THE CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE



Books

- ❖ **Chaffee, Paul.** *Accountable Leadership: A Resource Guide for Sustaining Legal, Financial, and Ethical Integrity in Today's Congregations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997). This book examines important financial, legal, and ethical aspects of congregational leadership. It also identifies literature and organizations that can help leaders better understand their responsibilities.
- ❖ **Copenhaver, Martin B., Anthony B. Robinson, and William H. Willimon.** *Good News in Exile* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). Like foreign languages and other endeavors that require familiarity to have meaning, religion requires an understanding of practices unique to its culture. These authors, all ministers, believe that the “post-liberal” church can both remain faithful to its roots and offer worship that is meaningful for modern Christians.
- ❖ **Farber-Robertson, Anita.** *Leading While Learning: Increasing Your Effectiveness in Ministry* (Bethesda, Md.: The Alban Institute, 2000). In this book, Farber-Robertson presents a conceptual framework and exercises that can be used to assess and improve group and interpersonal relationships. By employing the “double loop” learning recommended here—understanding how and why things happen—clergy and lay leaders can transform relationships and organizations.
- ❖ **Heifetz, Ronald A.** *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1994). Leaders who want more than “Six Easily Digested Secrets of Leadership” will want to consider this work by a physician and lecturer on public policy. Though written for a broad audience, the focus is on adaptive leadership, distinctions between adaptive and technical problems, and differences between leadership and authority—an approach that is useful to religious leaders.
- ❖ **Herrington, Jim, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr.** *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000). This book, which grew out of a process instituted in Houston by the Union Baptist Association, emphasizes how leaders can encourage and help maintain congregational change. The format is a mix of story, theory, and practical advice.
- ❖ **Kotter, John P.** *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996). A world expert on business leadership argues that change strategies often fail to alter behavior—and in this book presents a process that can help leaders understand the stages that organizations must pass through in order to change.
- ❖ **Trumbauer, Jean M.** *Sharing the Ministry: A Practical Guide for Transforming Volunteers Into Ministers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995). Moving beyond “fill ‘em and forget ‘em” recruitment, Trumbauer presents a new paradigm of volunteer ministry that is based on these assumptions: each person is uniquely gifted for ministry, church ministry is shared, and church staff and lay leaders need to help identify and use the gifts of all congregants.

Web Sites

- ❖ **Circuit Rider** (www.umph.org/resources/publications/circuit_default.html). Several articles on leadership appear in the November/December 2000 issue of *Circuit Rider*, the United Methodist clergy magazine. Titles include “Authority and Power for Pastoral Leadership,” “Laying Spiritual Foundations for Leadership,” “Leading a Small Church,” and “Servant Leadership in a Disconnected Time.”
- ❖ **Transforming Christian Leaders** (www.christianleaders.org). Grounded in the belief that adults learn best through narratives, this Web site provides resources centered around stories about congregational life and challenges. The case studies (or stories) are arranged by topic, and are structured to encourage congregational leaders to imagine themselves in various situations—and to envision how they would respond. The Web site was crafted as part of a project to encourage the use of technology in theological education.

www.congregationalresources.org

Finding the Right Pastor for Your Parish

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Our congregation is searching for a new pastor. Out of the pool of available applicants, how do we identify and call the right leadership? We want the best fit possible.

A

The work of the calling committee (or pastoral search committee) is crucial in avoiding later conflict. In fact, an informal analysis has shown that 70 percent of conflicts between a pastor and members of the church or governing board can be traced back to inadequacies in the search process. This conflict can begin innocently as a series of misunderstandings about what the committee says the church expects and what the applicant (priest, rector, minister) believes the committee wants. For instance, one church I worked with said they wanted “strong leadership” because the last pastor was too passive. The applicant who was hired said he would provide this, but a year later he was fired for being a dictatorial micro-manager. The nuances of “strong leadership” had never been discussed. Another church’s calling committee said they needed someone with strong pastoral skills, having in mind an ability to counsel individuals and couples in transition, pain, or crisis. The applicant who was hired said he had strong pastoral skills, but he meant that he was good at visiting homes and hospitals. Later, when he was fired, he said he had no skill or interest in pastoral counseling.

The goal of obtaining the right leadership for a congregation actually involves three lesser objectives: (1) determine what kind of leadership is appropriate; (2) make that clear to the applicant; and (3) choose the right applicant out of all who apply. Completing the following three tasks will help the calling committee to achieve those objectives:

1. Conduct a parish self-study. This self-study is designed to determine what kind of church you are. This is where expectations and tasks need to be explicitly defined: What do we mean by “strong leadership” or “good pastoral care”? Questions include:

- What are the most important values by which we live and minister?
- What are our major challenges?
- What are our goals and visions for the future?
- What would have to happen to make this a “wow” place to worship?

2. Assess applicants in terms of the church’s needs.

Select five to 10 people who meet the established criteria and who would get an enthusiastic response from the congregation. This is where an applicant’s track record needs to be explored. It is a truism of the business world that past performance is one of the best predictors of future behavior. So the calling committee needs to ask “how” questions—for example, how has the person run stewardship programs, or youth programs, and what have been the results? Another dimension of selecting pastoral leadership relates to church size—a factor often overlooked in the selection process. Based on its average worship attendance, a church may be categorized as family, pastoral, program, or corporation. With an attendance of fewer than 150 people, the first two types require an emphasis on interpersonal skills such as warmth and friendliness. Larger churches need leaders who are able to build consensus, set visions, and recruit and empower volunteers.

3. Select one applicant through a process of discernment. In the discernment phase, discussion centers on who on the short list of applicants is the best fit for the church’s pastoral leadership. Discernment means carefully listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit. This is a time of prayer, quiet, Bible study, and a focus on the positive qualities of the applicants. Questions here may be more subjective: “Can I talk about very sensitive or personal issues with this person?” “Would I want this pastor with me at my death bed?”

A successful search process might, then, be described as one that achieves balance: Finding a pastor who understands a congregation’s values and who will be called on to help congregants confront life’s challenges means finding a pastor with the right mix of both leadership and interpersonal skills.



Rev. Luther Kramer has been a field consultant with the Alban Institute since 1981. He developed the calling process for the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama. One of his specialties is training both calling committees and local consultants in how to work with calling committees.

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The Alban Institute and its Indianapolis Center for Congregations have created the Congregational Resource Guide to help congregational leaders connect with the resources they need to gain insight into problems and encourage transformation in their communities of faith. To begin, select a feature, click on a key subject, or enter a search term in the Quick Search box.

This program is a joint effort of the Alban Institute and its Indianapolis Center for Congregations.
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FEATURES

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About the Alban Institute

CONGREGATIONS is a bimonthly publication of the Alban Institute, a nonprofit, interfaith **membership organization** founded in 1974 to provide a comprehensive range of resources to Christian and Jewish congregations. **Our mission** is to provide clergy and lay leaders with practical, research-based information and ideas for effective ministry as they grapple with an ever-changing environment.

The Alban Institute serves leaders—both ordained and lay—across the denominational spectrum through **consulting services, education events, book and periodical publishing, and research**. Our work is supported by membership revenue, grant funding, and the sale of programs, services, and publications.

The Alban Institute **encourages dialogue** with many faith traditions, people of diverse ethnicity, men and women, large and small congregations, and urban and rural congregations. We invite you to join in conversation with us by becoming a member or writing an article for CONGREGATIONS—or both! Please call us at 301-718-4407 or send an e-mail to pwalker@alban.org.

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