

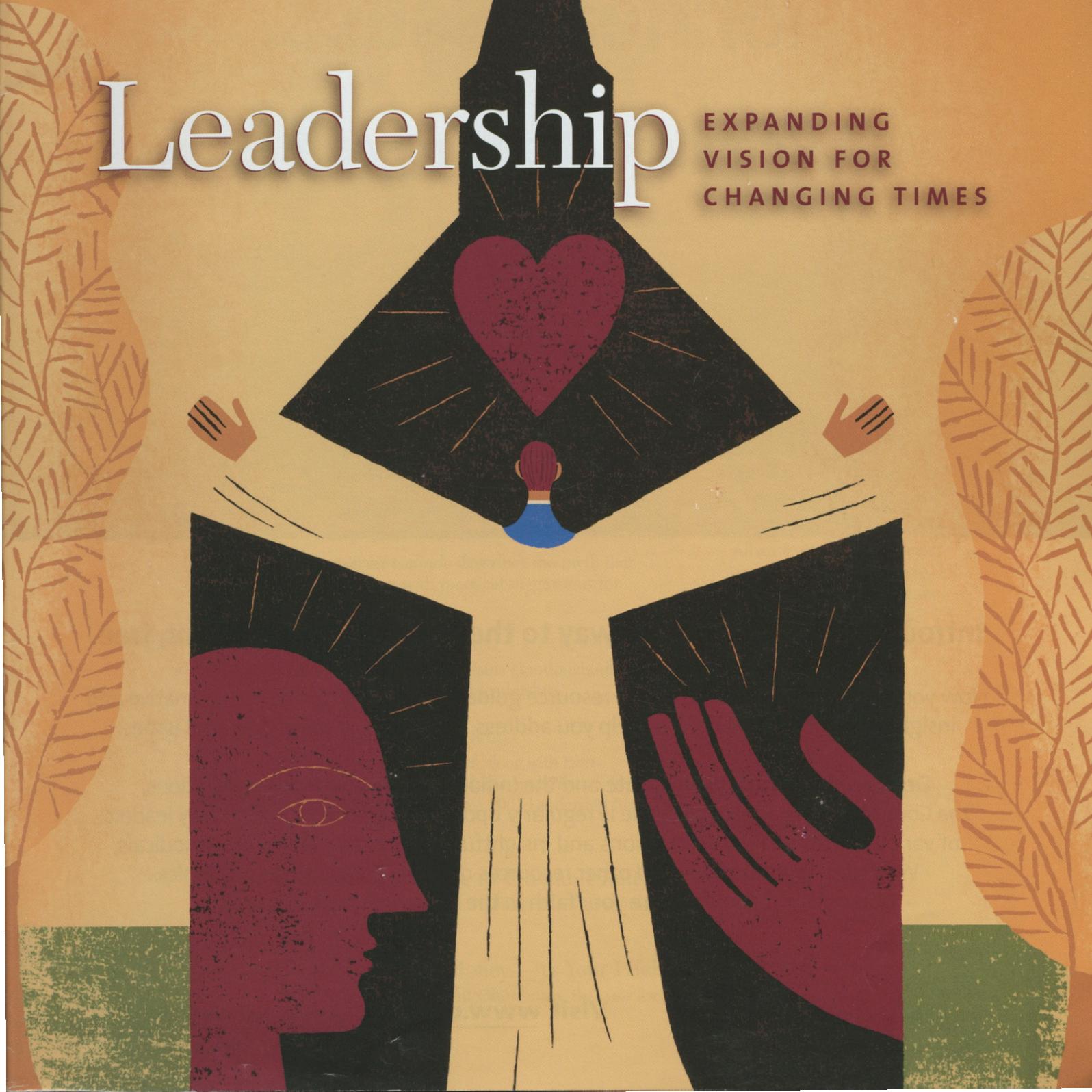
Congregations

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WINTER 2003

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in Focus

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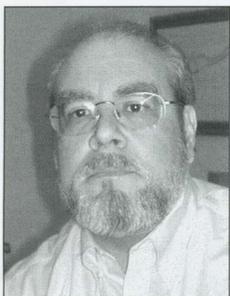
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Mark Lau Branson



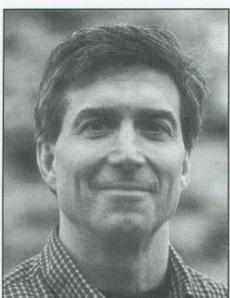
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Rev. Dr. Karen Minnich-Sadler currently works as an intentional interim pastor to congregations experiencing transition and conflict. In addition to her congregational work, she has developed workshops for church leaders that address times of personal transition and the understanding of dysfunction within congregations.

Rev. Fred Oaks is an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches (U.S.A.). He has served as pastor of congregations in rural, urban, and suburban settings. Since 1991, he has been the senior pastor at the Southport Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana.

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Onward and Upward



Congregations

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Moving?

If you are about to move or have moved recently, please send your address label, along with your new address, to "Membership" or send an e-mail to membership@alban.org.

By the time you have arrived at this page, you doubtless will have noticed that there's something different about the magazine you hold in your hands. For one thing, it arrived with some other publications—such as the Alban book catalog and education catalog—that you, as members, are likely to be interested in. And for another, the magazine itself is now 44 pages long instead of 36. We expanded the size of the magazine to allow us to go into greater depth with our themes, and also to give us the flexibility to provide a wider array of articles if a particular issue warrants. We also expanded the size because CONGREGATIONS will now come to you quarterly instead of bimonthly.

We have several reasons for this change. One is that we have been assessing our entire membership benefits package to try to find ways to connect with our members in deeper and more meaningful ways. By producing four issues per year instead of six, we are able to focus our resources on other types of member engagement, such as threaded discussions, a Members-Only Web site, and more. We also decided to expand our periodicals program by publishing a monthly electronic newsletter, *Alban In Progress*, which will be made available to our membership and beyond beginning this month. Alban consultants and staff are out in the field—or in the office—working on cutting-edge ideas and practices every day that you, our members, never hear about. We wanted to change that, and as the newsletter evolves over time we hope you will find what they are doing to be of real value to your work (see page 36 for instructions on how to sign up if we don't have your e-mail address).

In this issue of CONGREGATIONS, we explore the ever-relevant topic of leadership. You may remember that our September 2001 issue also covered the leadership theme, and that it coincided with the release of our first Alban Institute special report: *The Leadership Situation Facing American Congregations*. In this issue we revisit the key findings of this report (see page 28), provide responses to the report from Patti Simmons of the Texas Methodist Foundation and Claire Schenot Burkat from the New Jersey and Southeastern Pennsylvania Synods of the ELCA, and include an update from Alban president James P. Wind on what we have learned in the time between—and where we're going next. There also are articles on the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership (see page 20) and how the quest to "make meaning" in a congregational setting can lead to an open view of leadership that encompasses the whole congregation (see articles on pages 9 and 14). And there's more, of course, but I'll let you find out for yourself. Happy reading!

Blessings,

Lisa Kinney
lkinney@alban.org

Benefits of an Annual Fitness Report

THE SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2002 ISSUE OF CONGREGATIONS carries excellent articles on the many facets of clergy compensation by Becky McMillan, Lawrence Wohlrabe, and Dan Hotchkiss. I would like to add another dimension. Part of the difficulty laity have in building compensation packages is that they frequently do not know how to assess what the pastor does in his or her position. In secular society there are many measures of accountability—from the number of widgets produced to the size of staff supervised, funds raised, and so on. How does one assess the impact of a pastoral prayer or counseling of the grief-stricken? It is a challenge, but not an impossible task.

Military chaplains have to complete an annual fitness report. An important part of this report is a section dealing with what the chaplain feels he or she has accomplished during the previous year that is worth consideration for promotion. Once completed, this report is submitted to the chaplain's supervisor and then on to the base/station commander for their ratings and evaluations. It behooves chaplains to keep a running account of their ministry throughout the year to be used as grist for the annual report.

This discipline can have merit for the parish minister. Rather than wait with baited breath for official boards to evaluate one's ministry without much more than denominational guidelines, the minister could submit to the board an annual record of accomplishments for them to see and evaluate. This might include everything from a record of pastoral visits, hospital calls, funerals, and assorted official board activities to innovative events for children, youth, and adults; varieties of worship experiences; and participation in community and ecumenical projects.

Listing projects envisioned, developed, and accomplished, as well as their effects on the congregants and community, can help board members evaluate their pastor's ministry in the local church. This activity also can help the pastor track what works and what needs more development. An annual report also can help the congregation better appreciate their pastor's total ministry to church and community if it is included in the annual church report.

Accountability is the watchword today. When church boards see the many facets of pastoral ministry in such a report they may have a better grasp of how to support their pastor for the good of God's whole church.

REV. RICHARD S. MCPHEE

First Baptist Church (ABC-USA)
Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania

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Bryan D. Spinks, The Institute of Sacred Music, Yale University
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Christian Perspectives on Foreign Language Education, Barbara Carvill

Christian Environmentalism with/out Boundaries, Mark Bjelland, Steve Bouma-Prediger, Susan Bratton, Janel Curry & John R. Wood

Written on the Heart: The Tradition of Natural Law, J. Budziszewski

For additional information on these and other events and for applications, go to www.calvin.edu/ffs or contact Seminars in Christian Scholarship Calvin College, 3201 Burton SE, Grand Rapids MI 49546; 616-957-8558; 616-957-6682 (fax); email seminars@calvin.edu

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Applicants should send a cover letter, resume, and contact information for three references to J. Andrew Dearman, Academic Dean, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 100 East 27th Street, Austin, TX 78705-5797.

The deadline for applications is March 1, 2003. Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary is committed to affirmative action and equal employment opportunities.

AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Potholes on the Road to Vitality

Never does a congregation have more at stake than when it selects its next minister or rabbi. No congregation—large or small, rich or poor—can escape this turning point when the future seems fragile and malleable. For each faith community a good choice can mean years of vital congregational ministry. The wrong choice can usher in years of conflict, floundering, or ennui. For more than a few congregations, the inability to negotiate this transition proves fatal.

For candidates, the stakes are equally high. A good “match” can leave a clergy leader feeling that she or he has won the pastoral lottery. A great congregation and a good way of life are the prizes. A mistake here, however, can lead to years of wandering in the vocational wilderness, a lifetime of “if onlys,” family or personal breakdowns, or relentless forays at playing the game again and again.

The road to congregational vitality is dotted with potholes. A potentially dangerous one suddenly looms each time a congregation sets out to choose a new leader. For years, I have watched congregations and clergy approach this pothole. Some hurtle toward it at full speed, denying reality until the last moment, pretending that the incumbent minister will live and serve forever. Others overanticipate. With warning lights flashing miles in advance, they slow down, bringing congregational momentum to a standstill. They seek to control the uncontrollable future with succession plans, insider candidates, backroom deals, and expensive headhunters. The vast majority of congregations muddle through, slowing a bit and keeping fingers crossed that the hazard ahead will not cause much damage.

Horror Stories

If ever there was a leverage point for change in American religious life, it is at this pothole moment. Sadly, most lever-pullers operate in ambiguous circumstances that make it difficult to know which way to pull or push.

Frequently, I speak with travelers on this busy religious highway. Ministers tell me horror stories of how their new congregations ambushed them with hidden problems and festering wounds. Congregational leaders complain that their new clergy leader turned out to have an abrasive style, conflicting priorities, or concealed personal problems. Denominational and seminary

placement officers often remark on the fictions that distort the “call process”—congregations present idealized portraits of themselves to candidates, and candidates play the same game.

All these realities—and more—come into view in a rare journalistic account of a congregational search. Stephen Fried’s *The New Rabbi: A Congregation Searches for Its Leader* (New York: Bantam Books, 2002) recounts the one-year process that turned into three years of hapless groping. Fried’s nonfiction account tells of a great synagogue, Har Zion of Philadelphia, as it came to the end of a historic rabbinate, the 30-year tenure of Gerald I. Wolpe. Har Zion is a powerhouse congregation of 1,400 families, a flagship of Conservative Judaism. But with all its resources—money, tradition, power brokers (Fried calls them big *machers*)—Har Zion flounders and struggles at the moment of decision.

What struck me as I read Fried’s account was that everyone had tried to do the right thing. Rabbi Wolpe tried to prepare his congregation by announcing his retirement a year in advance. Then he valiantly tried to stay out of the search process. The young assistant rabbi tried to hold the community together in what was expected to be a yearlong transition. The congregation carefully picked a search committee. That team faithfully met, pondered, and reviewed résumés. Candidates came and went. Denominational leaders presented lists of approved candidates and sought to protect both synagogue and rabbis.

The results of the first year were disappointing. Few candidates seemed worthy of an interview. One “great candidate” raised the

search committee’s hopes, but then had second thoughts and withdrew. The search process came up empty, and the congregation started over again.

Meanwhile the remaining wheels of congregational life continued to turn. Bar and bat mitzvahs, holy days, and tragedies in the lives of members did not wait for search committee action. The congregation struggled to fill its ministerial needs, bringing in an interim to supplement the work of the young assistant, who over time became—to his surprise—a candidate. Finally, the congregation made a decision—as much by default as by design. (Those who want to know the outcome must read the book.)

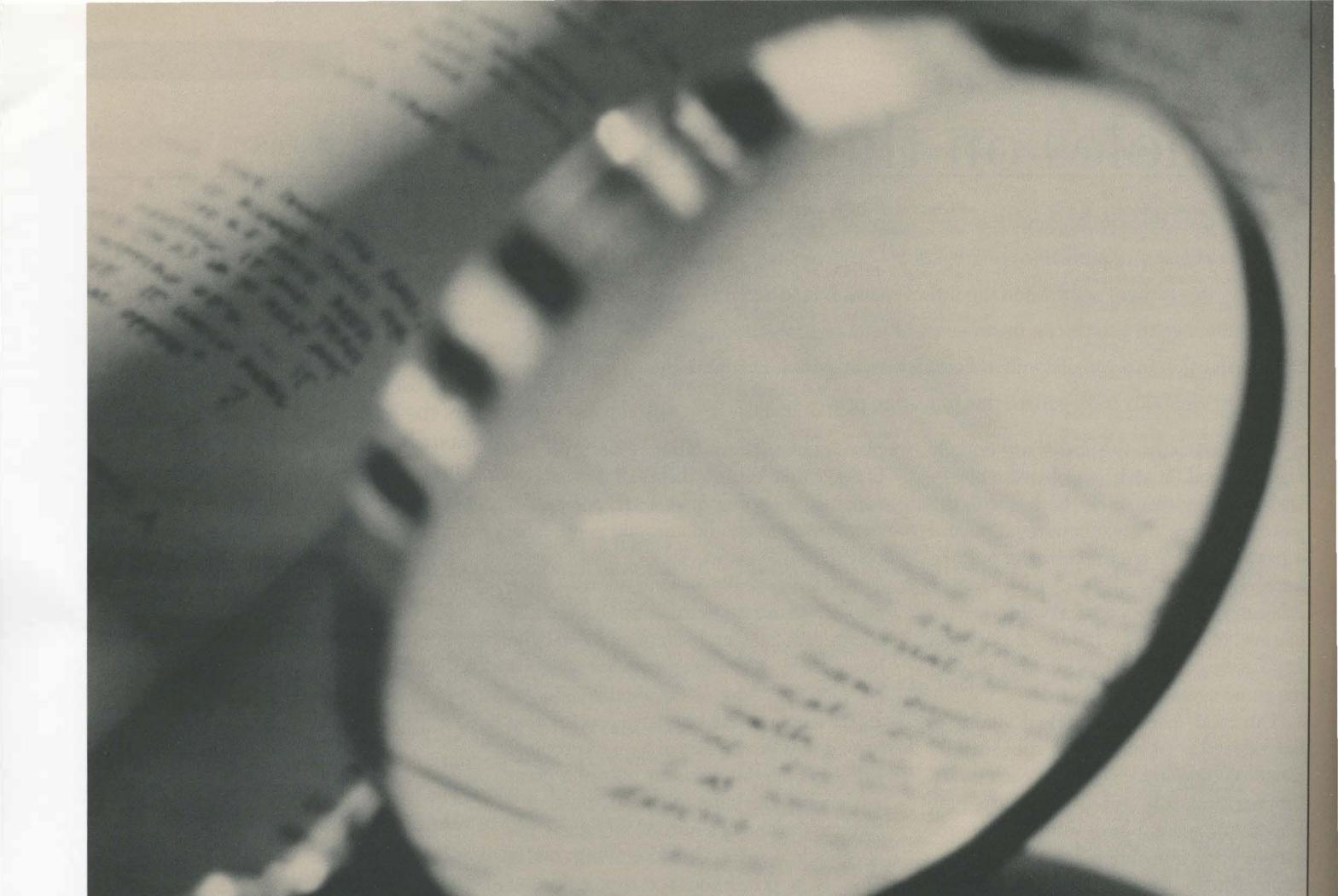
Glimpses of Reality

Few journalists take time to explore the day-to-day realities of congregational life. Few congregations let their lives be examined in depth as the people of Har Zion did. But on those rare occasions when storytellers and story-makers align, we see glimpses of our own reality.

Such stories raise major questions. How do we better prepare congregations for this pothole moment? How do we help congregations define their leadership needs more clearly? How do we help search committees—often made up of people who have never been down this road—play their role more effectively? How do our denominational polities need to change if they are to support congregations through decision-making processes quite unlike those for which the polities were designed? Answers to these questions—and others—are essential if our congregations are to be vital and if our leaders are to thrive.



Rev. Dr. James P. Wind is the president of the Alban Institute. Prior to joining the Institute in 1995, he served as program director at the Lilly Endowment’s religion division. Dr. Wind is the author of three books and numerous articles, including the Alban Institute special report on leadership.



Dysfunction, Unfaithfulness, or Human Frailty?

How to Understand the Difference in Your Congregation

KAREN MINNICH-SADLER

I often read discussions about the dynamics of congregational life, learning from the perspectives experts offer to help us understand what happens in relations among the people of God. I listen with empathic pain to colleagues who feel pushed to the limits of trying to understand the people they serve and want to love—people with whom they have trouble connecting.

Pastoral resources offer answers, but often we are uncertain which answer speaks to our own situation. Some resources suggest that large numbers of members in some congregations are dysfunctional; others insist that these congregants are immature in their thinking and need to grow up. Some authors, observing misguided folk who resist change and have trouble dealing with contemporary social issues of concern to the church, may declare that such members are unfaithful to the gospel's call to outreach in our own time and place. Other writers see intense and intentional hostility.

Constructing Reality

I offer here a way of viewing these dynamics that involves neither dysfunction nor unfaithfulness. This view stems from an idea developed by Harvard professor Robert Kegan, “constructive-developmental theory.”¹

This theory examines how humans take the experiences of life and put them together to give life meaning. As we see and experience new information, we decide how we are going to feel about it; we evaluate and assign it meaning. We fit new information and experiences into our lives in a way that makes sense to us. This is the constructive part of the theory—what it means to say that humans construct their own reality. It does not mean that there is no true reality to be known, only that we see through a glass darkly and have our own slant on events.

As we grow and age, we see life differently. We learn to think in increasingly complex ways. How we made meaning—that is,

how we constructed reality—as children is not the same as how we do it as adults.

Although this growing process never stops even in late adulthood, at recognizable points in the journey things coalesce, and for a while life is seen and understood from that vantage point. Kegan says that at such intervals we are in “balance” because that is how the experience feels.² Life is balanced, and despite normal daily turmoil, life for the most part hangs together and makes sense. This balance is not a conscious choice nor is it one quickly or easily changed.

These periods of balance are few. Each has characteristics that can be described, and as we describe them, we can learn to understand how people see life, what is meaningful to them and why, what makes them feel whole and completed as human beings, and what most threatens them. One tremendous benefit of such understanding is that it renders us less likely to take others’ behavior personally. Thus we have less need to be defensive, and it is more likely that we will be able to enjoy people as they are and experience more hope in our ministry.

People Who Need Power

Every church leader has, at one time or another, run into a person for whom power is *the* issue. These people are difficult to talk with in disagreements, seem to overreact, behave destructively without regard to whom they hurt, and once crossed, cannot forgive. Usually not many such individuals are found in one congregation, but the force they wield is considerable.

Is there a way to relate to such a person without using a term like “pathological” or “dysfunctional”?² According to constructive-developmental theory, at one point of balance, having power is a key issue. When individuals see life from this perspective, their needs, wishes, and interests must be met if they are to feel completed as human beings, whole and safe.³ They believe that whether things go badly for them in life depends on their own actions, so they exert pressure on themselves to make life work the way they think it should, compromising only when it suits their best interests to do so.

If they fail to achieve the desired outcome, their self-contempt and the anger they turn inward are overwhelming. If they see someone else as the barrier to getting what they need, the anger directed toward the perceived adversary is likewise staggering. Life is tough for these people, for they cannot count on anyone but themselves. To make matters worse, they generally believe that most people are out to get what they need for themselves; the power-seeker must be faster or smarter or superior in some other way to avoid getting lost in the crowd. Remember, this is an unconscious process: he or she has not deliberately chosen to relate in a way we may consider harmful.

Imagine these people in the congregation, maneuvering the situation to feel good about themselves as the people of God. See them working hard to accomplish their intent, fearful that if they fail, life will be meaningless. Then imagine that they see you, in your role as church leader, as someone who gets in the way. Their perception of you as a roadblock would make them anxious and

angry under any circumstances. But as a church leader, you are a figure they had hoped could be trusted and relied on to help them achieve their end (a sense of safety and wholeness). Their sense of betrayal may be immeasurable.

If we find ourselves up against such members who are causing great turmoil in the congregation, we may be tempted to tell them to think of others first or to think about what they are doing to the church. As reasonable as this statement sounds, we may be asking them to do something beyond their capabilities.

When my daughter was beginning to date, she was naturally given a curfew. Her response was to ask what would happen to her if she disobeyed. When I tried to focus instead on obedience simply out of affection for me, she still insisted on knowing the consequences and seemed to weigh those in deciding whether to honor the curfew.

I understand now that she was still seeing life from the perspective of meeting her own wishes in order to feel good and whole. I wanted her to consider another’s feelings first—not because it benefited her to do so, but because she cared more about my feelings than her own. This she had not yet learned to do.

Some people enter adulthood continuing to see life from this perspective. We may believe that their way of thinking is immature and not the optimal way of forming relationships. But to the extent that we judge rather than understand, we will lose hope in trying to connect to these children of God. It makes a big difference in how we are present with people if we see them as dysfunctional or if we see them making meaning in life differently than we do.

People Who Need Closeness

At the seemingly opposite end of the spectrum are those congregants who have no need of power and, in fact, often seem powerless in relationships. They seem to need other people to help them be whole persons; they get their identity from someone else. We often speak of those who relate in this way as having no sense of a self separate from others, or of being fused. From the perspective of autonomy (self-differentiation), it could be said that these people are too dependent on others, have no opinions of their own, and exhibit groupthink. But again, let’s look to constructive-developmental theory for another perspective.

Kegan’s theory allows for a “balance” in which a person needs someone else in order to feel completed as a human being. As people let go of their thirst for power to meet their needs and interests, they learn to share the reality of who they are with other people. In fact, these people now need someone else to make them feel whole.⁴ An autonomous or self-differentiated person might look at these people and see too much closeness. But to a person who constructs life this way, closeness is as necessary as breathing. Without it, he would cease to exist.

So imagine again a church, one made up largely of people who exhibit this need. Imagine that they have, for the most part, been in the congregation for many years and see it as their second home. Over the years they would have together built up traditions and rituals that symbolize their closeness. This close-

ness is, for them, a faithful response to the gospel; it is what Jesus meant in speaking about unity. Therefore, anything that threatens these relationships, and the shared traditions that have held them together, is not faithful.

Pastors may be uncomfortable with the way some people talk about Jesus (“he is my friend”), and want to enlarge that view, open it up to a more complex understanding of the otherness of Christ. However, if a person needs another person for her to feel completed, she will tend to have a certain conception of Jesus—as the friend who talks with her in the garden. It will be hard for her to see Jesus in any other way and still feel loved by Jesus.

Since this way of understanding life is a balance most people will experience at one time or another in their lives, younger (or newer) people in the church may well see life from this perspective. However, because they are of a different generation, or because they have not been part of building the older traditions, they will seek to build new traditions meaningful to them. Their ways may clash with the older traditions, and we may assume that the “older” folks think differently from the “newer” folks. While their preferences may differ, if the newer people need other people to enable them to feel completed, they are seeing life from the same fundamental perspective as long-time members. The content may be different, but the focus, the basic way of making meaning, is the same. Understanding this similarity may help us build bridges between the often opposing worlds of older and newer church members.

Moving Cautiously

Autonomous people sometimes have difficulty relating to “people who need people,” for their emotional demands can seem unending if we do not understand their perspective. This is especially true if we feel that they are asking us to form relationships as they do so that they can feel more comfortable with us. We may even be tempted to insist that they see as *we* do and to tell them they should become less dependent on others. They would not, however, hear this statement as it was intended. They would hear an indictment, a judgment, that they are not doing enough in their relationships. Thus, rather than speaking a liberating word to them, we would add to their burden. We would also appear to be pushing them even further away.

In using constructive-developmental theory, I do not mean to imply that pathology does not exist. Rather, the theory has challenged me to move more cautiously when labeling people and situations, to try to understand rather than judge. Within any perspective (balance) there can be a wide range of health/dysfunction; there can be a wide variety of preferences for relating (for example, as introvert or extrovert). People in the same balance will not necessarily agree in their opinions or feelings. What they will hold in common is that particular aspect of life they need to make them feel they are completed human beings. This theory provides one way of understanding people regardless of generation, gender, vocation, education, or locale. It describes the basic human experience of relating with the world, and how that changes (or stays the same) as we age.

Paths to Understanding

Viewing people through the lens of this theory helps us to understand why people defend what they defend, why certain values or prerogatives are important to them—and why we cannot always make ourselves understood, since we address people from our own perspective and fail to understand that it is not theirs. The lens can also allow us to see what is within our power to change and what is not.

People do not move easily from one way of constructing reality to another. The journey is long and difficult, for the way one has organized and understood the world to fit together and make sense must disintegrate if a new balance is to take its place. It is simply not within our power to make this shift happen for other people. We may learn to communicate in ways that are more meaningful to others, and we may learn how better to provide a blend of support and challenge that encourages the journey; but we cannot give life to the growing process for another human being.

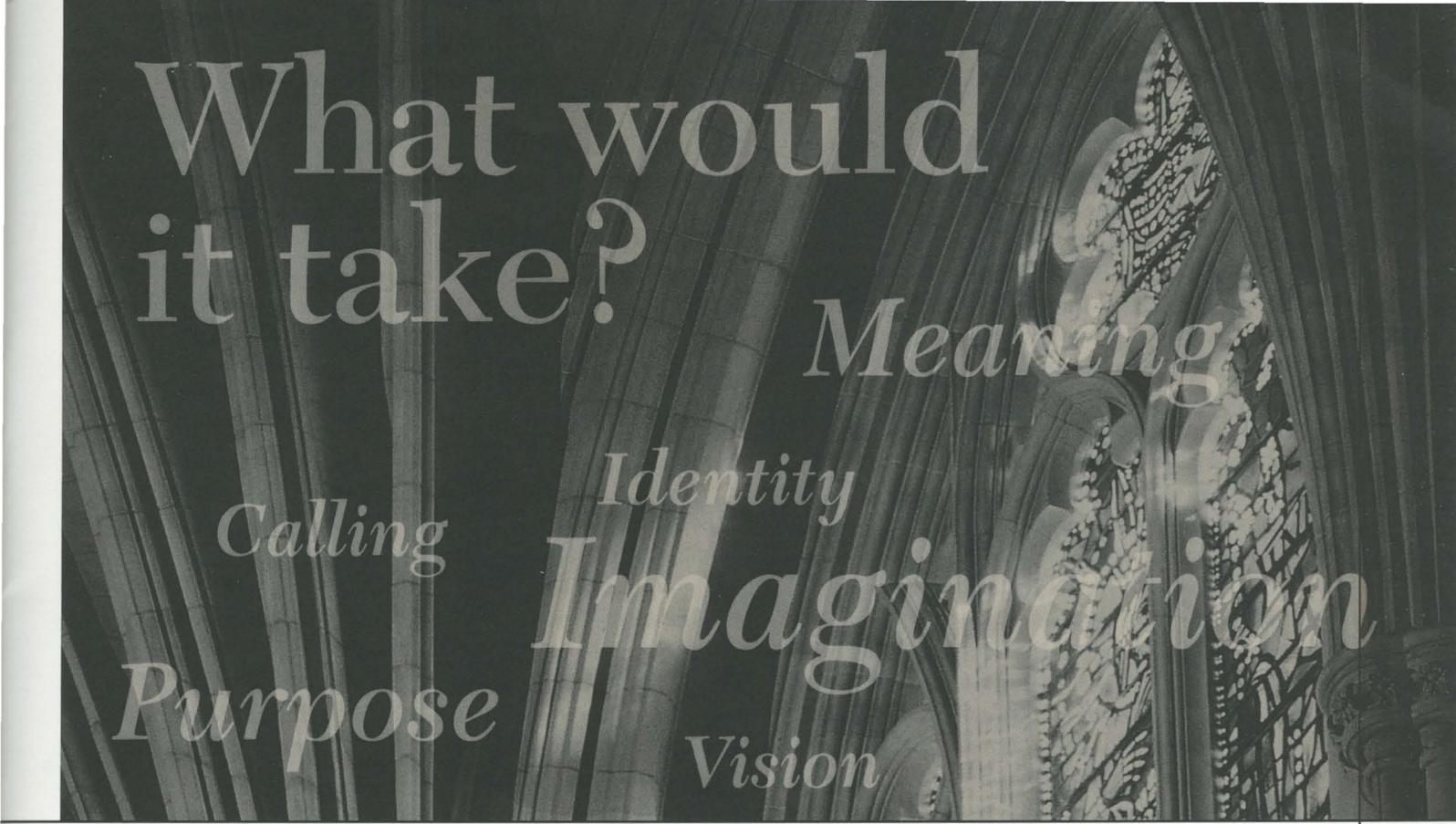
Some may hear this caution as an added burden, for if the journey is long and difficult, what hope have we for the problems with which we struggle in our parishes? This question does not necessarily, I think, get to the heart of what most troubles us. Understanding other perspectives encourages us to be present with people, to create the space that allows the Holy Spirit to bring mission and ministry to life among people just as they are, while we continue to uphold (without judgment) the idea that there is always more to the story. If we must see or hear people responding to the gospel in a certain way for us to feel good about our ministry, then that need may be part of our own journey that needs reflection and prayer. We may be trying to carry a burden that is not ours to bear.

Attending to how all these differences are brought to life in the congregation will help us move more gently through the lives of the people we serve. It may also encourage us to be gentler with ourselves when, facing our own limitations, we are exhausted or puzzled by the experience.

If we are able to understand how people see *from their perspectives* (which usually means understanding how they see without judgment on our part), we will be able to teach and preach and practice partnership in ministry in a way that allows the greatest possibility for new life and growth. As we struggle to gain insight into the world of others, we will at the same time be given new insight into our own. ♦

NOTES

1. This theory is introduced in detail in Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), and applied to contemporary societal issues in Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).
2. Kegan, *Evolving Self*, 43–44.
3. Kegan, *Evolving Self*, 89–95.
4. Kegan, *Evolving Self*, 95–100.



What would
it take?

Meaning

Identity

Calling

Imagination

Purpose

Vision

Moving Forward by Looking Back

The Story of Crooked Creek Baptist Church

FRED OAKS AND ALICE MANN

Spiritual leadership is occurring wherever members of the faith community are weaving new strands of connection between the Source of meaning (as defined by their religious tradition) and their present situation—with all its perils, opportunities, and choices. The act of weaving, no matter who is doing it, is spiritual leadership.

— Alice Mann, *Where Does Vision Come From?*

Once upon a time there was a church called Crooked Creek...We begin with these words so that you will know we are going to tell you a story. It is a special kind of story, one about the power of story, and how a congregation tapped into that power through the work and prayer of many leaders.

Something about a story draws us in. As an engaging narrative unfolds, we begin to anticipate movement in the plot. Where is the story going? What will happen next? How will the central tensions in the plot be resolved?

Congregations have stories. Living congregations have unfinished stories, and guiding a process that shapes the story of a faith community is an important aspect of congregational leadership.

Most often, leadership is defined as the act by which one person—the holder of the top position in the organization—both sets the agenda for others and brings them along, so that they adopt and implement that agenda together.¹ But a different kind of leadership is emerging in some congregations—one in which clergy and lay leaders understand their role as

the formation of narrative. In shaping the story, a community of people tells about what was, what is, and what might be. No one person dictates or controls this process. Instead, it flows from dialogue among members of the congregation as they listen and speak to one another about the unique history of their congregation, and about the relationship between their congregation's story and the larger story of God's work in the world. It is a process of meaning-making.²

E. L. Doctorow has observed, “[T]he gifted storyteller always raises two voices into the lonely universe, the character’s and the writer’s own.”³ The same is true for those who shape the story of a congregation. Leaders who participate in the formation of narrative interpret the history of their congregation and suggest ways in which that history might be pointing the congregation into the future. We tell here the story of congregational leaders who guided a process of narrative formation in a long-established church. Their process offers an excellent model of cooperation and teamwork that connects heritage to vision. The work resulted in a renewed appreciation of the congregation’s history and its unique calling. It also generated a widely shared sense of expectation of how the present congregants could work as partners of God in writing an exciting new chapter in the unfolding story of their church.

This process we are about to describe included three key components. **First**, a team of laypeople researched the congregation’s history and shared what it learned with other members, who were invited to add their own memories and ideas to the team’s findings. **Second**, an evocative question was posed to the entire congregation, stimulating imagination and drawing all members into the work of narrative formation. **Third**, a pastor with a collaborative leadership style listened carefully to the congregation’s dialogue about identity and purpose, and used his role of worship leader to interpret that dialogue and to posit some of its implications for future ministry. Eventually, a vision of the future emerged. A path to that future was discerned. And because both the vision and

the path were the result of an open, inclusive congregational process, church members now sense that their heritage informs this pilgrimage, and that God is present to bless and guide them on the way.

One Congregation’s Story

Once upon a time there was a church called Crooked Creek. For 165 years, the Baptists of Crooked Creek grew and thrived and sent roots deep into the soil of their community on the northwest side of Indianapolis. Over many years, the congregation established a strong identity and a sense of purpose. As a new century dawned, the leaders of Crooked Creek Baptist Church sensed that their congregation was ready to embrace a new vision for ministry. In the early months of 2000, leaders met frequently to talk about the future. But they made little progress until an Alban Institute workshop prompted them to research their history and share what they were learning with fellow church members. We both were involved with this event—Alice as workshop presenter and Fred as staff from the Indianapolis Center for Congregations. The process launched at the workshop took nearly a year to unfold, but it continues to pay rich dividends. The congregation is now engaging in a process of change that flows naturally from its unique identity and purpose as expressed over time.

Henry Ford once declared, “History is bunk.” But if he had ever led a change process in a historic congregation, Ford might never have uttered those words. Indeed, he might have discovered that history can be a good friend to those leading change in congregations and, paradoxically, a powerful ally in the work of discerning a vision of the future. History can authorize and energize a future-oriented vision for ministry. In long-established congregations, the way forward begins with a creative look back.

“A group of us met for several months prior to the workshop to talk about our future,” reported the Rev. Michael Snow, senior pastor. “But at that time we were focused on statistics and programs, not on identity. The process with Alice Mann

really helped us with identity.” Now in his mid-40s, Snow served as associate pastor of the church for 14 years before being called as senior pastor in 1996. He had read books and articles on church health and church growth. But which ideas touted in the books and articles were the best fit for this congregation? And how would new ministries relate to the congregation’s heritage?

In fall 2000, the Indianapolis Center for Congregations invited Crooked Creek Baptist Church to become one of five congregations working with Alice Mann in a yearlong size-transition process. Crooked Creek’s leaders accepted the invitation enthusiastically. The first event of the project provided the direction they needed to begin connecting their heritage with present-day ministry opportunities. That connection has shaped the church’s vision of the future and has energized a transforming process of change.

Layman Fred Cartwright had an epiphany during that event, an all-day workshop led by Alice in October 2000. “At that first plenary gathering, Alice asked several questions that intrigued me,” he recalled. “I was especially intrigued by her question ‘What is the unique calling of your church?’ Our congregation had a pretty diverse group of members present at that event—young and old, male and female, black and white. I became a scribe for the group’s conversation, making notes as we talked together.” The give-and-take was particularly lively during an activity Mann called “The History Grid” (below).

Era of history	What was going on in that context?
1. Founding era	
2. “Glory days”	
3. Today	

In this activity, church members visited three significant eras in the life of the congregation: its founding, its “glory days,” and the present. The goal of the exercise was the formation of narrative—the emergence of the congregation’s story about itself—shaped by clergy and laity together. Reviewing the completed grid, they asked themselves if themes emerged, whether perhaps there had been a persistent calling or sense of purpose that had remained constant throughout the congregation’s history.

“In my work as a program director for General Motors, I frequently use a business card,” said Cartwright. “And I remember thinking to myself, ‘If Crooked Creek Baptist Church had a business card, what would be printed on it?’ How could we describe concisely who we are and what we are about?”

At the end of this first size-transition event, the church moderator announced that he was forming four groups to pursue the work of size transition: a demographics team, a barriers-to-growth team, a communication team, and a calling team. While the word “calling” might normally conjure up images of telephone contacts or home visits, this particular “calling team” was charged with researching the congregation’s history to discern its unique vocation. As part of its exploration, the team would ask a key question: At this time in our history, are we called to make room for more people? Since Fred Cartwright had always had a keen interest in history, he volunteered immediately for the calling team, hoping that the group could help Crooked Creek Church discov-

er, cherish, and build upon its heritage. Four others joined him.

Researching the Past

The calling team was especially interested in researching an aspect of the congregation’s history that came to light during the history grid activity. Fred Jones, an African American who had been a member for many years, told the group that the church’s neighborhood on the city’s northwest side had long been home to black residents who had been deeply involved in community life. In fact, he reported, one of the church’s 14 founding members was an African American—a rarity in 1837 Indiana. This fact was news to nearly everyone present. Dr. Snow recalled having heard it several years before, though he had never seen confirming documentation. He would not have long to wait.

Few people are tempted to read through the voluminous yellowed minutes of old church business meetings. Still, each member of the calling team agreed to research a specific period of the congregation’s history. “It was a humbling experience,” Cartwright recalled. “We began to sense how important the church had been in the lives of those who had gone before us. We started to appreciate that our congregation’s heritage is a sacred trust. I was fascinated by what I read. I wondered what these folks had been thinking and feeling. For the most part, I had to read between the lines to speculate about such things. And that was a lesson in itself. If researchers 50 or 100 years from now seek to discover how we felt God was moving in our church in 2002, to what sources could they turn? I would like to see us develop a more comprehensive approach to cataloguing our history. Could we use time capsules? A different approach to reporting that would include more narrative? How would this new approach be developed and maintained? We have not yet answered those questions.”

Each member of the calling team made notes during its review of church records. These notes were collected into a 30-page document. Other historical material was added, including civic records from the Crooked Creek community. Eventually,

the team developed a multilayered timeline spanning 200 years, from 1800 to 2000. It contained most of the data generated by team members’ research—church membership, church events, pastoral leadership, church building, community events, and world events. Cartwright recalled: “We put it all up on poster board, brought a video camera into the room, and then invited some of our oldest members to come in, look over the timeline, and talk to us about their memories. They brought in old pictures and reminisced. We asked them questions and learned some new things. For example, we realized that during our centennial in 1937, other people did what we were doing now: they stepped back, took stock, and claimed a heritage. Now those videotapes have become part of our heritage. Ten years from now we plan to pull out that film and show it during our 175th anniversary celebration.”

Prayer for the Future

While the calling team was scouring the congregation’s archives and preparing to share its discoveries, the entire congregation was called to a “season of prayer.” As a Christmas gift in December 2000, Cartwright gave Dr. Snow a small book, *The Prayer of Jabez*. This little-known biblical prayer seemed an ideal petition for a congregation desiring to be open to God’s future for them.

And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, “Oh, that you would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that your hand would be with me, and that you would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain.” So God granted him what he requested. [1 Chron. 4:10 NKJV]

Dr. Snow devoted a series of sermons to this prayer in February 2001. Members of the congregation were encouraged to pray this prayer each day, requesting God’s blessing for the purpose of an expanded witness. This process of simultaneously researching the past and praying about the future created an environment perfect for nurturing new visions based on historic

How did we understand our calling (vocation)?	What did we see as the right size?

strengths. The prayer created a sense of anticipation. How would God bless them in their life together? What forms would the blessings take? How would these blessings enable them to serve others in new ways? How would these new ministries of service shape the unfolding story of Crooked Creek Church?

The answers would come, in time, from the congregation as a whole. To stimulate dialogue, leaders began to pose an important question to all church members soon after the first size-transition training event. “*What would it take?*” This question was printed on buttons, banners, worship bulletins, and newsletters. For several weeks, the question alone appeared in a variety of places, with no accompanying explanation. This device created a buzz in the congregation. (“*What would it take?*” What would *what* take?”) Eventually, church members were given the reference point of the question. It was rooted in the first size-transition training event, at which Mann had posed the question, “What would it take for your church to make room for its next 50 members?”

This question was discussed in a variety of settings for most of a year. The communication team designed experiences in which people could listen and speak to one another, openly sharing their hopes and fears related to change, growth, and hospitality. Connections were made between the church’s history and its future. The conversations centering on this question added a communal dimension to the church’s discernment about the future.

This, then, was the prelude to a compelling future vision at Crooked Creek Baptist. A large group of leaders attended a size-transition training event that started them talking about the relationship of the past to the future. They organized four teams of leaders, and these teams worked to include the entire congregation in the dialogue. Their history was thoroughly researched and shared while people prayed together expectantly for God’s new blessings and talked with one another openly about what it would take to welcome new people.

Discerning Themes

Once the historical data had been collected, the calling group began a process of discernment. What themes emerged from its research? What threads of identity and purpose ran through the fabric of congregants’ common life over the years? The members of Crooked Creek had more than an academic interest in this matter, because their answers to these questions would give form and shape to their vision of the future.

“As a pastor, I have often been invited to guide individuals who were trying to figure out God’s will for their lives,” Dr. Snow observed. “Alice Mann helped create an environment for us to do that as a congregation. Just as individuals have unique combinations of spiritual gifts, personal experiences, and temperament, so also each congregation has a unique calling. Part of discerning that calling is to

ments, it fails to build ownership among people of the congregation, and leaves their gifts and perspectives untapped. On the other hand, he is not comfortable with approaches that leave the pastor out of the vision process altogether, as if the clergy leader had nothing to contribute. To Snow, the role of pastor as interpreter seemed to strike the optimum balance of clergy and lay participation in the envisioning process.

With great excitement, the calling team announced that its research had confirmed Fred Jones’s assertion that one of the 14 founding members in 1837 was black. His name was Morley Stewart; little else about him could be documented. But this knowledge confirmed that the church’s long-standing racial diversity was a reflection of its roots—it had been racially integrated from day one. Church leaders began to appreciate the strong connection between the congregation and

“I understand my role to be that of *interpreter*,” said Dr. Snow. “As the congregation wrestles with who they are, and who they are becoming, I listen. Then I articulate what I’m hearing in a way that helps them gain clarity in the dialogue.”

ask, ‘What has God already done here?’ God will likely continue to work in a similar manner. The apostle Paul was addressing a congregation when he wrote, ‘And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ’ [Phil. 1:6].”

“I understand my role to be that of *interpreter*,” said Dr. Snow. “As the congregation wrestles with who they are, and who they are becoming, I listen. Then I articulate what I’m hearing in a way that helps them gain clarity in the dialogue. And I keep our dialogue in conversation with the larger story of biblical narrative.”

Michael Snow is aware of the “pastor as vision-caster” model, in which the clergy leader comes down from on high and thunders, “Thus saith the Lord!” But he is uncomfortable with that model, because with its unilateral pronounce-

its local community. Although some sections of Indianapolis had been virulently racist, the Crooked Creek community and church were markedly different. Residents of Crooked Creek had been involved in the Underground Railroad, helping slaves escape to freedom during the Civil War, and later they participated in the struggle for civil rights. Dr. Snow now sees the church deeply rooted in its community, stabilizing and strengthening generations of residents. “So much of *who* we are is rooted in *where* we are,” he said. “If we ever outgrew our facilities on this site, we would plant new churches in other parts of the city. I don’t think that we will ever move out of this community.”

The calling team invited many church members to participate in a dialogue about the congregation’s heritage and the implications of that heritage for future ministry. The

team made presentations followed by small-group discussions at business meetings, Sunday school classes, and leadership retreats. Every person's perspective was treated respectfully. Broad participation in the dialogue created interest in the calling team's research. Eventually the congregation discerned five themes that had remained constant over the years:

1. **Family-focused** with a tradition of generations of worshippers.
2. **Loving, caring community** of believers who convey a cordial welcome to all.
3. Committed pioneers, drawn together **far and wide** as one family of God.
4. A cultural **kaleidoscope** of believers.
5. Strong and steady **pastoral leadership**.⁴

Connecting Themes to Vision

Crooked Creek Baptist Church now had a renewed appreciation of its heritage, an atmosphere of spiritual expectation, and some sense of what it would take to make room for 50 new members. But how could the leaders make specific connections between the congregation's heritage and its vision of the future? Dr. Snow addressed this need by interpreting the congregation's story in his role as worship leader. The church's annual stewardship emphasis consisted of a series of worship services on the theme "How to Leave a Legacy." One service focused on the subtheme "Pass It On." Drawing from the biblical account of the influence Eunice and Lois had on Paul's young coworker Timothy (2 Tim. 1:1-9), Dr. Snow noted how families pass on cherished values from one generation to another. In the same way, he said, values in the family of faith—the congregation—are passed on. The sermon included a presentation by Fred Cartwright, who shared the calling team's report with the entire congregation. In his teaching on this topic, Dr. Snow introduced the image of a bridge. The bridge spanned the distance from Crooked Creek's past to its future, he said. The pillars supporting the bridge were the congregation's cherished values. To pass on these precious values effectively to a new generation, the congregation would have to express them in fresh ways.

This symbol captured people's imagination. They became conscious of their place on the bridge. They began to plan ministries and programs linked to the congregation's historical identity and purpose. For example, many families active at Crooked Creek Baptist have deep roots in church and community—some family names can be found in church records well over a hundred years old. But this multigenerational stability comes at a price: such churches are at risk of becoming insular, parochial, and closed to newcomers. How could the congregation's values of inclusion and hospitality be used to balance the strong ties of fellowship and family tradition? Balancing close fellowship among members with hospitality for the stranger is an ongoing challenge for any growing church, but few congregations deal with the issue openly. Crooked Creek, however, scheduled a conversation about what it would take to reach out to those who were not yet a part of the congregation. One suggestion was made repeatedly during this dialogue: add a new worship service. That service was launched in September 2001. The congregation's pioneering spirit is expressed in the new service's nontraditional style.

The church's history of being a "cultural kaleidoscope of believers" also had implications for the future. Congregants are now claiming their diversity as a gift to be celebrated, reaching out to their racially diverse neighborhood with a message of welcome and inclusion. Bilingual Hispanic church members are teaching classes in beginning and intermediate Spanish, so that other members can learn a new language to reach out to the growing number of Hispanic residents in the neighborhood. The congregation is planning to offer a Spanish-language service in the near future. The church also took under its care a local seminary student from Myanmar (Burma). He was hired as church custodian, though he also devoted many hours to caring for the needs of Burmese refugees in the community. He eventually became the church's "coordinator of cross-cultural ministry" and started a Burmese congregation after Crooked Creek ordained him in June 2002.

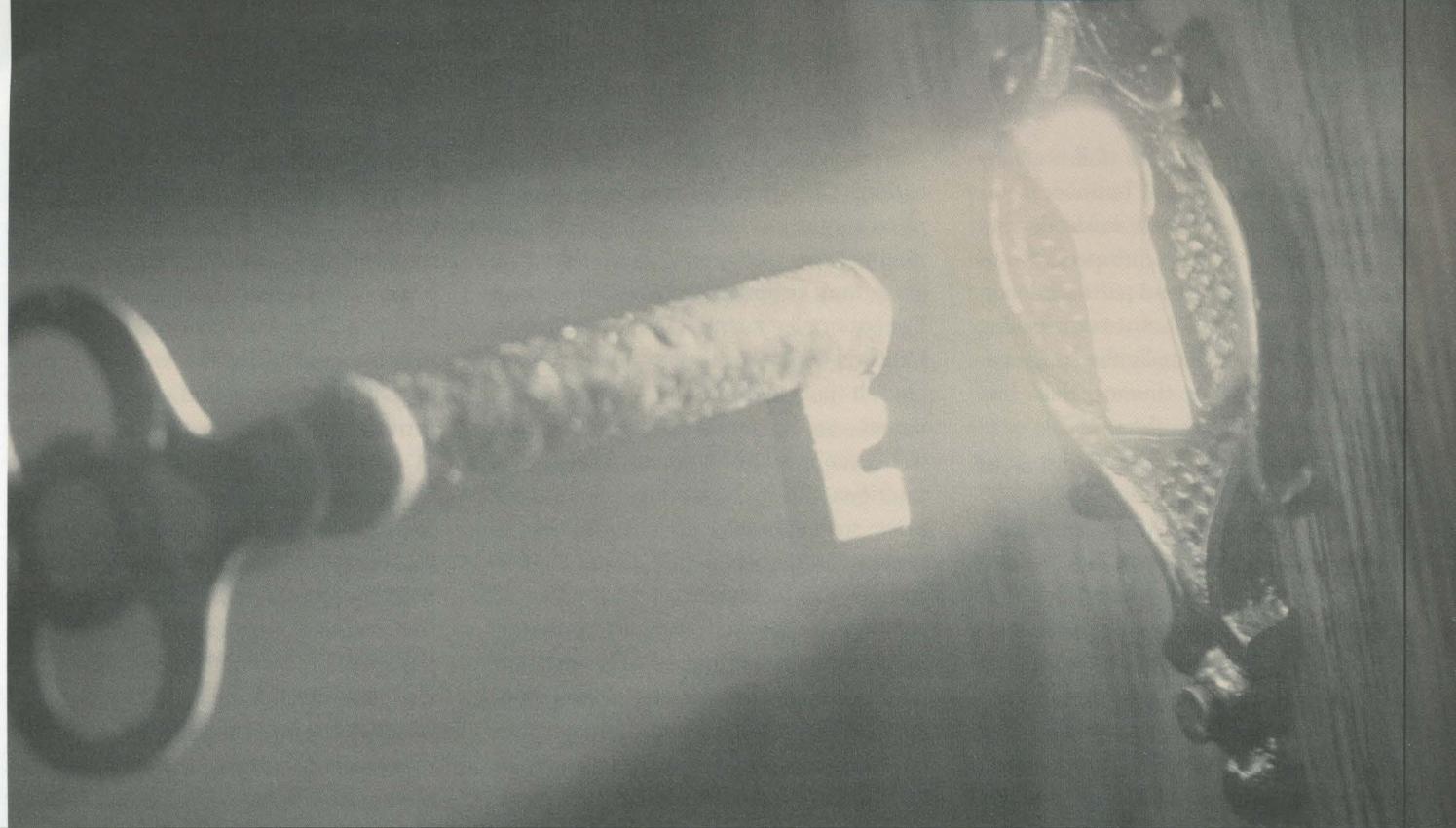
Responses to the question "What would it take?" have brought other issues to the surface. Including more people has implications for the church's facility, leadership development, programs, staff, and budget. Church leaders are now setting priorities and pacing the work to be done, so that the congregation may continue to thrive. They are gaining a renewed sense of purpose and focus. "This has really helped our self-esteem," said Dr. Snow. "It's easy to get discouraged—you're not the biggest church, you don't have the most programming. But then you realize that that's OK—you're unique! And that gives you a sense of freedom, because you don't have to try to be all things to all people. Just be who you are."

Fred Cartwright concurred. "This process has been a real affirmation for those of us who worked on the calling team. . . . We've seen that God has been at work in our church in the past, and now God is working among us today in similar ways. God has blessed us. God *is* blessing us."

Where this venture will lead, no one can say for sure. But the spiritual leadership provided by clergy and lay leaders at Crooked Creek has helped to produce a renewed spirit in this historic congregation. More and more people are stepping onto the bridge connecting the congregation's past to its future. The old story is shaping a new story. The congregation is drawing from the best of its heritage to address the challenges and opportunities of ministry in a new day. There is joy in the journey. ♦

NOTES

1. Jerry B. Harvey, *How Come Every Time I Get Stabbed . . .* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 111.
2. Wilfred H. Drath and Charles J. Palus, *Making Common Sense: Leadership as Meaning-Making in a Community of Practice* (Greensboro, N.C.: Center for Creative Leadership, 1994).
3. E. L. Doctorow, ed., *The Best American Short Stories 2000* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), xvi.
4. Fred Cartwright, et al., "Discovering Crooked Creek Baptist Church's Calling" report (Indianapolis: Crooked Creek Baptist Church, 2001), 1.



Where Does Vision Come From?

Three Theories of Vision Formation

ALICE MANN

We at the Alban Institute are often asked where the vision is *supposed* to come from in the life of a congregation. This question is not really a technical issue that can be addressed with a “correct” method. Rather, assumptions about how vision emerges reflect the underlying ecclesiology of a particular faith community. By ecclesiology, we mean one’s understanding of the nature of the church and, as a corollary, one’s assumptions about religious authority. In practice, we can identify at least three typical approaches to the issue of vision—each reflecting a different “theory of church.” While it would be rare to find the positions stated quite as starkly as we have done here (in our “quotations” of three imaginary church leaders), the sharp contrast may be clarifying.

A congregational theory of vision formation. “Authentic vision for our congregation can originate only in the membership. Our aspirations may be clarified through a congregation-wide planning process, through the work of ongoing committees, or through informal conversation among members. Whatever its source, any proposal for future direction

will be brought to a congregational vote to ensure that it truly represents the people of our church—who we are, what we value, how we understand our future calling.”

This theory is a characteristic basis for planning in the explicitly congregational traditions (United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalist, and American Baptist, for example). Even in traditions where pastors, rabbis, or bishops have more formal authority, the behavior of leaders and members in North American congregations is often shaped by congregational assumptions.

A pastoral theory of vision formation. “Our ordained minister is our spiritual leader. As a person of prayer, our pastor spends time discerning God’s intentions for this church. Through preaching, teaching, and organizational leadership, our pastor offers the congregation a unifying vision for the future and invites other leaders to participate in bringing that vision to fruition.”

This theory of vision formation is often presented in books on leadership by authors from the evangelical tradition; they commonly describe the pastor’s task as “casting the vision.” Lay leaders with a

business background sometimes advocate a variation on this model, arguing that the top organizational leader must set the future agenda (a prevalent, but not universal, view of the executive role).

A connectional theory of vision formation. “The primary unit of mission is not the congregation but rather the wider fellowship of believers in this region. To discover an authentic vision for our congregation, we look to our mutually acknowledged religious authority [such as bishop or presbytery] for inspiration and guidance. We test our congregation’s particular aspirations against that larger vision whenever we engage in discernment about the future.”

This approach to vision formation might be found in the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and United Methodist traditions, for example. Goals of the regional unit (diocese, presbytery, annual conference) are lifted up as benchmarks for congregational mission. The vision of the regional body may be implemented through funding of congregations, clergy placement decisions, and each pastor’s self-understanding as one with dual accountability—serving both the congregation and the wider body.

Making Meaning Together

The congregation’s vision might be seen in another way—as the “meaning the congregation makes” about its present and its future. Theories that rely on either the “visionary leader” (whether this is the local pastor or the bishop) or on the conventional machinery of parliamentary self-governance may miss the underlying process by which people make sense of their faith lives—as individuals and as congregations. Writing primarily for corporate executives, Wilfred Drath and Charles Palus argue for a richer view of a leader’s work. They see the person in formal authority as one participant in an organization-wide process of “meaning-making” that is going on all the time. “Meaning-making is all about constructing a sense of what is, what actually exists, and, of that, what is important. . . . When this happens in association with practice (work, activity) in a community, we say that the process of leadership is happening.”²¹

While their specialized vocabulary can be a bit daunting, Drath and Palus highlight fundamental human longings (meaning, purpose, significance) and competencies (telling a story, making meaning together) that are “home territory” for a religious congregation. In fact, meaning-making occurs at two levels in a religious system. Just as in any other organization, people need to “make sense” of their experience as members or leaders. Why am I part of this congregation? What kind of participation is meaningful for me? What is going on here?

However, religious systems engage in another level of meaning-making not found (at least consciously) in most other organizations. A central function of religion per se is to interpret reality, to make sense of the cosmos, to tell the foundational story in which other stories may find their proper context. So when leaders work together to articulate a vision for the congregation, they are “making meaning” of an enterprise that itself “makes meaning” of the universe.

Because of this duality, the leadership process in a religious system is especially complex and demanding. But it also contains (at least potentially) rich layers of significance, beyond what we might ordinarily expect of routine planning tasks. To explore the deeper layers of meaning hiding beneath “simple” planning questions, participants must be invited to interact with the deepest Source of meaning, wherever that may be located in their particular tradition—in Torah, in Jesus, in Word and Sacrament, or in a founder’s writings, for example. When that deep engagement happens, congregational life may become for people—in brief but important moments—an encounter with God, a taste of the kingdom, a glimpse of heaven.

Breakdown and Breakout

We might use the term “breakout”²² to describe these moments when a congregation’s symbols come alive in the present moment, when they “work” to give profound meaning to what is happening right now among us. To take a secular example, we might think about the damaged flag from the World Trade Center in New York that was carried to many

places in the following year, including the Olympic Games in Salt Lake City. Especially in the era since the war in Vietnam, the American flag—potentially a symbol of patriotism and national unity—had for many people either lost meaning or become associated with negative meanings (bitter division over the morality of that war, cultural imperialism, commercialism). While those painful associations did not disappear entirely, two historical events intervened to refocus the flag’s potential meanings. The first stretched over several years, as our country celebrated a whole set of 50th anniversaries related to World War II. And the second was, of course, September 11, 2001—a moment when differences and disagreements were largely (though never completely) overshadowed by national trauma. As a result, many people experienced “breakout” moments related to the American flag during the months that followed the attack.

The opposite of “breakout” is symbolic “breakdown.” During the Vietnam era, antiwar protesters burned the flag to dramatize their loss of confidence in American values. The objects and images we had relied upon to connect us with the deeper meanings of our national life often seemed bitterly ironic—or simply irrelevant as consumerism took over as the dominant shared value among us. (One might argue that the Nike “swoosh” logo replaced the flag as the single most potent emblem of American culture.)

When church leaders work together to articulate a vision for the congregation, they are “making meaning” of an enterprise that itself “makes meaning” of the universe. Just as in the case of our national life, it may take an experience of breakdown to reveal the connection between “making sense” in our organizational decision-making and “making meaning” of the cosmos in a religious sense. Today’s most profound example of symbolic breakdown in American religious life revolves around the sexual abuse of children by clergy, and the ways religious institutions (across many faith traditions) have engaged in collusion and cover-up. Here the connection between the two levels of meaning-making is powerfully revealed: If the

God-symbol in the God-place abuses me (or my child), how can I experience God as trustworthy and life-giving? If I report this behavior to other religious leaders and they betray me (by calling me a troublemaker, by hiding the abuser's history, or by passing the problem on to another congregation), how can I trust the faith community as a meaning-making body? Where symbolic breakdown has occurred, the relationship between the two levels of meaning must be built up anew from the fundamental Source. People must tell a new story together that is large enough and powerful enough to incorporate the betrayal and to suggest an interpretation of the world that "makes sense" once again.

Spiritual Leadership

Even in the absence of a major symbolic breakdown, however, the connections between the two levels of meaning are constantly under construction. We may say that spiritual leadership is occurring wherever members of the faith community are weaving new strands of connection between the Source of meaning (as defined by their religious tradition) and their present situation—with all its perils, opportunities, and choices. The act of weaving, no matter who is doing it, is spiritual leadership.

Such weaving can happen within all three of the models of vision formation we cited, provided that members and leaders generally concur that the model applied is appropriate. Each model, in its more extreme expressions, can rob the vision-tapestry of some of its richness by banning the participation of weavers from other parts of the system. Extremely congregational vision-formation processes tend to block contributions from the pastor or denomination. A highly pastor-centered process tends to limit members and denominational colleagues to the role of responder. A vision-formation process dominated by the denomination may ignore the insights of the clergy and laity closest to the ministry situation. Nonetheless, each of the three basic approaches can be practiced in a way that exemplifies open

inquiry and recognizes the interdependence of the parties. ♦

NOTES

1. Wilfred H. Drath and Charles J. Palus, *Making Common Sense: Leadership as Meaning-Making in a Community of Practice* (Greensboro, N.C.: Center for Creative Leadership, 1994), 9.

2. Linda J. Clark, Joanne Swenson, and Mark Stamm, *How We Seek God Together* (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 2001), chapter 1.

This article is excerpted from a forthcoming Alban book on strategic planning in congregations by Alice Mann and Gil Rendle. The book is scheduled for publication in 2003.

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Mark Lau Branson, Ed.D.

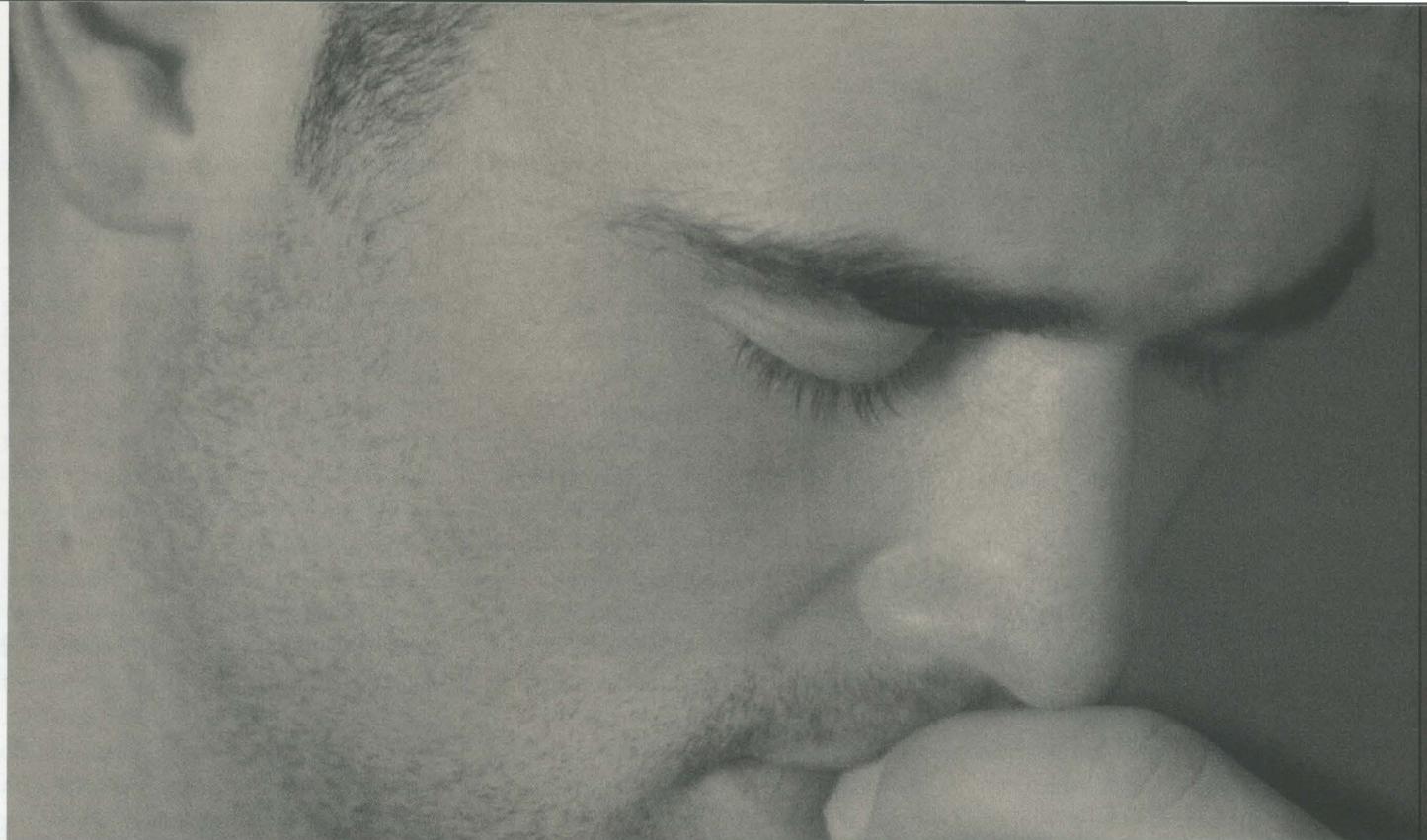
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The Myth of Competence

ISRAEL GALINDO

Excellence does not require perfection. —Henry James

The Rev. Susan Finster stood at the back of the church greeting her parishioners at the end of her first “real” sermon at her first “real” parish. After seven years as an associate pastor at two congregations, she had started the day excited about her first Sunday as the new senior pastor of Miles Road Church. The service went well, and from all accounts the sermon was well received. Susan took to heart the compliments from the members.

“Great sermon, Pastor,” said a member of the search committee.

“Well done,” a deacon added.

“Thank you,” a young mother said. “That’s just what we needed to hear.”

But not 20 minutes later Susan found herself in her office, weeping. She was replaying the sermon in her head, focusing on points in her delivery she thought were poorly done. She wondered if anyone had noticed that her pulpit robe was too large. She fought back a familiar queasy feeling in her stomach that was

always accompanied by a small critical voice that asked, “Who do you think you are, anyway?” Fighting the conflicting emotions that boiled up, Susan ended the morning angry at her inability to celebrate the day and her accomplishments. She wondered again at this constant feeling of inadequacy.

Clergy have one of the most challenging careers anyone could hope for. And despite theologies of grace and calling to servanthood, congregations expect performance from clergy. This expectation to perform and to get “results” can become a point of personal and congregational anxiety. Poorly managed, such discomfort can result, ultimately, in clergy burnout, termination, and congregational frustration. It does not help that American congregations live within, and often share, a culture whose values reflect corporate “bottom-line” attitudes and expectations of leadership. As a result, clergy themselves often take on these performance expectations.

I have identified, among leaders in both secular and religious contexts, what

I've come to call "the myth of competence."

The myth of competence is the attitude, fed by chronic anxiety, that engenders the belief that personal self-worth, relevance, and meaning reside in *external* definitions and assurances of being competent in all that one does. It manifests itself in ways of functioning and relating in the church that can result in burnout and depression.

What the Myth Is Not

I do not imply certain understandings, nor should they be inferred, when I speak of "the myth of competence." First, I don't mean that incompetence should be tolerated in congregational ministry. In fact, for clergy in a senior leadership position, tolerating incompetence merely ensures that it won't be long before the congregation loses its best people. Neither do I mean that we should not be good at what we do. We should, in fact, be setting an example of doing our best for the Lord and the church, employing our gifts and talents.

The myth of competence does not mean that we should refrain from challenging people to higher standards, or fail to hold them accountable to clearly communicated performance expectations. We should not make excuses for laziness. Truth be told, lazy people can have a great capacity to use good theory to poor ends. I can't tell you how often I've heard people use the concept of self-differentiation to say, in effect, "That's not my job," or "I don't want to overfunction."

The Roots of the Myth

The myth of competence is a particular occupational hazard that haunts people in leadership, in both corporate and ministry contexts. The myth stems from issues related to a sense of self-worth, a personal formative history, a deficient belief system, and a lack of fully realized self-differentiation, or self-actualization. The myth also involves the context and relationships in which leaders find themselves.

If Susan is to overcome her tendency to embrace and function out of the myth of competence, she will need to realize

that the myth operates at both personal and systemic levels. While it resides at the individual level, it is also a systemic issue: it manifests itself fully in how a person functions and relates to others at corporate levels. The myth shows itself in relationships at work, in the family, and in social and community environments.

Susan has long suspected that her nagging feelings of inadequacy began when she was a child. She's not far off the mark. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development demonstrates that issues of competence are central during a formative stage of life. Erikson called the fourth stage of development "industry vs. inferiority." This stage occurs during our elementary school years. At this developmental stage we become keenly aware for the first time, overtly, of family emotional processes, including parental expectations, the performance demands of school, and messages from peers. Participation in competitive sports only serves to confirm that we are not all created equal in skills and abilities.

Because of the nature of congregational relationship systems, people who function from a belief in the myth of competence are susceptible to unhealthy relational and communication patterns. Those pathologies take advantage especially of leaders who fail to act from a strongly self-differentiated stance. These leaders are ripe prospects for chronic anxiety in various manifestations—"hostage-taking" ("If you don't perform better, we will judge you"), a myopic focus on issues and content ("It's the pastor's preaching that's the problem"), "identified patient" strategies ("It's the *pastor* who's the problem"), and feelings of dependence ("I'd better not rock the boat; no one else will accept me if I fail here").

Symptoms of the Myth

People who buy into the myth of competence suffer predictable symptoms. For Susan, the ones that often got her into trouble as an associate were oversensitivity to criticism and inappropriate responses to flattery. The former gave "power" to the critics in the system and derailed her ability to provide vision. The

latter tended to make her emotionally dependent and susceptible to seduction.

Other symptoms include a hypercritical attitude toward others' successes or failures, and a tendency toward blaming (which puts the focus on "others" and fosters "deflecting" repertoires like excuse-making and passive-aggressive behaviors.) Negative feelings about competition are symptoms, as are feelings of persecution, inadequacy, insecurity, and "shame."

The myth of competence makes some clergy reluctant to take risks. This hesitance leads to a failure in leadership and can, in turn, contribute to a lack of personal and institutional growth. Ultimately such clergy are unable to provide vision, often engaging instead in "poll-taking" leadership and never-ending consensus building. Others ultimately tend toward reclusiveness and timidity, as well as overfunctioning or underfunctioning.

The Paradox of the Myth

Clergy and congregations can fall victim to societal values that focus on success (typically meaning more and bigger) and "results." Miles Road Church, Susan's new congregation, has a reputation for demanding top-rate performance from its clergy and staff. It is also known to hold high expectations for the standard of worship (especially the preaching), the excellence of the day school, the use and appearance of the buildings, and the quality of programs.

Maintaining high standards is a desirable corporate value, but when it is motivated by anxiety it can trap clergy or congregations in the myth of competence. In that case, the drive to maintain standards becomes the drive for perfection (or the appearance of perfection). Such attitudes embody a certain paradox. Rather than resulting in confidence in the leader, they result in insecurity (you can't always "act" your way into a new reality, which is what Susan found herself doing). Rather than resulting in effective leadership, insistence on near-perfection results in weak leadership because it feeds into "sick" systemic forces driven by anxiety. Rather than liberating the leader, it

oppresses—having to be “perfect” all the time is exhausting! Rather than enabling vision, the standard of perfection fosters myopia because leaders focus on their performance, as judged by other people’s expectations.

The paradox of the myth of competence is that rather than generating freedom, it leads toward controlling behavior, since a leader focused on competence has little tolerance for honest criticism. When the focus of leadership is on the appearance of competence, it results not in personal and congregational growth but in stagnation. Once we find the comfort zone of a repertoire or “bag of tricks,” we will tend to stick with it and not risk opening ourselves to the challenges of growth.

While those who live by the myth of competence can maintain the façade for a while, the end product is the opposite of what is desired. Rather than resulting in maturity, this mode of leadership leads to dependence. Leaders whose primary aim is to appear competent always have their radar turned on, scanning for other people’s approval. Rather than resulting in differentiation, this approach results in enmeshment as we become overdependent on the system to provide affirmation of our self-worth, our values, and our vision. Ultimately, rather than focusing on functioning better, we become preoccupied with appearances. Leaders whose drive comes from the myth of competence are more concerned with appearing competent than with leading effectively. They’d rather receive the affirmation of congregants than engage in challenging the congregation’s system toward maturity, growth, and integrity.

Moving toward Wholeness

How do we move beyond swallowing whole the myth of competence? For individuals, overcoming the myth may be a lifelong struggle, especially for people like Susan. On a corporate level, systemic anxiety, dysfunctional relationships, and power issues complicate the picture. Perhaps the most productive starting point for moving toward wholeness begins with the leader. Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ **First, confess incompetence.** Given what we are called to do in ministry, we are all inadequate to the task.
- ◆ **Adopt a functional theology of grace.** Living with the myth of competence may express the lack of ability to receive grace, leading often to an inability to extend grace.
- ◆ **Make personal excellence and relevance the standard of your ministry, not competence.** There is a qualitative difference between a driving desire to appear competent and a commitment to excellence. Excellence involves setting standards based on your own values and principles rather than working to meet other people’s expectations. The chart below contrasts these two postures.
- ◆ **Accept failure as progress toward a goal.** You know you’re doing better if you are willing to accept the risk of failure as a step in the process of achieving goals and visions. Leadership requires vision, vision calls for risk, and failure is often the price paid en route to realizing one’s vision. Learn to risk the cost.
- ◆ **Seek to understand the source of the myth of competence in your life.** One’s family of origin is a good place to look. Where and from whom did you get the message that you were

not good enough? That you would “never amount to anything”? Children whose parents live vicariously through them are prime candidates for the myth of competence.

- ◆ **Redefine the role of leadership.** Leadership is not being perfect, or infallible, or “strong,” or authoritative, or “the best” or “most important.” Leadership is about providing the appropriate functions needed by the church at the right time, promoting health, maturity, and differentiation in others. It means challenging the system more than it means keeping people happy.

Given what we are called to do—preach like a golden-tongued angel every Sunday; run an organization efficiently, using a volunteer force and depending on donors’ generosity; afflict the comfortable; give care to souls that may be unwilling and unmotivated; lift a countercultural prophetic voice in an often hostile (or worse, apathetic) culture; and act as God’s presence at all times and in all places—given all these demands, we will always be inadequate. No one is competent by oneself to do all that is required for successful ministry. The good news for the Rev. Susan Finster, and for us, is that we are not called to do it alone, and that our primary calling is not to results, but to faithfulness. ◆

Competence-focused Leadership	Excellence-based Leadership
Locus: External	Locus: Internal
Characterized by anxiety	Characterized by enthusiasm
Feeds on deficits and insecurity	Feeds on challenge
Informed by external standards	Informed by internal values
Responsible to others	Responsible to self
Driven by external expectations	Driven by internal impetus
Global and vague	Selective and specific

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

STEPHEN OTT

Why do so many cognitively intelligent pastors and other leaders flounder, while many of lesser intelligence enjoy success? The widespread push for achievement in the 20th century often asserted the basic importance of cognitive intelligence, yet we see that people with high IQs are not always successful in relating to spouse, parents, or offspring; dealing with people at work; or living well and happily in a demanding world.

The concept of intelligence was scarcely mentioned in psychology books until the late 1920s. An early researcher in the field, David Wechsler, wrote in 1940 about the nonintellectual factors in general intelligence. Although he went on to concentrate on the cognitive branch of intelligence research, he recognized the importance of noncognitive aspects of general human intelligence. Howard Gardner in 1983 expanded Wechsler's concept of general intelligence and wrote of "multiple intelligences," and specifically of "personal intelligence."

The exploration of personal intelligence—involving self-awareness and interpersonal and emotional competence—represents another direction and branch of psychological research. It is from this lineage that Reuven Bar-On (who coined the phrase Emotional Quotient [EQ]), Daniel Goleman, and others write, examining successful functioning in the workplace and in interpersonal situations, clarifying how applications of EQ lead to excellence in performance. They have explained why some people are able to exercise emotional competencies to make a profound positive difference in their work and in their organizations, while without it others stumble.

Traits and Competencies

Bar-On defines emotional intelligence as "an array of non-cognitive abilities, capabilities, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environ-

mental demands and pressures" (paper presented to the American Psychological Association annual meeting in Chicago in 1997). It is commonly agreed that emotional skills and intelligence develop over time. They modify and can grow throughout life, tending to peak in one's 40s; they can be taught through skills training and therapy experiences. It is important to distinguish between an inborn *trait*, like perfect pitch or a sharp sense of taste or an aesthetic sensibility, and a *competence* like that of a composer, a chef, or a painter. The competencies build on existing traits, but are the result of focused training, learning about applications, and practical experience. Competence is a valuable set of skills and habits that lead to more effective performance, and to a greater likelihood of success.

Learning Emotional Competence

According to Goleman, some research indicates that emotional competence matters *twice* as much as raw intelligence or technical know-how in contributing to outstanding performance in work (*Fortune*, Oct. 26, 1998, p. 293–298). Strong technical knowledge and intellectual ability, coupled with high emotional intelligence, are thought to characterize a person well along in the process of self-actualization. Scoring high in emotional intelligence does not automatically make a person superb at work or in relating to people; it means he or she has a high *potential* to learn the emotional competencies needed for outstanding performance. In a subsequent article, Goleman indicates that emotional intelligence has a genetic-nature component, along with the nurture-learning that accumulates with age and experience. How much of each is a factor is not known, but research demonstrates that while each individual has different capacities for growth and adaptation, emotional intelligence can be learned (*Harvard Business Review*, Nov.-Dec. 1998, p. 93–102).

Research indicates that the thinking part of the brain learns differently from the emotional part. The centers for rational thought are located in the neocortex, the thin layer that covers the top of the brain. It learns by adding new information to the existing networks of association and understanding, thus expanding them, depending to a high degree on sensory input in visual and aural form. But learning an emotional competence engages our emotional circuitry, involving our social habits and emotional memories. These are located in the limbic structures, deep in the middle of the brain, with the amygdala playing a key role. It is the site where emotions and affective memories are stored. Neural circuitry runs from the limbic system to the gut, giving new meaning to the term "having a gut feeling." Learning emotional competence involves a process different from that of learning multiplication tables. The limbic system learns by repetition, experimentation, and practice, all of which involve emotion. It takes a limbic connection to change an emotional skill.

Going to a lecture or a typical training program on interpersonal competence isn't likely to get the job done, for people won't automatically know how to apply and practice emotionally what they have heard, and the lessons have been aimed at the wrong part of the brain. Many of us have gone to workshops and brought home great materials in notebooks that were never looked at again. EQ isn't about information; it is about taking information and combining it with motivation, self-awareness, and vision, and striving for a new application, a new way of living. Emotional learning involves growing new pathways at the neurological level, not just adding more input to the existing (status quo) web. New ways of living, responding, and understanding oneself involve creating new circuits and replacing older, less adaptive ones.

EQ and Leadership

Emotional competence is crucial to the leadership role. Leadership is closely linked to helping others accomplish their tasks efficiently and to building confidence, satisfaction, and productivity among employees or volunteers. Problematic leadership lowers the morale and productivity of the work group and has a negative impact on individuals in the group: it blurs the focus on accomplishing tasks, raises frustration and hostility levels, decreases group cohesion and cooperation, and contributes to lowered motivation and loyalty to the organization. The effects of chronic distress on individuals in such environments may include increased distractibility and a permanent dulling effect on intellectual functioning.

Pastorally managing an organization that has been stable and orderly in the past, and has avoided the chaos of drastic change is a job far different from *leading* an organization, which involves working with the volatile changes and shifts of the present.

Unskillful leadership also contributes to lowered retention rates of valuable workers or volunteers, and to a loss of customers and thus lower profits. Reuven Bar-On suggests that EQ is emotional and social intelligence, concerned with the ability to understand oneself and others, to relate effectively to people, and to adapt to and cope with one's immediate situation—in the process increasing one's ability to deal successfully with environmental demands. Leadership based on these self-aware abilities and skills uses active self-management and empathy, aiming at relational management, which in turn can catalyze needed cooperation and resonance in organizations. "Resonance," in organizational terms, is the joining together of people in a vital common mission and in cooperative anticipation of their shared future.

The Making of Visionary Leaders

Visionary, innovative leadership is built spiritually on a sense of vocational calling in one who exercises self-awareness and

congruence with one's deepest motivating values. Such leadership is both cognitive and emotional in its wisdom; it is based on core motivating values. A new idea or insight needs people of emotional competence to refine it, initiate it, and put it into effective practice and follow-through. People can lose their calling by just doing the same thing over and over, failing to hear changes in their dreams and values as they move through cycles of life and vocation. Awakening to one's spiritual values and one's source of hope and renewal are of paramount importance to becoming a visionary leader whose skills and character join hands. It is an example of emotional intelligence vocationally focused.

Many denominations today are aware that a significant proportion of their

churches have plateaued or are losing members, a complex political, social, and religious trend measurable for more than 40 years. More than half the congregations of the American Baptist Churches are in this situation. Identity and ministry are being challenged by a more secular society whose new generations show a decreasing interest in denominational life. Fewer church leaders now have the confidence that they know how to lead congregations effectively in mission and servanthood during such a time of change.

Pastorally managing an organization that has been stable and orderly in the past, and has avoided the chaos of drastic change is a job far different from *leading* an organization, which involves working with the volatile changes and shifts of the present. Leading sometimes requires inoculation of the organization's system to increase a sense of urgency to address needed change, as well as an ability to remain steadfast in the face of the resulting conflict and stress. Average EQ skills are

unlikely to be sufficient to transform a "stuck" congregational system, which may resist the change it needs.

Training for Renewal Ministry

Among American Baptists in the northeast there is a new program built upon the anticipation ("prolepsis") of God's calling the church into renewal and vitality for the future. The Nehemiah Leadership Network (NLN) is a cooperative program of 10 American Baptist regions that nurtures and encourages visionary pastors who choose to lead congregations in renewal. The program identifies candidates with a high potential for success with renewal ministry, and helps them to develop the spiritual vitality, emotional maturity (EQ), and leadership skills needed for leading congregations in renewal. Such pastors attend a vocational evaluation program at the Center for Career Development and Ministry in Dedham, Massachusetts, aimed at measuring the extent to which the pastor has the leadership traits and skills for revitalization work. The center and the pastor devise an individual plan for learning, strengthening and deepening the integration of the pastor's emotional intelligence, leadership training, and spiritual grounding in a transformation ministry.

As the meltdown of old denominational forms continues, and the importance of teamwork, cooperation, and collegiality increases, the need for superb people skills grows in ministry leadership. Learner-directed, the NLN is one form of church renewal, providing an appropriate environment for the experimental, repetitive learning required for focusing on emotional growth and self-actualization (EQ). These experiences are combined with systems knowledge and change theory, interdependence and mutual learning in a small group, and a vital personal spiritual practice. ♦

More on Emotional Competence

How is emotional competence measured? To find out, visit our Web site at www.alban.org/journal/currentissue.asp. A reading list compiled by Stephen Ott also is included.





FORMING GOD'S PEOPLE

A few years ago, I asked a group of pastors to list the obligations and roles specified in our legislated denominational materials. As I listed these duties on a screen, the murmuring began. As leader of this retreat, I was supposed to provide a moderate dose of clarity and encouragement for colleagues who had asked for help with burnout, a dearth of collegial relationships, and little agreement on what we as clergy were trying to accomplish. It was obvious that this exercise did not encourage the group. More than three dozen separate items were included, and over 50 verbs. “Supervise...administer...care...report...preach...cooperate...evaluate search...counsel...lead...oversee...prepare...provide...deploy...obtain maintain...” Our documents specified topics for counseling, contexts for ministry, and, of course, denominational duties. The murmuring continued; then the pastors began laughing. They sat right there, in the presence of a judicatory leader who had a supervisory role, and they laughed at the job description.

When we look for resources to guide our modes of leadership, we are provided with a smorgasbord of types and metaphors. Consumer choice reigns, and pastors are tempted to deliver on the images. You might be a type-A CEO who creates and manages a “tall-steeple church” or a “megachurch.” You may prefer being an activist in the Saul Alinsky mold to help us act (or feel) really liberal (or conservative). Your style may be that of a motivational speaker who can intensify our spiritual affections.

Those who promote each image give us reasons that suit our desires for organizational successes, along with no small nod to our internal insecurities and drives. We might seek a pastor who serves as

Seminary professor Mark Lau Branson describes interpretive, relational, and implemental leadership

alter ego, as therapist, or as a parent who accepts or scolds or serves as a target for some leftover antiauthoritarian arrows. We may want a shepherd to be an all-sufficient guide, provider, and rescuer. Perhaps a teacher-sage would assure us that we are thoughtful and educated, then leave us to be enlightened adults who make up our own minds. If our priority is preserving a

traditional institution and its financial holdings, we need a manager-controller. And even though we will use other terms, we may desire an entertainer whose sermons are at least marginally competitive with sports or concerts or, more likely, the lure of a latte with the Sunday paper.

Leading Where and Why

It is critical that leadership be understood as a secondary question. The prior work concerns ecclesiology, soteriology, and missiology—or what we mean by church, salvation, and mission. Through our leadership, what do we wish to create or move or form or produce? I hear church leaders who hope to lead massive growth, or institutional survival, or civic engagement. But we need to ask: Growth of *what*? Survival of *what*? *What* engagement, and *why*? Congregational leaders need constantly to ask: What is the church? And: What is the church in this place? In *Models of the Church*, Avery Dulles—priest, professor, and now cardinal—gave us a useful set of images. Each model could be used to develop appropriate dimensions to our leadership: institutions need managers, heralds articulate a message, servants express compassion and mercy. It is notable that Dulles's revised edition features a new model, "community of disciples," which he develops as a synthesizing and inclusive type.

Dulles's attention to "community" counters rampant individualism as well as cultural definitions of community that include little more than affinity and affection. Dulles draws attention to specific qualities that seldom merit focus in many U.S. churches: relative intimacy, permanence, and proximity.¹ These characteristics counter the congregational models that acquiesce to our society's norms. We tend toward casual relationships (we've lost the long evenings of storytelling, and we seldom interfere in each others' lives). We live commuter lives (work, friends, recreation, school, church). And we relocate frequently (for reasons of career and taste). If our congregations want to realize the traits Dulles notes, we will need to give adequate attention to geography, more significant time together, and committed covenant practices. Only with these emphases can a congregation promote consistency in discipleship and meaningful engagement with a neighborhood. In *The Problem of Christianity* Josiah Royce emphasized a community's need for

shared memories, cooperative activities (what sociologist Robert Bellah has called "committed practices"), and common hopes.²

Converging social forces have successfully embedded an imagined "good life" in our psyche and social formation—a salvation story that leads to habits of consumerism, careerism, and many levels of sanctioned and unsanctioned violence. Churches and pastors often serve as chaplains to this national project, perhaps offering moderating voices but generally keeping faith and church circumscribed to minimal practices. Akin to other civic players, church leaders find our niche (providing animated or staid worship, a food bank, a religious comment in civic settings). Clergy's place is dictated by society, church is tagged onto the numerous commitments of all the members, and our relationships and imaginations are centered elsewhere.

What are we leaders to do if we take these descriptors of community seriously? How would one lead such a community if it is to display a thorough and distinctive association with Jesus? What memories need to be owned and repeated as common memories? How do we define "hope?" How might worship and love and ethics and jobs cohere? What cooperative activities are essential? How do we define and encourage proximity and permanence? What countering forces should we expect?

Giving Structure to a Vision

In an urban United Methodist church, a few families wanted to re-envision how our lives embodied our faith. We were several years into Bible study, social analysis, covenant groups, mission attempts, and continuing growth as a multicultural congregation. Some biblical passages had lured us—Jeremiah called for immigrant Hebrews (actually interned war prisoners) to envision several generations of life and service in Babylon (Jer. 29). Isaiah's imaginative poetry celebrated a visible urban community that attracted the commendation and participation of others (Isa. 58). Luke's accounts in Acts and Paul's prior-

ities in his letters gave us a sustained look at the Holy Spirit's generative and corrective work of establishing identifiable covenanted communities.

These studies, and our analysis of urban forces, plus hours of prayer and stories, had led us to consider creating a co-housing³ community. Biblical images gave us the meanings we needed; continuing hours of conversation and labor built our relationships; planning and budgeting and delegating inched us forward to carry out this corporate project. Themes of community, ecology, and neighbors gave structure to our vision. We built and remodeled nine units, for various family sizes, with organic gardens, solar power, frequent meals with each other and with guests, and commitments to the neighborhood. Our church practices of plural leadership were evident in the shared work of envisioning, laboring, and caring about relationships.

This project illustrates how leadership needs to function in a congregation. *Interpretive leadership* creates and provides resources for a community of interpreters who pay attention to God, texts, context, and congregation. *Relational leadership* creates and nourishes all of the human connections in various groups, partnerships, friendships, and families. *Implemental leadership* develops strategies and structures so that a congregation embodies gospel reconciliation and justice in a local context and in the larger world. In effect, these three spheres are structures in the congregations—structures that give meanings (interpretive), human connections (relational), and organizational practices (implemental). It is crucial that a congregation's primary leaders nurture capacities and skills in all three spheres, and that they are attentive to cohesive and coherent practices in the context of constant change.

Interpretive Leadership

Interpretive leadership creates a learning community. A community of interpreters uses the available literary, social, and spiritual skills to give attention to "texts" while listening to and observing God's initiatives. The texts of Scripture and tradition require more attention than a Sunday ser-

mon; those who are being formed into a covenant community will give considerable time and energy to study. The scriptural metanarrative⁴ and the individual writers and their narratives require significant attention. What do we mean by “covenant” or “gospel” or “faithful”? What does it mean to be a “church”? How did our faith ancestors worship? What kind of faith communities did they form? How were they to relate to neighbors? What mission is God’s mission?

Further, the congregation’s life, its history, and its makeup need attention. Various venues can be formed for the telling of *spiritual* autobiographies. I have also seen the benefits of telling *cultural* autobiographies and *money* autobiographies. The congregation as a whole also has a story. The official narratives give too much attention to clergy and buildings; we need to uncover stories of faith, of mission, of spiritual strength, and of woundedness. In the Japanese-American Presbyterian church where my family has become active, we have created numerous conversations with “appreciative inquiry” interviews. This approach surfaces the strongest and most life-giving stories and characteristics of an organization. The congregation is gaining the capacity to see a more hopeful future that is generated by the best of its past. Members are becoming aware of the abundant resources for congregational re-envisioning and reinvigoration.

Leaders also equip the church to interpret the surrounding neighborhoods. The economic, social, and political stories of the city and its neighborhoods will give perspectives on the congregation’s place and prospects. Interpretive leaders motivate storytelling and research, make connections between congregants and neighborhoods, and build capacities for discernment. The assumption here is that theological and spiritual connections link the worshiping community with the surrounding people and powers.

Even when churches begin with organizational activities that are well connect-

ed to gospel meanings, organizational activities and structures are often passed on without those connections. Our children inherit ceremonies, programs, structures, and policies that have lost their substance. The foundational graces in Scripture, the tradition’s power and movement, are not readily available. “Meaninglessness” is not just a subjective critique of restless youth.

Interpretive leadership provides the resources, the inspiration, the percep-



These three spheres are structures in the congregations—structures that give meanings (interpretive), human connections (relational), and organizational practices (implemental). It is crucial that a congregation’s primary leaders nurture capacities and skills in all three spheres.

tions that form a people who own the biblical and historical narratives, re-narrate their own personal and corporate stories, and become aware of the numerous forces that shape their context. All of these “texts” are brought to study, prayer, discernment, and envisioning as the congregation narrates and enacts its own local theology. Spirituality, then, is defined as attentiveness to and participation in the initiatives of the Holy Spirit. Church leaders create a whole congregation of interpreters as they guide and offer resources for these activities. This interpretive leadership is done with vital and deep connections to relational and implemental activities.

Relational Leadership

Numerous tip-offs announce that ours is a relational work. Covenant and salvation are essentially relational ways of being—with God, with a faith community, and with neighbor. We are to be reconciled agents of reconciliation. If meanings are to be continually discerned by the interpretive community, and if those meanings are to be made tangible and visible,

the whole process will be made possible by the congregation’s numerous relational connections—its groups and networks.

Within the congregation, families and friendship need leadership so that gospel meanings can be embedded and healthy relationships can be nurtured. In groups that discern, plan, and work, relational dynamics make the difference between dysfunction and banality on one hand, and lives that exhibit sanctification and justice on the other. Leaders need to be attentive

to their own emotional intelligence⁵ and foster that characteristic in the church. Temporary organizational movements may be based only on message and programs, but our faith calls for love.

Church leaders can re-narrate and contextualize classical practices. Hospitality—a gracious offering of self and space and time—is essential for the congregation’s ongoing life and for its extension to neighbors. Generosity of resources and attitudes creates dynamics that counter our society. Covenanting, paralleling the Wesleyan practices of holding “faith friends” accountable, gives opportunity for God’s many gifts and graces. Belonging, often undermined by denominational norms and societal transience, is one of the most needed counter-cultural practices for congregational viability. Other activities like pastoral counseling and spiritual direction can be redeemed from their more individualistic forms and turned toward an attentiveness that encompasses consequences and resources for congregation and mission.

Leaders give attention and guidance and resources to this knitting together of lives. But this community formation is nei-

ther generic friendliness nor purposed on playing a prescribed role in strengthening American society. Leaders are moving from their biblically sanctified imaginations to form and equip a particular *polis*—a community whose character is thoroughly and visibly shaped by the gospel. This forming of corporate character, of vision and values and habits, takes place as the shaping powers of the society are displaced by truth as it

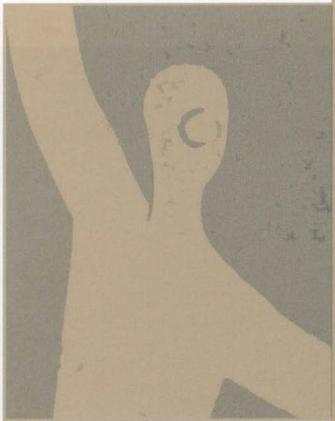
used to refer to gatherings for civic governance, and primary New Testament metaphors like body, city, and kingdom—emphasizes the corporate nature of our faith lives. These images have lost their distinctiveness for those of us formed by the Enlightenment, consumer choice, and the pursuit of personal careers. Relational leaders provide imagination and space for participants to be shaped as an alternative community.

thing characterized by the *shalom* of justice and truth and repentance and hope that allows us to take communion and not be struck dead. That ought to be a primary goal of leaders.

Implemental Leadership

The Eucharist and other institutional practices give structural form to our meanings and relationships. Paul believed that parishioners were risking their lives

and health by participating in this instituted meal when practices of truth and love were lacking. How is worship to be practiced in coherence with our meanings? In what ways does worship center our relationships and mission? Our congregations have little understanding about worship as a dangerous practice. Interpretive work needs to be a constant as we give attention to implementation.



Our resistance to the work of Scripture and Spirit is often displayed in the common ecclesial practice of what theologian and educator Paulo Freire calls “gregariousness.” We give priority to avoiding tension. We never, never, never want to be even remotely associated with something called a “judgment.”

was made visible in the Jewish carpenter’s actions and teachings, and as made tangible by the Holy Spirit among us. We, as congregational leaders and participants, are redeemed from societal lies and cultural bondage as we talk and cajole and pray and forgive and cry and laugh our way to being a “city set on a hill.” As we do this, we nurture a relational trust that undergirds faithful corporate life and witness.

This relational work creates the synapses, the tendons, the arteries of the body. And if leaders are forming a *polis* as they generate and orchestrate resources, then individualistic forms are converted. While our faith is profoundly personal, it is not private. Catechesis, or the initiation and instruction of those who are moving toward linking their lives with the church, is not individual discipleship but the work of making a community. Outreach is not just helping the businessperson be more ethical or the neighbor more evangelistic (although those behaviors are important). The corporate focus of New Testament metaphorical language—the word “church” or *ekklesia*, which was

Consistency is required in our interpretive leadership. Relational work, whether in pastoral counseling or in casual conversations, must not work against what the Holy Spirit is teaching the congregation in Scripture. Congregational participants (including leaders), as practicing sinners, often seek the approval of others concerning jobs, houses, expenditures, time commitments, and numerous other practices. Too often these activities come from our anxieties and fears. Our resistance to the work of Scripture and Spirit is often displayed in the common ecclesial practice of what theologian and educator Paulo Freire calls “gregariousness.” We give priority to avoiding tension. We never, never, never want to be even remotely associated with something called a “judgment.” So Bible studies offer numerous options (like a deli counter), and sermons carry the weight of editorials (maybe). Once again, being people formed as consumers, we make choice our centering characteristic. Our relational leadership must, through words and affection and touch and time and mentoring and weeping, weave some-

Implemental leadership includes much of what has traditionally been considered management or administration. It is important that we form structures, develop strategies, delegate tasks, obtain and disburse resources, provide oversight, evaluate processes and results, and coach numerous other leaders. Further, leaders shape and reshape these activities amid continuous internal and external changes. These structures serve all aspects of congregational life and witness. While some things can be accomplished with total spontaneity, much of our common life requires organizational attentiveness and skills. Leaders do not have the luxury of just uttering an idea or meeting for coffee—we need to connect meanings and relationships with concrete forms and practices.

In the story above about United Methodists, some members decided to embody meanings and relationships in a co-housing community. Previously the church had taken other steps based on the formation generated in study and worship. Studies in Scripture and tradition, and honest discussion about their own lives, led many members to join covenant discipleship groups that

brought accountability and encouragement to specified practices (like daily Scripture reading and prayer, weekly worship and corporate Bible study, regular mission activities, and tithing). At another time the meanings of discipleship and membership were put into practice in a nine-month “exploring membership” process that allowed new members to join with greater clarity and commitment. Whenever community members are hearing the Holy Spirit’s call in their lives, leaders must give attention to specific practices.

Corporate governance, missional activities integrated seamlessly with nurture and worship, facility maintenance, small-group structures, networks with other organizations, and catechesis all require careful formation and sustenance, which means implementation. A sermon well preached or relationships well cultivated or even a vision well formed can prove fruitless, lost in habitual organizational behaviors, if these three areas of leadership are not vitally connected. As leaders move among these areas of work, it is this phase of developing systems and practices that is often the center of risk, the point of courage and wonder. Seminaries offer little training, and clergy guilds tend to downplay administration as a necessary but less valuable function than preaching or counseling. But I believe it is when leadership teams, in partnership with all participants, make imaginative and costly forays into obedience that we learn what our corporate vocation is.

Praxis and Cohesion

For many years I enjoyed a collegial working friendship with the pastor of a nearby African American Presbyterian church. When we were teaching a seminary course, he once noted that his congregation was prone to act too quickly: “Our style is ready, fire, aim!” He noted that, lacking adequate attention to interpretive work, the congregation had numerous short-lived projects, and tended to wear people out. His words helped me see our church’s style, which I characterized as “ready, aim, aim, aim, ready, aim, aim, fire.” We Methodists talked a

lot, interpreted everything repeatedly, but moved too slowly toward committing ourselves. Some members of a congregation will specialize as teachers, activists, or nurturers; but people who are responsible for larger oversight must embody all three leadership capacities. When we lead by keeping meanings, relationships, and structures well integrated, we create a greater possibility for generative, self-correcting praxis. In Aristotle’s framework, if some set of activities is to be described as “praxis,” then its ends are embedded in the current activities. This concept is behind the thought of Paulo Freire, who emphasized that action and reflection are interactive. By leading in this holistic and cohesive manner, we form and generate sustenance for the congregation in its vocation as a sign and agent of God’s initiatives.

Once when I was leading congregational studies on Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, we were often troubled. Repeated attempts to understand these teachings about blessings, grace, and behaviors left us adrift and confused, yet lured. We studied the sermon in relationship to the whole of the Gospel of Matthew. We approached it in parallel with the Sermon on the Plain in Luke. Still, we were largely alien to the text. We read Bonhoeffer. We read Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon. Over several years, as our relational lives deepened and our involvement in mission increased, we kept coming back. Then one evening we began seeing the text in a very different way. That evening, the question was transformed from “What does this mean?” to “What kind of people do we need to be for this to make sense?” This is a different approach to hermeneutics, one that recognizes that not only do we interpret Scripture: it interprets us. That shift led to an overwhelming experience of convictions and longings about our lives—our marriages and families, our jobs and money, our politics and civic lives. God was forming us in the longer praxis of congregational life and mission. Note again the synergism, or creative interplay of relational, interpretive, and implemental leadership.

Are there deep congregational wounds or simmering volatility? Healing and redemption will require overlapping work on interpretation, relationships, and administration. Is it time for transformational change? Rerooting a congregation in classic narratives and practices, and forming new groups for study, caregiving, and mission will require the same multifaceted leadership. Does the congregation need to be lured away from complacency and complicity with consumer capitalism, careerism, and the role of chaplain to U.S. globalism? We have the grand hope of an alternative narrative, to be embodied in the relational and organizational practices of worshiping, learning, missional congregations. Leadership teams need to be formed and supported so that they thrive as participants and agents in God’s redemptive reign. ♦

NOTES

1. Dulles cites sociologist Charles H. Cooley concerning these traits; see Charles Cooley, *Social Organizations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1909/1967).
2. See Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918/1968).
3. *Co-housing*, developed mainly in northern Europe, seeks to promote a more cooperative approach to housing that provides both private dwellings and common spaces and functions. For further information, log onto www.cohousing.org.
4. *Metanarratives* are large, overarching stories that provide meaning that smaller narratives do not have access to. While postmodernism looks askance at metanarratives and emphasizes smaller, local narratives, Christians can value those local stories while holding that the larger Genesis-to-Revelation narrative, and the Jesus story itself, are metanarratives in that they give meanings to the world beyond the texts’ local specifics.
5. Emotional intelligence, or “EQ,” is used in parallel with the more familiar intelligence quotient, or IQ. See Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam, 1995).

SUGGESTED READING

Visit www.alban.org/journal.asp and go to “current issue” for Mark Lau Branson’s leadership reading list.

Where Are We Now? A Leadership

It has now been more than a year since the Alban Institute released *The Leadership Situation Facing American Congregations*, a special report that was a year in the writing. Since that time, many people across a broad denominational spectrum have either downloaded the report from our Web site or have received bound copies. From the response that Alban Institute president James P. Wind received as he traveled around the country for speaking engagements in the past year, as well as other feedback many of us at the Institute have received, it seems that this report has struck a nerve.

Because the theme of this issue of **CONGREGATIONS** is leadership, we decided that it is time to revisit this special report and provide you with an update concerning our thinking on the topic. What we provide on the following pages are a brief synopsis of the key findings of the report, two responses to it from people working in the field, and some thoughts from James P. Wind concerning new directions we are exploring. This is a dynamic avenue of inquiry for the Alban Institute, and we welcome communication from our readers as we move ahead.

Key Findings from the Report

There are two prevailing views of American congregational life today: one is that American congregations are confronting tremendous crises and challenges that still are unfolding; the other is that, blinded by a crisis mentality, we have overlooked the ferment, growth, and new vitality emerging in American religious life. At the Alban Institute, we acknowledge and explore the veracity of both points of view and hold them in tension and relationship with one another.

Three Indicators of Crisis

1. SHORTAGE OF CLERGY. Major Christian (with the notable exception of the Unitarian Universalist Association) and Jewish denominations are experiencing or soon will face a shortage of clergy. For example, between 1993 and 1998, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) lost an average of 111 clergy per year. Similarly, as of 1995, the United Methodist Church had experienced a six-year slump in ordinations of clergy.

From a supply perspective, the prevailing trend toward a shortage of clergy carries three implications: denominations will face many retirements; clergy entering the profession at a later age will have shorter pastoral careers; and more laypeople will claim places in congregational leadership.

2. QUALITY OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP. Concern about the decline in the quality of those coming into office is widespread across denominations and faith traditions. "Fewer and fewer

undergraduate students who graduated at the top of their classes are coming to theological classes," observes professor Shubert Ogden of the Perkins School of Theology. Those graduates who go on to become seminary and rabbinical students often report below-average academic marks. In addition, they express reluctance to enter into ordained ministry.

3. RETENTION OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY.

One study found that clergywomen in the United Methodist Church are leaving local church ministry at a 10 percent higher rate than men. Women still encounter "glass ceilings": lower pay, harassment, and a general lack of support from their hierarchy. They repeatedly complain about a "sick denominational system," dysfunctional patterns among Annual Conference leaders, flaws in the superintendency system, and an unsafe denominational space.

A Horizon of Ferment

While the dominant reading of the current situation casts a perception of crisis, there is in the current moment a sense of ferment that suggests transitions leading to hope. Despite membership decline and scandal, the Episcopal Church Foundation reports "a powerful feeling of 'pulling together' with a sense of common purpose and mutual support." Further signs of ferment include the possible emergence of a new leadership strategy in the form of "lay pastors," and other leadership innovations.

Report Update

The Alban Institute's Position

In light of the seemingly paradoxical realities facing American congregations, we consider the following changes crucial to a formation of renewed vitality:

- ◆ Where the old denominational systems have failed to provide support for clergy, we need to develop new, healthy, and safe environments for clergy and lay leaders to learn and connect.
- ◆ New pathways and processes of learning need to be created for all congregational leaders, such as supportive peer learning, educational programs, and interdisciplinary settings.
- ◆ Leaders need to see leadership in new ways. They must read culture critically, their congregations carefully, and their theological sources creatively.
- ◆ There are many leaders who feel dispirited or ill equipped for their current roles. In addition to making resources available to struggling leaders, those without the capacity to serve should have a clear exit route.
- ◆ Leaders need to show young people compelling images of leadership and remove the systemic barriers that discourage their consideration of such roles.

READ THE FULL REPORT

The Leadership Situation Facing American Congregations is available free of charge on our Web site. Go to www.alban.org/leadership.asp.

Supporting Pastoral Excellence

PATTI SIMMONS, DIRECTOR OF FOUNDATION RELATIONS, TEXAS METHODIST FOUNDATION

The Alban Institute's special report has inestimable value to organizations such as ours who are engaged in helping congregations advance their ministries. Our daily interactions with clergy and congregations, as well as our understanding of the structures that support them, confirm the paradoxical nature of Alban's overall conclusion: there are signs of both "turmoil" and "ferment" in American congregations. The more we know about the crises that obstruct the mission of the church and the creative energy that—properly used and promoted—will further it, the better able we will be to assist them in pleading the cause of Christ within a context of dramatic, far-reaching change. Alban's perceptive analysis, energetic prose, and insightful reporting make us realize how deficient we have been in the areas of evaluation and research and how instrumental those vehicles could be in improving conditions across denominations.

Threats to Leadership

With this study, Alban has brought important realizations to the forefront of the religious community. Imaginative, visionary leadership is the key ingredient to vital, effective congregations. That leadership is being threatened by crippling pressure from the escalating needs of its constituents resulting, in part, from the loss of more stable cultural patterns. Clergy face daunting expectations. They must fill countless roles—spiritual leader, psychologist, counselor, business manager, human resource specialist, to name a few—and those roles expand so rapidly that a sense of futility sets in as the gap between what they were prepared for in seminary and what they encounter on a daily basis steadily widens. In addition to feeling unprepared, clergy feel alone.

Denominational structures designed to support them often have conflicting aims: their role as supervisor and administrator of a competitive appointment system hinders a consistent expression of support.

Though Alban's study confirms our own anecdotal evidence of growing discontent among United Methodist clergy, we are frankly dismayed by the *extent* of the problem, evidenced by the increasing difficulty of attracting and keeping well-educated clergy in pastoral ministry. Particularly alarming to us were indicators of profound dissatisfaction, such as the reluctance of some United Methodist ministers to encourage others to enter the ministry. Equally disturbing was a study on the retention of clergywomen in the United Methodist Church, which began with a troubling statistic in its statement that "women are leaving local church ministry at a ten percent higher rate than male clergy . . . due to lack of support from the hierarchical system, a difficulty to maintain their integrity in the current system, family responsibilities, and rejection from their congregations."

New Initiatives

Despite a system under enormous stress, we concur with Alban's assessment that the signs of "ferment" are strong and pervasive. There is much to affirm, even in the "turmoil," and creativity is, after all, born out of conflict. Universities, seminaries, judicatories, laity, and organizations outside the mainstream such as ours, are recognizing an acute need for building and supporting visionary leaders, and they are addressing that need in new and creative ways. For example, Upper Room Ministries is expanding its comprehensive spiritual formation academy to include "Companions in Ministry," a rhythm of spiritual community and pilgrimage that

both supports and challenges pastors into new ways of creatively responding to the needs of the world and the Church today.

Here at the Texas Methodist Foundation, we are responding with our own Clergy Leadership Initiative. Major attention is given to supporting and nurturing clergy by providing opportunities for growth, learning, and mutually sustained relationships in an environment of safety and support. Clergy Development Groups consisting of seven to ten members meet four times a year for a minimum of two years. In addition to the affinity groups, we are continuing our educational events open to all clergy and laity to provide current research-based knowledge and skills for strengthening ministries and nurturing spirituality. In addition, we hope to produce research that will broadly benefit not only Texas United Methodist participants, but also other denominations. New models of pastoral leadership, as well as measures of the effectiveness of resources and methods, will be invaluable to all churches engaged in recruiting, training, and supporting new leaders.

Clearly, the Alban report makes a compelling case for the need for a safe collegial support system and for meaningful educational opportunities for clergy. This kind of environment offers the best chance for continued pastoral excellence because it encourages the mutually sustained relationships and support that clergy desperately need and it instills a process of learning that will resonate throughout congregational life.



Patti Simmons is director of foundation relations at the Texas Methodist Foundation, a nonprofit organization providing assistance to United Methodist churches, individuals, and institutions through loans, investments, grants, planned giving, stewardship services, and educational seminars. A lifelong United Methodist, she brings to her role at the Foundation 15 years of experience teaching college English and marketing educational technology.

A Time of Crisis and Opportunity

CLAIRE SCHENOT BURKAT, MISSION DIRECTOR FOR NEW JERSEY AND SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNODS, ELCA

Yes! A crisis in leadership *has* visited the American congregation. And yes, this crisis, as serious as it is, has also opened the door to unprecedented opportunities. For every agony described by James Wind and Gilbert Rendle in the Alban Institute special report, there may not be exactly a corresponding ecstasy, but certainly a call to creating new avenues for ministry among the clergy and laity.

The one unrealized dream of the Reformation was the desire to usher in the age of the “priesthood of all believers.” Ironically, it is due to the severe shortage of those entering religious orders that today’s Roman Catholic Church has responded by boosting responsibilities for the laity. The resulting increase in lay participation far surpasses the good intentions for sharing the ministry put forth by the mainline Protestant denominations. Likewise, many of the independent, evangelical, and Southern Baptist congregations also have embraced a more proactive way of recruiting, training, and deploying the gifts of the laity than their mainline counterparts.

Perhaps this is because the congregations are much larger on the average than the pastoral-sized congregations of mainline churches. Or maybe the newer congregations were developed upon a strong model of small-group ministry. Or perhaps, the independent, evangelical, and Southern Baptist congregations define and design themselves as less clergy-centered than other denominations.

The report released by the Alban Institute, while alarming, should not surprise anyone who works with Protestant denominations. Many mainline executives have not seriously reflected upon the phenomenal decline in church attendance in the past 20 years, so why would they examine the corresponding question of leadership? The leadership crisis has also visited the denominational staffs, as turnover and

lack of clear role and job responsibilities have taken their toll on ever-rotating executive staff appointments.

Crisis Indicators

1. SHORTAGE OF CLERGY. Even a quick look around at pastors’ conferences or assemblies brings the sobering realization that clergy now serving are advancing in years and are not representative of the people who pose the greatest mission opportunities in our country today. This gap between our leaders and their flock is generational, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gendered. Questions each synod, diocese, or conference should consider are, “What percentage of the clergy is under the age of 45? How does this correspond with the demographic reality of the synod since the 2000 census?”

One might point out that many of the seminarians today are second-career individuals who graduate at middle age. Yes, this is true; however, they too will be retiring or easing up on duties in the next 15 or 20 years along with the other clergy Boomers.

The Opportunity. In the future, bivocational or part-time ministry that serves small or struggling congregations—rather than those yoking two or three congregations in order to pinch together a single salary—will not only be acceptable, but desirable. Many African American churches have practiced this for years. I know a young pastor in the Bronx who works at her previous position as an attorney one day a week in order to supplement her income so that her poor congregation can afford to keep her. She eases the congregation’s financial burden, and they in turn assume more pastoral responsibilities. For the thousands of congregations all over the country with fewer than 100 worshippers on a weekend, this is an arrangement worth exploring.

2. QUALITY OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP. Wind and Rendle's examination of the report by the Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi certainly speaks to us all. The malaise, depression, and general angst among many clergy can be, in part, attributed to a serious lack of personal and professional boundaries in the ministry, and standards of evaluation that are ineffective, one-sided, and vulnerable to misuse—for instance, to punish the rabbi or pastor instead of encouraging him or her.

Adding to the overall unmanageability of the job are the demands of today's two-career marriages, or the stress of negotiating a divorce or a shared-custody situation. The distance from family and friends, the demands of elder-parent care and children, and the rarity of days off further aggravate an already stressed system.

The malaise, depression, and general angst among many clergy can be, in part, attributed to a serious lack of personal and professional boundaries in the ministry, and standards of evaluation that are ineffective, one-sided, and vulnerable to misuse.

Furthermore, crushing financial burdens face many second-career seminarians upon graduation. Sent to a struggling first-call parish, one can easily see how the debt load of the pastor combined with the desperate financial situation of the congregation is a script for either fiscal hysteria or anxious denial.

In addition to the catechism of complaints raised by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) regarding the quality of recent seminary graduates, I would add a few more concerns. The ability to think theologically and to cast a vision of a hopeful future, along with the desire to help unify the body of believers rather than escalate anxieties, are personal traits in short supply. How shocking to note the Missouri Synod study conducted by Alan and Cheryl Klaas reporting that as many

as 20% of the clergy are in advanced stages of burnout and perhaps another 20% are well on their way.

The Opportunity. Gather, interview, study, and enlist as mentors for the newly ordained the 20% to 40% of clergy who do seem to have healthy balance of personal and professional life. By the way, these few clergy have gone neglected by the rest, who in a climate of whining and grouching forget to appreciate those that celebrate and support.

3. RETENTION OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY. In June 2003, I will celebrate 25 years of ordained ministry. As I look back, I realize how oblivious or naive I was for the first 10 years, hardly knowing how badly I was being treated at times. By the second 10, I had put in too much time to quit the ministry even on my worst days. But I am glad I stayed, because eventu-

ally I found that my life's call and my spiritual gifts were a good match.

So, as I read the report's findings on the particular difficulties confronted by women in the ministry, I was saddened by how many reasons women cited for leaving the ministry or for their unhappiness in serving. Not coincidentally, these are some of the same reasons cited by people of color who serve the church. In fact, we should see if the discouragement these female pastors receive precedes or instigates a similar exodus of the people of color in the next 10 years. All of this is bad news indeed for the church, which needs seasoned and mature pastors to mentor recruits.

Lack of support from the hierarchical system, lack of mobility opportunities, difficulty maintaining their place in the

system, responsibilities to family, and rejection from the congregation are all reasons for which women leave the ordained ministry. Why look for help and support from a system that ignores your gifts and causes pain?

Women are specifically mentioned in the Alban study. Why are women leaving at a more rapid rate than unhappy men? One guess would be that women tend to be less willing to bottle up their misery in a professional situation, especially if it negatively impacts their families or primary care-giving roles. In this regard, clergywomen are not unlike other working women who choose to leave stressful professions, such as law, business, and medicine.

The Opportunity. The stress and unreasonable expectations felt by women pastors and pastors of color are the same growing edge for the marginalized people in this country who need to be touched and guided by the gospel message. How does it help for the spiritual leader to be as overwhelmed as everyone else? If we can attend to the justified complaints of women pastors, these insights will also help us reach the millions who need this balance in their lives as well.

If the pastor/leader is more of an equippier, preacher, sojourner, and teacher for the flock—and less of a care-giver, parent, or rescuer—we might see a more empowered clergy and laity.

Planting and Coaching

The Southern Baptist and independent associations are the church planters of the 21st century. For every 100 mainline missions, there are 2,000 evangelical, Baptist, and independent churches planted. These new paradigm churches are very attuned to the technology of the population under age 30, committed to the conversion of the adult believer, and committed to faith formation in a small group setting rather than a formal Sunday school system. The commitment to evangelism, the priority of church planting as an opportunity for welcoming the newcomer, the intentional outreach to new immigrant populations (especially

those who are Spanish speaking), and the sharing of pastoral ministry functions with lay leaders will transform American Protestantism in this next century.

The formula for transformation among mainline denominations is not so very complex: plant more congregations than close. Work with congregations at risk willing to be coached for growth. Support and encourage congregations to grow to the next size whenever possible. Raise clergy and lay leaders capable of guiding the faith journey of new adult believers. Choose congregations and leaders who have a passion for the gospel and a love for people to be ambassadors for receiving and guiding the next generation of saints.

For everything there is a season under heaven. For those leaders, clergy and lay, who are open to the shifting sand and transforming winds blowing through our culture and country, the next two decades will be an amazing journey!



Rev. Claire Schenot Burkat is the mission director for the New Jersey and Southeastern Pennsylvania Synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As mission director, and with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, Rev. Burkat has planted nine new congregations, developed congregations at risk, and helped raise more than two million dollars for mission and evangelization. She is the co-author (with Roy Oswald) of *Transformational Regional Bodies: Promote Congregational Health, Vitality and Growth* (Life Structure Resources, 2001).

Revisiting *The Leadership Situation Facing American Congregations*

JAMES P. WIND, PRESIDENT, THE ALBAN INSTITUTE

More than a year has passed since the Alban Institute released its special report, *The Leadership Situation Facing American Congregations*. In our minds this report, the first of its kind in Alban's 28 years of existence, would serve two purposes. First, we wanted to share what we had learned about a central—perhaps the central—challenge facing congregations at the start of a new millennium. Second, we at Alban wanted to signal our intent to focus energies, resources, and attention on this issue of special concern to us. We were staking out future territory, stating that the leadership needs of American congregations were so urgent that we felt called to reshape our work in response.

When we released this report on our Web site (the first time we had tried such an experiment), we tossed a pebble into the large ocean of written and electronic publications about American religion. We had no way of knowing whether we would create a ripple or whether this stone, like many others in the American whirlpool of ideas, would slip beneath the surface unnoticed. Would anybody hear what we had to say, or care about the issues we had raised?

We have been pleasantly surprised. The report has made waves—of many sorts. Initial responses ranged widely. One reader, a middle-aged pastor, wrote to thank us for naming what he was experiencing and to ask if he could come work with or for us. A dean from a preeminent university-related divinity school called to say that the report was the single best resource available describing the current leadership realities. The president of a denominational seminary called to ask if we could send enough copies for all his board members. A judicatory leader asked that we send by overnight courier a stack of

reports in time for a task force meeting the next morning on developing new programs for clergy. Letters arrived thanking us for naming a reality that many had experienced.

A Pattern of Responses

Alban did more with the report during these past months than wait for the mail. We were invited to share the report with groups of pastors, seminary faculties, foundation staffs, denominational executives in national offices, and judicatory leaders. Various Alban staff listened to people discuss our reading of the situation and assess our findings.

In almost every case, a pattern was evident in the responses. Predictably, people wanted more information on their own denomination or on a particular aspect of the report. Once in a while, we were pointed to information that had eluded us in our search. In at least one case, new research findings challenged our findings. Duke Divinity School's *Pulpit & Pew Project*, for example, released findings from a major new survey of clergy, reporting higher levels of clergy satisfaction than some of the reports we cited. Seventy-four percent of the Duke survey respondents said they were "very satisfied" in their current positions. While it seemed to brighten the picture we were painting, the Duke report also spotted dark clouds on the horizon as it pointed to a warning sign about clergy health. Seventy-eight percent of men and 52 percent of women in ministry were classified as either overweight or obese.

Some respondents thought we were too gloomy, spending excessive energy on the crisis side. Others felt that we gave too much credence to evidence that we called "ferment." But in the vast majority of cases, we found people affirming our overall reading. Our

conclusions that both crisis and ferment were real and that the American clergy system was in trouble seemed to hold up.

When Alban leaders set out on this project, we did so first to develop a shared institutional reading that might help us plan for our future. We knew that we were not doing academic research in the sense that sociologists of religion do when they design, administer, code, and analyze their surveys. Alban was, characteristically, not so exhaustively scientific. Instead, we interviewed people with special vantage points on ministry; and we pulled together important pieces of research that others had conducted, but that had received too little notice. We stitched fragments of knowledge into a larger story. Our report was a snapshot of what many leaders of American religion intuitively knew. It was gratifying to hear many of them affirm that we had distilled what they knew and felt.

A Changed Landscape

The leadership situation in American religion, however, is a moving target. A few weeks after we released our report, the events of 9/11 changed our landscapes. Suddenly the media were telling stories about religious leadership after the terrorist attacks (most emblematically in the account of the martyred Father Mychal Judge, who died at Ground Zero), and throngs of people were searching out religious leaders for help.

A month later the *Boston Globe* broke its story on the sexual misconduct scandal that rocked—and continues to rock—American Catholicism. Some of the most moving conversations Alban staff had with clergy during this time took place when we met with Catholic priests who were reeling from the effects of their church's troubling clergy crisis. These seismic events in American religion reinforced our sense that leadership was the key question before America's religious communities. Our convictions had deepened over the year of testing our work.

One way to assess the usefulness of a report is to see how people use it.

Repeatedly, people told us they were using our report to strengthen and sharpen diagnoses of their situations. Frequently, concerned church leaders sent us proposals for new kinds of programs—the creation of pastoral support groups, for example—that could be seen as direct responses to the phenomena we had described. Our report seemed to have played a role in legitimating discussion of a painful topic and in galvanizing energy to address it.

Expressions of Pain

I will let one such response serve as a powerful demonstration that Alban's report struck a responsive chord in the lives of clergy and denominational leaders. On November 2, 2002—more than a year after we released the report—18 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ministers addressed an "Open Letter" to the denomination's 807,335 members, its 6,988 clergy, 3,734 congregations, 33 regions, and its officers, committees, and organizations. They wrote seeking dialogue about what they called an abusive climate in the denomination, one "increasingly poisonous or toxic" (p. 2). The authors wrote out of painful experience of "longtime systemic dysfunction" in the Southwest Region of their church body. Citing Alban's special report frequently in the 13-page letter, the authors came to an exasperated and despairing conclusion that contradicted centuries of catholic conviction and tradition. Reversing the proverbial wisdom that outside the church there is no salvation, these writers declared that for many spiritually searching people today the proverb would read *intra ecclesiam nulla salus* (there is no salvation inside the church) (p. 6). Their report concludes with an appeal to members to take up the "serious work" of creating a different kind of environment among Disciples.

At Alban we read such reports with mixed feelings. The

pain expressed by dedicated leaders of U.S. congregations and denominations, though it confirms our findings, is distressing. The brave attempts by many pastors and other leaders to resist the temptation to despair and their efforts to create new leadership possibilities are signals of hope.

Further Steps

So where are we? After more than a year of receiving feedback, we at Alban remain convinced that leadership is the pivotal issue for the well being of U.S. congregations and denominations. We have been encouraged to go further in our inquiry and to continue searching for more insight about our current circumstances. In addition, others are asking Alban to join in partnerships that create safe, nurturing, and creative environments in which leaders can thrive and learn to do effective ministry.

In addition to working with others, we will take some steps on our own. Early in 2003 we will begin new efforts to assemble groups of clergy and other congregational leaders to learn about their needs and hopes. In our publications we will report on what we are learning. We are designing new resources (books, educational experiences, electronic networks) that will strengthen leaders to think and act in new ways—to change their reality. Finally, we will continue to remind the churches, synagogues, and parishes of our land that now is the time to make major new commitments to—and investments in—the formation of a fresh generation of leaders prepared to meet the challenges of a time when old models and assumptions are passing away. ❏

What Do Alban Members Say About Leadership?

To find out the results of our 2001 leadership survey, please visit www.alban.org/journal/currentissue.asp. You'll learn what our members say about challenges—and the abilities they need to face them—in their own congregations.



Stewardship Is More Than Money— It's Your Life!

RICHARD ARMSTRONG AND PHIL OLSON

In one of Jack Benny's most memorable comedy routines, a thief accosted him, demanding: "Your money or your life!" After a typically long pause, and at the insistence of the hold-up man, Benny finally responded testily: "I'm thinking, I'm thinking!"

At the beginning of the third millennium, the intersection of money and life remains a key concern for Christians. Like Jack Benny, we're thinking, we're thinking. We believe that the two terms belong in the same sentence, especially when it comes to Christian stewardship. For stewardship is more than money—it's your life!

Aspects of Stewardship

Christian stewardship is life lived in Christ, the life of discipleship. It takes seriously the psalmist's affirmation that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" (Ps. 24:1). All of life relates to stewardship.

Every aspect of Christian discipleship can be defined in terms of stewardship. Thus worship is stewardship of the faith God has given us. Worship in its fullest sense is our response to and expression of that gift. It is more than a weekend obliga-

tion. It's the stewardship of our relationship with God, creature connecting with Creator, the giving of ourselves to God through praise, prayer, and acts of commitment.

Likewise evangelism is stewardship of the gospel. We've been made trustees of the truth—not our truth, but God's truth revealed in the One who is the Way, the *Truth*, and the Life. We are custodians of the good news, not to hoard it for ourselves, or to overprotect it like a child squeezing the life out of a tightly grasped baby bird, but to share it with others. As stewards of the gospel, we are called and commissioned to reach out prayerfully in Jesus' name and with his love to the hurting and hungering world around us.

So, too, service can be understood as the stewardship of life. It is more than isolated acts of ministry—caring for congregants, feeding hungry people, advocating for justice, helping homeless people, protecting our environment. It's more than an attitude. For the faithful steward it is a way of life, the life of discipleship. It includes caring for those we love, attending to the bodily, spiritual, material, emotional, and social needs of the people God has placed in our care and keeping, whether they are in our immediate family or the family of faith. Faithful

stewards are involved in Christ's ministry of reconciliation and the renewal of broken relationships. Obeying Christ's commandment to love the unloved and the unlovable, to pray for our enemies, and to care for outcasts is part of our stewardship obligation.

Practicing spiritual disciplines is also part of Christian stewardship—the stewardship of time. For it requires that we manage our lives in such a way that we set aside time for prayer, Bible study, and other spiritual disciplines. Faithful stewards are spiritually sensitive to holy interruptions and sacred serendipities. They are open and obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Four “C” Words

Faithful stewards are always growing. They never graduate from the school of discipleship. Christ calls his disciples to be always on the cutting edge of life. As we are nurtured in our faith, we grow in our understanding of what it means to have “the mind of Christ.” As our senses and sensibilities are stimulated by the Holy Spirit, we grow as stewards and mature as obedient disciples.

Holistic stewardship encompasses all that we are, all that we hope to become. We use four “c” words to summarize scores of biblical passages upon which we base our theology of holistic stewardship: conversion, commitment, communion, and concern.

Conversion is essential to a right understanding and practice of Christian stewardship. Belief in God, a *personal* God, is the indispensable requirement. One must acknowledge God's sovereignty as Creator, giver, ruler of all things; and one must accept God's redemption in and through Jesus Christ. Acknowledging God as Creator and Redeemer, we enter into the stewardship of Christ, the chief steward. We are “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1). Thus, our stewardship is the expression of our faithfulness to God in Christ.

Commitment follows conversion. In joy-filled response and grateful obligation we dedicate our lives and possessions to God. Because of our re-creation, we can responsibly care for creation, faithfully managing the resources of God's universe, understanding our dominion not as ownership but as management.

Communion is living in fellowship with God and the people of God through the Holy Spirit. This same Spirit inspires and enables our stewardship individually and corporately.

Concern for the world and its needs—as well as our generous service and support of the poor and needy, the oppressed, and the underprivileged of the world—expresses our holistic stewardship through the ministry and mission of the church in the world.

Much more could be said, but we offer here only this brief theological summary that informs our understanding of stewardship. In reality, however, the problems of life have a way of keeping us from God's great intentions for our lives as

Christians, congregations, and communities. Christ's followers falter when they reject, ignore, misunderstand, or misappropriate God or the Bible and deny their Christian accountability by failing to act as faithful stewards of all that has been entrusted to them. This failure is especially evident in our financial stewardship—how we earn, invest, spend, and give our money.

Religious and Secular Stewards

Many congregations are not getting much help from their pastors, who themselves may not think in terms of holistic stewardship, or who have failed to teach that most of the themes of the Bible relate directly or indirectly to stewardship. Hardly a sermon should not rightfully be called a stewardship sermon. The gospel always has implications for stewardship that are implicit, if not explicit, in every message because stewardship is life. Yet some pastors boast to other pastors and their congregations that “we preach about stewardship only once a year.” And the people cheer. To them, stewardship is money.

The world doesn't accept our holistic stewardship premise. Publishers have issued books galore on money management, investment counseling, and the art of making millions. But the implications are far greater than the management of our money—only one important aspect of stewardship. Increasing numbers of citizens (especially young people) are actively showing their concern about the stewardship of the earth and its resources; of the land, sea, and air; of minerals and vegetation; of wildlife and human life. But stewardship also involves our trusteeship of time and space, of energy and knowledge, of science and art, of culture and history, of human intelligence and material possessions.

A common concern that the two of us have long shared about these realities has led us to embark on a joint venture—a congregation-based stewardship manual, which we hope will foster a deeper biblical and theological understanding of stewardship and encourage and equip pastors and church members to become more faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us.

It is worth noting that at a time when some Christian writers are arguing that because the term “stewardship” is misunderstood by the average church member, it should be discarded, it has become a common word in secular parlance. Government agencies, corporations, universities, and other secular organizations speak of their stewardship responsibilities. Indeed, leaders of these institutions may have a broader understanding of the term than many church people, for whom stewardship has only to do with money.

A Broader Understanding

We define Christian stewardship as the management of the whole created order and all of life in grateful recognition that God—the source of all good gifts, the One who has redeemed us through Jesus Christ—has entrusted to humankind that responsibility.

The definition we have articulated is, we admit, a lofty one. We write about it out of our own struggles to practice what we preach and teach. We need continually to confess the ambiguities and inconsistencies of our own lifestyles, which often belie the values we espouse with our lips. The hope of our salvation in this regard is that we are at least aware of those inconsistencies and no longer attempt to justify them. Rather we seek to understand what it means for human beings who have been blessed with so much to be faithful stewards of all that God has created. It is a constant struggle that measures the integrity of our faith and mirrors the level of our trust in the providence of the God in whom we profess belief.

A conversion of the heart is needed before a conversion of the checkbook can take place. Christian stewardship has to do with what we give of what we have, what we do with what we keep, and what we plan for what we leave.

Our separate but similar experiences in churches have convinced both of us that, despite all the books written on the subject in recent years, for most churches stewardship has mostly (if not solely) to do with money. To expand that understanding to include time and talent, as well as treasure, would be their definition of holistic stewardship. To be sure, financial giving is an important part of our personal stewardship. We both believe that our giving is the most tangible measure of our spiritual health, for nothing happens to a person's giving until something first happens to the person.

To put it another way, a conversion of the heart is needed before a conversion of the checkbook can take place. Christian stewardship has to do with what we give of what we have, what we do with what we keep, and what we plan for what we leave. How many people include God in their estate planning? Financial stewardship includes how we get the money we make, how we give the money we have, and how we spend the money we keep.

Faithful Congregations

Relying on the Holy Spirit to do the converting, Christian pastors and teachers need to train people and congregations to understand and practice the basic principles of personal and corporate stewardship. Needless to say, we must strive with God's help to be role models in our own stewardship. Congregations and all other Christian organizations need to understand the difference between stewardship and fundraising. In the secular world the latter is viewed through anthropological glasses, and is need-based, highly competitive, and technique-oriented.

Stewardship, on the other hand, starts from a theological premise, is duty-based (trusteeship), and spiritually motivated.

Fundraising is a legitimate and necessary enterprise, but there is a distinction between Christian and secular fundraising. Christian fundraising is never manipulative. It incorporates the principles of Christian stewardship, which recognize that need is useful in deciding which cause one should give to, but not in determining whether to give at all or how much.

Good stewardship requires that congregational budgets, for example, should not be based on operating needs with a portion set aside for benevolent purposes, but should reflect the personal stewardship of the members, whose giving to the church is a reflection of their grateful obligation to God and of their desire to put God first on their priority list. Christian stewards give proportionately, sacrificially, and systematically. They know the joy of giving.

And just as its members must practice stewardship as an essential spiritual discipline, so too must the congregation be a faithful corporate steward of the resources entrusted to it by its members. The best gauge of a church's spiritual temperature is its benevolence

budget. How much does a congregation give back to God to show that it knows everything it has belongs to God?

But as we said at the start, stewardship is more than money. It has to do with all of life. That rule applies to the corporate stewardship of the church as well as to the personal stewardship of individuals. The mission and ministry of the church are expressions of its corporate stewardship. Congregations and their members study, take positions, and engage appropriately in efforts to solve the larger issues confronting the world—global warming, protection of the environment, peace and justice issues, poverty, hunger, disease, and all other problems besetting humankind. It is their stewardship of life.

Not that individual congregations can solve all the world's problems or settle every issue. But they can do their part, they can express their concern, and they can show the world by example what it means to be a steward of God's creation and the gift of life. To that end we are putting our heads together on a project that we hope will help people and churches to take seriously the truth that faithful stewardship demands not just your money—but your life! ♦

A New Benefit for Alban Members

In late January, the Alban Institute will unveil—at long last—the Members-Only section of our Web site. To gain access, you simply need to visit www.alban.org and sign in using your member ID (as your user ID) and your last name (as your password). Visit us soon for a complete archive of the redesigned CONGREGATIONS, free online reports, and more benefits to be announced in the coming months.

Lilly Endowment Inc.

National Clergy Renewal Program 2003



*"As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God."*

— Psalm 42:1

At the center of the congregation is the pastor.

Spiritual guide, scholar, counselor, preacher, administrator, confidant, teacher, pastoral visitor, and friend, a pastor has a privileged position and performs many roles. In season and out, a pastor is called upon to lead communities to the life-giving waters of God.

The National Clergy Renewal Program, offered by Lilly Endowment Inc., is intended to strengthen Christian congregations by providing an opportunity for pastors to step away briefly from

the demands of daily parish life and to engage in a period of renewal and reflection. The Endowment will provide as many as 100 grants of up to \$45,000 each directly to congregations for support of a renewal program for their pastor.

Applications are now being accepted. Applications must be postmarked by July 18, 2003, and the award announcement will be made by December 2003.

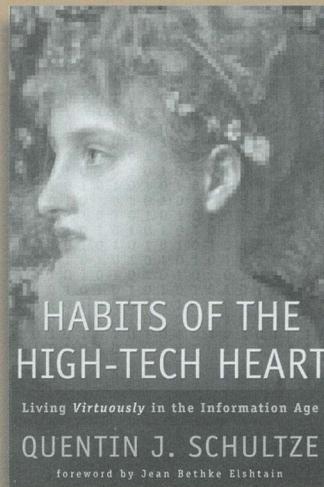


For information: Send an e-mail to clergyrenewal@yahoo.com; contact the program's Web site: www.clergyrenewal.org; call 317/916-7302; or write Lilly Endowment Inc., Religion Division, 2801 North Meridian Street, Post Office Box 88068, Indianapolis, Indiana 46208. (Indiana clergy should apply only to the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program for Indiana Congregations.)

Habits of the High-Tech Heart

LIVING VIRTUOUSLY IN THE INFORMATION AGE

Quentin J. Schultz
Grand Rapids, Mich.:
Baker Academic, 2002



review book

I admit it. I have a love-hate relationship with information technology. It's not simply that I love it when everything functions properly to allow me instant communication with friends, family, and coworkers, and that I hate it when bugs bite, networks clog, and my laptop goes into e-cardiac arrest. This is a deeper concern.

I have a flock of nagging questions about where the wired world is going. Is all this cyber-stuff helping us to become better people? Or are we frantically chasing after ever-more efficient means with no reflection on the moral ends? Are we fixated on the latest innovations in *how* we communicate to the neglect of *what* we are saying, *why* we are employing these methods to say it, and *whether* our message is salt and light, dispelling the darkness and decay around us? Have we learned anything from the fact that modern technology can be turned against us, as it was on 9/11?

These questions are important, and they are especially so to me. My employer, the American Bible Society, has committed significant resources to sharing God's Word with the world digitally. At the heart

of this enterprise lies ForMinistry, which I direct. For the last four years, ForMinistry has been dedicated to providing the church with free Web-building tools, biblically oriented online resources for ministry leaders, and consultation on how best to touch lives in cyberspace with the reconciling message of Scripture.

Still, we at ForMinistry continually question the proper place of technology in ministry. Should the church forgo databases and digital communications in favor of more familiar methods? Has the church come to rely on *technique* over biblical wisdom, the teachings of our predecessors, and the witness of the saints? In a nutshell: what does our high-tech ministry amount to in spiritual terms?

A Constructive Contrarian

Habits of the High-Tech Heart addresses cyberculture with insight, humility, humor, and solid grounding in the biblical metanarrative. It is a thoughtful critique of the pervasive tendency to fall into what Schultz calls "informationism":

a non-discerning, vacuous faith in the collection and dissemination of information as a route to social progress and personal happiness. . . . As a quasi-religion, informationism preaches the *is* over the *ought*, *observation* over *intimacy*, and *measurement* over *meaning*. (p. 26)

Schultz takes the role of constructive contrarian, placing the technological worldview, with its practices of efficiency, control, and individualism, under the authority of the Judeo-Christian worldview, with its practices of virtue, spiritual discipline, and life in the community of faith. His thesis is that advances in technology alone will never guarantee social, much less moral, progress. As Schultz commented in an e-mail message to me, "The opposite is usually the case: rapid technological innovation fouls up human lives and weakens existing social institutions, thereby undermining the very institutions that are supposedly nurturing the habits of the heart."

Timeless Answers

When it comes to positive recommendations, Schultz eschews novelty or cleverness. He calls upon an array of philosophers, theologians, and authors to bear witness to the ancient virtues that form our moral

framework. "We need to understand information technologies," Schultz argues, "in light of the virtues nurtured historically within religious traditions. [Such traditions] are rich sources of moral wisdom that can virtuously shape our informational practices" (p. 21). He challenges us to laugh at the illusion that we control our fate through technology, exhorts us to demonstrate authenticity, and encourages us to respect those who question whether online "community" can ever replace incarnational communion.

In so doing, Schultz draws us back to the age-old questions: Where did we come from, where are we going, and what constitutes a good life along the way? What makes an individual or a society virtuous? How do we develop ethical character in ourselves and shape it in our children?

Though he does not explicitly treat all seven classical and theological virtues (prudence, temperance, justice, courage, faith, hope, and love), Schultz suggests that they should form the basis for further conversation. Subsequent contributions to this topic will need to focus on the familiar antidotes to vice (*humility* against *pride*, *kindness* against *envy*, *abstinence* against *gluttony*, *chastity* against *lust*, *patience* against *anger*, *liberality* against *covetousness*, and *diligence* against *sloth*) and how these healthy habits of the heart are practiced online.

Asking the Right Questions

Perhaps the best thing about *Habits* is that it does *not* present "Twelve Steps to Virtual Sanctity" or "The Seven Habits of Highly Virtuous Netizens." Instead, Schultz asks the hard questions about purpose, meaning, and *telos*—precisely the ones we've been ducking all this time. As he wrote to me,

The purpose of the book [is] to help us all figure out what the right questions are with respect to the information society. Our biggest problem seems to be that we don't know any longer what questions to ask. So we don't ask any deep or overarching questions. Instead we ask only about what's next in innovation. . . . It's all quite silly. We are creating new problems faster than we can solve old ones.

The questions that direct biblical peo-

ple in every context are these: Are our actions and attitudes—online and off—in accord with God's justice and mercy? Do we love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves? Can the world see this from the way we approach technology? Are we carrying out our God-given role as stewards of creation, which implies by its very nature the cultivation and application of technique? Do we allow the Holy Spirit to penetrate every sphere of human culture—including cyber-culture—to align us to the gospel?

Because this book is so important—not so much for its answers, but for the questions it poses—it needs to be widely engaged. It could inform a ministry board's strategic planning, serve as the catalyst on a church elder retreat, or form the basis for an adult Christian education series in a parish.

An Electronic Dialogue

Habits is such a rich book, however, that it cannot be exhausted in a few meetings. Might we not employ both face-to-face dialogue and electronic communications to support these explorations over time and across distance? With proper structure and direction, participants could experience appropriate (and perhaps also some inappropriate) applications of Net technology and bring their online insights to real-world class meetings.

I would certainly appreciate a Web site, online discussion forum or e-mail list for *Habits*. Few of us may be able to meet face to face with other readers of the book. Information technology can play a valuable role in helping us collectively think through the issues the book raises, while at the same time testing the validity of its arguments. We need to gather practical insight into how technology can be used by people who will probably never meet face to face, talk on the phone, or communicate by snail-mail to help each other grow in virtue.

In the preface, Schultze writes, "My goal is not so much to discard database and messaging technologies as much as to *adapt* them to venerable ways of life anchored in age-old virtues" [p. 13]. At the end of the introduction, we read of the need "continually to de-technologize our religious traditions by ridding them of excessive technique and renewing their virtue-nurturing practices" (p. 24). Throughout the book there are tantalizing hints of how to adapt tech-

nology to virtue and rid our religious traditions of "their excess rationalism and instrumentalism" (p. 196). But it remains up to us readers to supply concrete examples of *appropriate* adaptation and *moderate* technique, rationality and instrumentality, none of which, I take it, are inherently immoral. And I, for one, would greatly benefit from listening electronically to fellow sojourners.

It's extremely important, in my view, to decouple technique from technology, to uncover over-reliance on technique in matters that have little or nothing to do with technology, and to explore ways in which information technology can actually help us with reducing dependence on technique in our spiritual practices. For example, in "Sojourning With Heart," Schultze rightly commends the spiritual discipline of contemplation as an effective way to "[de-technologize] religion in the information society" (pp. 197–98).

But consider: the place of technique—the balance between the *methods* and the *meaning* of meditation—has been a bedeviling issue in the practice of contemplation for millennia. It is even more pressing in our self-help, quick-fix culture, where there's a new-age method for every madness. Is it possible that information technology could play a role in connecting us to our rich heritage of contemplative writings, to contemporary pilgrims on the contemplative way, and even to spiritual directors who can help us sort out issues via e-mail as well as in person? If so, then we have here a case of technology helping us avoid over-reliance on technique in the practice of a classic spiritual discipline.

A Fourth Way

I once thought we had only three options regarding technology for ministry:

1. Join the info-optimists and technophiles and embrace the Internet as God's appointed means for completing the Great Commission. The faithful in this camp see current technology as offering us a Kairos moment.

2. Cast our lot with folks like Ellul, Marcuse, and Postman, who cry "Technolatry!" and seek to name and confront prophetically the principalities and powers dominating this aspect of contemporary life.

3. Try to pretend that Web sites, e-mail, and the like are just neutral tools, fully under our control, which we can use for good or evil as we see fit. This position is where I find

most Christians gathered, unaware that the supposed neutrality of technology is itself part of the myth of technolatry, a pillar of the modernist worldview that humankind's highest values are found in mastery, control, efficiency, expertise, problem-solving, constant innovation, and the quickest dispatch of the obsolescent.

Habits of the High-Tech Heart confirms my conviction that there's a fourth way. It begins by recognizing that information technologies fundamentally shape how we communicate, which in turn shapes our language, perceptions, and self-awareness—our very identity. Once we discern the spiritually formative power of these devices, we must intentionally reclaim centuries-old practices of faith formation. We must heed the witness of Scripture, take our place in Christ's Body for worship and service, love God and neighbor, and care for our souls, our neighbors, and all creation with a sense of responsibility born of gratitude. Out of this context, we can proceed deliberately and judiciously to apply these soul-shaping resources to our lives online. In this way we shall be enlivened by grace to bear those fruits of godly living that St. Paul urged upon the Galatian Christians using the technologies of his day: koiné Greek, parchment and pen, a scribe (in essence, a word processor), and the Roman road system.

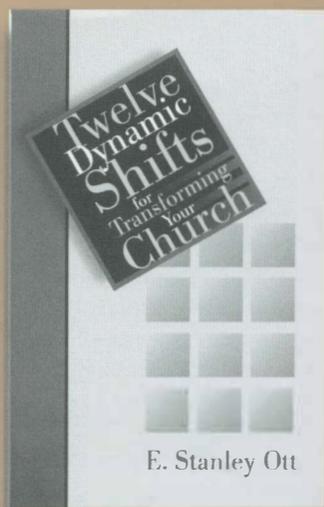
I take from *Habits of the High-Tech Heart* a renewed sense that churches must employ both the incarnational and the electronic to extend their ministries. The stories we hear at ForMinistry attest to the impact our efforts are having, especially on seekers who, after finding a church's ForMinistry-powered Web site, make that congregation their new home. Recently, a newly formed Carpatho-Russian Orthodox mission parish baptized a couple who had visited the church's Web site and decided to return to their roots in the Orthodox tradition. This couple has had their marriage blessed in their new parish family, and are expecting their first child in August, who will be baptized. This story may have started in cyberspace, but it is being played out every week in the home where they meet for worship. And that is precisely what we want when we seek to equip churches online for ministry.

CHRIS THYBERG

Director for Ministry Development,
American Bible Society
New York, New York

Twelve Dynamic Shifts for Transforming Your Church

E. Stanley Ott
Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002



review book According to E. Stanley Ott, “Wherever you find yourself as a church, God has an exciting, life-building vision for the whole church and for your congregation” (p. 4). However, for a church to realize that vision it must leave behind the idea of business as usual and discover new ways to share the gospel and meet needs. The first step in this process is an evaluation of the church’s present situation. To assist in this effort, Ott offers an extensive discussion of three types of churches:

Traditional churches, where the emphasis is on continuing what the church has done in the past and fitting people into established programs;

Transformational churches, where the emphasis is on intentionally meeting needs and ministry as a way of life;

Transitional churches, where congregations find themselves somewhere in between.

The goal for every church, according to the author, should be to become a transformational church, a move that involves implementing twelve shifts in four areas of church life: vision and

expectation, ministry to people, the congregational program, and the practice of leadership. While much of what the author proposes can be found in other books and resources, several new contributions are made by this book. For instance, scriptural references at the end of each shift underline its biblical basis. Plus, questions for reflection and discussion help guide pastors and church leaders in helping their churches to make these shifts. The author also places great emphasis on the need for leaders to bless the things their church is currently doing while adding ministries and structures to allow the church to move in the direction of becoming a transformational church. Toward the end of the book is a useful chapter consisting of examples from churches that have implemented the various shifts, including accounts of their successes as well as the struggles they faced along the way. Finally, the book provides an extensive bibliography that includes numerous resources related to each of the twelve shifts.

This book is well written, easily readable, and because of the topics discussed and resource material included, a worthy addition to the library of any church leader. By implementing any or all of these twelve shifts, church leaders and congregations will find themselves well on the way to renewed vitality and vision as they seek to serve the living God.

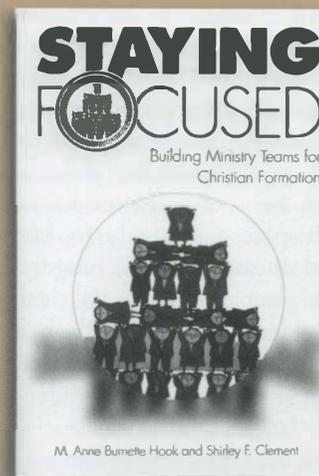
REV. GARY J. McABEE

Livingston First Baptist Church
Livingston, Alabama

Staying Focused

**BUILDING MINISTRY TEAMS FOR
CHRISTIAN FORMATION**

M. Anne Burnette Hook
and Shirley F. Clement
Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2002



review book *Staying Focused* is written for congregations that want to advance from assimilating members to creating disciples. M. Anne Burnette Hook and Shirley F. Clement, with the added expertise of five national leaders, take seriously the opportunity that committee work presents to form and shape faith. The structure of the book is straightforward: 1) identify the purpose of ministry areas, 2) examine administrative, nurture, outreach, and witness areas, and 3) articulate the responsibility of leaders to stay focused on discipleship. The authors seek to awaken the latent processes by which churches make, nurture, and send out disciples.

Steeped in the Wesleyan tradition, the book reclaims Wesley’s means of grace with theological integrity, including extensive sections on stewardship and restorative justice. Non-Methodists will find an articulate example of how one tradition incorporates theology with practice. Still, the reader will need to translate the book’s Methodist identity in order to appreciate the book’s lessons for the wider Christian community.

Furthermore, having served United Methodist and congregations of other Protestant traditions, I wonder if decision-making groups can, as the book suggests, infuse their meetings with fellowship, study of Scripture, and theological discussions along with the other daunting tasks entrusted to committees. *Staying Focused* could make for very long meetings!

The main strength of the book lies in how it will organize small-group discussions of Scripture. The authors methodically weave the priority of making disciples into each area of ministry. However, they leave unexplored the mundane tasks—like coordinating the calendar and prioritizing the budget—that make ministry and mission possible. Congregations will also appreciate the authors' attempt to free ministries from inherited workloads. Their effort meets a hunger expressed by individuals for meaning and direction in committee life.

In addition, the book conversationally addresses organizational and personal resistance to staying focused on disciple formation, such as conflicting expectations that people bring to the task. It outlines differences in spirituality and unearths tools for equipping teams for service to God. I wish the book would attack the practical issue of limited time and resources rather than run the risk of adding work to already overburdened ministries; for instance, suggestions for gathering support and directions for setting priorities would have been helpful. To its credit, the book does prompt readers to explore its list of additional resources.

Staying Focused will be useful for governing boards, charge conferences, and leaders who want to move beyond church busyness to Christ's business. As a conceptual framework with practical spiritual disciplines, it will help build ministry teams committed to making disciples.

REV. KATHERINE A. SIMONS

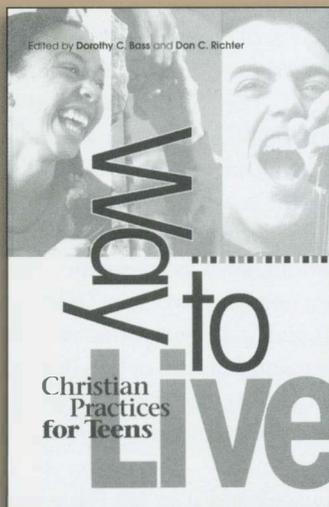
New Hope Presbyterian Church
Olney, Maryland

Way to Live

CHRISTIAN PRACTICES FOR TEENS

Dorothy C. Bass and
Don C. Richter, eds.

Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002



review book *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens* meets teenagers exactly where they are in their life journey. The book empowers teens to understand their impact and the difference they make through everyday choices at school, with family, and at play. *Way to Live* is an energetic dialogue of real teenagers doing the real work of adolescence—the embarrassing, fun, exciting exploration of life—as Christians.

The chapter titles are one-word basic life elements, such as Food, Play, Creativity, Work, Bodies, and Time. However, there is nothing simplistic about these topics, nor is there anything meek about the content. The various authors contributing to this book have broken down complex life issues into palatable stories, quotes, and artwork geared directly toward teens. Youth share their own raw, unashamed honesty on topics such as sex, relationships, and truth—and how God is present in and central to all of them.

The stories that hang on these life elements raise awareness for young

Christians. As CNN highlights corporate ethics and environmental hazards, editors Bass and Richter take these issues and put them in a language with which teens identify. The chapter on “Stuff” portrays our material possessions as good stuff (which helps us glorify and love God) and bad stuff (which gets in the way of loving God). Teens learn about products made by companies that exploit God’s children through sweatshops and the power they have to support or discourage corporate behavior by their individual purchases. Understanding the world as God’s creation gives new importance and passion to worshipping God through recycling, saving gas, and enjoying the outdoors. Social responsibility and individual accountability are necessary ingredients to the Christian life—and an important developmental focus of adolescence. *Way to Live* uses familiar scenarios that help teens connect their beliefs with their everyday choices.

Energy and enthusiasm fly from this book in wild colors, angled text, and exclamation points. There are personal, moving stories that call for quiet contemplation, as well as pithy one-liners that can be sent as text messages by cell phone. The variety of information presented keeps readers of any age engaged and inspired. This book can be used as a study guide, a format for youth fellowship, or an enjoyable read from cover to cover. Everyone will enjoy the Web site that accompanies the book (www.waytolive.org), where interactive friends hold dialogue with end-users about real world issues and the Christian response. If there were a tagline for this site, it would be, “MTV’s *The Real World* gets Jesus as a Roommate.” *Way to Live* should have a prominent place on the bookshelf—and in the “Favorites” folder—of every teen, parent, and pastor.

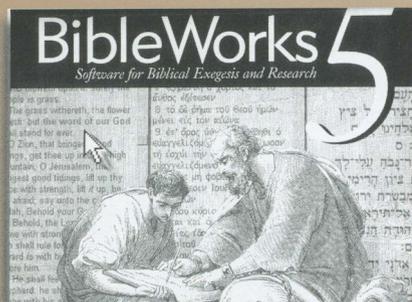
MICHELE VAN SON

Project Consultant
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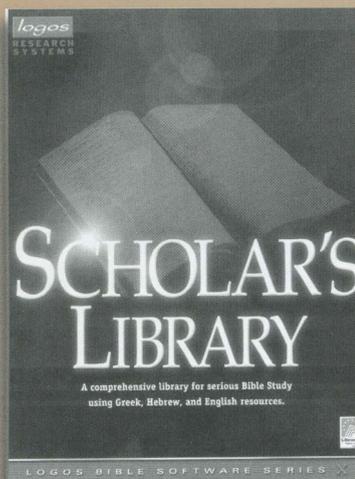
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software review

Both the *Bibleworks 5* and *Scholar's Library* software packages have more resources than most pastors or Bible scholars could ever use. They are clearly intended more for academic study than for practical use by a pastor or church-school teacher as a resource for preparing a sermon or a lesson for a church-school class. But they certainly could be used for such purposes by a discerning and disciplined pastor or teacher. In fact, one could easily get lost in the sea of data available at one's fingertips.

Both resources have introductory videos that are easy to understand, as well as a variety of menu possibilities for the preacher or scholar. In *BibleWorks 5*, for example, there is the choice of working in one of three different modes: Beginner, Standard, or Power User. The Beginner mode allows one to perform simple searches of a given text or to compare passages in various translations or languages. The Standard mode provides everything the Beginner mode does, plus additional search criteria and the option of typing in other key words or phrases. The Power User mode offers even more functions, such as automatic font changes when entering Greek or Hebrew text.

BibleWorks 5 provides an easy-to-read user manual and an option during installation to customize the number of versions (translations) and languages the user will have available; there are 28 different languages and over 90 Bible translations to choose from. In addition to the basic text material there are lexicons in Greek and Hebrew (with English or other language interpretations) as well as eight different reference works that could help a preacher or teacher find useful material to enrich a given text or passages of Scripture.

Scholar's Library is intended more for serious research than for the weekly preparation of a sermon or lesson. It certainly does provide an integrated digital library of books and other resource articles from various magazines and small group resources. However, *Scholar's Library* is part of the Logos Bible Software Series X and tends to favor conservative and pietistic understandings of the Jewish and Christian manifestations of religious beliefs. For instance, the Bible Study section is geared primarily toward a position of biblical literal-

ism. The Theology section has strong emphasis on the *Moody Handbook of Theology*. Many of the resources are from *Leadership Journal* and *Christianity Today International*.

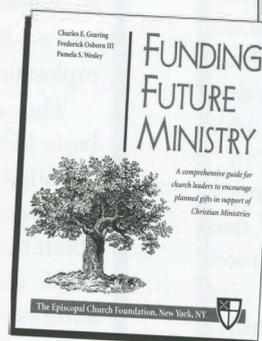
Scholar's Library is more expensive than the *BibleWorks 5* package; at press time, their respective Web sites offered prices of \$599.95 for *Scholar's Library*, versus \$299.95 for the full version of *BibleWorks 5* (\$150.00 for the upgrade). But for the pastor who wants to engage in rigorous Bible research as a foundation for preaching and teaching ministries *Scholar's Library* may well be worth the additional cost, especially when one considers the wide variety of resources that it includes—such as materials for prayer, devotion, and small groups, as well as the Leadership Library Series and the Mastering Ministry Series.

Either software package more than adequately provides basic biblical research materials to enhance the preaching and ministry of a pastor or teacher.

REV. TERRY E. FOLAND
Field Consultant
Alban Institute

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RESOURCES ON LEADERSHIP FROM THE CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE GUIDE

Anderson, Leith. **Leadership That Works: Hope and Direction for Church and Parachurch Leaders in Today's Complex World.** (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1999). Defining leadership as "figuring out what needs to be done and then doing it," Anderson addresses leadership complexities and tensions in this jargon-free book. He advises leaders to clarify their management philosophy, theology, and goals at the outset of their ministries.

Block, Peter. **Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self-Interest.** (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1996). Block defines "stewardship" as a choice "to preside over the orderly distribution of power" so that partnership replaces dominance and accountability replaces dependency. He outlines key steps toward stewardship-based organizational transformation and explores issues of purpose, control, mission, planning, and responsibility.

Callahan, Kennon L. **Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys.** (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990). *Effective Church Leadership* defines and lists the major resources of a missional pastor-leader. Callahan gives practical insight into how pastors and key leaders can transform themselves and their communities of faith into vibrant mission outposts. A plan for pastoral evaluation and an evaluation worksheet are included.

Heifetz, Ronald A. **Leadership Without Easy Answers.** (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1994). Heifetz distinguishes between technical and adaptive problems (which require different modes of action), and between leadership and authority. The bulk of *Leadership Without Easy Answers* works through these distinctions in theoretical and practical ways. The book's focus on adaptive leadership will be useful to religious leaders.

Kotter, John P. **Leading Change.** (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996). An expert on business leadership argues that 21st century leaders must be committed to lifelong learning, constant change, new

ideas, and the capacity to transform organizations from static to dynamic cultures. The change process described here will help leaders understand an organization's inevitable stages of change in its path to transformation.

O'Toole, James. **Leading Change: Overcoming the Ideology of Comfort and the Tyranny of Custom.** (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995). Recognizing that efforts to change organizations and systems often fail, O'Toole offers a leadership philosophy that focuses on respect for people. He emphasizes the importance of developing trust—through shared purpose, vision, and values. Insights on how leaders sabotage their own efforts and how systems resist change will be useful to any change agent.

Rendle, Gilbert R. **Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders.** (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 1998). This practical guide combines theory, research, and the author's extensive work with congregations to provide leaders with diagnostic models and tools for leading faithful and spiritually focused change. The case studies, analyses, worksheets, and games will help congregations and their leaders understand the varied reactions that change can elicit.

Stevens, R. Paul, and Phil Collins. **The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership.** (Bethesda, Md.: Alban Institute, 1993). Drawing on systems theory, covenant relationships, and biblical references, the authors affirm the importance of interdependence among church members and explore various dysfunctional relationships that work against interdependence. They also affirm that ministry is not what we do with "extra time," but what we do with all of life.

Weems, Lovett H. Jr. **Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture and Integrity.** (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993). Weems makes the case for a leadership that is heroic in the context of the larger community. He calls for integrity founded on moral leadership and a new passion for commitment. *Church Leadership* integrates the best of recent wisdom in leadership studies.

A New Approach to Recruiting Volunteers

Q: My congregation is struggling to find strong candidates to replace “retiring” and burned-out volunteers. No pool of applicants is waiting at the door. In my generation, many of us were “grabbed by the collar” and yanked into volunteering. How do we identify and recruit new volunteers today—for tomorrow?

A: Committed and motivated volunteers are the lifeblood of congregations. They are major contributors to the vitality of congregational life. Yet it is increasingly difficult to find willing congregants who have the time and commitment. We live in a busy society—longer work hours, little discretionary time. Many adults seeking spiritual solace and guidance say, “I’m searching. What can you do for me?” Along with curiosity, openness, and confessed need, consumerism has entered congregational doors: “Do unto me because I really don’t have the time or commitment to do unto you.”

Clergy and congregational staff are overextended as the congregation’s expectations grow. The demand for meaningful and engaging religious services, as well as social and educational programs, is a steady drumbeat. Venerable volunteers, the “FFWDAW” (“faithful few who do all the work”), the ones who can always be counted on, are aging and burning out. Soon we will *not* be able to rely on today’s faithful few.

Changing the Language

The need for volunteers is as strong as ever, but the times, the people, and the culture have changed. Congregations must manage an enduring need in a new context with a new approach. Our ideas about volunteers, volunteering, and community must change. The tried-and-true methods—“Gather ye volunteers where ye may”—succeeded in bringing us to this point; but they no longer work. To adapt to new circumstances, we must *learn, reflect, and reconsider*.

Language, the construct by which we create reality, is a good place to begin learning. To volunteer is to make a freewill offering—the Latin root meaning “to wish” or “to will.” We often think of volunteering just as we think of charity (from the Latin *caritas*, meaning “love” and “regard”)—one gives out of love. “To volunteer” is to make a contribution based on the perception of a need and a degree of affection toward that need. If motivated, one makes a freewill offering of time, money, or both. The traditional logic assumes: I join a congregation. A leader or member asks me to volunteer for a task. If I have the time, the motivation, and some affinity (interest, affection, skill) for what is asked of me, I may offer myself as a volunteer. *Or I may not.*

To change this reality, we must change the language that creates it. Rather than “volunteer,” let’s experiment with “steward.” Rather than “You request, I comply” (or not), let’s move the congregation/congregant relationship from the “you/me/consumer” context and place it in the context of spiritual journey in covenant. A steward (from Old English) is “keeper of the hall,” one whose responsibility is “to perceive, to watch out for.” Covenant, a mindful promise between all congregational members and staff, describes the practical means and the experience of living with others in community with God.

Opportunities for Stewards in Covenant

What questions and opportunities arise when we look to congregants, clergy, lay leaders, and professional staff as stewards in covenant with one another?

1. For me, a vision that “we are all in this together” emerges. A publicly shared and affirmed vision and mission identify for the whole congregation its unique gifts and purpose. Do congregations generally have this sense of “who we are” and “what we are about”?

2. I regard **stewards as congregants with innate talents, life experiences, and skills.** What do my fellow congregants bring to the task of “perceiving, of watching out for” the welfare of the whole community? I wonder if the sense of *calling* that speaks to clergy could speak also to congregants-as-stewards, so that one offers to the community from one’s gifts and not solely to fill a job slot in the congregation’s activities.

3. Finally, how does the congregation wish to live the **day-to-day responsibility and reciprocity** that covenant assumes?

These questions provide opportunities for an approach that no longer segregates the need for volunteers from the purpose of the congregation or from its sense of community. We begin such an approach by seeking to answer the first two questions in the Book of Genesis, inquiries that speak to our spiritual journey and our covenant with God and one another: “Where are you?” and “Am I my brother’s keeper?”



Jerry Garfield is an Alban Institute field consultant who provides coaching on ways to strengthen the clergy-lay leader partnership. He consults with congregations, as well as regional and denominational bodies, about leadership, strategic planning, and clergy transition. Mr. Garfield may be reached at JGarfield@alban.org.

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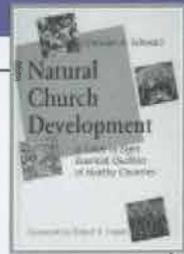
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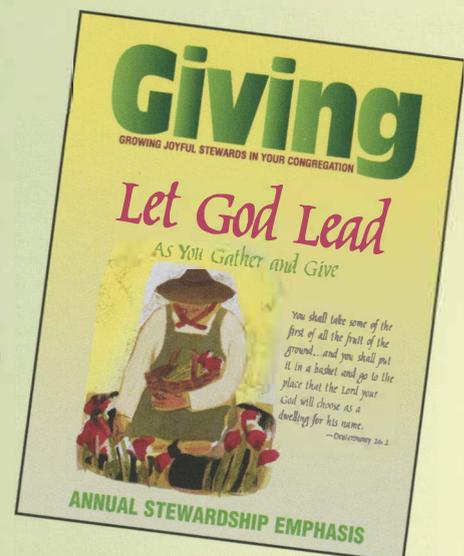
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CONGREGATIONS is a quarterly publication of the Alban Institute, a nonprofit, interfaith membership organization founded in 1974 to provide a comprehensive range of resources to Christian and Jewish congregations. Our mission is to provide clergy and 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.

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