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A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXAMINING HOW FOUNDING PASTORS IN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES NEGOTIATE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES SUBSEQUENT TO TRANSITION FROM CHURCH PLANT TO ORGANIZED CONGREGATION

By

Thomas C. Gibbs, Sr.

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF
COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Saint Louis, Missouri

May 15, 2015

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Abstract

Research shows that Presbyterian church planters who remain as a congregation's founding pastor negotiate leadership challenges, which occur subsequent to the organization of a Presbyterian Church, often described as the "solidification stage," and are related to the transition to a shared form of leadership through the creation of a session. The corresponding shift in power dynamics and the unexpected and conflictual character of these leadership challenges intensifies, what the literature confirms as, the specially challenging nature of pastoral ministry.

This study explored how Presbyterian founding pastors negotiate these leadership challenges. Four research questions guided the research: (1) What kinds of leadership challenges do Presbyterian pastors face? (2) How do pastors experience the personal impacts from these leadership challenges? (3) How do pastors experience relationship impacts from these leadership challenges? (4) How do pastors negotiate these challenges? The study employed qualitative research methods and used a semi-structured protocol to interview six founding pastors.

The research revealed three types of leadership challenges: personal criticism, criticism about ministry vision or practice, and debates about decision-making authority. Coming out of the research were four recommendations for practice. First, it is important for church planters and founding pastors to obtain a working knowledge of systems theory in order to understand the interconnectedness of their congregations and the importance of the shift in power dynamics, which emerges subsequent to the church's organization.

Second, founding pastors should make intentional efforts to differentiate themselves from their ministries. A critical aspect of this effort is the leader's resistance to over-function in the ministry system and willingness to accept losses related to the ministry challenge. Third, four leadership capabilities were noted for their importance: proven leadership credibility; gaining perspective; learning to think and act politically and, implementing strategic changes in governance to enhance the overall effectiveness of the session. Finally, the research demonstrated that it is critical for the founding pastor to have in place or work towards creating a supportive and unified session.

To Tara

Table of Contents

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Chapter One

Introduction

A pastor who successfully launches or plants a new congregation and who remains as the congregation's senior leader or founding pastor enjoys special privileges, but must also negotiate difficult leadership challenges related to the process whereby the church plant matures into an organized congregation. While the privileges can be quickly imagined, the challenges commonly associated with pastoral ministry might not be so easily anticipated.

In the recent work, *Sticky Teams,* which is devoted to helping ministry leadership teams become unified and effective, longtime pastor Larry Osborne introduces the roots and scope of ministry challenges:

> To begin with, there's our sin nature. It messes up everything. Add to that our differing backgrounds, biases, blind spots, and passions. We all come to the table with a different set of eyes, which often causes us to see the same things quite differently, making consensus hard to come by....In addition, most leadership teams are saddled with traditions, policies, and organizational structures designed for a day long past. Yet, as every leader knows, it's not easy to change deeply entrenched patterns and traditions, no matter how stupid they may be....The result is a well-known pattern of board conflict, turf battles, staffing silos, and splintered congregations—the stuff of ministry legend and gallows humor.[1]

However, in the specific situation of a church plant that has newly formed into a self-sustaining congregation, a church is not saddled with deep traditions, outdated organizational policies, or entrenched ministry leaders. These are all in the process of being established. In the case of newly organized churches, the formative process

[1] Larry Osborne, *Sticky Teams: Keeping Your Leadership Team and Staff on the Same Page* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 20.

presents a leadership challenge that is accompanied by associated leadership challenges. This research focused on how pastors negotiate these leadership challenges.

The Challenge of Pastoral Ministry

No matter the form, all types of pastoral ministry are challenging. More than a century ago, John Newton, the famous hymn writer and pastor, explained the romantic ideal that often gets attached to vocational ministry for a young, recently ordained pastor as one of the methods God uses to draw young pastors into the ministry. In a letter entitled *On the Snares and Difficulties attending the Ministry of the Gospel*, he writes:

> But a distant view of the ministry is generally very different from what it is found to be when we are actually engaged in it. The young soldier, who has never seen an enemy, may form some general notions of what is before him; but his ideas will be much more lively and diversified when he comes upon the field of battle. If the Lord was to show us the whole beforehand, who that has a due sense of his own insufficiency and weakness, would venture to engage? But he first draws us by a constraining sense of his love, and by giving us an impression of the worth of souls, and leaves us to acquire a knowledge of what is difficult and disagreeable by a gradual experience. The ministry of the Gospel, like the book which the Apostle John ate, is a bitter sweet; but the sweetness is tasted first, the bitterness is usually known afterwards, when we are so far engaged that there is no going back.[2]

Indeed, an idealized view and the promise of fruitful ministry can draw pastors to their chosen vocation, but the difficulties encountered upon the assumption of the pastorate can quickly erode those hopes. Presbyterian pastor and counselor Paul David Tripp states, “I think we would be shocked if we knew how many pastors have lost their joy—how many of us get up at the beginning of each week and grind it out, if for no other reason than we don’t know what else to do...How many of us want to escape and just don’t know how?”[3]

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[2] John Newton, *Letters of John Newton* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960, 1990), 48.

Similarly, in the important work, *The Leader's Journey*, pastors Jim Herrington and Robert Creech, together with pastoral counselor, Trisha Taylor, share the example of one pastor who "left seminary with a resolve to call people to the life of Jesus, helping them to learn to follow Christ. He described how his hope of fulfilling that calling slowly died and was replaced by the daily grind of institutional maintenance and by codependent personal relationships."[4] In his own words, the pastor stated, "I'm working harder than I've ever worked, for less results than I've ever gotten. My health is failing, my family is falling apart, and I don't know what to do."[5] What happened to this pastor's initial enthusiasm? What sapped his joy?

What is it about pastoral ministry that makes it ripe for the experience of intense vocational and personal challenges? Since the 1980's, considerable and sustained effort has focused on trying to answer this question and understand the specific challenges faced by pastors as described by pastors in hopes of promoting sustainability in the pastorate.[6] It has been discovered that pastors often feel like their personal lives, family

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[3] Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 37-38.

[4]Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 4.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Cf. Gary L. Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person: Maintaining Personal Integrity in the Choices and Challenges of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), C. Welton Gaddy, *A Soul Under Siege: Surviving Clergy Depression* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1991). Gary W. Kuhne and Joe F. Donaldson, "Balancing Ministry and Management: An Exploratory Study of Pastoral Work Activities," *Review of Religious Research* 37, no. 2 (December, 1995): 145-63. Peter Brain, *Going the Distance: How to Stay Fit for a Lifetime of Ministry* (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 2004). With support of the Lilly Endowment, the Pulpit and Pew Project of Duke Divinity School seeks to analyze Protestant and Catholic pastoral leadership. The study states that one of its major goals is to answer these questions: What is the current state of pastoral leadership at the beginning of the 21st century? What are the factors affecting pastoral leadership today, and what do current trends portend for the future? Results on trends among Catholic clergy were published in two works: Dean R. Hoge, *The First Five Years of Priesthood: A Study of Newly Ordained Priests* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002); and Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Evolving Vision of the Priesthood: Changes from Vatican II to the Turn of the Century* (Collegeville, MN:

relationships, and vocations are tangled into a knot instead of a harmonious whole. Researchers Gary Kuhn and Joe Donaldson portray the life of the pastor as "taxing, fast-paced, and unrelenting, often characterized by doing two or more tasks at the same time."[7] Additionally, there is pressure to keep the personal struggles of the pastor secret, lest they mar the dogged image of having it all together and hamper the important work to which the pastor has been called.

The research findings of the Lilly Endowment-sponsored SPE pertaining to Presbyterian clergy and the Pulpit and Pew Research Project focused on Protestant clergy are especially important to this study, which focused on how Presbyterian church planters negotiate ministerial challenges subsequent to church organization. In 2004, Covenant Theological Seminary (CTS), Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS), and Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) jointly received a Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) grant funded by the Lilly Endowment to explore pastoral sustainability among their respective graduates. This research was led by Bob Burns, who now serves on the staff of Seven Hills Fellowship in Rome, Georgia and as an adjunct professor of educational ministries at Covenant Theological Seminary (CTS). During the period in which this

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Liturgical Press, 2003). In 2001 the Pulpit & Pew committee commissioned a study focused on clergy in five Protestant denominations who had left parish ministry. This research was published in Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005). Another, related effort funded effort by the Lilly Endowment entitled Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) provided grants totaling $84 million to 63 organizations and was based on the conviction that when churches are led by spiritually strong, thoughtful, able, and imaginative pastors, congregations tend to thrive. It sought to answer the question: What does it take to sustain pastors in such a way that they will flourish in ministry over the long haul? Research specific to Presbyterian clergy was published in Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2013).

[7] Gary William Kuhne and Joe F. Donaldson, "Balancing Ministry and Management: An Exploratory Study of Pastoral Work Activities," *Review of Religious Research* 37, no. 2 (December 1995): 160.

research was conducted, Burns served as dean of lifelong learning and director of the Center for Ministry Leadership at CTS.

In order to best explore what is important to pastors flourishing over the long haul of ministry, the Center for Ministry Leadership created a forum named the Pastors Summit. Meetings were held for six years with seventy-three pastors representing twenty-six states across the United States.[8] Additionally, the pastors represented a variety of "church sizes (from new church plants to congregations of more than 1,200 members), and ethnic contexts (based on proportions of constituencies served by the denominations involved)."[9] The pastors gathered in small groups called cohorts, meeting three times per year, often with their spouses, for a two-year period.[10]

A core conclusion drawn from the research of the Pastors Summit is that pastoral ministry is a uniquely challenging vocation.[11] This assertion does not discount the stress, struggle, disappointment, conflict, moral failure, and even termination, which are common to all vocational endeavors. Nevertheless, the data provided by the Pastors Summit suggests that the special context of the local congregation, the breadth of duties for which pastors are responsible, and manner in which the pastor's way of life and ministry are woven together heighten their profession's intensity. In their book *Resilient Ministry*, Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman and Donald Guthrie observe, "One of the unique aspects of pastoral ministry is how it affects and defines all areas of life. Work, family,

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[8] Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving*, 13.

[9] Ibid., 3.

[10] Ibid., 13-4.

[11] Ibid., 11-7.

and personal responsibilities blur together through the week, so that pastors have difficulty distinguishing when they are on or off duty."[12]

Similarly, one pastor who participated in the Pastors Summit described the overwhelming character of pastoral ministry this way:

> Most people in our church have a life that is like a stool with three legs. They've got their spiritual life, their professional life and their family life. If one of those legs wobbles, they've got two others they can lean on. For us, those three things can merge into one leg. You're sitting on a one-legged stool, and it takes a lot more concentration and energy. It's a lot more exhausting.[13]

As noted above, the Pastors Summit included pastors serving in a wide variety of contexts—congregations of different sizes, age, ethnic make-up, and geographical locations. Yet, a common theme among the participants was the experience of ministry as an overwhelming endeavor that tended to define every other area of life.

The research conducted in the Pastors Summit overlaps with The Pulpit and Pew Project at Duke University Divinity School. This study was led by researchers Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger and results were published in *Pastors in Transition.*[14] Beginning in 2001, the study researched clergy who had left local, church-based ministries either voluntarily or involuntarily in five Protestant denominations. Those denominations included the Assemblies of God, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), and the United Methodist Church. This effort not only sought to explore the reasons pastors transition out of local, church-based ministry, but it also queried whether anything could

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[12] Ibid., 15.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Hoge and Wenger, *Pastors in Transition*, 2005.

"be done to prevent them from leaving."[15] Consequently, this study also aimed to promote pastoral sustainability.

Specifically, the research of Hoge and Wenger indicated that among those who left the ministry either involuntarily or partly involuntarily, twenty-seven percent identified some form of internal church-based conflict or conflict with the supporting denominational body as their main motivation for leaving.[16] Additionally, respondents in the study were also asked about their reasons for leaving a local ministry position. The top three reasons given as having "great importance" or being "somewhat important" in the decision to leave were: "I felt drained by the demands on me," I felt lonely or isolated," and "I felt bored or constrained in the position."[17] The authors note, "The sources of these feelings were mainly conflicts in the congregation, conflicts among the staff or conflicts among denominational leaders."[18] This identifies ministerial conflict as a common challenge pastors face, yet ministry professionals are so ill-equipped to negotiate such conflict that it either involuntarily or partly involuntarily leads to their transition out of ministry.

Additionally, the research indicated that fourteen percent of respondents listed ministerial "burnout; frustration; feeling of constraint; sense of inadequacy" as the main motivating factor, which led to transition[19]. For example, a sixty year-old male pastor in the ELCA commented,

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[15] Ibid., viii.

[16] Ibid., 39.

[17] Ibid., 37.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 38.

> When you're a one-person operation, and you're trying not only to build the congregation, you're building budget, you're driving capital campaigns, you're looking at staff, programs, seven days a week and seventeen hours a day, it takes its toll. Even though you may love every minute of it, the reality is, you have to come up for air.[20]

This resonates to a high degree with the SPE research about the demands ministry makes on its pastors. Ministers commonly experience what could be described as a loss of self while fulfilling their pastoral responsibilities. Over time, this takes a toll that often causes pastors to leave their church-based ministry or to leave the ministry completely.

Before moving on from the work of Hoge and Wenger, it is worth noting that it also compared the data to uncover any variability among the denominations in their reasons given for leaving. While this data was not explored fully in the book, the research indicated that "Presbyterian ministers reported a higher level of conflict within the congregation than ministers of the other four denominations."[21] This highlights a need for further research into why Presbyterian denominations experience a higher degree of congregational conflict. It is hoped that this research into Presbyterian church planters provides a further explanation as to why this may be the case.

In summary, the research conducted by Hoge and Wenger not only confirmed how common are ministerial burnout and the feelings of frustration and inadequacy that accompany those in the ministry observed by the SPE research, but it also further identified conflict in ministry as a key reason why pastors leave the ministry. Indeed, as Dan Allender states in his book *Leading With a Limp*, "So here's the hard truth: if you're a leader, you're in for the battle of your life."[22]

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[20] Ibid., 31.

[21] Ibid., 41.

Systems Theory Applied to the Congregation

This suggests that the conflictual character of ministry and the role of the pastor as leader are important and interrelated areas of focus. Systems theory, which is based on the pioneering research of Murray Bowen, emphasizes the interrelatedness of the constituent individuals of an organization perhaps better than any other conceptual framework for understanding organizational dynamics.[23] While Bowen focused largely on family systems theory, Edwin Friedman's important contribution to systems theory, *Generation to Generation*, recognized the theory's wide-ranging implications for religious communities and other organizations.[24] Peter Steinke, one of Friedman's former students, sought a wider audience for Friedman's insights. He explains a systems theory approach:

> Systems thinking is basically a way of thinking about life as all of a piece. It is a way of thinking about how the whole is arranged, how its parts interact, and how the relationships between the parts produce something new. A systems approach claims that any person or event stands in relation to something. You cannot isolate anything and understand it. The parts function as they do because of the presence of other parts. All parts interface and affect each other.[25]

According to systems analysis, ministry conflict arises, at least partially, from two sources: competing interests and the latent anxiety of the various stakeholders within a ministry system. An interest can be virtually anything, including things such as a well-reasoned theological stance, a conviction about ministry strategy, how to respond to a

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[22] Dan B. Allender, *Leading with a Limp: Take Full Advantage of Your Most Powerful Weakness* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2008), 1.

[23]Cf. Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1978).

[24] Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985).

[25] Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 3.

particular ministry crisis, or ways to allocate budget dollars. Conflict can occur when opposing stances are held by members within the system.

The difficulty commonly associated with conflict, however, is related to the degree to which those opposing stances are perceived as threatening by the various stakeholders. It is this sense of threat that escalates a difference of opinion into the more negative concept of conflict. According to systems theory, this perception of threat is a measure of the latent anxiety in the organizational system. The anxiety level of a member in the system refers to that person's responsiveness to threats, whether real or perceived. Herrington, Creech and Taylor describe these two types of anxiety as acute and chronic.[26] According to them, "Acute anxiety is our reaction to a threat that is real and time-limited. We react to the threat, respond to it, and then eventually return to a normal state of mind and body."[27] Chronic anxiety, however, is much more influenced by one's perception. With chronic anxiety, "the threat is imagined or distorted, rather than real. Consequently, it is not time-limited; it does not simply go away."[28] Unlike an acute response, which triggers the flight or fight response hard-wired into human physiology in order to help people respond to danger, a chronically anxious person is unduly hampered by this heightened emotional state because it persists. Consequently, they do not do their best work, they take situations and people too personally, and they often respond defensively. The greater the presence of latent anxiety, the more likely will be the development of reactive and conflictual dynamics.[29]

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[26] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation, 35*.

[27] Ibid., 35.

[28] Ibid.

Systems theory also describes the important role ministry leaders have in their organizations due to their ability to influence the relative level of anxiety in the system. According to Friedman, "[The] overall health and functioning of any organization depend on primarily on one or two people at the top, and that this is true whether the relationship system is a personal family, a sports team, an orchestra, a congregation, a religious hierarchy, or an entire nation."[30] Similarly, Steinke notes, "No group shapes and influences a congregation's health, efficiency, and growth more than church leaders. The way in which the leader functions arises out of who the leader is. The leader's being and functioning are twin to each other."[31] In other words, the way the pastor as leader functions in the organization cannot be minimized.

A systems approach suggests that the leader's ability to negotiate the latent anxiety in a system, particularly that which is associated with conflictual dynamics, is largely a factor of their ability to remain calm and reflective. This is known as maintaining a well-differentiated and non-anxious presence. According to Herrington, Creech and Taylor,

> Differentiation deals with the effort to define oneself, to control oneself, to become a more responsible person, and to permit others to be themselves as well. Differentiation is the ability to remain connected in relationship to significant people in our lives and yet not have our reactions and behavior determined by them.[32]

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[29] See for example: Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 41-51. Peter L Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 12-14.

[30] Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 221.

[31] Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*, xi.

[32] Herrington, *The Leader's Journey*, 18.

Ronald Richardson describes the job of an effective church leader as keeping "down the level of anxiety in the emotional system of the congregation...They do this primarily by managing their own anxiety, and then, secondarily, by staying in meaningful contact with other key players in the situation. They do not tell others to *be calm*. They simply bring their own calmness to the situation."[33] Well-differentiated, non-anxious leaders are able to resist being unduly entangled in the emotional processes at work in the system, maintain meaningful connection to the various individuals in the system, and act according to their convictions in pursuit of important organizational goals.

Pastors and Church Planting

As noted earlier, this research explored the particular situation of Presbyterian pastors who remain as pastors of the churches they planted, studying how they negotiate the challenges of leadership related to that work. The preceding introduction about the challenges of pastoral ministry and systems theory provides important background to this study. The specific pastoral situation of church planting and the life cycle of a church plant, however, require further explanation.

As pastors, church planters engage in the specific leadership challenge of gathering a body of Christian believers and those newly believing into an organized congregation. While most pastors would affirm the priority of growth, church planters sense this acutely. Yet, the special gifting and competencies required for church planting have not always been acknowledged by church. For example, Aubrey Malphurs, church consultant and professor of pastoral ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary, writes,

> In the early to mid-twentieth century, those who were attracted to the idea of starting a new work, especially under a denominational label, would let those

[33] Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, 51.

> responsible for new church starts know of their desire and would request their help, specifically in the form of finances. However, far too often a year or two later, the new church had gone nowhere and the so-called church planter had moved on to other matters. The money that had been invested was depleted along with the energy of those who had given their time and other resources to the new work.[34]

According to Malphurs, the predominant reason for failure was that the "so-called church planter wasn't a church planter. That is, God didn't design him to start churches."[35] By contrast, today there is wide recognition of the specialized role church planters fulfill and there exist assessment tools, training opportunities and abundant resources for would-be church planters.[36]

Even so, not all church plants or church planters are identical. In fact, there is a spectrum to the roles church planters play in the churches they plant. Noted church consultant Ed Stetzer, who wrote *Planting Missional Churches*, distinguishes three models or types of church planting in which church planters serve slightly different roles. They are: the apostolic harvest church planter; the founding pastor; and team planting.[37]

The apostolic harvest church planter is described simply as the one who "starts the church and moves on."[38] The Apostle Paul exemplified this model throughout his

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[34] Aubrey Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting: A Guide for Starting Any Kind of Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 27.

[35] Ibid.

[36] For example, the Presbyterian Church in America through its Mission to North America agency sponsors the Church Planting Assessment Center, which evaluates the suitability of church planting candidates and spouses. Similarly, the growing Acts 29 Network of churches has its own assessment process and Church Planter's Boot Camp. Lifeway Research has developed an online church planting assessment tool called Church Planter Candidate Assessment, which is used by a number of different denominational groups, including the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Assemblies of God.

[37] Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 53-75.

[38] Ibid., 53.

missionary journeys. Stetzer explains, “Paul would go to an established urban center, teach and preach at the marketplace and/or synagogue, engage the intellectuals and elite, start worship, appoint elder-pastors, and then supervise the new elder/pastor via letter and occasional visits.”[39] That Paul and Barnabas follow this model is documented well by Luke in Acts 13-14.

The team planting model employs a group of church planters who “relocate into an area to start a church.”[40] This model for church planting is attractive for many reasons in that it provides for “camaraderie, a division of gifts, and a strong leadership base.”[41] Importantly, Stetzer notes that the transition to sustainable congregation is less of a focus than is the planting of other churches and training those who would plant them.[42] The presence of multiple planters at the beginning of a plant also increases the likelihood of even multiple church plants occurring simultaneously. For these reasons, the transition to becoming a self-sufficient, organized congregation is less of a focus.

Stetzer identifies the founding pastor approach to church planting as the most common.[43] In this model, the church planter who initiates the planting of the new congregation remains with it as its long-term senior leader and pastor. While the desire for church planting might remain strong with the founding pastor, the implementation for future church plants will be executed by others trained for this purpose. Stetzer identifies

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[39] Ibid., 54.

[40] Ibid., 70.

[41] Ibid., 71.

[42] Ibid., 73-4.

[43] Ibid., 61.

Rick Warren, the well-known founding and lead pastor of Saddleback Church in Orange County, California, as representative of this model.[44]

Interestingly, Stetzer further subdivides the founding pastor model into two sub-groupings: planted pastor and the entrepreneurial planter. Simply described, the planted pastor is one who assumes responsibility for a newly formed grouping of people interested in forming a new congregation within its first two years, often launched by a mother church.[45] The planted pastor then becomes responsible for the long-term health and development of this grouping, helping it develop into a sustainable congregation.

By contrast, the entrepreneurial planter is a blend of the apostolic church planter and the traditional founding pastor models. As with the founding pastor, the entrepreneurial pastor desires a long-term relationship with the newly formed congregation and will remain through its first several years. Yet, similar to the apostolic model, the entrepreneurial pastor often seeks new challenges, which can hasten a transition to a new field of ministry. It appears that the challenges related to consolidating the gains of church planting into a sustainable, organized congregation can become laborious to the entrepreneurial pastor. In Stetzer's words, "Some entrepreneurial planters don't want to lead the church through the solidification phase (three to seven years), so they leave before this phase begins causing a real problem: job security."[46]

Both the traditional founding pastor and the planted pastor are committed to negotiating this longer "solidification phase," referred to by Stetzer, even though it is accompanied by problems that may threaten their long-term role in the system.

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[44] Ibid., 63.

[45] Ibid., 64.

[46] Ibid., 69.

Interestingly, Stetzer does not explore why the solidification phase might make it difficult for the church planter or even threaten their job security. Based on the research discussed above, it might be inferred that demanding and conflictual changes occur in congregational system, requiring church planters to maintain more differentiated stances and to utilize leadership skills that were previously unneeded. If true, it is understandable why some church planters would want to transition out of a church plant during this phase rather than negotiate those challenges.

It is clear that during the solidification phase of a church plant, a church formalizes its governance structure and establishes its leaders. While there are several different models of church governance, all of which garner biblical support by their proponents, the important point to observe is that church plants undergo a shift towards some formalized governance structure. In the traditional founding church plant model, the most significant aspect of this shift is one from being solely directed by the church planter to some form of shared leadership. This shift in decision-making authority is an important step in the solidification process, and it fundamentally changes the ministry system.

In the case of newly founded Presbyterian churches, much of the solidification phase often occurs subsequent to a congregation's formal organization. The organization or, as it is sometimes described, particularization, of a congregation typically occurs when an effort has a minimum number of members, is financially secure, and has identified additional, qualified leaders who are elected by the body.

The primary change in the organization of a congregation involves a shift in power. Prior to particularization, the church plant is overseen solely by the church

planter. Subsequent to the church's organization, the session acts as the governing body in Presbyterian churches and exercises spiritual oversight for the newly formed congregation. Due to this new governance structure, the overall responsibility for the congregation rests with session as a group. Even if the pastor remains among the members of the session as a "first among equals," this change introduces a significant shift in the power dynamics of the congregation. What is more, though the formal processes of organizing a Presbyterian church can occur relatively quickly, within the first two or three years of planting, the church planter who is now serving in the more traditional role of senior or solo pastor must still negotiate the longer solidification process yet to be completed.

Problem Statement

Interestingly, church planting literature is largely silent on how pastors negotiate the solidification phase, especially for those in the Presbyterian tradition. Given the dramatic shift in organizational and power dynamics from church plant to organized congregation, does this increase the overall anxiety in the congregational system, which in turn heightens conflict and fosters associate ministry challenges? Specifically, what leadership challenges emerge during the solidification phase subsequent to organization, and how do Presbyterian pastors navigate them?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore how Presbyterian founding pastors negotiate leadership challenges, which emerge subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation. It is hoped that by better understanding these challenges in their associated context, helpful insights and strategies might be learned in order to

enhance the leadership effectiveness of current and future church planters and pastors. Three main areas informing how pastors negotiate this transition have been identified: church planting, systems theory applied to power dynamics of congregations, and leadership skills essential for ministry challenges. To that end, the following research questions guided this research:

1) What leadership challenges do Presbyterian pastors face subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation?
2) How do pastors experience the personal impact from these leadership challenges?
    a) Emotionally?
    b) Physically?
    c) Behaviorally?
    d) Cognitively?
3) How do pastors experience relationship impacts from these leadership challenges?
    a) In relation to their spouse?
    b) In relation to their lay leaders?
    c) In relation to their ministry staff?
4) How do pastors negotiate these challenges?
    a) What ways of relating to yourself about which you were already aware or came to learn during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?

b) What ways of relating to others about which you were already aware or came to learn during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?

c) What skills or practices about which you were already aware or came to learn about during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?

Significance of this Study

This study has significance for the many affected by the leadership challenges associated with solidification phase of a church plant, which in a Presbyterian context occurs subsequent to a church plant becoming an organized congregation. This study is significant for founding pastors who seek to lead congregations during this transitional period, the newly recognized lay leaders who become members of the session, the members of the congregation, particularly those who join the church plant in its earlier stages, and the broader church.

First, there is significance for the church planter who remains as the pastor of a newly organized congregation. If there are significant leadership challenges subsequent to organization of a congregation, there is a significant benefit in learning about them by pastors who negotiate this season in the life of a congregation. If it is determined that these challenges contribute to ministerial burnout, depression, or transition out of ministry and additional negative results, then understanding these dynamics is critical. Moreover, this will enable pastors to exhibit more effective leadership strategies, which should encourage overall congregational health.

Second, there is significance for the newly recognized lay leaders now serving as elders on the session of the congregation. By understanding the systemic character of the congregation and the power dynamics that emerge in newly formed congregations, it is hoped that sessions can practice more effective leadership. Moreover, sessions that are better able to practice well-differentiated, non-anxious responses amidst congregational dynamics will better shepherd their congregants.

Third, there is significance for the members of the congregation, especially those who join a church plant in its earliest stages. The system dynamics of growing churches are constantly changing, especially subsequent to when a church launches worship into its first several years. It is common for original members of a church plant to attempt to thwart the leadership direction of the church planter. Stetzer describes this as "vision hijacking."[47] "Vision hijacking is an attempt by church members, often highly invested core-group members, to redirect the church away from the planter's vision, especially when the original vision no longer seems workable."[48] Using the language of systems theorists, church plants can quickly become highly anxious. Anxiety can emerge even over seemingly insignificant issues: an article shared by the senior pastor, a change in nursery protocol, or a minor change in worship practice. By researching the specifics of the ministerial challenges arising during the solidification phase of a congregation, members will better be able to understand the myriad of responses to anxiety in a congregation and to act in ways that promote the health of newly formed congregations.

Fourth, this study has significance for the broader church. Churches, church planting networks, theological seminaries, denominational agencies and church

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[47] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches,* 298.

[48] Ibid.

leadership institutes are all devoted to preparing and sustaining pastors in ministry. With this research, they will have deeper insight into an often overlooked, difficult and transitional phase of ministry leadership It is hoped that the insights derived from the research will have wide application to founding pastors across the denominational spectrum.

Definition of Terms

In the context of this study, the terms are defined as follows:

Church Plant – A church plant, called a mission church in the Presbyterian context, is a local gathering of Christians and their children led by a church planter. The plant regularly gathers for worship, administration of the sacraments of baptism and communion, growth and instruction in the Christian faith, and service and witness to the gospel in its community.

Church Planter – In the Presbyterian Church in America, a church planter is an ordained pastor under the ecclesiastical authority of a presbytery, who is given the responsibility to launch, develop, and lead the organization of a local congregation. Among Presbyterians, pastors are elected or called by the local congregation, and church planters are typically sent or commissioned by a presbytery.

Formal Authority – Formal authority is "the exercise of power that has been legitimated by recognized social structures."[49] Therefore, the pastor and ruling elders have formal authority in the newly formed governance structure of a congregation.

Founding Pastor – A founding pastor is defined as a church planter who continues to serve the congregation as its senior leader and pastor after the church organizes.

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[49] Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving*, 213.

Informal Authority – Informal authority is relational in nature. "It is derived from the relational status one has in a community and perhaps even from the place one's subgroup holds within the broader community."[50] It is to be expected that those who share the same formal authority will have varying levels of informal authority depending upon each person's situational context.

Multisite Congregation – This term applies to a congregation that exists as one congregation and with one overseeing governance body, but which worships in multiple locations. There is no limit to the number of sites that a congregation may have.

Organized Congregation – An organized congregation, called a "particular church" in the Presbyterian context, is identified by the shift in ecclesiastical responsibility of the church plant from the presbytery and church planter to the local governing body called the session. Additionally, organized congregations are typically financially self-supporting.

Particularization – This describes the process through which a Presbyterian church becomes an organized congregation.

Pastor – A pastor is an ordained ministry leader of a local congregation. Pastors in the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) (the research group) are commonly known as teaching elders and lead alongside ruling elders in the local church. In order to become pastors, they have successfully completed a credentialing process, and most have attended theological seminary.

Presbytery – The presbytery is a regional governing body in the Presbyterian context comprised of pastor and ruling elder representatives from member congregations in a geographical region. Among other responsibilities, presbyteries have ecclesiastical oversight for church plants and church planters in their bounds.

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[50] Ibid.

Ruling Elder – A ruling elder is a lay church leader who has undergone a process of training and credentialing in a local congregation in preparation for leadership. Subsequent to training and credentialing, ruling elders must be elected by the local congregation before undertaking their responsibilities on the session. In the Presbyterian context, ruling elders are ordained to the office in perpetuity, but often have a term of active service on the session. In order to return to active service, churches commonly require ruling elders to be reelected. Therefore, churches often distinguish between active and inactive ruling elders when determining who is currently serving on the session.

Session – The session of a local congregation is its board of governance. It is comprised of the senior pastor, other pastors elected by the congregation (if any), and ruling elders elected by the congregation. Sessions have responsibility for the ecclesiastical oversight of a local congregation's membership and its overall organizational goals.

Solidification phase – Broadly speaking, this term applies to the period of time between a church plant's launch of worship to a period of long-term stability. Stetzer has suggested a period of three to seven years.[51] For the purposes of this research, examining how Presbyterian pastors negotiate the leadership challenges subsequent to organization, the solidification phase is assumed to be the five-year period subsequent to the organization of a Presbyterian congregation. It is understood that it often requires two or more years before a church plant can organize into a particular congregation. Therefore, the solidification phase typically occurs from year three until year eight or even beyond.

Stakeholder – A stakeholder is anyone potentially affected by the outcome on a particular issue or resolution of a particular challenge. Stakeholders have varying levels of interests,

[51] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 69.

engagement with issues, degrees of influence over others, values, loyalties, and alliances and fears regarding loss.[52]

[52] Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 90-1.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how Presbyterian founding pastors negotiate leadership challenges, which emerge subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation. The literature review begins by exploring church planting resources, and specifically their treatment of leadership. That is followed by a broader survey of the most recent literature related to organizational leadership theory and how it might contribute to pastoral development of capabilities essential to negotiating ministry challenges. This will be followed by a discussion of the literature related to systems theory and why this conceptual framework is so helpful for ministry leaders negotiating leadership challenges. The literature review will then conclude with an analysis of biblical and theological data pertinent to the area of ministerial leadership. This survey will also demonstrate the wisdom of practicing a balanced, critical integration with much of the literature on leadership, which will be shown to confirm or further explain Biblical insights.

Church Planting

Church planting is a practice as early as the church itself, finding its origins in the command of Lord Jesus Christ and in the scriptures that testify to him.[53] Luke's account in the Acts of the Apostles essentially chronicles the church planting efforts of the early church, mostly through the leadership of the Apostle Paul and his companions.

[53] Matt. 28:18-20.

Perhaps more than any other book in the previous century, Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, gleaning insights from the Apostle Paul, has influenced generations of missionaries and church planters. Allen operates from a working assumption that even though Paul's efforts were extraordinarily blessed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, there yet remains a "universal character" attached to them.[54] Allen carefully guards the character of Paul's missionary strategy as a Spirit-led, strategic effort. After demonstrating that the apostle did not have a specific strategy to determine the cities of his mission, he nonetheless asserts that upon arrival, Paul made these cities strategic to his overall missionary effort.

> He seized strategic points because he had a strategy. The foundation of churches in them was part of a campaign. In his hands they became the sources of rivers, mints from which the new coin of the Gospel was spread in every direction. They were centers from which he could start new work with new power. But they were this not only because they were naturally fitted for this purpose, but because his method of work was so designed that centers of intellectual and commercial activity became centers of Christian activity.[55]

While it is not necessary for the purposes of this study to explore what Allen identifies as the Apostle Paul's strategy, what is important is recognizing it as a strategy. No matter the community, city, nation, or region targeted for church planting, issues of class, financial support, communication methods, and many other culturally specific matters had to be negotiated by the Apostle Paul. Allen's work is an excellent introduction into how Paul negotiated the contextual aspects of missionary strategy in pursuit of founding churches rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ across the vast Roman Empire.

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[54] Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods; St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 5.

[55] Ibid., 17.

Second, Allen identifies a significant number of differences, largely negative ones, between Paul's methods and the methods utilized by American and European missionaries of the twentieth century. At the core of his critique is the idea that the apostle equipped the churches he planted to be self-sustaining, and more recent church planting efforts, in the eyes of Allen, cause the indigenous, planted congregation to remain overly dependent on outside leadership and support. Allen argues, "We have approached [those we seek to reach] as superior beings, moved by charity to impart our wealth to destitute and perishing souls...We have been anxious to do something for them. And we have done much. We have done everything for them."[56] Consequently, the churches planted are unable to internalize the skills and capacities required for a healthy congregation to be sustained.

Allen argues that indigenous congregations must go through the same stages of growth that all mature congregations experience. He writes, "We cannot teach less than the full truth which we have so learnt. But to introduce the fully developed systems in which that truth has expressed itself amongst us is to attempt to ignore differences of race and clime and to omit necessary stages of growth. It is impossible to skip stages of growth."[57] This is essential so that congregations learn indigenous responses to indigenous challenges. In this way, the body learns how best to live, serve, and extend the interests of the congregation, becoming increasingly self-sustaining and mature.

Ed Stetzer recognizes the abiding significance of Allen's work for church planting, describing it as a "seminal book in missiology."[58] By tracing the Apostle Paul's

[56] Ibid., 142-43.

[57] Ibid., 147.

steps, Allen identifies the New Testament church's response to the missionary mandate of the Lord Jesus Christ. Allen's work explores how the early church integrated the calling, gifts, and capacities of a church planter, applied contextually specific and strategic actions to form congregations, and developed indigenous leadership so that congregations became self-sustaining.

The last two decades have seen numerous works devoted specifically to promoting church planting in the United States.[59] A survey of these works reveals themes similar to those observed by Allen. For the purposes of this research, however, it is important to narrow the focus and give focused attention to the literature's contributions on church planter selection and the process through which church plants become fully organized congregations.

Church Planter Selection

As noted above, church planters exercise a specific type of senior pastoral leadership. Gaining clarity about one's fitness or potential for church planting, then, is critical. When it comes to the selection process, the literature focuses on the concepts of the church planter's calling and assessment inventories in order to discern whether or not someone is qualified to become a church planter.

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[58] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 351.

[59] These are representative: Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001); Timothy J. Keller and J. Allen Thompson, *Church Planter Manual* (New York: Redeemer Church Planting Center, 2002); Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004); Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*; Tom Jones, editor, *Church Planting from the Ground Up* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2004); Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 2006, and Darrin Patrick, *Church Planter: The Man, the Message, the Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

Calling

After noting that church planters "come in all shapes and sizes," church planting consultant, Marcus Bigelow, writes, "The common denominator for [all] church planters is a belief that God is calling them to plant a church. Without a doubt, the seed of faith is the most important ingredient in all of church planting."[60] Similarly, St. Louis church planter and pastor, Darrin Patrick writes, "Ministry is more than hard. Ministry is impossible. And unless we have a fire inside our bones compelling us, we simply we will not survive. Pastoral ministry is a calling, not a career...I am continually shocked at how many men are trying to do ministry without a clear sense of calling."[61]

Having assurance in one's calling is important because it grounds the confidence of the church planter in the God who calls. R. Kent Hughes, who experienced a difficult church planting experience early in his ministry life and wrote about it with his wife, Barbara, notes, "When God calls one to ministry, he gives the requisite gifts to fulfill that ministry."[62] After reflecting on 2 Corinthians 4:1-10, Bigelow observes, "A sense of call provides assurance and security in the face of adversity. It contributes to staying power, confidence in ministry, and a sense of empowerment."[63] Indeed, the Apostle Paul notes, "Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God."[64]

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[60] Marcus Bigelow, "A Church Planter Who Me? The Call to Plant," in *Church Planting from the Ground Up*, ed. Tom Jones, (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2004), 19-20.

[61] Darrin Patrick, *Church Planter: The Man, the Message, the Mission* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2010), 30.

[62] R. Kent Hughes and Barbara Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 1988), 128.

[63] Bigelow, *Church Planting from the Ground Up*, 20.

[64] 2 Cor. 3:5.

The question, then, arises, what constitutes confidence in one's calling? How does one discern a true call to church planting? The literature uniformly agrees that a true call requires a desire or interest in the task. Patrick writes, "The man who is truly called to ministry desires it. He does not enter the ministry grudgingly, dolefully, reluctantly, dragging his feet. He enters ministry because he wants to and feels joy in pursuing this desire."[65] Bigelow agrees, "The first confirmation of a call to plant a church is the presence of a passion for it. While it may be totally subjective, if you are not passionate about planting a church, I would encourage you to question your call."[66] Keller and Thompson put it directly, "You must want to do the job...have a desire, an acute awareness of human need and a burden to meet that need."[67] Therefore, a call to church planting can be quickly dismissed if there is no interest in or desire for the work.

Nevertheless, a desire for the work is insufficient to constitute a call to church planting. Joined with that desire must also be requisite ability for the work and a corresponding confirmation by the church, giving opportunity to plant a specific location.[68]

Assessment

The purpose of assessment is to gain clarity about one's true ability or fitness for church planting in order to discover whether one's ability is congruent with one's passion. Keller and Thompson note, "Planting a church is a demanding task. It requires gifts, skills and experiences somewhat distinct from pastoring an established

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[65] Patrick, *Church Planter*, 34-5.

[66] Bigelow, *Church Planting from the Ground Up*, 23.

[67] Keller and Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, 65.

[68] These three elements, though variously named, are widely acknowledged by Christians in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition as essential to discerning a true calling.

congregation."[69] Malphurs, as noted above, suggested that it was common in the middle portion of the twentieth century to launch churches without due consideration for a planter's abilities.[70] This often led to disastrous results. Now, however, "most denominations, networks, and church planting churches wisely insist that prospective church planters go through an assessment process to determine if they are church planter material."[71] Much can be said about what constitutes an effective assessment inventory, but at its core is the effort to discern the character and temperament of the planter and the presence of ministerial and interpersonal competencies or abilities essential to performing the task. Keller and Thompson note, "Christian leadership is mobilizing God's gifts to get to God's goals in God's way."[72]

At the top of that list is the church planter's character. The main thing needed in order to lead others in ministry, according to Keller and Thompson, is "unusually mature character."[73] When one surveys the New Testament on officer selection, it is obvious that the focus of concern is on the character of potential candidates.[74] Patrick compares the priority on ensuring qualified pastors and church planters to the importance of having qualified doctors to perform surgeries, having qualified pilots to fly planes, and having qualified architects to build houses.[75] The work of shepherding, leading, and caring for

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[69] Keller and Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, 61.

[70] Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, 27.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Keller and Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, 61.

[73] Ibid.

[74] 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4.

[75] Patrick, *Church Planter*, 44.

those for whom Jesus Christ has died is of utmost importance and requires qualified individuals to carry out the task. Patrick urges, "People usually end up getting hurt when they are under unqualified leaders, and everything from marriages to the church itself is likely to fall apart."[76] "Godly character," Malphurs notes, "is the foundation of any leadership. It's the essential element that qualifies Christians to lead others."[77]

In addition to assessing the character of a prospective church planter, assessment tools also aim to discover the planter's temperament and experience in ministry. Malphurs defines temperament "as one's unique, God-given (inborn) style of behavior...Each person has a unique behavioral pattern or style that involves distinct ways of thinking, feeling and acting."[78] The most common tools used to identify temperament are the Personal Profile (DiSC), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), and the 360-degree Assessment. Each of these assessment tools has its strengths, and they can be used together to increase the quality of feedback gathered about a prospective candidate.

In order to discern the interpersonal and ministerial competencies necessary for the task of church planting, church planters and those who work with them have compiled a list of common traits or characteristics. Malphurs provides an exemplary list:[79]

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 97.

[78] Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, 32.

[79] Ibid., 34. Mission to North America (MNA), the church planting arm of the Presbyterian Church in America uses the work of J. Allen Thompson, *Church Planter Competencies as Perceived by Church Planters and Assessment Center Leaders: a protestant North American study*, Ph.D. dissertation, (Deerfield, IL: Trinity International University, 1995), cited in Keller and Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, 69-70. R. Paige Matthews provides a similar list in R. Paige Matthews, "Church Planter

visionary
courageous
self-starter
strong people skills
strong prayer life
flexible/adaptable
risk taker
resilient
focused
optimistic
spouse on board
nontraditional
emotionally healthy
good self-esteem
likes a challenge
challenges the status quo
inspirational
people magnet (attracts people)
healthy family
servant's heart
team player
strategic thinker
spiritually mature
good knowledge of the Bible
not quick to quit
innovative
good listener

Furthermore, it is critical to an effective assessment process that potential church planters get feedback about the planter's experiences in ministry from those who have served under, worked alongside, and supervised the candidate. Past experiences are important indicators to future effectiveness in church planting endeavors and require objective input from others. Keller and Thompson explain, "Although self-evaluation is important in

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Assessment" in *Church Planting from the Ground Up*, ed. Tom Jones, (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2004), 136-139. Ed Stetzer cites Charles Ridley's work, Charles R. Ridley, *How to Select Church Planters: A Self-Study Manual for Recruiting, Screening, Interviewing and Evaluating Qualified Church Planters* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Evangelistic Association, 1988), which highlights thirteen behavioral characteristics essential for church planters, in Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 82-84.

understanding one's gifts and call, much can be learned by inviting the objective evaluation of experienced church planters."[80]

While a church planter will not possess all of these characteristics, and neither will they be possessed in equal degree, possessing many of them indicates the presence of ministerial and interpersonal competencies required for church planting. Moreover, the assessment process is effective at discerning whether a candidate is motivated to pursue church planting for the wrong reasons. Stetzer notes six of those wrong reasons:[81] a strong desire to preach but no one will give the candidate an opportunity, frustrated where one is because one can't do what one wants to do, can't get an invitation to pastor an established church, need to get some experience—and church planting seems like a good opportunity to practice ministerial skills, and dreaming of a large ministry to boost one's reputation or ego.

In summary, church planting should be encouraged when a genuine call to church planting is joined to mature character, temperament, and observable and tested abilities essential for church planting.

Congregation Formation

The purpose of this research was to explore how Presbyterian founding pastors negotiate leadership challenges subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation. As noted above, Stetzer terms this important transitional season in a church's life the "solidification phase" of the church plant.[82] While not all types of

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[80] Keller and Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, 68.

[81] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches,* 88-9.

[82] Ibid., 69. Aubrey Malphurs uses the phrase "maturity stage" similarly, to describe the transition church plants make from an initial growth period to a more permanent and settled season. Malphurs, *Planting*

church planters remain with a congregation through this transition, the commitment to negotiate this part of the church is a defining characteristic of founding church planters, regardless of their ecclesiastical affiliation.[83]

The literature identifies three interrelated areas which are critical to understanding how church planters can successfully negotiate the solidification phase: leadership of the church planter, leadership development within the members of the congregation, and the establishment of the church's governance structure. Each of these areas requires attention.

Leadership of the Church Planter

One of the most challenging aspects for the church planter is the priority that must be given to leadership. Malphurs writes, "Not only must church planters be leaders, they must also be strong leaders. One of the reasons so many American churches are struggling today is because pastors are not exercising strong leadership."[84] Similarly, Stetzer comments, "Leadership is essential. You may have plenty of funding, a full-time team, and a great location; but if your leadership skills are not developed and you are reluctant to invest in developing them, you will not succeed."[85]

Nevertheless, Malphurs notes three factors working against church planters who exercise strong leadership in the church today. The first factor is historical. Church members remember the excesses of political tyrants who led "various totalitarian regimes" from the mid to late twentieth century, and the moral lapses of many high

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Growing Churches for the 21st Century, 231-44. Neither of these terms necessitates the specificity noted above for the special case of congregations that organize in the Presbyterian Church in America.

[83] Ibid., 61-70.

[84] Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 101.

[85] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 104.

profile church leaders acting without accountability in America.[86] Taken together, these have "created a somewhat popular anti-authoritarian mood."[87] Consequently, churches are often resistant to a strong pastoral leader.

The second and third factors are ecclesiastical in nature. Malphurs highlights a pastoral model popular in the 1970s and early 80s called "the enabler model," which advised pastors to primarily serve others by training the laity for ministry.[88] While this model encouraged servant leadership, it also created an unintended leadership vacuum, promoting pastoral inaction and causing churches to suffer as a result.

Similarly, the Church Renewal Movement of the 1960s and 1970s emphasized lay ministry involvement. Of course, there are many biblical reasons to emphasize the involvement of the laity, but, as Malphurs notes, from this movement emerged "the idea that laypeople were to lead the church. Consequently, many pastors turned their leadership authority over to various lay elder or deacon boards and assumed positions alongside of or under them."[89] Malphurs argues that when pastors abnegate their leadership authority exclusively to laity led boards, the consequence is "power blocks that stifle good pastoral leadership."[90]

Malphurs argues that pastors are best suited to lead by qualification, training, and immersion in the task.[91] Therefore, they should exercise the authority of leadership in the

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[86] Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 102.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid., 102.

[91] Ibid., 102-3.

churches they serve. Of course, church government debates are legion and do intersect with the expected pastoral leadership role. Regardless, the idea that church pastors are not church leaders, Malphurs notes, is without biblical and theological support.[92] Accordingly, the pastor or church planter ought to become "the leader of leaders, the point person on the ministry team."[93] This does not negate the importance and involvement of lay ministry leaders. Lay ministry leaders, regardless of ecclesiastical tradition, share in the exercise of accountability and important ministry practices. However, this is a shared responsibility with the pastor, who serves as a first among equals of the leadership team.

Malphurs' counsel on church planter leadership can best be understood as one seeking to navigate between two extremes—an authoritarian leadership style and a passive leadership style. In an authoritarian leadership style, the leader's word cannot be questioned, and the leader operates under no authority. This kind of leadership is distinctly worldly and bears no resemblance to the authority Jesus Christ calls church leaders to exert.[94] At the opposite extreme is an unduly passive leadership style, which is characterized by pastors who are immobilized to act courageously for fear of upsetting key members of the board. In such cases, the board itself is often characterized by an over emphasis upon achieving consensus. Consequently conclusions are often nothing more than compromises that risk little and gain even less. According to Malphurs, this

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[92] Ibid., 105-6.

[93] Ibid., 104.

[94] And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. Mark 10:42-44.

leadership isn't "characteristic of biblical leadership and most commonly results in no leadership."[95] The consequence is sustained ineffectiveness.

In summary, the literature on church planting suggests that church planters are to exert a strong leadership role in the churches for which they are responsible. Yet, this leadership is neither authoritarian nor unduly passive in character. This sort of leadership fits what the late Jack Miller, church planter and professor of practical theology, described as "pacesetting leadership."[96] Whether in a church plant or in an existing congregation, pacesetting church leaders "marshal [a church's] gifts and life for outreach to the world and [are] able to enlist others to help in this cause."[97]

Leadership Development within Congregation

Leadership development is a key area in which church planters must guide their developing congregations. Glenn Schneiders, founder and pastor of Crossroads Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky, writes, "Creating a healthy leadership culture may be as important to the long-term viability of the church as anything done by the church planter."[98] Ed Stetzer writes, "Take whatever time is necessary to develop leaders. It's not enough to assign tasks; new churches must truly develop leaders."[99] Similarly, Malphurs notes, "Probably the biggest neglect that I've observed in churches in the twentieth and now the early twenty-first century is the failure to train leaders for

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[95] Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 112.

[96] C. John Miller, *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986, 1999), 109ff.

[97] Ibid., 109.

[98] Glenn Schneiders, "Developing the Leadership Culture" in *Church Planting from the Ground Up*, ed. Tom Jones, (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2004), 297.

[99] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 112.

leadership in the church."[100] This explains comments by British church planter and author, Stuart Murray, "There is increasing awareness in the contemporary church planting movement of the importance of leadership training."[101] Keller and Thompson summarize the priority of leadership development, "Leadership is the crucial resource in the church for it to grow both in maturity and outreach."[102]

Church planters engage in leadership development along two parallel and sometimes overlapping trajectories: lay leadership development and staff team development. Malphurs envisions lay leaders as those who strategically implement the ministry vision of the congregation.[103] Welcome teams, nursery coordinators, Christian education, music leadership set-up teams—these duties all require lay leaders leading other members. Indeed, lay leaders are critical to congregational effectiveness. Management consultant, Peter Drucker observes, "People determine the performance capacity of an organization, No organization can do better than the people it has."[104] In fact, the method or strategy utilized to train the laity to lead is less important than the decision to do so. In order to reach maturity, church planters must train "leaders at every level of the church."[105]

Staff leaders are also critical to the overall vision of ministry effectiveness. Malphurs defines the staff team "as two or more gifted, competent, spiritual leaders who

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[100] Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 236.

[101] Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*, 226.

[102] Keller and Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, 157.

[103] Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, 151-8.

[104] Peter F Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization: Principles and Practices* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 145.

[105] Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 236.

have committed to serve together to accomplish the church's disciple-making mission."[106] He suggests that the purpose of the staff is to equip the congregation; in this way, the staff equips the implementers.[107] Staff team members, then, fulfill those roles that require a more full-time commitment so that others are fully equipped for their task of service, and various strategies can be employed to mobilize staff to fulfill their purposes. The important point is that church staff members must have either already been equipped prior to their hire or they must be trainable while on the job so that they can lead the congregation to accomplish its vision.

Establishment of Governance Structure

Whether or not a church plant has a denominational affiliation, most church plants eventually formalize their congregational identity by becoming an officially recognizable unit. Ed Stetzer lists and describes the milestones that congregations typically must pass in order to formalize their identity: 1) adopt a statement of faith, constitution, and bylaws, 2) obtain an employer identification number, federal tax exemption, state sales tax exemption, nonprofit bulk mail permit, and insurance, and 3) incorporate.[108] Typically, the constitution or the bylaws of the new congregation stipulate the form of governance that the new congregation will embrace. Under the authority of this new governance structure, the church assumes responsibility for all of its financial obligations, administration, and governing oversight.[109] In the case of church plants affiliated with a particular denomination, greater specificity will give shape to the passage of these

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[106] Ibid., 160.

[107] Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, 159-70.

[108] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 310-14.

[109] Ibid., 322.

milestones, and additional steps may also need to be taken before a congregation is formally organized.

In the specific case of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), there exists a clear demarcation between a mission church and an organized church, and the process required for organization is clearly delineated.[110] Because the denomination already has a statement of faith and a constitution, church plants do not often adopt additional bylaws. To a large degree, the focus is upon the formation of the new governing board. In Presbyterian churches, this board is called the session, and it is comprised of the pastor[111] and other elected leaders. These non-pastoral leaders, known as ruling elders, are identified through a specific process.[112] Under the leadership of the church planter, each PCA mission church has the liberty to develop methodologies for training and selection of its leaders. Still, these methodologies must conform to the boundaries established by the denomination's *Book of Church Order (BCO).* Broadly speaking, the process is as follows: First, members of the church plant are invited to recommend candidates for office. Then, eligible candidates are trained by the church planting pastor. Next, candidates are examined and those approved are declared eligible for election by an overseeing regional denominational body called the presbytery. Finally election by the congregation follows.

Regardless of ecclesiastical identity or the biblical arguments for forms of church governance, the establishment of the church's governance structure is the most important

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[110] The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) outlines a lengthy, formal process through which a "mission church" is organized. See *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*, 6th ed., (Lawrenceville, GA: The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the PCA, 2013) 5-9.

[111] Another aspect of particularization is the congregation's calling of a pastor. In most cases, the church planter becomes the organizing pastor. For more information, see BCO 5-9.f.1, 20 and 21

[112] This process is outlined in the Presbyterian Church in America's BCO, chapter 24.

facet to the process of congregation formation. Malphurs explains, "The primary issue has to do with polity, how the church is organized, which determines where the power rests."[113] Formalizing a governance structure, then, signals a shift in where decision-making authority rests in the congregation. Whereas prior to organization, this authority typically rests solely with the church planter, subsequent to organization this authority rests with the governing board.[114]

For this reason, much of the literature on church planting recommends delaying the establishment of a governance structure for as long as possible.[115] In fact, one of the most commonly cited mistakes committed by church planters is formalizing a governance structure too soon and placing spiritually immature and unqualified individuals in positions of authority. Malphurs suggests, "It is wise to wait—one to two years—until [the church has] had time to discern who are its spiritually mature people."[116] Church planting consultants, Jim Griffith and Bill Easum express even greater concern:

> Formalizing the leadership and organization of the church too soon is dangerous. Whether its bowing to pressure by zealous supervisors, current "unofficial" leaders, personal insecurities, or personal experiences with previous "church," the net effect is the same—a major sea change in the life of the church, and, more importantly, redirecting youthful energies away from mission to management. Either way, formalizing leadership too soon *always* hinders the growth of the plant. The organization of the plant needs time to find its indigenous roots in the mission field. Future leaders need time to prove themselves on the battlefield.[117]

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[113] Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, 170.

[114] This insight does not apply to the particular situation when a senior leader retains sole decision making authority after a church has formally organized, even if there are deacons or elders who serve in an advisory capacity as is the case in certain congregational forms of governance.

[115] Jim Griffith and William M Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 104.

[116] Malphurs, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, 170.

[117] Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts*, 102.

The fundamental issue at hand in formalizing the church's governance structure too soon is establishing a board of ministry leaders who are unprepared, ill-equipped, and lack the spiritual maturity and vision to lead the newly forming congregation. Rather than leading, the newly formed board often subverts the leadership of the church planter and thus stymies growth.[118]

Similarly, Larry Osborne notes, "The best time to remove a problem player is before they have a place on the team."[119] For this reason, he argues for the importance and maintenance of a careful congregational leadership selection process. When leadership selection is not a priority, ineffective and contentious ministry leaders are inevitably empowered. The consequences are legion. Osborne writes,

> Meetings become an exercise in conflict avoidance, and important initiatives are sidetracked or tabled in the hope that later discussion will somehow miraculously forge an agreement. Laughter and joy all but disappear. Off-the-record discussions and after-the-meeting meetings conspire to sabotage or change everything you thought you'd decided the night before.[120]

Importantly, the literature highlights biblical wisdom, which also resists quick formalization of leadership. 1 Timothy 5:22 urges, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands."[121] Griffith and Easum cite the principle entailed in this verse, "Remember, leaders need to have spiritual maturity before they are put into any official capacity."[122] Those most eager for a church to establish a formal governance structure or to serve in that capacity are usually more interested in power for its own sake than in service and

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[118] Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 237.

[119] Osborne, *Sticky Teams*, 48.

[120] Ibid., 47.

[121] 1 Tim. 5:22.

[122] Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts*, 108.

extending the vision of the congregation. According to Griffith and Easum, when someone is anxious "to be in position of power," that person "is the last person you want in that position."[123]

Additionally, time alone is insufficient to determine those who should be entrusted with governing authority in the organized congregation. Keller and Thompson outline a lengthy leadership training process that church planters can utilize in order to train and determine who best qualifies to serve as an office holder.[124] They list four disciplines through which to ascertain the Christian character of prospective church officers. First are the self-management disciplines: getting work done on time, not being controlled by outside circumstances, keeping commitments, consistency, and honesty. Second are the interpersonal disciplines: sensitivity to others, winsomeness and at ease in confronting, good listening skills, ability to be teachable, patience and warmth, not controlling in nature. Third is gospel confidence: a gracious and affirming spirit, not irritable; a repenting-in-joy spirit, not defensive; a grateful spirit, even in trouble, and not given to self-pity. Finally, they list the spiritual disciplines: consistent [in] prayer/Bible study; knowledgeable in the Bible; handling temptation well—free from patterns of besetting sin; no un-reconciled relationships in the congregation; good accountability relationships in the congregation; consistent outreach to those without Christ; and able to disciple a new believer.[125]

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[123] Ibid., 104.

[124] Keller and Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, 176-8. Their example is also consistent with the constitutional requirements of the Presbyterian Church in America outlined above.

[125] Ibid., 176-7.

Determination about character is joined to inquiry about ministry leadership gifts and skills and whether or not an individual is committed to the overall vision of the church.[126] Similarly,

> Those who ignore [philosophical alignment] pay a high price in conflict and in constant revisiting of the vision God has already given. Rather than spending their time finding the best way to fulfill God's vision, they end up in endless discussions of whether or not it's God vision in the first place. And in the meantime, the ministry languishes.[127]

The point to emphasize is not the specifics of one's training methodology or even the shape of one's ministry philosophy, but that those who share authority in a newly organized church need to be individuals whose character, understanding of the gospel, interpersonal capacities, commitment to the vision of the church, and overall fit with the church planter are high priorities.

In summary, the literature on church planting is copious and rightly focused on the skills and strategies required for launching a congregation. Perhaps for this reason, the literature does not focus on negotiating organizational challenges common to older congregations. Interestingly, the literature suggests that when a church plant transitions to a more formalized leadership structure, this may heighten the challenges faced by the church planter. Nevertheless, these challenges are not adequately explored, perhaps because these challenges are more often associated with more traditional, church-based leadership. Importantly, the transitional nature of a church plant that is becoming a particular congregation, and the associated leadership challenges, do not receive special treatment in the literature.

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[126] Ibid., 177.

[127] Osborne, *Sticky Teams*, 56.

The literature also reveals that organizational structures within churches can either enhance or hinder organizational effectiveness. Within each ecclesiastical model for ministry governance, there are pathways for effectiveness and opportunities for bottlenecks. John Kaiser, a church consultant and the President of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada, proposes an organizational leadership structure called "The Accountable Leadership Strategy," which is transferable to a number of different ecclesiastical governance structures.[128] Fundamentally, this strategy separates the governance of a congregation from the day-to-day operation of that congregation. This ensures that the day-to-day will be carried out under the supervision of the senior leader and the staff, who are accountable to the senior leader. The board holds the senior leader accountable by making sure that leader acts consistently with the stated mission of the organization and with the board's adopted policies.[129] The separation of the governance function from the day-to-day operation of an organization encourages greater organizational clarity, enhancing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the entire congregation.

Leadership Capabilities Essential to Negotiating Organizational Challenges

The body of literature devoted to organizational leadership is vast. Therefore, this literature review will highlight several widely accepted works that explore how individuals develop the capability to negotiate organizational challenges. Since congregations are complex organizations, it is assumed that such a survey will yield

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[128] John E Kaiser, *Winning on Purpose* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 43.

[129] Ibid., 41–48. A very engaging treatment of the policy governance model of servant leadership is presented in Mike Conduff, Carol Gabanna, and Catherine Raso, *The Ontarget Board Member: 8 Indisputable Behaviors* (Denton, TX: Elim Group Pub., 2007).

many helpful insights and applications to pastors negotiating ministry challenges subsequent to the organization of a church plant.

It is important to note that the literature does not support the notion that leadership qualities are either innate or learned. While the notion that leaders are "born" that way or that leaders can develop their skills in an academic and theoretical manner is common, such binary constructions are inadequate. Rather, research confirms that many factors are relevant to the developing leader, including one's innate temperament, family of origin, learning environments, and even experiences of failure. The literature shows that leadership development occurs throughout one's life. Due to its scope, this portion of the literature review will be subdivided into discussions about traits possessed by effective leaders, types of challenges leaders must negotiate (and the importance of distinguishing them), important capacities and skills leaders must practice.

Leadership Traits of Effective Leaders

First, consider how effective leaders are described. The literature suggests that someone must be perceived as having credibility if they are also going to be perceived as a leader.[130] Credibility is a prerequisite that constituents desire in those they follow. For example, in *The Leadership Challenge*, leadership management consultants, James Kouzes and Barry Posner, note that leadership is a "reciprocal process between leaders and their constituents."[131] Consequently, the interpersonal dynamics contained within that relationship are important. According to Kouzes and Posner, "Strategies, tactics, skills, and practices are empty without an understanding of the fundamental aspirations that

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[130] James M Kouzes and Barry Z Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Keep Getting Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 27.

[131] Ibid., 28.

connect leaders and their constituents."[132] In other words, there is nothing academic or theoretical about what makes someone willing to follow another person. This determination is based on real-time, face-to-face encounters between leaders and constituents while handling all sorts of organizational challenges. It is in those challenging crucibles that the desirable traits for effective leaders are consistently revealed. So, what traits are essential for effective leaders to possess?

In order to answer the question, Kouzes and Posner conducted research, asking the question, "What values, personal traits, or characteristics do you look for and admire in a leader?"[133] Their research has now spanned twenty-five years and "thousands of business and government executives" from various cultures, ethnicities, genders, organizational hierarchies, educational backgrounds, and age groups have been surveyed.[134] Among twenty characteristics commonly cited, only four consistently rise to the top: honest, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent. [135]

Honest

It seems obvious that there is no substitute for honesty; its relevance needs no explanation. Without honesty, the reciprocal relationship between leader and follower cannot function. If a leader cannot be trusted, then they cannot be followed. For this reason, leadership educator and author, Stephen Covey, devoted an entire book to a discussion of how essential honesty is for leaders and their organizations. "For most people," he writes, "trust is hidden from view…But once they put on 'trust glasses' and

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[132] Ibid.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid., 28-29.

[135] Ibid., 29.

see what's going on under the surface, it immediately impacts their ability to increase their effectiveness in every dimension of life."[136] It is easy to recognize that we appreciate and deepen relationships with those who act in accord with their personal conviction and whose word can be trusted. When constituents trust those who lead, every facet of the organization becomes more effective.

Forward-Looking

As noted above, the second critical trait identified by Kouzes and Posner is being forward-looking. In order for someone to be seen as a potential leader, it is essential that they be able to envision possible futures for the organization. Having some general view of an idealized future is not what is necessary here. Rather, it the capacity to paint a particular, realizable picture of the future that engages and enlists others in making that dream a reality.[137] Forward-looking leaders have a way to connect the hopes and dreams of their constituents with a corresponding vision for the organization. Forward-looking leaders capitalize on the synergy that can result from joining a constituent's personal aspirations with the organization's broader vision.

Inspiring

While related, the character trait of "inspiring" is distinct from "forward-looking." Leaders who inspire others are able to connect the hearts of their constituents to the mission of the organization. It is important to recognize that leaders who inspire others possess more than simple charisma or charm. Rather, an inspiring leader is able to communicate their dreams in ways that connect deeply with the hearts of those they lead.

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[136] Stephen M. R Covey and Rebecca R Merrill, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (London: Free Press, 2006), 20.

[137] Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 33-34.

This trait is especially important when organizations negotiate difficult challenges or tragic losses. Kouzes and Posner reason that if the leader is not devoted to the cause, who will be?[138]

Long before today's current fascination with leadership development, Abraham Lincoln recognized the importance of stirring the hearts of those being led. Pulitzer-prize winning writer Doris Kearns Goodwin, in her book *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, highlights Lincoln's strategy, "[In order to] win a man to your cause, [you must first reach his heart,] the great high road to his reason."[139] When his speeches were compared to those of his political rivals of the day, this element is what they remembered. Reporter Horace White records his reflections on a speech Lincoln gave in Springfield, IL on October 4, 1854, "His speaking went to the heart because it came from the heart. I have heard celebrated orators who could start thunders of applause without changing any man's opinion. Mr. Lincoln's eloquence was of the higher type, which produced conviction in others because of the conviction of the speaker himself."[140]

Competent

The final vital leadership characteristic is competence. This refers to a leader's ability to follow through on their promises. Competent leaders do what they say they are going to do; this reaches beyond their trustworthiness to their capability. Competent leaders have the relevant skills and experiences to serve in their vocational arena.

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[138] Ibid., 34.

[139] Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 25.

[140] Ibid., 165.

Leadership is found in the convergence of these four traits. Kouzes and Posner write,

> ...these are the characteristics that have remained constant over more than twenty five years of economic growth and recession, the surge in new technology enterprises, the birth of the World Wide Web, the further globalization of business and industry, the ever-changing political environment, and the expansion, bursting, and regeneration of the Internet economy. The relative importance of the most desired qualities has varied somewhat over time, but there has been no change in the fact that these are the four qualities people want most in their leaders.[141]

These four traits make people willing to follow a leader. If organizations are going to fulfill their goals, then attending to the reciprocal process between leader and follower is critical. Consequently, the credibility of the leader in the eyes of an organization's constituents is essential for effective leadership.

Organizational Commitment

Closely connected to the trait of credibility is the leader's organizational commitment. The observable commitment of the leader to the organization is also critical to a leader's potential effectiveness. In his research of top companies, American business consultant, Jim Collins, describes this leadership trait as characteristic of what he calls Level 5 leadership.[142] Level 5 leaders those who "...channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It's not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious—but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves."[143] Level 5 leaders

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[141] Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 36.

[142] James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't* (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 17-40.

[143] Ibid., 21.

blend “extreme personal humility with intense professional will.”[144] While possessing a self-effacing character, Level 5 leaders simultaneously maintain a “ferocious resolve [and a] stoic determination to do whatever needs to be done to make the company great.”[145] This duality of commitment is critical to understanding Level 5 leadership.

Ironically, humility and modesty are incomplete descriptors. In fact, Collins and his research team rejected describing Level 5 leaders as “servant leader(s)” or “selfless executive(s)” because to them it sounded too “weak or meek.”[146] Level 5 leaders are simultaneously selfless and fanatical; they are “infected with an incurable need to produce results. They will sell the mills or fire their brother, if that’s what it takes to make the company great.”[147] According to Collins, Level 5 leadership is essential if companies are to make the jump from “good to great.”[148]

The literature indicates that the most effective leaders simultaneously demonstrate a self-effacing character that refuses to allow ego to get in the way of results. This humility is combined with an intensity and drive to do whatever it takes to achieve the organization’s goals. This organizational commitment is essential to leadership effectiveness.

Organizational commitment, characterized by self-effacing sacrifice and intense determination, along with leadership credibility, which is characterized by honesty,

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[144] Ibid.

[145] Ibid., 30.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid., 37.

forward-looking behavior, inspiration and competence, have been empirically demonstrated to be essential traits possessed by effective leaders .

Types of Leadership Challenges

The next area of literature on leadership theory involves various types of leadership challenges. Even within the same organization, leadership challenges are rarely exactly alike. Nevertheless, researchers have recognized the value of relating leadership challenges into two broad categories: technical challenges and adaptive challenges.[149]

Technical Challenges

In their book, *Leadership on the Line,* Heifetz and Linksy distinguish a technical challenge as one that "people…have the necessary know-how and procedures" to be able to solve.[150] A technical problem is not distinguished by the amount of time involved, the complexity of the problem, or the expertise required, but by whether or not that expertise, knowledge, and time is readily at hand. For example, even though open-heart bypass surgery is incredibly complex, time-consuming, and potentially life threatening, it is a technical problem that cardiac surgeons, experts in their field, perform regularly. Put succinctly, a problem is technical when the problem is clearly defined, the solution is clearly understood, and the specific authority charged with doing the work is clearly identified.[151]

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[149] Cf. Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 13ff. Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 19ff.

[150] Heifetz, and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 13.

[151] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 20.

In the specific case of church planting, the following common experiences are common challenges, which could be classified as technical in nature for most church planters: securing affordable office space and strategic meeting spaces, creating marketing strategies to publicize the new work, including website designs, signs, logos, and mailers, formulating a vision statement for a new congregation, planning events that welcome newcomers to find out about the new congregation, interviewing and hiring musicians to assist during worship services, hiring administrative and financial staff to manage the affairs of the growing church, and raising funds and develop a support network until the church becomes self-sustaining. Some of these items might take months to address, yet they still are technical in nature for most church planters, because they already have the requisite skills and training to solve them. Challenges are identified as technical without regard to how long or even how arduous the task might be. Rather, a technical challenge is one in which the problem is clearly defined, the solution is known, and the one doing the work is identified.[152]

Adaptive Challenges

In *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky contrast technical challenges with they call "adaptive" challenges. In adaptive challenges, the problem is often not clearly understood, there are not clear solutions, and authoritative experts will likely disagree on how to approach the problem. With adaptive challenges, the current knowledge regarding the problem is insufficient, and new ways to approach the issue must be learned in order for it to be addressed.[153] At the core of the adaptive

[152] Ibid., 19. Cf. Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 13.

[153] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 19–20.

challenge is a difficult learning process that requires "changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties."[154]

As noted above, in a technical challenge, those with the skills and knowledge, often the designated authorities, do the work. However, in an adaptive challenge, the people closest to the problem, often those without formal authority, must "internalize the change itself."[155] The very essence of an adaptive challenge is that an "expert" is not available to address the stresses being presented by the challenge. Instead, those experiencing that stress must face the learning opportunity presented by the adaptive challenge. Put simply, adaptive challenges require new realities to emerge—new processes, new perspectives, and changed people. This pathway also includes a share of loss. Though adaptation is the pathway to that new place, the destination will not be reached unless the players learn how to go beyond authoritative expertise, shed certain entrenched ways, and tolerate organizational losses.[156]

In a church planting context, the following are common challenging experiences, yet they have significant adaptive aspects to them and will likely be perceived very differently from the challenges earlier identified as technical. First, adaptive challenges are faced when a church planter moves to a new city without any significant relationships or a core ministry team in order to launch a church. Second adaptive challenges are faced when the entire core group of leaders abandons the church planter within the first six months of moving to the field of ministry. Adaptive challenges are also involved when a

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[154] Ibid., 19.

[155] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 13.

[156] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 2009, 19.

key staff person is discovered to be exploring planting another church with members of the congregation without knowledge of the church planter.

Adaptive challenges arise from problems that are not clearly defined, solutions that are not fully understood or easily at-hand, and identified authorities who are unable to adequately address issues. Consequently, adaptive challenges are often experienced as crisis situations. Nevertheless, due the intense learning processes they set in motion, adaptive challenges create, metaphorically speaking, organizational laboratories within the organization.[157] Whether it's conflict in the workplace or in one's place of worship, the departure of a longtime senior leader, receiving news about terminal illness, or the passing of a child or spouse, life's challenges are also learning opportunities that require growth and change, which are at the heart of an adaptive process.

Distinguishing Adaptive from Technical Challenges

It is not enough to simply recognize that these two types of challenges exist. In order for organizations to flourish, leaders must distinguish them in real time in order for the organization to succeed. Failure to do so can mean the failure of the organization or the loss of one's leadership position. For example, Heifetz and Linksy write,

> Indeed, the single most common source of leadership failure we've been able to identify—is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems.
>
> In times of distress, when everyone looks to authorities to provide direction, protection, and order, this is an easy diagnostic mistake to make. In the face of adaptive pressures, people don't want questions; they want answers. They don't want to be told that they will have to sustain losses; rather, they want to know how you're going to protect them from the pains of change. And of course you want to fulfill their needs and expectations, not bear the brunt of their frustration and anger at the bad news you're giving.

[157] "Seeing life as a leadership lab enables you to try things out, make mistakes, strengthen your skills and take pleasure in the journey as well as the fruits of your labor." Ibid., 42–44.

> In mobilizing adaptive work, you have to engage people in adjusting their unrealistic expectations, rather than try to satisfy them as if the situation were amenable primarily to a technical remedy. You have to counteract their exaggerated dependency and promote their resourcefulness.[158]

At the core of the adaptive process is a learning process, but it is a process that people resist because it disrupts long-standing, organizational stasis. Linsky and Heifetz warn that it is impossible to move through an adaptive challenge without challenging "people's habits, beliefs, and values. It asks people to experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures...No wonder people resist."[159] Nevertheless, unless the organization pushes through the adaptive change process, new solutions, strategies, processes, talent, and even leadership will not emerge, and those things are vital to furthering the goals of the organization.

Capacities and Skills Leaders Need to Negotiate Organizational Challenges

The most difficult organizational challenges are almost always adaptive in nature. Consequently, adaptive challenges create organizational contexts that are uncertain and risky for everyone, including the leader.[160] According to Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, leading through an adaptive challenge is "disruptive and disorienting" for everyone.[161] So much so, this period of "disequilibrium can catalyze everything from conflict, frustration, and panic to confusion, disorientation, and fear of losing something dear."[162] They note

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[158] Heifetz and Linksy, *Leadership on the Line*, 14-15.

[159] Ibid., 30.

[160] Cf. chapter two, "The Faces of Danger" in Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line, 31ff,* for a discussion about how leaders experience marginalization, diversion, attack and seduction as forms of organizational resistance arising from constituents seeking to preserve the status quo in the midst of negotiating adaptive challenges.

[161] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 2009, 28.

[162] Ibid.

that it is critical for the leader to be able to do two things well: "(1) manage yourself in that environment and (2) help people tolerate the discomfort they are experiencing."[163]

This discomfort or disequilibrium is commonly experienced as a rise in the temperature of the organization. Heifetz and Linsky note, "Changing the status quo generates tension and produces heat by surfacing hidden conflicts and challenging organizational culture."[164] In *Leadership on the Line,* they describe the process of controlling the temperature while negotiating an adaptive challenge as "orchestrating the conflict."[165] It has been observed that leaders who negotiate organizational challenges well, effectively orchestrating the conflict, possess higher emotional intelligence (EQ), which is a leadership capacity. The researcher will now examine why emotional intelligence is a critical leadership capacity. Afterwards, this chapter will consider those skills that are critical for leaders to practice in order to negotiate leadership challenges.

Emotional Intelligence

In order to manage themselves in the heated period of disequilibrium created by an adaptive challenge, leaders must be able to maintain a calm, emotionally stable presence and be able to respond appropriately to the emotionality of their constituents. This capacity is gained by growing in what the literature terms, "emotional intelligence" or "EQ." Also called emotional health or emotional quotient, EQ refers to the ability a person has to perceive, understand, and manage emotions within themselves and others

[163] Ibid., 29.

[164] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line,* 107.

[165] Ibid., 101ff.

so that they are better able to manage behavior and relationships.[166] Emotional intelligence helps to explain the impact of the main emotions (and their relations) that humans experience—happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and shame—have on overall human flourishing. What has been discovered is that the impact is significant.

The origin of this discussion lies in an exploration of the interrelationship of the emotional part of brain functioning, called the limbic system, with the thinking or rational part of the brain, the prefrontal cortex. Researchers have determined that different parts of the brain control and are engaged when a person is performing and experiencing different types of activities and situations. The emotional part of the brain governs emotional, non-rational responses, including the fight or flight response. The thinking part of the brain governs cognitive functioning.[167]

Importantly, it has been discovered that human brains are "hard-wired to give emotions the upper hand" because everything the body experiences through sight, smell, hear, taste, or touch must pass through limbic system, the emotional part of the brain, prior to arriving at the rational part of the brain.[168] This also means that a person "feels" things before they are able to "think" things. Communication between these two parts of the human brain is the physical basis for what is called emotional intelligence.[169]

This is also the reason why a person's ability to function rationally greatly diminishes when their experience of threat increases. According to Goleman, Boyatzis

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[166] This definition is adapted from Scott J. Allen, *Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: A Guide for College Students*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

[167] See the important discussion in Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 26-9.

[168] Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* (San Diego: TalentSmart, 2009), 6.

[169] Ibid., 7.

and McKee, "In moments of emergency, our emotional centers—the limbic brain—commandeer the rest of the brain."[170] When a person is threatened, the emotional part of the brain takes control. Significantly, this is true whether or not the threat is realistic. It is the experience or perception of threat or emergency that is significant. Consequently, the lower one's emotional intelligence, the more the "veto power" of the prefrontal cortex is diminished, thus increasing the likelihood of emotionally unpredictable or harmful responses. Therefore, threatening workplace situations need not occur only when the fire alarm sounds. All that is needed to turn up the heat and diminish one's cognitive functioning could be the latest monthly financial report or a weak annual review. Such things might engender emotional responses from an individual that far outweigh what a more objective observer would give to them.

There is also far-reaching relevance to the capacity of higher emotional intelligence. Formerly, it was thought that intelligence quotient (IQ) was the greatest indicator of future success. Yet, in their book *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves highlight recent research demonstrating that "people with the highest levels of intelligence (IQ) outperform those with average IQs just 20 percent of the time, while people with average IQs outperform those with high IQs 70 percent of the time."[171] Until the concept of emotional intelligence was identified, the phenomenon of the under-performing individual with a high IQ was unexplained. Now Bradberry and Greaves suggest,

> EQ is so crucial to success that it accounts for 58 percent of performance in all types of jobs. It is the single biggest predictor of performance in the workplace and the strongest driver of leadership and personal excellence....Of all the people

[170] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership,* 28.

[171] Bradberry and Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0,* 7-8.

> we've studied at work, we have found that 90 percent of high performers are also high in EQ. On the flip side, just 20 percent of low performers are high in EQ. You can be a high performer without EQ, but the chances are slim.[172]

In *Resilient Ministry,* Burns, Chapman and Guthrie note a study that Daniel Goleman highlights, one which began in the 1950s and underlines the importance of EQ to individual and organizational performance.

> Eighty Ph.D. students in science at the University of California, Berkeley, went through an intensive battery of IQ and personality tests. They also had exhaustive interviews with psychologists, who evaluated them on such qualities as emotional balance, maturity and interpersonal effectiveness.
>
> Forty years later, when these former students were in their seventies, researchers tracked them down again. They evaluated each person's career success based on their resumes, assessment by peers in their field and sources like *American Men and Women of Science*. The conclusion drawn from this analysis was that issues of EQ—the capacity of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management—were about four times more important than IQ in determining professional success and prestige for these scientists.[173]

Applying this topic to churches and ministries, Peter Scazzero, pastor and author of *The Emotionally Health Church*, sounds the alarm and suggests that the church needs a "Copernican Revolution" in understanding how emotional health relates to spiritual maturity. The thesis for his book is "that emotional health and spiritual health are inseparable…It is not possible for a Christian to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature."[174]

Scazzero is aware of the fact that emotional intelligence is not developed automatically. It is important to recognize that a person can appear physically,

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[172] Ibid., 20-21.

[173] Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* 102–103. Cf. Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam, 1998), 44-45. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 30.

[174] Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: a Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 50.

intellectually and even spiritually mature, yet remain emotionally underdeveloped. In *Resilient Ministry*, Burns, Chapman and Guthrie note, "It is possible to that a mature adult can be an emotional adolescent."[175] Similarly, Scazzero comments that "a person can be deeply committed to contemplative spirituality, even to the point of taking a monastic vow, and remain emotionally unaware and socially maladjusted."[176] Like any other facet of a person's development, emotional intelligence requires intentional, focused attention.

Unlike one's intelligence quotient, the literature indicates one can develop emotional intelligence throughout one's life. Goleman writes, "Emotional intelligence is not fixed genetically, nor does it develop only in early childhood...[It] seems largely learned, and it continues to develop as we go through life and learn from our experiences—our competence in it can keep growing."[177] Consequently, developing emotional intelligence corresponds to gaining a critical capacity necessary to negotiate heated, adaptive organizational challenges. EQ helps a person to remain calm under pressure and respond creatively to an emotionally charged environment, which is part of the process when an organization is undergoing the stress of an adaptive challenge.

In *Primal Leadership*, Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee explore the impact emotional intelligence has on leadership. They write, "Great leaders move us. They ignite our passion and inspire the best in us. When we try to explain why they are so effective, we speak of strategy, vision or powerful ideas. But the reality is much more

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[175] Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*, 106.

[176] Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 44.

[177] Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, 7.

primal: Great leadership works through the emotions."[178] The degree to which a leader exercises emotionally intelligent leadership is the degree to which the leader prolongs their impact. When emotional intelligence is joined with sound leadership decision-making, something Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee describe as "resonant leadership" emerges.[179] The greater the resonance between leader and constituent(s) "the less static" are the interactions of group members, and the "noise in the system" is minimized.[180] They write, "The glue that holds people together in a team, and that commits people to an organization, is the emotions they feel."[181]

Of course, dissonance is the enemy of resonant leadership. When emotionally intelligent leadership is not present, the static and noise increase. Dissonant leadership "dispirits people, burns them out, or sends them packing."[182] Yet this does not mean every situation requires a highly resonant leadership style. In fact, it is crucial to distinguish which leadership style is needed in order to navigate specific adaptive challenges. Certain adaptive challenges might be better navigated by a leadership style that is experienced by constituents as less resonant.

Primal Leadership identifies the various leadership styles as: visionary, coaching, affiliative, democratic, pacesetting, and commanding.[183] While the pacesetting and commanding styles are the most discordant, that does not mean they should never be

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[178] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 3.

[179] Ibid., 19.

[180] Ibid., 20.

[181]Ibid.

[182] Ibid., 22.

[183] Ibid., 55.

utilized. An emotionally intelligent leader will be able to recognize when a more directive or pacesetting approach is required to negotiate the intensity of certain adaptive challenges.[184]

Leaders must recognize that their leadership style concretely expresses their level of emotional intelligence. This part of a person's "hard-wiring" is a critical capacity to understanding how people perceive their own emotional responses and the emotional responses of those they seek to lead. Additionally, this awareness can broaden one's capacity to use the full repertoire of leadership styles, depending on the character of the challenge one faces.

Essential Leadership Skills

In order to help those within the organization negotiate their discomfort so that solutions to the adaptive challenge can emerge, leaders must not only possess emotional intelligence, they must also practice certain important skills. In the literature, the most important are identified as getting perspective, deepening dialogue, thinking politically, and enlisting others in the process.

Getting Perspective

Many temptations arise when one faces an adaptive challenge. A significant one is the tendency to become more enmeshed in the problem. However, the literature suggests that it is critical for the leader to momentarily step away in order to gain perspective in the midst of an adaptive challenge. This step provides the leader some

[184]For a more complete discussion of how developing one's leadership styles can enhance leadership effectiveness, consult Bill Joiner, *Leadership Agility Five Levels of Mastery for Anticipating and Initiating Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

perspective in the midst of the difficulty. Heifetz and Linsky describe this skill of stepping away as "getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony."[185]

The benefits of gaining the perspective of the "balcony" are many: slowing the process down; distinguishing technical from adaptive challenges; and developing a greater ability to listen and reflect on competing perspectives. Nevertheless, stepping away and slowing things down in a crisis can seem counterintuitive. For example, consider most traffic accidents. The response times of police, fire, and emergency medical crews often determine whether lives will be lost. The last thing an officer should do in an emergency situation is "get on the balcony."

Nevertheless, in an adaptive challenge, taking time to get perspective and slow the process actually enhances the likelihood that effective solutions will be found to whatever problem the organization faces. Stepping away during an adaptive challenge affords the leader and constituents a fresh vantage point from which to see the problem and consider the personalities involved. If many of the people are able to meaningfully step away, this will increase the number of different perspectives, thereby increasing the likelihood of a better outcome.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky quote F. Scott Fitzgerald, who once said that "the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function."[186] The leader must act decisively, yet remain deeply aware that they could be wrong. If the leader fails to take time to get on the balcony while in the midst of the action, they will likely suffer from both wrong decisions and deadly indecision. However, when leaders act decisively and remain open

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[185] Heifetz and Linsky *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading, 51*.

[186] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 37.

to other possibilities in real time, adjustments to the organizational course can be made. Only leaders who intentionally seek to gain perspective on the challenges in front of them will be able to say, "A plan is no more than today's best guess. Tomorrow you discover the unanticipated effects of today's actions and adjust to those unexpected events."[187]

Deepening Dialogue

Adaptive challenges present leaders with a host of interlocking problems. Emotional reactivity and quickening of the pace hamper the negotiation of adaptive challenges. Similarly, meaningful dialogue often breaks down among stakeholders facing adaptive challenges precisely at the time when dialogue among them is most needed. During adaptive challenges, dialogue-killing responses are common: cutting-off, withholding information, or intensely aggressive engagement. So, how do leaders deepen the dialogue among their constituents?

During adaptive challenges, the temperature rises and this threatens the perceived safety of the work environment. Consequently, people are less apt to share information, especially when they believe their job might be on the line. Therefore, it is essential for the leader to be diligent about making the organizational system a "safe" place for constituents to share. Dialogue deepens when people feel their perspectives will be heard, even if they are ultimately rejected. A safe environment is usually one where the leader does not have to "have their way." Being open to change and communicating that openness to the team perhaps does more to create safety than anything else. Genuine humility is absolutely crucial to deepening the dialogue. Humility regarding one's opinions and answers demonstrates an openness to others' opinions and solutions that deepens collaboration and is crucial to getting through the adaptive change process.

[187] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 73.

Another way of describing this is building trust among key team members. In *The Advantage,* Patrick Lencioni states, "When team members trust one another, when they know that everyone on the team is capable of admitting when they don't have the right answer, and when they're willing to acknowledge when someone else's idea is better than theirs, the fear of conflict and the discomfort it entails is greatly diminished."[188] In trusting relationships, people practice a humble openness to one another that fosters honest sharing. Still, humility only makes a situation more conducive to dialogue. In *Crucial Conversations,* organizational leadership consultants, Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler, outline four components of that dialogue process. They are easily remembered through the acronym CRIB:[189] commit to a mutual purpose, recognize the purpose behind the strategy, invent a mutual purpose, and brainstorm new strategies.

At the core of each component in this strategy is the suspension of one's personal goals long enough to interact with the goals of others, so that a mutually beneficial strategy or conclusion can be embraced. For dialogue to be effective, those involved must move beyond what they want, understand what motivates each person's wants, determine a purpose that can be agreed upon by the most members, and then envision strategies that realize that mutual purpose.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that consensus need not be reached and conflict does not have to be avoided in order for dialogue to deepen. In fact, Lencioni

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[188] Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business,* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 38.

[189] Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler, *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 82-88.

claims that "conflict avoidance" is "always a sign of problems."[190] In order to deepen dialogue, conflict cannot be avoided, but it must be orchestrated in such a way to strengthen the overall cohesiveness of the team. In the context of trusting environments, opinions can be freely shared and freely rejected by the majority without the minority becoming defensive. In this way, even when the minority opinion is not determinative, it has at least been heard. Consequently, even the minority can participate in the implementation of the majority decision.

According to Lencioni, "Great teams avoid the consensus trap by embracing a concept that Intel, the legendary microchip manufacturer, calls 'disagree and commit.'"[191] The goal of dialogue is not a consensus opinion, which often mires teams in endless debate about how to avoid loss or achieve unrealistic goals. Rather, Lencioni explains, dialogue should enable a team to honestly reflect on all possibilities so that one decision can emerge, enabling all team members to unambiguously commit "to a common course of action."[192] He adds, "When a leader knows that everyone on the team has weighed in and provided every possible perspective needed for a fully informed decision, he can then bring the discussion to a clear and unambiguous close and expect team members to really around the final decision even if they initially disagreed with it."[193]

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[190] Lencioni, *The Advantage*, 38.

[191] Ibid., 48.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Ibid., 49.

Thinking Politically

Heifetz and Linsky devote an entire chapter to the important role that relationships play in navigating adaptive challenges.[194] They explain that at its heart, negotiating stakeholders' interests amidst relationships is a political conversation: "choosing among conflicting wants and interests, developing trust, locating support and opposition, developing sensitivity to timing, and knowing the informal and formal organizational refrains."[195] In the preceding conversation about dialogue, the priority was placed on making sure every voice was heard. Nevertheless, that does not mean that every voice has the same power or authority. When recognizing the politics in organizational systems, it is important to distinguish the concepts of power and authority. In *Resilient Ministry*, power is defined as "the capacity to act or influence others."[196] This power is often tied to the constituencies one represents, one's duration in the organization, one's perceived standing within the organization, and the nature of the authority one possesses.

Similarly, authority is power that "has been legitimated by the social structures within which the authority is exercised."[197] It is common to further distinguish authority into two types: formal and informal. According to Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, formal

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[194] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 75ff.

[195] Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*, 210. For a fuller exploration of how pastors experience and negotiate political challenges amidst power dynamics, consult Robert Burns, "Learning the Politics of Ministry Practice" (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 2001).

[196] Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*, 211.

[197] J. N. Bartholomew, "A Sociological View of Authority in Religious Organizations," *Review of Religious Research* 23, no. 2 (1981): 118–32. Cf. Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*, 212.

authority is exercised by those who have been legitimately given power by the recognized social structure, while informal authority is related to relationships and is rooted in the "status one has in a community and perhaps even from the place one's subgroup holds within the broader community."[198] All leaders exercise authority amidst power dynamics rooted in complex, interlocking relationships that are characterized by both informal and formal levels of authority. Consequently, it is essential to not only be aware of these dynamics, but to be able to negotiate them in the midst of organizational challenges.

Heifetz and Linsky further identify partners, opposition, and those in the middle as participants in the political conversation.[199] Opponents are often easy to identify and can quickly garner attention. Yet, partners or supporters are more strategic. Linsky and Heifetz explain that partners provide emotional and spiritual support and "provide protection, and they create alliances for you with factions other than your own. They strengthen both you and your initiatives."[200] Nevertheless, the safety of partners tempts the leader to focus all of their time on deepening those relationships. It is essential, however, that the leader pay attention to those with whom they disagree. While opinions may differ, focusing on those who oppose the leader connects the leader to them relationally and demonstrates to the group that the goals of the organization are greater than maintaining the leader's sense of personal loyalty. During times of adaptive stress,

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[198] Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving,* 213.

[199] Refer to "Think Politically" in Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 75-90.

[200] Ibid., 78.

leaders must resist the temptation to never sit down and discuss the situation with those who oppose their leadership.[201]

As important as partners and opponents are, those who remain in the middle are perhaps the most important. Heifetz and Linsky write, "…the people who determine your success are often those in the middle, who resist your initiatives merely because it will disrupt their lives and make their futures uncertain."[202] Adaptive challenges are resisted because they introduce new realities that dispense with older, more familiar practices. Those older practices may need to be replaced, but they are often still experienced as safe and preferred. When the leader stays relationally tied those in the middle, this reduces the anxiety that those in the middle experience in the face of the adaptive change process, ensuring that they do not move into the category of opposition. In some cases, these individuals can become partners after they experience the benefits created by undergoing the challenge.

Enlisting Others in the Process

During technical challenges, expert authorities are praised for the work they perform and the solutions they provide. Being the expert feeds the ego. For this reason, it is tempting for experts to relate to adaptive challenges from the posture of the "person who has all the answers." Nevertheless, in adaptive challenges, the answer is not yet known; therefore, the technical experts cannot have possibly emerged.

The lack of experts is both part of the challenge and an important part of the pathway forward. Though experts are not present, people are facing the problem. And these people must be enlisted in the process of discovery and change in order to help the

[201] Ibid., 87.

[202] Ibid., 78.

organization navigate the adaptive challenge. What people need from the leader is not so much the answer, but empowerment to join in the search and change process.

In *Leadership on the Line*, this is described as, "giving the work back."[203] Heifetz and Linsky urge, "To meet adaptive challenges, people must change their hearts as well as their behaviors…The issues have to be internalized, owned, and ultimately resolved by the relevant parties to achieve enduring progress."[204] It is absolutely crucial that the leader place the work of solving the problem in the "hands" of those who are facing the challenge so that it might be solved together.

This is also closely tied to what is described in the literature as "strengthening others."[205] Kouzes and Posner write,

> Leaders accept and act on the paradox of power: you become more powerful when you give your own power away. Long before empowerment was written into the popular vocabulary, exemplary leaders understood how important it was that their constituents felt strong, capable, and efficacious. Constituents who feel weak, incompetent, and insignificant consistently underperform, they want to flee the organization, and they're ripe for disenchantment, even revolution.[206]

There are many reasons why leaders ought to involve others in the adaptive challenge. Their perspectives deepen the pool of meaning, they might possess the crucial insight needed, and their participation develops their capacity for future leadership and strengthens their loyalty to the organization. In adaptive challenges especially, the "Lone Ranger" model of leadership must be discarded. Any leader who goes it alone during an adaptive change process is sure to be a casualty of those adaptive stresses. Moreover,

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[203] Ibid., 123-39.

[204] Ibid., 127.

[205] Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 248-74.

[206] Ibid., 251.

those who most need to learn from the adaptive challenge will not have been given that opportunity, which only impoverishes the organization more when future adaptive pressures arise.

In this review of the literature related to organizational leadership, the traits of effective leadership were identified to be observable credibility and organizational commitment. Being able to understand and distinguish technical from adaptive challenges is also an essential capacity for leaders. The literature notes that in order to negotiate the disequilibrium of adaptive challenges, leaders must develop their emotional intelligence and simultaneously learn critical skills, which enhance the organization's ability to move through seasons of organizational difficulty.

Systems Theory Applied to Congregations

As noted in the introduction, systems thinking is the conceptual framework for understanding organizational dynamics. It emphasizes the interrelatedness of the constituent individuals of an organization and seeks a broader application of family therapy insights. In contrast to focusing on individuals, systems theory asserts that the function of an individual part cannot be understood without considering its relationship to the wider relational network. Systems thinking teaches that "our conflicts and anxieties are [not] due primarily to the makeup of our personalities, and suggests, instead, that our individual problems have more to do with our relational networks, the makeup of *others'* personalities, where we stand within the relational systems, and how we function within that position."[207]

[207] Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 13.

One of the most important researchers, theorists, and popularizers of systems thinking in relation to churches, synagogues, and similar organizations is the late Edwin Friedman. In his important work, *Generation to Generation*, Friedman explores the theory's wide-ranging implications for religious communities and business organizations. In fact, Friedman identifies churches and synagogues as most closely approximating family dynamics. He writes, "The one nonfamily emotional system that comes closest to a personal family's intensity is a church or synagogue, in part because it is made up of families, and in part because so much of the force of religion is realized within the family."[208]

Because clergy are both members of a personal family and leaders of their religious communities, the challenges associated with their calling are daunting. According to Friedman, "[C]lergy...are constantly caught between interlocking homeostatic systems each of which is difficult enough to keep on an even keel much less to keep afloat when they are influencing one another."[209] Nevertheless, due to the systemic character of congregations, clergy are also perfectly positioned to promote the functioning of those within their religious communities. Friedman observes, "No other member of society is in a better position to foster these existential encouragements to healing than the clergy because of the unique entrée into family systems our community position has given us."[210] He notes that the cleric possesses "unusual therapeutic potential."[211]

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[208] Ibid., 26.

[209] Ibid.

[210] Ibid., 5.

[211] Ibid.

In order to understand why the cleric has such unusual potential, one must more fully explore the implications of systems thinking. In their important work on how pastors negotiate the challenging context of congregational ministry, *The Leader's Journey*, Herrington, Creech, and Taylor write, "Whenever you engage in a relationship that is long term, intense, and significant, you become emotionally connected to one another in a living system. Each person who is part of this interaction begins to affect, and be affected by, the anxiety and behavior of others."[212] As noted by Steinke, systems thinking emphasizes that "any person or event stands in relation to something. You cannot isolate anything and understand. The parts function as they do because of the presence of the other parts."[213]

These comments emphasize both the interrelatedness that clergy experience within their congregational systems and the emotional character of that connection. According to Michael Kerr, author of *Family Evaluation*, the human family "can be described as an emotional field...The emotionally determined functioning of the family members generates a family emotional atmosphere or field that, in turn, influences the emotional functioning of each person."[214] He notes that like a gravitational field, the emotional processes at work in a system of relationships cannot be seen directly, but their presence cannot be denied.[215] The hard-wiring of all relationship systems is explained by the emotional processes at work within the relational networks of the various members.

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[212] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*, 29.

[213] Steinke, *Healthy Congregations*, 3.

[214] Michael E. Kerr, *Family Evaluation* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 54-55.

[215] Ibid.

Anxiety

According to the literature, the greatest evidence of that emotional, "gravitational pull" is observed by watching the varying levels of anxiety present within the system. Steinke explains that anxiety is simply an automatic reaction to a threat.[216] Anxious responses should not always be interpreted negatively; in fact, anxiety is vital to self-preservation. The human body is hard-wired to flee from dangerous persons and situations. Anxiety is the body's way of informing the brain that some aspects of the environment might cause harm.[217] Nevertheless, the body's anxiety measurement "tools" are not without their deficiencies. Sometimes a threat is more imagined than it is real.[218] Consequently, the body develops an anxious response to something that is not a real threat. As noted in the introductory discussion, this type of anxiety is best termed chronic.

Systems theory observes that some measure of chronic anxiety is always latent within any organizational system. For example, when a person encounters a difference of opinion between members in a system, anxiety about that differing point of view might increase. In this case, the person may experience an elevated emotional response to an opinion that most likely has no potential to harm their person. Even so, the measure of anxiety present in the emotional process indicates that the threat is very real. Consequently, the likelihood of a reactive response, rather than a more well-defined engagement, increases.

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[216] Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*, 3.

[217] For a helpful summary discussion about how anxiety works see, Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times,* 3-17 and Peter L Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA.: The Alban Institute, 2006), 15–28.

[218] Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey*, 35.

What is more, anxiety travels from person to person within the emotional field of the system., In *A Failure of* Nerve, Ed Friedman compares chronic anxiety being passed along to a noxious, flammable gas filling up a room. All that is needed for the explosion is for someone to supply the spark.[219] Systems counselor and pastor Ronald Richardson describes a congregation as "intertwining mobiles" making up an emotional system.[220] When people experience anxiety, they further unbalance the system by infecting others with their sense of threat, which intensifies the "sense of threat within the system."[221] Like an electrical transformer, when anxiety travels from person to person, sometimes the level of anxiety is magnified, enabling even more people to "plug" into its voltage.[222] This increase in anxiety in the emotional system also hampers its ability to respond in helpful ways to whatever challenges the organization faces. In fact, the increased levels of anxiety increase the likelihood that conflictual dynamics will emerge, and the system will be mired in regressive tendencies.

Conflict is more than a disagreement, which can be positive, as noted in the previous discussion on leadership. Rather, destructive conflict is characterized by heightened emotional intensity related to elevated levels of anxiety. In such situations, differing points of view turn into dissension. Or, when our preferred path is not chosen, people interpret it as personal rejection, or even worse, they view it as rooted in a grand, conspiratorial scheme. According to Steinke, when anxiety is high, people are more

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[219] Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 1999, 2007), 58.

[220] Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, 41.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Ibid., 50.

likely to function out of the limbic system, and consequently their responses are more automatically defensive and reactive.[223] Steinke lists typical automatic responses: impulse overwhelms intention, instinct sweeps aside imagination, reflexive behavior closes off reflective thought, defensive postures block out defined positions, and emotional reactivity limits clearly determined direction.[224] The heightened sense of threat associated with the interests and concerns of members within a system determines how conflictual the dynamics will be. According to systems theory, the greater the level of anxiety and the less emotionally intelligent the members of the system are, the greater the likelihood that destructive, regressive dynamics will emerge.

In *A Failure of Nerve,* Edwin Friedman lists five of the most regressive tendencies, which emerge in chronically anxious systems. First, he discusses reactivity, which is "the vicious cycle of intense reactions of each member to events and to one another."[225] Maintaining a constant focus on the latest, most immediate crisis renders a person incapable of gaining the distance that would enable them to see the emotional processes in which they are engulfed. When one works from a reactive stance, the focus is always on issues and answers, rather than on the more important emotional process. Second, he discusses herding.[226] This response to chronic anxiety occurs when the forces for togetherness triumph over the forces for individuality, moving group members to adapt to the least mature member(s). Because there is no capacity for loss or pain, the

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[223] Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, 19–20. It should also be observed that systems theory's emphasis on emotional processes and the subsequent importance of calm, reflective leadership closely parallel the concepts of emotional intelligence. Although these concepts arose in different learning disciplines, when combined they reinforce and further elucidate the insights gained within each framework.

[224] Ibid., 20.

[225] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 53.

[226] Ibid., 54.

group must compensate for its most anxious participants. Third, he discusses blame displacement. Chronically anxious systems also encourage "an emotional state in which family members [church members] focus on forces that have victimized them rather than taking responsibility for their own being and destiny."[227] This amounts to a refusal to take responsibility. Ironically, the "blamer" feels that they will be empowered through the criticism, but instead this actually prevents their further growth. Fourth, he mentions the quick fix mentality, which has "a low threshold for pain that constantly seeks symptom relief rather than fundamental change."[228] Friedman adds, "This mindset gets focused always on symptom relief rather than on fundamental change in the emotional processes that underlie their symptoms, the chronically anxious family [or church leadership team] will constantly seek saviors, then pressure the expert—whether medical, educational, therapeutic, legal or political, [or religious]—for magical administrative solutions."[229] Finally, he discusses lack of well-differentiated leadership. Perhaps the most important contribution of systems thinking is the recognition it gives to well-defined leadership stances that lessen the overall anxiety within a system. Chronically anxious systems, however, lack this and suffer "a failure of nerve that both stems from and contributes to the first four."[230]

As noted in the introduction, systems theory teaches that the senior leadership within any organization has the greatest potential to impact its overall health and functioning. This is not due to the formal authority possessed by the senior leader, but

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[227] Ibid.

[228] Ibid.

[229] Ibid., 84-5.

[230] Ibid., 54.

rather to their unique ability to function as a well-differentiated, non-anxious presence within the system.

Well-Differentiated Leadership

Rather than focusing on expert solutions, systems thinking regards leadership as an emotional process. Friedman notes that leadership "is essentially an emotional process rather than a cognitive phenomenon..."[231] The essential ingredient to that emotional process is the presence of what the literature describes as a well-differentiated leader. The concept of "differentiation" is best understood through the lens of discoveries made in the field of microbiology.[232] According to cellular biology, a differentiated cell is one that fulfills its purpose and reaches its goal, while cooperating with the entire organism. A healthy, differentiated cell must resist doing violence to other cellular entities and resist allowing them to interrupt its functioning. In this way, a healthy cell fulfills its purpose and protects itself from being invaded by infectious or viral pathogens. [233]

Similarly, the well-differentiated leader is able to fulfill one's purpose, cooperate with others and yet not lose sight of their own person and interests amidst the emotional field within an organization. This kind of leader is able to remain calm, reflective, and committed to a defined course of action amidst surrounding emotional turbulence. Friedman describes a well-differentiated stance as:

> ...someone who has clarity about his or her own life goals, and, therefore, someone who is less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional processes swirling about. I mean someone who can be separate while still remaining connected, and therefore can maintain a modifying, non-anxious, and sometimes challenging presence. I mean someone who can manage his or her own reactivity

[231] Ibid., 13.

[232] Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, 83.

[233] Ibid., 83-84.

> to the automatic reactivity of others, and therefore be able to take stands at the risk of displeasing.[234]

It is the presence of the "self" in the leader that allows for and strengthens the integration of the whole organization. The lack of a "self" in the leader similarly leads to the disintegration of the organization.[235] Steinke reminds the pastoral leaders he counsels, "To be a non-anxious presence, you focus on your own behavior and its modification rather than being preoccupied with how others function. In a hospital, a rule for caretakers reads: 'In case of cardiac arrest, take your own pulse first.'"[236]

In summary, systems theory, based on the pioneering research of Murray Bowen, Edwin Friedman, and those who have followed in their steps, has yielded enormous insight for organizational leadership. Seeing the systemic nature of all organizations, the anxious, emotional processes at work among them, and the power of well-differentiated, non-anxious leadership in their midst gives leaders in every type of organization powerful tools with which to frame their leadership challenges and to formulate their own creative responses to those challenges. Nevertheless, congregations and synagogues are close organizational analogues to the family and are fertile ground in which to apply the insights of systems theory.

A Biblical-Theological Framework for Church Planters

Before proceeding, it is important to consider the relevant biblical data on these issues. How do the scriptures frame the practice of church planting? From whom comes its justification? In what ways does the Bible speak about church planters? What

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[234] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 14.

[235] Ibid., 49.

[236] Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, 31.

qualifications are important? Are they ministry leaders? What challenges do they face? What about the context of the churches in which they serve? Central to answering each of these questions will also be considering how the Bible confirms and further elucidates the insight already highlighted by the preceding literature review.

Christ-Mandated Mission of Church Planting

The activity of church planting is situated within the grand biblical story of God's special creation, humanity's fall into sin, God's progressively unfolding gracious redemption and restoration of a world lost in sin, and the final consummation of God's saving purposes. It is not without significance that the Bible's final vision of the future has continuity with the creation story, yet a vision that expands and fulfills the original vision of creation. The primary metaphor through which humans are to understand that glorious consummation is that of the new heavens and the earth, which has at its center the new city or the new Jerusalem.[237] Rather than an escapist eschatology, the Bible has a restorationist view of the future.[238] Therefore, the critical insight that emerges from the Bible is that God begins history in a garden, restores that original vision in Jesus Christ, and yet also expands it, so that it is situated in the grander concept of a city.[239] According to New Testament scholar, Vern Poythress, in his book *The Returning King*, "The apex of

[237] Rev. 21-22.

[238] "The structure of the biblical drama has matching book covers, we might say. It moves from a creation story through a dram of sin and redemption to a consummation in a new and restored creation. This balanced structure argues for a restorationist vision of the future. For the covers to match and the story to be complete, it must be a garden restored in this world and history." Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 274-5. Cf. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005), 69-78 and Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979, 1994), 274-87.

[239] Rev. 21:1-22:5.

history is ever so much more magnificent than the beginning. The garden is now also a city, and the light has completely driven out the night."[240]

The story of humanity begins with Adam and Eve, wonderfully created in the image of God as male and female[241] and carefully placed in the garden,[242] which is watered by a beautiful river, abounding with food, and centered on two trees: the Tree of Life, which symbolized their dependence on the Lord, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which symbolized their obedience and trust in the Lord as essential to their maturity. In this story of beginnings, Adam and Eve were not to rest content with the garden, but they were to exercise their God-given potentialities as image bearers and fulfill their God-given vocation.[243] According to Genesis, Adam and Eve were to exercise dominion over the earth by tending the garden[244] and bearing children[245] to populate the world. Over time and in subjection to God's authority, this would result in a God-honoring culture and civilization.[246] In other words, from the Bible's beginning pages, worshipping communities that would inform and give shape to every other area of life are envisioned.[247]

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[240] Vern Sheridan Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing, 2000), 192.

[241] Gen. 1:26-27.

[242] Gen. 2.

[243] Gen. 1:26-28.

[244] Gen. 2:15.

[245] Gen. 1:28.

[246] That God's purpose was the creation of a Godly civilization can be inferred both by the redemptive trajectory of Scripture and its final idealized manifestation in Revelation 21 and 22. Simultaneously, God's displeasure with the corrupt and wicked expressions of culture, which resulted from sin's entrance (Cf. Gen. 4:17-24; 6:1-7; 11:1-9; 18:16-19:29), indicates that God's ideal for civilization was very different than the one recorded in the Bible.

Significantly, Adam and Eve failed to fulfill God's purpose and sinned by transgressing God's commandment, which forbade them from eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.[248] Nevertheless, God's original plan for this world did not end with them. God promised to redeem Adam and Eve and to punish the serpent who had led them astray.[249]

In the unfolding storyline of the Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to be a second Adam[250] and the seed of the woman.[251] Through him—his life, death, and resurrection—God begins again and speaks light to the darkness, so that he would have a people to serve and glorify him.[252] When people put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, they are not only joined to him, but to a communion of saints that extends to every corner of the earth and across the ages of history. The Bible refers to this communion as the *ecclesia*, the called assembly of the redeemed, or more simply the church.[253]

The writers of Hebrews and Revelation refer to the glorious vision of this new world as a new city.[254] This consummated vision of God's plan is the realization of God's kingdom purpose. Additionally, when the Revelation paints the picture of this glorious

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[247] The first manifestation of this is the nation of Israel, called out of bondage in Egypt unto freedom through the leadership of Moses, led into the Promise Land of their Fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and given a royal dynasty under King David. Under the Davidic Kingship, Israel most approximated God's ideal for a God-centered civilization integrating all facets of society.

[248] Gen. 2:16; 3:6.

[249] Gen. 3:15.

[250] Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45.

[251] Gal. 4:4; 1 Pet. 1:23; 1 Jn. 3:9; Rev. 12.

[252] Jn. 1:1-14; 9:5; 2 Cor. 4:6.

[253] Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:36-47; Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:12, 27; Eph. 2:11-12; 4:1-16.

[254] Heb. 11:10; Rev. 21:2.

new city, it contains a "river of the water of life, bright as crystal"[255] and "the Tree of Life with its twelve kinds of fruit" for the healing of the nations.[256] This clearly confirms that God's glorious and original vision for the garden of Eden will be fulfilled in the Holy City. According to the late missiologist, Harvie Conn, "The city is the fulfiller of the paradise of God...This eschatological strand repeatedly ties the future of the city with the original, sinless past of Eden and its restoration in Christ."[257]

The Bible concludes with the consummation of God's original sovereign plan, begun in the Garden, focused on the saving work of Jesus Christ, and realized in the establishment of the church. Harvie Conn grasps the grand scope of the *Missio Dei*[258] when he writes,

> From all eternity, [God] planned in electing grace to save a multitude of people through the sacrifice of his Son (Eph. 1:4-5, 11). In the freedom of his sovereign grace, and the omnipotent right of that freedom (Rom. 9:14-26), he exhibits his saving love "according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11).[259]

Similarly, Stuart Murray writes,

> God is the Missionary, who sent his Son and sends his Spirit into the world, and whose missionary purposes are cosmic in scope, concerned with the "restoration

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[255] Rev. 22:1.

[256] Rev. 22:2.

[257] Harvie M. Conn in "Christ and the City: Biblical Themes for Building Urban Theology Models," in *Discipling the City: Theological Reflections on Urban Mission,* ed. Roger S. Greenway (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 236. Cf. Harvie M. Conn, "Strategy Planning: Searching for the Right Answers," in *Planting and Growing Urban Churches: From Dream to Reality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 72-3.

[258] While acknowledging the possibility for this phrase, which when translated is "mission of God," might be construed pretentiously, Murray argues that "this phrase does seem to have been a catalyst for renewed reflection among missiologists and the emergence of some important emphases." Murray, *Church Planting*, 264n1.

[259] Conn, "Strategy Planning: Searching for the Right Answers" in *Planting and Growing Urban Churches*, 70. It's primary purpose is "to express the conviction that mission is not the invention, responsibility, or program of human beings, but flows from the character and purposes of God." Murray, *Church Planting*, 39.

> of all things," the establishment of *shalom*, the renewal of creation, and the coming of the kingdom of God, as well as the redemption of fallen humanity and the building of the church.[260]

In this intervening period, prior to the consummation of God's saving purposes and subsequent to the Lord Jesus Christ's finished work on the cross, the church realizes its mission as part of this grand *Missio Dei*.[261] From this derives the basis for the followers of Jesus Christ bearing witness to Jesus Christ[262] and living in accord with his kingdom priorities[263]

Jesus Christ commissioned the apostles to build the church out of obedience to his missionary mandate. Two passages from Matthew's gospel form the basis of this assertion**.** First, Matthew 16:15-19 reads,

> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."[264]

There is no need for the purposes of this study to explore the important and popular debates concerning apostolic succession or Petrine primacy. Rather, it is sufficient to note that this passage clearly identifies Jesus' purpose as the building of his church as the primary agent of the kingdom.

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[260] Murray, *Church Planting*, 39.

[261] Murray argues for neither overemphasizing nor deemphasizing the role of church planting in the *Mission Dei.* "Church planting is not an end in itself, because the church is an agent of mission.... Church planting is legitimate only if set within a broader concept of mission." Ibid., 40.

[262] Matt.28:18-20; Lk. 24:44-48; Acts 1:8; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 1 Cor. 2:1-2.

[263] Matt. 5:13-15; 6:33-34; Jn. 13:34-34; Rom. 12:9-21; Eph. 2:19; Tit. 3:8; 1 Pet. 2:11-12.

[264] Matt. 16:15-19.

Moreover, this mission shall succeed in accord with Christ's sovereign power. Even Satan and his hellish gates shall not be able to thwart Christ's establishment of the church. In the words of Samuel Stone's familiar hymn, "The Church's One Foundation,"

> The Church shall never perish! Her dear Lord to defend,
> To guide, sustain, and cherish is with her to the end;
> Though there be those who hate her, and false sons in her pale,
> Against or foe or traitor she ever shall prevail.[265]

Secondly, one must consider the familiar passage from Matthew 28:18-20,

> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."[266]

Famously known as the "Great Commission," here Jesus reminds his disciples that his messianic work has secured for him all authority. Accordingly, there are no other authorities, in heaven or on earth, which can thwart the mission he gives to his disciples.

Consequently, the divine exhortation to evangelize the entire world is given. As those who are sent out into the world, the disciples are called to bear witness to the kingdom that has come in Jesus Christ and to multiply themselves by making disciples from among the people groups of the world. Both the content and the grammar of the passage make clear that this disciple-making mission is Trinitarian and full-orbed, characterized by the going, teaching, and baptizing work of the disciples.[267] In addition,

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[265] *Trinity Hymnal*, Revised Edition (Suwanee, GA: Great Commission Publications, 1990), #347.

[266] Matt. 28:18-20.

[267] The main verb is in the imperative: "make disciples." The related verbs, "going," "teaching," and "baptizing" are participles modifying this main action and "characterize it". D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 597.

Jesus' gracious presence attends their effort. The disciples are assured that God's sovereign power attends the challenging purpose he has given to them.[268]

The missionary mandate that Jesus gives to the disciples for the establishment of the church receives further confirmation in the words Jesus gave to his disciples shortly before his ascension, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."[269] The entire book of Acts, then, becomes a testimony to the apostles' fulfillment of this task. Beginning with Pentecost, then Peter, John, and Philip's early efforts, Acts finally gives its fullest attention to the Apostle Paul. Above all else, Paul was a church planter in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ,[270] commissioned by the church at Antioch,[271] and in partnership with the other apostles.[272]

Church Planters as Ministry Leaders

Nevertheless, as Anglican Old Testament scholar, Christopher Wright, insightfully notes, "It takes disciples to make disciples...you [have] to live under the reign

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[268] Surely Murray overstates his case when he writes, "Attempts to derive a biblical basis for church planting from the great commission are disadvantaged by the fact that there is no explicit mention of the church in the famous passage." Murray, *Church Planting*, 68–70.The author finds it self-evident that fulfillment of this task, especially the injunction on Trinitarian baptism, requires the existence of a formalized ecclesiastical body, most reasonably understood as the one Jesus had already spoken to the disciples about in Matthew 16. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate to find in the Great Commission important rationale for the church planting mandate.

[269] Acts 1:8.

[270] Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16; 26:13-16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8; Gal. 1:15-16.

[271] Acts 13:1-3.

[272] Gal. 2:1-9. Cf. "It is, however, not only as a man of letters but perhaps even more as a man of action that Paul has made his mark on world history.... Paul was not the only preacher of Christianity in the Gentile world of that day—there were some who preached it in sympathy with him and others who did so in rivalry to him—but he outstripped all others as a pioneer missionary and planter of churches, and nothing can distract from his achievement as the Gentiles' apostle *par excellence*." F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977, 1985), 17-8.

of God if you [want] to go preach about the reign of God."[273] The Christ-mandated mission of making disciples assumes broader responsibilities for the church than are required for the mere task of proclamation. In other words, the church must practice additional tasks, ones that are essential to disciples reaching their maturity, including teaching, sacraments, regular worship, fellowship and more.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon church planters to provide leadership for these additional tasks that promote and sustain the church's mission. Wright notes, "Jesus had spent three years teaching his disciples what it meant to be one. It involved practical and down-to-earth lessons on life, attitudes, behavior, trust, forgiveness, love, generosity, obedience to Jesus, and countercultural actions toward others."[274] God's mission requires pastors and planters who lead God's people to fulfill it. Wright notes that this accounts for Paul's great emphasis on gospel transformation among the members of the churches he planted, rather than on multiple exhortations to evangelize those outside the churches.[275] As Wrights explains, "Gospel witness had to flow from gospel transformation."[276]

This demonstrates, from a biblical point of view, that pastors and church planters have incredibly complex responsibilities. The duties of church are manifold, and pastors are called to lead their congregations in the fulfillment of those duties. Perhaps the clearest passage, which highlights the broad scope of the duties pastors have is Ephesians

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[273] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 163.

[274] Ibid.

[275] "This is not at all to suggest that Paul did not want them to do that; it is clear that Paul expected his churches to be hubs of evangelistic witness." Ibid.

[276] Ibid.

3:11-12, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”[277] According to Paul, then, pastors are to equip the church members so that the broader mission of the church can be fulfilled.

Moreover, the character qualifications that Paul outlines in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 assume a leadership role for elders, whether ruling or teaching, and deacons. Specifically, Paul writes, “If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?”[278] The clear import of this reference is that pastors have broad leadership responsibilities for the whole church, analogous to the responsibility that parents have to care for their families. Similarly, Jesus reminds his followers that the authority they are to exert is unlike that of the world and ought to reflect his own pattern of service.[279]

Defining Character

Before further exploring the leadership responsibilities of pastors, it is worth noting the attention Paul gives to the character traits essential for those who serve. This emphasis is specifically seen in Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus. Interestingly, Paul’s emphasis on character traits is remarkably consistent with the insights gleaned from organizational leadership theory. The point seems clear: it is necessary that pastors and planters possess key character traits deemed beneficial to ministerial leadership. These traits need to have been observed and tested over time by others in the context of ministry. Not to devalue the importance of the gifting of the ministry leader, but character

[277] Eph. 3:11-12.

[278] 1 Tim. 3:5.

[279] Matt. 20:25-28.

is more definitive of person's sense of self than is an individual's charisma, charm, or ministerial skill.[280]

As stated earlier, systems theory suggests that a well-differentiated ministry leader will be better able to take challenging stances and remain non-anxious in the emotionally heated context of the congregation. Leaders whose character has already been tested and proven consistent in the "heat of battle" will be better suited to the challenges associated with leadership struggles. Such leaders will be able to negotiate strong disagreement by either remaining committed to the chosen course of action in the face of intense opposition or by amicably changing, compromising, or creating new solutions out of principle and not out of a need for approval.

Leadership practices, which are rooted in the core identity of a person, are also remarkably consistent with the scripture's teaching about love.[281] The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians,

> I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.[282]

Love is the supreme mark of a life shaped by the presence and grace of Jesus Christ. Elsewhere, Paul writes, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And

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[280]This is another insight that finds confirmation among organizational theorists. Larry Osborne observes, "A final lesson I've learned about guarding the gate is that character is always more important than giftedness. Just as in sports, the best players don't win championships; the best team does...Great skills and giftedness in what someone does can never counterbalance a fatal flaw in who they are." Osborne, *Sticky Teams*, 59.

[281] Patrick Lencioni makes this exact point when he writes, "At its core, accountability is about having the courage to confront someone about their deficiencies and then to stand in the moment and deal with their reaction, which may not be pleasant. It is a selfless act, one rooted in a word that I don't use lightly in a business book: love. To hold someone accountable is to care about them enough to risk having them blame you for pointing out their deficiencies." Lencioni, *The Advantage,* 57.

[282] 1 Cor. 13:1-3.

walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."[283] Here, he connects the calling to love others with the privilege of being "beloved children" of the Lord. Only through a gospel-based identity that is grounded in love will a pastor be able to reflect the loving character of the one who gave humanity the gospel. What is more, the passage from 1 Corinthians 13 suggests that this love, which is rooted in a gospel-based character, is far more important to ministerial effectiveness than are either giftedness or devotion.

Paul's comments reveal that a minister's character is reflective of their identity as an image bearer united to Jesus Christ. Thus, more attention must be given to the full personhood of the church planter as ministry leader. When any pastor aspires to make a great impact, the pastor faces a great danger of losing what is most significant about their personhood—their simple joy and privilege derived from being a disciple of Jesus. As noted in the introduction, ministry challenges can erode the ministry leader's sense of self. In his book *Sensing Jesus: Life and Ministry as a Human Being*, Zack Eswine comments,

> I use the words *merely* human and *only* local in order to differentiate [pastors] from Jesus. Jesus is human, but not *merely*. Jesus is local, but not *only*...As ministry leaders we endeavor to give our lives in such a way that every neighbor we minister to will know that we are not God. The Serpent's invitation to celebrity, immediate gratification, and using people to advance ourselves as if we are God poisons the air. Jesus recovers our lungs! To exalt Jesus as Lord is to free us to the derivative glory of belonging humanly to him.[284]

While there are many causes for this erosion, it is often the case that ministry leaders ignore the warning signs from their emotions, a part of their personhood that is often neglected or ignored. Church planters are thinkers and doers, however, the notion

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[283] Eph. 5:1-2.

[284] Zack Eswine, *Sensing Jesus: Life and Ministry as a Human Being* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 47.

that they are emotional beings gets short shrift, especially among evangelical Christians. For example, the well-known Evangelical Christian leader, Leighton Ford, reflects on his ministerial training,

> Emotions were discounted in much of the evangelical teaching I heard growing up. We were taught about *facts, faith, and feelings*—in that order. Faith was to be based on the facts of the Christian message (an essential emphasis, to be sure), but we should not rely on feelings because they were unreliable, secondary, and untrustworthy."[285]

In *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, Peter Scazzero suggests that this de-emphasis on the emotions is rooted in an unbiblical, Platonic dualism. Through the ages, humanity has preserved the Platonic message that the spirit is good and the body is bad. Scazzero points out that along with this, "a subtle message has filtered into our churches that to be human, to be emotional, is somehow sinful—or at least less spiritual."[286] Consequently, this led people to distinguish spiritual health from emotional health. Scazzero adds,

> Over time, this unbiblical paradigm led to an attitude that regarded feelings and emotions as being opposed to the Spirit (especially anger, which became one of the deadly seven sins, despite the "be angry and sin not" and "be slow to anger" teachings of Scripture). In the minds of many today, the repression of feelings and emotions has been elevated to status of Spirit or virtue. Denying anger, ignoring pain, skipping over depression, running from loneliness, avoiding confusing doubts, and turning off our sexuality has become a way of spiritual life.[287]

In the preface to Scazzero's book, pastor and author Leighton Ford, takes issue with this; though feelings are "changeable, they are not unimportant!"[288] If the emotions are ignored or minimized, then so is a significant aspect of someone's humanity.

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[285] Quoted in Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship That Actually Changes Lives*, 7–8.

[286] Ibid., 51-52.

[287] Ibid., 52-53.

[288] Ibid., 8.

Humanity includes emotion. Because people bear the image of God, a human's emotional life, like their physicality and capacities for reason and spirituality, must not be overlooked.

Recognizing the complexity that characterizes humanity, Dan Allender and Tremper Longman write in their book, *The Cry of the Soul*, "We are not *machines* that can be repaired through a series of steps—we are relational beings who are transformed by the mystery of relationship."[289] Recognizing the inherent relationality of life, which is tied together with the emotionality it stirs, Longman and Allender refuse to shy away from the important questions. Instead, recognizing that the first chapter of the book of Genesis teaches the inherent dignity and createdness of each person, which includes the emotional life, the authors explore the biblical data about emotions and what they reveal. They write that at humanity's core, "Every emotion, though horizontally provoked, nevertheless reflects something about the vertical dimension: our relationship with God. This book explores what our difficult emotional struggles say about our relationship with God"[290]

In the case of this effort being prejudiced, even the famous theologian John Calvin affirms the priority of self-understanding, which arises from an exploration of the emotional life as revealed by the Psalter,

> What various and resplendent riches are contained in this treasury, it were difficult to find words to describe...I have been wont to call this book not inappropriately, an anatomy of all parts of the soul; for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in in a mirror.[291]

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[289] Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman, *The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions about God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), 13-14.

[290] Ibid.

[291] John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), xxxvi–xxxvii.

Similarly, Allender and Longman write,

> Emotions are the language of the soul. They are the cry that gives the heart a voice. To understand our deepest and convictions, we must learn to the cry of the soul.
>
> However, we often turn a deaf ear—through emotional denial, distortion, or disengagement. We strain out anything disturbing in order to gain tenuous control of our inner world. We are frightened and ashamed of what leaks into our consciousness. In neglecting our intense emotions, we are false to ourselves and lose a wonderful opportunity to know God. We forget that change comes through brutal honesty and vulnerability before God. Our only hope to face with our deepest ruling passions is the hope of redeeming the fabric of our inner world.[292]

Of course, taking a long hard look into the depths of one's heart is painful. The prophet Jeremiah knew this too, and he lamented, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?"[293] Nevertheless, Allender and Longman share, "[Emotions] vocalize the inner working of our souls and [so] are tainted as any other portion of our personality.…[it is] emotion that links our internal and external worlds."[294]

This is precisely why Scazzero is so zealous to raise this issue for ministry leaders. He warns:

> What concerns me is that the many Christian leaders I meet are emotionally numb. They are not aware of anything that could be called feelings or emotions. When you ask them how they feel, they may use the term "I feel" but in actuality they report only a statement of fact or a statement of what they think. Their emotions are in a deep freeze. Their body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions indicate that emotions are present, but they are not aware enough to even identify them. Even for those of us who are the "touchy-feely" types, we are often unaware of the depths behind our emotions.[295]

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[292] Allender and Longman, *The Cry of the Soul*, 25–26.

[293] Jer. 17:9.

[294] Allender and Longman, *The Cry of the Soul*, 14, 20.

[295] Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, 54.

Scazzero recognizes that it is unfaithful to the biblical data about humanity to neglect or minimize the important insights to be gleaned by paying attention to a person's emotional life.

What is more, the biblical data wonderfully confirms the empirical findings of organizational leadership researchers who are now emphasizing the role of emotional intelligence.[296] When a ministry leader has a limited awareness (or a lack of awareness) of their emotional life, it does not mean their emotions are insignificant factors. Rather, it means that emotions, including those which are largely ignored or about which one is unaware, are free to exert influence, sometimes in deeply destructive ways, over what is being done in the name of Jesus Christ.

The casualties occurring due to ignorance about the role of emotional health exist among both ministry leaders and those that they lead.[297] Ministry leaders are increasingly tired, discouraged, and overwhelmed by ministerial pressures. Because they are deeply confused about what to do and they do not know who to consult, it is common for many of these leaders to exit the ministry on account of moral failure or burn-out.[298]

Church members are equally perplexed. Not only do they fail to recognize the role that emotions play in their own lives, but it is also especially difficult for them to recognize the flawed humanity—including its emotional aspects—of the one who is charged with leading them. Ironically, this fuels both disillusionment with ministry leaders and the continual, yet unsatisfying, quest to find a more "perfect" ministry leader. Given the common expectations for those in ministry, it is often difficult for congregants

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[296] See earlier discussion about emotional intelligence.

[297] In many ways, this is the basis for Scazzero's work in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*.

[298] See the above discussion noting the study performed by Hoge and Wenger.

to grasp the humanity of those who lead them. As Burns, Chapman and Guthrie explain, "Ministry leaders collapse under the overwhelming pressures to ignore their own needs motivated by busyness, people-pleasing, the tyranny of the urgent and their own lack of priority on personal growth."[299]

For all of these reasons, ministry leaders must understand how one's emotional world is tied to and reflective of the presence of a deeply rooted gospel maturity and character.

Defining Leadership

Using the earlier distinction between technical and adaptive challenges, pastors, like most professionals, have responsibilities that might be termed "technical." Pastors are expected to preach, plan, and lead regular services of worship, provide expert biblical and theological answers, pray publically and privately, train and oversee assisting ministry leaders, counsel those grieving or in crisis, guide those who are questioning, and oversee the annual program of ministry, including the finances of their congregation. Indeed, as daunting as this list is, it fails to grasp the entire scope of what the typical pastor handles during their regular routine. Church planters must add many more tasks to their list of typical duties. For example, church planters must also be skilled at networking among relationships, doing evangelism, fund-raising, and setting a vision for a new congregation. As noted earlier, church planters must have a baseline competency in such things in order to anticipate future effectiveness.

When considering these ministerial leadership responsibilities, it is helpful to understand them in terms of technical and adaptive leadership challenges. Virtually all of

[299] Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*, 34.

the above tasks can be regarded as technical responsibilities for pastors and church planters. What is more, the typical seminary education that pastors receive is specifically oriented to provide this kind of technical expertise. Nevertheless, the most challenging situations that pastors and church planters face often do not correspond directly to any of these ministerial responsibilities.[300] Rather, pastors and church planters face leadership challenges that encompass personal criticism, conflict, disagreements about doctrine, challenges regarding adopted ministry practices, and disputes about how authority is exercised.

Because these leadership challenges are adaptive in nature and situated within anxious ministry systems, they are particularly difficult for church planters and pastors to experience. Even so, adaptive challenges and anxious ministry systems are not foreign to the Bible. It provides ample evidence of ministry leaders negotiating adaptive challenges amidst anxious ministry systems. Consider how two prominent ministry leaders, Jesus and Paul, negotiate adaptive challenges in highly anxious circumstances.[301]

Jesus as Ministry Leader

Matthew records a discussion that the apostles had with Jesus about their future place in the coming kingdom,

> Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to

[300] Cf. Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry*, Gary L. Harbaugh, *Pastor as Person* and C. Welton Gaddy, *A Soul under Siege: Surviving Clergy Depression*.

[301] It might be helpful to further frame these ministry leaders as also church planters, although each of a different classification.

> sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."[302]

First of all, note that the mother of two of the more prominent disciples, James and John, who are also brothers, approaches Jesus. She asks him to give a privileged place to her two sons in the eschatological kingdom of God. It appears that James and John must have come with their mother, because verse twenty-two indicates that they are part of the conversation. While it is impossible to further describe the nature of the privilege sought, suffice it to say that the disciples believed the closer one was positioned to Jesus, the more glory and privilege one would experience. From a Christian perspective, this reflects sinful self-seeking and is contrary to Christ's instruction about putting others and the kingdom ahead of self.

Moreover, though their request was sinful and expressed privately, their transgression did not remain so. Immediately, the power dynamics of this political process can be seen. James, John, and their mother have an interest or desire that they want Jesus to grant. The anger of the remaining ten disciples, upon discovering the mother's request, indicates they too shared in this interest. So, there exists a competing interest. Notably, the ten are not upset at James and John for what they had done for its own sake, which would have been to take an ethical stand. Rather, the passage indicates

[302] Matt. 20:20-28.

that they are upset because James and John had potentially compromised their own interests;[303] they were jealous.

Added to this, the abundance of triangulation in the relationships further hints at just how anxious the apostolic band's ministry system had become. Consider the two major triangles that emerge: 1) Jesus, James and John, and their mother; 2) Jesus, James and John, and the remaining ten.[304] Systems theory predicts, and this passage confirms, that whenever the anxiety level goes up, the greater will be the temptation to triangulate among system members as a way of negotiating the anxiety.

It is important also to note the adaptive learning process Jesus introduces for the disciples. While it must have surprised the disciples, Jesus asserts that he had not been delegated the authority to grant their request.[305] His refusal to provide a quick or satisfying solution for James and John could have only elevated the temperature in the ministry system. Simultaneously though, this becomes a powerful learning opportunity for the disciples and perfectly illustrates the nature of an adaptive challenge.

Finally, it is important to consider how Jesus negotiates this situation with his disciples. Using the language of systems theory, one could say that Jesus practices a well-differentiated ministry stance. In this, Jesus provides an example of how ministry leaders can negotiate similar adaptive challenges. Notice that Jesus refuses to be caught in either of these emerging triangles, which immediately changes the power dynamics in the ministry system. He does this by highlighting a previously unconsidered, but very

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[303] Carson, *Matthew, 432*.

[304] It is impossible to speculate about the remaining triangle of James and John, their mother, and the remaining ten, but it is not without significance.

[305] Matt.20:23.

important triangle, the one between him, his heavenly Father, and the disciples. He reserved his most important comments for all of the disciples at the same time, which meant that he refused to take sides among the disciples.

However, this was not the first example in this account of Jesus' well-defined leadership. Prior to this, he refused James and John's request to sit at his right and left. Nevertheless, his refusal was delivered obliquely, so that he might preserve his relationships with James and John. He first queried them about their own willingness to suffer alongside him. Their enthusiastic response clearly indicates they had still not grasped the suffering character of Jesus' ministry or their future calling as his apostolic witnesses. Still, Jesus did not address this. He merely refused their request by noting that it was not his to grant. Surely, this must have been upsetting to James and John. Yet, they, and the remaining ten disciples, are able to receive Jesus' "no" in part due to the way Jesus delivers it.

All of this underscores the need for well-defined ministry leadership in the process of negotiating adaptive challenges. What if Jesus needed the approval of James and John or their mother? What if he could not have disappointed Peter, already the leader of the apostolic band? If Jesus were unable to take a well-defined stand and remain calm, he would have been unable to lead effectively in this instance. Because he was able to handle the situation appropriately, however, this interaction proves a beautiful example of ministerial leadership.

What is more, this passage helpfully frames how ministry leaders experience triangles, power dynamics, anxious ministry systems, and adaptive challenges. Ministry leaders can find numerous biblical examples of well-differentiated, non-anxious

presences and learn how to negotiate adaptive challenges to enhance their leadership effectiveness.

Paul as Ministry Leader

Paul writes in his letter to the church at Philippi,

> I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith.[306]

The adaptive challenge presented here is straightforward. The apostle is imprisoned in Rome, and the members of one of his earlier church plants are understandably concerned both for him and for what his imprisonment means for the Christian witness.[307] Paul does not hide the fact that his ministry may be about to come to an end, possibly through a tragic martyrdom. Surely, this is an adaptive challenge for a ministry leader. He is the ministry leader and founder of the church at Philippi, his life is in question, and he is separated at a far distance from his congregation. Nevertheless, he leads his young church by maintaining a non-anxious, well-differentiated stance that refuses to allow any of the

[306] Phil. 1:12-25.

[307] Cf. Acts 28:16,30.

competing power dynamics present in this situation to steal his joy or compromise his confidence in the gospel going forth.

Multiple power dynamics are at work in the passage. First, there is the Roman justice system, which has imprisoned him and has the power to take his life. Second, there is the presence of competing ministers who appear to have cast Paul's imprisonment in a negative light for the purpose of their own selfish ambition.[308] Finally, there is uncertainty and loss that the young congregation at Philippi was experiencing as they became increasingly anxious about the life of their leader.

The dominant interest here is the value of Paul's life to the young church. Ironically, it is the perspective Paul himself gives to this question, demonstrated by his own non-anxious stance, that enables the congregation to navigate the adaptive challenge. Consider how Paul reframes his imprisonment for his anxious flock. First, he says that it's a positive circumstance, not a negative one, due the evangelistic opportunity it has provided and how it has encouraged others in their boldness to evangelize. Rather than viewing the evangelistic situation through a rigid, black-and-white lens, Paul is able to apply the logic of the cross and recognize that through limitation and loss come the greatest of impacts. This demonstrates a creative, imaginative capacity, which is critical for all forms of leadership.

Second, observe that Paul refuses to be triangulated with those who were maligning him and maliciously rejoicing in his imprisonment. Doubtless, due to their own anxiety, they would have loved to tangle with him and gain his attention. Yet, Paul sees the absurdity in addressing these distractions directly. As long as they provided

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[308] Ralph P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Revised (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1987), 73.

orthodox testimony about the gospel, Paul was not going to be bothered. Instead of needing to more directly engage them, Paul is confident that Christ can use their evangelical witness despite their selfish ambition. Again, the way that Paul does not feel an emotional need to answer, address, or control those who oppose him speaks powerfully to a well-differentiated stance.

Finally, note that the threat of martyrdom to Paul's life is real; his life hangs in the balance. As with all founding ministry leaders, even the thought of Paul's passing creates enormous anxiety for his constituents. While Paul is confident that he will remain with them for their own edification in the faith, he reminds them that his greater affections lay not with them, but with the Lord. In verse twenty-three he writes, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better."[309] In this way, Paul mitigates his own importance to their growth and development. This also prepares the Philippians to seek their future growth and leadership from the Lord directly, and from future ministry leaders who are not yet identified. The fact that Paul is released from prison does not erode this important act of leadership. By stating that Paul's heart and ministry are not fused with the Philippian congregation, he frees them to be more preoccupied with the Lord and his future leading.

In the preceding narratives, two ministry leaders, Jesus and Paul, have been considered. In both situations, an adaptive challenge was addressed. In Matthew's account, Jesus addressed the adaptive challenge related to competing interests among his disciples. In the Philippian account, Paul negotiated the adaptive challenge related to his potential death and the subsequent impact that his departure would have on the church. The requisite character for leadership is illustrated by both Jesus and Paul. These

[309] Phil. 1:23.

narratives also reveal and confirm the earlier discussion about important capabilities that are essential for negotiating ministry challenges.

Summary of Literature Review

From the preceding literature review, it can be concluded that church planters who remain as a congregation's senior pastor subsequent to organization will face a myriad of ministry challenges, many of which they will feel unprepared to navigate. This is primarily due to the fact that the literature on church planting intentionally neglects lengthy discussion on the longer transitional period into a more organized church. The gap in the church planting literature on this question has catalyzed research in the literature related to organizational leadership theory and systems thinking. The literature review demonstrates that these two research areas have much to contribute to the leadership challenges facing pastors of newly founded congregations. Finally, the biblical and theological discussion frames this entire inquiry as consistent with and reflective of Jesus' own mission for the church and his ministry leaders. What is more, the biblical data provides compelling examples of the insights arising from organizational leadership theory and systems thinking.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how Presbyterian pastors negotiate leadership challenges, which emerge subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation. There are two assumptions of this study: (1) the season subsequent to a church plant's organization in Presbyterian churches can be challenging to its new pastor, who typically served as the congregation's church planter, and (2) pastors who have undergone this transition have learned important strategies critical to negotiating this season in a church's life through their own experiences. In order to address this purpose, a general qualitative study was proposed in order to examine how Presbyterian pastors negotiate the leadership challenges of this season of their ministry.

The research identified three main areas of focus that are central to negotiating the leadership challenges which arise during this period. These include the areas of church planting, systems theory applied to power dynamics of congregations, and leadership skills important for the negotiation of ministry challenges. To examine these areas more closely, the following questions served as the intended focus of the qualitative research:

1) What leadership challenges do Presbyterian pastors face subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation?
2) How do pastors experience the personal impact from these leadership challenges?
    a) Emotionally

b) Physically?

c) Behaviorally?

d) Cognitively?

3) How do pastors experience relationship impacts from these leadership challenges?

a) In relation to their spouse?

b) In relation to their lay leaders?

c) In relation to their ministry staff?

4) How do pastors negotiate these challenges?

a) What ways of relating to yourself about which you were already aware or came to learn during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?

b) What ways of relating to others about which you were already aware or came to learn during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?

c) What skills or practices about which you were already aware or came to learn about during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?

Design of the Study

Sharan B. Merriam, in her book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* explains that the qualitative researcher is "interested in the understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and

the experiences they have in the world."[310] Merriam identifies four characteristics as "key to understanding the nature of qualitative research: the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive."[311] The most common form of qualitative research is the case study. Merriam defines a case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system."[312] The boundedness of the system specifies "the unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation."[313] Merriam further delineates the advantages of qualitative case study research as being "particularistic, descriptive and heuristic."[314]

Even though this study involves pastors of several different churches within the same denomination, the boundary of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) is not small enough to consider this a case study. Nevertheless, the research stance governing qualitative analysis and essential to case study guided the approach. For this reason, semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary source of data gathering. The qualitative research method provided for the discovery of specific, richly descriptive data from participants' perspectives in the narrow phenomena of leading newly organized churches. Merriam notes that the qualitative research method also provides the reader the opportunity to "[discover] new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what

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[310] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 13.

[311] Ibid., 14.

[312] Ibid., 40.

[313] Ibid., 41.

[314] Ibid., 43.

is known."[315] This study method minimized variables for this in-depth research because all of the participants were pastors in the Presbyterian Church in America and shared the same institutional structure and cultural milieu. Because the variables involved in the data analysis were more focused, the study provided avenues for enhanced exploration of the intricacies of the leadership challenges experienced by the participants. Thus, the study enabled the researcher to gain a more complete emic or insider's perspective of those involved in leading newly organized churches in the Presbyterian Church in America.[316]

Participant Sample Selection

This research required participants who were able to communicate in depth about their experience of the challenges involved in leading a newly organized congregation in the Presbyterian Church in America during its first five years subsequent to organization. Therefore, the purposeful study sample consisted of a selection of pastors who had planted churches in the Presbyterian Church in America, were called to serve as the first pastor in the newly organized congregation, and remained in that role for at least five years. The requirement that the church planter must have remained in the role for at least five years subsequent to organization was due to the fact that Presbyterian churches are often organized within two to three years of launching a worship service. During the additional five years after the congregation's organization, pastors must negotiate a new organizational structure and power dynamic, which is a very different experience from the initial church plant. Moreover, during this solidification phase, pastors often experience new leadership challenges. In summary, the goal of the research was to secure

[315] Ibid., 44.

[316] Ibid., 14.

information-rich data about their experiences of leadership challenges subsequent to their congregation's organization.[317]

The study was conducted through personal interviews with six pastors in the Presbyterian Church in America. They all were invited to participate via an introductory letter, which was followed by a personal phone call. All expressed interest and gave written informed consent to participate in the research. Each participant was asked to complete a one page demographic questionnaire before the interview. The questionnaire asked for information concerning the selection criteria. It also requested information that was of particular interest in this study. Possible participant variables of interest included marital status, number of children, location of the congregation, congregation size, whether they were still the pastor of the congregation, and when they transitioned (if they were not still the pastor of their planted congregation.)

Research Subjects

Information about the research subjects and their situations in ministry is provided here. Pseudonyms have been assigned and the specific geographical location of their congregation has not been identified. They are listed according to the size of their congregation.

Stephen

Stephen is married and has three children. He has served his congregation for nine years –four years as its planting pastor and five years as its senior pastor. Stephen's congregation is located in a suburban community of a major metropolitan area in the southwestern United States. Currently, the church is comprised of approximately 170 members. During the time of the ministry challenges shared, Stephen was a solo pastor,

[317] Ibid., 77.

and two ruling elders served on the session. Currently, the congregation has three active ruling elders on the session and one inactive ruling elder who remains a member of the congregation.

Robert

Robert is married and has four children. He has served his congregation for eight years – one year as its planting pastor and seven as its senior pastor. Robert's congregation is located in a medium sized city in a southern state. At the time of the interview, the church consisted of approximately 250 members. Serving alongside of Robert are one additional pastor on staff and four active ruling elders on the session. Four inactive ruling elders remain members of the congregation.

Greg

Greg is married with four children. He has served his congregation for sixteen years – one and a half years as its planting pastor and for the remaining time as its senior pastor. Greg's congregation is located in a medium sized city in the southwest. Currently, the congregation consists of about 350 members. During the time of the ministry challenges shared, one additional staff member served the congregation. Currently, there are eight active ruling elders on the session and five inactive ruling elders who remain members of the church.

Jason

Jason is married with four children. He has served his congregation for twelve years – two years as its planting pastor and ten as its senior pastor. Jason's congregation is centrally located in a large city in the southwest. The current membership of Jason's congregation is slightly more than six hundred people. The church staff is comprised of

multiple pastors and paid ministry leaders. Currently, there are six active ruling elders on the session and four inactive ruling elders who remain members of the church.

Kevin

Kevin is married with two children. He has served his congregation for eleven years – two years as its planting pastor and nine as its senior pastor. Kevin's congregation is located in the densely populated center of one of the largest cities in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Among the research subjects, Kevin's congregation is the only multisite congregation and is comprised of about seven hundred members, existing in multiple locations. The site location relevant to the ministry challenges shared was both the original location and the largest, comprised of about four hundred members. In Kevin's congregation there are multiple pastors and paid ministry leaders. At the time of the interview, there were ten active ruling elders on the session and nine inactive ruling elders who remain members of the church.

Mark

Mark is married with three children. He has served his congregation for thirteen years – one year as planting pastor and twelve as senior pastor. Mark's congregation is centrally located in a large metropolitan area in the southwestern region of the United States. At the time of the interviews, Mark was the only participant who no longer remained as the senior leaders of his congregation, because he transitioned to another ministry role. During the time of Mark's tenure of service, the congregation consisted of about twelve hundred members and had multiple pastors and multiple paid ministry leaders. At the time of Mark's tenure, there were fourteen active ruling elders serving on

the session and there were eight to ten inactive ruling elders who remained members of the congregation.

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary tool for data gathering. The open-ended nature of the interview questions facilitates the ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues in order to explore them more thoroughly.[318] Audio recordings were made during each interview and later used to create transcripts for data analysis. These methods enabled the researcher to look for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variation of participants.[319]

Initial interview protocol questions and categories were derived from the literature and the personal experiences of the researcher. Due to the thick, rich detail provided in the first interviews, these questions evolved around the explanations and descriptions that emerged from doing the constant comparison work during the interview process. Coding and categorizing the data while continuing the process of interviewing also allowed for the emergence of new sources of data.[320]

Six pastors were interviewed in person for one and one-half hours each. These interviews took place in a relaxed and unhurried context that was convenient for the participants. Each participant was advised of the purpose and use of the research according to the policies of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Covenant Theological Seminary. Each participant also signed a consent form. Each interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder. Due to scheduling conflicts, travel, and the geographical

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[318] Ibid., 90.

[319] Ibid., 173ff.

[320] Ibid., 175ff.

separation of research participants, it took three months for the researcher to complete the data gathering phase.

Data Analysis

As soon as possible after each interview, an administrative assistant of the researcher transcribed the interviews. The interviews were then printed and the hardcopy studied by the researcher using the constant comparative method, which routinely analyzes the data throughout the interview process. This method provided for the ongoing revision, clarification, and evaluation of the resultant data categories.[321]

The interview protocol contained the following questions.

1) I want to talk to you about significant leadership challenges subsequent to transitioning from church plant to organized congregation. Can you tell me about a significant leadership challenge you faced after undergoing that transition?
    a) Who, other than yourself, was involved in the challenge?
    b) What were you, and the others involved, seeking to do or accomplish?
    c) Did the others involved have the same goals/interests as you? If not, what were they?
    d) Did you have goals/interests that some, or all, of the others didn't share? Is so, what were they?
    e) How did you respond? What did you do?
2) How did you seek to lead in the midst of this challenge?

[321] Ibid., 30-1, 175, 193, 199.

a) Did you change anything about yourself in order to negotiate the challenge?
b) Did you goals change or were they modified during the challenge? In what ways?
c) Did you learn anything or gain any insights that proved important to you?
d) How did you view of leadership change while undergoing this leadership challenge?

3) In what ways was this experience challenging for you?
4) What impact did it have on you?
5) What about other relationships? How were your relationships affected as a result of this leadership challenge?
    a) To your wife?
    b) To your ministry staff?
    c) To your lay leaders?
6) Of all the things that happened, what are some of the things that changed the most in your leadership as a pastor/church planter? What happened to you as a leader? Tell me about that? How do you think your elders saw that? What about your wife?

Researcher Position

This section reveals potential biases that may affect the researcher. First, the researcher has planted a church in the Presbyterian Church in America, and he has continued to serve as the senior pastor of the church he planted for several years

subsequent to its organization. This affords the researcher a critical, insider perspective on the process of church planting generally and on the specific policies, procedures, and organizational structures related to forming a congregation in the Presbyterian Church in America.

Second, the researcher believes that church planters are unprepared and unaware of the leadership challenges which often occur in a newly formed congregation subsequent to its organization in the Presbyterian Church in America. This opinion is based upon both the personal experiences of the researcher in planting a Presbyterian congregation and upon the personal experiences that other Presbyterian church planters have shared anecdotally with the researcher.

For these reasons, it is important to acknowledge that the researcher is sympathetic to the challenges experienced by pastors negotiating this season in a congregation's life. The researcher believes that if pastors better understood the power dynamics at work in newly organized congregations through the lens of systems theory, recognized the relevance of emotional intelligence for understanding oneself and others, and gained leadership insights and skills important for negotiating leadership challenges common to newly organized congregations, it would promote the sustainability of their pastorates and increase the overall effectiveness of congregations.

The perspective of the researcher, then, is born out of the researcher's personal experiences and ongoing learning process. Again, this is due to the researcher having remained for several years as the senior leader of the church the researcher planted and having the researcher's opinions formed through the negotiation of leadership challenges personally experienced in the newly organized congregation. In conclusion, it is believed

by the researcher that these personal experiences and the description of his learning process impacts the research positively.

Study Limitations

As stated in the previous section, pastors interviewed for this study were limited to those serving in the Presbyterian Church in America. Consequently, this study is limited by its focus on how one denomination practices church planting. The PCA has very specific policies and procedures related to the organization of its congregations and how power is shared in the leadership of a congregation. While it is reasonable to assume that this study's conclusions would be applicable to other Presbyterian denominations following similar policies and governance structures, it must be acknowledged that the principles learned here may not equally apply to all types of church plants.

Second, the PCA denomination does not ordain women. Therefore, all of the research subjects were male. This study does not consider how a female member of the clergy would negotiate the leadership challenges subsequent to organizing a congregation. However, it is reasonable to consider that many of the principles would be transferable to female clergy serving in a Presbyterian context.

Third, every participant was a pastor serving in the United States of America. This study does not consider how the cultural factors in the United States influence power dynamics and how they relate to Presbyterian governance structures. While it is reasonable to assume that many of the principles would be transferable to Presbyterian denominations in other cultural settings, it would be important test those conclusions in each cultural context.

Some of the study's findings may be generalized to other similar newly organized Presbyterian churches in North America. Readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of these conclusions should test those aspects in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies, the readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their situation.

Summary

In this chapter, the study methodology was described. This research took the form of a general qualitative research study. Interview subjects were pre-screened using the researcher's relational network, among other strategies. After participant selection was complete, semi-structured interviews were conducted and transcripts were produced from the audio recordings of the interviews. The transcripts were studied using the constant comparative method. The analysis is structured according to the research questions in chapter one. Common challenges and responses were noted, and effective strategies for negotiating these challenges were identified. These insights became part of the description for how pastors of newly organized Presbyterian churches can best negotiate the challenges leadership subsequent to the organization of a church.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how Presbyterian pastors negotiate the leadership challenges which emerge subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation. Interviews were conducted with six research subjects meeting the criteria outlined in chapter three. These interviews are compared and discussed in this chapter in order to address the following research questions:

1) What leadership challenges do Presbyterian pastors face subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation?
2) How do pastors experience the personal impact from these leadership challenges?
    a) Emotionally?
    b) Physically?
    c) Behaviorally?
    d) Cognitively?
3) How do pastors experience relationship impacts from these leadership challenges?
    a) In relation to their spouse?
    b) In relation to their lay leaders?
    c) In relation to their ministry staff?
4) How do pastors negotiate these challenges?

a) What ways of relating to yourself about which you were already aware or came to learn during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?
b) What ways of relating to others about which you were already aware or came to learn during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?
c) What skills or practices about which you were already aware or came to learn about during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?

Leadership Challenges Pastors Face Subsequent to Organization

The first research question focuses on the leadership challenges pastors face subsequent to the organization of the church they planted. Several interview questions provided research participants the opportunity to identify and describe the leadership challenges they faced. These challenges can be categorized in three ways: objections about church's vision or ministry practice, personal criticisms, and how decision-making authority is shared between the session and the senior pastor.

Objections to the Church's Vision or Ministry Practice

Two of the research participants, Jason and Kevin, specifically identified challenges related to church members objecting to some aspect of the church's vision or ministry practice. Jason's leadership challenges regarding ministry vision and practice arose approximately one year following the church's organization, and according to Jason, "showed up in [a network of related] personalities for a number of years." It began, however, with two families, who "expressed some frustration about some of the

directions the church was heading related to its mission and worship." In their words, they felt that the church was too "oriented to reaching out," and the term, "seeker-sensitive," which was used by the church then "was a negative term for them." These families wanted the church to focus more on "teaching God's commandments" and suggested that the church was "emphasizing grace too much."

According to Jason, his response to these two families upset them because he indicated that things would not change in relation to the direction and values of the church. Consequently, these two families began discussions with members of the session. After those discussions began, Jason noticed that though the elders did not share the opinions of these two families, "They were having a difficult time letting them go." In fact, Jason said, "They were upset with me for suggesting that maybe they need to transition out of our church." With this, the leadership challenge shifted and became one of personal criticism, which will be discussed below.

In Kevin's situation, shortly after the church's organization and during a season of rapid growth, the leadership sought to "localize and define the ministry of our church."[322] In order to do this, the session made the decision to have "all community groups and all official church ministry events happen within the [central district of the city]." According to Kevin, this decision was made with the full support of the session and ministry staff and only occurred after "a series of months, lots of talking, lots of praying, [and] lots of thinking about vision." Kevin and the session realized that unless the church focused on reaching the immediate area surrounding their particular location, which was not currently being reached by the PCA, the demographic realities of the wider metropolitan

[322] Kevin states that "six months into [the church plant] we had three hundred people."

area would unduly shape their ministry direction.[323] For example, Kevin states, "It would just be a matter of time before people are asking me to plant a church in [a neighboring community, not part of their ministry focus.]"

This surfaced as a leadership challenge because three community groups at that time were currently meeting outside the central district of the city and would have to be either discontinued or relocated to comply with the policy. To inform these groups, the session chose to write a paper outlining its position and to share this paper with the groups by sending the assistant pastor and a ruling elder to visit each group. Immediately, two criticisms were levied against the decision. First, to the opposing groups, it smacked of, what he termed, "city-righteous." The decision to "localize" into the city made those who were living and meeting outside the city feel like "they were second class citizens [and that the session was] making moral judgment[s] on them." The idea here was that this decision made it appear as though it was spiritually more mature to focus on ministry in the city as opposed to the outlying suburban communities.

Second, the opposing groups said plainly, "This doesn't make any sense. Geographical lines are arbitrary." In other words, making this decision would needlessly inconvenience those living in areas geographically distant from the city's central district, and they did not believe this component of the church's "vision" was this important. For one of these groups, the decision was particularly painful, and Kevin described the situation as becoming "toxic." He states that this group "didn't trust or want to trust" the session, and they did not "like the idea of the leadership leading with vision." According

[323] Kevin noted that there were numerous PCA congregations available to those living in the outlying suburban communities, but at the time of the challenge their congregation was the only PCA church in the central corridor of the city.

to Kevin, this group did not feel that the session was “sensitive enough to the relational factors and life factors” at work among these groups.

Personal Criticisms

Importantly, all of the research participants highlighted negotiating the criticisms of church members, staff members, and/or ruling elders as a leadership challenge. Some of the criticisms intersected with the objections about ministry direction and practice noted above, and the discussion about how decision-making authority is shared below. What is more, these criticisms often occurred simultaneously with the experience of these additional challenges. Still, others arose independently. Regardless of how they surfaced, their common focus was criticism of the senior pastor. Criticisms of the senior pastor were experienced as a ministry challenge especially by Stephen, Robert, Mark, and Jason. In the case of Jason, the criticisms were directly related to the objections about ministry vision and practice that have been previously noted.

Stephen recounts how he first experienced criticism. About “a year and a half after [the church] particularized,” a dozen adults, representing six families of “two to three kids each,” left the church. At the time, the membership was right at one hundred members, so this represented more than ten percent of the membership, and the loss “was significant.” Stephen describes the reasons for their departure as rooted in personal criticisms of him and his leadership. Several families “had gotten crossways with me.” They were “critical of my preaching; my preaching wasn’t good enough. It wasn’t deep enough. ...They also got activated because I stood up [against] some immorality happening with one individual I confronted.” Stephen states that in addition to criticizing his preaching, they “disrespected my calling, my authority in the church.” In fact,

Stephen recalled that they tried to "recruit other people to leave the church with them. [They were planning] one Sunday where they all would kind of leave at the same time."

The criticism that Robert experienced arose concerning a discussion about whether to hire a youth worker and whether an ordained or non-ordained staff person would best fit that role. According to Robert, the session chose to hire an ordained pastor. Yet, given financial constraints, acting on that decision had to be deferred another year until funds came available. As a result, a ruling elder with children in the youth program was given "the responsibility to spearhead the networking of parents" to help with the youth ministry.

"Increasingly," Robert recalled, "he was not engaged in the process" of managing the responsibilities of the youth ministry. This was surprising to Robert because "he was the one who actually brought the recommendation that we hire an ordained person." Robert remembers calling this elder frequently to check on him. Finally, he asked him, "Hey, what's going on?" To question the elder responded, "I'd like to resign from the session." Robert responded to this suggestion by asking whether he and "one of the [other] elders come over and talk" with him and his wife. At this meeting, "a list of grievances for decisions that had been made by the session" was given. In particular, Robert remembers, that the wife was "pretty aggressive in her criticism of us and our decisions." In fact, "the wife was critical of the decision we made to defer hiring a youth work," even though it was her husband who had suggested deferring the decision.

At first glance, this situation appears to be a ministry conflict with the session. However, Robert shared further about how the criticisms were actually focused on him. In reality, he says, the wife was "blaming him," not the session, for the problems. Proof

of this was revealed later through a ladies' gathering of church members in the home of the pastor. Robert's wife said that this woman publically shared with the ladies of the church that she felt that Robert's expectations were too "high" and that he was too "demanding" for ruling elders, and that these criticisms were underneath everything. According to Robert, following this incident, the relationship between the elder's family and the pastor's family, which was highly valued by both Robert and the ruling elder, was never the same. Though they remained in the church, the closeness was never regained.

Closely connected to these criticisms were other criticisms raised by a departing assistant pastor. The elders had arranged for this departing pastor to meet with them and Robert. According to Robert, he had thought this meeting would be something of an "exit interview." It became clear later, however, that the session and the departing pastor had orchestrated this meeting as an "opportunity to air his grievances against" Robert.

The criticism that Mark received occurred roughly two and a half years after the church particularized. According to him, "it coincided with our biggest growth spurt...the biggest growth spurt we ever had" in his entire tenure there. This growth in membership also spurred the growth of the ministry staff. In particular, Mark hired a "[senior staff director] to whom other [staff] members reported."

This was a significant change for one staff member who had served with Mark as his staff person from the very beginning of the church. In a short span of time, this long term relationship and way of functioning transitioned. Whereas in the beginning their relationship had almost been, according to Mark, "brother-sister" like, it was now very different. "She began to feel out of the loop...namely, out of my loop." Joined to this were

some decisions that she made, which did not please Mark. This proved very difficult for the staff person, who was increasingly feeling very distant from Mark. Ultimately, one day she came to Mark and said, “I can’t work with you anymore. I’m leaving.”

This, in Mark’s words, “led to a domino effect, a leadership implosion, where there were then several elders that were closely connected to the ‘staff worker’ that presumed that [Mark] had committed injustices and treated her unfairly.” At the same time, a member of the original core group and a member of the first group of elders “started going around and interviewing other staff members, behind [Mark’s back,] to ask if there were issues that were similar. He was looking for a pattern.” Mark recalled that this elder “felt like this was his fiduciary responsibility” to investigate these matters.

Added to this, Mark received a phone call in which he was told that he needed to be at a meeting that night. When he arrived, the entire session was already there. Mark described it as “an intervention... [during which] they were calling him to task.” Particularly difficult for Mark was the fact that one of the leaders at this meeting, a lawyer by vocation, had always been very “affirming” and “kind” to him. Suddenly though, “it was like I was before a court of law and he was the prosecuting attorney....He gave his case against me, and then the next guy, and then next guy went.” This all lasted for “thirty to forty-five minutes” and focused on a “litany of things,” but primarily concerned with what was “deemed to be a heavy handed, autocratic leadership style.”

It has already been noted that Jason’s situation began as an objection to church vision and certain ministry practices. However, when this discussion was taken up by the session, it changed direction somewhat and became more focused on and critical of Jason, the pastor. As he recalls, these criticisms were experienced for “over six” years,

because they migrated to other, interrelated personalities. Essentially, Jason recalls, because these members did not receive the response they desired, “They began to attack me and my character. They began to say lots of things about me—that I was a steam roller, that there was no real dialogue about the direction of the church, and that I was the one making all of decisions.” According to Jason, this was when the criticism of the elders as “yes men” first emerged. Jason said that the specific criticisms by these two families lasted for about “eighteen months,” after which they departed the church.

Jason also shared the specifics of their departures. In the case of one of the families, it culminated in a “four to six page letter, single spaced, small font, [containing] a catalogue of all [Jason’s] errors and all of the ways that [he] had wounded them.” According to Jason, “Once the letter was presented, it did demand a response.” In an effort to guide the session, Jason “asked one of [his] mentors [to advise] the session” and to encourage their support. Even then, it came down to a “split vote,” which resulted in the session asking the family to cease their criticisms. Still, after this family departed the church, Jason recounts that this family solicited a pastor of another PCA congregation in a neighboring city “to basically in a soft way investigate if there were any inappropriate behaviors that had been” committed. Jason did meet with this pastor, who ended up not exploring the matter further.

In the case of the second departing family, they also “solicited a lay ministry leader from another church.” According to Jason, this person from the other church “wanted a meeting with me and some elders where [the departing member’s] grievances against me [could be aired out]...in front of the other elders, besmirching me and my character to me and the other elders.” This meeting also occurred, and gave one more

opportunity for these criticisms to be voiced. At this point Jason felt that these criticisms had finally ended. Yet, six months later, he shared that “one of my ruling elders who was also my clerk of the session, began to exhibit some behavior that was concerning to me.” Jason said that he noticed this elder had “stopped talking freely to me, and he stopped speaking in our session meetings.” When approached by Jason to find out whether there was a problem, Jason recalls, “He then told me that he thought I probably wasn’t the best person to continue as pastor of our church.” Interestingly, this ruling elder was echoing the earlier criticisms that Jason was a “steam roller...and an unhealthy leader for [the] church.”

About a year and a half later, two more of the original ruling elders, together with their wives, arranged for a meeting with Jason. According to Jason, this meeting had two purposes. One was related to fund-raising for acquiring a building for the church. The other was so that they could share some concerns with Jason. According to Jason, one of these men was “his closest friend” in the church. At the meeting, Jason said, they “laid into me with all their criticisms.” Jason recounts that they were raising questions, “Are we missional?” There was a little “different flavor [to their criticisms], but still just attack and directed at me...like fix it.” At that point, Jason said he realized that “they had been talking for months about their dissatisfactions.” Interestingly, this discussion, which began with criticisms made by the ruling elder and the two other ruling elders, actually became a distinct ministry challenge—that of how decision-making authority will be shared between the senior pastor and the session—which will be outlined below.

How Decision-Making Authority is Shared

While objections about church vision or ministry practice and personal criticisms were a part of the story Greg shared, the ministry challenges he faced were more squarely related to how decision-making authority would be shared between the senior pastor and the new session. According to Greg, the conflict went all the way back to how the church began. Greg states, "I wanted to be a church that was about gospel growth in people. I wanted to be reaching people with the gospel and growing people in the gospel, so that there were no false dichotomies between reaching the unbeliever and reaching the believer." According to Greg, most of his "first elders" and a small group of "five families" were not committed to this direction. He states that they "wanted a pulpiteer;" they wanted "a nice Reformed, Calvinistic church...just a small, nice family church."

While this first appears to be strictly an objection about the ministry vision, according to Greg, the main issue was that they wanted "all decision making [to come from] the session, and they wanted me to be part of whatever they were thinking." In Greg's words, "Anyone who knows me knows that's never gonna fly." Greg saw himself as the leader of a "mission" and the caster of the church's vision. He describes this as being the "primary leader among leaders, [having] a distinct [role] though it's not separate." In contrast, the church's new elders wanted to retain decision-making authority about the church's vision and direction and only delegate preaching and teaching to Greg. According to Greg, "Their interpretation of [my role] would be that I want to be the Pope."[324]

[324] Greg's story illustrates well how personal criticisms, objections about ministry vision and practice and power sharing are ministry challenges experienced by pastors of newly organized churches simultaneously.

This ministry challenge regarding decision-making authority reached a critical point in relation to the other ministry staff person serving alongside Greg. Greg states that "some elders...came to me and said that they wanted [the staff person] to go." This staff person was not an ordained minister, but according to Greg, the elders thought he "was acting more like a pastor [because] he pushes back with them." Greg resisted this direction because the staff person "was on board" with the vision and direction of the church. Greg shared one conversation that clearly revealed these competing perspectives about vision and decision-making authority.

> I had one elder pull me aside when we moved into [the new] building. He said to me, "Look at this, you know, what do you think, Greg, what do you think is going to happen now...Why don't we dream a little bit?" And, I'm like, "Okay. I'm good with that. I love to dream." And then, at the end of the conversation, he said, "Rumor has it [the staff member] has your ear more than we do."

According to Greg, that "was the beginning of the end for [the staff member]." The session then held an illegitimate meeting of the session without Greg, who according to Presbyterian government, as the senior pastor, is the moderator of the session, and unless special circumstances warrant must be present at all session meetings.[325] The purpose of this meeting was to fire the staff person, which they did.

Interestingly, the leadership challenge that Jason experienced migrated yet again. Jason first experienced the challenge related to the church's vision. It then moved to personal criticism. As the challenge continued to unfold (some three years later), the ministry challenge focused on how decision-making authority would be practiced by the session and the senior pastor. At this time, one of the ruling elders, who also served as his clerk of the session, was no longer confident in Jason's leadership of the church. According to Jason, "He had a very different view of governance. He wanted the session

[325] *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*, 12-1, 2, 3.

to manage all of the details of the church, and he only wanted me to have responsibility for a very limited area of activity in the church...basically Sunday morning and Christian education." The elders "would have other responsibilities, but there [should] be no integration" of them.

In order to bring resolution to this dispute, Jason proposed two things to the session. First, they should define the role of the senior pastor so that everyone could agree about what those responsibilities were. Second, they should adopt a system for the nomination and rotation of officers. Both of these measures were adopted by the session. Not surprisingly, after the adoption of the rotation policy, this elder chose to rotate off the session and subsequently left the membership of the church.

The challenges Jason faced were still not finished. Three years following the incident of personal criticism (year seven of the ongoing conflict) noted above—the one in which two elders and their wives criticized Jason's leadership—one of these elders became part of a group that sought to undo the officer nomination and rotation process that the session had been adopted four years earlier in response to the debate about church governance. In fact, Jason said that this elder, while serving on the session, had "voted for the rotation that we adopted, and now, he [was] part of a group trying to undo that rotation."

According to Jason, the reason for the dispute with the session involved the question of who held the decision-making authority. At this point, there were three original elders in the church who were inactive, which means they were not currently serving on the session. Some of them felt that the current session was "simply doing whatever Jason" told them to do, that "they were yes-men." Simultaneously, there was a

second generation of elders that Jason had raised up though the rotation policy and who were now serving on the session. According to Jason, the main elder who was resisting the nomination and rotation policy was not actively serving on the session at that time. What is more, the current session was not comfortable with him returning to service because of his adversarial stance.

The specific occasion in which this dispute arose was the session's rejection of a candidate for the officer of elder – a person whose name had been submitted for consideration by another member of the congregation. The session did not act upon this recommendation because this member had not fulfilled certain requirements related to the nomination policy, requirements which had been clearly communicated to the congregation. According to Jason, the decision of the session not to consider the recommended member for the office of ruling elder led him file a complaint against the session.[326] Nevertheless, though this member filed the complaint, Jason observed that it was the inactive ruling elder who was now in opposition to the officer nomination and rotation policy that was "inciting all of the antagonism related to the nomination process" behind the scenes. Again, this was something for which that ruling elder had initially voted.

The inactive elder's objections notwithstanding, the current session was now unified in its understanding of the policy. Therefore, after considering the complaint raised by the recommended-for-office member, the session chose to deny it and reaffirm its policies related to the nomination and rotation of officers. This led the member to

[326] "A complaint is a written representation made against some act or decision of a court of the Church. It is the right of any communing member of the Church in good standing to make complaint against any action of a court to whose jurisdiction he is subject, except that no complaint is allowable in a judicial case in which an appeal is pending." Ibid., 43-1ff.

appeal the decision and file a complaint with the Presbytery, which was "the next highest court."[327] Jason said that this process was technical, extremely time-consuming and "basically occupied the [entire] year."

When the Presbytery finally looked into the matter, they "ruled against" this group and affirmed the ruling of the session. Jason said, "This really put an end to that conflict." He also added that the current session was able to say, "Hey, this isn't about Jason, this was about our church growing through and learning how to deal with conflict." Jason then highlighted that the entire story "lasted eight years. All of that's connected because... [many of] the same people were involved."[328]

Therefore, the answer to the first research question, which inquired about the leadership challenges Presbyterian pastors face subsequent to their church's organization, is three-fold. Pastors face ministry challenges related to objections to the church's vision and/or ministry practices, criticisms directed to their person or ministry practices, and questions about how decision-making authority is shared between the session and the senior pastor.

The Personal Impact of These Leadership Challenges

The second research question focused on the personal impact these leadership challenges have on the pastor facing them, with specific attention paid to the emotional, physical, behavioral, and cognitive impacts of these ministry challenges.

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[327] Ibid., 43-3.

[328] Similar to Greg's experiences, Jason's story reveals that personal criticisms, objections about church vision and ministry practice and who has decision-making authority are not only experienced simultaneously, but are deeply interwoven realities.

Emotional Impact

Each of the research participants reported significant emotional impacts experienced throughout their ministry challenges. For example, Greg talked about how difficult it was to feel people's disapproval. He said, "I think it was the collision of realizing for the first time in my life, people don't like me. And, realizing the first time in my life, I can't control it and change it." Greg also felt, at one point, like he wanted to quit. He said, "The tapes that are going through my head [were leading him to conclude that if] someone else [offers me a job] at this time, I'm bailing." His summary of this season: "That was hell."

Similarly, Jason reported it was "shocking" to discover how upset people were. He recalled, "I didn't think people... that I had been pastoring, serving and trying to love [could] say such things about me...very, very difficult." When the direction of the criticism began to come more from members of the session, Jason reported feeling "very alone and unprotected." Jason also found the length of the ministry challenge "disheartening." He recounted the counsel of someone he reached out to as saying that it would take as many as five years to "resolve or work through" the situation. He immediately asked the question of himself, "Can I survive five years?"

During the meeting with the two elders and their wives, Jason reported feeling that "I can never please these people. They're always going to be upset. The church is never making them happy enough." So intense were these feelings on that particular day, Jason recounted that he "broke down in tears" during the meeting. At that point, one of the wives told Jason, "I don't know what's wrong with you, but you need to get that fixed." Jason said that he later came to feel like that meeting "was an ambush."

When Robert lost the ruling elder with whom he had been so close, he focused on the "sense of loss" he felt. He shared, "This was a guy that I had [known] from really the first week that I [had] gotten [to the city.] [We] had begun to meet for breakfast, to talk about the vision, [and] to share the vision... And so I felt like he was a confidant." His criticisms were deeply discouraging to Robert, but discouragement was not the only emotion Robert experienced during the ministry challenge. After the meeting that his session had arranged for the outgoing staff member to share his criticisms of Robert, he said that he felt "very alienated." In addition to this, Robert admitted that he had a sense of "betrayal [and feelings of] anger." I felt "like they'd stabbed me in the back."

Stephen reported that the ministry challenges he faced affected his mood. He explained, "I was stressed. I was stressed because as a good planter you need people. And not only do you need people, you need a good reputation in the town that you're in. And all these people were connected to others, and could bad mouth me, the church. So, I was worried; I was apprehensive."

Kevin took it personally when people objected to the decision of the session. He recounted, "It was a challenge to sit in meetings, have people say things to you, to differentiate and not take it personally, and I would [take it personally.]" He said that he felt like he "was seen as the point on the spear that was popping their balloon." Taking things personally was also accompanied by a certain measure of "fear" for Kevin. He worried, "Am I going to lose the church?" This fear also involved wondering about whether or not "the elders [would] stay unified."

Mark became angry when he experienced his ministry challenge related to the personal criticism of a staff member towards him, and when he discovered that an elder

had begun to interview other staff members "behind [his] back." He said, "I find out about this, and it pisses me off. I feel like it's subversive of my leadership." However, this anger gave way to hopelessness. Mark and his wife "went through a couple of days of a lot of hugging and weeping and praying...we felt like our days were over. This was it."

Physical Impact

The physical impact of the ministry challenges experienced by the research participants almost exclusively pertained to sleeping patterns. Stephen reported having "trouble sleeping some nights." Kevin said the ministry challenge "definitely affected sleep." Jason also reported "trouble sleeping." He said that "several times [I] woke up in the middle of the night with my heart racing [and] sweating [profusely.]" When asked about whether he experienced problems sleeping, Greg reported, "Oh gosh, yes. Goodnight. I'd wake up at 3 a.m. I knew I should roll over and go back to sleep, [but] my mind would just [get] engaged."

Behavioral Impact

The pastors experienced two types of behavioral impact related to the ministry challenges they faced. First, Greg said that he experienced a "loss of motivation in areas...I think you could probably say that I was depressed." After hesitating over his own remark, Greg reiterated, "Yeah, easily, why would I not say that? Yeah. Yeah. There was this span of two years that it was just dark—very, very dark."

Stephen and Jason reported a more proactive, although not necessarily positive, affect their ministry challenges had on their behavior. The leadership challenges led them to respond to the criticism or objections by either more directly engaging those who were

offended or by trying to assuage their criticisms. For example, Stephen, who was criticized over his preaching style reported,

> I'm a very intuitive preacher. [So,] I tried to access more sensory detail, and sensory information, and historical information, and bring that into the pulpit. I even changed back temporarily to more of a manuscript style to try to have more detail...in preaching....I was really trying. I was expending lots of energy to try to satisfy people."

Kevin thought that he tried to over-manage the situation. He noted, "I would probably try to over-persuade. I would try to bolster [the session's] conviction that we were doing the right thing by sometimes just talking too much. You know, driving the point home." At the time, one of his ruling elders commented on this, "Sometimes I think when people get on your bad list, you sort of run them off." After reflection, Kevin said, "I think I can sometimes speak that way."

Cognitive Impact

There were three types of cognitive impact the leadership challenges had on the research participants: preoccupied focus, misplaced identity, and a sense of unpreparedness. Greg experienced both preoccupied focus and misplaced identity. He recalled, "When I'd run, I'd be arguing with these people [in my mind]...I'd be trying to fix everything, and control everything. There was a sense of trying to control something I could not control." When asked if he felt preoccupied, he said, "Oh yeah. Goodnight!" He said that he felt "consumed" by the ministry challenge. Regarding the misplacement of his identity, Greg said, "[I] realized [for] the first time in my life how much my identity is in my performance and people...I had people that didn't like me. I had what would appear to be a performance that's going down, because the church is not going to

make it. I had nowhere to run." He summarized these thoughts, "I went through burnout big time."

Kevin remembered "It was hard for me to turn off the workday, and it would be with me at night. It would be with me when I woke up in the morning. Additionally, Kevin reported that the ministry challenge exposed certain unhealthy ideals he had held about his identity. He explained, "[I was this] idealist, middle child, and bright. All these things play[ed] into wanting [the church] to feel good. [The conflict] challenged my own idols of harmony." He also expressed how unprepared he felt for these leadership challenges. When asked whether any of his previous training had equipped him to negotiate challenges of this sort, he said, "Not at all," and explained that he felt "blindsided" by the conflict. He felt that seminary and campus ministry training had given him "no preparation for this sort of thing."

When asked about how the ministry challenges were difficult, Mark explained how he had learned that "I can quickly slip into [feeling like a failure.] I can really swing from being very confident in the Lord's hand upon me as a leader to, oh, crap, I'm an idiot, and I'm a failure." Similar to Kevin, Mark also expressed how unprepared he was to negotiate his ministry challenge and said that he "did not know" how things would change; it "never occurred to me [and] caught me blind." In reflecting on the cognitive impact of his ministry challenge, Stephen likewise confessed that it exposed his "idol of acceptance and [his] desire to please people."

Finally, Jason noted that the ministry challenges exposed how unclear he was about his own identity and its relation to the church. He recalled, "[I learned] that my life, where my life stopped and the church's life began, was not clear...the church had kind of

been absorbed into me, and I had sort of bled into the church, so...it just overtook everything in my life and my family." This indicates a lack of clarity about personal identity exposed by the impact of the ministry challenge.

How Pastors Experience the Relational Impact of Ministry Challenges

The third research question focused on the relational impact that pastors experience associated with these leadership challenges. In order to more clearly understand the nature of the relationship impact, this question was subdivided to focus on relationship impact in three areas: the pastors' relationship to their spouses, the pastors' relationship to their lay leaders, and the pastors' relationship to their ministry staff.

In Relation to Their Spouse

All six research participants experienced negative impact from the leadership challenges in relation to their spouse. For example, Mark's spouse "was devastated [and] the hardest part was when [their] best friends left [the church]." Mark said that it "felt like a divorce" for his wife. Despite this, however, Mark said that the conflict, "amazingly," drew them closer to one another. According to Mark, his spouse was important to his negotiation of leadership challenge.

Kevin also talked about the negative relationship impact the leadership challenges had in relationship to his spouse. For example, in relation to an elder's wife who had gotten upset over an issue, Kevin said that this woman would "look at [his wife] stone-faced and barely say a word to her." According to Kevin, "[this is] making [my wife] actually angry. She's angry about it." Robert said something very similar regarding the relationship impact the leadership challenge had in relation to his spouse. As with Kevin's wife, Robert's wife had the spouse of an elder stop speaking to her. When asked

how Robert's wife experienced this, he said, "She's hurt. She's mad.... [And,] I think it made her even more cautious relationally."

When Greg was asked about the relationship impact of the leadership challenges in connection with his spouse, he said, "It hurt my wife deeply." He discussed this at some length,

> I noticed over the years that when people say things about me that are not true, untrue and unkind things, she takes it very, very deeply and very, very personally.... It got the point where she would say, "Honey, why don't you get out? I can't handle you feeling this way. I can't handle what's happening. I wish God would call you to something else."

In spite of this negative impact, however, Greg stated that the conflict "drew us together."

Jason noted that his spouse was the primary person with whom he processed the ministry challenges. Consequently, "She had a very difficult time knowing how to respond to me. She didn't really know how to fix it." This was a negative impact for her. Jason and his wife experienced at this time two distinct, yet related issues associated with the ministry challenge. First, Jason's wife's uncertainty about how to respond to the criticism was experienced by Jason in ways that might be perceived as hurtful. For example, when Jason shared with his wife the lengthy letter filled with criticisms, her response was, "Well, they do have some points." During this time, Jason also noted that their marital relationship "was not harmonious." He recalled, "When we could get away from the [ministry] conflict, we could experience harmony...but the daily grind was pretty devastating." According to Jason, he and wife were "fighting about little things all the time."

These responses were consistent with Stephen's testimony about how the leadership challenges impacted his relationship with his wife. Like Jason, Stephen also "processed" the ministry challenges with his wife.

> I think what was hard for hard for her...is I can go talk to the people. I'm in the situation with them. So, I see the conflict for what it is. I see the resolution of that. She is more on the sidelines in a support role. She is not able to see me work out this conflict or take a stand where I needed to take a stand. So, she is getting everything in a secondary way, and certainly, I think it was stressful for her.

Nevertheless, Stephen reported that his wife is a "logical thinker" and that she was "less affected than" him during the leadership challenge. In fact, when Stephen was asked whether his spouse was an asset to negotiating the ministry challenge he said, "Oh, absolutely!"

While all of the research participants testified that the impact of the leadership challenges were negative in relation to their spouse, three of them – Greg, Mark, and Stephen – also reported that the ministry challenges had a positive impact. The leadership challenges became an opportunity to draw closer together and experience support in the midst of the problems.

In Relation to Their Lay Leaders

Given that the leadership challenges were often squarely focused on the pastor's relationship to the lay leaders, the relationship impact experienced by the pastors in relation to their lay leaders were less uniform than those involving their spouses. Both Stephen and Kevin expressed largely positive impacts experienced in relation to their lay leaders. For example, Stephen noted that when he brought a session member to one of the meetings that had been arranged for the purpose of hearing members' criticisms, "the calculus [of the upset members] changed." By this, he meant that his session member

"saw [the situation] for what it was." Very quickly, Stephen noticed, "our session was really together" and realized that they did not think this was "a legitimate kind of criticism or complaining that was happening." In fact, he stated that his session viewed the criticisms with exasperation. They "couldn't figure it out. If they're not happy here, then go be happy somewhere else."

Kevin also experienced the positive impact of supportive lay leaders. "We were a unified voice...it was important test to me. Would the fellowship hold together?" According to Kevin, the lay leaders passed the test; their response was "majority positive." He recalled, "I still remember the porch we sat on at the house...where we said 'We're going to do this.' So, I think there was unity, and it was a good test of what the session would be like."

The experience of personal impact in relation to lay leaders was mixed for Mark, Greg, and Jason. Mark's first personal impact was very negative, when a few elders took turns questioning Mark at a surprise meeting. One of these leaders had been very close to Mark, which made this even more difficult. At this point, Mark thought things were coming to a close, and he worried that "this is it." Surprisingly though, a few days later, "a manila envelope" was delivered to his home. Inside were several "hand-written letters by all the elders that...varied in their degree of remorse, but for the most part [apologies] for the things [that had occurred.]" He also noted that the letters expressed their support and said, "Gosh, I wish I had those letters."

In Greg's situation, the lay leaders that were first called to serve on the session were at the center of the ministry challenge. As previously noted, the session and Greg were having a dispute about decision-making authority. Consequently, the personal

impact of this conflict was very difficult for Greg, and has been noted above in relation to the second research question. Greg notes that eventually, “three [ruling elders] resigned.” The cause of their resignation was related to Greg’s strategies for negotiating the challenge, which involved defining the church’s “philosophy of ministry” and requiring incoming ruling elders to “be in line with” it. At this time, Greg also led the session to implement a system of rotation. At the time, there were “eight” members on the session, and three were opposed to the new direction. The remaining five, however, were new elders that were part of a team of leaders that Greg had been training and working with when the ministry challenge began. According to Greg, “these [newer] guys are genuine friends. Consequently, Greg’s experience of the personal impact of the leadership challenge in relation to his lay leaders was at first very negative, but over time the impact became positive.

Jason’s situation was most similar to Greg’s. As has been noted, his lay leaders were surprised by the members’ criticisms of the church. When Jason suggested that it may be time for these members to move on, the lay leaders found it difficult to let them go. According to Jason, this was confusing for him. He remembers visiting one of the families and afterwards the elder saying, “Well, this has nothing do with you, Jason. This is about them.” At the time, Jason felt as though the elders were “beginning to see.” But it would be several more months before the session chose to stop engaging this family. According to Jason, it was hard for the session to realize that “not everybody’s going to be happy with the church.” The session’s inability to handle the loss of members impacted Jason and made him, in this situation, feel “very alone.”

As the situation continued, the ongoing criticism by the ruling elder who felt Jason should not continue as the pastor caused additional impact. For example, Jason said, “I recruited two other elders from the session who felt safe to me” to visit with the critical elder. This was very upsetting to the other two elders who weren’t there. At that point, Jason notes that the session was divided and that “it was probably a mistake” to try to “handle that...privately.” In response, Jason said that he “apologized to every person, including the man who was actually saying I needed to leave.” As will be noted later, this decision to apologize was very important. According to Jason, “One of the things that was important for everybody in our system was to hear me say I made a mistake.” Though difficult, this situation yielded a positive impact.

The conversation that Jason had with the two elders and their wives also yielded both a positive impact and a negative impact. According to Jason, his sense of feeling overwhelmed in that situation revealed to his constituents that “he’s a human being.” Consequently, this opened the door for “a new kind of interaction” with one of the elders. Jason reported that the elder “was having lots of challenges in his own job, and he was the business owner.” He recalled, “We began to dialogue about other factors related to leadership.” Ultimately, he noted, the “relationship...began to change in a fundamental way, an move in a new trajectory that was positive.”

As for the other elder and his wife, they “stopped having interaction” with Jason. Interestingly, Jason shared that the relationship between these two elders and their wives also ceased. “They don’t interact with each other. They don’t talk anymore.” Eventually, Jason said that this elder, who was noted above in the discussion about inciting antagonism regarding the officer nomination and rotation policies, left the church.

Connected to this and occurring simultaneously through the newly adopted officer rotation policy was the raising up of new leaders who were supportive to Jason. After the conflict reached its highest point, at which the case came before Presbytery and the session was exonerated, Jason noted the support of the session, “My current session [members] were able to say, ‘Hey, this isn’t about Jason, this was about our church growing through and learning how to deal with conflict.’” As with Greg, the support of the newly formed session should be seen as a positive impact in relation to the lay leaders.

Robert experiences with his lay leaders were exclusively negative, leading to a sense of loss, alienation, and betrayal. In the situation related to the elder and his wife who criticized Robert and the decisions of the session, Robert felt loss upon this elder’s departure from the session. Even though they never left the church, the relationship changed. Robert said, “It is a loss of friendship and relationship.... I don’t think he and I have had a meal together [more than] three times, all upon my initiation, all upon my pursuing him.” The situation of the departing pastor, along with the surprise meeting that the session allowed for that pastor to share his criticisms of Robert, also impacted Robert negatively. When asked if he felt isolated, Robert said, “I didn’t realize that I was isolated until after the meeting happened.” Later, one of Robert’s elders confirmed the purpose of the meeting by saying that “[We] orchestrated this thing so that [the elders] and [the pastor] could bring his grievances against [him].” At that point, Robert said, “Now, I feel very alienated.” As previously noted, Robert said that he felt as though the session had “stabbed me in the back.” The impact experienced by Robert was “betrayal.”

In Relation to the Ministry Staff

The leadership challenges highlighted by Robert, Mark, and Greg were inseparably linked to a staff member. Therefore, the relationship impact intersects with the personal impact, a topic which has already been explored in this chapter. In the case of Robert, the departing staff member privately collaborated with Robert's session so that he could have an "airing" of his grievances with Robert. As already noted, the relationship impact of this was negative. One impact that has not yet been noted, however, was the sense of personal loss that Robert experienced over the departure of this staff pastor. Robert said, "I was hurt, [and] really up until that last six or eight weeks, I felt like the associate and I had a great friendship." As with the session, his criticisms were experienced by Robert as betrayal, and the two of them "haven't spoken in four years, since he left."

Similarly, Mark stated that the criticism of [the staff person] was the occasion of his most significant leadership challenge. This instigated quite a bit of conflict with the session. However, as noted earlier, the elders eventually apologized for their treatment of the situation. According to Mark, the situation turned because of the participation of another staff member, his senior staff director. This staff person, who "was [also] a ruling elder [and] one of [the] original ruling elders," began to defend Mark in the heated, surprise meeting. Another pastor whom Mark had just hired also raised questions. Mark said this new pastor remarked, "I can't believe my ears." Because of the efforts of these staff members, the "narrative that the first group of elders was presupposing" was called into question. Though the ministry challenge began with a staff member and was largely

negative, the overall impact of the ministry staff in relation to the leadership challenge was positive. Mark stated that "[the staff] rallied around me."

In the case of Greg, the fellow staff member was a source of great encouragement for him. Greg stated that this staff member, who was his "closest friend," had become the focus of the session's criticism. For this reason, they terminated his employment with the church. Greg stated that this was "one of the saddest things in the whole thing." Greg's decision not to publically resist the firing will be explored in the next research question, and according to Greg, that choice was critical to negotiating the leadership challenge. But, "in order to keep the church together...I told the congregation that I'm at one with the session." Though privately disagreeing, Greg publically sided with the session. When Greg was asked whether the staff person understood this distinction, he said, "He knows. He knows I didn't [agree with the decision of the session.]"

Nevertheless, according to Greg, his relationship to this staff member changed. He lamented, "Our relationship is not what it was." He said that the staff member "…probably wishes that [I] would've resigned...or could've done more." Whether more could have been done is unclear, but the relationship changes felt between this pastor and staff member are undeniable. The ministry challenge completely altered their relationship.

Interestingly, Jason revealed that the relationship impact of the ministry staff was one of the most encouraging aspects of negotiating the ministry challenge. Jason stated, "My key pastoral staff [and] senior leadership staff were always very supportive and in sync." Jason did highlight one part-time staff member who "shared some of the criticisms" already noted, but "because other staff members were in support and also did

not approve of this staff person's role, we were able to negotiate that." Consequently, according to Jason, the ministry staff "was incredibly supportive...and aligned, which was great!"

Kevin did not report any ministry staff relationship impact connected to the leadership challenges. Stephen, who did not have additional ministry staff at the time of the reported leadership challenge, could not provide data in response to this research question.

How Pastors Negotiate Leadership Challenges

The final research question focused on the specific ways of relating to self and others, and the skills or practices employed by the research participants, that proved helpful for negotiating their leadership challenges. In order to ensure that all facets of negotiating the leadership challenge were addressed, this research question was further subdivided into three distinct questions:

1) What ways of relating to yourself about which you were already aware or came to learn during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?
2) What ways of relating to others about which you were already aware or came to learn during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?
3) What skills or practices about which you were already aware or came to learn about during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?

Ways of Relating to Yourself

Five of the six research participants revealed that they came to understand how important it was for them to differentiate themselves from the actual leadership challenge. For example, Stephen noted,

> I started realizing that as a leader in a church, in some sense, you represent God to people...but what happens is that people have issues with God. They, [then,] try to work it out with the closest thing to God that's near them. And often that's the pastor. And so, it helped to realize that....I realized that I don't have to take that personally. That it really isn't me.

Robert said, "I was not well differentiated" throughout the leadership challenge. He added that "over the last four years that has changed." When asked whether his "grip is a little less tight" on the ministry, Robert responded, "Oh absolutely...[though] I still want things to be done with excellence...it's not the whole thing...my identity is not tied up in [it]." Stephen shared that he began to learn similar things. He reported, "I developed a healthy tough skin that...is not a knee jerk reaction when somebody is mean or ugly or critical of me. [I learned that] the issue they bring up is not the issue that's really bothering them."

As previously noted, Greg also felt that he had "wrapped [himself] and the ministry together." To address this, Greg said that he needed to "settle into his justification." For him, this meant "settling into Jesus being my righteousness." This thought, Greg said, "empowered me. It strengthened me. I made me say, 'Okay, I can lose. I can fail.'" Greg agreed that he was "learning to be okay" with "who he [is] in [Jesus] Christ."

Kevin only made one comment in relation to this, and it has already been mentioned. He shared, "It was a challenge to sit in meetings and have people say things

to you, to differentiate and not take it personally. And, I would." Jason's comments regarding this have also been reported. He noted that "the church had...been absorbed into me, and I had...bled into the church, so it...overtook everything in my life and my family." Distinguishing the boundaries between self, family and ministry became important for Jason. "My life had gotten smashed together in some unhealthy ways."

It should also be noted that Robert, Jason, and Stephen were all engaged in Doctor of Ministry programs focused on the practice of ministry near the time of their ministry challenges. Each of them mentioned this as a facet of their negotiation of the leadership challenge. Jason realized how important it was for him to think about "leadership in an intentional way in order to negotiate the conflict, as well as the various groups of people and challenges he faced in church ministry. This is what led him to pursue a Doctor of Ministry in the area of leadership.

Robert stated that the "relationships were what drove [him]" to pursue the Doctor of Ministry degree, but he acknowledges that it was an important "learning opportunity." Once it began, Robert said, "I began to read things that were helping me differentiate from my call as the lead pastor...and it forced me to be more reflective than I had been...[enabling] me...to think through why I reacted the way I did, and what would be a healthier response to some of the leadership challenges I was facing."

Stephen had recently completed his Doctor of Ministry studies when the leadership challenged emerged in his congregation. Completing this gave Stephen a sense of accomplishment, which he expressed by saying, "I was feeling on top of my game." When asked whether the program helped him negotiate the challenge, he said that it did, and that out of it "I became a self-learner.... I went to school on this conflict situation,

became a better leader out of it." Reflecting further, Stephen specifically mentioned the insights of systems theory, to which he had been exposed in the Doctor of Ministry program. He said that this was "something that really helped me understand why the church was behaving the way it was."

Another strategy that proved helpful to both Greg and Jason was taking a three-month sabbatical away from ministry. Jason said that this proved important because it helped him to differentiate himself from the ministry. He described it as a "boundary setting event" in his own life and that of the church. He mentioned in particular that the conflict with his wife "disappeared immediately" when the sabbatical began. Greg also went on sabbatical for a summer because, "I was absolutely exhausted." He agreed when asked whether this was "one of the things [he] did to negotiate the challenges" he was facing.

Finally, it should be noted that both Stephen and Greg mentioned that exercise was a way of dealing with the pressures of the leadership challenge. Stephen said that "to mitigate the stress," he "would go for a run [to] have the opportunity to leave it all behind." Greg also mentioned the importance of exercise, and shared that during this time he "got into MMA" or Mixed Martial Arts, which is a competitive combat sport. Greg explained, "I had to do something physical."

Ways of Relating to Others Which Proved Helpful to Negotiating the Leadership Challenge

Four different ways of relating to others which were employed by the research participants proved helpful to negotiating the leadership challenges they faced. They included: reaching out to others for perspective, depending on others for support,

acknowledging errors and demonstrating a willingness to change before others, and intentional reflection about how relationships were affecting the leadership challenge.

Relying on Others for Perspective

Mark, Jason, and Robert stated that reaching out to others for perspective in order to better understand their leadership challenge was important. During his leadership challenge, Mark "drew in [one of his mentors] and a pastor group that [he met] with every October." From these sources, Mark said that he received "some wise counsel." It was very important for him to process his experiences with people outside the system.

At the point when Jason's session had really become divided, he reached out to a ministry leader with experience in negotiating leadership challenges at the denominational seminary. This leader began to help Jason make sense of his ministry challenge. According to Jason, "He completely understood what was going on in a way that I knew I didn't." Through this relationship and "two very important books" suggested by the ministry leader, Jason said his "thinking on different ways of doing things" was "stimulated."

Robert reached out to other friends in ministry. He recalled, "I felt like I needed conversation partners." Also, as already noted, this effort was linked to his pursuit of the Doctor of Ministry program, which in turn, provided perspective on his leadership challenges.

Relying on Others for Support

The research participants also relied on the support of others in order to negotiate their leadership challenges. For Stephen, the support of his wife was an "asset," even though discussing the leadership challenge proved difficult for her. In particular, he noted

that this was difficult because “she’s a thinker” and “I tend to be more feelings oriented.” He credited her with being “rock solid during this and...one of the reasons [he] came out of it.” Stephen also drew support from the elders in his church. Their actions defending and affirming Stephen’s ministry were very important to him. He recalls that they said to him, “Your preaching is fine,” which was a “huge boost” for Stephen. He explained that this demonstration of unity is something that he deems important to future ministry success, noting that after the conflict, the church has grown “year after year, both in finances and membership.” “We had been through battle together....we are much more bonded together after [the leadership challenge] happened.”

Mark feels that the support he received from his staff was crucial to navigating the ministry challenge. “It was important then to have people in the church like [his senior staff person]...helping me make sense of things.” As noted previously, the support of the [senior staff person] came at a critical point during the leadership challenge. According to Mark, he confronted the accusers and started “defending me.” This supportive action stirred another staff member to question the criticism, and then, Mark shared, “a couple of other elders started to call into question the narrative that the first group of elders was presupposing.”

Kevin spoke about the encouragement he received from the support of one his elders regarding a decision that had been unpopular with a member of the church. The elder informed him, “You made [one] hundred percent the right decision.” Robert’s encouragement, as has been noted, came from friends in ministry who were not part of his congregation, connected to his Doctor of Ministry program.

Greg's primary source of support came from the new leaders he was raising up to serve as elders in the congregation. Greg stated that the "second generation" of leaders was "being reached by the gospel." When asked with whom he processed the ministry challenge, he answered by referring to these "new elders." He added, "These guys are genuine friends."

Jason likewise drew his support, as has been noted above, from the other pastors and senior staff. He saw them as "incredibly supportive" and "aligned, which was great."

Admission of Error

Another factor that the data shows to be crucial for the negotiation of the ministry challenge in relation to others is the willingness to admit error and/or apologize for mistakes that have been made. Kevin, Mark, Stephen, and Jason all mentioned that they made mistakes and acknowledged this at some point during their leadership challenge. For example, Kevin's leadership challenge involved the disappointment that groups in the church felt over the decision to restrict the future geographical location of such groups to the central district of the city. He noted that this appeared to be a kind of "city righteousness," which offended people in the church. Therefore, Kevin stated that he "repented" for this language about the "city," and he even changed the wording for one of their core values from "city" to "place."

Mark, who was accused of having an autocratic leadership style by a staff person, stated that he "completely reconciled" that relationship. He remembered saying to the staff person, "Please tell me where I've sinned against you...I remember apologizing...[and] begging for her forgiveness."

After meeting with his accusers, Stephen noted that he tried to adjust his "preaching style" in order to please them. While this ultimately did not make a difference for the accusers, it demonstrates Stephen's willingness to admit possible error or a need for potential improvement.

Jason also acknowledged that he made a mistake in the meeting between him, two supporting elders, and the elder who had voiced his desire that Jason should no longer remain the pastor. At this meeting, as previously noted, Jason suggested that this elder should "probably step off the session." This action was upsetting to "the two elders who weren't there." After this, Jason made his admission of error, which was a unifying act. He recalled, "When I apologized...that was something we all believed in, that we're all sinners and broken, [and] it really helped us get to another place in the conversation." In particular, Jason noted that he thought it "earned some credibility with the two guys who hadn't been in the original meeting."

Intentional Reflection About Relationships

Mark, Greg, and Jason all indicated that they began to think more intentionally about the interconnected and changing dynamics of the relationships involved in the leadership challenge and how fitness for leadership is connected to relational capacities. Mark noticed that his staff's person's criticisms were somehow related to the rapid growth, the "doubling" of the staff, and change in the direct reporting of the staff person to a senior staff person. He explained, "It went from...a brother/sister relationship to a...staff person reporting to [a senior staff person] who reported to me. She felt disempowered."

Mark reflected that this change was related to the church's transformation from the start-up phase to a larger, multi-staff church. During the start-up phase, Mark noted that the church was more of a "family." As the church grew, however, relationships and roles evolved. Mark noted that it was important to be "clear [about] expectations, roles, and responsibilities." Mark also realized that "several elders...were very closely connected to the [staff person] and presumed" her version of the story to be accurate. According to Mark, these "elders aligned themselves" to advocate for the staff person. Mark described these behavior dynamics at work as "triangulation" among the various parties.

Greg's leadership challenge also led him to reflect deeply about how relational capacities affect one's fitness for ministry leadership. Greg made a distinction between those individuals, "Calvinists," who were aligned theologically with the Presbyterian doctrine he taught and their relational capacities. According to Greg, just because a person was aligned theologically didn't mean they were a relational fit. He noted an anecdote about the core groups of church planters, "I knew the statistics...that in the first five years you lose your original gathered people...Well, that didn't happen here. It happened ten years into the thing. And that first generation ended up being my biggest headache, heartache, and I think, got in the way of...this church."

Greg said that theological agreement was not enough; it was essential for the "gospel [to]...become real...on a deeper level." After the challenge, Greg realized how critical it was for his leadership team to serve together as a "band of brothers," which required a certain "authenticity about sin" joined to a deep belief in having a "wonderful savior." Greg's comments reveal that it is important for officers and the pastor to be

aligned relationally in the gospel, philosophically in ministry outlook, and theologically in a Reformed mindset.

Jason became curious about why criticism reappeared when they "popped up in another person in our system." He commented that when the second instance of criticism arose, it was by a ruling elder. Jason observed this to be a key difference from criticism raised by a non-elder. As a ruling elder, "[he has] a lot more authority in the church and [has] a lot more influence." Therefore, the potential for conflict increases significantly.

According to Mark, "the organization of the church" was a very important event for the relationships in the church. He reflected:

> [It radically changed the way the entire church related to itself. And, I wasn't prepared for [it]. I don't think any of us were prepared for those changes [and] how it would affect all of our relationships...Whereas before I had made virtually every decision. Now decisions were being made jointly and there was going to be disagreement. How would we negotiate disagreement? How would people relate to us? How would the session respond to the church's disappointment?

Jason's reflection about relationships "affected the way [the church] trains elders." Prior to the leadership challenges, officer training "[emphasized] knowledge of the gospel, grace, theological conformity to the [Westminster] Confession of Faith, our reformed distinctiveness, and our Presbyterian church government." While "all those things are still important," Jason noted that the church now focuses,

> …a lot more on the interpersonal maturity of...potential leaders: How will they function as a team? Will they be able to tolerate disagreement, disappointment? Do they have to have their way? Can they form deep relationships? Do they try to control the meeting and never stop talking? Do they never talk? Are they able to confess their sins? Will they forgive, or will they hold grudges? We talk a lot more about those kinds of things in identifying a potential leader than we ever did.

Skills or Practices Which Proved Helpful to Negotiating the Challenge

Four skills or practices were employed by the research participants that proved helpful to negotiating their challenges. They included: intentional efforts to enlist others, acceptance of undesirable or negative outcomes, inner sense of resolve to lead through the leadership challenge, and success in making organizational changes. It should also be noted that the seemingly intuitive strategy of reaching out to the offended parties for dialogue had mixed results at best, according to the research participants.

Intentional Effort to Enlist Others

Five of the six research participants reached out to their session or key staff members in order to negotiate their leadership challenge. As noted before, the help Mark received during his leadership challenge arose quickly in the midst of the challenge and at the initiative of others who were also experiencing the challenge. Therefore, the help others provided was critical to negotiating the leadership challenge, but Mark had not specifically sought this assistance.

For Stephen, the real difference in negotiating the leadership challenge was the help he received from his session after seeking their help to deal with the criticism he was receiving. He observed that when he brought a session member to one of the meetings, “It was good to have him with me, because it was then that the session member saw [the situation] for what it was.” Their support gave Stephen perspective. He reflected, “I started to see how insane, if you want to call it that, the criticism was when I brought an elder with me. And [the elder] was so puzzled...He could not understand why they would be so critical when we’re doing so well as a church...”

Jason also asked his session to help him address the disagreements two families were having with the church. While the session did not agree with the families' criticisms, they were not able to "let go" of these families quickly. In order to guide his elders, Jason enlisted the support of a mentor to speak with the session. The mentor "encouraged the elders to [help these families] move on or to decide that they needed another pastor." It was at this meeting that the session finally sought to stop the criticism and accept the loss of these families. Over time, however, these disagreements among members of the session helped keep the leadership challenge alive. It turned into personal criticism of Jason that was voiced by a member of the session. This ruling elder lacked confidence in Jason's leadership as pastor. In response, Jason's first step was to enlist the help of two additional elders with whom he felt "safe."

An additional strategy for negotiating these criticisms was the creation of a system of rotation for elders. According to Jason, this created "a healthy, constructive way of negotiating significant differences" and provided a means for a "gracious exit" for disgruntled elders. In addition to this, the rotation policy necessitated that other church members be recruited, trained, and installed into leadership positions to create a more unified and supportive session. In Jason's case, this strategy was successful. New elders were installed who were more aligned with him, and a more unified session emerged. As noted earlier, Jason said that at the end of the conflict, "They were able to say, 'Hey, this isn't about Jason, this was about our church growing through and learning how to deal with conflict.'"

Robert enlisted the help of another elder to address the distancing, which was occurring with another elder. They agreed to meet with this elder and his wife. During

this meeting, a list of grievances were aired. While not resolving the situation entirely, Robert noted that "at least for the elder and myself," this meeting revealed "that there were problems in their marriage that were unrelated to the session."

Kevin's leadership team anticipated potential pushback for the ministry direction from the beginning, so he enlisted the team's participation at the outset. This process was characterized by "lots of talking, lots of praying, lots of thinking about vision [before arriving] at the decision to this." In order to implement the decision, an elder and a staff pastor were further enlisted to communicate it personally to the various groups affected.

Greg enlisted the support of his fellow staff person. As has been noted, however, this staff person became a focus of criticism for the current session. Eventually, against Greg's wishes, that staff person was fired. For Greg, this loss was "devastating." Nevertheless, he enlisted additional lay leaders to serve as ruling elders and eventually established an officer rotation policy. It was the addition of new elders, even before the policy was adopted, that proved critical to negotiating the challenge. When "I had new leaders on...those three guys could see the handwriting on the [wall]." At this point, "three guys resigned." After the leadership challenge concluded, Greg realized that a "major difference" in learning how to negotiate the leadership challenge was enlisting others to help in the process. His thinking shifted from an attitude of "I can do it all" to more of a "band of brothers" approach. He stated that now, his "…leadership goals are having a team of guys that really...do [the ministry] together."

Acceptance of Undesirable or Negative Outcomes

Three research participants specifically acknowledged that negotiating through their leadership challenge required the acceptance of undesirable or negative outcomes.

Greg stated that “in order to keep the church together,” he did not resist the “firing” of his supportive staff member.” This was in spite of this staff person being his “closest friend,” that way the meeting had been conducted in an unconstitutional manner, and the fact that the relationship with the staff person changed significantly. Still, the acceptance of this staff person’s departure was critical, according to Greg, because it represented an example of him “submitting” to them, something “[the critical elders] said I would never do.” According to Greg, he accepted this undesirable outcome “for the gospel, [and] I knew that [if I didn’t it] would destroy the church.”

Stephen came to accept the fact that he could never make everyone happy. He said, “I think most pastors want everybody to be happy and want to please people.... I was dealing with a population that no matter what I did, their goal was to make sure and communicate with me that they were not pleased.” Stephen came to realize that “no matter what I did, what I said, anything...they were not going to be happy.” Accepting this assessment was important to Stephen’s process of letting go of this group who were criticizing his leadership, even though it meant a loss of “over ten percent of [the] communicant membership” at a significant time in the church’s life.

As noted earlier, Stephen held onto an “idealistic” view of “harmony” in ministry. He noted that he has since become “more a realist,” when it comes to ministry. Describing what he meant, Stephen said, “Stuff happens all the time, and it’ll keep happening. You can’t control outcomes. You want to be faithful. You want to try to keep integrity before the Lord...[but] I don’t need [complete harmony] as much.” Speaking hypothetically about loss, Stephen said, “If this elder leaves, I’ll be sad...but I wouldn’t be surprised.” Stephen connected his newfound willingness to accept loss in ministry

with a chronic health issue afflicting his wife. He said, “I think all these things personally have just sobered me.”

From the very beginning, Jason seemed aware that he would have to accept certain undesirable outcomes, specifically the departure of members. “Letting [these members] go,” however, became “very difficult” for Jason’s ruling elders. In this case, the elders were not able to lose these members until a pattern of “behavior” that “was unhealthy and unhelpful” was established. Nevertheless, it was not until criticism was voiced by elders that Jason came to realize that he “could not resolve all conflict.” At that point, this “thought was beginning to emerge.” Prior to this, he explained, “I thought I could always fix it. [This was] especially [true] if it was among the members of the Session. It was hard for me to embrace the idea that loss didn’t just mean loss of members occasionally, but it might mean [the] loss of an elder.” Jason said that because he “wanted to be successful in ministry,” it “encouraged unrealistic expectations” in those to whom he ministered. He recounted, “When I could meet those expectations, they loved me, which I [also] loved. But then, when I couldn’t, it’s like it flipped, and the intensity of that affection was now [oriented to] dissatisfaction.” For this reason, Jason came to realize, “I had to step back... [and] let people be disappointed.” Jason said that he now has “a better grasp that part of taking people somewhere means that some people won’t come with you, and there will be loss.” He now understood that this was “part of leadership.”

Inner Sense of Resolve

Although expressed differently, three of the six research participants became aware of an inner resolve or deepening commitment to their congregation that helped

them negotiate the leadership challenges. There was a sense that they had to see the challenge through for the good of the congregation. Greg spoke about this when he said that he came to a place "where I knew what needed to happen so this will never happen again. I didn't care anymore in a positive way. I didn't care what people thought of me...I'm going to do what needs to happen."

When Stephen expressed this deepening commitment, he referred to "Ezekiel chapter two," which is about the call of the prophet. According to Stephen, God told Ezekiel to go:

> …to the exiles, [but] they're not going to listen to [God], and... they're not going to listen to you [Ezekiel]. They are a rebellious house. But, [God] says that he'll make his head for him harder than flint. He'll make his head harder than theirs. And, I think that's what God did... [God made] me more determined.... [I learned that] it's not about me. It's about the church, [which] is at stake.

From the beginning, Jason expressed a strong desire for "accomplishing goals" as part of his ministry orientation. During the challenge, however, his sense of commitment to the congregation deepened. He recalled, "There came a point when I realized if we don't stand up to these attacks, the entire vision and ministry of the church will be compromised. We have to do it. It's worth it."

Organizational Changes

Several of the research participants noted that important to their navigation of their leadership challenge were specific changes in the way both they, as pastor, and the ruling elders, as the congregation's leadership, understood their roles and structured their authority. For example, both Greg and Jason noted efforts to revise leadership training materials. Part of this was the "approval" of the "Philosophy of Ministry" paper, something that had been around since the beginning of the church, but which Greg

revised during the leadership challenge. He described it as having been “filled out and matured over the years.” Greg noted that this paper had the support of his “new leaders.”

Jason also revised his leadership training materials so that they focused more on “the interpersonal maturity of potential leaders” and “how they [function] on the team.” That change gained the approval of the session. Jason also remembered that the session adopted a policy “that articulated [his] role in the ministry of the church.” The purpose of this document was to clarify not only Jason’s role, but that of the session. According to Jason, its purpose was “to move the session from a management of all the details of the church, to more of governance model of leadership.” Rather than managing “all the details,” those are “entrust[ed] to...the senior pastor.” This, in turn, enables the session to “evaluate the big pictures items and the shepherding items” of the church.

Mark noted that one significant outcome was the creation of a document for his leadership entitled, “The Guiding Principle,” which he stated was a “second permutation of how do I bring clarity between the roles and responsibilities of the senior pastor versus the ruling elders.” The fact that this was the second version indicates that a discussion about the definition of roles had already begun among the church’s leadership, and therefore, was part of the negotiation of the leadership challenge.

Finally, three research participants noted that implementing a rotation system for ruling elders on the session was important. Greg and Jason were able to implement a system of rotation for their sessions in the midst of the leadership challenge. Mark, on the other hand, realized this as an outcome. When asked whether he led the church to embrace a rotation system, he answered, “I absolutely did.”

Reaching Out to Offended Parties Proved Mostly Ineffective

Finally, five of the six research participants mentioned that they or their session members made intentional efforts to dialogue with the parties who objected to the vision, offering personal criticism or debating about decision-making authority. Yet, it is important to note that the research participants did not necessarily regard all of these efforts as helpful or effective for negotiating the challenge. The results were mixed, at best.

For example, Stephen said that he "individually addressed the different members" to "talk to them" about their criticism. In fact, Stephen said that the "main thing I did that helped me successfully navigate this was I did a lot of talking." Stephen also noted that this was contrary to his "introvert[ed] personality." Nevertheless, Stephen said that "listening to their criticism" was probably a mistake. He continued, "I was naïve to accept their criticism...and was expending a lot of energy to try to satisfy people, and it was just all for nothing."

Robert noted that he "kept calling" a member of his session who was "dragging his feet." After finally connecting with the elder, a meeting was set up to talk through the issue. Interestingly, at this meeting, "a list of grievances" were first aired. As noted earlier, this ruling elder eventually resigned, and his relationship with Robert significantly changed.

Kevin specifically highlighted he would "never do [it] again." This referred to the decision that Kevin and his session made to call "a town hall meeting to discuss the issue" about which his congregation was having conflict. He recalled, "We thought this would be a good way for people to show that we're listening, and let people share their

concerns." The conclusion, however, was far different. He explained, "What happens is that [it becomes a forum for] the people that are upset, [and the] friends of the people that [are upset,] and [they] end up taking their side just because of friendship loyalty." Importantly though, Kevin distinguished between what he termed "slow-adopters" and "opposers." No matter their efforts to reach out, the "opposers" failed to respond and remained angry. On the other hand, the other two groups eventually responded to these efforts and so, in Kevin's words, "I don't want to write [it off] as a total failure."

Jason highlighted that he had made efforts to "communicate the direction of the church" in personal meetings with two families who raised objections to certain practices in the church. Later, he referenced how he and one of his elders went to visit "with one of the families" that was upset about the direction of the church. When he noticed a behavior change in one of his elders, he approached him to ask what was wrong. Nevertheless, none of these efforts to reach out resulted in any of the parties changing their minds or any of the relationships being restored. According to Jason, all of these families eventually left the church.

When Greg first encountered criticism, he thought, "Oh, I'll win them over [by being] very persuasive." He noted that his strategy was "conversations, lots of conversations." Yet, it was these same "guys" who continued their resistance and who finally resigned from the session as the church moved through the leadership challenge. Greg commented that he finally told them, "Listen, we just don't see the world the same way, so what are we going to do?" However, they did not resign until they recognized that they were in the minority.

It is important to note that these efforts were not wholly ineffective. Greg noted that his wife still reminds him that "there are people in the first group that did change." Greg agrees with his wife's insight, and he tells her, "You are right. You are exactly right. There are and they did. The gospel did change them, and they're still here." As in the case of Kevin, efforts to reach out were not without effect during the leadership challenge.

Summary

This chapter has explored the leadership challenges faced by six founding pastors subsequent to their church's organization. These challenges fell into three categories: criticisms about the church's vision or ministry practice (Jason, Kevin); personal criticism (Stephen, Mark, Jason, Robert); and disagreement about how decision-making authority is shared between the pastor and the session (Jason, Greg). While each of these leadership challenges was unique, they were all affected by the presence of the newly formed session that coincided with the organization of the church.

In the leadership challenges faced by Kevin and Stephen, the presence of the session was largely positive. They were quickly able to mount a strong show of support for the pastor and demonstrated a high degree of unity. Therefore, the leadership challenge was overcome. Mark's leadership challenge was similar. While some members of his session were suspicious of his leadership style, after Mark received the support of others members of the session, the entire session unified and reaffirmed its support of Mark. Through this demonstration of unity and support, the leadership challenge was overcome.

The leadership challenges faced by Greg and Jason were also similar. Both of them experienced a combination of personal criticism, objections to ministry vision, and disagreements about how decision-making authority would be shared. In addition, both of their leadership challenges negotiated the presence of ruling elders on the session who took an adversarial stance towards the pastor. In order to negotiate the challenge, both Jason and Greg established a new generation of ruling elders and secured a more unified and supportive session. With the creation of a more cohesive leadership team, the leadership challenges were overcome.

Finally, Robert also experienced personal criticism and objections to ministry vision. The impact that he felt was similar to the impact felt by the other five pastors. Robert also sought to employ similar strategies in order negotiate his leadership challenge. However, a strongly supportive and unified session never emerged to help Robert.

In the next chapter, the conclusions derived from this research will be shared. As expected, it will be shown that the solidification phase following the organization of a Presbyterian church is a challenging season of ministry for founding pastors. Founding pastors who learn how to differentiate themselves from the various leadership challenges and who recognize the interconnectedness of their ministry system are better able to absorb the personal and relational impact of those challenges. Chapter five will also explore the specific capabilities and strategies that proved essential for negotiating these leadership challenges.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how Presbyterian founding pastors negotiate the leadership challenges which emerge subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation and during the church's solidification phase. It is hoped that by better understanding these challenges in their associated context, helpful insights and strategies might be learned in order to enhance the leadership effectiveness of current and future church planters and pastors. There were two assumptions in this study. First, the season subsequent to a church plant's organization in Presbyterian churches can be challenging to its new pastor, who typically served as the congregation's church planter, and therefore is a founding pastor. Second, pastors who have undergone this transition have learned important strategies critical to negotiating this season in a church's life through their own experiences. Three main areas informing how pastors negotiate this transition were identified: church planting, systems theory applied to power dynamics of congregations, and leadership skills essential for ministry challenges.

To examine these areas more closely, four questions guided the literature review and were the focus of the qualitative research:

1) What leadership challenges do Presbyterian pastors face subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation?
2) How do pastors experience the personal impact from these leadership challenges?

a) Emotionally?

b) Physically?

c) Behaviorally?

d) Cognitively?

3) How do pastors experience relationship impacts from these leadership challenges?

a) In relation to their spouse?

b) In relation to their lay leaders?

c) In relation to their ministry staff?

4) How do pastors negotiate these challenges?

a) What ways of relating to yourself about which you were already aware or came to learn during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?

b) What ways of relating to others about which you were already aware or came to learn during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?

c) What skills or practices about which you were already aware or came to learn about during the challenge proved helpful to negotiating the challenge?

This chapter presents the conclusions of this study. The research confirmed the assumption that the solidification phase of a Presbyterian congregation is challenging for founding pastors. The specific kinds of leadership challenges, and the resulting impact that those challenges may have on pastors, will be discussed first. Next, this chapter will

discuss the strategies, capacities, skills, and practices that the research participants highlighted as important for negotiating the leadership challenges. It is believed that these strategies are transferable and will enhance the leadership effectiveness of current and future church planters negotiating the solidification phase in the life of a congregation. The chapter will conclude with a summary of recommendations for ministry practice and for further research.

Kinds of Leadership Challenges Faced by Founding Pastors

The interviews revealed that founding pastors experience three distinct kinds of ministry challenges subsequent to the church's organization: 1) criticism about the church's vision or ministry practice (Jason, Kevin); 2) personal criticism (Stephen, Mark, Jason, Robert); and 3) disagreement about how decision-making authority is shared between the pastor and the session (Jason, Greg).[329] It should be noted that these ministry challenges were often interrelated. While the data from all participants illustrate this point, in the cases of Jason and Greg especially, the ministry challenges they faced occurred over the course of many years and were characterized by the inter-weaving of personal criticism, objections to vision or ministry practice, and debates about how decision-making authority was shared.

As the literature notes, church planters experience conflict related to personal criticism and objections to ministry vision.[330] The shift in power dynamics, however, within a newly founded Presbyterian congregation from one where the church planter enjoys sole decision-making authority to one where this decision-making authority is

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[329] Although not specifically considering the same ministry context of leading a church after its organization, these conclusions are strongly consistent with the research by Hoge and Wenger, *Pastors in Transition*, 31-49, 76-129.

[330] Cf. Hoge and Wenger, *Pastors in Transition*, 76-129.

shared with the session, changes the way that criticism and objections are experienced by the founding pastor, as well as intensifying their impact. For example, Jason noted that his ministry challenges presented with two families who were not satisfied with the overall vision of the church. After voicing their concerns with Jason and being dissatisfied with the results, they voiced their dissatisfaction to members of the newly formed session. According to Jason, the session did not agree with the criticism. However, the elders found it difficult to "let them go." Jason's comfort with their departure, however, became the occasion for personal criticism by the families, which in turn garnered sympathy from some elders for these families. This triangulation of relationships stressed Jason's relationship with the elders and allowed the conflict to spread and deepen.

Greg noted that his first elders were interested in a particular vision for his role and the church. They "wanted a pulpiteer" and a "nice Reformed, Calvinistic church." He, on the hand, had a more outreach-oriented vision for the congregation. He saw himself as the leader of a "mission" to reach his community for the gospel. Greg believed that these differences about his role and ministry vision were part of a larger narrative that was bound together with the question about how decision-making authority would be practiced in the new congregation. Greg's ministry challenge lasted for several years. Things came to a crescendo when the session chose to terminate a staff person against Greg's wishes.

This conflict highlights the difficulty that founding pastors and new sessions have in understanding their role and relationship to one another and to the broader congregation. Some of the questions that this challenge raises include the following: Who

has the authority to hire and fire staff? What role do session members have in the exercise of the day-to-day operations of the church? In what way and to what extent is the pastor accountable to the session? When these questions are not answered and agreed upon by all members within the leadership team, things can devolve very quickly into an outright power struggle among key stakeholders, as they did in Greg's situation.

In the case of Mark, who experienced personal criticism from a staff worker, the interrelatedness of the ministry system was the key to understanding how a leadership challenge can become very difficult to navigate. Mark had a long-time staff person who had various criticisms that had built up declare to him, "I can't work for you anymore. I'm leaving." Yet, due to the interconnectedness of the ministry leadership team, this person did not leave quietly. Specifically, several elders were affected by this staff-worker's departure. Mark said this staff person's exit "led to a domino effect...where several elders...closely connected to the staff worker presumed" that her frustration with and criticism of Mark were valid. They believed the staff person's version of the story. This resulted in a secret investigation of other staff members by a self-appointed elder. This was followed by an elder-called meeting, something Mark referred to as "an intervention," the purpose of which was to "call him to task" for his failures.

Upon reflection, Mark recognized that their ministry system had changed significantly since the hiring of this staff person. The ministry challenge coincided with their greatest period of growth and a shift in this staff person's reporting structure. From the founding of the church, she had reported directly to Mark, but now she reported to a new hire. According to Mark, their relationship had been "brother-sister" like, but she soon began to feel "out of my loop." Mark felt that the overall growth of the church, the

change in leadership structure, and the shift in their relationship lay underneath the criticisms.

Therefore, it is critical for founding pastors to observe the interconnectedness of their ministry systems and the power dynamics present within the session. These connections and power dynamics evolve constantly. Personal criticism and disagreement about ministry vision or practice can quickly escalate into a much bigger ministry challenge.

Systems theory provides a model for understanding the significance of the change in power dynamics in a newly formed congregation.[331] Conflict is related to the interconnectedness of the various stakeholders within a ministry system and the presence of different interests, perspectives, power dynamics, and latent anxiety. Before a church's organization, a member's criticism may be negotiated by only one critical ministry leader – the church planter, who holds sole decision-making authority. However, subsequent to organization, many more ministry leaders are invested with formal authority and are a part of the decision-making process. This change in organizational structure heightens the likelihood of triangulation, the spread of latent anxiety, and the escalation of conflict within a ministry system. The researcher believes that it is important for church planters and founding pastors to obtain a working knowledge of systems theory in order to understand the interconnectedness of their congregation and the importance of the shift in power dynamics, which emerges subsequent to the church's organization.

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[331] Cf. Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, Ronald W. Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor: Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family*, Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, Steinke, *Healthy Congregations* and Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works*.

The Personal and Relational Impact of Leadership Challenges

The personal and relational impact experienced by founding pastors who endured leadership challenges also yielded important insight into how these leadership challenges are negotiated. The research suggests that church planters who transition to a position as their congregation's founding pastor require greater preparation than is currently available to help them negotiate future leadership challenges. Likewise, they should give a greater priority to self-care.

Personal Impact

Emotional Impact

In terms of emotional impact, two participants (Jason and Greg) reported that this was the first time that they had experienced significant disapproval in their ministry. For Greg, this led to an overall "loss of motivation" in ministry. He recalled that this led to a season of depression where things were "very dark." Robert focused on the "sense of loss" and feelings of alienation he felt while navigating the challenges. Both Robert and Mark reported feeling angry about the actions of elders that they had once trusted implicitly. Kevin felt fear, was tempted to take "things personally," and wondered whether the "elders [would] stay unified." Stephen became "stressed" when he realized that those who were criticizing might leave the church and tarnish the church's "good reputation" in the community.

Physical Impact

Many of the participants also reported that the difficulties affected their sleep patterns. Notably, Jason reported waking "up in the middle of the night with my heart

racing [and] sweating profusely." Similarly, Greg said that he would "wake up at three a.m.," but could not go back to sleep; "my mind would just [get] engaged."

The leadership challenges also revealed a preoccupied focus and misplaced identity for the participants. Many of the participants felt the burden of trying to fix or control aspects of the leadership challenge, yet they knew that was impossible. The sense that the ministry was out of their control led the pastors to try harder in an effort to resolve the situation. Stephen reported "expending lots of energy to try to satisfy people." Kevin sought to over-manage the situation to convince his elders that "we were doing the right thing."

Growing out of a preoccupied focus on the ministry and over-functioning behaviors, the pastors came to learn that they had mistaken their identity with the success of the ministry. Mark noted that when things began to erode, he could quickly "slip into [feeling like]...a failure." Kevin said that the leadership challenge exposed his "idols of acceptance." If he was disliked, then he was unsuccessful. Jason came to learn how unclear he was on "where my life stopped and the church's life began." He said that "the church had kind of been absorbed into me, and I had sort of bled into the church...it just overtook everything in my life and family."

Relational Impact

Impact on the Ministry Leader's Spouse

The relational impact felt by the pastors during the negotiation of these leadership challenges was also significant. All expressed that the situation had a negative impact on their spouse. Nevertheless, three of them also reported that the ministry challenges drew them closer to their spouses. While the challenge drew Mark and his wife closer, the

impact of the loss was very difficult for his wife to handle. When a key family left the church, Mark's wife "was devastated...It felt like a divorce." The wives of Kevin and Robert reported feelings of anger over the criticism that was directed at their husband. In both of these situations, the wife of an elder stopped talking to the wives of these pastors.

Stephen's wife found it difficult not to be involved directly in the resolution of the challenge. Stephen noted that this was "stressful for her." Greg's wife also felt severely distressed during the worst of their challenge. She wished that "God would call [her husband] to something else." According to Greg, she couldn't "handle it." Even so, both Greg and Stephen reported that that their wives were helpful in the negotiation of the challenge and felt that they drew closer together.

Jason also depended on his spouse in order to process the ministry challenge. Not surprisingly, he reported an overall increase in conflict with his spouse during the time of the ministry challenge. Jason noted that this was due to his spouse feeling a "sense of inadequacy about how to respond" in ways that were helpful.

Impact on Staff and Lay Leaders

Since many of the leadership challenges directly involved either a staff member or ruling elders, the relational impact related to staff and lay leaders was less consistent. For both Kevin and Stephen, the support and unity provided by their lay leaders proved critical to negotiating the leadership challenge. Stephen noted that the "calculus" of the entire situation changed when his elders showed that they were unified behind Stephen. Kevin saw the challenge as something of a "test" for his leadership; their support was strongly "positive" for him.

As noted earlier, some of Mark's elders began a secret investigation and called for a meeting to get to the bottom of the criticism. While this was incredibly difficult, it also became the occasion for other elders to show their support and stand with Mark. Their support began to change the overall narrative of the difficulty. Later, several "hand-written letters" were delivered to his home which expressed their support. This was tremendously encouraging to Mark.

Greg lost a staff member who was also his closest friend in the ministry. The loss associated with the staff person's departure and the confusion it brought to the status of the relationship with the staff member still linger. However, Greg's willingness to allow this staff person's departure was crucial to his garnering support from new, incoming elders, who were similarly upset by this action. When these new elders came into ministry leadership, the "three elders" who had opposed him resigned, which brought the ministry challenge to a close.

Over time, Jason's situation paralleled Greg's. He too had some elders who were resistant to the overall direction of the church on a number of issues. Eventually, the adversarial elders either left the church or stepped out of their position of formal authority. It was through the influence of incoming lay leaders that a unified and supportive team was created. In addition, Jason's staff was "incredibly supportive and aligned." This unity and support proved very important to negotiating the challenge.

The relational impact that Robert described was exclusively negative. The lack of support from both staff and his ruling elders were are the heart of his leadership challenge. This led to a sense of loss, alienation, and feelings of betrayal. Particularly hurtful was the resignation of a ruling elder from the session. Though this man did not

leave the church, the only occasions when they have spent time together were at the instigation of Robert.

Summary of Personal and Relational Impact

When the personal and relational impacts are surveyed together, the data confirm that these pastors were unprepared to negotiate these sorts of leadership challenges. Specifically, Kevin said that he felt "blindsided [and] had no preparation for this sort of thing." Mark also noted that his challenge "caught me blind." Greg noted that the challenge "consumed" him, and he experienced "burnout."

An important observation provided by the data is that it closely parallels the observations noted earlier in the introduction and literature review regarding the uniquely challenging vocation of pastor.[332] As Burns, Chapman and Guthrie note, "One of the unique aspects of pastoral ministry is how it affects and defines all areas of life. Work, family, and personal responsibilities blur together through the week, so that pastors have difficulty distinguishing when they are on or off duty."[333] The image of the "one-legged stool," which was provided by a Pastor's Summit participant is given a greater depth of meaning in light of the research:

> Most people in our church have a life that is like a stool with three legs. They've got their spiritual life, their professional life and their family life. If one of those legs wobbles, they've got two others they can lean on. For us, those three things can merge into one leg. You're sitting on a one-legged stool, and it takes a lot more concentration and energy. It's a lot more exhausting.[334]

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[332]See especially Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*, Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, *The Leader's Journey*, Hoge and Wenger, *Pastors in Transition* and Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*.

[333] Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*, 15.

[334] Ibid.

To a large extent, the founding pastors interviewed in this study were absorbed into the ministry challenges so that every facet of their lives were impacted in some way. The costly nature of the impact compares well with the image of leadership given by Dan Allender – leading with a limp – in his book bearing the same title.[335] He writes:

> Leading is very likely the most costly thing you will ever do....Many times conflict escalates into assaults and betrayal—with the heartache that comes when confederates turn against you. No wonder leaders feel exhausted and alone. No wonder they suspect that other members of the team are withholding the very information they need to make better decisions. No wonder the intensity of the challenge causes so many to burn out or quit.[336]

Therefore, the challenging nature of the ministry task founding pastors seek to fulfill cannot be underestimated. In virtually every way, leading through this ministry challenge will be overwhelmingly daunting. Even those who negotiate their challenges will carry life-long wounds from the process. Therefore, seminaries, churches, presbyteries, and church planting agencies and networks ought to give focused attention to preparing church planters for the leadership challenges, which are sure to come. Likewise, church planters and pastors should seek these continuing education opportunities.

The costs associated with ministry leadership also highlight the priority for each pastor to attend to the duties of self-care. Self-care is the intentional and regular effort that ministry leaders make to attend to their lives, in all aspects, in order that the calling to ministry leadership can be sustained.[337] Peter Brain describes self-care in his book, *Going the Distance,* as "the wisdom to ensure, as far as humanly possible, a wise and

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[335] Allender, *Leading with a Limp*.

[336] Ibid., 2, 4.

[337] Cf. "In the Pastors Summit, we grew to describe self-care as the *ongoing development of the whole person,* including the emotional, spiritual, relational, physical and intellectual areas of life." Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*, 61.

orderly work that conserves and lengthens a pastor's ministry."[338] Prioritizing self-care acknowledges that ministry leaders are people too, and they need to be cared for as they go about the demands of ministry. Forgetting this truth will cut short and invariably diminish a ministry leader's impact.

Finally, the participants' feeling of unpreparedness, which was revealed by the research, makes the gap in the literature regarding instruction for negotiating this phase of a congregation's life all the more perplexing. Why are there so few resources available to pastors who seek to negotiate the difficult solidification phase in a congregation's formation, especially if the congregation is Presbyterian?[339] Ed Stetzer highlights the tip of the iceberg with only one sentence when he writes, "Some entrepreneurial planters don't want to lead the church through the solidification phase (three to seven years), so they leave before this phase begins causing a real problem: job security."[340] It is simply inadequate to assume that a church planter must choose between risking a threat to job security or seeking a new ministry calling in order to avoid the challenging solidification phase.

The insights noted earlier by Jim Griffith and Bill Easum about the relationship between leadership selection and the formalization of governance structures are an improvement on Stetzer and apply here:

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[338] Peter Brain, *Going the Distance: How to Stay Fit For a Lifetime of Ministry*, 24.

[339] Though studies like Burns, *Pastors Summit: Sustaining Fruitful Ministry*, Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*, Hoge and Wenger, *Pastors in Transition*, Osborne, *Sticky Teams: Keeping Your Leadership Team and Staff on the Same Page*, highlight many and different kinds of challenges ministry leaders face, these works do not specifically address how founding pastors negotiate the solidification phase of a congregation. The researcher is not aware of any work exclusively devoted to this phase of ministry leadership.

[340] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 69.

> Formalizing the leadership and organization of the church too soon is dangerous. Whether its bowing to pressure by zealous supervisors, current "unofficial" leaders, personal insecurities, or personal experiences with previous "church," the net effect is the same—a major sea change in the life of the church, and, more importantly, redirecting youthful energies away from mission to management. Either way, formalizing leadership too soon *always* hinders the growth of the plant. The organization of the plant needs time to find its indigenous roots in the mission field. Future leaders need time to prove themselves on the battlefield.[341]

According to Malphurs, giving attention to leadership selection prevents the newly formed board from unduly subverting the leadership of the church planter and thus hindering growth.[342] As Griffith and Easum advise, when someone is anxious "to be in position of power" that person "is the last person you want in that position."[343] Moreover, given the likelihood of negative personal and relational impact revealed by the research, it is all the more important for church planters and future founding pastors to exercise extreme care during the leadership selection process.

The Strategies Employed to Negotiate Leadership Challenges

The purpose of qualitative research is to provide an experientially rich description of the particular situation or person serving as the focus of study. In this instance of this study, the goal was not to answer every question that might be asked of these pastors exhaustively, but to explore in great depth and from an emic perspective how these pastors negotiated the leadership challenges they faced.[344] The researcher's goal was to uncover how they made sense of the leadership challenge. Therefore, the strategies the participants employed to negotiate their leadership challenges were their own, and were

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[341] Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts*, 102.

[342] Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 237. Cf. "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (1 Tim. 5:22).

[343] Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts*, 104.

[344] Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 14.

either known prior to or learned in the midst of negotiating the challenge. They were specific to these pastors and their situations. Nevertheless, the conclusions reveal that the strategies employed by these pastors have important parallels to the literature on leadership.[345] Given the rich description afforded by qualitative research and the parallels to the literature, these insights are deeply relevant and transferable to pastors negotiating similar challenges.

In answer to the question, how do founding pastors negotiate the leadership challenges subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation, the research yielded strategies that are best categorized in three areas: 1) Distinguishing their person from the leadership challenge; 2) Exercising critical leadership skills; and 3) Making strategic changes to governance structures.

Distinguishing Their Person From the Leadership Challenge

Critical to the negotiation of these leadership challenges was being able to distinguish themselves from the actual leadership challenge. Five research participants specifically highlighted the importance of this skill. Stephen learned that "I don't have to take [it] personally" and that these challenges were really more about how these people were relating to him as pastor and even how they were relating to God. Robert came to understand the importance of loosening his grip on the ministry and felt that he was not very well differentiated at the beginning. Kevin and Jason had similar comments.

For Greg, the practice of differentiation was closely connected to getting reacquainted with his justification, which is the theological truth affirming that a

[345] It is beyond the scope of this research to consider how all relevant leadership strategies, capabilities, capacities and skills contained in the literature apply or may apply to these leadership challenges. Again, the priority of this research is to consider what strategies were employed, why they were relevant and how they may or may not intersect with the literature.

Christian's acceptance before God is sure and founded solely on grace. When Greg was reminded of the truth that "Jesus [was] my righteousness," he felt empowered. This renewed awareness of the gospel's gift of grace strengthened Greg and allowed him to "be okay" with the potential of failure.

The priority of the differentiation of the leader was highlighted earlier in the literature review, and it arises out of the contributions of systems theory. According to Friedman, "[The] overall health and functioning of any organization depend on primarily on one or two people at the top, and that this is true whether the relationship system is a personal family, a sports team, an orchestra, a congregation, a religious hierarchy, or an entire nation."[346] Steinke also notes the importance of the well-differentiated leader.[347] Freidman explains why it is important for a leader to remain differentiated:

> [The non-anxious, well-differentiated presence not only] enables religious leaders to be more clear-headed about solutions and more adroit in triangles, but because of the systemic effect that a leader's functioning always has on an entire organism, a non-anxious presence will modify anxiety throughout the entire organization.[348]

The research participants were able to practice differentiating themselves not only through their own reflection, but by specifically setting clearer boundaries with those with whom they were engaged in the leadership challenge, as well as by being willing to accept associated losses. The acceptance of loss was directly correlated to resisting over-functioning during the ministry challenge. At some point, these pastors discovered that no matter what they did, their effort would not resolve the issue. Jason referred to the transformation in perspective he experienced when he explained, "[Before] I thought I

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[346] Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 221.

[347] Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, xi.

[348] Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 208.

could always fix it...It was hard for me to embrace the idea that loss didn't just mean the loss of members occasionally, but it might mean the loss of an elder. [Eventually though,] I had to step back... [and] let people be disappointed."

These pastors came to learn that becoming a well-differentiated, non-anxious presence in the midst of their leadership challenge was crucial to successfully negotiating the challenge. Not only did it allow them to better reflect on their own person in the midst of the challenge, but this in turn affected the rest of the ministry system by allowing others to take a self-defining position by either leaving or ceasing to fight. The refusal to continue over-functioning helped reduce the overall anxiety in the entire system.

Self-care was also a component of these pastors' efforts to differentiate themselves from the leadership challenges. Robert, Jason, and Stephen were all engaged in Doctor of Ministry programs that were directly focused on negotiating leadership challenges in ministry. They all testified that this intentional learning opportunity helped them to better understand the nature of the challenges they were experiencing.

Another self-care strategy that was crucial for differentiation was taking a sabbatical. Both Jason and Greg took three-month long sabbaticals in the middle of their leadership challenges. Jason described it as a "boundary setting event" that enabled him to put distance between himself and the problems he was facing in the church.

Finally, Greg and Stephen mentioned making exercise a priority during the leadership challenge. Interestingly, it was at this time that Greg took up mixed martial arts fighting as a way to get away from the challenges he was experiencing with his elders. Greg noted, "I had to do something physical."

From these observations, it can be concluded that founding pastors must take intentional steps to differentiate themselves from their ministries and set firm boundaries. This becomes critical when undergoing a ministry challenge, because the temptation to be absorbed into the ministry challenge is strong. To strengthen this effort physical exercise, continuing education, and sabbaticals were all discovered to be effective strategies employed by these pastors. A critical corollary to these efforts was the leader's resistance to over-function in the ministry system and willingness to accept losses related to the ministry challenge.

Exercising Critical Leadership Skills

In order to negotiate their leadership challenges, these founding pastors possessed important leadership capabilities. As noted earlier, however, these ministry leaders did not feel prepared for their leadership challenges, so these capabilities were not performed with reference to prior learning. Rather, these leadership traits, capacities, and skills demonstrate either an intuitive awareness by the ministry leader or were learned during the leadership challenge, and proved important for leading through ministry challenges. The research revealed four critical leadership capabilities for negotiating the leadership challenges: proven credibility, getting perspective, thinking and acting politically and making strategic changes to governance structures.

Proven Credibility

The fact that all of the research participants were able to successfully plant and organize their congregations into particular churches demonstrates possession of the element of leadership credibility as identified by Kouzes and Posner.[349] As noted before,

[349] The characteristics that define the credible leader are: honesty, forward-looking, inspiring and competent. Cf. Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 29.

credibility is fundamental to the "reciprocal process between leaders and their constituents."[350] In this way, the aspirations of both leaders and constituents are meaningfully connected and harnessed in order to accomplish meaningful goals.

Through leadership challenges, however, both the connection between leader and constituent and the agreed-upon goals are tested. Therefore, credibility must be proven again in the crucible of the leadership challenge. Proven credibility is the idea underlying what Collins describes as "level five leadership," which was noted earlier in the literature review.[351] Level five leadership blends "extreme personal humility with intense professional will," that ensures "whatever needs to be done to make the company great" will be done."[352]

In order to negotiate the leadership challenges which arise during the solidification process, all of the pastors proved their credibility repeatedly by demonstrating level five leadership traits. In particular, Jason's and Greg's willingness to endure such lengthy and painful leadership challenges make this clear. Jason's challenge led to a presbytery trial, which required numerous hours of preparation on top of his regular pastoral duties. Stephen connected his resolve to that of the biblical prophet, Ezekiel:

> To the exiles, [but] they're not going to listen to [God], and... they're not going to listen to you (Ezekiel). They are a rebellious house. But, [God] says that he'll make his head for him harder than flint. He'll make his head harder than theirs. And, I think that's what God did... [God made] me more determined.... [I learned that] it's not about me. It's about the church, [which] is at stake.

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[350] Ibid., 28.

[351] Collins, *Good to Great*, 17-40.

[352] Ibid., 21, 30.

Similarly, Jason stated, “There came a point when I realized if we don’t stand up to these attacks, the entire vision and ministry of the church will be compromised. We have to do it. It’s worth it.”

Getting Perspective

Heifetz and Linksy highlight the importance of “getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony” in order to better understand the factors at work in the midst of a leadership challenge.[353] The primary way these pastors sought to gain perspective on the situation they were experiencing was through deeper reflection on previous training, continuing education, and stepping away from the ministry challenge.

Stephen had recently completed his Doctor of Ministry degree, a process that had exposed him to the insights of systems theory, which was “something that really helped [him] understand why the church was behaving the way it was.” Stephen was able to deeply reflect on what he had learned and apply this to his current ministry challenge. Similarly, in the midst of their leadership challenges, both Robert and Jason reached out to others for perspective. This decision to reach out led to their participation in a Doctor of Ministry program focused on negotiating leadership challenges in ministry. This continuing education program provided Robert and Jason invaluable perspective. Robert noted, “I began to read things that were helping me differentiate from my call as the lead pastor...and it forced me to be more reflective than I had been...[enabling] me...to think through why I reacted the way I did, and what would be a healthier response to some of the leadership challenges I was facing.”

It should also be highlighted that both Jason and Greg took sabbaticals in the midst of their ministry challenges. This time away was critical not only for self-care, but

[353] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 51.

for getting perspective on the situation. While counterintuitive, the choice these pastors made to take sabbaticals at this time forced the anxious processes at work to slow down. This, in turn, lowered the overall anxiety in the system.

Thinking and Acting Politically

In the literature review, it was noted how understanding the power dynamics that accompany existing relationships in a given organization, in terms of both formal and informal authority, is critical to negotiating the leadership challenges that arise within the system. Bob Burns states that at its heart, this is a political conversation that requires "choosing among conflicting wants and interests, developing trust, locating support and opposition, developing sensitivity to timing, and knowing the informal and formal organizational refrains."[354] Given the change in organizational structure, specifically the formation of a session that accompanies the organization of a Presbyterian congregation, founding pastors must negotiate much more complex power dynamics subsequent to the organization process. To be effective in leadership, it is incumbent for founding pastors to think and act politically.

Kevin and Stephen were able to draw upon their political or relational capital with their elders and leverage the formal authority of their sessions in order to negotiate their leadership challenge. When Stephen's elders became involved in the leadership challenge, the "calculus" of the challenge shifted. Those who were criticizing Stephen were effectively silenced, which in turn led to their departure from the church. Stephen also noted that going through this struggle with his leaders enhanced their sense of

[354] Burns, Chapman and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*, 210. Cf. Burns, "Learning the Politics of Ministry Practice."

cohesion. He reflected, “We had been through battle together...we are much more bonded together.”

Kevin was able to enlist his session members to visit with those who were upset about the choices the session had made. This choice was politically advantageous because it demonstrated that this was a decision of the entire leadership team and not just the pastor. This shared ownership made it more difficult for those who were opposed to gain traction. When Kevin did have to engage the opposing parties, the elders accompanied him. One remarked, “You made [one] hundred percent the right decision.”

Mark’s situation was more complex. Several elders were affected by the staff person’s criticisms of Mark. Her informal authority among ministry leaders led to several ruling elders initially agreeing with her, which caused a triangulation of relationships. However, when Mark was able to share his side of the story and, more importantly, when other ruling elders accepted Mark’s version of the story, the dynamics shifted in favor of supporting Mark. A senior staffer who also served on the session was particularly helpful. When this staff person defended Mark, “a couple of other elders joined him.” They then started to question the narrative provided by “the other group of elders.” Eventually, the support Mark received was able to unify the entire session in his defense.

The situations facing Robert, Greg, and Jason were more challenging because key stakeholders among the lay leaders opposed them throughout the leadership challenges. Greg and Robert were able to stay connected to those were in opposition and yet recruit and train new leaders who would offer their support. In so doing, these leaders demonstrated a significant degree of emotional intelligence required to negotiate strongly conflictual political processes.

Crucial to maintaining this connection to the opposition was a counterintuitive willingness to accept losses without becoming "emotionally hijacked."[355] Jason admitted error in the way he had dealt with an elder who desired him to step down as pastor. This confession was critical to staying connected to two additional elders whose support Jason needed. It further allowed the adversarial elder to voice his opposition to Jason in the system. While difficult, this actually enhanced Jason's credibility and created a platform from which new elders could be trained and recruited.

Similarly, Greg submitted to his elders' decision to terminate a trusted staff person, even though this action occurred at a session meeting with questionable legitimacy. Nevertheless, acceptance of this loss enabled Greg to garner support from other members of the congregation who were also upset by this staff person's departure. This support eventually translated into new elders who were more aligned with Greg's vision of leadership coming to serve on the session. It was through the presence and support of the new elders that the old elders eventually chose to resign.

It is worth noting that Robert never seemed able to leverage the power dynamics and political processes at work within his ministry system to bring about a more stable ministry system. While elders did participate with him in the process of working through the leadership challenges, Robert never felt supported, and he never believed that the elders were strongly aligned with him. Perhaps this contributed to Robert's resignation from his position as senior pastor within two months of his interview for this research.[356]

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[355] "Negative emotions—especially chronic anger, anxiety, or a sense of futility—powerfully disrupt work, hijacking the task at hand." Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 13.

[356] Robert confirmed this conclusion in a private phone conversation on March 12, 2015.

Making Strategic Changes to Governance Structures

The final leadership capability demonstrated by the research participants was the ability to make strategic changes to the governance structures in their respective churches. For Greg, Mark, and Jason, these changes proved essential to the negotiation of the leadership challenge. There were two different, yet related aspects to these changes: the separation of governance from the day-to-day operation of the church and the establishment of a system for the rotation of elders on the session.

Separation of Governance from the Day-To-Day Operation of the Church

As noted earlier in the literature review, the day-to-day operations of the church can quickly become the focus of the governing board, creating confusion as to who is actually running the church. The most strategic way to answer this question is to distinguish the roles of the organization's senior leader and that of the governing board. Kaiser proposes, "…the position played by the board is governance. Accountable to the board is the pastor, who plays the position of leadership."[357]

This necessitated Jason's desire to define roles in the midst of his leadership challenge. Jason sought "to move the session from a management of all the details of the church, to more of governance model of leadership." Rather than managing "all the details," those could now be "entrust[ed] to...the senior pastor." This, in turn, enabled the session to "evaluate the big pictures items and the shepherding items" of the church.

Interestingly, after his leadership challenge ended, Mark's leadership adopted something they called, "The Guiding Principle." This "was a second permutation [of a document that sought to bring] clarity between the roles and responsibilities of the senior

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[357] Kaiser, *Winning on Purpose*, 46.

pastor versus the ruling elders." The fact that this was the "second" version indicates that a discussion about the definition of roles had already begun among his church's leadership, and therefore, was part of the negotiation of the leadership challenge. In Jason's church, this goal was achieved when the session adopted the document: "The Role of the Senior Pastor."

Rotation System for the Elders

The final organizational change noted by the research participants as important for negotiating the leadership challenge was the formation of a rotation system for ruling elders on the session. The importance of this decision is connected to the great power for influence invested in lay leaders within the Presbyterian system of governance. Burns cites one pastor's perspective on the strategic importance of the elders who serve on the session: "Who is involved in leadership is just… it's almost the whole game. Because out of that flows the culture of the church."[358]

Greg and Jason were able to implement a system of rotation for their sessions, and this was crucial to their ability to negotiate the leadership challenge successfully. Through the entrance of new leaders who were better qualified and more aligned with the vision of the founding pastor, the intense, conflictual aspects of the leadership challenges abated. What is more, the rotation system created the possibility for leadership training with greater depth and breadth in focus. Jason observed that in addition to the knowledge of the Bible, Reformed distinctiveness, and Presbyterian church government, which are the traditional emphases in Presbyterian officer training, the church now focuses a lot more on:

[358] Burns, "Learning the Politics of Ministry Practice," 128.

> The interpersonal maturity of...potential leaders: How will they function as a team? Will they be able to tolerate disagreement, disappointment? Do they have to have their way? Can they form deep relationships? Do they try to control the meeting and never stop talking? Do they never talk? Are they able to confess their sins? Will they forgive, or will they hold grudges? We talk a lot more about those kinds of things in identifying a potential leader than we ever did.

The research shows that without the critical support of key stakeholders in a ministry system, the senior pastor will not be able to negotiate the leadership challenges that arise subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation. During this solidification phase, it is critical that the founding pastor have in place a strong, unified, and supportive session. The cases of Kevin and Stephen strongly demonstrate this conclusion. Because there was cohesion among the members of their core leadership teams, they were more quickly able to negotiate the leadership challenges that arose. In the case of Mark, this support and unity quickly emerged after the initial questions regarding his authority were resolved. These founding pastors demonstrate the necessity for a strong, unified and supportive session.

In the cases of Greg and Jason, this same point is established from a negative perspective. Both Greg and Jason utilized their leadership capabilities to create strong, unified, and supportive sessions, and it was through this process that they were eventually able to negotiate their leadership challenges. That the team's creation was worth many years of effort, as in the Jason's case, further indicates the importance of a cohesive leadership team.

As noted by the literature, this also suggests that from the very beginning of the church's life, church planters should be attuned to the need for healthy and effective officers. Doctrinal and ecclesiastical alignment of leaders is insufficient to negotiate the most difficult of leadership challenges. It is incumbent for church planters to evaluate

elder candidates in terms of their overall emotional intelligence, personal experience of the gospel, and embrace of the church's philosophy of ministry.[359]

The cases of Greg and Jason indicate that a congregation's first session members may not provide the kind of strong, supportive, and unified team necessary for effective congregational leadership. Therefore, creating governance structures – such as officer rotations for members of the session – at the point of the church organization ensures that a process exists to recruit, train, and install new elders. This encourages greater cohesion among the church's officers. Perhaps if Greg and Jason had implemented a rotation system at the point of organization, some of the difficulty associated with their leadership challenges could have been reduced.

Emphasizing this point, when this goal could not be achieved, as in the case of Robert, the relationship between founding pastor and session remained tenuous, and the overall effectiveness of the congregation was hindered. Founding pastors will be unable to negotiate the most difficult of leadership challenges that arise subsequent to the organization of the church without the presence of a cohesive leadership team providing support, strength, and unity.

Leadership as an Adaptive Process

The literature frames the strategies employed by the participants as part of an overall adaptive change process.[360] In contrast to the more technical challenges these

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[359] "Formalizing the leadership and organization of the church too soon is dangerous. Whether its bowing to pressure by zealous supervisors, current "unofficial" leaders, personal insecurities, or personal experiences with previous 'church,' the net effect is the same—a major sea change in the life of the church, and, more importantly, redirecting youthful energies away from mission to management. Either way, formalizing leadership too soon *always* hinders the growth of the plant. The organization of the plant needs time to find its indigenous roots in the mission field. Future leaders need time to prove themselves on the battlefield." Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts*, 102.

[360] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 19ff.

pastors faced during the planting of their churches, the transition from church plant to organized congregation presented challenges for which they felt unprepared and which they did not fully understand. Consequently, the learning process that ensued was an adaptive challenge. These pastors and those closest to the leadership challenge were required to internalize the learning process, which required changes in "priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties."[361]

The fact that these were adaptive challenges also makes allowance for the uniqueness characterizing each situation. No one leadership challenge within the solidification phase of a congregation's life will be identical to that faced by another congregation. These challenges are situation-specific and systemically unique. There is no step-by-step manual on how to negotiate this phase of ministry. In fact, the data revealed by the research is far from exhaustive of all relevant factors. Many more factors pertinent to the negotiation of these challenges could be discovered, and even greater alignment and discontinuities with insights from the literature could be confirmed. Nevertheless, the data from the participants reveal that leaders who negotiate this adaptive process experience very difficult leadership challenges. In order to navigate them, they must grow as leaders. The research contained here reveals those aspects of the learning process essential for negotiating this adaptive process in the hopes of helping others navigate similar leadership challenges.

In order to aid current practitioners and to promote future research, concluding recommendations will be distinguished accordingly.

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[361] Ibid., 19.

Recommendations for Practice

It is important for church planters and founding pastors to obtain a working knowledge of systems theory in order to understand the interconnectedness of their congregations and the importance of the shift in power dynamics, which emerges subsequent to the church's organization. Therefore church planters and pastors should pursue continuing education opportunities focusing on congregational leadership from a systems theory perspective. In addition, seminaries, churches, presbyteries, and church planting agencies and networks are encouraged to provide instruction from a systems theory perspective for church planters and pastors who negotiate the solidification phase of a congregation.

It is important for founding pastors to make an intentional effort to differentiate themselves from their ministries. This becomes critical when one is undergoing a ministry challenge, because at that point the temptation to be absorbed into the ministry challenge is strong. Physical exercise, continuing education, and sabbaticals are shown to strengthen this effort and are effective, boundary-setting strategies employed by pastors. A critical corollary to these efforts was the leader's resistance to over-function in the ministry system and willingness to accept losses related to the ministry challenge.

The leadership challenges associated with the solidification phase will test and develop the founding pastors' leadership credibility and capabilities. It is particularly important for founding pastors to recognize the importance of gaining perspective on their respective challenges, to think and act politically amidst conflictual power dynamics, and to implement strategic changes in governance that enhance the overall effectiveness and unity of the session.

The research shows that without the critical support of key stakeholders in a ministry system, the senior pastor will not be able to negotiate the leadership challenges that arise subsequent to the transition from church plant to organized congregation. During this solidification phase, it is critical that the founding pastor have in place or work towards creating a strong, unified, and supportive session. Therefore, church planters should give great attention to the leadership qualifications necessary for future officers and provide for governance structures during the organization process that will promote and sustain the kind of cohesive session that is necessary to negotiate the leadership challenges that will arise during the solidification phase of the church.

Recommendations for Further Research

Due to the personal and relational impact associated with this phase of ministry and the necessity for skillful, effective leadership, this phase of pastoral ministry should be researched further in order to gain a fuller understanding of what pastors actually experience and are required to negotiate. In order to do this, a case study could be conducted on one of the lengthier and more involved leadership challenges contained in this research or on a comparable situation.

Because of the critical role of elders who serve on the sessions of newly organized Presbyterian churches, and the associated dramatic shift in power dynamics, it is recommended that a qualitative research study be conducted to explore how ruling elders negotiate the leadership challenges experienced subsequent to the congregation's organization.

As the research indicated, some critical stakeholders who participated in the leadership challenges were neither staff members or lay leaders, but members of the

congregation. Given research constraints, this area was not fully explored. Due to their informal, relational capital, however, their interests and perspectives were an important aspect of each founding pastor's negotiation of the leadership challenge. Therefore, it is recommended a qualitative research study be conducted on how an entire congregation might better understand, prepare and negotiate these leadership challenges.

Conclusion

This qualitative research study has confirmed that Presbyterian founding pastors experience the season of congregational life subsequent to the formal organization of the churches they planted as challenging. The leadership challenges, which commonly arise, include personal criticism, criticism about ministry vision or practice, and debates about decision-making authority.

The research revealed a gap in the literature on the treatment of this issue. The research participants also indicated that they had not received any formal training to navigate this season of ministry. Together, these findings show why founding pastors felt unprepared to negotiate these challenges. The research showed that founding pastors who were able to negotiate these leadership challenges began to understand the interconnectedness of their ministry system and differentiated themselves from the overall leadership challenges. Founding pastors must also practice effective leadership strategies and employ strategic methods of church governance in order negotiate these leadership challenges.

Finally, the research indicated that a strong, unified, and supportive session was essential to the founding pastor negotiating these leadership challenges. When this type of session existed prior to the leadership challenge, it was decisive for successfully

negotiating the leadership challenge. When it was absent, the formation of this kind of session became a critical outcome of successfully negotiating the challenging, and proved critical to negotiating associated aspects of the leadership challenge. Therefore, the founding pastors will not successfully negotiate the leadership challenges common to this stage of congregational life without the presence of a cohesive, supportive session.

In conclusion, the researcher hopes that this qualitative research will help better educate founding pastors, lay leaders and congregants participating in church plants about the leadership challenges likely to be encountered during the solidification phase. It is also hoped that this will enhance the leadership effectiveness of founding pastors negotiating this season in a congregation's life and promote a more sustainable form of ministry leadership.

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