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**TRANSITIONING FROM A SOLO PASTORATE
TO A SENIOR PASTORATE**

By

STEVEN L. PETROELJE

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

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Faculty Advisor *Nathan Brum*
Second Faculty Reader *Mark L. Valley*
Director of D.Min. Program *Zach Ewing*
Library Director *James C. Takala*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges encountered by a solo pastor when transitioning into a senior pastor role. The transition from a solo to senior pastor role requires an understanding of new ministry challenges that will be encountered and an ability to develop skills to effectively face these new ministry challenges.

This study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with twelve pastors in the Reformed Church in America. The review of literature and analysis of the twelve interviews focused on three key areas of ministry that affect solo pastors who transition into a church with other ordained pastors on staff. These three areas of focus were: leadership skills and transition, power and authority dynamics, and staff relations.

In the area of leadership skills and transition, the findings of this study revealed leadership skills that must be considered and developed. These included being a team player, delegating, having gifts for leadership, managing time with flexibility, exhibiting certain character traits, and developing one's leadership skills.

In the area of power and authority dynamics, the findings of this study revealed the importance of clearly defined job descriptions and proper use of authority. Pastors reflected on how they felt their ability to influence others changed when becoming a senior pastor. Sources of power and authority were also examined, including God-given authority, formal authority, and earned relational authority.

In the area of staff relations, the findings of this study revealed challenges pastors encounter when leading staff. These issues relate to the role of the pastor in staff meetings, the hiring process, and team building. Because staff ministry and leading other full-time ordained staff is a new component of ministry for those who transition from the solo to senior pastorate, the findings of this section can help pastors better understand what to prepare for and how to lead staff. The final findings of this study revealed how the transition from solo to senior pastorate affects personal aspects of the pastor's life such as family, health, work hours, and other personal boundaries.

This study concluded that those who transition to the senior pastorate must devote more of their time to administration and staff leadership. In turn, staff members tend to provide more direct leadership and care to members in the congregation through the distinct responsibilities of their ministry focus. It was concluded that the amount of influence that a pastor has depends largely on the leadership structure of the church. This study concluded that pastors can learn to develop the skills needed for leading staff. It also revealed boundaries that must be set for ensuring family and personal health.

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Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Pastors are facing challenges in ministry and leadership that are new to modern ministry structures and organization for the church. In the past, many clergy served average-size churches as solo pastors. However, church growth and ministry specialization have resulted in an increased number of multiple-staff churches. Bruce Jones, associate pastor at Moody Church when he wrote the book *Ministerial Leadership in a Managerial World*, states, “There is a demand for more staff, particularly in evangelical churches. The commitment to evangelism in general, and church extension in particular, requires more clergy per capita.”¹

This structural change in church organization often requires solo pastors to transition into senior pastor roles. Larry McSwain, co-editor of *Review and Expositor*, wrote:

Theological education in the past could focus upon the preparation of a universal person capable of a general knowledge extensive enough to meet the needs of the congregation of God’s people. With the increasing size and complexity of local churches new demands emerged for ‘specialists’ in even more narrow parts of the work of the church.²

Despite the quality training students receive at theological institutions, unanticipated conflicts and challenges will arise to confront those who work in a multiple-staff setting. McSwain goes on to identify potential problems that often arise from changes in church leadership structure:

¹ Bruce W. Jones, *Ministerial Leadership in a Managerial World* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), 161.

² Larry McSwain, ed., “Church Staff Relations,” *Review and Expositor* 78:1 (Winter 1981): 3.

Reports from churches reflect echoes of conflict between these specializations. Misunderstandings regarding identity, overlapping responsibilities, and conflicting philosophies of ministry characterize the climate within many church staffs.³

Sadly, when conflicts arise in multiple-staff churches, pastors, churches, and the name of Christ suffer.

However, staff ministry can also prove fruitful and effective for the Kingdom of God. David Larsen, Professor Emeritus of Preaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, points out that “Christian ministry is always seen as shared ministry in the New Testament.”⁴ Walter Jackson, former professor of ministry at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, offers biblical support for the concept of church staff saying:

Jesus, in a sense, had a multiple staff with the twelve disciples. The division of labor in Acts 6 sees ‘seven men of good reputation’ (vs. 3, NASB) set aside to govern the distribution of food at the church’s tables. The diversity of functions as found in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12 and 14, and Ephesians 4 illustrate multiple and differing gifts for ministry. It takes little imagination to visualize the usefulness of Paul’s companions as we trace his missionary journeys across the first-century Roman world. While the term ‘church staff’ is not found in the Scriptures, the idea of people working together in ministry with each assisting others is certainly quite biblical.⁵

Jackson acknowledges that “many crucial work issues arise in a multiple staff situation; these must be addressed.”⁶ He goes on to name some of these crucial work issues: expectations of team members, accountability structures, interpersonal relationships and leadership dynamics in church ministry.

Since the senior pastor in most church structures is responsible for the oversight of both ministry and staff, the senior pastor should have an awareness of these issues

³ Ibid.

⁴ David L. Larsen, *Caring for the Flock: Pastoral Ministry in the Local Congregation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 115.

⁵ David P. Gushee and Walter C. Jackson, eds. *Preparing for Christian Ministry: An Evangelical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 264.

⁶ Ibid., 265.

when agreeing to serve in a multiple-staff setting. If the senior pastor previously served as an associate pastor on a church staff, the pastor probably has a basic understanding of the crucial work issues that often arise in a multiple staff situation. However, if a church calls a senior pastor who has had no prior staff experience, he will encounter new ministry challenges in this role.

MINISTRY CHALLENGES

What can be done to help solo pastors transition into the senior pastor role? Such a transition will require an understanding of new ministry challenges that the pastor will encounter and an ability to develop skills to effectively face these new ministry challenges. These new challenges often fall into three key areas that will be examined in this dissertation through the literature review and personal interviews.

Leadership Skills

“For a church to be healthy, it needs healthy leadership,” asserts pastor and church consultant Donald MacNair.⁷ Quality leadership is a crucial element for the success of any size church or organization. Sometimes we mistakenly measure the leadership abilities of pastors based on the size of the church they serve. James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, authors of books on leadership, offer the following conclusion:

If we value bigger, more grand, and longer, then we are likely to be disappointed in most leaders and in ourselves and to limit to a very few the number of people who can lead. In our view, leadership is both local and global. Acts of credible leadership come in all sizes.⁸

⁷ Donald J. MacNair, *The Practices of a Healthy Church: Biblical Strategies for Vibrant Church Life and Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 1999), 107.

⁸ James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993), 260.

What our culture values in leadership may not be the same as what the Bible calls for in church leadership. There seems to be a growing trend toward pastoral leadership as fulfilling the role of a “CEO.” This mindset can quickly arise when the church is led as if it is a business. Author and pastor Eugene Peterson put it bluntly:

American pastors are abandoning their posts, left and right, and at an alarming rate. They are not leaving their churches and getting other jobs. Congregations still pay their salaries. Their names remain on the church stationary and they continue to appear in pulpits on Sundays. But they are abandoning their posts, their calling. They have gone whoring after other gods. What they do with their time under the guise of pastoral ministry hasn’t the remotest connection with what the church’s pastors have done for most of twenty centuries. . . . matters of God and the soul and scripture are not grist for their mills. The pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeeper’s concerns – how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money.⁹

A return to biblical church leadership is necessary. Regardless of the size of their churches, Christian leaders must acknowledge God as the author of their authority and the one to whom they are accountable. They must view themselves as servant leaders and shepherds of those entrusted to their care.

However, there are new challenges in the ways that pastors exercise leadership skills when transitioning from a solo to senior role. Jones gives eight discernable differences between small and large churches, differences that impact the necessary skills and expectations of church leaders. He explains:¹⁰

- *Preaching* may be just acceptable in a small church; it is often exceptional in a large church.
- *Pastoral Care* is a personal touch in a small church; it is a professional touch in a large church.
- *Pastoral Staff* may be one generalist in a small church; it means additional specialists in a large church.

⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 1-2.

¹⁰ Jones, 137-138.

- *Perception* of Church life is primarily relational in a small church; it is functional in a large church.
- *Program* development is simplified in a small church; it is diversified in a large church.
- *Personalization* of people supports their identity in a small church; their anonymity in a large church.
- *Participation* of members is immediate and direct in a small church; it is intermediate and indirect in a large church.
- *Potential* is focused on the church in a small church; on the community in a large church.

Seminaries are supposed to provide training for future church leaders. But seminary training alone cannot provide future leaders with all of the answers. Some leadership skills must be learned through practice and experience. Former New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani states, “Leadership does not simply happen. It can be taught, learned and developed.”¹¹ Robert Burns and Ronald Cervero studied how pastors learn the politics of ministry practice. They refer to this as “learning in practice.”¹²

This study includes an examination of how leadership skills play a role in the transition from a solo to senior pastorate and how these skills must be learned or altered to make such a transition. It examines necessary qualities of leaders, leadership and relationships, and the impact of transition on leaders.

Power and Authority Dynamics

In light of the conflicts and challenges that are often absent from a single-staff congregation but present in multiple-staff settings, much attention has also been given toward issues of pastoral authority. Robert Dale, a former associate professor of Pastoral leadership and Church Ministries at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, highlights the importance of this second area of focus:

¹¹ Rudolph W. Giuliani, *Leadership* (New York: Miramax Books, 2002), xxi.

¹² Robert W. Burns and Ronald M. Cervero, “How Pastors Learn the Politics of Ministry Practice,” *Religious Education* 97:4 (Fall 2002): 309.

Probably no area in church staff relationships has caused more problems than the question of authority and power. Some pastors have led their church staffs in such a manner that the other members felt they had no opportunity to share their own insights or ministries except as they were directed to do so by the pastor. The pastor, they said, 'ruled' with an iron hand.¹³

On the other hand, Dale points out that the pastor dare not abdicate his position as leader.

To function effectively every congregation must have someone who is designated as the individual with the final authority. Every staff has to have someone who is the leader. Someone must have the overview of the entire staff functions.¹⁴

Even when all staff members accept that one person is designated as the senior or lead pastor with final authority, they may differ in their opinions about how that authority should be exercised. The organizational structure of the church may also dictate the way that a senior pastor uses authority. Some believe that the authority of the senior pastor is autocratic. Others emphasize a team-based ministry where all staff members have input in leadership decisions and the use of their spiritual gifts. Ultimately, all pastors are called to follow the example of Christ, the servant leader who humbled himself to do the Father's will and who is the source of delegated authority.

When a team of pastors can work together with an agreed-upon structure of authority, much fruit can be produced for God's Kingdom. This study reveals the importance of using authority while maintaining an attitude of servanthood. Author and pastor Rick Warren states, "You bring out the best in people by giving them a challenge, giving them control, and giving them the credit."¹⁵ Senior pastors who desire full control hurt their staff and the people they serve. People work better and are ultimately much more effective when they have clear job descriptions that spell out responsibilities, when

¹³ Robert D. Dale, "Leader Style and Church Staff Mesh," *Review and Expositor* 78:1 (Winter 1981): 15.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 388.

they know their authority as well as their responsibility, and have mutual confidence in and good relationships with their colleagues.¹⁶ Allen Graves, former Senior Professor of Church Administration and Dean Emeritus of the School of Religious Education at Southern Seminary in Louisville, summarizes the view of a team-based ministry that is less authoritative by quoting the words of Gaines S. Dobbins, in “Learning to Lead”:

Leadership is not getting above others in prestige and power. It is servanthip – getting down under the load of human need to bear it sacrificially and redemptively. According to this standard, the measure of greatness is not prominence but humility, not excellence but faithfulness, not authority but obedience, not being served but service.¹⁷

The transition into serving as a senior pastor of a multiple staff led church will involve times when staff and authority issues arise that the pastor never confronted as a solo pastor. Jones effectively summarizes the advantages and potential problems that exist when a pastor becomes a senior pastor with staff, perhaps making this transition for the first time. He writes:

Multiple-staff ministries provide great potential for growth, but, as we have seen, they can produce problems as well. Before accepting a staff position, a candidate should seek a clear definition of his or her responsibilities and the relationships he or she will enter with the senior pastor, the other staff, and the structures they will be required to work through. On the other hand, when a minister-manager becomes a senior pastor of a church, he should not assume the *modus operandi* he used in his former church needs no adjustment to his new church. And if he has never been a senior pastor, he should make every effort to learn how to be an effective minister-manager of multiple staff if he wants his church to grow.¹⁸

This study considers how senior pastors can exercise authority in a way that is biblical, shared and humble. This is no easy task in light of our sinful nature,

¹⁶ Allen W. Graves, “Factors in Church Staff Effectiveness for Today’s Churches,” *Review and Expositor* 78:1 (Winter 1981): 30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸ Jones, 176.

expectations of church members and leaders, and challenges that arise when serving on a team.

Staff Relations

In light of the new challenges that exist within multi-staff churches, a variety of solutions have been proposed to help those who transition into a multiple-staff setting. Many in the field of church leadership try to uphold effective church administration as a solution to the conflicts that arise. A church is both an organism and an organization. According to author Charles Tidwell, “An organism is a complex structure of interdependent and subordinate elements whose relations and properties are largely determined by the function of the whole. . . . Such an organism *requires administration* – good administration – if it is to be very effective.”¹⁹ Several other authors also focus on the importance of a pastor developing administrative skills and abilities. But staff relations deal with the sensitive natures of people and their ability to work together. There must be more to solid staff relations than good organization.

A senior pastor himself, George Cladis opens his book *Leading the Team Based Church* by stating his conviction that “if a church is to succeed in carrying out a healthy ministry and developing a good Christian community there must be stable and high-quality relationships among the members of the principle leadership team.”²⁰

Those who transition from a solo to senior pastorate enter into previously untread water when it comes to the relationships among full-time paid staff. They may have experience with volunteers in the solo church setting, but working with other paid staff

¹⁹ Charles A. Tidwell, *Church Administration: Effective Leadership for Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1985), 12.

²⁰ George Cladis, *Leading the Team Based Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), ix.

comes with new challenges. How can one enhance interpersonal staff dynamics when leading staff meetings, building teams or delegating power? A pastor can be a wonderful preacher and teacher, but if the pastor cannot carry out the necessary relational aspects within a multiple staff ministry, conflicts will arise. Some churches now hire executive pastors or church administrators to help with personnel related issues.

Regardless of who it is, someone must be proactive in helping staff members work together for the good of the staff, church and members. Church consultants Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree state in their book *The Elephant in the Boardroom*, “A church with a large staff is vulnerable because of its complexity. The pastor must be able to work with two constituencies – the congregation and the staff – each requiring a distinct set of tools.”²¹

The third ministry challenge of staff relations in this dissertation examines how healthy staff relationships play a key role in churches of more than one ordained pastor. Through an examination of literature and personal interviews, the challenges of working as a team in the context of multiple staff and the senior pastor’s role to the staff are considered.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

Frank Wade, a rector and author who has served in large and small congregations, warns, “The wise among us will carefully consider the special aspects of the role of senior pastor in a large congregation before leaping into it.”²² In light of this warning, what kinds of adjustments are necessary when a solo pastor transitions into a senior pastor position and begins to serve in a church with other ordained pastors on staff?

²¹ Graves, 29.

²² Frank Wade, “Thriving in a Large Congregation,” *Congregations* 31:1 (Winter 2005): 10.

Senior pastors with staff deal with certain ministry dynamics that do not exist in a solo pastorate. As a current solo pastor who may someday be called to serve as a senior pastor with other staff, I want to discover what kind of ministry adjustments must be made by the senior pastor so that I and others who make this transition can be prepared to serve as a healthy and empowering leader. The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges encountered by a solo pastor when transitioning into a senior pastor role.

PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Three main areas that are central to this pastoral transition have been identified: leadership skills and transition, power and authority dynamics and staff relations. To that end, the following research questions surfaced:

1. What leadership and transitional challenges do solo pastors encounter when they become senior pastors?
2. What power and authority challenges do solo pastors encounter when they become senior pastors?
3. What staff-relation challenges do solo pastors encounter when they become senior pastors?
4. What lessons have pastors who have made this transition learned which can benefit future pastors who make the same transition?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study has significance for many who are affected by a pastoral transition from the solo to senior role. This study is significant for the pastor making the transition, staff who serve with that pastor, church health, search committees and family members.

First, there is significance for the pastor who makes this transition. When pastors transition into a multiple staff context, they must learn to minister in the midst of ministry

dynamics that differ from their solo pastorate experience. Changes in ministry practice must occur when making this transition. Not only are these transitions important for ministry effectiveness, they are also important for the long-term spiritual and emotional health of the many people affected. Ministry mistakes can carry long-term consequences for the staff and congregation if trust, communication or interpersonal relationships are damaged. If the necessary transitions and adjustments are not made, pastors may find themselves and their families affected by the response of a disgruntled congregation or leadership board. This study discerned challenges encountered by those who become senior pastors. Awareness of these challenges may help pastors' transition more smoothly into their new roles.

Second, this study offers significant insight for associate pastors who serve under a senior pastor in a multiple staff ministry setting. Although this study will focus primarily on the transitions that are necessary for the senior pastor, the results of this study will also benefit associate pastors who serve under new senior pastors. Just as there is much at stake for the senior pastor and family, staff-related transitions also deeply impact the ministry and personal well being of an associate. Dale warns of what is at stake for associate pastors who serve under first-time senior pastors who do not transition well:

Young ministers are encouraged to plunge into church work and gain experience early. They become generalists. When they move to a multiple staff setting, they are suddenly confronted with responsibility for supervision. Without a background in supervising others or in being supervised, young ministers learn supervision at the expense of their peers in ministry. Trial-and-error supervision of professional peers brings trouble.²³

²³ Dale, 15.

Third, this study provides significant insight for members of the church body who are impacted by multiple ordained or unordained staff members serving together.

Problems that exist between staff members result in stunted growth for church members.

Author William Tuck claims:

If church members see staff workers who are constantly putting each other down, circumventing each other for a place of greater recognition in the church, and unable to relate well with their fellow ministers, they will have great difficulty in understanding what it means to be servants in Christ's name.²⁴

When problems between staff members lead to termination of a position or a decision made by one or both pastors to leave the church, the congregation suffers from an absence of leadership. When pastors are unable to learn how to make effective transitions, they may carry poor ministry habits and attitudes into other congregations that they serve. Whenever an unhealthy ministry staff serves in a way that is detrimental to the church, the name of Jesus Christ is not glorified and the effectiveness of the church is hindered.

Fourth, this study has significance for search committee members of a multi-staff congregation as they seek to understand issues that potential pastoral candidates will face if they are currently serving in a solo role. Search committees seeking to call a senior pastor must keep issues pertaining to leadership, staff relations and authority matters in mind. Search committees must address these issues with prospective candidates during the candidating process as well as help in whatever way possible to prepare for the pastor's arrival and commencement of ministry. This study will be useful for search

²⁴ William P. Tuck, "A Theology for Healthy Church Staff Relations," *Review and Expositor* 78:1 (Winter 1981): 10.

committees as they consider how their next pastor will deal with matters of leadership, staff relations and authority.

Finally, this study has significance for family members of pastors who make this transition. Every pastoral transition involves a degree of transition for family members as well as the pastor. This includes the spouse and children (especially if children are still at home). For this reason, the family should be involved in the process of discerning a transition. John R. Cionca, executive director of Ministry Transitions, Inc. and professor of ministry leadership at Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, points to the impact of a pastoral transition upon a spouse and children:

Most marriages today, even among the clergy, are dual-career relationships. Some ministers' spouses work to supplement a modest pastoral salary; others work to fulfill their own giftedness. The complexity of family life today has led one executive minister to conclude, "Without essential wholehearted agreement that a change is the right thing for all, you'd better not do it." God does not reveal His will only to the cleric.²⁵

Likewise, Cionca goes on to say:

Children, especially those in adolescence, react with a wide variety of emotions to a possible move. Their first response can vary from "You might leave, but we're staying!" to "All right – we're out of here!"²⁶

This study will seek to help those transitioning from a solo to senior pastorate do so in a way that is healthy, productive and as smooth as possible for family members who will also be experiencing transition and new challenges in their personal lives. A better understanding of how to make this transition in a healthy way will provide significant benefit to family members.

²⁵ John R. Cionca, *Before You Move: A Guide to Making Transitions in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), 87.

²⁶ Ibid.

This chapter has introduced the problem, purpose, and significance of this study. The research questions focus on the areas of leadership and transition, power and authority dynamics and staff relations. Following a defining of terms for this study, chapter two reviews the literature that addresses the focus of this study.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

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

Associate Pastor – A pastor serving a local church under the leadership of a senior pastor.

Authority – Power and influence derived from a stated position.

Church Administration – “The guidance provided by church leaders as they lead the church to use its spiritual, human, physical, and financial resources to move the church toward reaching its objectives and fulfilling its avowed purpose. It is enabling the children of God who comprise the church to become and to do what they can become and do, by God’s grace.”²⁷

Church Multiple Pastoral Staff – A group of two or more ordained ministers serving in one congregation.

Classis – A body of churches within a denomination and located within geographical proximity that work together to serve the Lord.

Consistory – A group of church leaders elected by the congregation and ordained and installed to carry out distinct leadership responsibilities for a set term.

Executive Leadership Team – A leadership group consisting of representatives from a church consistory and other lay members. This team is often smaller in number than the elected consistory and are often empowered to make decisions or carry out the groundwork for the fuller leadership body.

Pastoral Authority – “The use of gift, position, and opportunity to release others at the right time so that pastor and people serve Christ together.”²⁸

Power – “The capacity to act, distributed to people by virtue of the enduring social relationships in which they participate.”²⁹

²⁷ Tidwell, 27.

²⁸ Bill Lawrence, *Effective Pastoring: Giving Vision, Direction, and Care to Your Church* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1999), 109.

Reformed Church in America (RCA) – A Christian denomination located in the United States and Canada consisting of 934 churches and nearly 170,000 confessing members.

Senior Pastor – A pastor who is designated as the leader of a church staff. This pastor may also be referred to as the “lead pastor” or may be called by the specific task he/she is responsible for carrying out such as “pastor of preaching” or “pastor of leadership”.

Solo Pastor – An ordained pastor serving a local congregation with no other ordained clergy on staff.

Trust – “Confidence earned from others through an intimate observation of our character and actions over an extended period of time.”³⁰

²⁹ Robert W. Burns, “*Learning the Politics of Ministry Practice*,” (Ph.D diss., University of Georgia, 2001), 11.

³⁰ Ibid., 124.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges encountered by a solo pastor when transitioning into a senior pastor role. Wade warns, “The wise among us will carefully consider the special aspects of the role of senior pastor in a large congregation before leaping into it.”³¹

In order to consider and understand how pastors can make this transition, a biblical/theological framework was examined, and three key areas of literature were reviewed. The literature on leadership skills, including skills needed for the challenges faced in times of transition, provided a framework for pastoral leadership. The literature on power dynamics and authority showed what is necessary for healthy leadership to function. Finally, the literature on staff relations revealed how a senior pastor must lead with others.

BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

What does the Bible have to say about leadership, especially ministerial leadership? How can the inspired Word of God be applied to pastoral leadership, including leadership in a larger church? The Bible upholds planning and preparation before making changes. Solomon, a man endowed with great wisdom, wrote in Proverbs 14:15, “A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.” Jesus said in Luke 14:28, “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first

³¹ Wade, 10.

sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?” From these verses it makes sense that a prudent solo pastor will sit down and estimate what is required of serving as a senior pastor prior to making that transition and facing the challenges.

The biblical teaching for leadership must serve as the foundation. Even though other models can be considered, the Bible must be our starting point. Richard Rardin, founder of Servant Shepherd Ministries, writes:

Without a doubt, many helpful methods and practices that originate in the business world can be applied in the Church. But here is the problem: Leadership models and philosophies employed in the business world have typically been stripped of their moral content. The only remaining questions are whether a given method works, whether successful leaders use it, and whether or not there is empirical evidence that suggests the model can be successfully applied elsewhere. In the business realm, the moral rightness or wrongness of the model is rarely questioned. Leadership methods are assumed to be neutral.³²

However, because we live in a world created by the God who established morality and truth, we must guard against leadership models that are stripped of moral content. As a result of our fallen nature, it is easy for us to pursue leadership principles that stray from the moral and biblical framework for Christian leadership. It is no less important today that we in church leadership positions understand and follow the philosophy of leadership exemplified and taught by our Lord.³³ Therefore, our framework for pastoral leadership in the church must be biblical. What does a biblical framework for pastoral leadership look like? What key foundational principles must be followed?

³² Richard Rardin, *The Servants Guide to Leadership* (Sandy Hook, CT: Servant Shepherd Ministries, 2001), xvii.

³³ *Ibid.*, xx

God is the Author of Authority

Rardin points to the authority of God through creation in Genesis one and two, and the giving of the law as it was inscribed by God in Exodus 32:15-16, as passages that reflect God as the source of authority:

God is the ultimate source of authority. It originates in Him. He authors all authority on earth as well as in heaven, whether exercised by men or by angels. The Scriptures make clear that he chooses to share His authority so that His will might be established in the lives of humankind.³⁴

Jesus possessed this divine authority as revealed to us in the gospels (Matthew 7:28-29, 21:23, 28:18; John 10:18, 17:2-4).³⁵ Before we can speak of any power and authority granted to pastors, we must remember that any power or authority that we have as pastors comes from God and is sustained by Him. Samuel Southard, a minister and pastoral counselor, stresses Christ as the source for any pastoral authority when he writes, “Christian authority is the continuation of the servant mission of the Lord. . . . All authority in Christian faith must take its meaning from Christ’s ministry. He is the source of power that legitimizes spiritual demands.”³⁶

Walter C. Jackson, former Professor of Ministry at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes:

Jesus is every Christian’s leader. The gospels present him as the final, full revelation of God. “I am in the Father and the Father in Me” (John 14:10). “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Yet, with such overwhelming leadership credentials, Jesus insisted he had come as servant, not as overlord.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid., 24.

³⁵ Ibid., 26.

³⁶ Samuel Southard, *Pastoral Authority in Personal Relationships* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1969), 11-12.

³⁷ Gushee and Jackson, 178-179.

It is this servant nature that leads us to a second key biblical and foundational principle for pastoral leadership.

Christian Leaders Must Lead as Servants and Shepherds

Pastor and author Eugene Peterson writes about the temptation for pastors to try to replace God rather than lead, pray and witness as servants and shepherds.

Pastors, instead of practicing prayer, which brings people into the presence of God, enter into the practice of messiah: we will do the work of God for God, fix people up, tell them what to do, conspire in finding the shortcuts by which the long journey to the Cross can be bypassed since we all have such crowded schedules right now. People love us when we do this. It is flattering to be put in the place of God. It feels wonderful to be treated in this godlike way. And it is work that we are generally quite good at.³⁸

If they are not careful, pastors can easily slip out of the role of servant and shepherd and into a role that promotes self-seeking and earthly glory. Peterson writes about this temptation:

Is there any way that I can live with these people and love them without being shaped by the golden-calf culture? How can I keep from settling into the salary and benefits of a checkout clerk in a store for religious consumers? How can I avoid a metamorphosis from the holy vocation of pastor into a promising career in religious sales?³⁹

Jesus taught and modeled for us how to stand strong in the midst of worldly temptation and the pursuit of earthly success. According to Mark 9:35, Jesus came as a servant.

This passage states, “Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘if anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.’” Likewise, Mark 10:42-45 says:

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even

³⁸ Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus also came to earth as a shepherd. He said of himself in John 10:14, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” Contrary to the example of Christ, the religious leaders of Israel were warned in Ezekiel 34 against being unfaithful shepherds of God’s people. Pastors are servants under the good shepherd. As those entrusted to serve as shepherds of God’s people, we must always remember that the people in the kingdom of God do not belong to the leaders; they belong to the Lord.⁴⁰ This is not always an easy principle to keep. “Servant leadership, as portrayed in the gospels, is difficult to maintain in a climate where increasingly larger segments of the Christian population prefer ‘super-leader’ styles.”⁴¹

Christian Leaders are Accountable to God

God is the author of authority. Any authority is spiritual authority delegated from Christ. Pastors must always remember that Christ is the head of the Church, the one to whom they answer. The Apostle Paul clearly presents the supremacy of Christ in Colossians 1:15-18:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Hebrews 4:13 says, “Nothing in all of creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” When pastors fail to remember that they are accountable to God, they can

⁴⁰ Rardin, 41.

⁴¹ Gushee and Jackson, 181.

develop a sense of arrogance and experience hardened hearts. William D. Lawrence, Executive director of the Center for Christian Leadership and Professor of Pastoral Ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary, refers to this as Leader's Disease. Lawrence writes,

Like the disciples, we have turned away from all other pursuits to follow Christ, but we can also mix our commitment with expectations that keep us from seeing Him for who He truly is and what He intends to do through us. We fill our minds with our puny plans and miss His powerful purpose for us, even as the disciples did. We have "Leader's Disease," that is, hardened hearts."⁴²

A biblical example of this leader's disease is found in Mark 8 where Peter puts his will ahead of Christ's:

Peter was pursuing man's interests rather than God's (8:33). Peter's expectations conflicted with God's purposes. He was looking for position and power, while God was looking for sacrifice and humility. He was afflicted with the dreaded Leader's Disease. Jesus' words show us that Leader's Disease is a chronic condition of the heart that is contaminated by expectations of self-reliance, position, power, recognition and control. It pursues man's interests rather than God's, while serving Christ. This faith must be purified, and until this happens, those with Leader's Disease will turn from the Cross with the same motives, fears and pride Satan has.⁴³

Satan is an example of one who defied accountability and submission to God.

The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25 teaches that all gifts have been entrusted by God and that someday we will all be accountable for what we have done with our resources. The reply of Jesus that is desired is, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Summary of the Biblical/Theological Framework

The Bible has much to say about how pastors should be serving in the church today. Pastors must understand that God is the author of any authority they have been entrusted with. It is easy for pastors in positions of authority to become prideful, rather

⁴² Lawrence, 21-22.

⁴³ Ibid., 31-32.

than humble and faithful. The Bible also teaches that leaders, including those in the church, must lead with a servant's heart and the loving compassion of a shepherd for the sheep who belong to God. Maintaining a servant nature, as Jesus modeled during his time on earth, will help pastors minister effectively among fellow staff members and the congregation. Finally, the Bible provides a framework that includes accountability to God. We are called to be faithful in God's eyes, not successful in the world's eyes.

Keeping a right perspective on these three principles that serve as a biblical/theological framework for ministry will help pastors serve according to the will and purpose of God. This framework serves as the foundation for examining what the literature says about the three key areas that must be understood for a solo pastor to face the challenges of transitioning into a senior pastor role.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

In the previous section, three foundational principles for ministry leadership were reviewed within the biblical/theological framework. With this review in mind, effective leadership and management qualities identified in the literature can be examined.

Qualities of a Leader

Jones says:

As I understand it, a biblical philosophy of management simply evaluates the purposes, people, principles, and practices of a church organization by scriptural standards. As such, I believe there can be a biblical philosophy of management in the broadest sense of the term, even though Christian leaders and pastors will develop distinctive philosophies of management within these broad guidelines. Pastors have a dual role: They have been called to minister to people as well as to administer the local church. I have found, in my own experience as well as in the observations of others, that being a minister is not an either/or relationship, but, in the truest sense, it is a both/and responsibility. The pastor is both minister and

manager. . . .There is no doubt in my mind that the task of ministry critically involves the theme of management in effective and growing churches.⁴⁴

Some pastors may feel like their calling to Word and prayer make them exempt from a managerial role. However, even the Apostles understood the responsibility of oversight and made sure that this need was met as recorded in Acts 6. Jackson affirms the need for management in ministry when he writes:

We see ministry leadership when the goals and mission statements of God's people become the ongoing accomplished results of those involved and especially so when the accomplishments are achieved through activities compatible with our biblical faith. . . . Christian ministry leaders are empowered to use every knowable leadership and management strategy ethically appropriate for each particular ministry setting and to rely upon God and discerning Christian wisdom for the strategies to design, equip, empower, and accomplish Christ's desires for His disciples.⁴⁵

Leadership and managerial qualities and methods that are evident in the world can be used as long as they serve God's purposes. Lawrence describes this purpose:

Our purpose is to glorify God by making disciples. And we are to do this by equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry. There is no greater privilege than to be God's instruments to help mature His children into effective servants for Him. Our purpose as pastor is to be disciple-makers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry so our churches can mature (Eph. 4:7-16). This purpose drives, pushes, and pulls us all at the same time. It fills our thinking, consumes our energy, focuses our time, and turns our lives into a blaze of God's glory.⁴⁶

What are some of the leadership qualities practiced outside of the church setting that may be helpful when applied to the biblical calling and purpose of pastoral leadership? What do authors writing from a business perspective offer in terms of leadership qualities which pastors could benefit from? James Kouzes and Barry Posner, authors of the best selling book *The Leadership Challenge*, list five key qualities.

⁴⁴ Jones, 32-33.

⁴⁵ Gushee and Jackson, 169-170.

⁴⁶ Lawrence, 67.

Leadership is not all about personality; it's about practice. We've forged these common practices into a model of leadership, and we offer it here as guidance for leaders to follow as they attempt to keep their own bearings and guide others toward peak achievements. As we looked deeper into the dynamic process of leadership, through case analyses and survey questionnaires, we uncovered five practices common to personal-best leadership experiences. When getting extraordinary things done in organizations, leaders engage in these Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership:⁴⁷

1. Model the Way:

Titles are granted, but it is your behavior that wins you respect. . . .

Modeling the way is essentially about earning the right and the respect to lead through direct individual involvement and action. People first follow the person, then the plan.⁴⁸

2. Inspire a Shared Vision:

Leaders inspire a shared vision. They gaze across the horizon of time, imagining the attractive opportunities that are in store when they and their constituents arrive at a distant destination. Leaders have a desire to make something happen, to change the way things are, to create something that no one else has ever created before. Leaders cannot command commitment, only inspire it.⁴⁹

3. Challenge the Process:

Leaders are pioneers – people who are willing to step out into the unknown. They search for opportunities to innovate, grow and improve. The leader's primary contribution is in the recognition of good ideas, the support of those ideas, and the willingness to challenge the system to get new products, processes, services and systems adopted. Leaders know well that innovation and change all involve experimentation, risk and failure. They proceed anyway.⁵⁰

4. Enable Others to Act:

Leadership is a team effort. Exemplary leaders enable others to act. They foster collaboration and trust. Leaders make it possible for others to do good work. They know that those who are expected to produce the results must feel a sense of personal power and ownership. When leadership is a relationship founded on trust and confidence, people take risks, make changes, keep organizations and movements alive. Through that relationship, leaders turn their constituents into leaders themselves.⁵¹

⁴⁷ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2002), 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 14-15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁵¹ Ibid., 18-19.

5. Encourage the Heart:

It is part of the leader's job to show appreciation for people's contributions and to create a culture of celebration. Leaders know that celebrations and rituals, when done with authenticity and from the heart, build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry a group through extraordinarily tough times.⁵²

It is not hard to see how pastoral ministry can utilize these qualities of leadership within the church. Pastors are called to be models, to inspire others to serve and live for God, to challenge the process, to empower others for ministry and to encourage the hearts of those we serve.

Another secular source considered in this section of the literature review comes from the book *Leadership* by Rudolph Giuliani. What qualities for leadership given by Giuliani can be useful for pastoral leaders? Giuliani offers the following insights and quotes regarding necessary leadership qualities:

1. Encouragement:

"One of the best parts of being mayor – really, of any leadership role – is getting the chance to let people know how much their work means to you. Setting that tone early and often was not only good for my employees and for the organization – it did me good, too."⁵³

2. Preparation:

"I realized that preparation – thus eliminating the need to make assumptions – was the single most important key to success, no matter what the field. Leaders may possess brilliance, extraordinary vision, fate, even luck. Those help; but no one, no matter how gifted, can perform without careful preparation, thoughtful experiment, and determined follow through."⁵⁴

3. Patience in Discernment:

"Making the right choices is the most important part of leadership. . . . One of the trickiest elements of decision-making is working out not what, but when. Regardless of how much time exists before a decision must be made, I never make up my mind until I have to. . . . Many are tempted to decide an issue simply to end the discomfort of indecision. However, the

⁵² Ibid., 20-21.

⁵³ Giuliani, 40.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 52.

longer you have to make a decision, the more mature and well-reasoned that decision should be.”⁵⁵

4. Overall Mission:

“The first question is always, ‘what’s the mission?’ Ask yourself what you’d like to achieve – not day-to-day, but your overarching goal. Then assess and analyze your resources.”⁵⁶

5. Purpose:

“Anyone leading a large organization risks losing a feel for the forest while managing the trees. I deliberated on the purpose not only of individual agencies, but of government itself. I’d go through the questions: What are we here for? What are the available resources?”⁵⁷

These are all qualities and questions that are asked by those serving as pastoral leaders within the church: How can I encourage others? How can I best be prepared? How do I discern what to do? What is the mission and purpose? Being an effective leader in these and other areas that are also basic qualities for leaders in the “secular” setting is crucial for healthy pastoral leadership.

A final secular source that offers insight into leadership qualities comes from Jim Collins, author of the best-selling book *Good to Great*. In this book, Collins examined leadership qualities that were found in companies that excelled and distinguished themselves above comparison companies who met average gains. The leaders of these top companies were referred to as “Level 5 leaders – an individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will.”⁵⁸ These “secular” qualities of Level 5 leaders can also offer helpful insights for church leaders and churches that seek to carry out the Great Commission. Collins noticed that the “good-to-great” companies shared, among others, the following four characteristics:

⁵⁵ Ibid., 123.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 306.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 317.

⁵⁸ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 21.

1. Leadership:
Collins writes: “We were surprised, shocked really, to discover the type of leadership required for turning a good company into a great one. Compared to high-profile leaders with big personalities who make headlines and become celebrities, the good-to-great leaders seem to have come from Mars. Self-effacing, quiet, reserved, even shy – these leaders are a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. They are more like Lincoln and Socrates than Patton or Caesar.”⁵⁹
2. First Who... Then What:
Collins explains: “We expected that good-to-great leaders would begin by setting a new vision and strategy. We found instead that they first got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats – and *then* they figured out where to drive it. The old adage “People are your most important asset” turns out to be wrong. People are not your most important asset. The *right* people are.”⁶⁰
3. A Culture of Discipline
Collins put it this way: “All companies have a culture, some companies have discipline, but few companies have a *culture of discipline*. When you have disciplined people, you don’t need hierarchy. When you have disciplined thought, you don’t need bureaucracy. When you have disciplined action, you don’t need excessive controls. When you combine a culture of discipline with an ethic of entrepreneurship, you get the magical alchemy of great performance.”⁶¹
4. The Hedgehog Concept
Basically, the Hedgehog Concept refers to an effort to be committed to a direct vision and purpose that fit that particular company. Collins describes it this way: “All the good-to-great companies attained a very simple concept that they used as a frame of reference for all their decisions, and this understanding coincided with breakthrough results.”⁶² “A Hedgehog concept is not a goal to be the best, a strategy to be the best, an intention to be the best, a plan to be the best. It is an understanding of what you can be the best at. The distinction is absolutely crucial.”⁶³ “A Hedgehog Concept is a simple, crystalline concept that flows from deep understanding about the intersection of the following three circles:”⁶⁴
 - What can you be the best in the world at (and, equally important, what you cannot be the best in the world at)?

⁵⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 95.

⁶³ Ibid., 98.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 95-96.

- What drives your economic engine? (or what sustains effective growth?)
- What are you deeply passionate about?

How do the qualities for leaders such as those discovered by Jim Collins in his examination of “good-to-great” companies apply to pastoral leaders? Author and church researcher Thom Rainer was so inspired by Collin’s work in the business field that he was moved to conduct similar research for “good-to-great” churches. He referred to these churches as “breakout churches.”⁶⁵ To be a “breakout church,” the following six criteria had to be met:⁶⁶

1. The church has had at least 26 conversions annually since its breakout year.
2. The church has averaged a conversion ratio no higher than 20:1 at least one year since its breakout year. This ratio answers the question, how many members does it take to reach one person for Christ in a year?
3. The church had been declining or had plateaued for several years prior to its breakout year, or the church was experiencing some time of stagnation not readily apparent in the statistics.
4. The church broke out of this “slump” and has sustained new growth for several years.
5. The slump, reversal, and breakout all took place under the same pastor.
6. Since the breakout point, the church has made a clear and positive impact on the community, and there are numerous stories that lives have been changed as a direct result of this.

The leadership qualities of the pastors who led these breakout churches were strikingly similar to the qualities of the leaders studied by Collins in *Good to Great*. Using a similar format to Collin’s research and comparing breakout churches with comparison churches, Rainer came to the following conclusions about the leadership qualities of the breakout church leaders. Rainer refers to these persons as Acts 6/7

⁶⁵ Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

leaders.⁶⁷ According to Rainer, an Acts 6/7 leader shows evidence of six key traits, or ascending levels of leadership ability.⁶⁸ Every church leader achieves at least the first of these levels, but those who met the six “breakout church” criteria showed evidence of all six levels.

The first level of leadership Rainer defined in the church setting was that of the called leader. This “Acts 1” leader knows of God’s call to ministry and has responded to that call. The second level is called the contributing leader. This “Acts 2” leader takes time to do well the basics of ministry such as preaching, teaching and prayer. The third level of leadership is the outwardly-focused leader. This “Acts 3” leader seeks to lead church and self to ministry beyond the walls of the church.

The fourth level is the passionate leader. This “Acts 4” leader exudes a contagious enthusiasm for ministry, which others gladly follow. The fifth level is the bold leader. This “Acts 5” leader is willing to take risks where success is only possible in God’s power. The final level, the Acts 6/7 leader, is called the legacy leader; he/she displays several important characteristics and qualities and is concerned about successful ministry beyond his/her own lifetime.

Rainer and his team discovered eight common characteristics in the Acts 6/7 leaders. The first is fierce Biblical faithfulness. All of the Acts 6/7 leaders are evangelicals who hold a high view of Scripture. Acts 6/7 leaders both believe and act upon their belief.⁶⁹

The second characteristic is a longer tenure. Acts 6/7 leaders are willing to and even want to have long-term ministries at one church.⁷⁰ They stay with a church during

⁶⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 44-45.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 54-56.

the difficult times even though there may be numerous temptations to move to a greener pasture.⁷¹

The third is confident humility. Acts 6/7 leaders displayed an unpretentious humility with their confidence. We saw no less confidence in the Acts 6/7 leaders, but their confidence centered more on what God was doing in their lives and less on their own inherent abilities. They were often reluctant to attribute any of the church's accomplishments to themselves. Their modesty was compelling and sincere.⁷²

The fourth characteristic is an acceptance of responsibility. These leaders refuse to blame others. They accept the responsibility that comes with being a leader. Weak leaders of churches blame people and circumstances. Breakout church leaders accept responsibility and see God's possibilities in even difficult situations.⁷³

The fifth characteristic is unconditional love of the people. Despite the pains and trials they experienced, the breakout church leaders still express an intense love for the members of their congregations. Breakout leaders love their flock unconditionally.⁷⁴

Persistence is the sixth characteristic of an Acts 6/7 leader. Because these leaders have a long-term perspective of their ministries at the churches they serve, they are able to lead toward progress one incremental step at a time. The combination of pastoral tenure and persistence seems to be a powerful combination that God has used to move these churches to greatness. While many of our comparison church leaders had a pattern

⁷⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁷¹ Ibid., 37.

⁷² Ibid., 59.

⁷³ Ibid., 61-62.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 62.

of leaving churches at the early signs of difficulties and obstacles, the Acts 6/7 leaders recognize that the greatest days for the church may lie just beyond the latest struggle.⁷⁵

The seventh characteristic is an outwardly focused vision. They consistently had a vision that was outwardly focused. In other words, a key component of their vision was to reach those who were not yet part of the church. They were passionate about reaching the lost and unchurched, and the visions they communicated inevitably reflected this priority.⁷⁶

The final characteristic is a desire for a lasting legacy. The ambition and drive of these leaders cannot be denied. And that ambition is not limited to their personal successes. They are ambitious for the church to be thriving and healthy well beyond their ministries and even their lifetimes.⁷⁷

Rainer's findings showed similarities between breakout churches and good-to-great companies. The comparison of leadership qualities and leadership principles between businesses (Collins) and churches (Rainer) reveals similarities and demonstrates how pastoral leaders can gain valuable insights and applications from the "secular" world. For this to happen, pastoral leaders must be willing to learn new skills and continually develop as leaders.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 65.

Learned Leadership

Leadership involves being the person that God has created and gifted you to be.

Leadership is at least a functioning quality of a minister's active self.⁷⁸ Jackson offers this insight:

Leadership, in any case, is not optional for a minister. If you are a minister, you are already a leader. Believers look to you, a minister, as if God has already given you the gift of leadership. In whatever way you speak, act, or teach; that will be considered leadership activity by your parishioners. Everything about you, who you are and how you behave, is factored into the way people see you as a leader.⁷⁹

Despite the fact that pastors are considered leaders because of their pastoral role, they do not stop learning how to be pastoral leaders upon graduation from seminary. In their book *Leading Congregational Change*, Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Furr acknowledge the limitations of seminary training:

The current setting for ministry demands continuous learning. Entire congregations must develop the capacity to adjust their way of life by learning new competencies. Leaders play a critical role in acquiring these new skills. Most clergy actually receive little or no formal training in leadership as portrayed in this book. In fact, most seminaries seem to assume a managerial role for the pastor. Beyond preaching, teaching, and pastoral care, they depict leadership primarily as planning and implementing programs and events.⁸⁰

This "learned leadership" is supported by the research of Burns and Cervero as depicted in their study of learning to minister amidst the politics of ministry practice. Burns and Cervero write, "Learning in practice refers to the construction of knowledge that takes place as professionals grow through experience and reflection on that experience."⁸¹

⁷⁸ Gushee and Jackson, 169.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 171.

⁸⁰ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 95-96.

⁸¹ Burns and Cervero, 309.

This learning is continual. “Political learning is cumulative in nature for pastors; they mature through levels of proficiency. Pastors generally enter the ministry with a great deal of technical knowledge, but very little political understanding.”⁸² As pastors change churches, new learning must occur. “New phases of ministry practice require new teaming.”⁸³ When encountering the politics of ministry practice, pastors become learners from experience, continually growing, learning, and extending their knowledge of how to lead:

Pastors enter the ministry because they deeply believe in the significance of their calling. Persons entering the pastorate need to understand the political realities of the ministries they are walking into rather than be blindsided and unnecessarily damaged by the church. Experienced pastors need to identify the knowledge they already have and extend that knowledge by reflecting on their experience and the experiences of others.⁸⁴

Jackson also affirms the necessity of leadership learning:

Leadership is largely a learned art. You can begin wherever you are now and grow into leadership. The truth of the matter is that God can use every type of person and personality style for successful ministry leadership and, in fact, has called you into the ministry because your own present and future leadership abilities are worthy tools for use in ministry service.⁸⁵

Cladis affirms the importance of continual learning:

Although educational and professional accomplishments are still important and required for many careers – even positions in church – they carry less authority with the average church member. Years of education may not produce a good pastor. Other gifts and skills are also needed that cannot be learned in a seminary environment.⁸⁶

⁸² Ibid., 313.

⁸³ Ibid., 314.

⁸⁴ Robert W. Burns and Ronald M. Cervero, “Issues Framing the Politics of Ministry Practice,” *Review of Religious Research* 45:3 (2004): 251.

⁸⁵ Gushee and Jackson, 171.

⁸⁶ Cladis, 21.

Rainer, upon reflecting on the leadership qualities of Acts 6/7 leaders wrote:

Some of us are born with gifts and characteristics that would make us more likely to be Acts 6/7 leaders than others. In that sense, some are more likely to attain this level of leadership than others. But I am also convinced, after hearing from these breakout church leaders, that many of the traits can be learned and sharply honed.⁸⁷

Pastors must build on the leadership gifts with which God has equipped them, utilize the wisdom of leadership qualities that have been proven helpful by others in the business setting or in other churches, and continually learn new insights and further develop leadership qualities for ministry practice.

Leadership and Relationships

Leadership cannot be addressed without recognizing the importance of relationships. Relationships are the starting point of a book written by James Kouzes and Barry Posner called, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*. Here are the opening lines to the first chapter of the book, which is appropriately titled “Leadership Is A Relationship”:

Leadership is a reciprocal relationship between those who choose to lead and those who decide to follow. Any discussion of leadership must attend to the dynamics of this relationship. Strategies, tactics, skills, and practices are empty rules unless we understand the fundamental human aspirations that connect leaders and their constituents. If there is no underlying need for the relationship, then there is no need for leaders.⁸⁸

Lawrence refers to how the Apostle Paul built a relational ministry upon the foundation of his relationship with Christ:

Nothing could fulfill him more than knowing Christ. Once he gained Christ he had everything; before he had nothing. Now he had true abundance. For such a pastor the size of his church is only as important to him as it is to Christ. To him

⁸⁷ Rainer, 65.

⁸⁸ Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*, 1.

fame means nothing except as it exalts Christ. In his mind preaching is not an issue of his identity; it is an expression of Christ's glory.⁸⁹

The importance of living in a right relationship to God for the productivity of ministry was affirmed by Jesus himself in John 15:5-8 when he said:

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

As pastors are in a right relationship with Christ, they are used in order to bear fruit for the glory of the Father. When pastors are apart from him or seeking to serve their own agenda, they can do nothing. Rardin affirms this partnership with God when he writes:

Leaders are not in it for themselves but for the good of those they lead, as the Lord defines their good. What matters is not what the leader thinks is good for those led, but what the Lord thinks is in their best interest. He has divine purposes for each of His sheep. While the leader cannot possibly know all that God is up to in the lives of His people, wise leaders will always seek to understand and promote those purposes as far as possible.⁹⁰

Peter, who once tried to put his will ahead of Christ by taking him aside to rebuke him (Mark 8:32), later echoed the right relationship that those in ministry must have to Jesus when he wrote in I Peter 5:1-4:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

⁸⁹ Lawrence, 17-18.

⁹⁰ Rardin, 34.

The act of pastors partnering with God through their relationship with him acknowledges God as the one who takes the initiative and invites them to be used by him. Peterson refers to this as “prevenience”:

The cure of souls is a cultivated awareness that God has already seized the initiative. The traditional doctrine defining this truth is prevenience: God everywhere and always seizing the initiative. He gets things going. He had and continues to have the first word. Prevenience is the conviction that God has been working diligently, redemptively, and strategically before I appeared on the scene, before I was aware there was something here for me to do. . . . I am entering a complex situation in which God has already said decisive words and acted in decisive ways. My work is not necessarily to announce that but to discover what he is doing and live appropriately with it.⁹¹

Living in a proper relationship with God is only part of the leadership challenge in terms of relationships (albeit the necessary first part). Those who are pastoral leaders also experience ongoing issues in their relationship to others. Staff relationships will be covered in a separate section of this literature review. For now, consider how leadership relates to the way we relate with people, especially those in the pew. Burns and Cervero, in their article “Issues Framing the Politics of Pastoral Ministry Practice,” describe two types of interpersonal relationships to consider. The first type involves interpersonal relationships that include staff, officers and congregation.⁹² The second type involves relationships that could be either on a more official, professional basis, or on an informal, personal level.⁹³

Peterson explains that it is possible to maintain interpersonal relationships in a way that is not true to God’s expectations. He calls this “doing the job” and describes it this way:

⁹¹ Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 60-61.

⁹² Burns and Cervero, “Issues Framing the Politics of Pastoral Ministry Practice,” 239.

⁹³ Ibid.

Being a pastor who satisfies the congregation is one of the easiest jobs on the face of the earth – if we are satisfied with satisfying congregations. The hours are good, the pay is adequate, the prestige considerable. Why don't we find it easy? Why aren't we content with it? Because we set out to do something quite different. We set out to risk our lives in a venture of faith. We committed ourselves to a life of holiness. At some point we realized the immensity of God and of the great invisibles that socket into our arms and legs, into bread and wine, into our brains and our tools, into mountains and rivers, giving them meaning, destiny, value, joy, beauty, salvation. We responded to a call to convey these realities in Word and sacrament. We offered ourselves to give leadership that connects and coordinates what the people in this community of faith are doing in their work and play, with what God is doing in mercy and grace. In the process, we learned the difference between a profession, a craft, and a job.⁹⁴

Being faithful to one's pastoral call will involve times of frustration in our interpersonal relationships with others. Burns and Cervero write in the article entitled, "How Pastors Learn the Politics of Ministry Practice":

Ministry practice nearly always involves working with people. People, in turn, have interests that lead them to act in certain ways when confronted with situations where they must make a judgment about what to do or say (Guthrie and Cervero 2000). The ministry, then, involves negotiating with others, choosing among conflicting wants and interests, developing trust, locating support and opposition, being sensitive to timing, and knowing the informal and organizational ropes. In short, the ministry involves politics.⁹⁵

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, in their book *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, do not shy away from spelling out the potential frustrations and challenges:

To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear – their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking – with nothing more to offer perhaps than possibility. . . . People push back when you disturb the personal and institutional equilibrium they know. And people resist in all kinds of creative and unexpected ways that can get you taken out of the game: pushed aside, undermined or eliminated. . . . Anyone who has stepped out on the line, leading part or all of an organization, a community, or a family, knows the personal and professional vulnerabilities. However gentle your style, however careful your

⁹⁴ Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 131-132.

⁹⁵ Burns and Cervero, "How Pastors Learn the Politics of Ministry Practice," 304.

strategy, however sure you may be that you are on the right track, leading is risky business.⁹⁶

Heifetz and Linsky go on to show that leadership is not only risky, but sometimes dangerous:

“If leadership were about giving people good news, the job would be easy. . . . People do not resist change, per se. People resist loss. You appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits of a lifetime. You place yourself on the line when you tell people what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear. Although you may see with clarity and passion a promising future of progress and gain, people will see with equal passion the losses you are asking them to sustain.”⁹⁷

One can see how such warning can apply to pastoral leaders serving in a church of any size. When pastors cast vision, preach for change, suggest changes in worship or ministry programming, or confront sinful behavior, people will react and their reaction may lead to strained relationships. Jesus faced this, as did the apostles and so will anyone in pastoral ministry. Indeed, according to the Apostle Paul, disciples of Jesus must expect it. The Apostle Paul warned:

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.⁹⁸

The second type of interpersonal relationship, which pastors will encounter in ministry according to Burns and Cervero, are relationships that could be either on a more official, professional basis, or on an informal, personal level.⁹⁹ Those staff relationships

⁹⁶ Marty Linsky and Ronal A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 2.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 11

⁹⁸ New International Version, II Timothy 4:2-5.

⁹⁹ Burns and Cervero, “Issues Framing the Politics of Pastoral Ministry Practice,” 239.

that are dealt with on a professional basis will be considered later. Informal personal relationships come with their challenges as well as their benefits. In a positive sense, they create a support system. Burns and Cervero quote one of the participants in their study who said:

I think you've got to be careful with your friendships, but I think a lot of pastors don't ever allow for there to be any friendships. So they don't build a loyal following. When they get in trouble, they don't have a group to support them. They are out there. People like them okay. But they don't have that committed core of people who will stand with them.¹⁰⁰

Although both leaders of smaller and larger churches face basic relationship issues with staff, officers, and congregation on a professional and personal level, there are relational differences that senior pastors who come out of a solo background must be aware of.

Writing as senior consultant for the Alban Institute, Roy Oswald discusses one difference that will be evident in interpersonal relationships in a larger church setting. This difference is the amount of meaningful contact that pastors will have with members. He compared pastoral demands in various size churches and identified the following four categories:¹⁰¹

1. The Family Church: fewer than 50 active members
2. The Pastoral Church: 50-150 active members
3. The Program Church: 150-350 active members
4. The Corporate Church: 350 or more active members

In terms of relationships and the ability to offer pastoral care, Oswald writes:

If clergy have the idea firmly fixed in their head that they are ineffective as a pastor unless they can relate in a profound and personal way with every member of the parish, then 150 active members (plus perhaps an even larger number of inactive members) is about all one person can manage. There are some clergy

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Roy M. Oswald, "How to Minister Effectively in Family, Pastoral, Program and Corporate Sized Churches," *Action Information* 17:2 (1991): 2-13.

who function at their highest level of effectiveness in the Pastoral Church (50-150 active members). Given the different clusters of skills required for other sizes of congregations, some clergy should consider spending their entire career in this size congregation.¹⁰²

Oswald goes on to add:

Clergy with strong interpersonal skills fare well in the Pastoral-sized church. These clergy can feed continually on the richness of direct involvement in the highs and lows of people's lives. Clergy who enjoy being at the center of most activities also do well. There are lots of opportunities to preach and lead worship and to serve as primary instructor in many class settings for both young and old. Outgoing, expressive persons seem to be the best match for the style of ministry in the Pastoral Church. An open, interactive leadership style also seems to suit this size church best.¹⁰³

Due to time demands and more people to minister to, a pastor's ability to spend personal time with members changes upon moving to a larger church. Oswald warns church members in program-size churches (150-350 members) of this reality:

To be sure, a member can expect a hospital or home call from the pastor when personal crisis or illness strikes. But members had better not expect this pastor to have a lot of time to drink coffee in people's kitchens.¹⁰⁴

Wade adds this perspective from his experience in a large church:

The senior pastor role is not one that satisfies the hands-on, do-it-yourself instinct. Senior pastors work with systems more than individuals. We make it possible for pastoral care to happen on a large scale, but we do not often get to the hospital ourselves. The intimacies of congregational life are not our regular fare. If one's reward system responds mainly to walking with individuals at key moments, the senior pastor role will not be especially satisfying.¹⁰⁵

This creates great challenges in the relationships that exist between pastors and parishioners. Wade writes:

I teach and preach to large groups and I love it, but it means that more people know me than I know in return. People hear how I think and understand far more often than I get to hear how they think and understand. This requires a major

¹⁰² Ibid., 4.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰⁵ Wade, 11.

effort on my part to find opportunities to listen to other's hearts and minds lest I trip into thinking that my view is everyone's view or – what is worse – that my view *should* be everyone's view. Large church pastors need to be heartily proactive in the work of finding out what is going on in the lives and, more importantly, inside the lives of individuals.¹⁰⁶

Senior pastor Jeff Zurheide describes the difference between the role of pastors in smaller and larger churches:

In the small church family the pastor does pastoral care directly. She goes to the hospital, spends time with the family, and offers the prayer. In a larger context, the senior pastor simply can't cover all of the pastoral care needs personally. And if one picks and chooses, favoritism (whether deliberate or otherwise) becomes the charge.¹⁰⁷

Marlis McCollum sums up these leadership challenges regarding relationships and time limitations in larger size churches when she quotes Peter Marty, senior pastor of the 2,900-member St. Paul Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA:

Marty cautions ministers not to move to a large church if they want to spend the bulk of their time on pastoral care. Likewise, he says, those without the skills and passions needed in the larger church – leadership, visionary capacity, and the ability to inspire others and foster togetherness, to name a few – would be better off not transitioning to a larger church. Not only will they lose the contact with people that they value, he says, but they will also be ill-equipped to effectively lead a large church.¹⁰⁸

It is clear from the insight of Oswald, Wade, Zurheide and McCollum that leadership challenges differ depending on the size of the church. These differences impact interpersonal relationships and the depth of pastoral care that can be offered. Pastors, especially when transitioning from a solo to senior pastor role, must consider these issues.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹⁰⁷ Jeff Zurheide, "The Stresses of Size: One Minister's Journey to the Land of Large Church and Back," *Congregations* 31:1 (Winter 2005): 34-35.

¹⁰⁸ Marlis McCollum, "Senior Pastor or CEO: The Challenges of Balance in Large Church Leadership," *Congregations* 31:1 (Winter 2005): 29.

Leadership and Transition

Transition from one place of ministry to another brings about leadership challenges, especially when this pastoral transition is from a smaller to a larger church.

McCollum writes:

Pastors transitioning from a small or mid-size congregation to a large church often believe their work will be much the same, only on a larger scale. Nothing could be further from the truth, say those who have already taken the leap. When the Alban Institute interviewed eight ministers from five denominations about their own moves to large congregations, all described the large church experience as markedly different from that of pastoring a smaller church.¹⁰⁹

It is important for pastors who transition from a solo to senior role to understand and prepare for what is different. Those who have made this transition or have studied the changes offer their input. Oswald describes this shift by saying:

When clergy move from a Pastoral Church to a Program Church, unless they are able to shift from a primarily interpersonal mode to a program planning and development mode, they will experience tension and difficulty in their new congregation.¹¹⁰

McCollum also highlights the necessity for a shift in focus and responsibilities:

Gone are the days of spending large portions of time personally tending one's flock, using board meetings as brainstorming sessions to flesh out fledgling ideas, and working closely with a handful of long-term staff members and a well-known cadre of volunteers. Instead, the pastor spends more time with his or her staff than with congregants, surrenders many aspects of ministry to a large and continually changing staff, and assumes responsibility for the management and administration of an organization that is far more complex than any he or she has typically known previously. . . . Shortly after transitioning to a large church, most ministers find themselves in a state of shock – or surprise, at a minimum – over these dramatic changes in their roles and responsibilities, as well as the organizational structure of the new church they have been selected to lead.¹¹¹

These leadership transitions that must occur when moving from a solo to senior position are above and beyond normal challenges of transition such as moving family,

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹¹⁰ Oswald, 5.

¹¹¹ McCollum, 27-28.

adapting to a new community and learning a new context. What can be done to prepare for such transition in light of the differences between solo and senior roles?

Norbert Oesch, executive leader of the Pastoral Leadership Institute, which has provided leadership training to ministers since 1997, offers the following twelve leadership keys to those about to enter into large church senior pastor ministry for the first time:¹¹²

1. Get leadership training for yourself that includes some system of support and accountability.
2. Keep your primary focus the goal of connecting people to God.
3. Learn what to say “no” to.
4. Invest your best energy and resources in Sunday mornings. That is still where 80 percent of your outreach happens.
5. Trust your people and love them. Trust their capabilities, their love for the Lord, and their desire for the good of the church.
6. Lead from strength and staff to weaknesses: Spend the bulk of your time and energy working in your most gifted areas, and hire or assign others to handle the rest. Don’t be afraid to bring on staff or volunteers who are better at certain things than you are.
7. Deeply invest in leadership training for your staff and lay congregational leaders.
8. Spend intentional and systematic time with unofficial leaders – those who are influential in the congregation though they hold no elected office in the church.
9. Give close attention to the history and culture of the congregation and the surrounding community. Discover the strengths there, and build on them.
10. Remember that the church and the people are not yours, but God’s.

Just as Oesch speaks of using the strengths of staff and giving close attention to the history, culture and strengths of the congregation, McCollum adds this quote from Peter Marty:

¹¹² Norbert Oesch, “Ten Keys to Success in Large Church Ministry,” *Congregations* 31:1 (Winter 2005): 28.

I think the most common mistake for senior pastors to make when they come to a large church is to pretend to themselves that they have all of the ideas, that they have all the gifts for effective leadership. . . . Seminaries don't equip you to be extraordinarily capable of everything. There are many, many things you need to learn quickly and quietly from gifted laypeople and staff people. You've got to be more of a listener and a quiet leader than someone who pretends to know it all.¹¹³

Oswald echoes the importance of delegation:

The clergy who are called as head of staff in a Corporate Church are usually multi-skilled persons who have proven their skill in a great variety of pastoral situations. Now, however, in a multiple staff, the senior minister will need to delegate some of those pastoral tasks to other full-time staff members, who will inevitably want to do them differently. Learning to allow these people to do things their own way is in itself a major new demand.¹¹⁴

Much of the insight considered so far comes in light of the learning curve that is a natural part of transitioning into a new leadership role. Kouzes and Posner state, "In any new endeavor, there is a learning curve: performance generally goes down before it goes up."¹¹⁵ Weese and Crabtree agree with the need for new pastors to be open to existing ministries that are effective and build on them. They write in their book, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions*:

The operation of the human ego in pastors can work against a healthy pastoral transition. The ego does not want to "adopt" the effective ministries that were the "children" of the previous pastor; it wants to have its own children. There is nothing wrong with the drive to be a creative presence in the congregation one is serving, to go beyond repeating the past. It is best to think of a pastoral transition as a blended family in which former effective ministries are adopted by the new pastor while new ministries are birthed as well.¹¹⁶

Loren Mead, founder and former president of The Alban Institute, compares the instinct to abolish existing ministries to a type of "hostile" takeover, saying:

¹¹³ McCollum, 30.

¹¹⁴ Oswald, 6.

¹¹⁵ Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, 168.

¹¹⁶ Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom: Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2004), 21.

The pastoral candidate has such a strong commitment (to a management style, to a theological approach, to an understanding of religious community) that he or she comes in to wipe out the past and start all over. In such a placement the new pastor often flushes out all remnants of the previous patterns of the congregation and imposes his or her own imprint upon it. The past is eliminated. Usually many members of the congregation leave – sometimes immediately, in other cases over a year or two. (Healthier congregations throw the fool out!). I see such an outcome as badly flawed. It comes from the assumption that the pastor “owns” the ministry and “is” the ministry. It assumes that the people of the congregation are not intrinsic to the ministry.¹¹⁷

Mead’s insight reminds us that leadership transition is not only something that pastors experience, but it also affects congregations. Speaking from the perspective of the impact of leadership transition on the church itself, Weese and Crabtree add:

A healthy pastoral transition is one that enables a church to move forward into the next phase of its external and internal development with a new leader appropriate to those developmental tasks, and with a minimum of spiritual, programmatic, material, and people losses during the transition. The focus should be on preserving spiritual, programmatic, material, and people resources as much as possible during the transition.¹¹⁸

For a healthy leadership transition to occur, Weese and Crabtree advise the arriving pastor with three responsibilities.¹¹⁹ First, the arriving pastor must be honest with himself regarding the match between his qualifications and the specifications. It is easy for a candidate to become so caught up in the excitement of a new position in a larger church that a sober evaluation cannot occur. Second, the arriving pastor must be willing to participate in the transitional plan developed by the board. Third, the arriving pastor must be able to publicly honor his or her predecessor without a sense of threat; he or she must not deny the congregation’s history.

¹¹⁷ Loren B. Mead, *A Change of Pastors...And How it Affects Change in the Congregation* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005), 46.

¹¹⁸ Weese and Crabtree, 41.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

The transitional time when new pastoral leaders arrive are crucial times for both parishioners and pastor. It requires teamwork, and Mead cautions against what can happen when such teamwork is not in place:

Not every pastor comes equipped to initiate that new teamwork, however. Not every congregation that asks for new leadership really wants it when they discover the new leader wants to go in ways they had not bargained for. In short, when reality sets in, a lot of potentially tremendous clergy and lay leaders can easily get crosswise with one another. And it is in the first year that the relationship can become very strong – or irreparably damaged.¹²⁰

Solid relationships and team ministry require navigating through dynamics of power, authority and political situations. Before moving on to a closer examination of literature concerning these challenges, a summary of what the reviewed literature has said about leadership skills in the midst of transition is in order.

Summary of Leadership Skills

The literature about leadership skills as it pertains to the inherent challenges of transitioning from a solo to senior pastor role can be summarized in the following four points. First, pastoral leaders can learn from leadership insights gained from “secular” applications. God is the source of wisdom to both those in the church and those in the business environment. These leadership insights must be measured and practiced in ways that honor God and Scripture.

Second, leaders are always learning. This will be especially true when transitioning from a solo context to larger church senior pastor role. This learning will require “learning in practice” and may involve gaining insight from personal mistakes, the wisdom of others, continuing education or the giftedness of leaders in the new environment.

¹²⁰ Mead, 42.

Third, leaders must recognize that there will be setbacks, complaints and perhaps even attacks from others. To be a leader is to place oneself in a position where leadership can be questioned. Leaders must utilize the resources that exist around them, including staff members, volunteers and lay church leaders. We are not called to be lone rangers who try to lead alone.

Finally, leaders must recognize issues that exist pertaining to relationships. These will include a variety of dynamics affecting interpersonal relationships, staff relationships and the decline in relational time that senior pastors will encounter upon transitioning into a larger church. This should be taken into account when considering one's gifts and preferences, especially in terms of pastoral care contact, as a pastor discerns a call to a new ministry setting.

Understanding these challenges concerning leadership skills is the first step for effectively transitioning from the solo to senior pastorate. This leads us to consider dynamics of power and authority that pastors may encounter in a new way upon becoming a senior pastor.

POWER AND AUTHORITY DYNAMICS

The examination of what literature offers in the area of leadership skills is now followed by a consideration of power and authority dynamics that leaders have to deal with. This examination begins with a clarification of the terms power and authority. Due to the different perceptions people have about power and authority, it is difficult to determine a concise definition.

Defining Power and Authority

One way of defining power comes from Lawrence, who illustrates the use of the word “power” in a negative way when he writes, “Power is something pastors must turn from, whereas authority is something pastors must have.”¹²¹ Emphasizing the term “authority” in a positive way, Lawrence defines authority when he writes:

Authority is the use of gift, position, and opportunity to release others at the right time so that pastor and people serve Christ together. We do exercise control over people, but not for our sake. We do it because of our concern for their maturity and growth. This demands a maturity and humility that comes only through the cross, the grave and resurrection.¹²²

Others define power and authority in a more “top down model of expected obedience.” MacNair distinguishes between authority and power in the following ways:

The writer of Hebrews beseeches his readers to follow their leaders willingly, making their job of giving an account to God easy and joyful. This request indicates that those who lead do so, not by executive order, but by exercising authority that is freely acknowledged, that grows out of the nurturing, sacrificial love that the elder demonstrates toward those in his care. It’s useful to distinguish between authority and power. Authority is the right to be obeyed. Power is the ability to effect another’s compliance, even against his or her will.¹²³

According to MacNair, pastoral authority gives one the right to be obeyed. The command that MacNair quotes from Hebrews 13:17 emphasizes that people must obey their leaders who exercises authority that is both earned from those they serve and entrusted to them by God. Pastoral power is abused when leaders coerce the congregation into compliance. Obedience and submission to authority seem to be something leaders can expect. MacNair sets forth an authoritarian definition of leadership.

¹²¹ Lawrence, 110.

¹²² Ibid., 109.

¹²³ MacNair, 159.

In his doctoral study, Burns defines power and authority in a third way. Utilizing the work of R.M Cervero and A.L. Wilson, as well as the work of J.C. Isaac, Burns defines power as “the capacity to act, distributed to people by virtue of the enduring social relationships in which they participate.”¹²⁴ In this sense, power is defined in a positive rather than negative understanding.

The definition of Burns differs from MacNair’s in two key ways:

1. An understanding that power and authority dynamics occur within the context of ministry politics.
2. A shift from “power-over” to “power-to.”¹²⁵

First, Burns defines power and authority within the context of ministry politics.

These are part of the enduring social relationships that form a context in which power and authority are carried out. According to Burns:

Ministry practice nearly always involves working with people. People, in turn, have interests that lead them to act in certain ways when confronted with situations where they must make a judgment about what to do or say. The ministry, then, involves negotiating with others, choosing among conflicting wants and interests, developing trust, locating support and opposition, being sensitive to timing, and knowing the informal and formal organizational ropes. In short, the ministry involves politics.¹²⁶

According to Burns, power and authority cannot be separated from themes of interest and negotiation.¹²⁷ When the exercise of power and authority are limited to domination and superordination, the interests of others and necessity for negotiation are forsaken. In fact, Burns defines authority as “power that has been legitimized by the social system within which the authority is exercised.”¹²⁸ Therefore, power that is

¹²⁴ Burns, 11.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 39.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 1.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 37.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 3.

limited to the traditional definition of “influence over someone else” fails to consider the multi-dimensioned aspects that arise with people and politics.

Secondly, Burn’s definition goes beyond the “power-over” understanding of power and formal authority as defined by MacNair. Burns expands this authoritative use of power by drawing on the work of Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan¹²⁹ in order to describe four dimensions in which power can be understood:

The first dimension is power as commodity. Burns states:

When power is viewed as a commodity; there become finite quantities of commodities, the more power one person possesses, the less is available to others. The focus of this dimension is on the use of resources to influence the outcome of decisions.¹³⁰

Within this context, the dominant actor prevails over the subordinate actor by using resources to influence the decisional outcome. Power, then, is the ability to get others to do what you want them to do, if necessary against their will or to do something they otherwise would not do.¹³¹

The second dimension is power as non-decision-making. Burns writes:

In this dimension, the dominant actor prevails by controlling the decision-making processes to limit access and agendas. Promoters of this dimension recognize that the more powerful actors can determine outcome from behind the scenes. This second dimension continues to assume that conflict is necessary for power to be exercised.¹³²

The third dimension is power as capacity. Burns explains:

In this dimension, the dominant actor prevails by managing the meaning to create legitimacy for an issue. Therefore, power is the ability to do or create something.

¹²⁹ Cynthia Hardy and Sharon Leiba-O’Sullivan, “The Power Behind Empowerment: Implications for Research and Practice,” *Human Relations* 51:4 (1998): 451-483.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 40.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 41.

It is ideological as well as economic and structural. In this way, power can be used by dominant interest groups to challenge the status quo.¹³³

The fourth dimension is power as relationships. According to Burns:

This understanding of power acknowledges that power does not exist in a vacuum, without others with whom or over whom to exert it. This relationship power focuses less on what an individual has (in terms of resources or authority), but rather how the individual interacts with other persons or institutions.¹³⁴

This is fitting for pastors as power dynamics that occur within the context of ministry involve working with people.

Burns summarizes a comprehensive position on power by stressing the relational dynamic, yet maintaining the idea that power is the capacity to act.¹³⁵ Therefore, in defining power as the capacity to act within enduring social relationships, Burns goes beyond the dominating elements of “power-over,” without forsaking the responsibility of acting on power and authority that is earned and conferred.

In this section of the review, these two words, power and authority, will be used in a synonymous way. The term “power” will be used in reference to how a pastor uses his or her authority in a relational manner rather than as a means of forced compliance. This is the use of Burns’ expanded and positive definition, which was previously considered.

Who Has the Power and Authority?

In defining power and authority as an influence that is given or conferred, we now move on to consider who has the power and authority? Who gives it or confers it? As

¹³³ Ibid., 42.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 43.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 44.

mentioned in the biblical/theological framework section, God is the author of authority.

Lawrence emphasizes where pastoral authority comes from:

All pastoral authority is derived authority. . . . Authority is not ours, it is Christ's, and we have authority only as He exercises it through us. Our right to do anything rests in His hands; so unless our hands become His hands, we are empty-handed. Through dependence on Him, we have all the authority we need to do whatever He wants, and this makes authority a spiritual concern. If we don't rely on Him alone, we may have the title of pastor, but not the authority. . . . Being a pastor does not bestow authority on us; instead it gives us opportunity for divinely given authority to be recognized.

Our authority comes from the Lord Jesus. When others know we are subordinate and obedient to Him, they more willingly follow our leadership as their shepherds. His authority over our lives gives us authority in their lives.¹³⁶

Ultimately, God gives power and authority to pastors. However, the amount of resource and influence that such power enables is also limited to the trust and authority that people give. Small church pastors often enter the church thinking that they have been given authority from God to lead. In many cases, pastors in small churches quickly realize that the authority is not seen in the pastor, but in an influential or long-term member. Anthony Pappas, Area Minister for the Old Colony Association of the American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts and author of *Inside the Small Church*, writes:

Because everyone in the small church operates within the same worldview, decisions and authority in the church are based on politics and political realities, not upon ideas. This is perhaps the hardest transition for a seminarian to make. Seminary culture is *ideological* – it gives allegiances to the notion that ideas are (or at least should be) the determiners of behavior. In the small church, however, authority stems from *politics*. People give their allegiance to *institutions* and to other *people*, not to ideas or doctrine.¹³⁷

Despite a general agreement that pastoral authority comes from Jesus Christ, the amount of authority the pastor holds and the degree to which pastors can use their

¹³⁶ Ibid., 106-107.

¹³⁷ Anthony Pappas, *Inside the Small Church* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), 48.

authority “above” others is viewed in different ways. There is a debate between how much power and authority should be given to the pastor and how much should be given to people, the priesthood of believers. In the past, much of the God-given power and authority was placed in the hands of pastoral leaders, ordained and installed overseers of the flock. Writing in 1969, Southard describes this view in his book *Pastoral Authority in Personal Relationships*:

Members of the primitive church were told to esteem those who were “over” them (I Thess. 5:12), to obey the doctrine as taught by the apostles (such as Paul: Rom. 16:17, 19). To “submit” to rulers of the flock was required (Heb. 13:17). This is the counsel of authoritative religion, a system of power which through personal obedience would influence opinion, induce belief, lead to action. Those who submitted would be rewarded; those who rebelled would be punished. The modern minister has inherited this role, and he cannot easily relieve himself of it. As a spiritual authority he is expected to be an evaluator of behavior, an upholder of standards, a mediator of godly acceptance or judgment.¹³⁸

Recently, greater emphasis has been placed on empowering teams. Cladis describes them in this way:

Effective ministry teams in the church in the postmodern era are empowering teams. They have put aside the older, hierarchical models and spread out the authority and responsibility of doing ministry. Leadership no longer means taking control, dictating, or giving orders. Gone also are the more subtle forms of controlling, such as using theological degrees to lift oneself above others with the implication that “clergy know best.”¹³⁹

Cladis goes on to say:

The church in the postmodern world must return the ministry to the people. The church began as a populist movement led by a servant-messiah who crossed the religious authorities to bring genuine faith back to the people. If churches are to have meaning in the postmodern world it will be because they are filled with people who have experienced that populist meaning, claim it, and are willing to live it in the world. The clergy must get out of the way of the people and encourage them on!¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Southard, 8.

¹³⁹ Cladis, 123.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 124.

MacNair agrees, saying, “It is profoundly significant that the pastor does not minister alone: he shepherds as part of a team, and he shepherds among a Spirit-gifted flock.”¹⁴¹

Leadership teams carry their own set of challenges regarding authority. Lawrence addresses the conflicts that can arise:

The issue of the pastor’s authority may be the thorniest one in the body of Christ today. Churches everywhere are splitting over it as apparently godly men of integrity divide in anger with fellowship fractured, friendships shattered, and hearts broken. The problem seems to have two causes. First, it appears to be the unintended result of giving the ministry to the saints. Clericalism was convenient. When you have a “holy man” who is superior to others, there’s not doubt about who’s in charge. However, when all the saints are gifted and everyone is a minister, questions about leadership and authority inevitably arise. The church’s shepherding structure is unnatural for some men who are accustomed to the gentile model, and it takes much grace from God to lead His way. Many of us will have to pass through some deeply humbling experiences before we stop striving for control and start serving Christ’s way.

The other factor is the lust for power. When our sinful desires find a way to justify themselves theologically, confusion reigns supreme. Power, whether used by a pastor to force his way to the top of the heap or used by elders to pull him back down and exalt themselves, is wrong. In fact it’s an evil of the lowest and most destructive kind.¹⁴²

This concept of having authority spread throughout the team is not only new to the church setting, but is distinct from the model of business and politics. Perhaps one reason why this debate over “Who has the power and authority” exists in the church, is due to the way that the business world depicts “leadership authority.” The business context emphasizes the power and authority of the CEO. This kind of image can be transferred to pastors or it can be assumed by church boards (who feel they “hire” and control the pastor). This is not only true for “senior pastors” in larger churches, but even solo pastors. Pappas, writing about small churches, says:

¹⁴¹ MacNair, 121.

¹⁴² Lawrence, 117-118.

Most such churches, for example, expect that the pastor will function as a sort of religious hireling – a chaplain carrying out the religious duties of the congregation – rather than as a pastor or a leader.¹⁴³

Oswald agrees when writing about patriarchal/matriarchal churches (under fifty active members):

This small church can also be called a Family Church because it functions like a family with appropriate parental figures. It is the patriarchs and matriarchs who control the church's leadership needs. What Family Churches want from clergy is pastoral care, period. For clergy to assume that they are also the chief executive officer and the resident religious authority is to make a serious blunder.¹⁴⁴

Even when granted or portrayed, is the CEO model biblical and healthy for pastors? What degree of authority does the pastor serving in a church setting really hold? MacNair discourages the CEO mindset and promotes leaders as shepherds who serve alongside of other leaders:

With regard to leadership, the pastor is the leader of leaders. . . . Leadership, whether exercised by the pastor, or other elders, or anyone else, must always be open-ended and shepherdlike, creating an environment that encourages the initiative of those being led. We forget this and we sacrifice biblical health if we repress the Spirit's gifts. It might be easier to exercise greater control, and the "results" might be more apparently homogeneous and excellent. But we're after obedience to God, not results, and we have faith that obedience will produce results – results of God's choosing, not ours. Nowhere in the biblical job description is the pastor a CEO. He is always a shepherd. Only through open-ended leadership can a pastor build the general perception that his ministry is one of shepherding a flock.¹⁴⁵

The fact that church leaders often fall into the business measurement tool for success (results over obedience), often contributes to the way that leaders are evaluated. However, Heifetz and Linsky offer agreement with MacNair in de-emphasizing results. They write:

¹⁴³ Pappas, 43.

¹⁴⁴ Oswald, 2.

¹⁴⁵ MacNair, 167-169.

For some people, stepping out on the line is worth the risk only if success can be seen, touched, felt, and most of all, counted. But trying to take satisfaction in life from the numbers you ring up is ultimately no more successful than making survival your goal. Meaning cannot be measured. Yet we live immersed in a world of measurement so pervasive that even many of our religious institutions measure success, significantly, by market share.¹⁴⁶

Rainer agrees with the dangers of such measurable demands and CEO

mindsets when he writes:

Churches and their lay leaders can be incredibly demanding of, if not vicious to, pastors. In my consulting ministry with the Rainer Group, I often deal with lay leaders who treat pastors like CEOs and expect immediate results of them. And ironically, while these lay leaders demand quick results, they can be reluctant to give the pastor any authority to carry out the initiatives they expect to take place. The result is frustration for both parties. No wonder it is not uncommon to see pastors leave under pressure or even be forcefully terminated in such situations.¹⁴⁷

Although business models can be helpful, churches and lay leaders must recognize that there are differences between business and church contexts. In his monograph *“Good to Great and the Social Sectors,”* Jim Collins warns, “We must reject the idea – well-intentioned, but dead wrong – that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become more like a business.”¹⁴⁸ Collins goes on to explain the difference:

The complex governance and diffuse power structures common in nonbusiness lead me to hypothesize that there are two types of leadership skill: *executive* and *legislative*. In executive leadership, the individual leader has enough concentrated power to simply make the right decisions. In legislative leadership, on the other hand, no individual leader – not even the nominal chief executive – has enough structural power to make the most important decisions by himself or herself. Legislative leadership relies more upon persuasion, political currency, and shared interests to create the conditions for the right decisions to happen.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Linsky and Heifetz, 212.

¹⁴⁷ Rainer, 58.

¹⁴⁸ Jim Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors* (New York: Harper Business, 2005), 1.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

In business and political settings, the top leader is often still seen as the one with utmost authority. In the social sector, such authority must be exercised in the context of working with others. Giuliani writes:

Much of your ability to get people to do what they have to do is going to depend on what they perceive when they look at you and listen to you. They need to see someone who is stronger than they are, but human too.¹⁵⁰

Giuliani stresses the authority of the top leader, but then encourages leaders to share resources. He writes, “Part of good leadership is giving others under your authority the same tools you’d expect.”¹⁵¹ Giuliani’s model is one of authoritative leadership using authority in a way that involves others. His authoritative style is clear when he writes:

My organizational style was to be on top of as much as possible. While I expected my commissioners to run their agencies and take responsibility for their performance, I also insisted on being kept abreast of results and initiatives.¹⁵²

The degree to which Giuliani encourages teamwork can be summed up with these words:

A leader must not only set direction, but communicate that direction. He usually cannot simply impose his will – and even if he could it’s not the best way to lead. He must bring people aboard, excite them about his vision, and earn their support. They in turn will inspire those around them, and soon everyone will be focusing on the same goal; the effort will come from within, which always results in more forceful advocacy than if someone is just going through the motions to please their boss.¹⁵³

Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol and Ken McElrath, in their book *The Ascent of a Leader*, support Giuliani’s advice to involve others in a way that challenges effort from within.

¹⁵⁰ Giuliani, xii-xiii.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵² Ibid., 313.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 183-184.

Managers get other people to do, but leaders get other people to *want* to do. Leaders do this by first of all being credible. That is the foundation for all leadership.¹⁵⁴

These authors warn those who fall into the all-too-common trap of using domination and misusing authority:

Immature leaders may manipulate or deceive followers, wounding them in the process. Instead of admitting their mistakes, they may try to cover them up, becoming even more isolated. Leaders who neglect the development of their inner world feel threatened by those who challenge them. They view power as means to dominate others. Such leaders undervalue others and overvalue themselves. All of this wreaks havoc in relationships, unmasking the leader's character immaturity.¹⁵⁵

A mature leader will seek to avoid the temptation to use domination to express authority.

Credibility and Vulnerability

Although pastors are given authority by God and through their position, credibility must be earned from other staff members and from the congregation in order for them to exercise their authority in a way that people accept. Kouzes and Posner explain:

Loyalty is not something a boss can demand. It is something the people – the constituency – choose to grant to a leader who has earned it. The people's choice is based not upon authority, but upon the leader's perceived capacity to serve a need.¹⁵⁶

Kouzes and Posner go on to say:

Credibility, like reputation, is something that is earned over time. It does not come automatically with the job or the title. It begins early in our lives and careers. People tend to assume initially that someone who has risen to a certain status in life, acquired degrees, or achieved significant goals is deserving of their confidence. But complete trust is granted (or not) only after people have had the chance to get to know more about the person. The credibility foundation is built

¹⁵⁴ Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and Ken McElrath, *The Ascent of a Leader: How Ordinary Relationships Develop Extraordinary Character* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 21.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, 9.

brick by brick. And as each new fragment is secured, the basis on which we can erect the hopes of the future is gradually built.¹⁵⁷

Similar to what Kouzes and Posner say, pastors quickly learn that such credibility does not come through degrees but through evidence of love. Kouzes and Posner write:

Leaders who are inaccessible cannot possibly expect to be trusted just because they have a title. Credibility is earned via the physical acts of shaking a hand, touching a shoulder, leaning forward to listen. By sharing personal experiences, telling their own stories, and joining in dialogue, leaders become people, not just holders of positions.¹⁵⁸

When done effectively, such vulnerability can build credibility and can pave the way for those in positions of power and authority to truly minister to others. Thrall, McNicol and McElrath describe the importance of vulnerability and transparency for establishing authentic and humble authority:

Vulnerability does not mean transparency. Transparency is simply disclosing yourself to others at time and in ways that you choose. Although transparency is a good start, in vulnerability you deliberately place yourself under others' influence, submitting yourself to others' strengths. You give others the right to know the pain of your weaknesses and to care for you. You choose to let others know you, to have access to your life, to teach you, and to influence you. In part, this true vulnerability is what the Bible means when it speaks of submission. *Submission* is a love word, not a control word. Submission means letting someone love you, teach you, or influence you.¹⁵⁹

What is the value of such vulnerability? These authors add, "Vulnerability expands influence and productivity."¹⁶⁰ Gushee and Jackson echo this earned ability to influence when they write:

Trust speaks of a leader who enjoys the confidence of the followers. Trust must be earned over time, although some followers "give" trust to a ministry leader from the beginning, only to loose it if the leader gives reason to doubt. A trusted leader is one whose reliability in word and deed is well known to the followers;

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 46.

¹⁵⁹ Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 81.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 83.

indeed, it is a mark of pride for them to tell their neighbors that their minister is trustworthy.¹⁶¹

Vulnerability, transparency and trust will allow pastors to earn and gain credibility from those whom they are called to lead.

Exercising Power and Authority with Humility and Accountability

The way that power and authority are exercised in the context of the church should exhibit even more humility than is found in the business setting because pastors are called to humbly serve and model the example of Christ. Cladis explains:

Jesus is our model of how we are to be with one another. Jesus comes to us as the suffering servant of God who laid down his life for his friends and who served and taught and loved us to wholeness. Jesus models for us the washing of the feet of the disciples and shows us that lordship is costly and full of self-denial. Jesus, the Son of God, God incarnate, models for us the image of power we are to have with one another: stooped down and washing feet, shepherding, giving, being last, and serving. These are the power and dominion images in the Church of Jesus Christ.¹⁶²

When pastors exercise power and authority with humility in their leadership, they earn and use God-entrusted power in a way that honors him and brings glory to his name. Leadership in this way is not about the leader, but about God. It's the kind of leadership John the Baptist used as he pointed not to himself, but to Christ. Pastors must use power and authority in a humble and servant-directed way because they will be accountable for the way they served God through their pastoral role. Rardin testifies to this accountability:

Leaders are accountable for how they use their authority. The exercise of authority in a position of leadership is not something to be taken lightly. Nor is it something to be avoided because of possible abuses. Both are easy mistakes to make. We do well to remember that the shepherd's authority comes not from a position, but from the Master to whom leaders are accountable. As partners with

¹⁶¹ Gushee and Jackson, 173-174.

¹⁶² Cladis, 130.

Him, shepherds remember to whom the sheep belong and that authority is to be used to benefit the sheep, not the shepherd.¹⁶³

Rardin warns about the challenges that pastors face and two mistakes to avoid:

There are two particular personal challenges that nearly all leaders face. The first is how to exercise authority as shepherds without becoming authoritarian. Most leaders enjoy exercising authority. They like making decisions, having people seek them out for advice, and, in general, calling the shots. It is quite understandable that while playing the role of key decision-maker, a leader can assume an authoritarian posture among the people he or she is called to serve.

Many leaders are more susceptible to err in this way than in the second: How do we serve the needs of those we lead without, on the one hand, becoming their lackey, and on the other, serving them only to be well liked and accepted? Each of us is more prone to err in one of these ways than the other. But to be effective, leaders need to avoid both mistakes.¹⁶⁴

Rardin offers the following advice for avoiding these mistakes:

The two challenges above can be largely avoided if we keep in view the work of both serving and shepherding. . . . the key to avoiding either extreme is to remember that our service is for the greater good of those we serve. . . . the servant shepherd has a built-in check-and-balance system. We avoid the danger of becoming authoritarian by remembering that, as servants, we place the needs of those we serve above our own. And we avoid the danger of subservience and/or manipulation for approval, by remembering that our authority as shepherds is used to serve His purposes in the lives of those we lead. Servant shepherds must never forget their two roles.¹⁶⁵

Returning to the executive and legislative analogy of Collins, Collins himself seeks to offer a balance when he writes:

The executive versus legislative distinction remains a working hypothesis, awaiting rigorous research. If empirical evidence validates the distinction, it is unlikely to be as simple as “business sector = executive” and “social sectors = legislative.” More likely, there will be a spectrum, and the most effective leaders will show a blend of both executive and legislative skills. The best leaders of the future – in the social sectors and business – will not be purely executive or legislative; they will have a knack for knowing when to play their executive chips and when not to.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Rardin, 98.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 250-251.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 251-252.

¹⁶⁶ Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, 12.

With a right balance in mind, pastors must recognize the challenges of using power and authority in a healthy and God-honoring way. After all, God is the one who calls and entrusts pastors to lead his people in a way that glorifies him.

Summary of Power and Authority Dynamics

In summary, pastors in positions of leadership will face temptations to use power and authority for their own glory. Perhaps in senior pastor roles, pastors will be tempted even more because of the prestige of their title, the large church in which they serve or the staff that serves under their guidance. Quoting Peter Marty, McCollum writes:

If they are not careful, senior pastors can lose perspective on the servant character of their work, and consider themselves to be running fiefdoms. Once you get into that mode of self-importance, you lose interest in and an affection for people, and you lose a credibility in dealing with them.¹⁶⁷

As has been seen from the literature, power and authority are concepts and realities that can be difficult to define. Three ways for defining power and authority have been examined. First, power and authority can be understood and used in a top-down direction that often takes the form of domination or force.

Second, power and authority can be understood and used in the context of enduring social relationships. Such use of power and authority acknowledges the context of politics and stresses both the capacity to act and the relational dynamic. Depending on the situation, power and authority may be exercised in the dimensions of power as commodity, non-decision making, capacity and relationships.

Third, power can be defined as a negative temptation. In a similarly negative approach, authority can be defined as a controlling force necessary for leadership. This study used the definition of power as “the capacity to act, distributed to people by the

¹⁶⁷ McCollum, 29.

virtue of the enduring social relationships in which they participate” as a guide for examining how pastoral leaders should exercise God-given authority in a humble manner.

Such authority and use of power is ultimately conferred to pastors from Jesus Christ and given to them through the trust of people. When a pastor loses sight of either of these sources of authority, an unhealthy pursuit of power and control can occur. One way that many churches have sought to maintain a healthy balance of power is through the use of ministry teams and shared authority. These teams also alleviate the tendency for people in the church to view a senior pastor as a CEO, using the business model in a way that may be detrimental in the social sector. Leadership in the social sector is different from that of the business world. In fact, Collins writes:

There is an irony in all of this. Social sector organizations increasingly look to business for leadership models and talent, yet I suspect we will find more true leadership in social sectors than in the business sector.

Collins goes on to say:

True leadership only exists if people follow when they have the freedom not to. If people follow you because they have no choice, then you are not leading. Level 5 leadership (defined as a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will) combined with legislative skill will become even more important to the next generation of business executives, and they will do well to learn from the social sectors. Indeed, perhaps tomorrow’s great business leaders will come from the social sectors, not the other way around.¹⁶⁸

Finally, this section has examined how leaders who exercise power and authority in the church must do so humbly as servants of Christ. Authentic spiritual leaders model Jesus’ humility. This involves earning credibility through faithfulness to God and loyalty as people choose to grant it.

¹⁶⁸ Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, 13.

STAFF RELATIONS

Many churches are seeking to empower multiple staff who serve together as a team. Cladis states, “Empowering teams are very effective teams for the Kingdom of God because they spread out power and flatten hierarchies.”¹⁶⁹ Prior to the larger church movement, many churches were led and served by a solo pastor, ordained elders and deacons, and the contribution of lay members. The literature of Cladis affirms the biblical support of team-based ministry. Cladis writes, “There is no sense in Scripture that the Son is resentful of the Spirit’s ministry or that the Father interferes with the redemptive work of the Son.”¹⁷⁰

William Carter, a consultant to churches with staff writes, “New Testament references to persons working alongside of one another in ministry, both in the local church and in the mission field, are numerous.”¹⁷¹ Jesus, the disciples, and the apostle Paul all worked with others. The Reformation principle of the “priesthood of all believers” states that all believers are gifted to serve in some way and must do so in a healthy way with others, not alone. Using the analogy of the body, the apostle Paul refers to the members of the church and their need for one another when he writes:

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” . . . But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for one another.¹⁷²

Thus it is seen that the concept of team is biblical. For whether persons serve as solo pastors with the body of Christ as their primary “staff” or whether they serve as

¹⁶⁹ Cladis, 15.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 34-35.

¹⁷¹ William J. Carter, *Team Spirituality – A Guide for Staff and Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 12.

¹⁷² New International Version. I Corinthians 12:21, 24-25.

senior pastors with other paid staff, they will find themselves in ministry that includes others. Carter sums up the fact that every church has some form of a staff, paid or unpaid:

A vital consideration here is that we must not forget that *the whole congregation is an extended staff*, that gifts are everywhere, and that a big part of our role is to see that someone is exploring the meaning of the gifts with all the people and helping them to be in ministries that express their Christian calling and concern. . . The pastor, staff and congregation are united in the gifts process. A whole ministry comes from the whole body, a spiritual organism regulated by Christ at its head.¹⁷³

The fact that pastors have others to work and serve with is a blessing. Heifetz and Linsky offer the following concern for those who try to lead on their own:

The lone warrior myth of leadership is a sure route to heroic suicide. Though you may feel alone at times with either creative ideas or the burden of final decision-making authority, psychological attachments to operating solo will get you into trouble. You need partners. Nobody is smart enough or fast enough to engage alone the political complexity of an organization or community when it is facing and reacting to adaptive pressures.¹⁷⁴

Perhaps seminary training can be partially blamed when pastors try to work alone, apart from a team-based structure. Oswald describes how poor training leads to later problems:

For the most part we clergy are not taught to work collegially. In seminary we compete with one another for grades. Each of us retreats to his or her own cubicle to write term papers. There is little interaction in class. In seminary we don't really have to take each other seriously. That might change if, for example, a professor were to assign four seminarians to complete research on a church doctrine, write one paper, and receive a group grade. . . . Unless our training can begin to equip us for collegial ministry, our seminaries will continue to turn out lone rangers who don't really have to work with other clergy until they get to the Corporate Church or the larger Program Church. By that time our patterns have been set.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Carter, 67.

¹⁷⁴ Linsky and Heifetz, 100.

¹⁷⁵ Oswald, 6.

Donald Schaeffer, a pastor interviewed for Rainer's study on breakout churches, acknowledged his lack of training. Rainer writes about it saying:

Donald Schaeffer confessed that his leadership reflected the era in which he started ministry. The pastor was held responsible for virtually every area of ministry, and the single-staff church was normative. "In seminary, I had never received any training concerning a large staff. I grew up in the era of the single-staffed church."¹⁷⁶

In order to work together as part of a whole body, pastors must consider the importance of working as a team when discussing staff relations. The remaining section of the literature review considers what it takes to work as a team in the context of multiple paid staff. It also considers the unique role of the senior pastor, including dynamics that senior pastors will encounter beyond their previous solo experience.

Working as a Team in the Context of Multiple Paid Staff

The biblical teaching on spiritual gifts and the unity of the body of Christ support the team-based ministry model. The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11-13:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.¹⁷⁷

This passage reminds us that as God calls some to pastoral ministry, he calls all believers for works of service. The whole church, all staff members and church members, make up a ministry team! Theologically, we call this the priesthood of all believers. As a pastor, Hardy Clemons explained the priesthood of all believers concept

¹⁷⁶ Rainer, 35-36.

¹⁷⁷ *New International Version*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984.

to his congregation by saying, “As a team of pastors, we will minister to you; with you, through you or for you; but never instead of you!”¹⁷⁸

Despite the biblical model and instruction on team ministry, selfishness, pride and sin often make working as a team very challenging and at times very painful. Carter writes, “Working with staff is a dynamic, evolving process that will continue to challenge all those who feel called to exercise their gifts in a collective ministry to the body of Christ.”¹⁷⁹

Ministry advancement requires harmony among those guiding the church. Successful service is rarely found where internal conflict divides the leadership.¹⁸⁰ The importance of a healthy leadership team cannot be underemphasized. Cladis refers to such teams as collaborative teams:

Collaborative ministry teams that have a clear purpose and rigorous discipline are a highly effective way of creating spiritually fulfilling work and moving toward a Christ-centered goal. Team ministry has a solid biblical and theological function that, in most cases, sets it above Lone Ranger heroics as the most meaningful way to serve in the church. A team that learns how to discern the spiritual gifts of the individual team members and how to have members work together, pray hard, and share information and energy in order to move toward a sharply defined mission, vision, or cause, is an extremely powerful unit of ministry.¹⁸¹

What does such a team look like? Cladis explains that “a collaborative team is one that shares its resources and gifts in order to move in harmony toward a divine purpose.”¹⁸² This doesn’t happen on its own, but requires team building. Carter defines it this way:

In the church setting the team is a group of persons with a defined spiritual objective developing an operational style and process that will enable them to

¹⁷⁸ Hardy Clemons, “The Pastoral Staff as Ministry Team,” *Review and Expositor* 78:1 (Winter 1981): 53.

¹⁷⁹ Carter, Foreword.

¹⁸⁰ Cionca, 65.

¹⁸¹ Cladis, 88.

¹⁸² Ibid., 93.

achieve fruition. Team building is a series of activities that enables the team to discover its best operational style and maintain its process in order to fulfill its purpose and accomplish its objectives.¹⁸³

Kouzes and Posner, in *The Leadership Challenge*, echo the importance of collaboration:

“You can’t do it alone,” is the mantra of exemplary leaders – and for good reason. You simply can’t get extraordinary things done by yourself. Collaboration is the master skill that enables teams, partnerships, and other alliances to function effectively. Collaboration can be sustained only when leaders promote a sense of mutual reliance – the feeling that we’re all in this together.¹⁸⁴

Kouzes and Posner offer these three specific guidelines:

Indeed, world-class performances aren’t possible unless there’s a strong sense of shared creation and shared responsibility. To foster collaboration, leaders are essential who can skillfully:

1. Create a climate of trust
2. Facilitate positive interdependence
3. Support face-to-face interactions¹⁸⁵

Since collaboration is so crucial for leaders in a team ministry, it is important to consider the dynamics of these three essentials in the context of a church staff relationship.

Create a Climate of Trust

In order for pastors to serve together on a collaborative ministry team, leaders must be proactive in establishing a climate of trust in order that the staff can serve effectively together. Staff members, usually under the direction of the senior pastor, must work hard at developing this atmosphere of trust.

Kouzes and Posner uphold the necessity for developing trust:

At the heart of collaboration is trust. It’s *the* central issue in human relationships within and outside organizations. Without trust, you cannot lead. Without trust

¹⁸³ Carter, 75.

¹⁸⁴ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 265-266.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 243.

you cannot get extraordinary things done. Individuals who are unable to trust others fail to become leaders, precisely because they can't bear to be dependent on the words and works of others. So they either end up doing all the work themselves or they supervise work so closely that they become overcontrolling. Their obvious lack of trust in others results in others' lack of trust in them.¹⁸⁶

Sometimes trust develops when we learn from and support others rather than criticize their failure. Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath write:

Leaders in relational organizations affirm the wisdom of Winston Churchill when he said, "Success is going from failure to failure with great enthusiasm." Trust develops in such places, and people learn things about each other they never knew before, finding deeper strengths that can sometimes remain hidden behind roles.¹⁸⁷

Giuliani stresses the importance of coming alongside others in rough times:

When someone around me is unfairly attacked, I go out of my way to make that person more important. . . . Just consider the alternative. A leader who distances himself from his staff at the first sign of trouble might save a few popularity points, but it's shortsighted. Eventually, no one wants to work for someone like that.¹⁸⁸

Without trust, leaders lose out on the contribution of others and try to minister alone.

Thrall, McNicol and McElrath warn:

Many adults – especially leaders – wander into dark forests of isolation. They don't live alone, but they live apart from the benefit of significant others speaking into their lives. Some leaders feel more comfortable with isolation than they do with letting people get close to them. They depend on personal distance for protection.¹⁸⁹

When team members begin to trust others, they start to open ourselves up to the accountability and influence that others can provide. This in turn strengthens the collaboration among team members. Kouzes and Posner explain it this way:

Knowing that trust is key, exemplary leaders make sure that they consider alternative viewpoints, and they make use of other people's expertise and

¹⁸⁶ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 244.

¹⁸⁷ Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 50.

¹⁸⁸ Giuliani, 235.

¹⁸⁹ Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath. 75.

abilities. Because they're more trusting of their groups, they're also more willing to let others exercise influence over group decisions. It's a reciprocal process. By demonstrating an openness to influence, leaders contribute to building the trust that enables their constituents to be more open to their influence. Trust begets trust.

In contrast, managers who create distrustful environments often take self-protective postures. They're directive and hold tight to the reins of power. Those who work for such managers are likely to pass the distrust on by withholding and distorting information.¹⁹⁰

One recent tool for creating a climate of trust is a staff covenant that is made and agreed to between staff members. Churches around the country are beginning to discover the value of implementing various kinds of covenants to form the basis for the members of church ministry teams to work together.¹⁹¹ Cladis describes why covenants are helpful:

In most cases, teams have relational problems not because of a single culprit acting intentionally but because of dysfunctional behavior that goes unrecognized and unaddressed. Covenants help solve this problem by giving team members standards of good group behavior and relationships. Israel was supposed to live out its covenant with God in love. Ministry teams, also, can use covenants to define loving relationships and what they look like, with the master image of God in perichoresis forming the background for establishing covenant community.¹⁹²

Carter agrees with Cladis:

The response to the call to ministry and the formation of a work team that helps persons find a more satisfactory relationship with God and with other human beings clearly implies a covenantal relationship. It is this *covenant* – between each person and God and between each person and all the other persons involved in the ministry – that forms the bond that binds the staff to one another and to the body they serve. Without this covenant all is vanity. Until persons are committed to a corporate ministry that originates in the will of God and culminates in the justification and perfection of Christian disciples there is no ministry, there is only labor.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 247-248.

¹⁹¹ Cladis, 39.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Carter, 123.

Seminary professor and psychologist Anne Marie Nuechterlein also connects the covenant relationship we have with God to church staffs:

A covenant made with God and your staff members is a solid component of a good quality staff relationship. By reminding yourself of how Christ empowers you for a hope-filled, forgiven, and holy life, you are better equipped to listen, discuss expectations, set common goals, interact intentionally as a staff, and communicate honestly and openly with each other.¹⁹⁴

The reasons given by Cladis, Carter, and Neuchterlein validate the benefit of a staff covenant for establishing standards, trust and accountability.

Facilitate Positive Interdependence

When staff members trust one another, their common goals, intentional interaction and honest communication will help facilitate positive interdependence.

Interdependence is a condition where everyone knows that they cannot succeed unless everyone else succeeds, or at least that they can't succeed unless they coordinate their efforts. If there's no sense that "we're all in this together," that the success of one depends on the success of the other, then it's virtually impossible to create the conditions for positive teamwork. To get extraordinary things done, we have to rely on each other. We need to have a sense of mutual dependence – a community of people each of whom knows that they need the other to be successful.¹⁹⁵

It would seem that the church would grasp the need for interdependence more than any other social system. The Bible teaches Christians to work together as the body of Christ. But sadly, church staff members are tempted to become independent and prone to go their own way. Cladis writes:

The church has known the power of God working through collaborative groups long before the postmodern management and business world discovered the power of even secular teamwork. Yet, like other leadership concepts, we let it

¹⁹⁴ Anne Marie Nuechterlein, *Improving Your Multiple Staff Ministry: How to Work Together More Effectively* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 35.

¹⁹⁵ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 251.

slip away. We exchanged Paul's notion of the church as the body of Christ for a clergy-centered parish model of ministry that usurped the role of the laity.¹⁹⁶

Such independence rather than interdependence can also occur within a church staff. Rather than working together, it becomes "everyone for themselves." When such an attitude arises, due to a lack of trust, negative results may develop; some staff members may begin to feel that certain areas of ministry belong to them and the concept of teamwork disappears. However, when a staff serves interdependently, Cladis reminds us of the positive outcome:

Teams are made up of people who are diverse in skill and temperament. Each member contributes skill and knowledge for the benefit of the group's goal. This collaboration is synergistic, producing a net effect that far outweighs the sum of the work of individuals.¹⁹⁷

In a church staff relationship, it is ultimately up to the one who is responsible for staff oversight (usually the senior pastor) to promote, encourage, model team ministry and facilitate interdependence. According to Cladis, teams must have a leader, but the principal role of that leader is, paradoxically, taking the responsibility to initiate a team process that results in the giving away of responsibility.¹⁹⁸ This requires that team leaders provide the freedom for members to use their gifts, along with accountability and defined expectations.

In his research on breakout churches, Rainer found that this type of atmosphere served as a magnet for attracting and keeping staff members. Here's what he found:

In our interviews with lay and staff leaders, we consistently heard two themes that were a magnet for them in their work in the breakout churches. These two themes seemed to be paradoxical. On the one hand, these quality workers relished the freedom given to them to carry out their work. They were clear that any attempts to micromanage them would be met with stiff resistance. On the other hand, they

¹⁹⁶ Cladis, 91.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 41.

were equally clear that they cherished the high expectation environments of their churches. They wanted freedom, but they wanted clear boundaries of high expectations.¹⁹⁹

What does it take to be a leader who serves as a team player and facilitates positive interdependence? In his study, Collins reports the various descriptions people used for good-to-great leaders: “quiet, humble, modest, reserved, shy, gracious, mild-mannered, self-effacing, and understated.”²⁰⁰ Similarly, in interviewing people about pastors of breakout churches, Rainer heard words like modest, humble, quiet, others-centered, deflects accolades, and open to criticism.²⁰¹ Such characteristics sound like traits of a team player, not a selfish lone-ranger.

Support Face-to-Face Interactions

A third essential component necessary for a healthy team that collaborates and works together is the support of regular face-to-face interactions. Teams and staffs will not grow closer if they are always confined to their own offices and neglect to interact. In most multi-staff settings, staff meetings and retreats are used to enable and support face-to-face interactions.

According to Carter, “the staff meeting is the single most important factor in maintaining relationships among staff persons and momentum in ministry.”²⁰² Giuliani agrees, writing, “I’ve begun every single morning since 1981 with a meeting of my top staff. The importance of the ‘morning meeting’ cannot be overstated.”²⁰³ The ways that staff meetings are carried out differ just as churches and staff members are each different.

¹⁹⁹ Rainer, 138.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 40.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Carter, 76.

²⁰³ Giuliani, 29.

Each staff is unique.²⁰⁴ Staff meetings provide an environment where relationships are built, trust and accountability developed and the use of gifts encouraged.

Cladis reminds us that healthy staff relationships are crucial and therefore they must be nurtured:

If a church is to succeed in carrying out a healthy ministry and developing a good Christian community there must be stable and high-quality relationships among the members of the principal leadership team.²⁰⁵

Cladis advises that frequent and unhurried staff meetings enable this development of community and high-quality relationships:

Collaborative church teams are continually seeking God's direction and seeking to stay in touch with the movement of the Spirit. These things take time – personal sharing, kneeling in prayer, Bible study and meditation, worship. Team meetings, then, must be frequent and last for hours. I typically meet with my leadership team for half a day each week. . . . Once a month we share a meal together. Every six months we take a full day and go on retreat.²⁰⁶

There are a variety of beneficial components to a staff meeting. Nuechterlein advises that “the atmosphere of the staff meeting should be light, unhurried, and fun.”²⁰⁷ Whatever the approach, relationships must be built:

Teams must go beyond the mechanics of task and function. We each have deeper needs that must be met in relationships – at home, at church, and even at work – in order for us to experience fulfillment. Every relationship has the potential to provide something we need. And every relationship has a purpose for us – to meet someone else's need.²⁰⁸

The ongoing development of trust and accountability are also positive outcomes of staff meetings. Staff meetings can enhance effective and productive ministry as

²⁰⁴ Carter, 27.

²⁰⁵ Cladis, ix.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 106.

²⁰⁷ Nuechterlein, 76.

²⁰⁸ Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 47.

members of the staff hold one another accountable. Addressing the importance of fostering accountability, Kouzes and Posner write:

Unless people take personal responsibility and unless they are held accountable for their own actions, we're not very inclined to want to work with them nor much inclined to cooperate in general. Individual accountability is a critical element of every collaborative effort. Everyone has to do their part for a group to function effectively. Structuring the situation so that people have to work collaboratively can actually increase personal accountability. Why? Because we know that our peers are expecting us to be prepared and to do our jobs, and peer expectations are a powerful force in motivating us to do well. The feeling of not wanting to let the rest of the group down strengthens people's resolve to do their best.²⁰⁹

Giuliani agrees when he writes, "Throughout my career, I've maintained that accountability – the idea that the people who work for me are answerable to those we work for – is the cornerstone. And this principle starts with me."²¹⁰

Another benefit of holding staff meetings is the opportunity they provide to encourage the use and development of gifts. Cladis states, "Teams must take the time necessary to know one another, build camaraderie, and understand each member's passion, gifts and spiritual journey."²¹¹ Our gifts are those unique abilities that God has given us to carry out his purpose. Discovering those gifts within the team will allow leaders to support and encourage each other and maximize their God-given gifts. Thrall, McNicol and McElrath refer to how this frees people up to serve:

When we sense a freedom to express our care and concern for others according to the unique way God has created us, everyone benefits. We experience the hope of fulfilling our particular purpose and destiny within the only context that can sustain our pursuit – community. And we recognize our larger purpose within the whole, to influence others, in love as they seek to fulfill their unique role in that same context.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 299.

²¹⁰ Giuliani, 69.

²¹¹ Cladis, 106.

²¹² Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 48.

Building a team of complimentary gifts is one challenge to staff ministry that solo pastors who transition into the senior pastor role must do well. Giuliani puts it this way:

Establishing a dynamic that brings out the best in each player is one of the toughest facets of leadership. It's not enough to identify and attract great parts. Making sure they add up to more than their sum is partially conscious and partially unconscious.²¹³

And he adds, "Some bosses hire only those of like mind. A leader has to surround himself with a complementary staff."²¹⁴

The literature indicates that if a ministry staff is going to effectively collaborate and work together, they must create a climate of trust, facilitate positive interdependence and support face-to-face interaction. Staff covenants and staff meetings are two important components, according to the literature, for working together in a collaborative manner as a team. We now consider some unique pastoral challenges that arise in staff settings.

Pastoral Responsibilities and Challenges that Arise in Staff Settings

In light of the staff responsibilities and challenges that senior pastors face, what are some matters that senior pastors should be aware of, especially if transitioning into this role for the first time? Perhaps it's helpful to begin by acknowledging that some who have made this transition recognize that there are challenges and sometimes frustrations. For example, Wade offers this summary:

Staff issues are common concerns among senior pastors and much anguish is lavished on them. Oftentimes, the "senior" part of the job must take precedence over the "pastor" part. In those difficult times, it is hard to enjoy the warm satisfaction of caring for the people closest to you. Enjoying the role of *pater familias* in the staff setting without losing one's humanity or humility is a bit of a

²¹³ Giuliani, 102-103.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 110.

trick that relies on mental as well as spiritual health. But the role can be very rewarding, especially if one finds joy in seeing others do well.²¹⁵

What are some of the challenges that senior pastors face in light of staff issues?

The research suggests the following challenges.

High demand of time for staff related issues

Being a large church pastor brings time demands. There are sermons to prepare, meetings to lead and increased administrative and leadership tasks. Outside of the office, there are the usual needs of family, health, and leisure. McCollum speaks to the increased demands senior pastors face: “While many large church ministers may, at first, be shocked by how little time is available to connect with individual members, they are likely to be equally surprised to discover the vast amounts of time they spend managing staff.”²¹⁶ Wade agrees, stating:

The senior pastor does not do a lot of the traditional work of congregational ministry but, like the conductor, he or she makes everything else happen. Finding delight in making things happen, as opposed to actually doing them oneself, is a key to thriving in the large church pastorate. The primary community we serve in a pastoral role is the staff.²¹⁷

MacNair describes it this way:

In addition to his other roles, the senior pastor heads the church’s staff, paid and unpaid. He exercises final authority in calling a staff member and in stipulating the terms of his or her call. The pastor oversees the staff person’s life and relationships with the Lord, with family, with the congregation, and with the presbytery. He sees to it that staff members develop and use good leadership skills.²¹⁸

This leads to a second issue for senior pastors in relation to staff ministry – hiring and developing staff.

²¹⁵ Wade, 12.

²¹⁶ McCollum, 30.

²¹⁷ Wade, 11.

²¹⁸ MacNair, 185.

Hiring and developing staff

The hiring of staff members is a crucial time in the life of the church, and it will have long-term positive or negative implications. The hiring process can be lengthy and the work does not stop after a person is hired. The newly hired staff member will require time for orientation, transition and perhaps development. This requires a time commitment from the senior pastor. Oswald paints this picture:

When some congregations grow to the point where their pastor's time and energy is drawn off into many other activities and the one-on-one pastoral relationship begins to suffer, they may hire additional staff to handle these new functions so their pastor can once again have plenty of time for interpersonal caring. Unfortunately, this strategy will have limited success. To begin with, when you hire additional staff you then have a multiple staff, which requires staff meetings, supervision, delegation, evaluation, and planning. These activities draw the pastor deeper into administration. Then, too, additional staff members tend to specialize in such things as Christian education, youth ministry, evangelism, or stewardship, which tends to add to the administrative role of the head of staff rather than freeing his/her time up for pastoral care.²¹⁹

Lawrence agrees with the extra time demands that senior pastors face during and after the hiring of staff:

If the addition is someone who reports directly to the senior pastor, he must lead the search. . . . Though a senior pastor shouldn't make every hiring decision, he should interview every full-time staff level candidate... Senior pastors should not be distant from their staff. Anyone who has the gifts and maturity to be on a pastoral staff should have access to the senior pastor and be comfortable with him.²²⁰

Those who have hired staff themselves offer the following four points of advice, advice senior pastors may find helpful. First, don't be afraid to hire people who are better than you are at what they do. If they aren't better than you, why are you hiring them?²²¹ Second, too many pastors think the staff's purpose is to advance their career, and they

²¹⁹ Oswald, 4.

²²⁰ Lawrence, 217.

²²¹ Ibid., 230.

end up frustrated and angry when a newcomer doesn't want to be used in this way. Don't hire staff to serve you and make you successful.²²² Third, each person added to the staff should be recruited with the same care as the first. The purpose of building the staff is to build the body by adding new gifts to the total.²²³ Fourth, as Giuliani (speaking from the political sphere) states, "I always tried to set a simple standard that I expected everyone I hired to follow when doing their own hiring: find the person best suited for the job. Period."²²⁴

Hiring is not an easy process. Often, mistakes are made. Oswald warns:

Our denominational systems do little to equip clergy to work collegially within a multiple staff. A three-day workshop on the multiple staff is a bare introduction. Leaders in industry with a master's degree in personnel management still make serious mistakes in hiring and developing leaders for the corporation. The head of staff of a Corporate Church learns to manage a multiple staff by trial and error. Sacrificing a few associate and assistant clergy on the altar of experience is the price the church pays for such lack of training.²²⁵

When hiring, senior pastors should seek to develop a staff whose members complement each other as they have been gifted by God. Of this complementary goal in the political setting, Giuliani writes:

The first part of choosing great people is to analyze your own strengths and weaknesses. That gives you an idea of where your needs are the greatest. The goal is to balance your weaknesses with the strengths of others, then to evaluate the team overall.²²⁶

Along with finding the right people, senior pastors also play a role in developing staff. Kouzes and Posner put it this way:

Leaders must develop the capacity of people in the organization to act on the shared values in ways that increase the organization's credibility with its

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Carter, 32.

²²⁴ Giuliani, 99.

²²⁵ Oswald, 6.

²²⁶ Giuliani, 101.

constituents. To develop capacity, leaders must expand or realize the potentialities of the people and organizations they lead; they must bring them to a fuller or better state. Leaders must assure that educational opportunities exist for individuals to build their knowledge and skill. Leaders must provide the resources and other organizational supports that enable constituents to put their abilities to constructive use.²²⁷

These authors also state, “Credible leaders turn their constituents into leaders.

This is the essence of how leaders get extraordinary things done in their organizations: they enable people to act.”²²⁸

As a senior pastor works with and develops a new staff member, he will get to know that individual better. In the process, the senior pastor may come to realize the new hire is not a good fit after all. Of such situations Collins writes:

In the social sectors, where getting the wrong people off the bus can be more difficult than in a business, early assessment mechanisms turn out to be more important than hiring mechanisms. There is no perfect interviewing technique, no ideal hiring method; even the best executives make hiring mistakes. You can only know for certain about a person by working with the person.²²⁹

At times, even the best intentions and efforts lead to a poor hire or a situation that turns ugly. In such cases, great leaders not only do all they can to make the hiring process successful, they also quickly deal with a hiring situation that doesn’t work out. Rainer describes his findings on how leaders of breakout churches responded to a poor fit or a staff situation that was detrimental:

The breakout churches have learned to act quickly and compassionately when a personnel issues becomes negative. If termination seems to be the only solution, the person terminated often receives a generous severance pay. Some of the churches even provide a job or ministry or counseling to the person well beyond the point of termination. . . . If you let a situation that needs attention continue, it will only get worse. But you have to handle everything you do in a Christlike manner. . . . After hearing from various leaders in the breakout churches, the research team noticed a very similar pattern in dealing with people who were

²²⁷ Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, 155.

²²⁸ Ibid., 156-157.

²²⁹ Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, 15.

mismatched with positions. We called the approach of the church the “three C’s: closure, compassion and communication.”²³⁰

Understanding expectations

A review of the literature also suggests that as senior pastors work with staff, perhaps for the first time upon transitioning out of a solo pastor role, it’s helpful to recognize the expectations that staff often have of the senior pastor they serve under.

Nuechterlein writes:

Staff relationships are influenced by the role expectations that staff members have of each other, and of their staff relationships as a whole. The quality of staff relationships is often determined more by each member’s role expectations than by the actual qualities that any given staff member brings to the ministry.²³¹

Nuechterlein also describes the most common expectations that exist between senior pastors and the staff members with whom they minister. Respect and shared role responsibility are qualities valued by associates on church staffs.²³² Kouzes and Posner affirm the need for leaders to show respect. As fundamental as it may seem, the best thing that leaders can do to show others they respect them and consider them worthwhile is to reach out, listen, and learn.²³³ Kouzes and Posner agree with Nuechterlein in terms of the need for sharing responsibility, saying:

Give people a choice about being part of what’s happening, and they’re much more likely to be committed. Choice builds commitment and creates ownership, and making people feel like owners is key. Unless people feel like owners, unless they have choices to make, they can’t truly exercise personal responsibility.²³⁴

Nuechterlein goes on to say that “while senior pastors could list many qualities that they would like their staff members to possess, my research has found there are three

²³⁰ Rainer, 100.

²³¹ Nuechterlein, 37.

²³² Ibid., 42.

²³³ Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, 97.

²³⁴ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 231.

qualities which they particularly value. These are competence, complementary skills, and trust.”²³⁵ Nuechterlein summarizes these three crucial components that enhance staff relationships.²³⁶

1. Your expectations for your own role and the roles of your co-workers
2. Your preferences for qualities desired in your co-workers and the characteristics they prefer for you
3. Your ability to talk with each other about these issues

The use of regular staff meetings and a staff covenant could provide opportunities for staff members to state their expectations and talk about staff related issues in an effort to be a healthy and united staff where the skills and gifts of each member are valued.

Summary of Issues that Arise in Staff Relations

Randy Pope, senior pastor of Perimeter Church in Duluth, Georgia, states, “Perhaps the first and most critical issue for a church to settle is to clearly identify the church’s leadership and determine how that leadership will function.”²³⁷ The literature shows that for those in a staff setting, how the staff relates to each other in the leadership context of the church is crucial. When a solo pastor transitions into a senior pastor role and begins working with multiple staff, that pastor cannot underestimate the importance of good staff relations. McCollum emphasizes how important this is when she quotes John Buchanan, senior minister of Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, who says:

While the success of a small congregation depends largely on the pastor, a large church’s success depends not only on the minister but also on the staff, explains

²³⁵ Nuechterlein, 39.

²³⁶ Ibid., 47.

²³⁷ Randy Pope, *The Prevailing Church: An Alternative Approach to Ministry* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 138.

Buchanan. The senior minister, therefore, must be able to motivate and empower existing staff and make sound decisions when hiring new staff.²³⁸

A senior pastor must understand the importance of working as a team and must model what that means. As the literature shows, collaborative team ministry is biblical. It occurs when the team creates a climate of trust, facilitates positive interdependence, supports face-to-face interactions, and recognizes and utilizes the gifts of staff members. Effective staff covenants and staff meetings provide an ongoing means for establishing this kind of team-based atmosphere.

Further, the literature shows that senior pastors who work with staff must understand and come to terms with the high demand of time that is required that relates to staff relations. A senior pastor cannot overlook the needs of staff in an effort to minister to the needs of the congregation. These needs must be addressed in the hiring process as well as the ongoing development of staff members. Finally, senior pastors must understand the role expectations of staff members and also gain a realistic understanding of the expectations that staff have of senior pastors. These expectations must be communicated. When role responsibility is shared, the roles must be clearly defined.

SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Returning to an earlier quote, Wade warns, “The wise among us will carefully consider the special aspects of the role of senior pastor in a large congregation before leaping into it.”²³⁹ In light of the literature examined, three primary themes require the careful attention of pastors considering a transition from the solo to senior role. The first theme focuses on leadership skills needed for this position. The second theme examines

²³⁸ McCollum, 30.

²³⁹ Wade, 10.

the pastor's motivation for seeking such a position. The third theme explores the place of staff ministry.

Leadership Skills

The first theme emerging from the literature addressing pastoral transition from solo to senior role is that of the need for leadership skills. Those considering a transition to a senior role should discern whether or not they have the leadership skills necessary for serving in a large church setting.²⁴⁰ Those without the skills and passions needed in the larger church – leadership, visionary capacity, and the ability to inspire others and foster togetherness, to name a few – would be better off not transitioning to a larger church.²⁴¹ Pastors who feel inadequate in certain skills must consider how they can learn or develop these skills.²⁴² Along with identifying certain skills needed for the senior pastorate, those considering this transition must examine their motivation.

Motivation

The second theme emerging from the literature on pastors considering transition from a solo to senior role is one of motivation. Transitioning from a solo to senior role must not be a move made for power and prestige. If it is, people will be used and the pastor will need to be humbled. Cionca writes:

Transition to a larger task should not be viewed as an egotistical climb up a career ladder. Rather, it can be an honest petition: "Lord, in our overall game of life, use me wherever I can have the greatest impact for your kingdom." Our desire is to touch lives for Christ, so when an opportunity presents itself to increase our sphere of influence, we must openly consider the possibility.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ McCollum, 29.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid., 30.

²⁴³ Cionca, 88.

If this is true, then some pastors should consider using their gifts to serve in a larger church with staff, and others should continue to serve effectively as solo pastors. Oswald recognizes that wherever God calls pastors is the best place for them to use their skills:

There are some clergy who function at their highest level of effectiveness in the Pastoral Church (50-150 active members). Given the different clusters of skills required for others sizes of congregations, some clergy should consider spending their entire career in this size congregation...If clergy can regard themselves as successful only when they become pastor of a large congregation, then 65% of mainline Protestant clergy are going to end their career with feelings of failure. Two thirds of mainline Protestant congregations are either Family (under 50 active members) or Pastoral sized churches.

The pursuit of power and size for selfish reasons is a temptation pastors must be on guard against. Likewise, pastors must consider whether serving in a larger church is a way to benefit people or themselves. Thrall, McNicol and McElrath use the imagery of a ladder in their book *Ascent of A Leader*. They describe organizations as either driven by building character or seeking capacity. To them, the character ladder puts people ahead of tasks. They describe how this approach builds relationships:

The character ladder leads to a relational organization – a community – that honors the completion of tasks. The capacity ladder typically leads to a task-driven organization, at the expense of people. This ladder creates people-users – leaders who use followers for their own benefit, to further their own success. But leaders on the character latter treat people as the object and focus of their success. They lead for the benefit of people, not just their own benefit.²⁴⁴

Pastors should ask when considering this transition, “What is my motive? Is it personal and self-glorifying or a humble consideration of how I can best serve God with the gifts and skills he has given to me?” This leads to a final consideration. “Is God calling and equipping me to minister in the context of a multiple staff?”

²⁴⁴ Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 50.

Staff Ministry

A third theme found in the literature on pastors considering transition from a solo to senior role explores involvement with a staff. Staff ministry comes with many challenges as well as with benefits of working with others. Senior pastors with staff inherit time demands, staff relational issues, and even the pains of staff failures. These are challenges that most solo pastors do not have to encounter. On the other hand, senior pastors with staff enjoy the ability to work and collaborate with others, define their gifts, enjoy mutual accountability and fellowship. There is no perfect staff just as there is no perfect pastor. Lawrence describes how pastors are always inadequate apart from Christ. He says:

Ministry is life permanently lived in the deep end of the pool with no time-outs. The odds will always be five thousand to seven, that is, there will always be five thousand hungry men (plus women and children), and all we'll ever have in ourselves to give them is five loaves and two fish. The pastorate will always be beyond us – beyond our gifts, our training, our experience, beyond everything except a radical trust in Christ. If we are seeking to become adequate as pastors, we are seeking something that will never happen. The best and brightest among us will never have more than a little boy's lunch. Ministry is permanently beyond our adequacy.²⁴⁵

Pastors are never adequate for the challenges of staff ministry, but with God's help, they can be used to serve alongside of other inadequate pastors for the glory of God. Upon considering the skills, gifts, ministry personality, motivation, and the effects on a pastor's family and health, this transition is one that should be made only when pastors understand that it is only by God's grace that they can faithfully carry it out. Should a solo pastor transition into the role of a senior pastor? The answer is "yes" if that is where God is calling him or her to serve. Pastors can serve as solo pastors and then be called to serve in a different way. Cionca sums it up by saying:

²⁴⁵ Lawrence, 24-25.

Pastoral strengths vary as do congregational needs. A minister's gifts and interests can even change over time, just as a church's emphasis will shift at different stages of its life. . . . Effective ministry, therefore, involves being the right person in the right place at the right time.²⁴⁶

Pastors should want to serve with the assurance that they are the right person in the right place at the right time. When that right place for a solo pastor seems to be the senior pastorate, the key areas of ministry examined in this literature review must be understood in order for a solo pastor to overcome the inherent challenges of transitioning into a senior pastor role.

²⁴⁶ Cionca, 85-86.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges encountered by a solo pastor when transitioning into a senior pastor role. The assumption of this study was that pastors have learned important principles involved in the transition from solo to senior pastorates through their own experiences. In order to address this purpose, I have identified three main areas of focus that are central to the transition from the solo to senior pastorate. These include the areas of leadership skills and transition, power and authority dynamics, and staff relations. To examine these areas more closely, the following research questions served as the intended focus for this study:

1. What leadership and transitional challenges do solo pastors encounter when they become senior pastors?
2. What power and authority challenges do solo pastors encounter when they become senior pastors?
3. What staff-relation challenges do solo pastors encounter when they become senior pastors?
4. What lessons have pastors who have made this transition learned which can benefit future pastors who make the same transition?

A qualitative study best comprehends the pastor's point of view from their world of lived experiences. This chapter describes the qualitative methodology used in this study. Sections in this chapter include the design of the study, sampling criteria, data collection methods, analysis procedures, research stance, and limitations of the study.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Sharan B. Merriam in her book *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* defines a qualitative case study as an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit.”²⁴⁷ Merriam identifies five characteristics of qualitative research:²⁴⁸

1. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people construct of experiences they have in the world.
2. Qualitative researchers are the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.
3. Qualitative researchers usually engage in fieldwork.
4. Qualitative researchers primarily employ an inductive research strategy.
5. Qualitative researchers use words and pictures to describe the results of their study.

By utilizing the design of a qualitative (rather than quantitative) approach toward this study, a number of important and beneficial outcomes were attained. The qualitative design allowed me to better analyze the meaning that pastors have constructed from their own experience of transitioning from the solo to senior pastorate. By conducting the research myself through personal interviews, I was able to gain valuable information that is beneficial to others and myself in ministry. The qualitative approach also allowed me to be personal in my research through the fieldwork of conducting face-to-face interviews. I was able to work toward theories of how pastors can make this transition in light of the observations and intuitive understanding I gained through an inductive research strategy. Finally, this study allowed me to use words to express the kind of

²⁴⁷ Sharan B Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 27.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 6-8.

transitional adjustments that need to be made by pastors rather than simply conveying the findings through statistics.

SAMPLING CRITERIA

This study was conducted through personal interviews with twelve pastors in the Reformed Church in America who have served as solo pastors at some point in their ministry prior to becoming senior pastors. This criterion was used in order to understand the adjustments and transitions pastors must make when moving from a solo to senior pastor context. It was necessary that those who were interviewed had solo pastor experiences to relate with and compare to their later senior pastorate experience. To determine which pastors fit this criterion, information was gathered from three sources:

1. The *Historical Directory of the RCA, 1628-2000*. The newest edition of this book contains a listing of every RCA church and the pastors that have served each church throughout the history of the RCA. It also contains a list of each RCA pastor with the churches they have served and the years served.
2. The annual denominational statistical tables that are printed each year following General Synod. These contain an up-to-date listing of clergy serving each RCA church. These tables also reveal how many ordained staff are serving each church.
3. My own personal knowledge of pastors who have served as solo pastors prior to becoming senior pastors.

These resources allowed me to devise a list of pastors in the Reformed Church in America who fit the criteria of serving at one point in time as a solo pastor and who subsequently served as a senior pastor. This list, which included pastors serving churches across the United States, was narrowed down to sixteen pastors who served in the Midwest. Since I currently serve in the Midwest, geographical proximity was a key factor

in choosing sixteen potential pastors to interview because of personal time constraints and travel costs.

Once I formulated this list of sixteen pastors who fit the criteria of this study, I mailed twelve of them a letter to describe the focus of my study and inquire about their willingness to be interviewed. This letter of inquiry was followed with a phone call two weeks after the letter was sent. The purpose of the call was to make sure they received the letter, confirm that they have indeed served as a solo pastor at some point prior to serving as a senior pastor, and inquire whether or not they would agree to be interviewed.

In making these phone calls, I learned one pastor was unable to set up an interview during a two-week window of time that I would be in his state. This was due to previously scheduled family vacation time. Another pastor notified me that he did not fit the criteria of the study. In response, I mailed out letters to two more pastors who were on the list of sixteen. Following phone calls to them two weeks later, my sample of twelve consenting pastors who fit my criteria was complete.

Size of membership, style of worship, location, and other church characteristics could have impacted the type of transition that was experienced. These factors did not impact the qualifications of those interviewed.

INTRODUCTIONS TO PASTORS INTERVIEWED DURING THIS STUDY

Twelve pastors were selected to participate in this study. All of these pastors happened to be men. In the following section each participant will briefly be introduced. All names and identifiable information of participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Hunter

Hunter is currently serving his third church with nearly thirty years of ordained ministry experience. Hunter began serving as a solo pastor in a small-sized congregation that experienced growth during his time there. He then served as a solo pastor at a church that later added additional staff, including a second ordained pastor. He currently serves as a senior pastor of a multiple staff. He and his wife have two children.

Eric

Eric has been in full-time ordained ministry for over thirty years. He and his wife have four grown children. Eric served as the only ordained pastor in the first three churches that he served. These churches did utilize some additional staff members or seminary students at various points in Eric's ministry. Eric has since served as a senior pastor in two larger multiple staff settings.

Craig

Craig has over twenty-five years of ordained ministry experience. He and his wife have three grown children. Craig has served in three churches in various parts of the United States. His first church experience was a solo pastorate. He then served as a senior pastor with another ordained pastor on staff. His most recent pastorate has also been as a senior pastor with multiple staff.

Ted

Ted has been in full-time ordained ministry for over twenty-five years. Ted served as a solo pastor in his first two churches. His third ministry setting was as senior pastor with additional staff. His current role is also that of senior pastor in a multiple staff setting. Ted has served churches throughout the Midwest.

Greg

Greg has been an ordained pastor for over twenty years. He and his wife have two children. Following seminary and ordination, Greg served as a solo pastor in a small town setting. This was followed by a second solo pastorate experience. He then took a call to be a senior pastor at a church with one other ordained staff person.

Frank

Frank has been an ordained pastor for nearly thirty years. He and his wife have three children. Frank has served four churches in four different states. Frank first served as an associate pastor. He then served two churches as a solo pastor. Most recently, Frank has served as a senior pastor at a church that has utilized ordained and unordained staff members.

Paul

Paul has been an ordained pastor for nearly thirty-five years. He has served in six churches across the Midwest. He served as a solo pastor in most of these churches. His current setting is in a multiple-staff church where he serves alongside of another pastor in a lead role. These two pastors have clearly defined ministry roles and areas of responsibility.

Randy

Randy has served for over twenty years as an ordained pastor. He has served three churches in three different states in the Midwest. He began his ministry as an associate pastor before serving in his second church as a solo pastor. His third ministry role began as a solo pastorate but became that of senior pastor following the addition of a second ordained staff member.

Nathan

Nathan has been an ordained pastor for over twenty-five years. He and his wife have two children. Nathan first served as a solo pastor. This was followed by time spent in an associate pastor position. His time as an associate involved a period of service when the senior pastorate position at that church was vacant. Nathan's current role is that of senior pastor at a church with multiple full-time and part-time staff members.

Kevin

Kevin has been in full-time ordained ministry for over thirty years. He has served as a solo pastor, associate pastor and senior pastor. All of his pastoral time has been spent in the Midwest. His last two pastorates were at large-sized churches with a variety of staff positions.

Derek

Derek has been in full-time ordained ministry for over thirty years. He and his wife have three grown children. Derek's ordained ministry experience includes roles of associate pastor, solo pastor, and lead pastor of a large staff. His service in these roles includes time spent in six different churches throughout the Midwest.

Bruce

Bruce has served as an ordained pastor for thirty years. He served as a solo pastor in the first two church where he served. He then took a call to be a senior pastor at a church with an additional ordained staff member and other part-time staff members.

Table 1 shows an overview of the demographics for the twelve pastors who were interviewed for this research.

Table 1 Research Participants' Demographics

| Name | Years in Ministry | Number of Churches Served | Number of Full-time Ordained Staff in Current Church | Membership Range of Current Church* |
|--------|-------------------|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Hunter | 30 | 3 | 2 | 1,500 + |
| Eric | 33 | 4 | 2 | 750-999 |
| Craig | 25 | 3 | 2 | 750-999 |
| Ted | 26 | 4 | 2 | 750-999 |
| Greg | 20 | 3 | 2 | 500-749 |
| Frank | 28 | 4 | 1 | 500-749 |
| Paul | 34 | 6 | 2 | 1250-1499 |
| Randy | 23 | 3 | 2 | 500-749 |
| Nathan | 27 | 3 | 2 | 750-999 |
| Kevin | 31 | 3 | 2 | 1000-1249 |
| Derek | 32 | 6 | 1 | 250-499 |
| Bruce | 30 | 3 | 2 | 500-749 |

* Number of total members ranging in increments of 250

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Once I established the twelve pastors who consented to be interviewed, I arranged for approximately one-hour personal interviews with each of them. Prior to the interview, I mailed each of the twelve pastors a copy of my interview guide, a research subjects' consent form, and another reminder that the interviews would be audio taped with my pledge for confidentiality of what they shared.

When the designated time came, I traveled to each agreed-upon location for the interview. Eleven of the twelve pastors chose to meet with me at the church. One pastor elected to have me interview him at his home. Prior to the start of the interview, I further introduced myself, thanked them for their willingness to be interviewed, and reviewed the purpose of my study. Together, we each signed two copies of the research subjects' consent form. They were each given one signed copy to keep. I took one signed copy that was mailed to the Doctor of Ministry office at Covenant Seminary. I also reaffirmed the confidential nature of the interview, expressed to them that their comments would be printed under a pseudonym, and pledged to send them a completed copy of my study once it was finished.

During the interview, I used the questions from the interview guide that are printed in the appendices and followed up on those questions with questions of clarification. Each interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder. All but two of the pastors were currently serving as a senior pastor. One pastor had transitioned back into a solo role and one had recently stepped down from the pastorate for personal reasons. The twelve pastors interviewed were drawn from four states and eight RCA classis.

ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

As soon as possible and always within one month of each meeting, I personally transcribed each interview. I used computer software to play back the digital recording on my computer and type out each transcript. The software allowed me to slow down the playback speed and replay as needed. I printed out each transcript with space on the right-hand side of each page for notes and points to remember. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used throughout this study. I then read the transcripts and analyzed the responses of each pastor to identify common themes, compare feedback and formulate chapter four of my dissertation.

RESEARCH STANCE

This section reveals three areas or biases that affect my research stance. These three areas include the consideration of negative experiences for learning, a larger vs. small church bias, and some personal biases that I brought into the research.

Recognizing that we can learn from negative experiences as well as positive, I did not screen interviewees or leave out portions of their interviews. Instead, I recorded the insights and lessons learned by all twelve pastors who experienced both satisfaction and difficulty in the transition.

In conducting this research, I tried to address the bias that the larger church is “better” or more “worthy” than the smaller solo pastor setting. I feel this is a mindset in our “bigger is better” culture. At appropriate times during the interviews, I asked pastors to discern how the larger church and staff setting led to both joys and frustrations. I also sought to approach this research with the biblical mindset that God calls us to serve in various capacities with different gifts and that the most important factor in whether or not

pastors served with staff was their own giftedness and fit. This is something that I am still discerning in my own ministry, and a personal benefit of this research was the opportunity to study this transition in light of how God has called me and may someday call me to serve Him.

In conducting this research, I acknowledge that two personal biases impacted my approach to this study. First of all, I am a solo pastor who may one day be called to serve in a senior pastor position. Therefore, this study was of personal interest to me as I sought to understand potential challenges and benefits of making this transition.

Secondly, since I am a pastor in the Reformed Church in America, it was natural for me to choose to do my research in that denomination. The findings of this study may be relevant for pastoral transitions in a variety of denominations, or the findings may have unique implications because the research was conducted within one denomination.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As stated in the previous section, pastors interviewed for this study were limited to those serving in the Reformed Church in America. This is the denomination in which I serve and in which I was most able to identify pastors who fit the requirements of this study. Pastors who were interviewed were limited to those who have served one or more pastorates as a solo pastor prior to becoming a senior pastor of an RCA church.

My focus in this study was on the transition made by solo pastors to churches that have additional paid staff. In all cases, those interviewed have or had experience as a senior pastor with at least one other ordained staff and in some cases additional paid staff as well. Those interviewed were pastors that were within driving distance and those with whom I could meet in person at a convenient time and location. Much of this limitation

was in light of time and economic considerations. However, within these limitations I had no problem finding enough pastors for this sample.

I conducted this study from the shared viewpoints of senior pastors who have made this ministry transition. Therefore, viewpoints and responses that pertain to pastoral leadership responsibilities, staff relationships and clergy authority within this study will be limited to those given by the senior pastor.

Finally, the conclusions of this study were limited to the transitional experiences of those who were interviewed along with input gained from selected readings. Therefore, the conclusions are limited to the experiences of a select group of individuals and chosen literature.

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The process described in this chapter reveals how I utilized a qualitative research approach to study the transition from the solo to senior pastorate. This qualitative design allowed me to better analyze the meaning that pastors have constructed from their own experience of transitioning from the solo to senior pastorate. Through carefully designed research questions and personal interviews with pastors who met the criteria, I was able to gain valuable information that is beneficial to others and myself in ministry.

This information was gathered in a carefully designed method by identifying pastors who fit the criteria, collecting data through recorded personal interviews, analyzing this data through transcripts that I typed while listening to my digital recordings, acknowledging my research stance, and identifying limitations to the study.

Through the research process described in this chapter, the information was analyzed as it related to the literature that was reviewed. The information gathered from

each individual interview was also analyzed as it related to the experiences of the other participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges encountered by a solo pastor when transitioning into a senior pastor role. To that end, this chapter utilizes the findings of the twelve pastoral interviews and reports on common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions for this study.

LEADERSHIP AND TRANSITIONAL CHALLENGES

The first research question sought to determine what leadership and transitional challenges solo pastors encountered when they became senior pastors. When asked which adjustments had to be made in light of the transition from the solo to senior pastorate, pastors identified many transitional challenges they faced in the area of leadership skills and practices.

The Challenges and Benefits of Delegating

Nine of the twelve pastors interviewed spoke of the challenges they encountered in letting go of total involvement and delegating certain areas of ministry to other staff members. Hunter commented on this transition:

There were things I had to give up that I liked. There was a time I had my nose in almost every administrative decision. You have to know what's going on in a solo pastorate. But when you go from solo to senior, you may not know about everything going on in the areas you give up. At times, I don't know what's going on in those areas unless others report it to me. A perfectionist personality can't be a lead pastor.

Ted acknowledged this challenge also, saying:

You can't be a lone ranger when you have other full time staff people in addition to all the volunteers. You must minister in a team context and that can be an adjustment. Whoever is on staff is going to want some areas of responsibility that the senior pastor (in this case myself) was used to doing himself. I've found that I had to really adapt.

Derek discussed the challenge of delegating and offered two critical incidents from his previous experience as an associate pastor, which reminded him of the need to empower his staff. Derek remarked, "These incidents made me say that this is not the way I'm going to lead if I ever become a senior pastor with staff."

The first incident involved a time when Derek worked with youth at a retreat. Following the retreat, a number of kids wanted to make a profession of faith on a particular Sunday. The senior pastor then said, "I won't be here" and when asked if Derek could lead the liturgy, the senior pastor remarked "Well, that's not his job, it's mine."

The second incident involved the funeral of a woman whom Derek had spent time with prior to her death because the senior pastor was on vacation. The family wanted Derek to have a part in the funeral but the senior pastor refused because he felt it was a doubling up of time. The family was hurt in the process by the senior pastor's unwillingness to give up some control.

Randy also experienced challenges to delegating in the early stages of bringing on an associate pastor. These challenges arose out of congregational expectations. Randy recalled:

When the associate came, I relinquished the pastoral care. Now initially that was a relief. But, the hardest part of that was the resistance of a number of people who did not accept that. They thought the senior pastor should be there for them. I had to set boundaries and say, "No, I will be here in the case of this or that, but

the associate is our pastor of pastoral care. It doesn't mean I'll never call you or stop in the hospital to visit you. But she will be the person to see you."

For other pastors, the act of delegating brought joy and relief. Paul found it refreshing to delegate responsibility in the area of leadership and to focus his time specifically on preaching and pastoral care. He explained: "I would much rather be making a pastoral call than doing some leadership things in the church. That was a fairly easy transition for me, because even in single pastorates, I did not enjoy leading consistory."

Eric agreed when he said, "I've heard of some senior pastors and even solo pastors who want to do it all. I have no problem delegating, giving people the freedom to do their job and sharing the pulpit with staff. I relish that opportunity."

Delegation and Trust

One of the challenges of delegating is the act of trusting another staff member and refraining from stepping in when things do not go well. Derek spoke about the delicate balance between entrusting responsibility and potential negative affects that it can have on ministry:

The solo to team approach creates a dynamic where you are no longer the only pilot. Now there is another person on board to whom you said, "This is your area." You want to free them to do that area, but in your mind you've got things you think ought to be done or can't help but think "that's the way I would do it." Sometimes there is room to offer advice and there are also times when you walk away and say "It's not my area anymore." There's a delicate balance there. It involves letting go and yet still being in that role.

Nathan agreed with the challenge of entrusting to the point of letting staff fail:

One challenge I faced was transitioning from being used to having lots of time for study and handling my own time, to then having to pour more energy into staff, delegating, letting go, handing off, and letting them at times fail. You give counsel and advice but they have to make decisions on their own. In the senior

role, you are not solely responsible anymore for their success. I probably erred on the side of letting them go and run and then when it got too late, helping them get out of difficult situations or putting out a fire.

Craig still finds himself wrestling at times with the task of delegating and entrusting others, yet views this challenge as a positive learning experience:

The difficult part of it for me personally was learning to give up some things. That was difficult because of the way I was created. I had to let it go. In that awareness, once it was gone, it felt good. It's nice having someone else do it. The problem was that many times I thought I could have done it better than that person. That's the way it is, and I had to learn that. People make mistakes and in some cases they did do it better than I could.

Craig pointed out that one of the benefits of delegating was that when he delegated, he sometimes discovered that someone could do something better than he.

Use of Time

A second leadership challenge faced by pastors who transitioned from the solo to senior role was recognizing their time would be allocated differently. For many, hands-on-ministry in the solo pastorate was replaced with more time spent managing, coordinating and leading staff as a senior pastor. Greg explained:

More of my time is spent, not doing everything, but making sure we are all on the same page and pulling in the same direction. For example, in a former solo setting, I basically did all of the congregational care. The elders there didn't call much. Crises, hospital visits, and calling on shut-ins were my responsibility. Here, I do some; especially crises and hospital calling, but, we coordinate things. We have a congregational care person responsible mainly for shut-in calling and following up with people after hospitalizations. So it's coordinating and making sure that things are covered.

Randy described how his use of time as a senior pastor involves more time spent with staff and less with laity:

When I think back to my solo pastorate, I probably spent time with key lay people, especially in the area of education, youth and music. Here it became more of spending time with the staff, which then spend time with those key

people. I feel a step removed from the laity. I now spend more time with staff than key lay people.

Nathan echoed this challenge:

You start having staff time rather than just looking at your whole week and what you need to accomplish by the next Sunday while being available for calling. For me now, it's truly a whole Monday morning that is given to staff and meetings along with probably another three to four hours given to working with staff such as the music person, etc. . . . In the solo pastorate I would choose three hymns and a liturgy in fifteen minutes, gave it to the secretary and went with it. I think now it's improved, but there is a lot of time spent with these individuals in processing that. Also, the other ordained pastor and I are each giving spiritual guidance to half the staff, so there are also one-to-one meetings where we are guiding and working with them.

As a leader, not only do the responsibilities that affect one's use of time differ in the solo and senior pastorate, but also the time it takes to gain approval for administrative decisions. Craig described that difference from his solo to senior pastorate experience:

I actually found that being a solo pastor was easier administratively. I use the term "you can spin on a dime." The need to ask for permission is less due to the fact that if you have been given authority by your consistory or your board, you know exactly where the chain is. From my experience, I was given that permission in a solo pastorate. I felt I could function very effectively. Here, they've definitely used the term senior pastor and you have definite roles and expectations. But they have struggled with a chain of command. To compensate that, in the last few years they've gone to a leadership team format which in my personal opinion is filled with bureaucracy and has slowed the decision making process tremendously.

The transition from the solo to senior pastorate affects the way that pastors are used to spending their time. Staff ministry comes with the responsibility of staff leadership, communication, addressing problems, and feeling a step removed from the congregation. It may also alter the administrative decision-making process that a pastor was accustomed to in the solo setting.

Necessary Leadership Skills for Senior Pastors

In light of the leadership challenges that solo pastors face when transitioning to a senior role, pastors were asked which specific leadership skills they felt a senior pastor must have in order to make this transition and minister effectively. Though some of these skills may also be helpful or necessary for solo pastors, these specific skills were considered a must for anyone transitioning from the solo to senior role. Nine of the twelve pastors who were interviewed pointed to specific skills necessary for the senior pastorate. These abilities can be summarized in four necessary skills.

A team player

Solo pastors may make excellent pastors without day-to-day team interaction with fellow staff members. However, when transitioning into a senior pastor role, the ability to work with others in a team setting is crucial. Greg noted that pastors must remember that the ministry is bigger than themselves. Many of the pastors listed teamwork traits such as not having to be in charge of everything, the ability to give up things, a willingness not to have to know everything that is going on, and the skills of nurturing, respecting, and encouraging staff. A team player is engaged in the ministries of the church without needing to control them. Bruce described this as being a coordinator more than an innovator.

Along with working well with others, being a team player involves sharing the credit and praise. Ted explained:

When congregations recognize their pastors, the solo pastor receives all the recognition and the entire Christmas gift. When you are on a team, it's more of a divided dynamic of shared ministry.

Sharing recognition and credit may be a new challenge for someone who has previously served as the only pastor at a church.

Leadership giftedness

Although leadership can be carried out in a variety of ways, a senior pastor must be a leader. Hunter described the leadership mentality of a senior pastor as one who accepts both authority and responsibility. He emphasized the ability to lead by example. Kevin commented on the importance of identifying one's leadership style and modeling loyalty. Those interviewed also highlighted the importance of good self-confidence, a commitment to modeling the Christian life, the vision to look ahead, and the importance of administrative and supervisory skills.

Time management in a flexible fashion

A senior pastor must be able to manage time in a way that results in getting things done while allowing for time to address unexpected issues that may arise. These may be staff concerns, program changes, or sudden conflicts. Ted noted, "The senior pastor in a church with lots of different dynamics needs to be able to massage things very well." This requires the administrative and organizational ability to get done what needs to be done, while also creating time for unexpected needs. This may also involve setting boundaries or distancing one's contact with a multitude of members in order to focus in a deeper sense with staff and key leaders.

Character traits

The majority of pastors interviewed stressed the importance of living out basic character traits. These included traits of honesty, humility, integrity, transparency, taking

joy in the accomplishments of others, and being thick skinned. Derek defined integrity as not only walking the talk, but also living in such a way that if something is done improperly or wrong, the people who know him best will know that it was done with the purest of intentions. Though these character traits are also crucial for solo pastors, the senior pastor must exhibit them before God, the larger congregation, and the other full-time staff members.

These leadership skills -- the ability to work well with others, leadership giftedness, effective time management and basic character traits -- are necessary for senior pastors according to those interviewed. Also, according to them, maturity and experience will help new senior pastors develop some of these abilities and skills. Of course, the pastor must possess the willingness to learn from a wide variety of sources in order to develop his or her leadership potential.

Leadership Development

The skills that are necessary for serving as a leader in a senior pastorate may involve some natural gifts and abilities, but they also require learning and development. The pastors that were interviewed shared how they not only discovered the skills that they would need to have as a senior pastor, but also learned how to develop and use them.

Senior pastors must continually be willing to learn. Frank commented:

There is never a person I can't learn something from. There is never a situation you can't learn something from. For example, a staff member we had taught me a lot about being a worship leader.

At times it becomes obvious that in a new role something has to change. The old way of doing ministry will not work. Randy reflected on how serving in the larger

church led to a sense of “burnout” and an awareness of his need to learn how to set clearer boundaries:

Before the associate came, I was sinking so I sought guidance from a Christian counseling center. With some guidance from the therapist, I eventually said to the consistory, “We either need to get some help (I was thinking visitation pastor or a part-time retired pastor), or we define what my priorities are and clarify them so that I know what to say no to and what to say yes to, and so that the congregation understands what I’m saying no to.”

Greg also experienced the need to learn, saying to himself, “If I’m going to keep doing this, I’ve got to find healthier ways to do it. Otherwise I’m not doing myself, my family and ultimately God any good.

Bruce found himself overwhelmed as a senior pastor and in need of learning to make changes. He shared:

A couple of years ago I was very burned out to the point where I was reading through the classified ads for other jobs. Between health problems and being physically and emotionally drained, I had to just cut back, pull back, and I think I’m coming back. I find that changes are almost a continual ongoing process in a changing ministry.

Even when things are going well and ministry is healthy, a leader must continue to learn. Just as Frank learned from fellow staff members, senior pastors can also learn from each other. Nathan tells of how he used a sabbatical leave to learn new skills:

One of the things I did in my sabbatical about seven years ago was to go to a number of churches that had staff and ask a number of questions such as: How do you stay fresh in your preaching? How are you handling staff? How do you continue to promote “team” and make your staff a team?

These questions pertained to issues that Nathan was considering at the time. He benefited from the wisdom and experience of other pastors. On another occasion, when faced with staff personnel matters, he sought the help of those in similar educational or business situations:

When we had difficulty with some staff members, we saw a need for a human resources team. We formed a team of individuals who handle these very issues in business settings and schools and that team of six came along the other ordained person and myself. Today, we have more people who handle these kinds of issues within businesses in our community, and these lay people are giving counsel and direction to the administrator and myself.

These pastors identified areas in which they needed to grow and new skills that they needed to learn. They received insight from fellow staff members, counselors, further education, peers, and other social sectors in order to develop new ways to serve as leaders in a senior pastor context. They pointed out that seminary education and even past experience cannot prepare a pastor for every challenge that is encountered in leadership when transitioning into a new role. Continued learning is important. Such insight and learning is also necessary as new places of service bring challenges in the area of power and authority dynamics.

POWER AND AUTHORITY CHALLENGES

The second research question sought to determine power and authority challenges that solo pastors encountered when becoming senior pastors. The pastors interviewed were asked to compare the authority and influence that they had in the solo and senior pastorates. While considering dynamics of power and authority, pastors were reminded of the biblical attitude of servant leadership, which serves as a foundation for the way one leads and exercises influence. This biblical foundation was based on the words of Jesus in Matthew 20:28 where he said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Authority Exercised with Humility and a Servant's Heart

The initial focus of this research question sought to determine how pastors pursued a servant's heart as a leader entrusted with power and authority. Those who had transitioned from a solo to senior pastorate were asked how they kept a servant's heart and mindset in the midst of a new level of formal authority (with and over staff), the expectations of those they served, and the temptations which they faced. Most pastors saw the pursuit of humility and a servant's heart as an ongoing challenge of great importance. When asked about keeping a servant's heart, Ted answered:

That is a daily issue that you just keep working on. I would say that you do your best to model servant leadership with people. You can do that even through your preaching. Servanthood can be modeled through your preaching ministry. One of the things that I've lifted up as an extremely high priority in ministry, and especially here, is the fruit of the Spirit and in particular the fruit of kindness. If they don't see that within the leader and all they see is someone who just has or thinks he has a lot of authority and control over things and that, then they are not going to pick up what is really significant to the heart of a pastor leader.

Eric also saw this as a daily challenge. He said, "I continually remind myself that I am a pastor first of all and I stay grounded in the scriptures and devotional life. I am continually reminded that I am a servant of Christ, and I am to lead following his example."

Frank sought continuing educational opportunities that would promote a servant's heart:

One way that I have dealt with this challenge is by taking a continuing education seminary class on servant leadership. I would highly recommend that. Continued learning is important and humility involves acknowledging that we don't know it all. Another way is to facilitate planned acts of kindness. Times where I am purposefully showing kindness to others.

Hunter shared how he once witnessed a poor model of servanthood and how it helped him learn the importance of a servant's heart:

At the meal time following a funeral where several pastors were present, a lady was carrying some dishes into the kitchen and nearly stumbling. There was a pastor sitting nearby. I saw the lady say to him, "Can you help pastor?" He responded, "I'm sorry, these hands are made for praying, not dirty dishes." It so startled me that it formed me for life.

Nathan described how a theology of grace keeps him humble:

Certainly one of my goals and values has been to be a servant and to walk before the Lord in humility. Certainly when you're preaching grace, it's all about humility, brokenness and spiritual bankruptcy before the Lord. I think if you are preaching and seeking to be an evangelistic congregation, you have no other choice but to clearly call sin sin and I know my own.

Authority Kept in Check Through Accountability

For those interviewed, a desire to remain humble led to an intentional willingness to seek accountability. It became clear in the interviews that most of these pastors experienced and sought various types of accountability: accountability in their own walk with Christ, their life boundaries and their service in the church. For some of the pastors, self-accountability was pursued. Greg reported on his practice of self-evaluation:

I have done a self-evaluation every year since coming here. I'm a bit embarrassed about how long it took me to figure this out, but the first conviction of my self-evaluation is that my effectiveness as a pastor is directly related to my relationship with Christ. Which is so obvious but often forgotten. I've tried to do basic things like staying regular with my devotions. A key for me, and I should do it more often than I do, but once a month I schedule a personal retreat day and go off by myself.

For other pastors, their staff, a group or another person served to help them stay accountable. Nathan described his accountability structure:

I am in a weekly accountability group with two other pastors. It is required on our staff that we have a mentor and an advocate that we see once a month. We are not afraid, and I have at times, seen a counselor.

Kevin's congregation sought to uphold accountability through regular evaluation:

There are annual evaluations that are done. I fill out evaluations on all the ministry staff people and the administrator. The administrator fills out evaluations on the rest of the support staff. Everyone does a self-evaluation as well. I do a self-evaluation and the consistory is also invited to submit evaluation comments for me.

Eric is part of a pastoral network that meets regularly. This is a change from earlier in his ministry. He commented:

In my other churches in the early years I had preacher friends that were older than I was that I would often call for advice. I used to golf with them and so forth. I am now part of a pastor's small group. There are seven of us who get together every three or four weeks. Our denomination has this Lily Foundation for pastoral networks. This is a good group of guys. It is well planned and we take turns leading.

Hunter did not see the value of pastoral accountability groups. He described how he seeks out individuals for accountability:

I'm going to be really honest: I never felt that pastors are honest with each other. I have people outside of this church, some of my own friends, that when I need somebody to talk to outside of here, because it's too close to home, they will absolutely be in my face and dead honest in a moment. I have a vice president now who has the skill of confrontation in a way that I know he would only use to help me.

Because they understood how temptation and pride can easily undermine a servant's heart and lead to a misuse of authority, pastors sought to remain humble, model servanthood and remain accountable. Of course, these temptations and necessary steps of accountability exist in both the solo and senior settings; the pastors I interviewed said they began to develop a servant's heart in their solo experience. But several mentioned experiencing new opportunities to practice humility with the shifts of power, authority, and influence that accompany a pastoral transition.

Sources of Power and Authority

Pastors reflected on the ways their authority and influence were impacted by their transition into the senior pastorate. Their reflections focused on three types of authority: God given authority, formal authority and earned relational authority.

God given authority

One source of authority recognized by those serving as senior pastors is authority given by God. Eric stated, “My power and authority first comes from God. Greg points to Christ as the head of the church, but also affirms the responsibility of those called to serve him:

It is Christ’s Church. So, we talk about servanthood and that Christ is the head. But, there are also our roles to be filled within the church and we must be clear about those. I remember someone making a statement once about pastoral egos. I thought, that doesn’t apply with me and he said, “Who else stands up and pretends to speak for God each week?” I thought, “Yeah.”

Formal authority

A second source of authority recognized by those interviewed was authority they received from the leadership of the church. This was authority that came with the position. Hunter expressed this when he said:

The consistory, specifically the executive team here, is my boss. I think I have the authority to try to get them to go in a certain direction. I do not have the authority to execute that direction without their blessing and without their approval. I think I should really influence people in direction, because I am here more than anybody else, I hear more than anybody else and I know more than anybody else. If I don’t, I’m not a good senior pastor. So I need to bring them up to speed, not by telling them “we are going to do this,” but by saying “here’s what we have going, here’s what I hear people saying, and therefore, here’s the direction I think we ought to go for the following reasons.

Eric added:

I realize that the Book of Church Order still says the consistory is the governing body of the church. So, as opposed to what some of the other staff might think, ultimately the authority resides with the consistory and I am accountable to them. At the same time, I need to lead, but it's not autonomous.

Greg agreed and expressed where he thinks he fits into the structure:

I think that the consistory in our polity is used by God to lead the church. My role as president of consistory is to facilitate and run meetings. I often think of it as trying to steer the process. Process to me is important. I want people to have their say, to be praying and to be listening. But I have a responsibility that it doesn't become chaos.

Derek also affirmed authority that is given to the senior pastor and the expectations that come with it:

Authority was definitely given and it was made very clear that I was the senior pastor. That's the way it was set up and said in writing and thought. In practical terms, for better or worse, there was always a segment of leadership, which, if an associate pastor wanted to do something, wanted to make sure that I was on board. There was a checking back, which at the time made me a little uncomfortable because I was anxious for them to give credibility to the associate. But I also recognized that it was their way of double-checking with me "are you on the same page here?" I think the structure of the Reformed Church does that by virtue of the fact that the senior pastor is president of consistory. How we practice that probably varies, but the bottom line is that the senior pastor is expected to be a guiding force so things are done decently and in order. So, I think there is that kind of power invested there.

Kevin pointed to other sources of formal authority. He said:

The power of the church is the power of the Holy Spirit. There were places I was in power. I think the privilege of the pulpit is that. There is also the authority of the Word. The scripture has a power of it's own.

Earned relational authority

Ted expressed how a senior pastor has to earn authority and how it does not simply come with the position:

In my previous church, the senior pastor was given an awful lot of rope in which he could either run with it or hang himself. I could share visions and dreams there and I could have everyone up saying “rah, rah, go for it.” In my role now as a senior pastor, there are lots of people in positions of authority in their own places of work and so on. So it really has to be earned and it really has to come about in a different kind of context than all of a sudden people following just because you have the title.

Kevin stated, “People have given you authority to manage things, to lead, and to exercise stewardship over things including opportunities you have.” In summary, the men agreed that pastoral authority and influence is exercised within enduring social relationships through power that is earned, conferred or entrusted from others.

The Senior Pastor’s Ability to Influence

Pastors that were interviewed reflected on the degree of power, authority and influence that they perceive they now have compared to what they possessed as solo pastors. Some felt that their ability to influence decreased in the senior pastorate while others felt their ability to influence increased.

Decreased influence with the broader congregation

For some, the solo to senior transition doesn’t change the amount of influence as much as it changes who is influenced. Derek described it this way:

To some degree my ability to influence individuals in the congregation was greater in the solo pastorate. Especially in the area of pastoral care, where in those really pastoral moments those relationships are built and we have a chance to really apply the gospel. When there is staff, you become one more step removed from direct contact with the congregation for every staff person you have. People are now dealing with the staff instead of you. I would hate to think the influence lessens, but who you influence changes. There is always influence, but the change is who and how many you are personally influencing. The constant factor is that influence also comes through preaching. So if the senior pastor is doing the bulk of the preaching, which is normally the case, that influence remains constant.

Hunter agreed:

I have a different audience now. The only time I have a large audience for influence is when I preach. In a church of 100 or less families, you can influence the whole church in a week or two. Here, the only people I can really influence well are those I get into contact with deeply, other than maybe a pastoral call or wedding. My biggest influence now is on the staff. If I add up my consistory, paid staff and my very close volunteer staff, it's about the same size as my first church. So that's where your influence has to switch.

Frank suggested that the degree of influence depends more on length of tenure than size of congregation. He said:

I think that in many ways, I still retain that same authority or influence that I had as solo pastor. Maybe my situation is unique in the sense that I've been here so long and the people, I would hope, trust me and look to my leadership. When a new person comes in, they haven't proved themselves. They need to be here a while to gain that influence and credibility. The longer you are there and serve with integrity, you gain influence. But you have to be there a while. I have found that the longer I am here, the more influence I have in the church and also in the community. I don't say that with pride, but I've earned that through time.

Upon contemplating the differences in influence between the solo and senior pastorate, Randy felt that perhaps the senior role has less influence for the following reason:

This may sound strange. In some ways I feel that I have less power as a senior pastor than a solo pastor. I have to share it. I didn't have to share it as a solo pastor. Here I share power. My job is to facilitate the process of decision-making. I try to give people the opportunity, training and feedback to do what they are gifted to do. But I don't think people look to me as much as they did in the solo pastorate.

Increased influence with the broader congregation

Others, such as Craig and Eric felt that they had more influence in the senior pastorate. Craig described how working with other staff allows for a greater sense of nurture and care for others:

When I get a request from a particular individual or someone I've been working with, and see the good things that happen, I can refer them to the rest of the staff for even further care and I can go on and nurture others. That work as a team, I enjoy because I get to see the success. In the solo pastorate, I wouldn't have been able to give that person as much care and attention. In some cases, I couldn't connect with everyone but now my staff can. They have that ability and so people are reached.

Eric felt that for him, the senior pastor role came with less suspicion and a greater acceptance of influence. When asked about the amount of influence in the senior role compared to his solo experience, Eric said:

I think I have more influence here. There really is a respect here for the senior pastor, but not the same for all the staff. Some of the staff feel like they don't get the respect. They have even said that "if I say something to the consistory, they hear it." In fact the consistory has many times told me "we want you to tell us your vision or how you are going to lead us." The ability to influence I think is expected. Not that I always get my way, but I think when I was a solo pastor, there was more suspicion of the pastor and the people weren't so readily accepting of influence.

These responses from pastors reveal how the use of power and authority and the degree of influence they perceive they have changed. For some, there was a greater sense of authority and influence. For others, it felt as though their authority and influence was diminished. Some recognized that the transition from solo to senior pastor changed who they influenced.

The Impact of Structure on the Ability to Influence

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that the ability to influence others and exercise authority often related to the organizational structure of the church. The basic leadership structure of the Reformed Church in America involves elders and deacons who are elected to serve as the governing body. The solo or senior pastor usually serves as the

president of consistory. In most cases, the majority of decisions in the church are made by the consistory.

In a smaller church setting, elected leaders can cover the majority of major decisions and the pastor can provide a high degree of influence. Many of the senior pastors were familiar with this structure from their solo pastorate days. However, in the larger church, this structure often led to frustration because it bogged down the decision-making process. As a result, it became evident in the interviews that larger churches with staff tended to either continue with the typical small church structure or adapt to a new organizational structure in light of their growth and size. The interviews revealed four primary forms of organizational structure that affected church governance and the involvement of the senior pastor.

A high degree of authority for elected leaders

This structure is a continuation of the common form of leadership in the Reformed Church in America. In this structure, the elected leaders make the decisions, the pastor serves as a facilitator of the process and the consistory oversees each aspect of ministry within the congregation.

Greg portrayed his role in this structure when he said:

I think that consistory in our polity is used by God to lead the church. My role as president of consistory is to facilitate and run meetings. I often think of it as trying to steer the process.

Greg recognized that his influence depends on the relationship he has with his consistory.

He admitted:

Here, I've got a few people who think that I am better than I am. I've got two people right now on consistory that do not like me at all. I know that and yet I

still have to work with them in the positions they are in. I'm forced to deal with these two right now. It's part of the reality in this situation.

As a senior pastor, Randy has influence upon the rest of the staff, but his influence is ultimately accountable to the consistory with whom he leads. Since Randy came as a solo pastor to a church that later added ordained staff, he assumed influence over staff within the same organizational structure. He described the structure in the following way:

When we started this whole staff structure and were going to call our associate, I asked them what they wanted the arrangement to be (co-pastor, assistant, associate...). They were clear they wanted me to be the senior pastor and they wanted me to supervise the staff. So, there is accountability to me, but ultimately to consistory and we all know that.

Under this same governing structure, Bruce works with staff, but does not have authority over staff. Referring to the role of the associate pastor, Bruce pointed out:

Youth work and education are his areas. There are some things that I would like to see done differently and there are some things I would do differently, but that is not my area of responsibility or control. In the way the structure is set up here, he is not accountable to me; he is accountable to the education committee.

In a similar way, when transitioning into his church, Bruce discovered the independence and influence of his first secretary:

Probably the biggest initial challenge was a full-time secretary who probably had as much influence in the way things happen in the church as the vice president of consistory! If she didn't do something, it didn't get done. If she didn't want to do it, she wasn't going to.

This accountability arrangement forced Bruce to negotiate his interests. It also led to frustration and confusion, which he openly expressed:

In my early years and even since, I've said that I feel like this church is an octopus. I thought I was going to be the head but haven't figured out where it is yet, and I can't chase it down. Part of the struggle I've felt here is that there isn't a clear direction and the group is large enough and diverse enough that it's very difficult to get everybody on the same page and going in the same direction. I'm

not sure that the structures that are in place here are most conducive to that. I've not been able to bring that around as much as I've hoped.

This led Bruce to conclude:

Maybe I've even surrendered trying to have that vision-casting role because you put a lot of time and energy into something and then the consistory and power people have the veto power.

A high degree of authority for the senior pastor

A second form of organizational structure that became evident through the interviews is a structure where the consistory leads but gives the senior pastor a high degree of influence. This could also be true in the solo pastorate, but in the larger church, it becomes more of a "CEO" mindset.

This high degree of pastoral influence and authority usually gives the senior pastor accountability and oversight over the staff and for much of the direction of the church. Kevin had this kind of staff authority. He shared:

I had direct supervision over the whole staff. There were some people who reported with staff to another person on staff that I might have been once removed from. Our church administrator was basically a supervisor of the support staff including secretaries, wages, etc... He was also answerable to me. There was no executive team but there was a personnel committee that people by structure got a yearly audience with.

Derek also experienced a high degree of authority and influence over staff and among congregational leadership. He recalled:

It was made very clear that I was the senior pastor and the "buck stops here." That's the way it was set up and expressed in writing and thought. I think the structure of the Reformed Church does that by virtue of the fact that the senior pastor is president of consistory. How we practice that probably varies, but the bottom line is that it is an expectation of the senior pastor – the guiding force to do things decently and in order.

Because of his long tenure at the church he serves, Nathan has a high degree of authority. He pointed to his church's organizational chart and how it inverts the typical business model and places Christ as the head at the bottom to signify servanthood.

Nathan is then listed with other staff, but it is noted that the other staff report to Nathan as the Executive Pastor. Nathan acknowledged:

Because of the long tenure, I don't think there is anybody that questions that I am the executive director in that sense here. But we are trying to say that it is not good use of my time to handle the associate and administrator responsibilities. When push comes to shove, I'm the executive director. By length of tenure and my time spent teaching, that's where I am. But we try to function as a team as much as we can.

For Nathan, his role as executive pastor is balanced by the distinct responsibilities of each staff member and teamwork with the elected consistory.

High authority in an executive team

In some larger churches, executive leadership teams have been employed to act as smaller governing bodies that include representatives of the consistory. These smaller bodies carry out the groundwork for the consistory and are often empowered to make decisions. These executive teams also often serve as the overseers of staff and specific areas of ministry. Frank revealed the authority of the executive team at his last church when he said:

The executive committee divided the ministry areas of the church up into education and outreach for the staff person and pastoral care and worship for myself. As far as the preaching and pastoral care, the associate preached two or three times per month and would do assigned hospital calls as I recommended. They wanted me to be the supervisor of staff.

Craig described how the rapidly growing church where he serves has struggled to move out of the typical consistory structure in an effort to establish an executive leadership team:

Here, they definitely use the term senior pastor and you have definite roles and expectations. They've struggled and still do struggle with a chain of command. They try so hard to be equal that when you need a decision, they don't know where to go with it. To compensate that, in the last few years they've gone to a leadership team format which in my personal opinion is filled with bureaucracy, has slowed the decision making process tremendously and has taken away the authority of the consistory.

As the church has grown, the board has expanded and they want to do their particular duties but they are struggling in how to do them. I don't lead consistory meetings anymore because members of the newly established leadership team now take turns leading the full consistory meetings.

Craig is obviously displeased with this new format that makes him feel as though he has very little influence. He expressed that he feels he is not gaining influence and that he does not have accountability or authority over other staff members because they report to the board. This new executive leadership board is self-appointed with no term limits. He explained:

The members of the leadership board were on consistory when they had this idea and now they've self-elected themselves and there is no rotation between consistory or that board. They can continually serve as long as they want. There are eight of them and the congregation has no voice.

Authority distributed to members and ministry teams

Each of the first three structures already mentioned give authority and influence to a select group or individual. A fourth structure, which many large churches are now moving toward, gives greater authority, decision making power and influence to ministry teams and members. This results in an empowering of lay leaders and a diffusion of power among ordained leaders. Four of the twelve senior pastors who were interviewed

serve within this kind of organizational structure. All four of these churches have membership of 750 or more. For them, this fourth structure has been a work in process or a recent organizational change that was carried out in response to growth and a need for more efficiency.

Eric told of the structural change that has occurred in the church he serves and how he has welcomed that:

We changed to team-based ministry. This church has a corporate mentality and a lot of professional people. I can't tell you how many times I have been referred to by members of the consistory and members of the congregation as our CEO. That kind of grinds me because I don't see myself as the CEO. It's changing and the emphasis is more on teams and it's becoming less corporate.

Paul has also been a part of a church that has gone through organizational restructuring. In fact, this restructuring into a team ministry model was a part of his call to serve in a specific way as part of a team. He described it this way:

The whole consistory did a self-evaluation study and out of that went to the team ministry model. They said, "What we have been doing is not working." They went to the team ministry model and said we want to try and have people who use their giftedness in their area. We have learned to hand off power since I've been here. A lot of it has been built through trust. Trusting the other person to do their job and then having them report back. If it's not a major item, consistory is probably not going to discuss it.

Ted has also been a part of a church leadership team that seeks to empower others to use their gifts in ministry. The changes they made were measurable:

When I came here there were what were called five ministry tracks. Those five ministry tracks basically controlled everything and one or two of them had control over every step you took. After the first year that I was here, we changed from five ministry tracks to a team ministry where we diffused all of that into all of these different teams and we put on these teams people who had real passion for that particular ministry.

For Hunter, the team ministry structure empowers people, even to the point of how finances are budgeted and spent. Lay members are empowered to use their gifts and the leadership team remains small and focused. Hunter highlighted this structure:

Here, five ministry teams submit items for consistory agendas. Everything is written out in terms of the agenda. We have a stock agenda, but the items must come through a team. A lay leader leads each team. There is one elder and one deacon on each of those. A layperson forms the agenda of each team and the issues are represented before the consistory by the elder and deacon representatives and one staff member. Many other lay people also serve on those teams. Each team is given a budget and allowed to spend as they want as long as they are within the budget.

The four pastors serving in a “ministry-team” structure all expressed a sense of joy and satisfaction in how their gifts were being used, the gifts and abilities of others were being empowered and church leadership remained balanced and healthy rather than controlling.

The second research question revealed the difference that pastors identified within the dynamics of power, authority and influence as they transitioned from the solo to senior pastorate. The basic need for humility, servant leadership and accountability remained consistent. Pastors felt they were given authority and influence from God, through their formal position and as they earned it through social relationships. Pastors discerned how the amount of influence they felt they had decreased, changed, or increased in the senior pastorate. This research question also revealed how the organizational structure of the church highly affected the way that pastors exercised authority and influenced others.

STAFF RELATION CHALLENGES

The third research question addressed staff-relation challenges that solo pastors encountered when becoming senior pastors. The challenge of delegating responsibility to other staff members has already been noted and will be expanded in this section. Along with the act of delegating come the challenges of managing personnel issues, establishing credibility with existing staff, leading staff meetings and hiring staff. Along with the challenges, there are also benefits to staff ministry that will be considered. This section concludes with reflection from pastors on how important or unimportant previous staff experience is for those who transition into the senior pastorate.

Challenges of Leading Staff

Those who transition from the solo to senior pastorate usually find themselves serving in a lead capacity with staff for the first time. Pastors openly expressed some of the challenges they encountered when they began to lead staff.

Addressing the needs of staff members

Greg was challenged when discovering how the needs of staff members differed.

He described the differences within the staff he works with:

The associate is pretty independent. We'll keep each other informed but our areas of responsibility don't overlap much at all. Our congregational care guy likes to know things that are going on. I realize that's what he needs and I'm happy to do that. Our music person is somewhere in between. I'm realizing that different staff have different needs, and I'm trying to be sensitive to that within reason.

In order to meet the needs of staff members, the senior pastor must allocate and sacrifice time for staff. Sometimes this involves offering pastoral care to staff members.

Nathan explained:

Rather than zeroing in on leadership and vision and preaching, my emotional energy kept getting spent in the hallways. Pretty soon you are spending an hour to two hours a week with staff who should be helping others. They can't even help others and you have to help them. A bunch of our energy started going into staff situations.

More meetings to attend

Ted, Derek and Hunter all spoke of how the transition from the solo to senior pastorate brings with it more meetings. There are more meetings with the addition of staff-wide meetings, individual meetings with staff members, and potentially more ministry teams or leadership meetings. Reflecting on this transition, Hunter noted, "All of a sudden you have more meetings than you used to." Speaking of increased meetings due to staff relations, Ted summarized:

You have to have an ongoing dialogue with your staff people. It requires more meetings. In addition to all the team meetings and night meetings I have, I do a disservice to my staff when I don't have at least a staff meeting every other week. If the staff is not getting along together, there are going to be problems.

Staff conflict

When there are problems or conflicts between staff members, the senior pastor will be affected. The problem may exist between the senior pastor and a staff member or between two other staff members. Either way, a challenge arises for the senior pastor who leads staff. Kevin shared:

Probably the most difficult challenge for any pastor is inner staff conflict. Whether you are the person caught in the middle or if the conflict is with you. I did have a personality clash with two members of the staff. Finally the only thing I could do was move them both out of their roles in the kindest and best way possible.

Differing personalities and philosophies of ministry

No two people are the same. When there is a ministry staff, there will be differences of opinion, belief, personalities and work ethics. Bruce addressed working with someone who had a different work ethic:

I found it hard to adapt to and accept the rather significant differences in our work ethic. He would put in his time and whatever wasn't done when the time was up, he'd quit. I'm more inclined to commit to a task and I'll work until that task is finished.

Eric spoke of his associate's different philosophy of ministry:

We don't all see things alike. The associate and I are not similar. He is politically and theologically to the left and he and I have butted heads on things. For example, he refuses to come to worship on Thanksgiving Day because he says it's a Hallmark day and not a worship day. He doesn't pray in worship for our nation, president and service people, even on Memorial Day weekends.

Hunter summarized, "Full time to some is different than full-time for others."

The influence and ideas of staff spouses

In some cases, the spouse of a staff member creates challenges or frustrations for a senior pastor. Hunter lamented about how a spouse tried to dictate the hours that her husband worked and the flexibility she thought he should have:

In some cases, the spouses of staff create the worst staff problems. If you were working in a factory and one of the kids didn't feel well or had to go to the doctor, do you think you are going to walk in your boss' office and say, "I'm not going to be here the rest of the day because one of my kids is sick." It drives me insane. I want to say, "Do you understand you work here?" Salary doesn't mean you go and do what you want, it means that you are on salary here. Spouses who don't understand ministry create problems.

Arrogance and self-promotion by staff

Although the Bible calls each of us to model the servant nature of Christ, our sinful nature can easily bring out arrogance and self-promotion. Nathan learned this from his experience as a senior pastor:

I incorrectly assumed that a servant mentality would catch just by working together, walking down the same hall and seeking to be a servant. The first three years with a former music director was great, but it seemed to shift to “it’s more about me than Jesus” and “my music is more important than preaching, praying and commissioning.” It became arrogance and self-promotion.

Just as senior pastors must guard against their own arrogance or misuse of authority, they must also look out for the dangerous effects of staff members who exhibit arrogance and self-promotion.

Establishing Credibility with Existing Staff

The transition into the senior pastorate often required pastors to establish credibility, not only with the congregation and leaders, but also with existing staff. In some cases, the senior pastor inherited authority or oversight over staff members who had longer tenure in that particular church. Pastors who inherited existing staff offered insight from their experience pertaining to how they sought to establish credibility with existing staff members.

For some pastors, an intentional effort was made to meet with existing staff prior to accepting a call. This proved to be beneficial in discerning a call, initially meeting potential staff members, and gaining an understanding of their needs and perceptions. Eric spoke of the importance of meeting with existing staff during the candidating process:

I met with staff when I was considering the call. I also had lunch with them here while considering the call. I think it's important to ask them questions when discerning a call such as:

- How do you perceive the needs of the church right now?
- What is your particular area of responsibility?
- What do you need from the senior pastor?

For example, in talking with the staff member who ministered to senior members at that time, I asked him "what would you like of me?" and he said "I would really like you to be able to visit some of these elderly people who feel like they have been neglected." So I did that.

Paul also met with an associate pastor prior to accepting a call. He recalled:

I sat down for a long time with the associate even before I had the call. The search committee suggested I come and I wanted to. I really grew to appreciate his faith, sincerity, and commitment. I think in that sense we were very much on the same page and we sensed that very early in our relationship.

Eric also saw the process of establishing credibility with existing staff to be an ongoing process after accepting the call. He explained:

Staff gave their input during the transition time. Staff meetings also provide input. My wife and I take one of our staff members and their spouses out to dinner each month. This has really been good. They appreciate it and we appreciate it. We have had them to our home too. With time, it just happens.

Ted shared two ways that he felt credibility was established with existing staff after transitioning into a new church:

First, I was given some credibility just from my age and the experience I had in ministry, including having been a senior pastor in my previous church. So some of that credibility just came from my past. When I got here, I think the credibility came by people realizing that I had a real heart for ministry and a real heart for this church. When they see that you are there with them and you're going to invest whatever it takes to get this done, that gains credibility.

Secondly, in terms of the staff and especially in terms of my associate, I am one who does not need all the glory and certainly not all of the control. That adds credibility to your ministry in working with staff and key leaders.

When credibility is established through a humble team approach, the newly installed senior pastor can benefit from the experience and wisdom of existing staff.

Derek spoke of the advantages of coming into a new setting with existing staff present:

One of the things I tried to do was to see it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. The advantage of existing staff is that they can provide information about how things work and so on. The staff can help you understand that as you come in and save you weeks or months of figuring it out. I could hopefully make them feel important and valuable as they oriented me to the way things are in the congregation and what some pitfalls are.

A New Ministry Task: Leading Staff Meetings

For those transitioning from a solo to senior pastorate, one new challenge they faced was leading staff meetings. As previously noted, staff meetings provide a regular time for building credibility, covering necessary administrative and calendar details, and enhancing relationships. Those who encountered this ministry task for the first time reflected on this challenge and the format of their staff meetings.

Randy came to his church as a solo pastor. Upon hiring an associate, Randy initiated weekly meetings. He explained the structure of those meetings:

We have staff meetings once a week. That includes the secretary and now also the custodian for part of it. We start with all five staff members. The custodian is dismissed after covering facility matters. We all deal with everything we need for the secretary and then she leaves. Then it's the three of us (senior pastor, associate and youth/education director) and then just the associate and I. The last thing we usually do is plan the worship service.

Ted also recommended involving all staff members in the staff meeting. This provides the staff with an opportunity to support and help one another. Ted offered:

I think that one of the things that we do that's helpful is include everybody that is on staff when we meet, from the most part-time person to the two ordained pastors, we spend equal amounts of time (they get the same amount of time as the associate and myself) in sharing what is going on in their ministry and how can we help each other in each other's ministry. Because, there is always at least one, if not all of us, who are going through a particular kind of challenge or something we really need to focus on. So how can the rest of us be involved in that to help that person through it? What is it that each of us as staff people need to do to help that person grow?

Derek encouraged all staff to participate, but sought to be understanding for those who were not full-time:

Staff meetings included anyone on the payroll, recognizing that some part-time person may not be able to be there. We would include them if we had a big staff celebration once a year or so on – such as making it in the evening. Anyone who could be there during the day. For part-timers, if you had trouble getting things done in your limited hours, maybe that means every other week. But, if the staff meeting was worthwhile, I thought people would want to be there.

For Bruce, staff meetings occur mid-week with the priority given to bulletin preparation and staff building. Bruce describes his approach:

We meet once a week on Wednesday morning and we put together the stuff for the bulletin, which is an overview of what's happening and what's coming. We meet and then we have coffee together. In fact, we drink coffee together almost every morning, which becomes an opportunity to check in and find out what's going on in the areas we are responsible for. We build team that way. We usually spend a brief time in prayer with each of us alternating who leads that. That's about it. We haven't done a lot of deep devotional or skill building. Once in a while I'll suggest something that's coming up and see if he wants to go. We also share resource ideas that we come across or things we read about. We try to stay unified in that way.

Greg has tried to make prayer an emphasis of staff meetings. He explained:

We have a staff meeting here once a week. It's pretty informal – checking in, calendars, issues and pretty much an open time. Then we spend time in prayer. Staff meetings were new to me. I checked with others. Some are structured. I've had a couple of people say to me "I think the best thing we can do is pray together." I think that's true for us.

Some pastors not only led regular staff meetings, but also valued occasional staff retreats. These once or twice-a-year retreats can offer additional times of fellowship, visioning, planning and group building. Kevin expressed, "We have annual staff retreats where we will do some envisioning and talk about goals that we had for each ministry area." Derek reflected on what was done at a previous church when he said, "At least

twice a year, if not three times, we would get off-site for a day and doing everything from spiritual, relational, programmatic, and team-building exercises.”

Hiring Staff

The solo pastorate does not involve extensive hiring of staff. There are times when volunteers must be screened or selected, or part-time employees hired on a contract, but the hiring process of other full-time staff members is another new challenge for pastors who enter into the senior role. Pastors gave the following hiring advice from their experiences and described their level of involvement.

For Kevin and Hunter, personal involvement and decision-making power were important as the church prepared to hire staff that the senior pastor would oversee. Kevin explained his role:

With pastors and ministers of music, we had search committees that I was an ex-officio member of. I wanted broad participation on that. I made sure that they went through a legitimate search process, gave fair interviews and were prepared for conducting the questioning. They were very concerned that I had that veto power. When it came time to the vote, I waited until everyone in the room had weighed in so that I would not improperly influence their input.

Hunter came to the following conclusion about hiring staff following a situation where he was told that the church would hire his staff for him:

One of our fairly large company people who was on consistory said to me, “We are going to hire you somebody.” I said, “No, I want to hire my own.” He said, “We have to have a search committee.” I said, “I bet when they want to hire your vice president, they put up a list in the lunch room asking for a volunteer committee and that committee goes out and interviews people and they come into your office and tell you who is going to be your vice president.” Without thinking, he said, “Are you crazy?” And I said to him “Are you crazy? I will no longer supervise anybody that I haven’t hired.” When they tried to force me to lead staff that I had not chosen, they were really not allowing me to lead.

Frank's role was within the context of a search committee. He described the approach, "I was on the search committee as an ex officio member. They would listen to what I had to say, but it was up to them to make the final call. I had no vote on the committee."

Craig offered the following advice for hiring staff members:

Stay within the parameters of your theological expectations. Don't get in a hurry. Take your time in the search process. If you feel in the interview that there is a red flag, listen to it. Be clear with your board about the expectations and responsibilities of the position you are seeking to fill.

Eric added, "I would emphasize what Jim Collin's says in his book *Good to Great* – you've got to have the right people on the bus." Nathan echoed this when he said, "We have been much more careful now to hire healthy people as best as we can. We hire character over competence."

Is Prior Staff Experience Necessary?

The following question was posed to pastors during the interviews: Is prior staff experience a necessity for pastors who want to assume a senior role? Due to a lack of experience, few pastors begin their ministry in a senior pastor position. Most begin either as a solo pastor or as an associate pastor on a staff. Because of this, most senior pastors either have associate experience or solo experience. Those who have served as an associate have experienced staff relationships but usually focus their gifts and talents in one area. They may have less preaching and leadership experience. Those who have served as solo pastors come with regular preaching experience and greater leadership responsibilities. This leads churches seeking senior pastors to ask themselves, "Should we look for someone who has had more leadership responsibilities but less staff

experience or someone who understands staff dynamics but has not been in a top leadership role?”

Although every pastor that was interviewed had previously served as a solo pastor, some also had staff experience. Those with prior staff experience certainly saw that as helpful but not necessary for their later role as a senior pastor. Frank described it this way:

I appreciated having staff experience before I had staff. Then I knew how the associate felt in certain situations. I could put myself into his position, having been there before. But given the choice, I would much rather call the solo pastor. Because he already knows the leadership demands and knows what needs to be done in all areas of the church. He is able then to better take over one specific area since he's had the whole.

Nathan echoed the benefit of prior staff experience:

I think it was very helpful for me to have staff experience. When I was a staff member, one senior pastor I served with led the church as a rancher and a second I served under led as a shepherd. I was able to observe both and see where I fit. When I came here I had to be comfortable in my own position.

Derek agreed with Frank and Nathan, although he cautioned against someone coming directly out of seminary into the senior pastorate:

Staff experience is not absolutely necessary, but certainly helpful. Somebody who has done research like you have done gains a great deal. The danger is for those who have never really thought about it and jumps in without any awareness whatsoever. By and large, coming out and having your first pastorate being head of staff I think could be really tough. The exception might be someone older who served in church leadership or something.

Despite the value of staff experience, none of the pastors interviewed said that previous staff experience was necessary prior to becoming a senior pastor. These pastors expressed that God equips people with various spiritual gifts and that with continual learning and adapting of skills, it is very possible for solo pastors to transition into the senior pastorate. Ted explained it this way:

There are people that have obvious skills to be in a senior pastor position that are not in that position currently. They just need an opportunity to be in that position from their giftedness and then they must keep reading about leadership and all those things. I wouldn't say that it should be based on whether or not you had that kind of experience. Rather it is based on your skill level and your adaptability to that and just the kind of person you are and the kind of gifts you have.

Craig agreed with the learning and adapting that is necessary, but emphasized how the solo pastor may be better prepared to make this transition than an associate:

I think a solo pastor transitioning into a senior role can learn. As a solo pastor, you always have to be aware of everything that's going on. The associates are aware of what's going on but are sometimes dealing with their own little world. I think there is a better understanding of some of the roles you are going to take when you come from a solo role.

Whether one has prior staff experience or not, those who transition into the senior role will encounter new ministry challenges that will require learning, adjustments and forms of continuing education. Even when a pastor has prior staff experience, each staff and setting is unique. As valuable as experience might be, search teams and discerning pastors must ultimately consider the gifts and how they fit the role being considered.

Benefits of Staff Ministry

Along with the challenges they encountered, pastors also described the benefits of working with a staff. These benefits include the ability to construct ideas, carry out ministry with the insight of others, and share responsibility.

Shared ideas and responsibilities

Shared ideas and responsibilities refer to the way that staff members in the same church can think things through together and cover for one another. Frank commented on this benefit of working within a team:

One of the greatest joys of working with staff is that I do not have all the responsibility. Also, being able to share the responsibility with another person who has been through seminary and who knows what being a pastor is about. So, I think that type of thing where I can say “what do you think.” Being able to bounce ideas off of each other rather than having to be the only creative person on staff.

As Eric described, this sharing of ideas is beneficial for dealing with conflict or difficult decisions as well:

The greatest joy of being a senior pastor with staff is the camaraderie and team aspect. You don’t have to do it all by yourself. I also appreciate that when there is a crises, complaint, or difficulty, you don’t deal with it alone. You get strength and input from the staff. I have some sharp staff people. They can share some insights and so forth that never would have crossed my mind.

Kevin agreed, pointing to the benefit of having someone to confide in and someone who ministers to you:

It is a joy to share in ministry and have people to confide in and celebrate with. My associate pastor was my pastor. That’s the way I introduced her, “this is my pastor.” I had good people, not people who were clones of me, but people who had the kind of rapport that we could talk over things we didn’t see the same way. So, I prefer working with a staff, because of the kind of camaraderie you share.

Randy reflected on the benefits of working with staff that was not present in his solo experience:

We laugh and have fun together. This is also a place to cry, a place to come to someone and say “I’m hurting or I didn’t appreciate what those people said or it was hard watching so and so die.” Together we deal with self-destructive behavior of people, not to mention our own. Staff allows for sharing experiences, partnering, laughing, crying and processing together.

These benefits lead to a sense of “family” that can develop among staff members who serve together. This can make it difficult to say good-bye. Derek reflected on leaving the staff at a former church:

The most difficult thing I had to do when I left was telling the staff I was leaving. That was an extremely emotional day. I still tear up if I talk about it too much. I wanted them to know before I informed the congregation, so I shared it with them. That was very difficult because, whether intentional or not, we had become

friends as well as co-workers. They were all dedicated people, committed both to Christ and to the church. It was just something that was very unique. It was based on the way things developed, their loyalty to each other and ability to work together. Not a day went by when there wasn't some sense of joy of being together with some person on the staff. That was very hard to let go of.

Serving with a specific focus

A second benefit of working with staff according to those interviewed is the ability to focus one's energy on specific areas of ministry. This is a change from the "generalist" context of the solo pastorate. Bruce put it this way:

The greatest joy is that I don't have to worry about youth ministry and I don't have to be in charge of getting the whole education ministry going while I'm still preaching twice a Sunday. So being able to focus more on some things that I enjoy and having somebody else do some of the things I don't enjoy as much and am not as good at and certainly don't have the time to do. I really like having gifted people whose gifts compliment mine so we can be stronger together than anyone of us can be alone.

Nathan echoed the joy of focusing on his gifts:

The joy of staff ministry is that I don't feel the tug I felt in the first congregation. I felt that I needed to be teaching SS, writing two sermons, directing youth, etc. and you felt bad you could do nothing for the jr. high or college age. Here, those pressures and worries are taken from me. I'm not worrying about chairs, tables, furnaces, temperatures, rent, broken windows, etc... There are a ton of things I no longer need to worry about and I can truly focus on teaching, leading, directing the congregation, and caring for people.

Not only do senior pastors experience the joy of focusing on their greatest gifts, but they also enjoy watching other staff members use and develop their gifts. Derek commented that one of the joys of working with staff is "seeing a staff person feel fulfilled through their ministry because they were able to develop it, move it, see success in it, receive positive feedback for it and see lives being changed through it."

A greater visible impact

A third benefit described by those who transitioned into the senior role was the joy of seeing more people impacted as the gifts of staff and laity were put to use. Hunter described the joy he felt serving in a larger church as a senior pastor compared to his time as a solo pastor:

For me, the benefit of working in a staff setting is the joy of expanded ministry, the joy of new programs, the joy of collective thoughts rather than just yours, and the joy of steel sharpening steel, where people say “you could do this better” or “you really helped me here.” It’s the joy of watching the puzzle come together – taking 5-7 people and filling the holes. It’s the satisfaction of watching your staff march together. On a Sunday morning, when I do the preaching, the associate does the liturgy and vice versa. That is completely shared. It’s awesome.

Ted agreed with the joy of seeing the impact on others. He gave the following example:

Last week I attended the celebrate recovery worship on Friday night. Not every church can have a ministry like that. We do and great people lead it. That particular night they had seven new people there. When I go and assist with the worship, most of those people have no idea that I am a senior pastor of the church and they couldn’t care! I’m there as one of the people and I get to sit back and see the impact. When I see the kinds of things that are really happening, those are my best days. I see people that are using their gifts and rising up in leadership.

The third research question revealed challenges that pastors encounter in the area of staff relations. Challenges of leading in a staff ministry setting were discovered. Those interviewed shared insight from their experience on how they established credibility with existing staff, how they approached the new task of leading staff meetings and lessons learned for hiring new staff members. This section considered how prior staff experience or a lack of it affects the senior pastor’s ability to lead and exercise spiritual gifts. Finally, pastors shared from their experience the benefits of staff ministry.

LESSONS LEARNED

The final research question sought to determine the lessons that pastors who have made this transition have learned, lessons which can help future pastors who make the same transition. This question provided the opportunity for the pastors to reflect on their transition from solo to senior pastorate. This reflection revealed things that pastors would do differently, practical matters of advice they would give to those making this transition, and the impact of this transition on other areas of life.

Things Pastors Would do Differently

Pastors were asked, “Suppose you were to make this transition again from solo to senior pastor. What are some lessons you learned or things you would do differently?” This elicited four recommendations from the experience of the pastors: the need for continuing education, clarification of roles, accountability and support, and careful staff selection.

Continuing education

Randy and Bruce agreed that they would be more proactive in becoming educated about the senior pastor role. Randy said, “One thing that comes to mind is that I could have taken a workshop or conference on staff leadership. Bruce answered, “If I were to do it again, I would try in the first year or two to take advantage of continuing education or training on what it means to be on staff.”

Clarification of roles

Craig and Hunter pointed out the value of role clarification, both for themselves and for other staff members. Craig remarked if doing things over:

I would ask about the responsibilities and expectations for myself, board members and staff. I would want to have the answers written down so they could be used as standards when board members rotate so that expectations don't change due to different leaders in office. A clarified job description on paper would be key because there is a lot of miscommunication that can occur and promises that aren't kept which leads to frustration.

Hunter stated, "I would also do a much better job of writing job descriptions and flow charting authority and accountability.

Accountability and support

Nathan and Hunter both expressed how they have learned to appreciate and need accountability and support. Nathan commented:

One thing I certainly would do, which I am now doing, is being in an accountability group with other 'senior pastors', I would be in a group with other pastors who have that role.

Hunter added, "I would probably have an accountability group that I could go to a little earlier rather than just say "I'll take care of myself."

Choosing staff more carefully

Derek and Ted shared lessons learned about choosing staff. Derek reflected:

I would choose my first staff person more wisely! I would spend more time asking, "What is the best role to be filled in that particular congregation? Who is the best person to fill it? What are the needs we have? Is he the one with that personality and skill?"

Ted echoed this lesson learned by saying:

I would be a little more deliberate in surrounding myself with people that can help move the ministry forward. You must be very discerning about who gets on your team; whether it's staff, key leadership people, key volunteers or ministry team members. I would be a little more discerning and deliberate about that process because that is a real key.

Practical Matters of Advice for Those Making This Transition

The pastors were also asked to give practical advice for others who were considering the transition from solo to senior pastorate. Three matters of advice were expressed: whether one is gifted, the need for a clear job description, and the importance of treating staff well.

Determine if the role fits your gifts

Six pastors emphasized the importance of determining if a pastor is truly gifted for the role of senior pastor. Nathan said, “I think the key is knowing who you are and then talking with some people about it.” Clarifying this exercise in self-discernment, Bruce added, “If you have a strong need to be a part of everything and have thoughts on everything, then I would say you are not a real good candidate for a pastor in a staff ministry.” Randy agreed:

Know who you are. Ask yourself, “Can I work with people? Can I share the ministry? Is my ego strong enough so that I don’t have to do it all and always be in the limelight?”

Paul echoed:

If you are going to go into staff, you must ask yourself, “Do I enjoy the position, the power, the ego thing?” A person must be very honest about it. If they enjoy the accolades and stuff that comes as a solo pastor and cannot share it with others on staff, then they will be miserable.

Derek stressed asking tough personal questions including the following:

- Can I let go of some control? If yes, will the things you want to get rid of really be something you can support someone else doing?
- Am I ready to ultimately receive all of the criticism whether due to me or not, while at the same time reflecting praise?
- How is my ego? Sometimes that may involve getting feedback from people who know us well.
- Does the position match my skills?

- Am I willing to share the admiration and love of the congregation with others?
- How do I feel about staff – do I want to develop friends, teammates or both?

Get a clarified job description

The second most common response pertaining to advice pastors would give was the urging to get a clarified job description. Frank and Hunter both expressed the need to have very clearly written out and specific job descriptions for self and staff. Randy encouraged that this included questions like “Who does what?” and “What are the lines of accountability?” Derek added:

Know both the written and possible unwritten expectations for the role. I think that’s critical. Most churches now days do a pretty good job of putting something down on paper. But there may also be a mindset that is not reflected on paper. Ask the tough questions. Are they really expecting the pastor of the whole congregation to also head up staff? Are they expecting a leader of staff? Are they expecting primarily an administrator? Try to figure it out. Ask yourself “How am I defining the senior pastorate and how are they defining it?”

Treat staff well

Treating staff well involves respecting, supporting and trusting those who work alongside of the senior pastor. Frank emphasized the need for trust:

Don’t undercut staff. Let them fail. Don’t try to have the heavy hand and tell them, “This is going to fail” or “This is how to do it.” Just step back and let them do it. Maybe offer gentle words of advice, but let them do the work. Let them either fail or succeed on their own.

Hunter added:

Have a servant attitude with staff. In the areas where other staff serve, don’t tell them what to do, but ask them for permission to serve with them. Then they have the authority in that area. Can you go over-ride that? Yes, but it’s just not wise. Servanthood is key. Also, have a salary for your associate that is, at least after a couple of years, close to yours. Otherwise they will feel they are not as valuable.

Other pastors suggested ways to build staff support, the importance of staff meetings and the need to listen to the concerns of staff. Kevin suggested from his own experience:

I encourage an annual overnight staff retreat with some play time built in. Find out how happy staff are, why they are happy, what their own challenges and difficulties are, what they need, and even what they might change about the job description. However, in doing this, don't make it sound like you are promising that change.

The Impact of this Transition on Other Areas of Life

The responses of the pastors to questions posed during the interview also revealed insights into how this transition affects other areas of life outside the ministry setting such as marriage, children, health, and work hours.

Marriage

Pastors acknowledged the importance of having a wife who also feels called to ministry and understands the challenges of being married to a pastor. Hunter commented:

I think ministry takes a toll on marriage, especially in transition, because you are going through things you haven't gone through before. That's good too. If you have a sympathetic caring and empathetic wife, she becomes your counselor. I can share things with her. I never mention names and try to keep her as normal as possible. But I know that if the phone rings at three in the morning and I say I have to go, she'll say "Drive carefully; I'll see you when you get home." If a pastor tries to make that call and he knows his wife is home fuming, it's worthless. It's a calling for a pastor's wife too.

Bruce agreed:

I'm at a stage where I have no children at home. They are all married. It's just my wife and I. I'm very fortunate that my wife is an extremely gracious person who, whenever there is an emergency, will say, "You go, that's where you have to be." She doesn't bid for my time with that. She has been very supportive with that. I'm at a great stage that way.

Some acknowledged that although marriage to a pastor requires a special understanding by a spouse, marriage to a pastor in a larger church with staff does have its challenges. Eric reflected:

This was not an easy transition for my wife. It was an easy one for me. This is a professional church and she kind of felt like she didn't measure up as she doesn't work outside of the home. So that was kind of a challenge for her.

Reflecting on the impact of this transition on his marriage, Derek added:

I think with our marriage, there was an expectation that with other staff, I would be freer. The reality was that the hours we thought would be freed up were filled with something else. That was especially true early on. A spouse might say, "Now that you have a staff person, I don't see you any more than I did in the first place." I think there has to be an upfront understanding with one's spouse of how the new staff person affects my job and my time with family. Is it going to free me up and should it free me up? Work through it before getting into it.

Nathan spoke of how the church he serves created an expectation for how he and his wife would nurture a healthy marriage. He affirmed the expectations the consistory set:

I am very grateful that a couple of years after we arrived, the consistory insisted and continues to insist that, I spend more nights at home than here. They have insisted that I have a date night and I have always done that. Probably two thirds of the time my wife and I also try to be gone after my study day.

Solo pastors who transition into the senior pastorate should consider how this new role may affect their spouse and the health of their marriage.

Relationship with children

Many of the senior pastors who were interviewed now have adult children. Those with children still at home, as well as those with adult children, reflected back on the impact of the transition upon their children. Some thought children yet at home were impacted negatively by their father's becoming a pastor.

Craig exclaimed:

I could never have had younger kids while serving in this role. Never. The time you are away from home is so great. My meetings have gone from five or six a month to twenty. The administrative role is unbelievable. So as far as my time with my kids, I've said to my wife many times, I'm glad we raised our three children in an environment where I wasn't in a church this size.

For others, the senior pastorate provided a positive opportunity to build relationships with their children. Much of this was due to flexibility of schedule and other staff members who could cover in cases of emergency. This was true for Randy, who recalled how serving with a staff person whose emphasis was congregational care benefited his family life. He told the following story:

I have this memory of sitting at the supper table when we got a phone call that somebody had died or something happened. I hung up and kept eating. My daughter said, "Don't you have to leave?" I said "no, the associate is taking care of it." She got a big smile on her face – it just said it all. It really relieved a lot of stress and decreased absence from my family. People may still call me, but I have the option of saying, "Please call the pastor of congregational care, and she will be over to see you."

Randy also noted how having other pastors on staff benefited his children:

My kids have felt the value of the transition in a very positive way. I think it's been fun for them to have a youth director. Their dad is not having to be a part of that. They've never resisted my coming to meetings or going on events; that hasn't been a problem, but they've had their own pastor. So, family wise and marriage wise, the transition has been nothing but positive.

Nathan reflected the same appreciation for how staff benefited his family:

I've always been grateful that reasonably quickly we moved to the size where the sponsors and the youth director were not mom and dad. We've felt that has been an important part in their understanding that faith in Jesus, Christianity, discipleship, devotional life and spirituality isn't something we do because we are paid. When they can see these other godly people role modeling faith, it was something they did because they wanted to and were passionate about. That has been a critical piece of their enthusiasm for the Lord.

Frank echoed the enjoyment of shared ministry and it's benefit for raising a family:

Having ordained staff allows me to be able to be gone on weekends when there is something important in the life of my kids. There is somebody here who can say to me that week, "I can preach for you this Sunday." It also gives me the freedom to be gone for vacation and not have to be here if somebody dies. In the solo pastorate, you come back, or at least I have always come back.

Greg pointed to positive and negative aspects of serving as a senior pastor and trying to be present in the lives of children:

I've tried to take advantage of the flexibility of my schedule and not feel guilty about it. Our girls are almost out of the house, but games, taking them for lunch, and things I could do, I tried to take advantage of. I could be there for all kinds of things that others couldn't be there for. But the flip side is that weekends are a mess for us. The family pays the price for that. We are just honest about that. The family knows that.

Hunter also tried to take a realistic viewpoint on the pros and cons of raising children while serving as a pastor:

Your children have to absolutely understand that they are in a fishbowl. If you give them any other indication, you are kidding yourself. Once, my son got a speeding ticket and another kid the same week got nailed for drunk driving and nearly killing somebody. They talked about my son. Your family has to give. My children know, for example, that I hardly ever missed any of their games. But they knew that I missed a lot of other things. Sometimes I could get out at 3:30 p.m. but then scheduled something later in the evening. I would explain that to my children, that since I could be there in the afternoon for them, I had to do some things at night.

In the same way that they cared about his marriage, Nathan's consistory communicated expectations about how he should be active in the lives of his children.

He explained these consistory expressed expectations:

They insisted that I be at all the kid's events that were important. The kids in fact knew that if I wasn't there, it was due to a crisis, emergency, or hospitalization. The consistory emphasized that for two reasons. First, they thought that was part of being a good dad. Second, they said, "Lots of dads in this area just think that is mom's work. You will role model that in our community." I was not just at

events as a dad and model, but also I was connecting, mixing with others. They insisted on that and I'm very grateful for that.

Except for the additional evening meetings in a larger church setting that decreased their ability to spend time with children at night, the pastors who were interviewed saw this transition as having a positive impact upon their children.

Work hours

Pastors differed on how they felt the transition from solo to senior pastor impacted their work hours. Part of this depended on the structure of staff, the boundaries they set, and the seasons of their church's life. Pastors may also have different viewpoints on what a healthy week consists of in terms of hours worked. Although Randy and Eric both expressed that the number of hours worked was the same or slightly less due to not preaching at each service, or having staff to cover areas of ministry, the majority of senior pastors expressed that this transition resulted in more hours of work.

Craig exclaimed, "I thought I worked a lot when I was a solo pastor. That was probably sixty to sixty-five hours a week. Here it's a solid eighty hours a week." Frank agreed saying, "I probably put in more hours as a senior pastor than as a solo pastor. Part of it maybe comes from having a larger church where there are more responsibilities even though you have staff."

In general, pastors agreed that the senior pastorate requires more than a forty-hour work week. A healthy number for most pastors fell between fifty and sixty hours per week. Serving a larger church involves more people to minister to and despite other staff members, there is always something for senior pastors to focus on.

Taking a day off

Since the majority of pastors found that their work hours increased when they became senior pastors, how well did they do at taking a day off in order to be refreshed and rested? Some pastors did take a regular day off or were committed to taking portions of time off at various points during the week. Other pastors struggled to set aside time off.

Nathan, Frank and Eric each noted that they took a specific day of the week off. In fact, each of them not only took a day off, but also had another day during the week when they had the freedom to study at home. Frank described how this works for him:

I try to take Monday's off. Saturday morning I study at home. Saturday's are a mixed bag. If I have to make a call, I do. If there is a wedding, open house or hospital visit, I'll do it but not always willingly. I try to reserve Saturday afternoon for family. Saturday night is just an open night. I basically work 5½ to 6 days a week."

Greg and Hunter each utilize opportunities for time off throughout the week rather than setting one specific day away from the office. Greg explained:

I haven't taken a set day here. Many of the things we like to do as a family are weather related, especially in the summer. We have a boat, I like to play golf, so if I say "Wednesday's my day" and it's bad weather day, that doesn't make sense. I think I've worked hard at it and tried to use the flexibility to my advantage."

Hunter echoed similar feelings:

I prefer not to take a day off, because "that day" may not be the day I want. For example, I hunt and it might rain on "that day." I try to take part of a Friday afternoon and part of a Saturday. Some days, I'll take off a whole day. If I have a wedding rehearsal on Friday night and a wedding on Saturday, I'll probably take off part of Friday.

Although some pastors took scheduled days off, others either regretfully acknowledged that they had done a poor job of taking a day off or felt that the demands of the job kept them from taking a day off. Kevin, Derek and Randy each admitted that

they had always found taking a day off difficult, even in the solo pastorate. That difficulty did not go away when they became senior pastors despite working with other staff members. Derek explained:

I found it tougher to take adequate time off just because there was, at least in the structure I was in, so much to do and I sometimes felt like the church was looking to me to provide that leadership. Even with a larger staff, there were many things I felt I needed to pay attention to.

At the time of the interview Craig had experienced a very difficult and busy week.

He noted:

I haven't gotten a day off in two weeks now and I'll never get it back. People say, "Take it another day" but it doesn't happen because of meetings and assignments. You learn to understand that that's the way it is."

General health

Because of increased flexibility in time and staff with whom to share ministry, some pastors felt that their general health was as good or better than during their solo days. But others certainly felt that the demands of the senior pastorate affected their health negatively.

Eric felt there was more stress to the senior pastorate position. He said, "The stress level and expectations are higher because you are not only dealing with a congregation; you're dealing with staff in a more intimate way." Craig agreed, saying:

Health wise, it's been an uphill. . . . it's taken a toll. I'm exhausted. I've had seven ulcers. I've even thought of studying in a different area, like counseling, for I don't see myself doing this for an extended time. Either that or I'll back off and take a smaller church again.

This increase in the stress that is experienced by senior pastors comes above and beyond the unfair expectations or burdens that many pastors face regardless of being solo

or senior pastors. At the conclusion of his interview, Craig gave three examples of unfair expectations or burdens he had felt in his current ministry setting:

Once a group from the church built a bus barn. I got back from vacation and there was a big meeting that I was asked to come to. They wanted to know why I didn't help build the bus barn because they saw me sitting in the garage one night looking at them. That was my first day of vacation and I was packing up to leave. See the expectations?

Also, I actually had it once where they measured my tire treads in my garage to see if I was actually submitting mileage honestly. They thought the mileage I turned in seemed too great for what the tire tread thickness was on my car. How's that for trust?

Finally, I had a guy once in the deacon's meeting who submitted a log of all the times the lights were on in my basement. He watched from across the street and wrote it all down because he was concerned we were using too much electricity. How would you like that?

The responses examined in regard to the fourth research question revealed lessons that pastors learned in three key areas. First, pastors reflected on things they would do differently if making this transition again. These lessons included taking advantage of continuing educational opportunities for staff and large church ministry, clarifying the roles of each staff member, seeking accountability and support and choosing staff more wisely.

Secondly, pastors offered practical matters of advice for those making this transition. These words of advice included the need to determine if the role fits the pastor's gifts, the need to get a clarified job description your ministry position, and the importance of treating staff members well.

The final part of this section dealt with the impact of the solo to senior pastorate transition upon other areas of life. These areas included marriage, relationship with children, work hours, days or time off and the effect of the senior pastorate on a pastor's general health.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This chapter examined the challenges encountered by those who transitioned from the solo to senior pastorate. It began by examining leadership and transition challenges. These included the challenges and benefits of delegating, trusting others, and using one's time efficiently. This section continued with an examination of necessary leadership skills that pastors who were interviewed felt senior pastors must have. These included being a team player, having gifts for leadership, managing time with flexibility, exhibiting certain character traits, and developing one's leadership skills.

The second section examined findings that pertained to power and authority challenges. These challenges included the task of exercising authority with humility and keeping authority in check through accountability. Sources of power and authority were also examined, including God-given authority, formal authority and earned relational authority. Pastors reflected on how they felt their ability to influence decreased or increased in their role as senior pastors compared to their solo experiences. This section concluded with an examination of how a church's governing structure impacted the extent of the senior pastor's influence. These various structures include a high degree of authority given to elected leaders, a high degree of authority given to the senior pastor, a high degree of authority entrusted to an executive team and authority that is distributed to members or ministry teams.

The third section in this chapter dealt with staff-relation challenges. This section began with a consideration of challenges pastors encounter when leading staff. These included the time necessary for addressing the needs of staff members, having more meetings to attend, dealing with staff conflict, different personalities and philosophies

among staff members and the influence of staff spouses that affect the senior pastor. This section on staff relations also covered the challenge of establishing credibility with staff, leading staff meetings, hiring staff and considering the value of previous staff experience. Benefits of staff ministry were also reported, including the ability for staff members to share ideas and responsibilities, a specific ministry focus for each staff member and a greater overall visible impact that senior pastors witnessed.

The final section in chapter four addressed lessons learned by pastors who made this transition. These lessons may be beneficial to those who are considering this transition or who may make it in the future. When asked what they would do differently, pastors emphasized the importance of continuing education, clarifying roles, developing accountability and support, and choosing staff carefully. Pastors also offered advice on practical matters, such as considering whether one is gifted for the role, clarifying one's own job description and treating staff respectfully. Pastors shared lessons from their own experiences about how this transition affected their marriage, relationship with children, number of work hours, strategy for taking time off and their general health. With these findings in view, we now consider how the literature and the responses of the pastoral interviews reveal common themes and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges encountered by a solo pastor when transitioning into a senior pastor role. In chapter two, the review of literature shed insight on the challenges encountered in the areas of leadership skills, power and authority dynamics and staff relations. Chapter three described the methodology for interviewing twelve pastors who have made this transition. Chapter four contained the findings gathered from the interviews that were conducted. This chapter will discuss the study and findings in light of the literature review and make recommendations for further research related to the purpose of this study.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Leadership Skills

This study provided insight into leadership challenges encountered when transitioning from the solo to senior pastorate. Both the literature and the field work revealed the need to delegate when moving from the generalist role of the solo setting to a more narrowed focus for the senior pastorate. Many found delegating to be difficult and an ongoing challenge. Others found the act of delegating to be refreshing as they could focus their time and attention on skills they were passionate about.

The way that pastors used their time in the solo and senior role also differed. Pastors discovered that serving as a senior pastor often decreased their ability to give the same personal congregational care they had offered in the past. Use of time in the senior

pastorate tended to be aimed more at staff and key leaders. Management and administrative tasks replaced some of the hands-on service they were used to offering.

Those who transitioned into the senior pastorate also discovered that there were specific skills that were needed, particularly as they served with staff in a larger church context. These skills were identified in chapter 4.

Although some of these skills were God-given gifts, other skills had to be learned and further developed. Pastors shared how they realized their need for further learning, who they turned to and how changes had to be made in light of their transition to a senior pastorate.

Power and Authority Dynamics

This study also provided insight into power and authority challenges encountered when transitioning from the solo to senior pastorate. One challenge was to serve with humility and a servant's heart in the midst of a larger church setting. When asked what aspects of the senior pastorate tempted pastors to become prideful rather than remain humble, Derek shared, "As staff increases, the temptation becomes to start equating size with success." Kevin responded, "I suppose one of the power temptations would be to try to get everyone to do your work for you. Another one might be to hog the credit for things that are done well." Both of these responses reveal the danger of becoming prideful rather than serving with humility. Because of this ongoing temptation, those interviewed sought ways to pursue humility, service and accountability.

The literature and interviews also revealed three primary sources of power and authority. These sources included God-given authority, authority granted by a leadership team, and authority that was earned or received from those being served. Many who had

served as senior pastors felt the level of influence they held in the senior pastorate often differed from the level of influence formerly experienced in the solo pastorate.

Finally, the organizational structure of church leadership was examined to see how it affected the use of power and decision making among staff, elected officers and lay members. The four structures that became evident from the interviews included a high degree of authority held by elected leaders, a high degree of authority given to the senior pastor, a high degree of authority within a small group such as an executive team, and authority distributed as members and ministry teams are empowered to serve. These structures influenced the amount of control or empowerment that senior pastors perceived they held as leaders.

Staff Relations

This study also provided insight into the challenges and benefits of serving in staff ministry. One challenge that pastors experienced was the increased amount of time demanded of them from more meetings, especially with staff members. Secondly, pastors felt challenged as they were required to deal with the needs of staff members and differing philosophies among staff. Third, pastors were challenged by situations of staff conflict or conflict-related issues that arose from family members of staff. Finally, these pastors faced the ongoing challenge of maintaining healthy communication between staff members.

Along with challenges, senior pastors noted key benefits they experienced as they served with staff. Team-related benefits of staff ministry included the ability to construct ideas, carry out ministry with the insight of others and share responsibility. A second benefit of staff ministry described by pastors was the ability to focus one's energy on a

specific area of ministry. A third benefit pastors noted involved the joy of seeing more people impacted as the gifts of staff and laity were put to use.

The third research question also led to responses that revealed how pastors sought to establish credibility with staff members they inherited. These efforts included meeting with staff and asking questions prior to accepting a call, an ongoing effort to build credibility and trust after the transition, and revealing a humble servant's approach toward working with others and valuing their experience and insight.

The tasks of leading staff meetings and hiring staff were examined as new ministry challenges for those who became senior pastors. Pastors described their approach to leading these meeting and the primary reasons for involving all staff members. These staff meetings were useful for business, visioning, fellowship, accountability, sharing and prayer. Pastors also gave input regarding the important process of hiring staff members. Some pastors are more involved than others in this process. Pastors emphasized the need to be patient, look for the right fit, be true to theological positions, and know the job description of the position that is being filled.

Finally, the third research question examined whether or not staff experience was necessary for those who became senior pastors. The view of those interviewed was that staff experience is helpful but not necessary. In some ways, solo pastors can be better prepared to lead and face the leadership challenges of the senior pastorate. However, staff experience in a full-time or seminary internship setting is helpful. The need to continue to learn, adapt and grow as a leader is also crucial as pastors use the gifts God has given to them.

Advice and Impact

The fourth research question revealed some of the lessons that pastors learned through the transition they made from a solo to senior pastorate. These lessons were expressed as changes that the pastors would make if they were to make the transition again. Pastors said they would make more effort to clarify roles, take advantage of continuing education, choose staff carefully, and seek accountability and support.

The pastors also offered advice relating to three additional, practical matters. They emphasized the need for clearly written job descriptions for both the senior pastor and for staff. They also stressed the necessity for examining one's own gifts to see if they truly fit the role being considered. Pastors also emphasized the importance of treating staff well.

The final interview questions examined how the transition from the solo to senior pastorate affects other areas of life. Responses from pastors offered insight into how this transition impacted marriage, relationship with children, work hours, days off and general health.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this section, the literature and research will interact in order to identify practical findings that pastors should keep in mind when considering or preparing for a transition from the solo to senior role. These findings will also be valuable for the pastor's spouse and family, pastoral search teams and other leaders in the church.

Leadership Findings

One of the first findings that was affirmed in comparing the solo and senior pastorate is the reality that the “grass is not always greener” on the other side of the fence. In a culture where “bigger is better,” pastors are being tempted to buy into similar thinking in terms of church size. Pastors can easily feel like the success of their ministry depends on the number of members, growth of the church, square footage of facility and size of the budget. The research of Kouzes and Posner revealed how evaluating leadership success by size can lead to disappointment.²⁴⁹

The research also revealed that the multi-staff ministry structure is new in the landscape of pastoral ministry.²⁵⁰ For centuries, solo pastors faithfully led Christ’s flock with no other ordained staff members. Lay people equipped and empowered by God gave of their time and talents to assist the pastor in the ministry of the church. This solo pastorate arrangement still exists in the majority of churches today. Pastors may be tempted to pursue the senior role or multi-staff context when in fact God has wonderfully gifted and created them to serve him faithfully in the solo pastorate. However, in pastoral leadership, regardless of staff size, the biblical goal is described as faithfulness, not success.²⁵¹

Identifying and acknowledging giftedness

This study showed that it is important for pastors to identify and acknowledge their giftedness. Before making any transition, the focus of the decision-making process must be, “How am I gifted to serve? Do I have the spiritual gifts, training, and personality

²⁴⁹ Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, 260.

²⁵⁰ McSwain, 3.

²⁵¹ New International Version, Matthew 25:23.

to serve as a senior pastor?” Six pastors in this study emphasized how important it is for pastors to discern whether or not they are truly gifted for the senior pastor role. God has equipped some to be solo pastors, some to be associate pastors, some to be senior pastors, and others to serve in a variety of other ways in his kingdom. This finding correlates with Paul’s teaching on spiritual giftedness in I Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 4.

Benefits and frustrations of the senior pastorate

In order to discern whether or not pastors have the spiritual gifts, training and personality for the senior pastor role, they must have a clear idea of what this role entails. This study has sought to bring to light many of the joys, challenges, changes and differences that exist when transitioning from a solo to senior role. Interviews with senior pastors who have had solo experience affirm that there are some aspects of the senior role that they truly enjoy more. Frank, Eric, Kevin, Derek and Randy all affirmed how working with others in a staff setting is a valuable benefit of the senior pastorate. Bruce and Nathan appreciated the ability to focus one’s gifts on a particular area of ministry.

However, there are also challenges and frustrations that they now experience, which were not present in their solo ministry. Ted, Derek and Hunter addressed the increased challenges that come with leading and attending more meetings. Kevin, Eric and Hunter spoke of senior pastorate frustrations that arise when there is conflict among staff. From the insights gained through the research, it is evident that the senior pastorate has imperfections, stress, and frustration as well!

Considering timing in light of other life commitments

It is also clear from the interviews that I conducted that serving as a senior pastor can positively or negatively impact one's marriage, relationship with children, work hours and health. Therefore, pastors who consider this transition must take into account the season of life they are in and the calling that God has placed upon them as a spouse and parent. Perhaps they have the gifts, but the added responsibility and time commitment is not in the best interest of their marriage and parenting responsibilities at this season of their life. If pastors do feel led to this new role in the midst of having young children or other commitments in life, it will require some boundaries and steps of accountability, which I will discuss more in the section on "Other Findings."

Leadership skills

One of the skills a senior pastor must have is the ability to lead. Although there are different styles of leadership, senior pastors must be prepared to take on the responsibility of the role and the praise or criticism that can come with it. The research of Kouzes and Posner in *Leadership Challenge*²⁵² as well as the works of Giuliani, Collins, Heifetz and Linsky, and Rainer demonstrates that the business world can offer positive leadership skills and insights that can be applied in the church. However, these skills and insights must not contradict biblical principles. The teaching of scripture must serve as the moral compass for leadership decisions and actions. Because businesses may at times utilize leadership skills in ways contrary to the intention and integrity that church leaders seek to practice, church leaders must carefully evaluate "secular" ideas before adopting them.

²⁵² Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 13.

Character traits for senior pastors

Those who transition from the solo to senior role must have a heart of humility, a servant's heart, and a willingness to continue learning and growing as a leader and servant of Christ. Those interviewed shared how they have learned lessons along the way and have sought to be a humble servant and a lifetime learner. Hunter shared the experience of watching a senior pastor unwilling to help a woman stumbling with a handful of dishes as a reminder that pastors must be willing to serve. Eric, Ted and Frank emphasized how important it is for pastors to remain grounded in the scriptures, remember that they are servants of Christ, and grow as leaders and servants through opportunities for lifetime learning.

Pride is a temptation that senior pastors face, and they must make sure that pride does not keep them from a lifetime of learning. The pastors I interviewed expressed how they benefited and learned from other pastors, counselors, people from the community and fellow staff members. This revealed how these pastors sought help and were humble enough to receive instruction and counsel even as they served in a role where they were seen as a person with high authority.

Relational leadership

Although every pastoral setting involves interpersonal relationships, a senior pastor must also be prepared for the relational dynamics that will be encountered when working with staff as well as ministering to a larger sized congregation. This new dynamic of pastoral leadership will require that certain leadership skills be developed and learned in order for effective ministry to take place.

This relational aspect will be challenged in the solo to senior transition in two key ways. First, the transition from a smaller to larger church will make it harder to develop deep relationships with as many people as before. The pastoral care role in leadership will change. It becomes less relational (in the sense of personal contact with members) and more administrative (with more contact with staff). McCollum describes this change, which was echoed by Greg, Randy, Craig and Nathan during the interviews. McCollum states:

Gone are the days of spending large portions of time personally tending one's flock. Instead, the pastor spends more time with his or her staff than with congregants.²⁵³

Secondly, smaller (family size) churches operate differently than larger (program/corporate) size churches. This will create new relational challenges that pastors must be prepared for. Oswald explains:

When clergy move from a Pastoral Church to a Program Church, unless they are able to shift from a primarily interpersonal mode to a program planning and development mode, they will experience tension and difficulty in their new congregation.²⁵⁴

Greg affirmed Oswald's observation when he described how he had to change from doing almost all of the congregational care in his solo pastorate and now coordinates and makes sure it is covered by a congregational care pastor in his current senior pastorate.

Delegating as a team player

Two key requirements in working with others in the senior setting are the ability to delegate and serve as a team player. Many solo pastors are accustomed to serving as a

²⁵³ McCollum, 27.

²⁵⁴ Oswald, 5.

type of “lone ranger.” They may have the time to take on more responsibility, find it easier to do it themselves rather than delegate, or be forced to do something on their own in order for it to occur. In the senior role, delegation becomes a necessity and team-based ministry is essential. Ted stated, “You can’t be a lone ranger when you have other full-time staff people in addition to all the volunteers. You must minister in a team context, and that can be an adjustment.”

With staff and increased programming, there is usually a longer chain of command process required for getting things accomplished. Craig referred to the freedom he had administratively in the solo pastorate and contrasted it with the struggling chain of command he has encountered in the senior setting. This change requires patience, the ability to trust in others, giving staff members freedom even to the point of failure, offering coaching and encouragement, and leading by example.

Power and Authority Findings

The biblical/theological framework given in chapter two of this study revealed God as the author of authority.²⁵⁵ Southard’s work makes it clear that as a result of God’s authority; any power, authority, or influence that pastors have comes from Christ.²⁵⁶ This is evident in biblical passages such as Matthew 28:18-20 and Colossians 1:15-18. Lawrence wrote, “All pastoral authority is derived authority. . . . authority is not ours, it is Christ’s, and we have authority only as He exercises it through us.”²⁵⁷ The pastors I interviewed acknowledged that the power, authority and influence they had came from God. Eric explained, “My power and authority first comes from God.”

²⁵⁵ Rardin, 24.

²⁵⁶ Southard, 11-12.

²⁵⁷ Lawrence, 106-107.

How power and authority is entrusted to the pastor

The power and authority that comes from God is entrusted to the pastor in various ways. The work of Burns²⁵⁸ described in chapter two shows how power can be understood in four dimensions: power as commodity, power as non-decision making, power as capacity and power relationships. Chapter four revealed examples of how pastors perceived the authority they were entrusted with as God-given authority, formal authority and earned relational authority. Hunter, Eric and Greg pointed to the consistory as a source of formal authority. Ted and Kevin acknowledged the need to earn relational authority from those a pastor serves.

Influence and structure

The way that “God-entrusted” as well as “church-entrusted” power and authority is used depends greatly on the organizational and accountability structure of the church. Some of the pastors I interviewed shared diagrams of their organizational and accountability structures with me. Many of these structures, including those given to me by Hunter and Nathan, acknowledged Christ as the head of the church. These diagrams also outlined specific roles of staff, lines of accountability, and dimensions of authority.

As mentioned in chapter four, churches varied on how much authority was given to the senior pastor and staff and how much was dispersed to members through ministry teams. Newer team models of shared leadership can be helpful in the church context as the priesthood of all believers use their gifts. According to Cladis, these newer models will be better received in our culture today compared to the older hierarchical and authoritative religious models. They will also better enable all members to use their gifts

²⁵⁸ Burns, *Learning the Politics of Ministry Practice*, 2001.

for the Lord's service and experience the joy of making a difference in the Kingdom of God. Cladis explains:

Effective ministry teams in the church in the postmodern era are empowering teams. They have put aside the older, hierarchical models and spread out the authority and responsibility of doing ministry. Leadership no longer means taking control, dictating, or giving orders.²⁵⁹

In order for new models of team-based leadership to work in the church, especially in churches where senior pastors work with other full-time staff, there must be a willingness by senior pastors to empower others for ministry. As Paul reminded, "We have learned to hand off power since I have been here. A lot of it has been built through trust." This requires time and energy by senior pastors who empower others. Nathan described how the transition to senior pastor and desire to empower others caused him to "pour more energy into staff, delegating, letting go, handing off, and letting them at times fail."

Degree of influence

The transition from the solo to senior pastorate can bring about changes in the amount of influence pastors feel they have. Senior pastors told me that their influence changed from pastor-to-people to primarily pastor-to-staff and pastor-to-key leaders.

Derek stated:

When there is staff, you become one more step removed from direct contact with the congregation for every staff person you have. People are now dealing with the staff instead of you. I would hate to think the influence lessens, but who you influence changes.

²⁵⁹ Cladis, 123.

Wade describes this change when he writes, “The senior pastor role is not one that satisfies the hands-on, do-it-yourself instinct. Senior pastors work with systems more than individuals.”²⁶⁰

Congregation-wide influence may still exist through preaching, if that is a key responsibility of the senior pastor. However, influence through personal visits, time spent in counseling or pastoral care, and meaningful conversation, often declines when entering into the senior role simply because of increased numbers and limited time. For those considering the transition from a solo to senior pastorate, the question must be asked, “Am I willing to give up or lose the current level of personal contact and influence that I enjoy with many or most members?”

The need for accountability

The pastors I interviewed emphasized the need for accountability. The churches Greg and Kevin served used self-evaluations as a means of personal accountability. But what about accountability in areas of our lives that we may be blind to see? Nathan found himself forced to confront such behavior in a staff member who exhibited “arrogance and self-promotion.”

Because we are at times blind to our own faults, many pastors establish accountability through networks outside of the church such as a group of other pastors, a mentor, counselor or close friend. Nathan and Eric revealed how valuable these groups have been for them in ministry. Accountability outside of pastor-to-pastor relationships may be necessary if it is difficult for a senior pastor to be open and accountable to other

²⁶⁰ Wade, 11.

pastors. Hunter felt this way when he expressed, “I never felt that pastors are honest with each other and therefore I have people outside of the church to talk to.”

Because of these findings, I believe that all pastors, but especially senior pastors, must establish appropriate boundaries and forms of accountability. There is simply too much at stake personally and for the sake of the church body if a senior pastor does not have some form of accountability. Moral failure or burnout of a senior pastor will lead to deep consequences for the church, other staff members, family members and ministry. I am afraid that many pastors have not found sources of accountability or are unwilling to submit to it. They are great leaders with many gifts, but they are also prone to great temptation because of their position and authority.

Staff Relations Findings

The literature on staff relations and teamwork revealed the benefits of working with others. Kouzes and Posner remind us, “Collaboration is the master skill that enables teams, partnerships, and other alliances to function effectively.”²⁶¹ Heifetz and Linsky state, “You need partners.”²⁶²

Many of the pastors I interviewed concluded that working with staff can be the greatest joy or the greatest frustration of the senior pastorate. Eric remarked, “The greatest joy of being a senior pastor with staff is the camaraderie and team aspect. You don’t have to do it all by yourself.” Kevin offered the opposite conclusion when staff members are at odds: “Probably the most difficult challenge for any pastor is inner staff conflict.” When unity, teamwork and healthy relations prevail, a staff serves as a great support group. Pastors who were interviewed smiled when thinking about positive staff

²⁶¹ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 266.

²⁶² Linsky and Heifetz, 100.

situations. They spoke of how they laughed, cried, celebrated, brainstormed and served together. As Randy put it:

We laugh and have fun together. This is also a place to cry. Staff allows for sharing experiences, partnering, laughing, crying and processing together.

Compared to the solo pastorate, staff ministry provided deeper friendships, decreased feelings of loneliness, and the ability to focus on specific areas of passion and giftedness. When staff relations were good, senior pastors expressed that it would be difficult for them to return to the solo pastorate. Pastors saw the impact of staff ministry that Cladis described when he wrote, “Collaboration is synergistic, producing a net effect that far outweighs the sum of the work of individuals.”²⁶³

On the other hand, when there was distrust, conflict or difficult issues related to staff, senior pastors were more likely to long for simpler solo days. Some of the pastors who were interviewed openly discussed difficult times in the past that they experienced with staff. Some had to fire staff members. Others senior pastors had to deal with negative consequences that arose when staff members were lazy, involved in moral sin, tried to overstep their authority, or couldn’t get along with others. Times when staff positions were vacant also provided extra work and difficulty.

Whether staff relations are good or bad, staff ministry brings new challenges and responsibilities to senior pastors. These involve hiring, supervising, leading, delegating, communicating, confronting and at times counseling staff members. Staff ministry also involves organizing and leading staff meetings, dealing with issues that may arise with the family members of staff, sharing the spotlight, and potentially taking on backlash

²⁶³ Cladis, 91.

from something that someone else is at fault in. These challenges and changes lead to the following five insights on staff relations that were discovered in this study.

Learning how to lead staff

Most seminaries tend to train pastors for solo or “generalist” ministry.²⁶⁴ Pastors are educated in areas such as preaching, counseling, outreach, leadership, pastoral care, biblical studies and youth ministry. This is often fitting for seminary graduates as many of them start out serving in a solo-setting ministry or in a specialized area as an associate pastor on a staff. However, seminary graduates may not receive much training in staff leadership or in working collegially with others.²⁶⁵ Five of the pastors interviewed expressed the importance of lifelong learning and development of leadership skills. This development can occur in the area of staff leadership for those who have had little formal training or experience in this area.

Recommendations for calling a solo vs. associate pastor

Search teams seeking to call a senior pastor often pursue one of two options (unless they call someone who has previously served as a senior pastor). One option is to call a solo pastor who has experience and training in leadership, preaching and almost every responsibility of church ministry except staff leadership. These pastors are accustomed to preaching on a weekly basis, encountering leadership challenges, and bearing responsibility. Their ability to lead staff must be learned on the go or through additional continuing education. The learning curve such a candidate must experience

²⁶⁴ McSwain, 3.

²⁶⁵ Oswald, 6.

would be similar to the learning process that a solo pastor undergoes when serving a church that adds additional staff.

The second option is to call someone who has served in a staff setting and who understands staff ministry, but who has specialized in a certain role and perhaps does not have as much preaching, counseling or leadership experience. In such cases, the transition to senior pastorate is easier in terms of staff relations, but more difficult in other areas of leadership responsibility.

When I asked senior pastors about the two options, the majority of pastors whom I interviewed expressed that they would recommend calling the solo pastor who has been accustomed to the responsibility of the “lead” role and must grow in the area of staff relations rather than the one who has not been a lead pastor. This is due to the fact that these pastors have probably not led staff and would also be asked to incur many other “lead” responsibilities that they have not carried out in the past. Craig summarized:

I think a solo pastor transitioning into a senior role can learn. As a solo pastor, you always have to be aware of everything that’s going on. The associates are aware of what’s going on, but are sometimes dealing with their own little world.

The feedback of those I interviewed expressed their belief that solo pastors can certainly transition into the senior role without prior experience and learn the new skills needed for this role.

Hiring staff

Many of the pastors that I interviewed emphasized the importance of hiring beyond competency. Nathan summarized their insights when he said, “We have been much more careful now to hire healthy people as best as we can. We hire character over

competence.” Eric alluded to the work of Collins when he said, “You’ve got to have the right people on the bus.” Along with competency for the job, pastors emphasized the value of character, chemistry, humility and theological agreement.

Even the measure of competency is viewed differently today. In the past, churches may have assumed that pastors who graduated from seminary, received approval by the denominational authorities that oversaw their educational development and showed evidence of solid skills were competent to serve the church and God’s people. The types of questions that most search teams sought to ask were questions of theological and practical competency. These included the pastor’s approach to preaching, outreach, youth ministry, pastoral care, theological viewpoints and spiritual background.

As churches expanded and added staff, competency of staff members focused on particular roles and responsibilities. Search teams also took into consideration the advice of references, benefit of listening to sermon tapes and past history at other churches.

Although many of these approaches are still used today, the hiring and calling of pastors involves much more examination of their character and team chemistry as well. Churches recognize that negative consequences of character flaws that lead to issues such as infidelity, addictions to pornography, inappropriate boundaries, and family concerns affect the pastor and church. Likewise, competent staff members (including senior pastors) who cannot work well with others often leads to division and problems within the church. Therefore, hiring decisions must take into consideration the overall chemistry of staff as they work together. Ted and Derek both acknowledged that if they were to make the transition from solo to senior pastor again, they would be more deliberate and

careful about choosing staff. Churches often learn the hard way that it is crucial to take the time that is necessary during the hiring process in order to find the right staff rather than settle for any staff. When there is a vacancy, there is pressure to fill the vacant position as soon as possible. However, pastors like Craig warned, “Don’t get in a hurry. Take your time in the search process.”

Kevin, Hunter and Frank all stressed the importance of having influence in the hiring process of staff members who would come under their supervision. Although senior pastors may have different levels of input or voting power on a search team, it is crucial that they are involved in the process. This again comes back to issues of chemistry and authority. Hunter went as far as saying to his consistory, “I will not longer supervise anybody that I haven’t hired.”

The importance of clearly defined job descriptions

Clearly defined job descriptions are important in the hiring process and beyond. According to those I interviewed, the more clearly defined the job description of the senior pastor and staff members, the more content the senior pastor was in terms of his role and staff productivity. Misunderstanding and varied interpretations of what pastors were expected to do often arose when job descriptions were unclear. Craig and Hunter both admitted that if they were to make this transition again, they would do a much better job of clarifying job descriptions. Clearly defined job descriptions should be written out and agreed upon by staff and church leadership. Such clarity can then be communicated to the congregation. Craig warned against not putting these in writing when he said, “There is a lot of miscommunication that can occur and promises that aren’t kept which leads to frustration.”

Clearly defined job descriptions reveal job expectations, set appropriate boundaries, offer a source of accountability and provide for easy-to-measure performance reviews. When each staff member's job descriptions are clearly identified, there is less overlap of roles and freedom to use one's gifts. Nuechterlein included clarification of roles and expectations as two of the three crucial components that enhance staff relationships.²⁶⁶ Because of these insights from those interviewed, I believe clearly defined job descriptions for all staff members and well-constructed organizational charts are crucial. They help staff members know their roles and what is expected of them, they define lines of accountability, and they provide a basis for measuring productivity.

Ways to improve staff relations

A final finding in the area of staff relations involves the importance of addressing and improving staff relations. In a busy church setting with multiple staff members, it is easy to drift into a group of individuals focusing on their own areas without camaraderie and communication. It may also be easy for senior pastors to give the impression that they are too busy to deal with the concerns or questions of staff members. Unless there is another staff member who has responsibility for staff relations (perhaps an administrative pastor), the senior pastor must take the initiative to seek harmony, teamwork, communication and development of staff. Kouzes and Posner write, "To develop capacity, leaders must expand or realize the potentialities of the people and organizations they lead; they must bring them to a fuller or better state."²⁶⁷

In many cases, this involves regular staff meetings. Some of these staff meetings are structured and others tend to be more open and flexible. Although the format of staff

²⁶⁶ Nuechterlein, 39.

²⁶⁷ Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, 155.

meetings varied, pastors in this study agreed upon the importance of meeting together regularly as a staff for prayer, communication and support. Senior pastors also advised seeking individual time with staff members. This was carried out as senior pastors took time to converse with staff members, observe and support them in their areas of service or enjoy appropriate time spent outside of the ministry setting with them.

Other Findings

Two other key areas of life were addressed in this study because they were affected by the transition from the solo to senior pastorate. These two key areas were marriage and family, and work hours and time off.

Marriage and family

The additional responsibilities and expectations that come with the senior pastorate role will affect marriage and family. It may affect it positively or negatively. In a positive sense, working with staff members will alleviate the need to be on call at all times and respond to all pastoral care emergencies. Staff members who serve in various areas of ministry will alleviate certain responsibilities that fell upon their senior pastor when he served as a solo pastor.

However, the responsibility of staff oversight, serving in a larger church, hiring issues and increased administrative tasks will create stress and time demands that were uncommon in the solo pastorate. Most of the pastors I interviewed agreed that the workload and hours they worked increased when transitioning from the solo to senior role. Craig estimated that his work hours changed from sixty to sixty-five hours per week in the solo pastorate to a solid eighty hours per week in the senior pastorate. An increase

in work hours affects the amount of time pastors can spend with their spouse and children. The affect that it has depends greatly on the boundaries and expectations that are set up by the pastor and church leadership.

As Hunter pointed out, “In some cases, the spouses of staff create the worst staff problems.” A spouse who tries to dictate an associate pastor’s hours or responsibilities, or who undermines the senior pastor, will create tension and stress. Solo pastors do not have to deal with spouses of other ordained staff members.

Senior pastors are not the only ones in the family who experience frustration or pain due to problems with staff members or their spouses. These issues can also be harmful to the senior pastor’s spouse who knows about the problem. Derek expressed:

I’ve seen my wife feel hurt or deeply affected when another staff person has gotten into difficulty and it’s affected my ministry and me. She felt that more deeply than even I did because she saw me suffering. She said “It wasn’t your fault – why do you have to take the blame?” That can lead to the risk of a spouse developing anger toward people in the congregation too. It took a number of years to understand and appreciate that dynamic.

Therefore, consideration of this transition should involve detailed conversation with one’s spouse about the new responsibilities and challenges that can arise when working with staff. The age and needs of children should also be taken into consideration. Although called into ministry and led by God to serve, pastors must not allow their pastoral role to endanger their marriage and family. The joys and rewards of pastoral ministry mean little if they occur at the expense of family relationships.

Work hours and time off

Through the interviews that I conducted with pastors, I learned that many of them did not take regular days or periods of time off. Some pastors, such as Kevin, Derek and

Randy, found it difficult to take time off even in their solo pastorate years. Pastors with children at home sought ways to attend events and spend time with them. Many of the pastors noted that this flexibility to attend children's events was a benefit of the pastorate. Since many had spouses who worked out of the home and children who attended school, the time off with family often occurred on Saturdays or during late afternoon school activities. The greatest challenges occurred when ministry meetings were held in the evening or when pastors felt the need to spend time on Saturday preparing for the responsibilities of Sunday.

Although some churches, such as Nathan's, were proactive in expressing their expectations for pastors to spend time with family, many did not voice expectation for time off. It would serve pastors and churches well to discuss and agree upon healthy boundaries for work hours (for senior pastors and staff members). Pastors who continually find themselves working long hours each week at the expense of their family, spiritual health, physical health and personal well-being should consider what changes need to occur. Bruce and Randy reflected in the interview on how they felt "burned out" and in need of making changes. Those considering the transition from the solo to senior pastorate should consider current boundaries and habits in light of the increased challenges of time and work hours they may incur. It may be wise to address this component in the candidating process so that healthy expectations are agreed upon in advance.

A final finding concerning family and work relates to the amount of support that pastors felt. It surprised me how many pastors commented on the ways they were supported in the solo pastorate, ways which no longer occurred in the senior pastorate.

These included signs of appreciation and support through yearly Christmas gifts, cards, garden items, and pastor appreciation acknowledgements. When they transitioned into a role with multiple staff members, these individual signs of support lessened. Ted explained:

When congregations recognize their pastors, the solo pastor receives all the recognition and the entire Christmas gift. When you are on a team, it's more of a divided dynamic of shared ministry.

While pastors should not serve to receive the glory of others, it is important that pastors and their families feel appreciated for the service they provide. This finding is helpful to keep in mind if a solo pastor is used to receiving such signs of love and is startled to see less of them in a senior pastor setting.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall, the literature and interviews revealed that God can bless both the solo and senior pastorate settings for the growth and advancement of His kingdom. Pastors can find joy and fulfillment in either role, as well as struggles and frustrations in either setting.

The key issue in terms of pastoral service and fulfillment lies in the way that pastors are gifted and equipped for ministry. Some are designed and equipped by God to be solo pastors. Some are designed and equipped by God to be senior or lead pastors who lead staff ministry. Some may be called and equipped by God to transition from one setting to the other at some point in their ministry.

When considering such a transition, pastors must take into consideration their gifts, personality, style, family commitments, leadership traits, preference for influence, degree of providing of pastoral care to members, and ability to share ministry with other

paid staff. The administrative and authoritative structures of the church must also be a good fit for the pastor. Pastors must also be willing to grow in their ability to serve the Lord, focusing on ways to continue their education and learning for the new dynamics and challenges that arise. Proper boundaries and delegation must also be set and kept.

Those who transition from the solo to senior pastorate out of a self-serving desire for a larger church, increased compensation, the ability to lead staff, higher budgets or fancier facilities may soon discover that these real or imagined “benefits” can also bring greater stress, frustration and demands of time.²⁶⁸ The primary focus in considering such a transition must be based on a match of gifts, a heartfelt sense of call and a humble spirit. The biblical teaching on servant leadership, allegiance to Christ and accountability to God must be the foundation on which any pastoral ministry is built. May the Lord bless his servants as they use their gifts to serve in churches of all sizes so that lives are redeemed, the gospel proclaimed, and the world transformed for his glory!

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This study focused on the transition from solo to senior pastorate. As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the focus can be. Therefore, I recommend the following areas of study for further research.

One study for further research could deal with the challenges encountered by associate pastors who transition into the senior pastorate. This study dealt with the transition from the solo pastorate. What kinds of challenges or issues would associate pastors encounter that are different from those of transitioning solo pastors? I believe that associates would find it easier than solo pastors to deal with staff relation challenges.

²⁶⁸ Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility*, 260.

On the other hand, getting accustomed to leadership challenges as a senior pastor may prove to be more difficult.

A second possibility for further research could be a study of challenges encountered by senior pastors who transition into an associate or solo role. What challenges would they encounter as they became the only ordained pastor with less or no full-time staff? How would this affect their use of time, the way they relate to parishioners, or their ability to equip and involve members in ministry?

A third recommended study could focus on the unique challenges of transitioning from a solo to senior pastor within the same church. This transition would occur when a church grows to the point of adding a second ordained staff person or additional staff members. Senior pastors in this situation may deal less with the challenges of establishing credibility and exercising authority. They would not be forced to deal with the challenge of inheriting existing staff. However, what challenges would the existing senior pastor face in delegating responsibility, addressing changes in expectation among members of the congregation, helping the new staff member truly feel like part of the team, and sharing ministry roles (such as weddings, baptisms or counseling) with another pastor?

The topic of this dissertation could also be expanded beyond the Reformed Church in America to include and examine how this transition affected pastors in other denominations. Such research could determine whether the findings of this study apply to other denominations as well.

Further research could also focus on the particular challenges of this transition for senior pastors who accept calls to churches that have a very large staffs. How do

authority and accountability structures, staff meetings, delegation of responsibilities and other aspects of ministry differ when someone transitions into this type of church?

Which components of this study become less challenging in a this context?

Another further area of research could center on the transitional challenges that associate pastors encounter when a new senior pastor comes to the church where they serve. What steps of action should an associate pastor take to build trust, establish credibility, and get to know the new senior pastor? How should the associate pastor respond to changes that the senior pastor seeks to implement?

A final further area of research could focus on the challenges that lead pastors face when they work with a number of full or part-time non-ordained staff members. How would the finding of this study differ if the staff members were not ordained? This factor may limit what functions some of the staff are able to carry out (such as baptisms, weddings, sacraments). How would this affect the ministry of the lead or senior pastor? What aspects of transitioning into such a staff setting would be similar?

These are some recommendations I have for further research. Each of these situations differs in some way from the findings of this study and therefore could not be addressed in depth as part of this study. However, understanding the challenges within these types of transitions would be of benefit to pastors, churches, staff members and family members. The goal of such research is to make these transitions healthy and effective so that people called and equipped by God may use their gifts and follow his call for the glory of God and the strengthening of his church!

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following interview guide was used when conducting personal interviews of pastors who once served as solo pastors and then became senior pastors serving on staffs with associate pastors. I used these questions as a semi-structured interview protocol. From interview to interview, some questions were left out and additional questions added if discerned they would be beneficial to the purpose of this study.

Leadership and Transitional Challenges

1. When you became a senior pastor and began serving in a larger size church, what adjustments of leadership skills and practices did you have to make?

Can you give me an example of the hardest part of that transition for you?

2. What are some specific leadership skills that you feel a senior pastor must have in order to make this transition and minister effectively?

Do you think these are learned and developed, or are they natural gifts that some have? If learned, what helped you learn them?

3. As a senior pastor, how do you keep a healthy biblical foundation for servant leadership in the midst of cultural and congregational expectations?

(i.e. “bigger is better,” “we need to keep people happy,” “comparing the church with other churches”)

4. Can you think of an example of how you have dealt with this challenge?

Power and Authority Challenges

5. How do you view the power and authority you have as a senior pastor? What are some temptations and potential dangers senior pastors might face in this area?

6. Let's define power as the ability to get things done and have influence. How is your ability to get things done or influence others different now compared to when you were a solo pastor?
7. As a senior pastor, how do you equip and promote a team ministry rather than working to just get your own way? If you have had a situation where there was a power struggle, can you briefly share what happened?
8. What challenges did you encounter in terms of establishing and maintaining credibility with church leadership, other staff and church members?
9. Can you give me an example of how you faced challenges in terms of power and authority as you transitioned from a solo to senior pastor role?

Staff Relation Challenges

10. When you transitioned from a solo to a senior pastor, what challenges did you face in the area of staff relations? Can you give some examples you've learned from?

How did you address these challenges?

11. What are some intentional steps that you took to reach out to those staff members that you inherited prior to, during, and after making this transition?
12. What do you feel is the senior pastor's role in helping a church staff remain healthy and unified?
13. Some people might say that a senior pastor of a church staff must have staff experience prior to becoming a senior pastor. Do you think a solo pastor can make this transition without prior staff experience?

If so, why? If not, why not?

14. How is the accountability structure of your staff set up?

Summary Questions

15. Suppose you were to make the move from solo to senior pastor over again, what would you do differently?
16. What surprised you during this transition?

17. If I were to someday transition from serving as a solo pastor to a senior pastor, what are some practical matters of advice you would you give me?
18. How does this transition affect a family (work hours, etc...) and how did you take this into consideration when choosing to make this transition?
19. What is the greatest joy of serving with staff as a senior pastor?
20. What is the greatest headache that might cause you to consider returning to the solo role?

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS THAT PASTORS WHO ARE CONSIDERING THIS TRANSITION CAN USE FOR EVALUATION/DISCERNMENT

The following sets of questions arise out of the review of literature and pastoral interviews that were conducted. They are designed to help potential senior pastors evaluate and discern challenges that pertain to leadership skills, power and authority dynamics, staff relations and family issues.

Key Leadership Questions to Ask When Considering this Transition

1. Do I understand the differences between the solo and senior pastorate?
2. Am I gifted for the solo or senior role?
3. Is the time right in light of other God-given responsibilities in my life?
4. Am I making this transition to better use my gifts or receive greater glory?
5. Am I a team player who is willing to learn and develop my gifts?
6. Am I willing to delegate responsibility and defer praise?

Power and Authority Questions to Consider in light of a Potential Leadership Team

1. Does the structure of the leadership limit power and authority to a few, or does it empower others to make decisions?
2. Is the leadership team too large for productive decision-making?
3. Are lines of accountability clear and measurable?
4. Is the leadership structure effectively providing opportunities for people to use their gifts?
5. Are job descriptions for staff members clear and reasonable?

Power and Authority Questions Related to Accountability

1. Do I recognize the potentially dangerous temptations that surround me?
2. Can I recognize potential signs of weakness that exist in my life?
3. Have I set appropriate boundaries in ministry settings (ex: how I counsel or spend time with people of the opposite gender)?
4. Am I part of an accountability group or relationship where I can be totally honest and where others can ask me any difficult question about my actions?

Key Staff Relations Questions to Ask When Considering this Transition

1. Am I aware of the common challenges and responsibilities senior pastors encounter when leading staff that are not as common in the solo pastorate?
2. What kind of training have I received for staff leadership, and what additional training might you need to get?
3. What role will I have in the hiring process, and what degree of staff supervision will be expected of me?
4. What are some concrete plans and approaches that I have for staff development, encouragement and team building?

Key Family and Time-related Questions to Ask When Considering this Transition

1. How will this transition impact my marriage and the time I spend with my spouse?
2. How will this transition impact the relationship and parental responsibilities that I have with my children?
3. What boundaries will I need to set in regard to the hours worked?
4. What will need to occur in order for these boundaries to be kept?
5. In the midst of ministry and family responsibilities, how can I seek to be physically, spiritually and emotionally healthy and well-balanced?

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