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MAKING A MOVE:
Exploring Factors that Contribute to a Successful Pastoral Transition

By
Michael Kennison

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF
COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how experienced pastors approach their first year of transition to an established church to be the senior pastor. Pastors face a complex set of challenges when transitioning to a new call at an existing church. Examining how a variety of pastors have approached such a transition can uncover influences and practices that contributed to the success of their transitions. The frequency with which the modern church experiences such transitions and the potential for disruption at each occurrence underscores the importance of such a study.

This study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with seven pastors who had experienced transition within the past five years, entering churches that varied in size and cultural character while being in the same denomination. The literature review and analysis of the seven interviews focused on the preparations, priorities, and adjustments in mode of ministry operation after beginning to determine significant patterns, The literature review provided a context through the examination of biblical examples of transition and study of three relevant areas of concentration: pastoral transitions, business transitions, and family systems theory.

The study concluded that while a fair amount is being written in each of these areas, little is presently impacting the transition practices of pastors. Factors that typically characterize transitions, including concern over the prior church, the pressures of moving, and the experience of trials, greatly limit time given to preparation by reading. The advice of mentors stands out as a much stronger influence. The pastors interviewed strongly supported the wisdom of prioritizing time with the congregation before initiating change and underscored the importance of faithfulness in feeding and caring for the flock as a foundation for change.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When making the increasingly frequent and complex move to a new call, pastors in the United States find limited help in planning and navigating their first year of ministry. They may potentially follow several preconceived plans:

Robert, a pastor with ten years of experience, was called to Sunrise Beach Church, a congregation of about three hundred members, where the previous and much-loved pastor had served for more than twenty years. He used a simple guiding principle that no major changes would be attempted in the first year. The transition has been, thus far, a successful one. At the same time, Ryan, also an experienced pastor, took a call to the large and prominent Christ Church, whose pastor had planted and served the church for more than twenty years. He stepped into the first year with the conviction that he had a short time to break with the past and make the ministry his own. Thus, he initiated major changes in worship and ministry priorities. The battles have been many, and the final outcome remains to be seen.

These two transitions, though fictitious in name, represent real experiences of men at opposite ends of the planning spectrum. The first finds substantial support in the literature on pastoral transitions. Ed Bratcher advises, "When I arrive in a new church, I'm bursting to jump into leadership. But I check my enthusiasm. In fact, I try to make no changes in the church for one year. Instead, I use the first year to wait, listen, and learn.

Only then do I lead."[1] At the same time, the second transition, which called for quick action, might find support in Ken Callahan's *A New Beginning for Pastors and Congregations*. Callahan remarks, "Your first three days shape the first three weeks. You can never make a first impression the second time. The first three weeks shape the first three months. How you as pastor use this time together with your congregation shapes the first three years. How you begin shapes how you continue and where you end."[2]

Since transitioning pastors often feel overwhelmed as they conclude their present ministry and prepare their families for the next, they may latch onto this simple, general advice for their first year in a new ministry. However, even the cited authors of these two approaches recognize that there is complexity to the issue. Bratcher, for example, immediately follows the above comment with the concession,

> The first year is the only year, of course, when some changes can be made. Maybe the organist has to go before he becomes entrenched in my term. Nonetheless, I've always been cautious about assuming I've been given carte blanche in that first year. I'm taken with the adage, "A new broom sweeps clean." Then again, the hand that guides the broom needs to know where to sweep. My newcomer's hand doesn't know that.[3]

One can feel Brachter's sense of the complexity of moving into a new calling. Likewise, Callahan's comments, which signal a bias for action, are in the context of a call to engaged shepherding, so that the action he advocates involves knowing and being known. This, in effect, sounds not unlike the advice to get to know the church family for a period of time before initiating changes. So while pastors under pressure might like a "rule of thumb" for the first year in a new calling, things are rarely so simple.

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[1] Ed Bratcher, Robert G. Kemper, and Douglas Scott, *Mastering Transitions*, 1st ed. (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1991), 81.
[2] Kenton L. Callahan, *A New Beginning for Pastors and Congregations*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 6, 7.
[3] Bratcher, 81.

The complexity of what to do in the first year of a pastoral transition is a matter of concern to the church because pastors in most denominations are stepping into new callings with increasing frequency. For example, the denominational magazine of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) recently listed thirty pastoral transitions out of the 3595 pastors recorded during a four-month period in 2008.[4] Michael Anthony includes in his introduction the observation that "the Southern Baptist denomination...reports that 225 of their senior pastors get fired every month while another 250 offer their resignation. That's 475 pastors each month starting the journey of career transition in just one denomination!"[5] George Barna, in his study of American pastors, printed in 1993, comments that, "During the past two decades, the average tenure of senior pastors has dropped to about four years from seven."[6] Bratcher asserts that, "in a given year, around 9 or 10 percent of Presbyterian pastors delight the 'Adventures in Moving' industry."[7] With this growing frequency of change comes the increased possibility of significant disruption in the peace and growth of the church, as well as the welfare of our pastors. And while this challenge is greatly helped by instruction to both pastors and search committees on factors that make a good pastor-church fit, even a good fit can be hampered by unnecessary missteps in the first year of ministry. Accessible guidance for the first year could aid in reducing such missteps.

Considering the growing frequency of pastoral transitions to established churches, one might expect to find a wealth of information on the subject. How might approaches

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[4] ByFaithOnline, April 2008, http://byfaithonline.com/page/pca-news/ministry-transitions-as-of-march-2008.
[5] Michael J. Anthony and Mick Boersma, *Moving on, Moving Forward: A Guide for Pastors in Transition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 12.
[6] George Barna, *Today's Pastors: A Revealing Look at What Pastors Are Saying About Themselves, Their Peers, and the Pressures They Face* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1993), 36.
[7] Bratcher, 8.

vary depending on the history and style of the church? Is there a way to think about an effective first year? How does the church's established system of doing and thinking about itself and about ministry impact the plans of the new pastor? While all of these areas are beginning to gain attention in the wider church, there is not a great deal of readily distilled information to guide those who are entering the first year of transition.

The books that deal specifically with pastoral transitions, such as Bratcher's *Mastering Transitions,* Coyner's *Making a Good Move*, Oswald, Heath, and Heath's *Beginning Ministry Together,* and Callahan's *A New Beginning for Pastors and Congregations*, typically provide anecdotal advice out of their own experience. Coyner served for many years as district superintendent and then as Bishop in the United Methodist Church, leading him to use his experience with transitioning pastors to begin seminars on moving into new positions.[8] Oswald, Heath, and Heath draw on more than thirty years of experience from the Alban Institute, but note some limitations in the institute's work that led them to begin their own research. Alban's research, for example, "did not distinguish between sizes of congregations. A single transition format was intended to fit all clergy and sizes of congregations.[9]

While *Beginning Ministry Together* does draw on recent research among Lutheran and Episcopal churches, its focus is more on congregational redevelopment in transition, and it draws more on the experience of lay leaders than on pastors.[10] Further, while such approaches as the Presbyterian Church, USA's Alban Institute are the response of some

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[8] Michael J. Coyner, *Making a Good Move: Opening the Door to a Successful Pastorate* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 9-10.
[9] Roy M. Oswald, James M. Heath, and Ann W. Heath, *Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions* ([Bethesda, Maryland]: Alban Institute, 2003), xi.
[10] ibid.

mainline denominations to the issue of pastoral transitions, many denominations have little to offer in terms of studied preparation.

In spite of the fact that the church has only recently begun to think about the subject of job transition, it has received quite a bit of attention in the business sector. Michael Watkins makes the observation that "Each year over half a million managers enter new positions in Fortune 500 companies alone." The proposition he draws from this reality is that "adoption of a standard framework for accelerating transitions can yield big returns for organizations."[11] Recognizing that approaches in business transitions vary, depending on whether the business is a start-up, a turnaround, realignment, or sustaining-success, Watkins and others carefully consider how new managers might establish themselves without losing precious time or relational capital. So the Harvard Business School, among others, has responded to the business need with a series of studies that offer detailed and systematic approaches to transition for new managers.[12] This approach moves significantly beyond the "one-size-fits-all" plan, or the lack of a plan, that sometimes characterizes church transitions.

In addition to this growing body of information, both mainline churches and businesses have begun to pay greater attention to the importance of systems theory as leaders step into on-going works. Ronald Richardson summarizes his application of systems theory to the church in this way: "The basic assumption I have been developing in this book is that emotional systems get in trouble and symptoms erupt as the result of

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[11] Michael Watkins, *The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels*, 1st ed. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2003), 6.

[12] Among them are: Michael Tushman, *Winning Through Innovation: A Practical Guide to Leading Organizational Change and Renewal,* Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading,* Linda Hill, *Becoming a Manager: How New Managers Master the Challenges of Leadership.* Also Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Pub.*

some kind of imbalance in the system. The imbalance is almost always related to a heightened level of anxiety in the system."[13] Anxiety in the church is often triggered by change, and the transition of a new pastor into the church is clearly a major change, both for the church and for the new pastor. So Richardson's application of systems theory to the leader, the pastor, is especially important to ponder. He advises, "One of the best things church leadership can do during difficult times is simply to understand the church better. During these times, simply achieving greater clarity about what is going on, based on the facts, will have major impact...when leaders are able to adopt the 'research stance,' this style calms down the system."[14]

A deeper understanding of anxiety and its impact on relationships between new pastors and their churches will greatly help those new pastors to remain calm, provide stability and assurance to the anxious churches, and to more effectively transition during the first year. Drawing more recently on this research in systems theory, Phil Douglass, professor of practical theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, has explored and categorized various church systems into distinguishable personalities. In describing the eight variations in church personality, and in pastors, he notes why such insights are important:

> There is no guarantee that spiritually mature people will work well with one another. While they usually share the same ultimate goals, there is no assurance that they will agree on the best way to achieve those goals. When people's convictions are strongly held and mutually exclusive (as were Paul's and Barnabas's plans for dealing with John Mark in Acts 15:36-40), conflict can emerge, which sometimes prevents progress towards the goals everyone desires. This is why it is important for church leaders to understand their ministry styles

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[13] Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 159.

[14] *ibid.*, 160.

> and why it is essential to establish philosophical and relational standards of qualification for your church leaders in addition to spiritual ones.[15]

Such studies make it clear that a pastor stepping into a new call is not simply dealing with his own role and mindset, but must consider the complex system into which he is entering. Some reflection among pastors recently in transition, with an eye towards their experience of the church's emotional system and its impact upon them, will serve the wider church as it guides pastors through future changes in call.

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the fact that pastors frequently move from one established church to another, little has been written on the personal priorities, preparations, and adjustments in mode of operating made by pastors transitioning into established churches, making it difficult to determine what significantly influenced their thinking. Both transitions methodology and systems research have been useful tools in clarifying some of the complexities in business and in other vocational transitions. But to what degree have they found their way into the thinking and practice of pastors, helping them to navigate the complexities of pastoral transitions? Loren Mead notes that, as far back as 1975, "A significantly large group of people have discovered each other as students of congregational life."[16] So the subject has certainly received attention among churchmen over the past thirty-five years. Yet, it is not clear that the benefits of research have translated into helpful changes in behavior for pastors.

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[15] Philip R. Douglass, *Your Church Has Personality* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, June 2008), 3.

[16] Loren B. Mead, *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors*, 1st ed. (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 1986; reprint, 7), 4.

This is a true concern when one considers the impact that frequent or failed transitions have upon the health of the affected churches. Barna notes several concerns in "Today's Pastors:"

> In our research on user-friendly churches...we learned that the pastor stays for a prolonged period of time. In fact, most of those pastors believed that the church they were serving would be the final church in their pastoral career. The practice of changing churches frequently is not a characteristic of a leading or effective pastor. Because viable churches are based upon relationship and because a strong community takes time to build, the possibility of a pastor creating a strong relational network within the congregation is minimized by a short tenure. Many pastors experience their most productive years in ministry between their third and fifteenth years in ministry between their third and fifteenth years of service. Leaving after four years or so removes the prospect of exploiting the prime years of influence. When churches experience a revolving door pastorate, they are less likely to be trusting, communal and outward oriented. A major influence of short pastoral tenures causes the congregation to assume a protective, inward-looking perspective.[17]

If they do not exercise wisdom and care, pastors moving into a new church can easily find themselves taking actions that will undermine the longevity of their call. It is therefore a great advantage, both to the pastor and to the church that the incoming pastor be familiar with the gathered wisdom found in the study of pastoral transitions, business transitions, and systems theory.

Statement of the Purpose

Pastors face a complex set of challenges when transitioning to a new call at an existing church. Examining how a variety of pastors have approached such a transition can uncover influences and practices that contributed to the success of their transitions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how experienced pastors approach their first year of transition to an established church to be the senior pastor.

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[17] Barna, 36-7.

Primary Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How did the pastors prepare themselves for the transitional entrance into pastoring an already established church?
2. What did the pastors consider to be their priorities for the first year of transition?
3. In what ways did the pastors make changes in their typical ministry style in the first year of transition?
    a. Changes in communication?
    b. Changes in decision-making style?
    c. Changes in work habits?
4. In what ways and to what degree were the pastors' preparations, priorities, and changes in style informed by the findings of published transition literature?

Significance of the Study

This study of pastoral transitions was important for several reasons. A deeper study of the experiences of several pastors reflecting on recent transitions can provide greater insight into actual practices in their preparation. It gave some insight into those practices that served the pastor and congregation well in navigating the difficult terrain of the first year of service together. And, perhaps most significantly, it shed some light on whether and to what degree the growing body of literature on transitions is actually impacting the thinking of both older and younger pastors stepping into a new work. Are there particular works within the fields of pastoral transition, business transition, or family systems that stand out as helpful tools? Is there advancement in seminary preparation for such transitions, and is this reflected in actual practice? While it cannot be

said that little is written on the matter of pastoral transition to a new call, this study advances the understanding of the degree to which these materials are utilized and impact practice.

Definition of Terms

The following key terms were used throughout this study:

Call: The invitation of the congregation to a person to serve as their pastor. The term also can refer to the tenure of a pastor.

Session: The collective body of elders, who have ordained authority to rule over a particular congregation.

Pastor: For the purpose of this study, this term refers to one who is a senior pastor or solo pastor of a PCA congregation.

PCA: The Presbyterian Church in America.

PCUSA: The Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.

Presbytery: A regional governing body of the PCA, consisting of all teachers and elder representatives of all of the churches within its jurisdiction.

Teaching Elder: A pastor of a PCA congregation, whose vocation is the ministry of the word of God. In the PCA, he is not a member of the congregation, but of a Presbytery.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore how experienced pastors approach their first year of transition into a senior pastor position at an established church. The goal of this research was to uncover influences and practices that contributed to the success of such transitions. Since pastoral transitions occur frequently and significantly impact church stability, it is a matter of some concern to understand and evaluate common practices among pastors in their first year of transition. Little has been written about the plans and preparations of typical pastors at this critical time, and not much of the existing literature focuses on the degree to which the expansive material on elements of transition has begun to influence the transitioning pastor's thinking.

There is, however, much written on the subject of transition, both in the church world and in the business world. As noted in chapter one of this dissertation, several of the larger Christian denominations, spurred by concern over the growing frequency of pastoral moves to new calls and the number of failures in those transitions, have formed study groups to evaluate this critical period. A growing body of literature on pastoral transition is being produced by such groups as well as by individual pastors. Because business managers face many of the same challenges as transitioning pastors, the literature on successful transitions in the workplace is also pertinent to this study. Those writing on pastoral transition and those writing on business transition have simultaneously begun to reflect on the relevance of systems theory to understanding the

complexities of transition into an existing group. Thus, the literature on family systems and its particular insights will also be examined in this study. So, three topics of study will be included in this literature review: pastoral transitions, business transitions, and family systems. These three areas will be reviewed for insights into factors that contribute to success in the critical first year of pastoral transition. The focus will be on those insights that pertain to the four research questions of this study: preparations and priorities going into transition, changes in mode of operating during the first year, and the influence of transitional literature as the transitioning pastor works through the first year.

The Biblical Perspective on Pastoral Transitions

Recognizing that the issue of pastoral calling and transition is a matter of concern in the Bible, it is appropriate to survey the biblical text to capture its insights into the movement of God's leaders to a new calling. The Bible describes all of God's people as "sojourners and exiles,"[18] living as those looking forward to a final home. So the letter to the Hebrews comments, "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth… they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one."[19] Transition is therefore not the exception, but the rule, for the people of God. But the specific area of concern for this study is the leader of God's people in transition. Of the many biblical leaders taking the reins of a work already in progress, two stand out as especially helpful due to the detailed description of their lives and insight into their transitions: Joshua and Timothy. Both men were called to service at pivotal points in salvation history, Joshua to the conquest of the Promised Land and Timothy at the

[18] I Peter 2:11
[19] Hebrews 11:13, 16

founding of the New Testament church. Both men followed towering personalities – Moses and Paul – with the mandate to place their own stamp upon God's kingdom work. Both men were groomed for the position and had a lasting impact.

Joshua

Turning first to Joshua, one notes that the book by his name is, as a whole, a book about transitions. James Montgomery Boice, theologian, noted author and former pastor of historic Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, comments,

> But Joshua is not only the story of a man. It is also the story of a conquest- the conquest of Canaan by the tribes Moses led out of Egypt. This means that it is a transitional book: a transition from the patriarchal age, in which the nation of Israel was being called formed, delivered, and trained, to the age of settled occupation of the land.[20]

So, as the people of Israel faced the challenge of dramatic change, how did God prepare his leader for the task? Joshua's transition into the leadership of Israel was particularly daunting for a number of reasons. His predecessor, Moses, led Israel for forty years in the desert, conducting a ministry enjoying the special imprimatur of God as the one with whom God spoke face to face.[21] The on-going work to which he had been called was a vast and weighty work, leading the great throng of God's chosen people into an inheritance from the Sinai to the Euphrates.[22] The people were already functioning in their various tribes, with seasoned leaders in place.[23] And the people were by temperament stubborn and headstrong.[24]

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[20]James Montgomery Boice, *Joshua: We Will Serve the Lord*, 1st ed. (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Flemming H. Revell Co., 1989), 4.
[21] Num. 12:6-8, Deut.34: 10-12
[22] Deut. 1:9-11, 7:6-8, Josh. 1:2-4
[23] Ex. 18:13-27, Deut. 1: 12-18
[24] Deut. 9: 6-9

So, in what ways did Joshua prepare, set priorities, and change his mode of operation as he stepped into Moses' shoes? His early work of preparation, initiated by the Lord, was primarily an internal, heart adjustment. What appears first in the text of Joshua, preceding any action, was Joshua's personal meeting with God to confirm his call. Central to that call was the promise of God, "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you."[25] The conviction that God and not man had called him became for him a source of strength and courage in the face of difficulty. So Boice comments, "...when God called him, the possibility of conquering the land-which had always existed for him because with God all things are possible-now became a certainty, and he moved ahead vigorously. No person is as invincible as one who is certain God has called him or her to a task."[26]

Where such assurance from the Lord gives courage, it also serves as a reason for humility. For it was clear that God was the primary and only indispensable actor in Israel's salvation. The book of Joshua begins, "After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant..."[27] From Joshua's first appearance in scripture, leading the battle against the Amalekites in Exodus 17:8f, to his accompaniment of Moses part of the way up Mt. Sinai as Moses received the law, to his participation in the mission to spy out the Promised Land, to his commissioning in Numbers 27, he was deeply impacted by the leadership of Moses. Yet, as Israel was poised to take possession of the Promised Land, Joshua was prepared for leadership by

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[25] Joshua 1:5
[26] Boice, 50.
[27] Joshua 1:1

witnessing God's ability to remove the seemingly irreplaceable Moses. John Calvin, noted commentator and theologian of the Protestant Reformation, comments,

> When God takes away those whom he has adorned with special gifts, he has others in readiness to supply their place, and that though he is pleased for a time to give excellent gifts to some, his mighty power is not tied down to them, but he is able, as often as seemeth to him good, to find fit successors, nay, to raise up from the very stones persons qualified to perform illustrious deeds.[28]

Internal preparation for Joshua included this conviction that he, like Moses, was not an indispensable hero of God's people, but a limited part of the work belonging to God.

Several particular priorities defined Joshua's calling as Israel's leader. These priorities stand out in the text, beginning with the one defined by God himself as he called Joshua: "Only be strong and courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go."[29] Francis Schaeffer, noted author and founder of the L'Abri Center in Huémoz, Switzerland, comments on the centrality of this priority for Joshua: "Throughout his life, Joshua was obedient. Of all the factors which gave him success the most important was that he heeded God's admonition about the book."[30] Joshua carried this priority of attention and adherence to God's spoken word into his ministry to Israel, even to the end of his life. Schaeffer again comments concerning the text in Joshua 23:6, "Joshua kept the command of God all the days of his life, and, before he died, he urged the people that followed him to do the same: 'Live your life within the circle of the propositions given in the written book.'"[31]

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[28] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Joshua*, trans., Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1949), xix.
[29] Joshua 1:7
[30] Francis A. Schaeffer, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*, 1st ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 34.
[31] Ibid, 34.

Joshua also established his calling as one who lived under and was led by the authority of the word of God. His first commands reflected this priority. In accordance with the command of God in Deuteronomy 1:8, he charged the people, "See, I have set the land before you. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore to your fathers."[32] Joshua's first command to the officers of the people was, "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, 'Prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan to go in to take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.'"[33] This first command reflected careful attention to the promise and direction of God. His second command, issued to the settled eastern tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, adhered to the command of Moses found in Deuteronomy 3: 18-20. Those who had gained their inheritance east of the Jordan were to accompany their brothers in the conquest west of the river. Joshua's command as he transitioned into leadership carefully complied with the command given to Moses.

A second priority is suggested by the events preceding the conquest of Jericho, found in Joshua 4 and 5. Boice notes, "The most important thing about the crossing of the Jordan River… is the prominence of the Ark of the Covenant in that crossing."[34] He explains the importance of the ark as a symbol of the presence of God, denoting his sovereignty, holiness, justice, and mercy. In broad terms, the ark itself, carried by the priests across the Jordan and into battle, represented the priority of calling the people to live and act as those dwelling in the presence of God, practicing life as worship. So, in

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[32] Deuteronomy 1:8
[33] Joshua 1:10-11
[34] Boice, 50.

Joshua 3:5, the people were commanded to consecrate themselves before battle, an action normally associated with worship.

Added to this priority, Calvin observes, "The valour of the priests in proceeding boldly beyond the bed into the water itself, was deserving of no mean praise, since they might have been afraid of being instantly drowned."[35] He comments, "in not being afraid on reaching the stream, and in continuing to move firmly forward to the appointed place, they gave a specimen of rare alacrity, founded on confidence."[36] Joshua's command in this instance demonstrated a leadership priority of challenging God's people to action based upon great faith. The people of God were then called to a conquest, taking possession of the land. They, like Joshua, were to find strength and courage in the promise of God to be with them. So the priority of leadership was not passivity, not maintenance, but a bold exercise of faith in God to march forward in battle.

The third priority expressed in the ministry of Joshua was his commitment to the development of fellow leaders. From his first recorded command in the first chapter of Joshua to his last address to the people in Joshua 24, Joshua carried out his work through "the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel.[37] Robert Hubbard, Jr., Professor of Biblical Literature at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, teacher at Denver Seminary, and noted Old Testament author, gives insight into the "officers of the people" described in Joshua 1:10:

> The "officers" probably are civilian administrators supporting Joshua rather than military officers. In lists of Israelite leaders, the term is often paired with "elders" (Num. 11:16, Deut. 29:9; 31:28) or "judges" (Deut. 16:18,Josh. 23:2, 24:1 I Chron. 23:4, 26:29; cf. Josh. 8:33) rather than with "(military) officers" or "soldiers." The officers comprise the secular counterpart of the priests, both of

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[35] Calvin, 64.
[36] Ibid, 64.
[37] Joshua 1:10, 24:1

> whom Joshua addresses. They are to fan out through the Israelite camp and command the people to prepare provisions for a departure in three days (v. 11).[38]

Joshua exercised his authority through several groups of recognized leaders, which are demonstrated in chapters three and four by way of the Levitical priests who led the charge of faith through the waters of the Jordan. The theme appears again at the siege of Jericho in Joshua 6, as the priests bearing the ark and the seven priests blowing trumpets led the charge against the city, and again, as Joshua "and the elders of Israel"[39] mourned the defeat at Ai. This theme of Joshua working together with his leaders continues throughout the book.[40] Concerning this theme, John Huffman, Jr., one of the Presbyterian Church's outstanding contemporary preachers and pastor of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach, California states that,

> The third quality of leadership is for a leader to be able to delegate responsibility. Joshua did this by working through the administrative structure that was already in place. He commanded the "*officers of the people*" to carry the word through the camp that, within three days, they would be passing over the Jordan River... Nothing ruins a community faster than leadership that either doesn't know how to delegate or refuses to delegate responsibility.[41]

These points at which Joshua publicly acknowledged the leaders of Israel, and particularly those points at which he challenged the leaders to press forward in acts of faith, exemplify meaningfully delegated authority and leadership development.

Did Joshua, in his transition into leadership, demonstrate changes in his mode of operation? One possibility presents itself in the narrative of Joshua 1:10-18 and 3:7-17, where the text of Joshua frequently emphasizes the engagement of the whole people of

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[38] Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Joshua*, ed. Terry C. Muck, 1st ed., The Niv Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 84.
[39] Joshua 7:6
[40] Joshua 8:10, 33; 9:15-19; 10:24; 18:8-9; 22:13; 23:2, 24:1
[41] John A. Huffman, Jr., *Joshua*, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, The Communicator's Commentary Series, Old Testament (Waco: Word Books, 1986), 45.

God in the conquest of Palestine.[42] In his study of Joshua 1:10-18, J. Gordon Harris, Distinguished Professor of Old Testament Emeritus at North American Baptist Seminary, indicates that the crossing of the Jordan, a necessary step in the conquest, also represented a potential threat to the unity of the nation.[43] In response to this threat, Joshua reminded the two and a half tribes of the command of Moses: "Remember the word that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you..."[44] But Joshua also made a critical shift from his position as the servant of Moses to his place as the new leader of Israel. Assuming the mantle of authority, he followed this reminder with his own command: "...all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brothers and shall help them."[45] The response of the tribes, affirming Joshua's authority in the place of Moses, confirmed the significance of this shift. Joshua had moved, internally and by his actions, from assistant to leader. That leadership was then quickly marked by a call to adjust to a new situation. Harris remarks,

> Joshua orders the officers of the people to go through the camp and tell the people to get their supplies ready. With this order Joshua changed the wilderness habits of the tribes. While they were in the wilderness the tribes had depended on manna from heaven for their supplies. A successful military campaign at the river Jordan and in Canaan, however, would depend on supplies and provisions of the people. This operations order heralded a new period in the life of the people.[46]

Thus, early in his transition to leadership, and in response to the great changes taking place in God's dealings with his people, Joshua engaged the support of his subordinate leaders and ordered a change in behavior from that which had occurred for forty years.

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[42] Joshua 3:1, 7, 12, 17, 4:1, 11, 5:8, 7:25, 8:33, 35, 10:24, 29, 31, 34, 36, 38, 43, 18:1
[43] J. Harris, C. Brown, and M. Moore, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, 1st ed., New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2000), 23.
[44] Joshua 1:13
[45] Joshua 1: 14
[46] Harris, Brown, and Moore, 25.

His own mental and behavioral shift from supportive responder to initiator was evident in this action.

In addition, Joshua's experience at Ai, found in Joshua 7, reflected a different kind of shift for Joshua in his mode of operation. Concerning the operations on the east side of the Jordan and at Jericho, Schaeffer observes,

> The people had destroyed Jericho, and the bottom portion of the ascent was completely open. What remained was to take the smaller fortress, Ai, at the top, for then the Israelites would hold the hill country and cold begin to expand their wedge. The greater place had fallen with ease; the lesser place stood before them. The seventh chapter of Joshua begins with the word *But*, and stands in antithesis to the sixth, for it tells a tale of defeat.[47]

The overshadowing themes of action and clear direction found earlier in Joshua's call suddenly gave way to confusion and despair. Joshua 7 records Joshua's response as he heard the report of defeat at Ai: "Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads."[48] Calvin endeavors, in his commentary on this section, to provide an explanation for Joshua's reaction:

> That Joshua felt particularly concerned for the divine glory is apparent from the next verse, where he undertakes the maintenance of it, which had been a matter assigned to him. What shall I say, he asks, when it will be objected that the people turned their backs? And he justly complains that he is left without an answer, as God had made him witness and herald of his favor, when there was ground to hope for an uninterrupted series of victories.[49]

Joshua, however, gained a deeper understanding of God's call and, more to the point, God's character, as God answered his complaint in verse ten: "Get up! Why have you

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[47] Schaeffer, 107.
[48] Joshua 7:6
[49] Calvin, 108.

fallen on your face? Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them."[50] Schaeffer paraphrases the address of God:

> What caused the difference between the victory at Jericho and the defeat at Ai? Only one thing, and Joshua, remember what caused the wandering for thirty-eight years in the wilderness, should have recognized its symptom. "Don't you remember that, Joshua? You should not be here on your face. You should be out dealing with sin among the people. For sin has made the difference."[51]

Joshua exhibited a zeal for God that manifested itself in action, progress, and victory. When victory did not occur at Ai, he was demoralized. The experience at Ai augmented his view of his call, deepening his understanding of the holiness of God and the need to deal with sin among the people.

Thus we see in these various examples that Joshua's calling included biblical insight into the kinds of preparation, priorities, and adjustments in mode of operation that might appear in a study of modern pastors in transition.

Timothy

Though separated by a wide gap in time and redemptive development, Timothy shared with Joshua the challenge of receiving the mantle of leadership in a work of God that was already established. In his introductory comments on his commentary on II Timothy, the late John Stott, Anglican cleric, respected and prolific author and leader in the evangelical church, frames Timothy's transition with these words:

> We are to imagine the apostle, "Paul the aged," languishing in some dark, dank dungeon in Rome, from which there is to be no escape but death. His own apostolic labors are over. "I have finished the race," he can say. But now he must make provision for the faith after he has gone, and especially for its transmission (uncontaminated, unalloyed) to future generations. So he sends Timothy this most

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[50] Joshua 7:10
[51] Schaeffer, 109.

> solemn charge. He is to preserve what he has received, at whatever cost, and to hand it on to faithful men who in their turn will be able to teach others also.[52]

Connected to this more general succession of Timothy was the specific assignment to the church founded at Ephesus, which appears in I Timothy 1:3. For a period of three years,[53] Paul established and served the church there, the events of which are recorded in Acts 19. (The complexity of fitting Paul's stated three-year ministry at Ephesus into the history of Acts and the connected question of when Paul would have written these instructions to Timothy is summarized in Philip Towner's introduction to his commentary on I, II Timothy and Titus. Towner is dean of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship of the American Bible Society based in New York City)[54] As Paul's imprisonments in Rome precluded his presence at Ephesus, Timothy was enjoined to remain at his leadership post there in order to safeguard the church.[55] John Stott surmises from the evidence that, following his release from house arrest in Rome, Paul was able to make a trip to Crete, where he left Titus to serve, and then on to Ephesus, where he asked Timothy to remain, after which Paul continued to Macedonia.[56]

In the history of Acts, Timothy is introduced to the reader in chapter sixteen, as Paul and Silas traveled from Derbe to Lystra on the second missionary journey. Timothy is described as the son of a believing Jewish mother and Greek father.[57] He followed his

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[52] John Stott, *Guard the Gospel*, ed. John R. W. Stott, 1st ed., The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 13.
[53] Acts 20:31
[54] Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, ed. Grant R. Osborne, The I.V.P. New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove: IterVarsity Press, 1994), 14-20.
[55] I Timothy 1:3
[56] Stott, 16-18.
[57] Acts 16: 1

mother and grandmother in the faith,[58] perhaps in response to Paul's preaching, and he had a good reputation among his associates. Stott notes,

> It is not just that Paul had a strong affection for Timothy as a friend... It is also that he had grown to trust Timothy as his "fellow-worker" (Romans 16:21) and his "brother and God's servant in the gospel of Christ" (I Thessalonians 3:2). Indeed, because of Timothy's genuine concern for the welfare of the churches and because of the loyalty with which "as a son with a father" he had served with Paul in the gospel, Paul could go so far as to say, "I have no one like him" (Philippians 2:20-22).[59]

At the same time, Timothy faced challenges as a leader. The city of Ephesus, and therefore the Ephesian church, was of some importance. Located on the coast of western Asia Minor, it served as a key port, and was therefore influential to the wider empire. Towner notes, "It was famed for its cult and temple dedicated to the worship of Artemis, around which a good deal of the city's commercial interests revolved. It also had a large Jewish colony. Ephesus presented the gospel with a formidable challenge in that it was a center of pagan worship."[60] This cultural mix proved to be fertile ground for harmful theological innovation, requiring a strong hand for correction and rebuke. Though firmly grounded in the scriptures,[61] Timothy has typically been depicted as "a very young man, somewhat sickly, full of timidity, and lacking in personal forcefulness."[62] Gordon Fee is an American-Canadian Christian theologian and an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God (USA). He currently serves as Professor Emeritus of New Testament Studies at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. He views this as "a bit overdrawn" but agrees that

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[58] II Timothy 1:5
[59] Stott, 18-19.
[60] Towner, 21.
[61] II Timothy 1:13, 3:14-16.
[62] Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), 2.

he "was young by ancient standards (but at least over thirty by the time of I Timothy), and apparently had recurring stomach trouble (cf. I Timothy 5:23)."[63] He adds that,

> A person of his youthfulness who could carry out (apparently alone) the earlier mission to Thessalonica and Corinth was probably not totally lacking in courage. In any case, the exhortations to loyalty and steadfastness in 1 and 2 Timothy are probably the result of two factors: his youthfulness and the strength of the opposition.[64]

In what ways did Timothy prepare for his calling to continue the work at Ephesus and other parts of Asia Minor? As in Joshua's case, Timothy's preparation for leadership included the firm assurance that God had indeed called him to the work. Thus Paul reminded him on several occasions of the marks of that call. "Do not neglect the gift you have" he urged, "which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you."[65] Again in II Timothy, as Paul called Timothy to persevere in suffering, he charged, "share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling..."[66] He began that charge with the reminder "to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."[67]

Often standing alone for the gospel among older and aggressively calculating competitors for the ear of the church, Timothy had to ground his heart in the assurance that he was called and upheld by the hand of God. This issue of calling has received some attention in the recent literature. For example, Dr. Robert Burns, the former Associate Professor of Educational Ministries, Dean of Lifelong Learning, and Director, Doctor of Ministry (DMin) Program at Covenant Seminary, in his recent book entitled *Pastor's*

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[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] I Timothy 4:14
[66] II Timothy 1:8-9
[67] II Timothy 1:6-7

Summit: sustaining fruitful ministry, gives an overview of the summit and its parent institution, the Center for Ministry Leadership. He describes the purpose of the Center for Ministry Leadership, located at Covenant Seminary, as "exploring what helps pastors survive and thrive in ministry."[68] The summit itself has served as a forum for gathering and harvesting the experience of some 61 pastors over the past 5 years. In his discussion of some of the findings of that summit he includes a review of calling. He notes that, "the need for confidants is particularly important when it comes to the gnawing reality for pastors – the question of one's calling," adding, "Most pastors don't usually question their initial calling to vocational ministry, but Summit participants attest to the fact that many question their particular callings…"[69] Paul's frequent reminders to Timothy strengthened his hand in this common pastoral need. Closely connected to this personal assurance of call was Timothy's need to see himself following after Jesus in that call. So Paul pressed him, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal."[70] Dr. Harry Reeder, author and senior pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, comments,

> Of much greater significance for Christian leaders is Christ as a leader who was unalterably committed to achieving his mission. He came into this world on a mission to save sinners, defeat Satan, and win the victory for his church. He allowed nothing to deter him. The dread of the cup of suffering that he would drink the awesomeness of the challenge in facing death, sin, hell, and the grave, and even his "descent into hell" and separation from his Father would not keep him from achieving his mission for the glory of his Father. To some measure it is

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[68] Bob Burns, *Pastor's Summit: Sustaining Fruitful Ministry*, 1st ed. (St. Louis: Covenant Theological Seminary, 2010), 2.
[69] Ibid., 21-22.
[70] II Timothy 2:8-9

> that leadership focus and passion which consumes Christian leaders who are following Christ their Lord and Savior.[71]

Thus this assured sense of calling played an important role in Timothy's preparation.

Additionally, Paul's concern for Timothy's personal preparation included attention to godliness:

> If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather, train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.[72]

He later followed with the implication that godliness and departing from iniquity is foundational to Christian life and ministry.[73] Paul's concern for preparing and maintaining Timothy's heart for vocation through the pursuit of godliness raises the question, "What is godliness?" Gordon Fee comments,

> The term *eusebia* (along with its verb and adverb) is a crucial one in these letters. In popular parlance it meant roughly what *religious* means in popular English. For many it is difficult to imagine Paul's using such a word... to describe either the Christian faith or Christian behavior. But the answer to this, as with many such terms in the Pastoral Epistles... lies with the false teachers.[74]

Where the false teachers made a show of godliness, Timothy was to pursue the reality of it. Fee characterizes that reality as "both the content of the truth and its visible expression in correct behavior.[75] As a foundation for ministry to others, Timothy was to become personally practiced in knowing and reflecting the character of God.

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[71] Harry L. Reeder, *The Leadership Dynamic: A Biblical Model for Raising Effective Leaders* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 65.
[72] I Timothy 4:6-8
[73] II Timothy 1:19-21
[74] Fee, 63.
[75] Ibid., 103.

Paul pointed out to Timothy that there was much danger in counterfeit godliness, but that true godliness carried great power in ministry.[76] In his revealing study of Jonah in *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, Eugene Peterson, pastor, scholar, poet, and author of over thirty books, highlights the pitfalls of neglecting true godliness:

> Along with institution and congregation, ego is both unavoidable and uncongenial to our work. We think that the "heart after God" that pulled us into this life of service to the word of God and his people will be our unfailing ally, but it turns out that few fields of work expose the ego so relentlessly to the ruses of vanity and pride. We who regularly speak in the name of God to the people around us easily slip into speaking in godlike tones and assuming a godlike posture. The moment we do that, even slightly, any deference to us or defiance of us can lead us into taking a godlike posture.[77]

Like Joshua's humility as he recognized the prerogative of God to raise up and to remove leaders, so Timothy was called to a kind of godliness that exposed his ego, set God in his mind as foremost, and caused him to walk in humility.

These personal preparations were, for Timothy, accompanied by several priorities for the work itself, each of which was delineated by Paul. With both Joshua and Timothy, primacy was given to the defense of that teaching delivered by God. Paul charged Timothy, "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you."[78] This he followed with the admonitions, "Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth,"[79]

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[76] II Timothy 3:5
[77] Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 85.
[78] II Timothy 1:13
[79] II Timothy 2:14-15

and "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."[80] These admonitions were followed with the more personal charge found in II Timothy 3, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ."[81]

Paul's primary concern, voiced at the beginning of his first letter to Timothy, was that he should "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith."[82] Timothy's priority was to faithfully teach the true gospel while restraining leaders in the church who were teaching different doctrines based on myths and endless genealogies. Gordon Fee suggests that such teaching, springing up from within the church, most likely had Jewish roots, but that the content is unknown. He remarks:

> It is the utter futility of it all that grips Paul at this point. Indeed, the word translated endless most likely refers to the "exhausting, wearisome" nature of the teaching... Furthermore, such speculations have nothing to do with God's work, which is by faith. The word translated work, when used in its literal, nonfigurative sense, refers to the "management" of another's household... or, as in the NIV, God's work, meaning God's "arrangements for people's redemption." This latter is more likely the intent, since the emphasis in this context does not seem to be on the failure of the false teachers to exercise faithful stewardship but on the gospel as God's work, based on or known by faith, in contrast to the futility of the "novelties."[83]

It is not just mechanical faithfulness to a script that Paul had in mind, but faithfulness to the one true gospel which alone has power to produce fruit in the lives of his people.

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[80] II Timothy 4:2
[81] II Timothy 3:14-15
[82] I Timothy 1:3
[83] Fee, 42.

Timothy was to carefully reflect the fullness of the gospel, leading to faith, and that, Paul said, leads on to the true fruit of love.[84] The priority of faithful presentation and defense of the gospel with the goal of love expresses the point made in summary by participants of the Pastor's Summit gatherings. Those participants concluded that the goal of ministry is to be neither "success" as culturally defined, nor simple faithfulness regardless of outcome, but rather a combination of the two, which is captured in the word "fruitful."[85]

The emphasis on faith in the power of God rather than empty words was likened to the faith that was made a priority in Joshua's ministry – calling the people of God to a faith that led to action. As a proper outworking of faith in the practice of the church, Paul placed strong emphasis upon the exercise of public prayer. So he enjoined, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people…"[86] He underscored this admonition: "I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or quarreling."[87] The constant, public nature of this exercise was to remind the church that the power of salvation is from God. In this way, the priority of faith was expressed to the church as vividly as watching the priests of Joshua's day carrying the ark into the waters of the Jordan.

Paul was further concerned that Timothy set as a priority the calling and equipping of men to help with the work. This was reflected in the specific qualifications for elders and deacons listed in the third chapter of I Timothy, where Paul simply assumed that Timothy would undertake the work of preparing men for leadership. This was followed with the explicit directive, "what you have heard from me in the presence

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[84] I Timothy 1:5
[85] Burns, 5.
[86] I Timothy 2:1
[87] I Timothy 2:8

of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."[88] Paul's strong emphasis on discipling leaders to assist in the work finds expression in what Paul did and did not emphasize in his list of qualifications. Stott comments:

> At this point in the letter, the tone changes. What had been a discussion of what the church and certain groups in the church ought to do becomes a discussion of what leaders in the church ought to be. The moral lapse and defection of some of this church's leaders undoubtedly had left the fellowship in a state of instability. And the internal disruption was likely to be met by severe criticism from unbelievers. For these reasons the two lists included at this point describe the necessary qualifications for the offices of the overseer and deacon. In each case the focal point is the candidate's reputation among believers and unbelievers, which is to be computed on the basis of proven moral character and maturity.[89]

Thus, Timothy's preparation by the pursuit of godliness was connected to his duty to prepare others, not simply through instruction, but through the personal attention and accountability expressed in the admonition of II Timothy 4:2: "reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."[90] So Reeder says, "That's one of the main responsibilities of a great leader: being prepared to reproduce and multiply leadership."[91]

Finally, Paul placed strong emphasis on hard work. In his instruction for officers, he included the promise that "those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."[92] He personally admonished Timothy to, "devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have…"[93] And as the time for his departure drew nearer, Paul pressed Timothy in his second letter, "An athlete is not

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[88] II Timothy 2:2
[89] Stott, 82.
[90] II Timothy 4:2
[91] Reeder, 68.
[92] I Timothy 3:13
[93] I Timothy 4:13

crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops."[94]

Completing the picture of Timothy's reception of the mantle of leadership, several apparent adjustments in his mode of operation suggest themselves in Paul's instructions. The first is implied by Paul's brief admonition in I Timothy 4: "Let no one despise you for your youth."[95] As with Joshua, who followed Moses, Timothy had to adjust himself to the leader's role, exercising authority, not for his own benefit, but "as an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity"[96] for the believing community. Paul's comment to the Corinthians to put Timothy at ease[97] seems to indicate a natural shyness or even timidity. Fee observes that, "In a culture where 'elders' were highly regarded, and in a church where the elders would have been older than he, this is not an insignificant encouragement."[98] This natural propensity would certainly have mitigated his ministry, where it is likely that elders were among those requiring clear, bold direction in the face of false teaching. At several points in I Timothy, Paul mentioned matters of dissention and even outright conflict by people of strong personality.[99] In such a church, Timothy had to stand alone as one bearing the authority of Christ.

At the same time, and in a way similar to Joshua's experience, Timothy was called to curb any tendency toward arrogance or self-promotion. As a young man stepping into the position at Ephesus as Paul's designate, Timothy might have been tempted to lord it over the flock. Paul gave specific instructions to him regarding the

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[94] II Timothy 2:5-6
[95] I Timothy 4:12
[96] Ibid.
[97] I Corinthians 16:20
[98] Fee, 107.
[99] I Timothy 1:6-7, 19, 2:12, 4:1-5, 5:8, 11-13, 19-20, 6: 1-2, 3-6

manner in which he was to publicly conduct himself: "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, in all purity."[100]

The last charge seems to reflect Joshua's experience in the defeat at Ai. God's willingness to train his leaders through the pain of adversity served, in the case of Joshua, to deepen his experience of the holiness of God and therefore his wrath against sin. In the case of Timothy, the extraordinary deprivations and sufferings attendant upon the work did not cause him to desert, but they did cause him to shrink back. Paul's first letter included several admonitions to step into heavy conflict with the boldness of authority and a willingness to offend.[101] In the second letter, Paul overtly challenged Timothy's approach to the ministry with such words as "a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control,"[102] "Therefore do not be ashamed,"[103] and "Share in suffering as a good soldier...."[104] The experience of conflict was not without forewarning, but seemed to have a deadening effect upon Timothy where boldness was required.

In the transitions of both Joshua and Timothy into leadership of an on-going work, the scriptures indicate preparations, priorities, and changes in the previous mode of operation that took place for these men. In both cases, heart preparation included a firm reassurance from the Lord that he had called them. With that reassuring call came a sense of humility before God's people. For Timothy, heart preparation included a call to personal, sincere godliness. The priorities for both men included the preservation and declaration of God's spoken word to his people. And both men prioritized the exercise of

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[100] I Timothy 5:1
[101] I Timothy 1:3, 18, 4:6-7, 5:11, 6:1-5
[102] II Timothy 1:7
[103] II Timothy 1:8
[104] II Timothy 2:3

great faith in God as well as investment in the next generation of leaders. Finally, both men experienced the challenges of stepping into an existing work with preparations and priorities in place, and then having to adjust their mode of operation to the new reality. Both men were called to shift their thinking and their words from that of a faithful follower to that of a leader exercising authority. Both had to, in the early course of the ministry, adjust to the reality of brokenness and sin in the face of a holy God.

Having gained some insight through biblical examples of leaders transitioning into existing works, the researcher will now turn to the larger body of literature. Three areas of literature are relevant to this study. The first two deal with the challenges of transition, one specific to pastoral transition and the other to business transition. The third category of literature pertains to family systems.

Literature Related to Pastoral Transitions

Materials touching on the subject of pastoral transition fall into several categories that intersect the issue of the pastor's first year in an established church. Those categories include the pastor's sense of call, the pastor's understanding of personality, the church's evaluation and preparation for a new pastor during the interim, and specific guidance for the pastor's first year. Of these, the categories most relevant to the research questions of this study include the pastor's determination of call, the pastor's understanding of personality, and specific guidance for the first year of the new pastorate.

Confirmation of Call

A number of authors share a particular concern regarding confirmation or clarification of call as a preparation for a new work. As was noted earlier in his study of Joshua, James Montgomery Boice commented "No person is as invincible as one who is

certain God has called him or her to a task."[105] In contrast to this positive assessment of call, Bob Burns, in his summary of the findings of The Center for Ministry Leadership's Pastors Summit, reported,

> The need for confidants is particularly important when it comes to a gnawing reality for pastors- the questioning of one's calling. Here we must make a distinction between the initial call to the ministry and the particular call to a current church. Most pastors don't usually question their initial calling to vocational ministry, but Summit participants attest to the fact that many regularly question their particular callings.[106]

Because of this important concern over confirmation of calling to a church, a number of authors discuss the elements of such a call in preparation for transition. Dr. Edward Bratcher, pastor of five churches in the Southern Baptist Convention and author of several books on pastoring, seeks to give definition to a particular calling in his book *Mastering Transitions*. He explains, "Sometimes the church that seems the perfect fit doesn't want to try us on. And sometimes the church that seems wrong turns out to be ever so right. A call to a specific church can be as mysterious as a call to ministry."[107] He further describes the "mystery" of calling with a list of influences:

> Nonetheless, there are many good reasons to seek a new call: to develop new ministry gifts, to change the focus of one's ministry, to move closer to extended family, to combine the pursuit of studies, among others... In some cases then, the call to move may begin with the personal values God has planted in us. Each of us has issues about which we won't compromise. And if the community or church asks us to compromise, we know what to do.[108]

Bratcher summarizes, "Although God's leading is difficult to determine in such matters, it's not impossible. When we consider prayerfully the following factors, I believe we can

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[105] Boice, 33.
[106] Burns, 21-22.
[107] Bratcher, Kemper, and Scott, 16.
[108] Ibid., 18,19.

get a better handle on where God is calling us."[109] He follows with a series of suggestions, primarily out of his own experience, for determining a specific call.

Many of the factors Bratcher mentions are mirrored in Michael Anthony and Mick Boersma's *Moving On Moving Forward.* Anthony, professor of Christian Education at Talbot School of Theology and pastor of five churches, teamed with Boersma, professor of Christian Ministry at Talbot with a background in pastoral ministry, to provide a guide to pastors in transition. Their writing was informed by a survey of some two hundred pastors from twenty-four different denominations. While providing a series of principles for a theology of God's call,[110] (including "God does the calling," "God's method of calling is unpredictable," "Recipients of God's call serve out of a heart of gratitude," and "God's will and your emotions are not linked"), Boersma notes, "one's calling is usually a unique personal experience. Some calls are dramatic and some are slow to form. It isn't that one is right and the other is wrong – they're just different."[111]

Boersma agrees with Bratcher that certain definable indicators of calling provide some anchorage to the pastor transitioning into a new calling to an established church. He clarifies, "I'm not saying, however, that there aren't ways to know whether one's call is real. God's word gives us general indicators..."[112] He then lists a stirring of the heart, the confirmation of church leaders, prayer, the guidance of a mentor, and the partnership of a spouse as such indicators. One hears in this list a number of the insights noted in the Center for Ministry Leadership's Pastor's Summit, including the concern for undivided

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[109] Ibid.
[110] Michael J. Anthony and Mick Boersma, *Moving on, Moving Forward : A Guide for Pastors in Transition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 24.
[111] Ibid., 26.
[112] Ibid.

worship,[113] accountable relationships for spiritual direction,[114] and marriage and family.[115] Joseph Umidi, professor of Practical Theology at Regent University School of Divinity, strongly endorses the importance of prayer, noted by Boersma: "Another key to achieving a successful leadership transition is bathing the process in prayer."[116] While he has in mind corporate prayer for the whole church family, included in that is the personal connection with God by the transitioning pastor. Dr. Harry Reeder would agree with a number of these listings, but further defines them while distinguishing the two sides of that calling:

> The first requirement for leadership in God's church is the existence of a divine "call." This means that the leader seeks the position, the position des not seek the leader. According to Scripture, there are two aspects to a biblical call: internal and external. The internal call is given by the Holy Spirit to motivate the leader with a God-given passion and spiritual gifts. The internal call is described in I Timothy 3:1: "if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task." Note the words aspires and desires. God moves in the hearts of potential leaders to equip them with a God-given passion to lead and a selfless sense of calling to be a leader. The word selfless is crucial. A call is not the drive of an inflated ego or the maneuvering of a manipulator to control others or gain power.[117]

Reeder, then, more clearly defines Boersma's "stirring of the heart" as "God-given passion to lead and a selfless sense of calling."

By way of contrast, Tina Wildhagen, Charles Mueller, and Minglu Wang, Ph.D. candidates at the University of Iowa, in an article based upon their research, say, "Factors Leading to Clergy Job search in Two Protestant Denominations," propose that, "a stereotypic view of clergy is that they are unique and their labor market behavior is not economically rational.... In this view, clergy make employment decisions primarily on

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[113] Burns, 12.
[114] Ibid., 14.
[115] Ibid., 33.
[116] Joseph L. Umidi, *Confirming the Pastoral Call: A Guide to Matching Candidates and Congregations*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000), 20.
[117] Reeder, 55.

the basis of "calling" and other faith-based criteria."[118] Following a review of common factors impacting clergy job searches, they conclude,

> These results indicate that, although faith-based criteria undoubtedly play a major role in the decision to become a minister, clergy base their decisions to search for other pastoral positions primarily on considerations of key job characteristics. Although many ministers become members of the clergy in order to fulfill their devotion to their religion, most ministers apparently are not driven by this same religious devotion in making decisions about employment at individual churches. Like other kinds of employees, clergy assess economic benefits, workplace justice, job satisfaction, and work expectations when they decide whether to search for other positions.[119]

While it is true that quite a few commentators on the call to a particular ministry spend little time on these very human elements that typically influence a decision, authors such as Bratcher, Kemper, and Scott are straightforward and unapologetic: "Accepting a call is at best a series of tradeoffs. I have to ask myself: Am I willing to live with this particular drawback in order to acquire that specific benefit? Consequently, before we begin the process, we should take time to assess our professional needs and our family's social and economic needs."[120] Ed Bratcher speaks as a Baptist pastor of over forty years, now serving as a writer, consultant and counselor of pastors. His co-authors are also pastors of long experience, Robert Kemper serving First Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ since 1973 and founding editor of The Christian Ministry, and Douglas Scott serving as rector of St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Radnor, Pa. It appears, then, that in the literature both spiritual self-evaluation and the human elements of need, preference, and compromise are included in conviction of call.

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[118] Tina Wildhagen, Charles W. Mueller, and Minglu Wang, "Factors Leading to Clergy Job Search in Two Protestant Denominations," *Review of Religious Research* 46, no. 4 (2005): 381. ellipsis replaces (McDuff and Mueller 2000).
[119] Ibid., 396.
[120] Bratcher, Kemper, and Scott, 35.

Understanding of Personality

Otto Kroeger, the head of Otto Kroeger Associates, who also served for twenty years as a consultant to such firms as AT&T, Xerox, IBM, and the United States Department of Defense, and Roy Oswald, Senior Consultant at the Alban Institute and recognized author on pastoral transitions, agree with the idea that the shape of a calling is personal and varied, adding to these descriptors that calling is affected by personality. They write,

> God calls both introverts and extraverts to the ministry. These calls come in different ways. For the introverts it usually comes during times of deep reflection; they hear the still small voice within. For extraverts, the call often comes through an incident in their external world or from environmental circumstances.[121]

There is a clear concern expressed in the literature that the pastor transitioning to a new work should examine his sense of call both personally and with others.

The work of Oswald and Kroeger is part of a body of literature related to both church evaluation and the pastor's self-evaluation, developed out of a concern for churches in transition. Loren Mead, an ordained Episcopal priest and founder of the Alban Institute, is an educator, consultant, and author working to strengthen religious institutions. In "Critical Moment of Ministry," Mead outlines important findings from what he describes as "a significantly large group of people...as students of congregational life."[122] Termed "The Congregational Studies Group," they began to describe the complexities into which a pastor transitions, using "a set of categories that are useful for those who think about the change of pastoral leadership in a congregation. They talked about a congregation as a complex interaction of program, process, context,

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[121] Roy M. Oswald and Otto Kroeger, *Personality Type and Religious Leadership*, 8th ed. (Bethesda, Maryland: The Alban Institute, 1988), 33.
[122] Mead, 4.

and identity."[123] Recognition of this complexity led to a further step. In his appendix, Mead notes, "A second generation of research began with the founding of The Alban Institute in 1974...The primary focus of this research was on the person involved in the change of position, whereas the earlier research had focused on the situation in which the personnel change occurred."[124]

One of the results of this shift from the complexity of the situation to the pastor himself was a search for personality descriptors. In the introduction to "Personality Type and Religious Leadership," Roy Oswald and Otto Kroeger note that, "We at the Alban Institute began using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) in 1978 because we wanted to better understand ourselves as a working community."[125] They state,

> As both of us are ordained clergy with parish experience, we see many ways the MBTI could bring insight, understanding and healing to the church. In the midst of the ambivalence and confusion of a complex role, church professionals need several good working theories. The MBTI and the Jungian perspective from which it comes, has been an exceedingly helpful tool for clergy to learn to apply its categories.[126]

Using the categories of the Myers-Briggs model, Oswald and Kroeger outline the tendencies of each personality type in vocational ministry in terms of ministry strengths and weaknesses, areas of temptation, and likely areas of conflict with other personality types. Among their conclusions they include a plea:

> In summary, we need to put a stop to the prevalent belief that clergy must be competent at everything. We need to do a better job of identifying mutually exclusive skills. In this competence at type theory can be a real asset. If clergy are introduced to their type early in their career, and taught to accept their strengths and limitation, they will be less likely to get trapped into trying to be all things to all people.[127]

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[123] Ibid., 5.
[124] Ibid., 70-1.
[125] Oswald and Kroeger, 33.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., 56.

This presses transitioning pastors toward preparatory self-examination to determine, out of their particular profiles, the strengths and weaknesses that they brings to the receiving churches in order to promote good and realistic fits. Note that this invitation to evaluation is not only germane to the question "Am I called to this work?" Rather,

> The MBTI categories offer clergy and other church professionals a valuable tool for understanding themselves, their role and those with whom them work and minister. First and foremost, the MBTI encourages deeper self-understanding. Your four letters imply both giftedness and liabilities; your preferences indicate that you will be good at certain tasks and not so good at others. The MBTI can help you honor your giftedness and also stop beating yourself over tasks that don't come easily for you.

This recognition leads naturally into the discussion of the pastor's plans to build a team for ministry, which is discussed below. As much as they underscore the flexing of a pastor's personality between strengths and weaknesses, Oswald and Kroeger assert the reality of "hardwiring" as well:

> Type theory asserts that no one can change one's own or someone else's type. No one can say, for example, "I'm tired of being a Sensor, I think I'll start being an iNtuitive" or "I think I'll become an Extravert so I can manage all the needs of this parish." We cannot willfully shift energy from one side of the continuum to the other. To do that takes long years of growth and development. It entails developing our lesser functions in our recreational or leisure life, rather than when the stakes are so high at work.[128]

There has been some discussion in the literature surrounding this question of style or personality adjustment upon entering an established church. For example, Dr. Phillip Douglass, author and Professor of Practical Theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, in adding to Oswald and Kroeger's use of the Myers-Briggs approach to personality types, notes that the receiving church has its own personality. This personality

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[128] Ibid., 55.

ought to be carefully considered, not only when making a determination of call, but also to help pastors take an informed approach to the work during their first year. He comments, "Personality drives a church and its actions. We might call it the 'operating system' of the church.... If a new pastor or staff member tries to change the operating system (i.e. the church personality) to fit his ministry style preferences, the church will malfunction in the form of conflict."[129]

Michael Coyner, resident bishop in the Dakotas area for the United Methodist Church and pastor for twenty-five years, counters,

> In making your own choice about leadership style for your new parish, you are actually making an important theological decision. Does the church serve the pastor, or does the pastor serve the church? Therefore, the pastor must be prepared to change and adapt leadership styles for a new church in order to best serve the needs of that church. A pastor whose natural tendency is to be relational, a lover, and a shepherd, may have to exert special effort in developing the more issue-related, task-oriented aspects of his or her leadership style to fit the needs of the new church.[130]

In his use of the term "leadership style" Coyner has in mind "natural tendencies," but not tendencies so strong that they cannot, by choice, be overridden. Weighing in on this issue of "style," Jackson Carroll, author, co-author, or editor of 14 books and numerous articles and research reports, in his research on "God's Potters" says,

> While I strongly agree that a pastor's leadership style must vary with the needs and challenges of particular contexts, it seems likely that most pastors have a dominant style, especially when it comes to helping a congregation set its direction; thus, our survey listed several ways in which leadership might be exercised in a congregation, ranging from a "top-down" style in which the leader makes most decisions and expects the congregation to follow, to an opposite

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[129] Philip R. Douglass, *What Is Your Church's Personality?: Discovering and Developing the Ministry Style of Your Church* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, June 2008), 8.
[130] Michael J. Coyner, *Making a Good Move : Opening the Door to a Successful Pastorate* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 34-35.

> extreme in which the laity set the direction and the pastor simply aids and abets the implementation of their decisions. [131]

As pastors enter their new churches, they may find that the demands of various members, perhaps the demands of a majority, do not fit comfortably with their strengths. The literature addresses the question of how the pastor should respond. Should the pastor adapt? Should the pastor acknowledge these areas of strength and weakness and build a team to compensate? Much of what is written, while differing in the nature of "style," at least advises pastors to know themselves well enough to recognize when the disparities appear and perhaps what to do about them.

Specific Guidance for the First Year of the New Pastorate

Literature related to the priorities and actions of pastors in their first year touch on a variety of issues. One prominent issue is that of timing for action. Is there a need to act quickly as incoming pastor, taking advantage of the "honeymoon period" to press for changes, or is there wisdom in taking time to understand before acting? Robert Kemper gives a fairly definitive answer to this question, "When I arrive in a new church, I'm bursting to jump into leadership. But I check my enthusiasm. In fact, I try to make no changes in the church for one year. Instead, I use the first year to wait, listen, and learn. Only then do I lead."[132] Roy Oswald repeats this advice:

> One of the most controversial issues in our Pastorate Start Up research revolved around clergy initiating changes upon arrival in their new parishes. Although some have done this without a lot of serious repercussions, we believe that making changes upon arrival can cause difficulty.... Therefore, we recommend that new pastors initiate no changes for at least the first six months.[133]

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[131] Jackson Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Willam B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 131.
[132] Bratcher, Kemper, and Scott, 81.
[133] Roy M. Oswald, *New Beginnings: A Pastorate Start up Workbook*, 7th ed. (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 1989), 37.

Views on how to handle even the first few weeks vary. In his workbook for pastor start-ups, *New Beginnings*, Roy Oswald focuses on the emotional health of the transitioning pastor. He observes,

> I am aware of several clergy who decided to approach the interim in a more intentional and healthy way. One clergyman in Ohio, who attended a "transition awareness event" sponsored by the national office of his denomination, spent his first Sunday in his new congregation sitting in the pew. The congregation had arranged to give him the Sunday off to help him get settled into his new home. Another clergyman not only took his regular month's vacation between pastorates but was allowed a month's transition time for himself and his family. They spent the first month getting settled into a new home and community and the second at a lakeside cottage. [134]

Kenton Callahan is a respected consultant, pastor, teacher, theologian and author of more than a dozen books. In direct contrast to these findings, early in his "A New Beginning for Pastors," he urgently advises,

> Regrettably, a few pastors have the notion, as they move into a new calling, a new settlement, a new appointment, that they can take a week or two to get everything organized and then begin...Sadly, they lose the best first days of their ministry with their new congregation...In the first few days and weeks you and your congregation teach one another who you plan to be together.[135]

In "Making a Good Move," Michael Coyner spends a good bit of time on this question of action and patience in the first year, asking, "What type of leadership will I use in this new church?" He seeks to define the pastor's ministry "style" through a series of contrasts, beginning with "being relational" vs. "being right."[136] The relational pastor, he says, "will expend much time with pastoral care and visitation in a relational style to build upon the initial stack of chips of pastoral trust. This style of building upon one's power and authority is a kind of servant model whereby the pastor demonstrates a

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[134] Ibid., 1.
[135] Kenton L. Callahan, *A New Beginning for Pastors and Congregations*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), 7.
[136] Coyner, 28.

willingness to serve and to care for the needs of the congregation."[137] By contrast, he says, "A pastor can also gain respect, authority, and power with a new congregation by being right in understanding and dealing with the issues facing the church. During the first year or so of ministry, the pastor can choose an issue and lead the church to resolve it."[138] He augments his picture with several other contrasting pairs, including "leader or lover," which reflects task vs. people orientation, "rancher or shepherd" to describe managing vs. personal care, and "passive or showing initiative." This last pair addresses the question of purposeful waiting vs. taking action in the first months of the pastorate.

These different approaches to ministry might, from the perspective of those interested in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator discussed above, be determined by a fairly set personality. But for Coyner, "either style, being passive or showing initiative, is a choice, a strategic decision by the incoming pastor. This choice is part of the leadership style that a new pastor must carefully choose to fit the new church situation."[139] But the action that Callahan has in mind is decidedly weighted in the direction of shepherding, setting a pace from the beginning that marks the pastor as engaged and interested in the lives of the congregants. So he begins his book with a fictional description of the ideal pastor:

> The three weeks came and went. The congregation members got to know Tom personally. He got to know them personally. Mostly, they discovered that Tom would listen to them. He actually wanted to know about them. He was not brimming over with plans for the church or personal advice. He was interested in them- as people.[140]

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[137] Ibid., 28-29.
[138] Ibid., 29.
[139] Ibid., 32.
[140] Callahan, 4.

While not speaking specifically to the first year of transition, James Means, author and professor at Denver Seminary, agrees with Callahan's priority, adding to it a strong emphasis on the spiritual vitality and integrity of the pastor:

> Our current mentality and literature emphasize managerial exploits, pragmatic strategies, technological expertise, and an incredible array of pragmatic methodologies for building churches, but barely refers to the necessity of loving people deeply and passionately. As a result, many contemporary church members feel used rather than cared for. [141]

In spite of the strong note of concern for pastoral care sounded here, much of the literature, in establishing priorities for the first year, includes a balance of tasks which Lawrence Gilpin, in his dissertation, "When the Long-Term Pastor Leaves," summarizes through the use of the phrase "paying the rent."[142] In his 1972 volume, *Putting It Together in the Parish*, James Glasse, former professor of practical theology at Lancaster Theological Seminary and originator of the phrase, argues, "...most parishes want three things of their pastor. If he meets these requirements he is free to do almost anything else he wants to do."[143] He then lists three minimal expectations: preaching and worship, teaching and pastoral care, organization and administration. Taking up the concept, Coyner summarizes that "when a pastor refuses or is unable to meet these basic needs, then the stack of chips of pastoral power and authority will not increase."[144]

Lyle Schaller, noted church growth consultant, mentioned Glasse's "paying the rent" concept as he advised transitioning pastors to be patient. He argued that it not only frees the pastor to do "almost anything else he wants to do," but specifically "earns him

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[141] James E. Means, *Effective Pastors for a New Century*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 25.
[142] Lawrence A. Gilpin, "When the Long-Term Pastor Leaves: The Local Church Process of Pastoral Transition in the Presbyterian Church in America" (Doctoral Dissertation, Covenant Theological Seminary, 2006), 21.
[143] James D. Glasse, *Putting It Together in the Parish*, 1st ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 55.
[144] Coyner, 28.

the right to introduce new ideas."[145] These basic themes of pastoral work are not culturally bound, according to Carroll. Rather, he notes,

> Ames's small town in Iowa and the storefront preachers' urban neighborhoods are worlds apart socially and culturally; however, in each setting the pastor engages in similar core tasks- worship leadership, preaching, teaching, and congregational oversight- to draw members into the narratives of their traditions. Different denominations and pastors may hold diverse views about the meaning of the tasks and accord them differing priorities, but this way of describing pastoral work is present, one way or another in all denominational traditions..."[146]

The universality of these expectations suggests to the transitioning pastor a foundational set of priorities, which are somewhat adjustable as to time allotted and style in which they are implemented. Should these priorities be missing, efforts to institute change, whether slowly or quickly, will fail.

Given the general foundation of preaching/worship, teaching/pastoral care, and organization/administration, what other priorities are noted in the literature? George Barna, well-known author and founder of Barna Research Group, notes in his research on "Today's Pastors" that, "One of the distinguishing characteristics of a true leader, though, is the ability to articulate and promote vision effectively."[147] This concept of vision casting as a mark of true pastoral leadership appears in the literature as a key concern for the transitioning pastor. James Means sounds a similar note, declaring, "Effective pastors are visionary leaders."[148] He continues, "Today's churches need visionary pastors, those who dream dreams, sharpen the missional understanding of the church, open themselves to new possibilities and paradigms..."[149]

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[145] Lyle E. Schaller, *44 Steps up Off the Plateau*, 1st ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 68.
[146] Carroll, 98.
[147] George Barna, *Today's Pastors : A Revealing Look at What Pastors Are Saying About Themselves, Their Peers, and the Pressures They Face* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1993), 118.
[148] Means, 96.
[149] Ibid.

Coyner mirrors Barna and Means on the importance of casting a vision, asserting, "The pastor is the key person in articulating the vision for the church."[150] He further defines its constituent parts: "The vision the pastor articulates is not an arbitrary thing. It is a vision that arises out of two foci: the biblical message and the needs/dreams/hurts/vision of the people."[151] Lyle Schaller adds,

> Depending on how one counts, five or six or seven sources account for most of the visionary leadership that has led congregations up out of a plateau in size. The most highly visible, of course, is the newly arrived pastor who brings a combination of transformational leadership skills, pastoral competence, persuasive communication abilities, productive work habits, an emphasis on excellence, contagious enthusiasm, attention to detail, and, most important of all, a positive vision of what God has in mind for this congregation.[152]

Considering the importance of vision as a priority for the transitioning pastor, do authors provide clarity of definition beyond that offered by Coyner? In spite of his concern for vision as articulated above, Schaller only hints at what he has in mind, defining it as, "What God is calling the congregation to be and do in the years ahead."[153] As Reeder delves into his "Three Maxims for Effective Leadership" in "The Leadership Dynamic," he uses Ronald Reagan as his example, asserting, "Reagan saw what needed to happen, what could happen, and how it needed to happen, and he led the way."[154] But this adds only a little to the definition. Further exploring the concept, he uses the term "mission" to describe what some authors describe as "vision." Barna is concerned with this distinction, and he takes time to differentiate between the two. He lists common mission statements (such things as "to evangelize the lost," "to exalt, edify, evangelize, equip, and empower," and "to make every person into a committed follower of Jesus

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[150] Coyner, 24.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Schaller, 62.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Reeder, 65.

Christ.") He then declares, "Those and hundreds of similar statements we heard are wonderful notions of the call to the Church at large. However, these are a reflection of the mission of all churches, the common calling of every church."[155] He goes on, "The vision for ministry provides a detailed sense of why God wants a church to exist in the community and how it is unique in comparison with other local churches."[156] Here Barna is able to articulate the distinction that vision will gather cultural information, discern the needs of the community and strengths of the church in order to make a connection, which he calls vision.

Interestingly, Roger Heuser, who serves as professor of Leadership Studies at Vanguard University, and Norman Shawchuck, pastor, consultant, and author of more than twenty books on leadership, add a new component to the concept of vision. They describe vision as seeing the unique strengths of the church and the needs of the community; they challenge the pastor to "connect your charisms with what the congregation needs most to fulfill its mission."[157] The series of questions that follow give some insight into what is meant. They ask, "What do I do well?" "How can I apply the one thing that I do well to the fundamental needs and purpose of the organization?" "How can I project what I do well on that which must be done now?" Carroll generally agrees with this sentiment, saying,

> While I strongly agree that a pastor's leadership style must vary with the needs and challenges of particular contexts, it seems likely that most pastors have a dominant style, especially when it comes to helping a congregation set its direction; thus, our survey listed several ways in which leadership might be exercised in a congregation, ranging from a "top-down" style in which the leader makes most decisions and expects the congregation to follow, to an opposite

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[155] Barna, 119.
[156] Ibid., 73.
[157] Roger Heuser and Norman Shawchuck, *Leading the Congregation*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 108.

> extreme in which laity sets the direction and the pastor simply aids and abets the implementation of their decisions.[158]

Vision, then, in the eyes of these authors, engages the pastors themselves, in terms of gifts and priorities, to know themselves, then to know their congregations, and then to know their community, in order to discern that unique expression of the church's mission that fits their community. And, at least in the eyes of some, the transitioning pastor is in a unique position to move forward with this vision. While these authors, with the exception of Schaller, do not speak of vision specifically in the context of transition, the centrality and urgency of their concern suggests that vision casting should be considered a priority for the first year. Yet the lack of clarity in defining the term is likely to create problems with implementation.

One final area of priority for the first year appears often in the literature: the issue of leadership development. The pastor entering an established church will typically be engaged with a team of co-leaders. Heuser and Shawchuck, in speaking of "team ethos," note the challenge for pastors today:

> The ethos of leadership networks in the New Testament is difficult to grasp for many contemporary religious leaders who grew up with modernity's proclivity toward "hero" leaders and relying on leadership images within Old Testament narratives, such as Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Gideon, Elijah, Nehemiah, and David. These images reinforce the divide between leaders and followers and remain ingrained in the conscious and subconscious ideals of leadership. Thus some religious leaders remain convinced that the leader as "hero" is what congregations need most...[159]

Indeed, Schaller's earlier comments concerning the ideal transformational pastor seem to support this modernist ideal. Lawrence Farris, three-time pastor and ministry consultant,

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[158] Carroll, 131.
[159] Heuser and Shawchuck, 121.

also recognizes the tendencies of the culture of modernity and so gives this advice to new pastors:

> Ministers who find themselves shoveling snow, folding worship bulletins, setting up tables and chairs, and emptying wastebaskets have lost sight of their essential tasks, and are simply casting about for a task that has a clearly defined beginning and end. A new pastor succeeding such a "do-it-all" pastor will have to be particularly clear about his job description lest the congregation assume he will simply continue his predecessor's practice of trying to do everything, at the expense of his unique calling.[160]

In rejecting a cultural model of leadership and embracing a biblical one, Reeder proposes a plan for personal development of leaders modeled after Luke 2:52.[161] It consists of "Wisdom, which is knowledge of God and understanding of his ways then put into practice, physical care, spiritual formation with God and relational formation with man."[162] Thus, the primary theme of the more recent literature on leadership development strongly urges resistance to a "hero" mentality and development of a team mentality.

Surveying the literature on pastoral transitions, several themes stand out as prominent. Concerning the question of action vs. passivity or fast start/slow start, most of the literature urges caution, calling for a period from six months to a year to become familiar with the congregation. A number of sources underscore the importance of "paying the rent" in order to earn the right to institute change. This payment of rent is described variously as meeting basic requirements of the job, or, from a slightly different perspective, meeting the needs and expectations of the congregation before asking for change. Under the category of "paying the rent," a number of authors call for deep engagement in pastoral shepherding as the key component in that work of earning the

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[160] Lawrence W. Farris, *Ten Commandments for Pastors New to a Congregation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 75.
[161] Luke 2:52- "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."
[162] Reeder, 104-114.

right to lead. One possible exception to this theme of caution and meeting of needs is found in the call to cast a vision for the congregation. While most authors touching on this subject speak generically rather than in the context of the first year of transition, the sense of priority and urgency given to the need suggests that the transitioning pastor take action on vision quickly.

Literature on Business Transitions

While the church world pays much attention to transitions, the business world seems even more aware of the issue. And while many of the concerns are parallel between the two groups, the prevailing advice is often different. The areas of concern pertinent to this study include: transitions in general, leadership styles/priorities for the new manager, and specific guidance for the first year.

Transitions in General

The issue of change or transition has received a good bit of attention in business writing in recent years. Advances in telecommunications, transportation, and other forces for globalization have required a rapid response to changing conditions. John Beilenson, president of Strategic Communications and Planning in Wayne, Pennsylvania, gives at least one reason for the interest. He states,

> Preliminary data suggest that more than 10 percent of all nonprofits experience a transition annually. This percentage will likely rise as the leading edge of the baby boom generation retires in the next ten years. A 2001 survey supported by the Casey Foundation, involving more than one hundred executives of community-based grantees, showed that 85 percent planned to leave by 2007. Subsequent studies by the Maryland Association of Nonprofit Organizations and Compass Point Nonprofit Services have confirmed what will likely be a sea change in executive leadership in the coming decade. A 2003 survey of 170 community foundations found that 53 percent of executives plan to leave in the next five years, 73 percent of them for retirement.[163]

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[163] John Beilenson, "Coping with Leadership Transitions in Community-Building Organizations," *National Civic Review* 94, no. 4 (Winter, 2005): 48.

William Bridges, former professor at Mills College in California and president of William Bridges and Associates, a highly regarded consulting firm, asserts that change is the new reality in business. He explains, "Change is the game today, and organizations that can't deal with it effectively aren't likely to be around long.[164] Bridges suggests that, because of the present frequency of change and the fact that "the highly competitive market" leaves "no room for error,"[165] managers must become skilled at helping people adjust to change. Bridges teaches managers ways to successfully help people through transition, including recognizing the psychological pain of leaving behind the familiar, managing the "neutral zone" between what was and what will be, and launching a new beginning. He regards transitions as a necessary evil – change will come, whether you like it or not, so cope or die. James Belasco, author of a popular management textbook and consultant to CEOs around the world, sounds a similar note to Bridges:

> Change surrounds us. Consider these facts: Sony introduces over one hundred new products every six months. Apple makes a new product announcement every week. IBM announces an average of more than four new products every business day. Price Club turns its inventory once a day.... What a dizzying rate of change for the managers of these organizations, their competitors, and consumers! Alvin Toffler was right: the pace of change is picking up. And the watchword is- change or die.[166]

But is the issue simply the shifting of external circumstances? In his exploration of the reality of change, Bridges makes an important distinction. He points out, "It isn't the changes that do you in, it's the transitions. Change is not the same as transition. Change is situational: the new site, the new boss, the new tea roles, the new policy. Transition is

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[164] William Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, First ed. (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1991), ix.
[165] Ibid., x.
[166] James A. Belasco, *Teaching the Elephant to Dance: The Manager's Guide to Empowering Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: Plume Books, a division of Penguin Books, 1990), 19. The ellipsis includes the citation, "Another Day Another Bright Idea," The Economist, April 16, 1988, 82-83.

the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the situation. Change is external, transition is internal."[167]

While change is common, attention must be paid to the psychological impact upon those going through the transition. Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric from 1981 till 2001, recognized the importance of the psychological, "human" aspects of transition as he reformulated the structure of General Motors. He discussed this in a 1991 interview with the Harvard Business Review:

> Second, and perhaps of even greater significance, Welch is leading a transformation of attitudes at GE- struggling, in his words, to release "emotional energy" at all levels of the organization and encourage creativity and feelings of ownership and self-worth. His ultimate goal is to create an enterprise that can tap the benefits of global scale and diversity without the stifling costs of bureaucratic controls and hierarchical authority and without a managerial focus of personal power and self-perpetuation. This requires a transformation not only of systems and procedures, he argues, but also of people themselves.[168]

This remarkable statement, calling for a new focus on transformation in people, grows out of a frustration voiced by Welch in the same interview:

> We've had managers at GE who couldn't change- who kept telling us to leave them alone. They wanted to sit back, to keep things the way they were. And that's just what they did- until they and most of their staffs had to go. That's the lousy part of this job. What's worse is that we still don't understand why so many people are incapable of facing reality, of being candid with themselves and others.[169]

As the business community began to address the constant changes in a global economy, working towards a more rapidly responding organizational style, many discovered in the human factor a strong resistance to change. In Welch's experience, and in that of many other change-agents, the necessary solution was the removal of

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[167] Bridges, 3.
[168] Noel Tichy and Ram Charan, "Speed, Simplicity, Self-Confidence: An Interview with Jack Welch," in *Leaders on Leadership*, The Harvard Business Review Book Series (Boston: Harvard Business Review, October 1989), 16.
[169] Ibid., 17.

obstructionists. From another perspective, communications coach and consultant Linda Trignano highlights the views of Peter Drucker, one of the best-known and most widely influential thinkers and writers on the subject of management theory and practice, as he speaks to this reality:

> In his book Management Challenges for the 21st Century, management and strategy guru Peter Drucker writes: "Everybody has accepted by now that change is unavoidable. But that still implies that change is like death and taxes — it should be postponed as long as possible and no change would be vastly preferable. But in a period of upheaval, such as the one we are living in, change is the norm." [170]

For Drucker, that which tends to be such a human challenge – facing change – is not something to be resisted, but something to be embraced with dispatch.

Trignano expands upon this concern as she outlines a common business theme growing out of the new reality of change. Describing an effort to introduce a new computerized communications system in a particular company, she says,

> Many employees resisted the transition and were reluctant to embrace reorganizing the business processes. Many were fearful of losing their job in the process. Rumors were rampant about a major downsizing after the job-streamlining process was completed. Corporate leadership knew that employee opposition could undermine the project and have significant negative business implications. The resistance displayed by many of these employees is often a typical response to change.[171]

Noting here just a few of the reasons that people so frequently resist change, she summarizes a kind of management style that helps people to change:

> It was critical for the managers to understand that the transition would affect each employee differently. The managers also needed to understand that the skills to navigate such wide-sweeping changes would be difficult for some employees to

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[170] Peter F. Drucker, *Management Challenges for the 21st Century*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 73, quoted in Linda Trignano, Linda Trignano, "The Change Challenge," Financial Executive 26, no. 9 (2010): 57.

[171] Linda Trignano, "The Change Challenge," *Financial Executive* 26, no. 9 (2010): 57.

> comprehend and would need time to take hold throughout the new work structure.[172]

The growing recognition that the flexing needed for business success required attention to the human factor has, in more recent years, spawned changes in traditional human resources functions in the business world. Jill Conner, director of People Development at Colgate-Palmolive and Dave Ulrich, professor of Business Adminstration at the School of Business, University of Michigan, trace this growing trend:

> Several authors have examined the emerging focus and priorities of human resources.... In order for the organization to improve its performance and create competitive advantage human resources must focus its attention on a new set of priorities. These priorities are more business issue-oriented and less oriented to the traditional functional HR specialties such as compensation, benefits, staffing, and appraisal. Strategic priorities such as fostering teamwork across functional units, building a customer service mindset to meet higher levels of responsiveness expected by consumers and retailers, identifying new skills and competencies, and global expansion are capturing the attention of human resource professionals around the world.[173]

The issue of change or transition has moved from the recognition of a new reality, to a call to embrace it, to techniques to help people welcome it.

This development of the psychological side of transition, which will be further addressed later in this literature review, has more recently led to the production of a series of management books about the psychological and spiritual side of the worker in transition. Dorothy Marcic, faculty member and director of Graduate Programs in Human Resource Development at Peabody College, produced *Managing with the Wisdom of Love* in 1997. The driving force behind her rather unusual advice is noted in the flyleaf: "Disappointing reengineering and downsizing efforts have prompted many managers to realize that prescribed formulas and materialistic solutions are not the total answer to

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[172] Ibid., 58.
[173] Jill Conner and Dave Ulrich, "Human Resource Roles: Creating Value, Not Rhetoric," *Human Resource Planning* 19, no. 3 (1996): 39.

organizational problems."[174] In addition, the Arbinger Institute's *Leadership and Self-Deception*[175] pursues the problems of self-interest, self-preservation, and interpersonal conflict that cause dysfunction in the workplace through a process of personal change.

In the introduction to their groundbreaking work, *Adaptive Leadership*, Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, well-known authors and co-founders of Cambridge Leadership Associates, carry the issue of transition further:

> These are extraordinary times. The turn of the millennium brought the pressing realization that every human being, as a member of a globalizing set of nations, culture, and economies, must find better ways to compete and collaborate. To build a sustainable world in an era of profound economic and environmental interdependence, each person, each country, each organization is challenged to sift through the wisdom and know-how of their heritage, to take the best from their histories, leave behind lessons that no longer serve them, and innovate, not for change's sake, but for the sake of conserving and preserving the values and competence they find most essential and precious.[176]

In summary, they explain, "The answers cannot come from on high. The world needs distributed leadership because the solutions to our collective challenges must come from many places...."[177]

Adaptive Leadership and its precursor *Leadership on the Line* represent a specific perspective on change that has its roots in the theory of origins. Heifetz and Linsky explain, "This work grows from efforts to understand in practical ways the relationship among leadership, adaptation, systems, and change, but also has deeps roots in scientific efforts to explain the evolution of human life, and before us, the evolution of all life

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[174] Dorothy Marcic, *Managing with the Wisdom of Love*, 1st ed., The Jossey-Bass Business and Management Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1997).
[175] The Arbinger Institute, *Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting out of the Box*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010).
[176] Ronald Heifetz, Grashow, Alexander, Linsky, Marty, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, 1st ed. (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 2.
[177] Ibid., 3.

going back to the beginning of the earth."[178] Based upon this evolutionary view of origins, they summarize the implications for human development in the form of six assertions. First, adaptive leadership is specifically about change that enables the capacity to thrive. (In business, signs of thriving include increases in short- and long-term shareholder value, exceptional customer service, high workforce morale, and positive social and environmental impact). Second, successful adaptive changes build on the past rather than jettison it. Third, organizational adaptation occurs through experimentation. Fourth, adaptation relies on diversity. Fifth, new adaptations significantly displace, reregulate, and rearrange some old DNA. (By analogy, leadership on adaptive challenges generates loss.) Finally, adaptation takes time. (Significant change is the product of incremental experiments that build up over time.)[179]

This view of adaptive leadership has implications for transitions in general and for the adoption of an appropriate style of leadership by the new leader. For the present section on transitions in general, the implication is that change or transition is not only unavoidable, but a valuable means of introducing new ideas into the organization, contributing to its ability to thrive. It requires patience and a style of leadership that values each diverse contribution and each person as a significant part of the successful whole. In the hands of Heifetz and Linsky, this picture of rapid change is given a positive face. Change is not only necessary for thriving; it is welcomed as the friend of thriving.

In the reality of a shrinking, interconnected marketplace, the issue of change and transition has been a key theme in business writing for the past several decades. The discussion started with recognition of the constant need to change, moved toward ways to

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[178] Ibid., 13.
[179] Ibid., 14-16.

effectively manage change, and then developed into a recognition of people's resistance to change and a dialogue about ways to deal with that resistance. Most recently, the experience of change has been placed within the framework of the evolutionary processes of origin. This has shifted the issue of change from a present and possibly temporary reality to a function of the fabric of life. In transition, the past is not simply jettisoned, but mined for its greatest contributions, and it is mined broadly to take advantage of the diverse perspectives and styles that contribute to the best outcome.

Styles or Priorities of Leadership

Nearly fifty years ago, Peter Drucker proposed that the key priority for any leader should be effectiveness. In *The Effective Executive*, published in 1966, he asserted, "Whether he works in a business or in a hospital, in a government agency or in a labor union, in a university or in the army, the executive is, first of all, expected to get the right things done. And this is simply that he is expected to be effective."[180] Drucker argues that changes in business have shifted the emphasis from the worker, who did what he was told, to a far greater number of "knowledge workers," who produce no product by themselves, but rather, provide the knowledge needed by a team of others to produce.

Such "knowledge workers" or executives, while essential to the work of the organization, are hindered in effectiveness by problems endemic to their position. He lists four of these problems. First, the executive's time belongs to everybody else. Second, executives are forced to keep on "operating" (maintaining) unless they take positive action to change the reality in which they live and work. Third, executives are effective only if people make use of what they contribute. Fourth, every executive "sees the inside

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[180] Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966,1967), 1.

– the organization – as close and immediate reality. He sees the outside only through thick and distorted lenses."[181] Drucker argues further that while such hindrances dictate that true effectiveness requires attention and effort, anyone can learn the practices leading to effectiveness. He lays out priority practices for the executive that lead to effectiveness. These include time management, a sense of his contribution to the whole, building on strengths rather than filling in for weakness, first things first, or concentrating limited strength on important opportunities, and learning how to make effective decisions.

While his ideas spawned a whole sub-category of business literature on effective time-management and other skills designed to make leaders better, Drucker had conservative expectations regarding the value of such improvements:

> We certainly could use people of much greater abilities in many places. We could use people of broader knowledge. I submit, however, that in these two areas, not too much can be expected from further efforts. We may be getting to the place where we are already attempting to do the inherently impossible or at least the inherently unprofitable. But we are not going to breed a new race of supermen. We will have to run our organizations with men as they are. The books on manager development, for instance, envision truly a "man for all seasons" in their picture of "the manager of tomorrow. A senior executive, we are told, should have extraordinary abilities as an analyst and a decision-maker. He should be good at working with people and at understanding organization and power relations, be good at mathematics, and have artistic insights and creative imagination.[182]

This theme of realistic expectations and recognition of personal limits echoes concerns mentioned earlier in the pastoral transition literature. While much attention is paid to the leader's most effective use of personal resources, the discussion is framed in categories more realistic than those of the modernist "hero" mentioned by Heuser and Shawchuck.[183]

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[181] Ibid., 9-14.
[182] Ibid., 18.
[183] Heuser and Shawchuck, 121.

More recently, Heifetz and Linsky worked to promote the idea that the essence of leadership is not found in maintaining the status quo, but in putting oneself on the line to foster change. In *Leadership on the Line*, they summarize what they consider important:

> 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 a possibility. Moreover, leadership often means exceeding the authority you are given to tackle the challenge at hand. People push back when you disturb the personal and institutional equilibrium they know.[184]

This concept was certainly not foreign to Drucker. He cites many examples of men who took significant risks to position their companies for the future through unpopular innovations. He mentions Theodore Vail, president of Bell Telephone System in the early 1900's, including in his story this account:

> But even in a monopoly, Vail concluded, one can organize the future to compete with the present. In a technical industry such as telecommunications, the future lies in better and different technologies. The Bell Laboratories, which grew out of this insight, were by no means the first industrial laboratory, even in the United States. But it was the first industrial research institution that was deliberately designed to make the present obsolete...[185]

Drucker noted the cost that Vail paid for initiating this change:

> [Vail's] decision to spend money on obsoleting current processes and techniques just when they made the greatest profits for the company and to build a large research laboratory designed to this end, as well as his refusal to follow the fashion in finance and build a speculative capital structure, were equally resisted by his board as worse than eccentricity.[186]

While Drucker recognizes that willingness to take risks is a part of effective decision-making, Heifetz and Linsky present it as the key priority of a good leader. This suggests to transitioning leaders that those actions presented in the book, such as moving beyond

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[184] Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line : Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), chapter 1 (Kindle).
[185] Drucker, *The Effective Executive*, 116-117.
[186] Ibid., 122.

one's level of authority and being willing to disrupt the status quo, are matters to consider from the very beginning of their work. While this appears to clash with the prevailing advice given to pastors, the picture is more complex. Heifetz and Linsky note, "The hope of leadership lies in the capacity to deliver disturbing news and raise difficult questions in a way that people can absorb, prodding them to take up the message rather than ignore it or kill the messenger."[187] This kind of leader closely engages with people, staying sensitive to the risks. The authors explain, "Leadership takes the capacity to stomach hostility so that you can stay connected to people, lest you disengage from them and exacerbate the danger."[188]

Heifetz and Linsky challenge the concept that transitional styles are contrasted as either action-oriented or people-oriented. They assert that the two must work together in a complex fashion. This is especially true in changes that are adaptive rather than technical. In an interview with Maryann Brennan, Heifetz explains the difference between these two types of changes:

> There are a host of problems that patients present to doctors for which a straightforward remedy is not available. In these cases, the responsibility for treating these problems cannot be taken from the patient's shoulders and placed solely on the authority's shoulders: the physician. It is in the nature of the condition that progress is going to require people to make adjustments in their life-style, reevaluate priorities, and change habits. The changes in these cases present an adaptive challenge, not a technical solution.[189]

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[187] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line : Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, chapter 1 (Kindle).
[188] Ibid., 14-16.
[189] Maryann Brennan, "Walking the Fine Line of Leadership," *Journal for Quality and Participation* 21, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 1998): 8.

While there are several other models presently used to describe the process by which organizations tend to thrive in transition,[190] this view of adaptive leadership is highly influential. It is characterized by a strong emphasis on the leader's appreciation of diversity, skill in empowering workers to participate in the adaptive solutions to business problems, and ability to differentiate between technical and adaptive challenges.

In his influential book *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge deepens the sense that leadership priority is found in team effort and in the appreciation and development of human potential. Five years after the publication of the book, Senge discussed the book's impact in his introduction to the paperback edition:

> The central message of *The Fifth Discipline* is more radical than "radical organization redesign"- namely that our organizations work the way they work, ultimately, because of how we think and how we interact. Only by changing how we think can we change deeply embedded policies and practices. Only by changing how we interact can shared visions, shared understandings, and new capacities for coordinated action be established.[191]

Senge presents a series of five disciplines in his book. The first, personal mastery, is the discipline of continuously clarifying and deepening one's personal vision, of focusing one's energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively.[192] The second, mental models, involves deeply engrained assumptions, generalizations, and even pictures or images that influence how one understands the world and how one takes action.[193] The third, building shared vision, includes the skills of unearthing shared pictures of the future that foster genuine commitment.[194] The fourth, team learning, is

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[190] A useful summary is provided in Lorraine U. Hendrickson, "Bridging the Gap between Organization Theory and the Practice of Managing Growth: The Dynamic System Planning Model.," *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 5, no. 3 (1992).
[191] Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline : The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Rev. and updated. ed. (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 2006), xiv.
[192] Ibid., 7.
[193] Ibid., 8.
[194] Ibid., 9.

true dialogue leading to advancement of the whole team. All of these are bound together by systems thinking, which Senge calls "the fifth discipline." He explains, "It is the discipline that integrates the disciplines, fusing them into a coherent body of theory and practice."[195] He asserts that "'Survival learning,' or what is more often termed 'adaptive learning' is important – indeed, it is necessary. But for a learning organization, 'adaptive learning' must be joined by 'generative learning,' learning that enhances our ability to create."[196] For Senge, such generative learning is what makes a person human. His sense of priority for the leader moves well beyond survival of the organization; it has greater concern for the personal and team development of individual workers within the organization.

Senge's concept of team-building has influenced business thinking around the world. Erik Oddvar Eriksen critiques the leadership of the Norwegian health system in his book *New Public Management*. That system, according to Erikson, is modeled after what he calls an instrumental style of leadership. He defines it this way, "New Public Management implies emphasis on the control and responsibility of top management, incentives, competition, quantitative result indicators, and measures of efficiency and effectiveness. Resources are to be managed better, and new reward systems are to provide motivation and discipline for employees."[197] Erickson notes that leaders who strive for common understanding will realize greater results than those seeking to realize set goals. As he explores this phenomenon, he provides a helpful description of communicative leadership:

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[195] Ibid., 12.
[196] Ibid., 14.
[197] Erik Erickson, Oddivar, "Leadership in a Communicative Perspective," *Acta Sociologica (Taylor and Francis Ltd.)* 44, no. 1 (2001): 21.

> The concept of communicative leadership includes the ability to test the reasonableness of the objectives in light of collective expectations. Thus, the term communicative leadership designates that leaders are able to generate agreement and that they act on the basis of a consensus which has been legitimately achieved. More specifically, such a leadership acts on the basis of an agreement, or of a conceived deliberation which it believes would result in agreement given sufficient time and information. In this way, leadership is a way of "meaning-making" through moral-practical arguing, where the validity of the argument depends on its generality or universality.[198]

The shared creation of meaning is what Senge described as "generative learning." It seems to touch a foundational need in people for creative engagement, which then manifests itself in greater results. As the business world presses forward its understanding of how leadership can spark greater creativity, it is delving more deeply into what constitutes human nature.

The Arbinger Institute explores this matter of humanity and productivity in its 2010 international bestseller, *Leadership and Self-Deception.* The key component of style in this volume is not in the leader, but in leaders in relationship with those around them. Here, ineffectiveness is the result of being boxed into one's self-deceived view of self and people, causing a ripple effect of destructive self-concern. Leaders are advised to see people as people, thereby reducing disruption and increasing productivity. The authors explain, "If you want to know the secret of Zagrum's success, it's that we've developed a culture where people are simply invited to see others as people. And being seen and treated straightforwardly, people respond accordingly."[199]

Unlike Heifetz and Linsky, who view conflict as resistance to change that might lead to personal loss, the Arbingdon authors suggest that the primary issue is even more personal. It is viewing one another as objects rather than as people. Thus, the issue moves

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[198] Ibid., 22.
[199] Institute, 40.

almost completely from goals and process to interpersonal relationships. The new manager being instructed in this new technique is told:

> And if you do what might on the surface be considered the right thing, but do it while in the box, you'll invite an entirely different and less productive response than you would if you were out of the box. Remember, people primarily respond not to what we do but to how we're being – whether we're in or out of the box toward them.[200]

Being "in the box," according to this volume, is being internally focused or selfish. The call to see people as people is viewed as a process achieved through education, mentoring, and personal focus. So the leaders of the fictitious Zagrum Corporation devote a great deal of effort to training and modeling for all workers this matter of remaining "outside the box" in personal attitude. They maintain that this constitutes the reason for the corporation's success. Emphasis has clearly shifted from organizational skill to attention to the human factor.

This shift in emphasis is not particularly new. In fact, twenty-one years ago, in their article "Involvement and Commitment in the Workplace: A New Ethic Evolving," F.B. Green, associate professor at Radford University and E. Hatch, professor at Appalachian State University, reported a strong interest within corporations on the matter of ethics:

> This article contends that a major dimension of ethical conduct pertains to the internal environment, namely, how a business treats its employees. A considerable number of articles in the literature have reported on worker alienation, unfair personnel practices, arbitrary dismissals, and discrimination. These examples are symptomatic of a persistent attitude that regards employees as exchangeable and replaceable factors of production. In western firms, according to a *Business Horizons* magazine report, people too often are seen as the problem and technology is seen as the solution.... Fortunately, a significant change is taking place in many firms. Rather than placing employees in narrowly defined jobs under close supervision and control, managers in a number of firms are creating an environment that encourages employee participation, contribution,

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[200] Ibid., 44.

> broader responsibilities, teamwork, and flexibility. "In factory after factory," report Harvard Business School professor Richard E. Walton, "there is a revolution underway in the management of work."[201]

In her book "Managing with the Wisdom of Love, seasoned consultant Dorothy Marcic seeks to root this issue of personal character impacting business in spiritual law. She notes,

> We see indications of our spiritual development in our relationship with the material world- for instance, in how we treat other people and the environment, as well as in our attitude toward work. To develop spiritually, we must believe in a dimension of reality beyond what we see and experience as the material world.[202]

Marcic calls for a necessary spiritual dimension to the effective worker that is wrought by faith. The source of guidance for this spiritual dimension is found in the teachings of all great religions, which are "essentially the same" and can be summarized as "love your neighbor, be honest, live in justice, control your impulses, avoid corruption, let your intentions be pure, and serve your fellow humans."[203] She then asserts that "at the core of these guiding principles is one fundamental law from which all others spring: love your neighbor and treat your neighbor as you would wish to be treated."[204] One hears the roots of this thinking in the article by Green and Hatch:

> In essence, many of the interactions enabling employees to function as successful team members are the same as those found and valued in close-knit communities and families. These aspects of human relations have been touted for decades by sociologists and family counselors as vital conditions for psychological wellbeing. Clearly, then, American workers deserve the same considerations. It is a common legacy of civilized societies that most people possess a fairly effective, commonsense understanding of how to create a climate in which persons come to like, trust, and work well with each other.[205]

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[201] Hatch, F.B. and Hatch Green, E., "Involvement and Commitment in the Workplace: A New Ethic Evolving.," *Advanced Management Journal* 55, no. 4 (1990): 8. Ellipsis replaces "(Rehder, 1988)".
[202] Marcic, 2.
[203] Ibid., 3.
[204] Ibid., 3-5.
[205] Green: 10.

Marcic's emphasis on the ethic of love reaches even to the question of objective- an issue that is typically viewed in contrasting ways in pastoral and business transitions. As noted above, the goal cited in *Leadership and Self-Deception* is to engage people as people for the ultimate purpose of productivity. In *Leadership on the Line*, people are disturbed and ultimately asked to risk what is personally important for the sake of changes that will bring improvements. Marcic asserts:

> Although everything I have learned about organizations...leaves no doubt that spiritual companies can be profitable companies, I do not propose that any organization proceed from that motivation alone. I believe, quite simply, that they should do it because it is the right thing to do. When the overarching goal of the organization is only profit... it is difficult to create a spiritual framework, for as soon as the bottom line is threatened, love goes out the window as an expendable commodity.[206]

While the pastoral transition materials recognize the need to challenge parishioners to press beyond what is comfortable for the goals of God's kingdom, there is also a strong value placed on people for their own sake, because they are God's sheep.

Specific Guidance for the First Year

One final segment of the business literature should be considered – writing that outlines a specific approach for leaders in their first year of oversight. One of the most extensive efforts in this category comes from Michael Watkins, associate professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School. He introduces *The First 90 Days* with a strong assertion: "The President of the United States gets 100 days to prove himself; you get 90. The actions you take during your first three months in a new job will largely determine whether you succeed or fail."[207] He then follows with a very specific timeline of actions for that initial period. He notes the cost and number of transitions in

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[206] Marcic, 20-21.
[207] Michael Watkins, *The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels*, 1st ed. (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2003), 1.

organizations, exclaiming, "It is surprising, therefore, that few companies pay much attention to accelerating leadership transitions."[208]

For Watkins, the desire for stable productivity drives interest in the breakeven point, which is the point at which leaders have contributed as much value to their new organizations as they have consumed.[209] The effort to reduce this ratio then fuels Watkins' pursuit of what he calls "a shared framework for transition acceleration."[210] The framework that follows is diverse, recognizing four distinct forms of transition in business: start-up, turnaround, realignment, and sustaining success. Watkins then provides a specific, ninety-day strategy for each situation, following a ten-point outline. He urges: promote yourself (to the new job), accelerate your learning (of the new job), match strategy to situation (determining the kind of business situation), secure early wins, negotiate success, achieve alignment (aligning structure with strategy), build your team, create coalitions (determine whose support is essential to your success), keep your balance (don't get isolated), and expedite everyone (help each of the workers to accelerate their own transitions). The theme of this work is efficiency, with a cogent plan to establish trust and get the whole team on the same page quickly.

Watkins shares a wealth of advice useful to any transition. For example, learning to promote oneself by recognizing the possible need for unfamiliar approaches rather than familiar ones or new advisors for a new situation is just as helpful in the pastorate as in the business arena. Also, learning to diagnose the new organization in a systematic way, determining in advance the important questions to ask, is simply wise. While the formulaic style and concern for speed in Watkins' approach may seem to fly in the face

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[208] Ibid., 7-9.
[209] Ibid., 2.
[210] Ibid., 9.

of the recent emphasis on team building and human connection, he is careful to incorporate these concerns into the approach. For example, he notes in his chapter on "Accelerate Your Learning" that "Other new leaders suffer from the action imperative, a learning disability whose primary symptom is a near-compulsive need to take action."[211] He has in mind, in spite of speed, action based on meaningful learning. And so he cautions, "Perhaps most destructive of all, some new leaders arrive with 'the answer.' They have already made up their minds about how to solve the organization's problems," adding, "displaying a genuine ability to listen often translates into increased credibility and influence."[212] Watkins seems to recognize many of the complexities of a human system, yet works to set a course of action, with its different variations, that he believes can always succeed. He notes as a first proposition,

> The root causes of transition failure always lie in a pernicious interaction between the situation, with its opportunities and pitfalls, and the individual, with his or her strengths and vulnerabilities...Transition failures happen when new leaders either misunderstand the essential demands of the situation or lack the skill and flexibility to adapt to them.[213]

This suggests that, given the right process and the right match of skill set and situation, every transition should succeed.

By contrast, one recent addition to the conversation appears in a 2006 article in the academic journal, "Emergence: Complexity & Organization." The authors include Benyamin B. Lichtenstein, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Management and Entrepreneurship at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, Mary Uhl-Bien, Ph.D., the Howard Hawks Chair in Business Ethics and Leadership and the Associate Director of the Gallup Leadership Institute at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Russ Marion,

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[211] Ibid., 36.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid., 4.

author of The Edge of Organization (1999), Leadership in Education (2001), and Leadership in Complex Organizations (The Leadership Quarterly), Anson Seers, Ph.D., currently a Professor of Management at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Business, James Douglas Orton, Ph.D., an expert on strategy-losing and strategy-remaking processes in the U.S. national security community, and Craig Schreiber, Ph.D., currently a research associate for the National Research Council. Previously he has worked on research projects sponsored by the National Science Foundation, NASA, the Office of Naval Research and Army Research Labs. The article states that:

> Leading-edge theorists and the leaders they inform are questioning the assumption that the essence of leadership rests within the character or the characteristic behaviors of effective supervisors.... Worse, the notion that a leader exogenously "acts on" organizations in order to achieve the leader's objectives may be misguided in the presence of the insight that organizations are highly complex and nonlinear.... There is also a growing realization that effective leadership does not necessarily reside within the leader's symbolic, motivational, or charismatic actions.[214]

The authors assert, "A new mindset is beginning to emerge, however, which recognizes that social processes are too complex and 'messy' to be attributed to a single individual or pre-planned streams of events...."[215] While the importance of leadership skill is in no way rejected, the article posits that the true work of leadership occurs "in the gap" between various agents in the organization. The authors reject the view that leadership ability resides within certain individuals as an abstraction – the reality is a much more complex event occurring between people. This, of course, raises the question: To what

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[214] Benyamin B. Lichtenstein, Uhl-Bien, Mary, Marion, Russ, Seers, Anson, Orton, James Douglas, Schreiber, Craig, "Complexity Leadership Theory: An Interactive Perspective on Leading in Complex Adaptive Systems," *Emergence: Complexity & Organization* 8, no. 4 (2006): 2. Ellipses replace, respectively, "(Seers, 2004)" and "(Meyer et al., 2005)".

[215] Ibid., 3. Ellipsis replaces "(Finkelstein, 2002; Marion and Uhl-Bien, 2001)"

degree is leadership as a gift or a learned gift the true issue in transition? How much is leadership affected by individual character and interaction between people?

Susan Staring, MSN, RN is Nurse Manager and Catherine Taylor, MSN, RN, *is* Clinical Nurse Educator at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina. They provide another useful, albeit less ambitious, approach to the first year of transition. In their article entitled *A Guide to Managing Workforce Transitions*, they comment on the aforementioned aspect of "messiness:"

> Along with the current change, nurses are dealing with their response to surviving the reduction of the workforce. The survivor syndrome includes symptoms such as guilt, anxiety, distrust, fear, insecurity; a sense of violation and preoccupation with death imagery; and blurred images of those who did and did not survive.[216]

They suggest a three-point approach to such a challenging scenario, stating, "Three key strategies were identified: emotional management, professional empowerment and empowerment by values. Emotional management was prioritized because its potential for energy could be channeled into the second two strategies. Each strategy seemed to naturally flow into the next."[217] Although the particular transitions in the article are workforce reorganizations rather than leadership transitions, the observations are applicable to the latter. "Prioritizing emotional management" in this process means that attention is given first to the people affected by uncomfortable change in very specific ways.

Staring and Taylor describe this as "validating both the unit staff's as well as the unit manager's emotions," noting that "it seemed essential that the staff recognize the

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[216] Susan Staring and Catherine Taylor, "A Guide to Managing Workforce Transitions.," *Nursing Management* 28, no. 12 (1997): 31.
[217] Ibid.

humanness of the unit manager."[218] They provide specific first actions to manage emotions:

> Staff was encouraged to understand, appreciate, and express their emotions. A system was developed that defined acceptable coping skills....If staff members' behavior was not appropriate per group norms, they would travel on an established pathway. An open door and pager policy was used...over time negative emotions gave way to the threads of positive energy.[219]

Staring and Taylor provide a roadmap for acknowledging concern for the very human emotions that accompany change, thereby channeling energy in a useful direction for the next steps of transition. Those next steps included "professional empowerment" through the formation of what the authors call a "shared governance model" (organizing the staff into groups with a significant voice in management), and then "empowerment by values" (training in diversity and formation of practices that valued the individual contributions of members). This sequence moved the staff through transition to productive stability. The experience shows the value of acknowledging the interests and emotions of team members before calling for buy-in to a new direction.

The general direction in the literature on business transitions is a decided departure from the leader as expert and trendsetter. Building a team and reaching team consensus, applying diversified thinking to new challenges, and recognizing the human factor as a key to successful transition are some of the themes garnering attention.

Literature on Family Systems or Systems Theory

Ronald Richardson, former Clinical Director of the North Shore Counseling Center, published an article in 2005 on *Bowen Family Systems Theory and*

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[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.

Congregational Life, in which he described the historical and philosophic roots of family systems theory. He wrote,

> From the time of the Enlightenment, we have been breaking reality down into discreet, constituent parts, losing the connection things have with each other, studying them separately, as if they existed on their own. In modern times, we have attempted to understand individuals apart from their communities of identity. Freud continued this process in his psychological language and worldview, separating the individual into discreet parts. Bowen has shifted the focus back to a more biblical view of the individual as a part of one or more larger wholes. For him, as well as for the ancient Hebrew authors, the family is the primary unit of interest.[220]

Here Richardson applauds a recent shift being introduced into the culture through the emergence of systems thinking. In business, in pastoral care and congregational life and in other areas of the culture, systems thinking has begun to focus greater attention on man in relationship rather than simply man the individual. Richardson has particular interest in this impact on church life. So he comments in the abstract of his article, "The theory helps us to see more clearly how we are emotionally interconnected with one another and the ways this can manifest either for greater personal and congregational health or greater difficulties."[221]

Well-known author, rabbi, and family therapist Edwin Friedman, viewed by many as the preeminent interpreter of Bowen Family Systems Theory for congregations and synagogues, adds his own perspective on the formation of systems theory.

> Since computers were introduced in the '50s, the speed with which they can perform functions has doubled at least every other year... Our brains have been avalanched by this blizzard of data. But the sheer volume of information is only one aspect of the problem. More significant is the fact that the increasing quantities have reached new thresholds of complexity, so that even the old ways of making sense out of information have become inadequate...Systems thinking began in response to this dimension of the information problem. It deals with data

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[220] Ronald W. Richardson, "Bowen Family Systems Theory and Congregational Life," *Review & Expositor* 102, no. 3 Summer (2005): 381.
[221] Ibid., 379.

> in a new way. It focuses less on content and more on the process that governs the data; less on the cause-and-effect connections that link bits of information and more on the principles of organization that give data meaning.[222]

So, moving from Richardson's broader historical perspective to the more recent approach, Friedman shows how the modern "blizzard of data" available to humanity through technology produced the demand for a new way of synthesizing that data – systems thinking. In *Generation to Generation*, he describes a shift away from linear, cause-and-effect thinking, which typically dissects an object or event to study its pieces, to an interest in the way various parts interact within a system. The important factors of any one part of the event are not found in its "nature," but rather in the ways that it interacts with the other parts.

Both Friedman and Richardson focus on the ramifications of this new kind of thinking for families and congregations. Richardson summarizes the contributions of both Bowen and Friedman to the study of organizational or group dynamics:

> [Bowen family systems theory] not only describes how we normally operate in relationships, it also offers directions for how growth can happen. The systemic approach includes the belief that, when we change our part in a relationship process, others will then have to change their part. This approach is not about doing "tricky" things to others to get them to change. It is about a caring way to be closely connected with others that allows us, at the same time, to be true to our own beliefs and values.[223]

This issue of how growth can happen is of great importance to the leader seeking to serve as a catalyst for positive change in an organization.

Foundational Propositions of Systems Theory

In *Generation to Generation*, Friedman's family systems theory draws on the previous work of Murray Bowen, professor of psychology at Georgetown University, to

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[222] Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation : Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, The Guilford Family Therapy Series. (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), Chapter one (Kindle).
[223] Richardson: 381-2.

formulate a series of five foundational propositions that govern the behavior and interactions of people. These are: the identified patient, homeostasis or balance, differentiation of self, the extended family field, and emotional triangles. The researcher will now focus individually on each of these.

The Identified Patient

> In his comments on "nuclear family emotional systems, Richardson notes:
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> A major difference between systems thinking and the individual model of human functioning is "where does the problem lie?" The individual model suggests that the problem is within particular people... This belief is bolstered by the many psychological approaches to human motivation and their diagnoses of individual problems.[224]

Friedman expands the picture, stating, "The concept of the identified patient…is that the family member with the obvious symptom is to be seen not as the 'sick one' but as the one in whom the family's stress or pathology has surfaced."[225] In this way, the challenge of understanding people, particularly for the pastor, moves from addressing isolated, individual problems toward an effort to understand the whole system.

Homeostasis

Seeking to draw a picture of homeostasis, Richardson says, "Emotional systems are like delicately balanced mobiles. Any movement by any one part of the mobile, toward or away from the center of gravity, affects the balance of the whole mobile."[226] Defining the concept as "the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually, in self-corrective ways, to preserve the organizing principles of its existence,"[227] Friedman

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[224] Ibid., 384.
[225] Friedman, Chapter One (Kindle).
[226] Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church : Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 29.
[227] Friedman, Chapter One (Kindle).

uncovers part of the reason that individual change is so difficult. The emotional connections that a person has, especially with family, continuously work to maintain the status quo. He notes one outcome of working with individuals in isolation, "In a family emotional system, when an unresolved problem is isolated in one of its members and fixed there by diagnosis, it enables the rest of the family to 'purify' itself by locating the source of its 'disease' in the disease of the identified patient."[228] In any such system, whether family, church, or another type, the priority of the leader is to view the problem from the perspective of the whole system, including its efforts to survive and achieve its goals. In this way, he can help each of the members take responsibility for their portion of the problem.

Anxiety is closely connected to this principle of homeostasis. Richardson explains: "Family systems theory calls the sense of threat that people, or systems, experience, anxiety...But most of our everyday, or chronic anxiety happens beyond our awareness, so that we are not conscious of how much it controls our functioning."[229] What are the roots of anxiety and how does such anxiety manifest itself in behavior? Richardson outlines the concept first framed by Friedman:

> The emotional equivalents of abandonment might be, for some, the feelings of being uncared for, not respected, not accepted, not listened to, not taken seriously, and so forth. At a deep level, we think we will perish unless the important people in our lives provide what we think we need from them emotionally...The general level of anxiety that we carry around as adults affects all our relationships. Even when it is no longer literally true that we will not survive if we are abandoned, it feels true emotionally. This is called "unresolved emotional attachment." ...Anxiety generated by our unresolved emotional attachments affects social and business relationships, as well as personal ones. We can't avoid the emotional processes.[230]

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[228] Ibid.
[229] Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church : Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, 42.
[230] Ibid., 49.

In this concern to "feel safe," Friedman explains, certain members of the family may serve as a kind of "trap" in the plumbing, absorbing the anxiety. If, at some point, they choose to "straighten out" and stop playing the part of the trap, the other members of the family will exert pressure in order to regain balance and reduce anxiety. The goal of a change agent in such a situation would be to actually upset the homeostasis, coaching people to step out of their assigned roles, while providing what Friedman terms "a non-anxious presence" to sustain the members of the family in transition.

The Differentiated Self

The differentiated person is one who knows himself and is secure enough in himself that he is able to apply that security to the relationships around him. He knows his own goals and is able to maintain and articulate those goals in the face of pressure. In *A Failure of Nerve*, Ed Friedman comments, "In order to imagine the unimaginable, people must be able to separate themselves from surrounding emotional processes before they can even begin to see (or hear) things differently"[231] Separating oneself from the anxiety belonging to other people, or society at large, is critical to being able to serve as a catalyst for change.

Friedman further clarifies this important concept of differentiation in *Generation to Generation*, "What is vital to changing any kind of 'family' is not knowledge of technique or even of pathology but, rather, the capacity of the family leader to define his or her own goals and values while trying to maintain a non-anxious presence within the system."[232] Later in the same chapter, he summarizes what he means by the concept:

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[231] Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve : Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, ed. Edward W. Beal. Margaret M. Treadwell (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 31.
[232] Friedman, *Generation to Generation : Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, Chapter One (Kindle).

> Differentiation means the capacity of a family member to define his or her own life's goals and values apart from surrounding togetherness pressures, to say "I" when others are demanding "you" and "we." It includes the capacity to maintain a (relatively) non-anxious presence in the midst of anxious systems, to take maximum responsibility for one's own destiny and emotional being.[233]

Differentiation, then, places the focus on leaders, forcing them to set personal goals and limits so as to define themselves before engaging in relationships with others.

In his recent article for *Congregations*, Tim Shapiro, president of the Indianapolis Center for Congregations, defines the concept while sounding a note of correction:

> Differentiation of self is the lifelong work of developing the ability for both autonomy and closeness. All humans benefit from this ability. Congregational leaders must have this ability. Yet, leaders occasionally misunderstand what Bowen Theory means by self-differentiation. It is interpreted as license to take alienating individual stands with little attention to relationships. On occasion clergy declare themselves "self- differentiated" as they leave a dismantled congregation through the back door.[234]

Friedman, aware of the danger of misunderstanding, sounds his own note of caution and explanation, saying, "The concept should not be confused with autonomy or narcissism, however. Differentiation means the capacity to be an 'I' while remaining connected."[235]

On the basis of his experience with Indianapolis churches practicing family systems theory, Shapiro adds this commentary:

> In Bowen Theory one of the markers for a well-differentiated self is remaining non-anxious in difficult situations. This instruction functions like the command to "love thy neighbor;" easy to say and often hard to do. Being told to remain non-anxious sounds good, but can be difficult to manage in certain situations. Anxiety is not always harmful, nor is it possible for most of us to be non-anxious about important matters. Trying to maintain a non-anxious presence often has a paradoxical effect—it raises, not lowers, anxiety.[236]

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[233] Ibid.
[234] Tim Shapiro, "Thinking About Congregations: Using Bowen Family Systems Theory," *Congregations* 36, no. 2 Spr (2010): 27.
[235] Friedman, *Generation to Generation : Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, Chapter One (Kindle).
[236] Shapiro: 27.

After some experience with Friedman's advice, Shapiro cautions that the experiences growing out of such leadership are not easy to navigate; the resulting reactions will cause leaders to think they are making matters worse, not better. Friedman says as much himself, noting, "Where family members can begin to increase their threshold for another's pain, the other person's threshold is likely to rise, even though he or she may at first go through 'withdrawal' symptoms when the 'addiction' is taken away."[237] Agreeing with Shapiro about the matter of maintaining a non-anxious presence, he comments, "Very few, however, can maintain their resolve to hold that position when the identified patient's symptoms become more intense."[238] Both authors make it clear that application in the face of anxiety is not only challenging but also filled with questions. It is perhaps for this reason that Friedman so often speaks of the effort as process rather than goal.

The Extended Family Field

Describing this concept as one's whole family of origin, from nuclear family to the whole circle of extended family members, Friedman notes the significance of paying attention to the bigger picture:

> The importance of emphasizing the contemporary relevance of the extended family field is that one "can go home again." Gaining a better understanding of the emotional processes still at work with regard to our family of origin, and modifying our response to them, can aid significantly in the resolution of emotional problems in our immediate family (marriage or parenting) or of leadership problems in a church or synagogue.[239]

In his own advice to pastors in *Becoming a Healthier Pastor*, Richardson provides a fairly extensive list of steps to enter into one's extended family field. He includes maintaining active, regular contact, getting to know the family better, developing a multi-

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[237] Friedman, *Generation to Generation : Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, Chpater Two (Kindle).
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid.

generational family diagram, honoring one's family, researching the toxic issues, and exploring relationship cut-offs. While the list is straightforward, Richardson shows that in this area, practice is a matter of stepping into ambiguity. He comments:

> What I offer here are some general directions for the work. What order they happen in or whether they all happen at once will vary. Unexpected experiences will occur, and at times it may seem as if there is just one obstacle after another. Things don't always happen the way we plan, and, after all, adaptability and flexibility are part of what we are trying to learn.[240]

Triangles

The last of the principles of systems theory is called "triangles." Richardson describes this concept,

> Triangles are the basic molecules of emotional systems. They are the primary way we manage the inevitable anxiety that eventually will occur in two-person relationships when they are stressed. When one member of a dyad begins to feel anxious, often around feeling either "too close" or "too distant," a third person (or group) will be brought in.[241]

Friedman adds, "The basic law of emotional triangles is that when any two parts of a system become uncomfortable with one another, they will 'triangle in' or focus upon a third person, or issue, as a way of stabilizing their own relationship with one another."[242] While the triangles concept is listed last in Friedman's five constructs, Friedman argues that it is the tool by which the other four are put into operation. He presents seven laws governing such triangles that have significant impact upon how one views efforts to bring change as well as the level of stress the "helpful" agent will experience.

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[240] Ronald W. Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor : Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family*, Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 78.
[241] Richardson, "Bowen Family Systems Theory and Congregational Life," 382.
[242] Friedman, *Generation to Generation : Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, Chapter one (Kindle).

Systems Theory and Preparations

The researcher will now consider how this literature on systems theory speaks to the research questions about pastoral transitions. Concerning the question of what preparations a pastor might consider when entering an established work, Richardson counsels a deeper self-knowledge through examination of personal family dynamics. He advises,

> Very few of us as adults have learned to see our family of origin – the family we grew up in that continues the generations of family that preceded us – as a resource to our own physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. In our North American individualistic approach to health, we rarely think of family as contributing to our wellbeing; rather, we more typically attempt to distance ourselves from them at times as a way to improve our own health. To honor our family, however, is to discover how it can help improve our own lives and wellbeing. And, strange as it may seem, it is a way to improve our functioning as pastors and as congregational leaders.[243]

The leader who seeks to shepherd others must first deal with his own (largely hidden) sources of anxiety and his own unresolved family issues in order to have the stability to serve as a calming influence for congregation members. In *Creating a Healthier Church*, Richardson provides a summary of what personal maturity involves:

> In family systems theory, fusion and differentiation are the emotional processes that lead, respectively, to less or more emotional maturity. These two terms refer to the way we manage the two life forces of togetherness and individuality within ourselves and in our relations with others...internally, the degree to which a person can separate thinking and feeling, and bring greater objectivity to his or her own inevitably subjective stance, and interpersonally, the degree to which a person can be clear or more objective about the emotional separateness between self and other, knowing what is self and self's responsibility, and what is not.[244]

The terms "fusion" and "differentiation" refer to the movement of a person along the continuum of attachment to others or distancing from others, depending on the need for

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[243] Richardson, *Becoming a Healthier Pastor : Family Systems Theory and the Pastor's Own Family*, vi.
[244] Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church : Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, 80.

togetherness or individuality. A person's ability to step outside themselves and understand their own responses along this continuum signals, in part, their emotional maturity.

Richardson sees such maturity as critical preparation for leadership among a new group of people. He also recognizes that the issue of becoming more differentiated by seeing oneself and one's family members in relationship more clearly is a life-long pursuit. He therefore suggests stages of effort, beginning with the decision to stop using distance as a way of coping and to begin drawing nearer to family members. Friedman would include in this picture that one must "take maximum responsibility for one's own destiny and emotional wellbeing,"[245] which would include an evaluation of life goals and close relationships. Lawrence E. Matthews, pastor of Vienna Baptist Church in Vienna, Virginia, who spent thirty-two years as coordinator of the Leadership in Ministry Workshops, shares his own experience of learning to use family systems thinking in ministry through his own personal exercises,

> My first experiences were as a member of a small coaching group led by Friedman. It was within that group that I began to explore through case studies and my own family-of-origin work the interface between [Bowen Family Systems Theory] and ministry praxis.[246]

Those who undergo formal training in systems thinking go through a process of coaching, including the formation of a researched map of their multigenerational family, seeking to identify patterns in their family relationships.

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[245] Friedman, *Generation to Generation : Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, Chapter One (Kindle).
[246] Lawrence E. Matthews, "Bowen Family Systems Theory: A Resource for Pastoral Theologians," *Review & Expositor* 102, no. no 3 Sum (2005): 426.[Issue Editor's Note: Family of origin work involves the ongoing development of a detailed map of multigenerational family relationships and emotional processes. This map is called a genogram.]

This literature review's survey of pastoral transition materials included a discussion of the use of the *Myers-Briggs Type Inventory* as a means of understanding personality. As a preparation for entrance into a new calling, this inventory would clarify personality type and the likelihood of a match with a particular church. Speaking to this assertion, Friedman comments, "The most important ramification of homeostasis for family theory is its emphasis on position rather than personality when explaining the emergence of a symptom."[247] In keeping with the family systems view that behavior is relationally-driven rather than nature-driven, Friedman resists the idea of a fairly stable, innate personality, suggesting instead that areas of under-performance can be meaningfully addressed through the work of differentiation of self and understanding of family dynamics. In *A Failure of Nerve*, he repeats this position, speaking against the prevailing "social science" view of reality in America with this description: "By the social science construction of reality, I mean a worldview that focuses on classifications such as the psychological diagnosis of individuals or their 'personality profiles' and sociological or anthropological niche...rather than on what will be emphasized in this work: the emotional processes that transcend those categories...."[248] For Friedman, personality profiles do not provide useful categories for describing the true forces that shape people's actions.

Matthews touches on one further area of preparatory reflection. In his article, he quotes psychologist Paul Pruyser's comments about a seminar he had conducted:

> I became aware that much of the instruction was one-sided, with the consent of both parties: the theologians sat at the feet of the psychiatric Gamaliels and seemed to like it, with only some occasional theological repartee—pastors were eager to absorb as much psychological knowledge and skill as they could, without

[247] Friedman, *Generation to Generation : Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, Chapter One (Kindle).
[248] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve : Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 3.

> even thinking of instructional reciprocity...the theological apperceptions in which they had been trained gave way to a psychological ordering system.[249]

While certainly supportive of family systems theory as a valuable pastoral tool, Matthews admonishes pastors using such tools to reflect on the ways in which their theology intersects or even challenges the theory. Friedman, speaking from experience as a rabbi as well as a therapist, shares his own views about this concern:

> The omission of religious texts also results from the aforementioned emphasis on self-definition rather than on technique. I do not believe that what makes pastoral counseling pastoral is whether we have packaged our psychology in Scripture. Consistent with the family model, I believe that the efficacy of the pastoral approach resides in our position in the emotional processes of our community and how we function within that position, in all aspects of our "family leadership" and not just while we are counseling. It has always seemed to me, therefore, that what makes pastoral counseling "pastoral" is whether we have listened to Scripture![250]

While this is not intended to dismiss the call to theological reflection, it does add another component – the consideration that much of what aids pastoral care for the congregation occurs as the pastor embodies the teaching of scripture in his own life and in his leadership.

Systems Theory and Priorities

Family systems theory also establishes a fairly clear set of priorities for any pastor, and particularity for those seeking to set a pattern for a new ministry. Closely connected to the prior comments on preparation, one priority would be to remain self-focused. In their forward to *Generation to Generation*, Gary Emmanuel and Mickie Crimone say a word about leadership,

> The challenge for clergy now became not to change their congregations or their techniques of leadership, but to alter their ways of being leaders – to focus less on the weakness or pathology in the group and more on their own strength. Being a "self-differentiating leader" (to use the term Friedman coined) may sound selfish,

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[249] Matthews: 427.
[250] Friedman, *Generation to Generation : Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, Introduction (Kindle).

> but it puts one's energy into leadership over oneself instead of directing others what to say or do.[251]

Therefore, the priority would not be to shore up weaknesses in order to try to please every member of the congregation, but rather to focus on strength, on emotional stability and self-knowledge, in order to wisely and meaningfully shepherd others. Friedman describes this priority through the metaphor of an electrical transformer. Large transformers in the electrical grid receive current at a rate of ten thousand volts, and then step that current down to the standard 110 volts. Friedman explains,

> But it is also possible to be a step-down transformer – to function in such a way that you let the current go through you without zapping you or fusing you to the rest of the circuit. This is not easy, and yet it is within the capability of most leaders. It has far more to do with their presence than with their actions.[252]

The leader must focus on being mature and present in an anxious situation. Friedman puts it succinctly, "All leadership begins with the management of one's own health."[253]

Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp agree largely with this assessment of priority needs for members of a congregation, but with a critical re-emphasis. Following a description of congregation member "Jan," who defines salvation in largely therapeutic terms, the authors comment:

> Without realizing it, Jen has redefined the problem that the gospel addresses. Rather than seeing our problem as moral and relational – the result of our willingness to worship and serve ourselves and the things of this world instead of worshiping and serving our Creator (Romans 1) – she sees our problem as a whole catalog of unmet needs. But whenever you view the sin of another against you as a greater problem than your own sin, you will tend to seek Christ as your *therapist more than you seek him as your Savior.*[254]

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[251] Ibid., Chapter One (Kindle).
[252] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve : Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 232.
[253] Ibid., 234.
[254] Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change*, 1st ed. (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2006), 11.

The key element emphasized by Lane and Tripp, the one that properly positions self-differentiation and connection to others, is a right (worshipful) relationship with the creator God through Jesus Christ.

In transition, self-differentiation can have a profound effect upon the sense of priority placed upon different actions. The pastor who is driven to maintain peace and stability by seeking to "fix" competing conflicts or demands for attention, according to this view, may spend much of his time on matters that never go to the root of the issue, since problems are often created to distract from more central issues. So the first priority can be described as an on-going self-differentiation for the good of others.

Edwin Friedman also calls this "courage." Describing the present state of American society as pervasively anxious, he asserts, "The emphasis here will be on strength, not pathology; on challenge, not comfort; on self-differentiation, not herding for togetherness."[255] He laments the forces of present society that "inhibit the development of leaders with clarity and decisiveness."[256] He later gives an example of what he means:

> ...Frequently, the leaders of a church would come to me seeking techniques for dealing with a member of the staff or a member of the congregation who was acting obstreperously, who was ornery, and who intimidated everyone with his gruffness. I might say to them, "This is not a matter of technique; it's a matter of taking a stand, telling this person he has to shape up or he cannot continue to remain a member of the community."[257]

The determination to exercise courageous leadership includes a willingness to confront people, to tell them how their behavior affects others, even while remaining connected to them. For Friedman, this kind of leadership impacts all areas of service, including preaching. He explains, "The concepts of family process bring together in one

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[255] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve : Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 2-3.
[256] Ibid., 2.
[257] Ibid., 8-9.

perspective counseling, administration, officiating, preaching, personal growth, and leadership."[258]

Systems Thinking and Adjustment in Mode of Operation

Following the thinking of Friedman and others by applying family systems theory to leadership and adjusting one's mode of operation after entering a new call is largely inappropriate. The whole point to systems theory is that the differentiated self remains stable, providing a calming presence for congregation members experiencing anxiety. This is especially to be practiced in situations where personal anxiety might cause the pastor to exhibit negative reactions. Richardson addresses one such situation, stating, "It would seem then that a major quality of mature leadership is to feel comfortable with others' distance from us and not to become anxious about their 'abandoning' us or abandoning our view of their responsibilities."[259]

People who are anxious will make every effort to attain homeostasis by pressuring the leader to conform to the mode of operation that has, in the past, provided balance for them. Calm leaders maintain consistency and will not allow themselves to be pulled into relational triangles that will actually increase the level of anxiety. Such leadership will shepherd parishioners toward greater maturity. While this individual emotional stability is recommended as the norm, Richardson does describe a kind of premeditated adjustment that is helpful:

> There are times when it is appropriate to pursue. In those times, pursuit demonstrates our caring for others, our interest in them, and their importance to us. But at other times, non-anxious waiting and listening communicate caring and respect. The more mature the church leadership, the more wisdom they will have

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[258] Friedman, *Generation to Generation : Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, Introduction (Kindle).
[259] Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church : Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, 77.

> about knowing when to move towards others and when to wait as they move away.[260]

So, in family systems theory, adjustments to one's mode of operation would never be reactive, simply meant to maintain peace. Rather, such adjustments are the result of thoughtful pursuit or non-anxious waiting formulated to serve the anxious member.

Systems theory has much to say about pastoral leadership in transition. Much of the focus is on leaders, urging them to prepare by addressing personal maturity, then practicing non-anxious presence as they enter the world of the congregation, and adjusting in a mindful way to spur parishioners towards maturity.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter addressed biblical examples of preparations, priorities and adjustments in mode of operation by leaders in transition. It also examined the same categories with regard to literature on pastoral transitions, business transitions, and family systems theory. The question remains – to what degree do the insights of these various areas of literature influence pastors transitioning to an existing church? What preparations, priorities, and adjustments in mode of operation actually manifest themselves in representative pastors transitioning to a new call? Though much has been written about transitions from the viewpoints of the pastorate, business, and systems thinking, little research has been done on the degree to which these resources are used by pastors in transition. To have a fuller understanding of this issue, it is necessary to investigate how pastors prepare, set priorities, and adjust their mode of operation in the first year of transition to an established church.

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[260] Ibid., 78.

Chapter Three

Project Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how experienced pastors prepare, set priorities, and make adjustments to their mode of operation when taking a call to an established church. The interviewees were also questioned about the degree to which literature on pastoral transitions, business transitions, and family systems theory influenced them. The study was comprised of personal interviews with seven pastors who had made such a transition within the past five years. The interviews were conducted in person and in the area to which the pastor had been called. The churches to which the interviewed pastors had been called varied in size and cultural character, though all were from the same denomination.

Design of the Study

To explore this question, a qualitative research approach was used. The particular concern of this research was the discovery of a human process: the learnings and other mental processes of a transitioning pastor. In order to carefully examine the complexities of this process, a qualitative research design was selected due to a number of advantages provided by such an approach. In *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, Sharon Merriam comments,

> The key philosophical assumption, as I noted earlier, upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. Qualitative research

> "implies a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone....'"[261]

Since this study was especially concerned with this very element – how pastors think about their preparations for transition, how they determine priorities, and how they respond to their new contexts – a qualitative research approach was required. Also, because the study was concerned, not with the researcher's perspective, as in the proving of a hypothesis, but rather with the perspective of the persons being interviewed, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate. The form of the qualitative study was basic or generic.

Sample Selection

The study was comprised of interviews with seven pastors who had experienced a transition to an existing church within the past five years, and who had begun their work at least eighteen months before the interviews were conducted. The researcher interviewed all pastors living in the selected geographical area that fit the study criteria. This served to reduce costs and investment of time in travel. Also, several subjects were included from outside the geographical area because they fit the criteria and had enjoyed particular success in transition.

The selected pastors were from the same denomination – the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) – due to the fact that the process of transition differs significantly from denomination to denomination. To select subjects from a variety of denominations would have introduced too many variables into the study. Also, because the process of giving and receiving a call in the denomination being studied rests almost exclusively in the pastoral candidate and the calling church, rather than in an overseeing body, the pastors'

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[261]Sharon B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 6. Ellipsis replaces "(Sherman and Webb, 1988, p.7)".

internal deliberations were especially pointed. Interviewees were not church-planters; they were men who experienced the unique transition challenges of a church already in existence. This provided consistency in exploring the impact of a new leader entering an existing system.

The chosen pastors had already passed through their first year of transition, as well as at least another six months, in order to give them meaningful time to reflect on their experiences. The distance in time from the initiation of the transition to the interview date was limited to a maximum of five years in order to lose as little data as possible due to forgetfulness. The number of interviews to be conducted (seven) was chosen to give reasonable breadth of experience to the study while taking into account the constraints of time. In order to include the possibility that the learnings and practices of transition may have changed over time, different age groups were included. Because this denomination only ordains men to pastoral roles, it was not possible to include diversity of gender. Also, in order to attempt to capture differences in seminary preparations for transition, some variation in seminary background was also included.

Proposed Design Tools

The specific tool for data gathering in this study was the semi-structured interview. This allowed exploration of how priorities and actions grew out of explicit or implicit assumptions, and how those assumptions were connected to learnings from written material. Merriam defines the parameters of a semi-structured interview:

> In this type of interview either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions. Usually, specific information is desired from all the respondents, in which case there is a highly structured section to the interview. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the

> researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.[262]

Each of the interviews was conducted in person in the cities where the various pastors resided rather than by phone or electronic means. This was because the full experience of the interview, with facial expressions and body language, provides data as to the relative importance of what was said. The comfort of meeting personally on "home turf" was significant in creating a personal connection and therefore a deeper level of trust and transparency in discussing a subject of some sensitivity. Merriam provides helpful guidance about this point: "Empathy is the foundation of rapport. A researcher is better able to have a conversation with a purpose – an interview, in other words – in an atmosphere of trust."[263]

All seven interviews were conducted within a one-month period. Prior to the interviews, the researcher mailed each interviewee a request for the interview with an explanation of the research project and the list of questions that would guide but not entirely limit the discussion, with the clarification that some follow-up questions might also be asked. A brief questionnaire was enclosed that included entries for each pastor's name, age, church name and approximate size, date the call began, and seminary background. Before the interview began, the researcher had the interviewee fill out a consent form in compliance with the research guidelines at Covenant Theological Seminary. The time for each interview ranged from one to one and one-half hours. The following prepared questions were used in each interview:

1. What did you do to prepare yourself for your new call?
    a. How did you confirm your call in your own mind?

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[262] Ibid., 73.
[263] Ibid.

b. How did you prepare with your family?

c. Were there other preparations that were important to you?

2. Describe those things you felt were most important to accomplish in your first year.
3. How would you describe your normal style of doing ministry?
4. Describe ways that you may have adjusted your style or mode of operation in ministry to fit the circumstances at the new church.
5. What advice did you hear or read about that influenced you in your transition?
6. What advice would you pass on to other pastors taking a call?

This series of questions was forwarded to each pastor before the interview to allow time for recall and reflection. The interviewed pastors were invited to reflect with their spouses as they previewed the questions. They were also invited to prepare and include personal notes from these reflections to aid in the interview. During the interviews, a series of follow-up questions were employed which were not structured, but were formulated as the interviews progressed. This semi-structured, qualitative approach encouraged reflection, which was consistent with the researcher's objectives for the study – to better understand those things that were, in the minds of the interviewed pastors, important for their personal preparations, priorities, and adjustments in style, helping them to make a good transition. My objectives also included helpful influences that guided these pastors. Hearing from the interviewees in a way that freely uncovered what was important and influential to them accomplished this objective.

The interviews were digitally recorded using a portable voice recorder and transcribed after each interview. The researcher then studied and coded the transcripts using the constant comparative method, which Merriam defines:

> The constant comparative method is just what its name implies – constantly compare. The research begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated.[264]

Limits to the Study

While the purpose of this study was to provide some insights into the process of transition by pastors, there are necessary limitations to its applicability. The interviews were conducted with pastors who passed through transition and continued with their churches. This limitation excludes the useful insights and experience of those who failed to survive the transition period. However, it allows a greater focus on those insights that seem to lead to success. Also, all of the pastors interviewed were from PCA churches. Because of this limitation, the study did not uncover the impact that varying theological and ecclesiastical traditions might have on the thoughts and actions of transitioning pastors. The fact that a large percentage of the pastors interviewed were from the same presbytery in the Midwestern United States may affect applicability to other presbyteries within the denomination and to other denominations. On the other hand, it may also open the door to further study, comparing observations from other regions and traditions.

Because of the constraints of time and money, it was not possible to glean data from a larger number of pastors. Yet, the focus on a smaller number allowed greater depth of insight in an area of some complexity. The experiences of those entering their first call out of seminary as well as those within the PCA who are engaged in church-planting are critically important to the future of the denomination. But for purposes of this study, these groups were also excluded. Those pastors transitioning to an assistant or

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[264] Ibid., 159.

associate position, while representing a significant population within the transitioning body, were also excluded. The decision to exclude these was made because their experiences, which would be deeply affected by their unique relationships to their congregations, sessions, and senior pastors, would have overly complicated the results of the study.

Researcher Position

Merriam notes, "In a qualitative study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data and, as such, can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information."[265] Rather than being an impediment to be removed, the investigator is, in many ways, an asset. Yet, Merriam also observes what has long been recognized – that "the human instrument is limited by being human – that is, mistakes are made, opportunities missed, personal biases interfere."[266] For this reason, it behooves the researcher to be self-aware and, with humility, to recognize areas of opinion and conviction that may in some way prejudice the findings of a study. Therefore, the researcher will now disclose limitations that might have impacted this study.

The researcher has served as an ordained minister in the PCA since 1981. He has experienced three pastoral transitions, two of them being into existing works, one of which held particular challenges and some painful memories. The researcher has worked and counseled with those who have been wounded by transition as well as those who have enjoyed a large measure of success. Personal experience and empathy for the suffering of brothers in the pastorate could influence the researcher's thinking.

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[265] Merriam, Ch. 1 (Kindle)
[266] ibid.

Specifically, concern for the welfare of pastors in transition can lead to hasty conclusions in finding "best practices." While simply being sensitive to the danger is helpful, the systematic process of the interview format and the range of interviewees, together with the benefits of peer review, will help to mitigate the dangers of bias.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how experienced pastors prepare, set priorities, and make adjustments to their mode of operation when taking a call to an established church. The pastors were also queried as to the degree to which literature on pastoral transitions, business transitions, and family systems theory influenced them. The study was comprised of personal interviews with seven pastors who have made such a transition within the past five years and have successfully continued in that position. Toward that end, four research questions guided this study:

1. How did the pastors prepare themselves for the transitional entrance into pastoring an already established church?
2. What did the pastors consider to be their priorities for the first year of transition?
3. In what ways did the pastors make changes in their typical ministry style in the first year of transition?
4. In what ways and to what degree were the pastors' preparations, priorities, and changes in style informed by the findings of published transition literature?

Introduction of the Research Participants

While the names of the research participants have been changed to protect their identities, a number of personal and church characteristics may be relevant to the transition experience and so were included in this introduction. All of the interviewed pastors are ordained in and serving in churches of the Presbyterian Church in America.

Scott

Scott serves in a suburban church in the Midwest with a membership of about one thousand. He is forty-two years old, married, with four children who ranged in age from high school to college age at the time of the transition. His seminary training took place at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, and the studied transition was his fourth pastoral call.

Aaron

Aaron's church is in a rural area in the Midwest with a membership of about sixty. He is fifty-five years old, with a wife and six children from elementary age to post-college. He graduated from Covenant Seminary and experienced this transition as his first call.

David

David is forty-three years old, married with three children, all of whom were elementary school to infant age at the time of the new call. His church, also located in the Midwest, is rural/suburban with a membership of about one hundred and sixty. He attended Reformed Seminary in Orlando. This was David's third pastorate.

Chris

Chris is thirty-six years old and married. He attended Reformed Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. He served as an assistant pastor in another denomination before taking the call to his present church, which is in a rural/suburban area of the Midwest, with a membership of about sixty-five.

Brett

Brett is thirty-eight years old, married, with two children of pre-school age at the time of transition. His church is Midwest suburban, with a membership of over seven hundred. He attended Covenant Seminary, and the studied transition was his second.

Michael

Michael is forty-two years old, married with four children of pre-school to elementary age. He attended Covenant Seminary and served in two previous calls before taking the church under study. His suburban church is located in the East, with a membership of about one hundred and seventy.

John

John is fifty years old, married, and had two children of elementary age at the time of transition. His church, located in the Southeast, varies in its attendant membership from two hundred in the summer to nearly one thousand in the winter. John is a graduate of Reformed Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi.

Preparations for Transition

The participants were asked to reflect on three different areas of preparation prior to beginning their first year of transition. These included clarifying the sense of call, their family preparations, and getting ahead in preparation. A fourth category, trials as preparation for transition, appeared so often in the interviewees' comments, that it was included as a fourth area.

A Sure Foundation: Clarifying the Sense of Call

The literature on pastoral transitions indicated that a clear sense of God's calling to a specific field of service could impact a pastor's successful transition, so this question

was included in the interview. This particular area of inquiry generated the greatest volume of response from the participants. For four of the pastors, dissatisfaction with their present calling or actual closed doors led to consideration of something new. John described his situation as "philosophical differences" with one of the major ministries of the church. Added to this dissatisfaction was his commitment to always answer inquiries from churches that had received his name, for the sake of the person who recommended him. Michael attempted to plant a church until it became clear that it was not going to materialize. David, with the help of several mentors, came to this conclusion about his prior church:

> I came to be convinced of two things: One, my vision for where the church should be going – we could get there, but we would have to wait a long time…In fact, I had an elder tell me straight to my face, "Just wait ten years and enough of us will die that you can do whatever you want."…The other thing I realized is that, as much as I am a southerner, I'm a "southerner-light" in my family heritage and this is the first time living in the deep south…even though we were speaking the same words, worship-wise, we were speaking a different language…I didn't want to just up and leave but I was open.

After a very difficult experience in another denomination upon graduation from seminary, Chris found himself not only doubting his call to ministry, but also doubting his salvation. This occurred during four years that he spent doing corporate work after closing down a fledgling church plant and finding himself cut off from ministry opportunities as a result of unknown false accusations. Chris was finally exonerated and reconfirmed as gifted for ministry by his session. Following this action, he said, "When I was restored after meeting with the church there, one of the first things I did was I applied for ministry as a check."

Two of the other three participants, Scott and Brett, were not driven by dissatisfaction. In fact, they struggled with guilt about leaving their former churches. Yet

both felt the need to remain open to God's calling to a place where their gifts might be better utilized. Scott included in this commitment a fear of settling into something comfortable, something that would not require constant dependence on the Lord. The final participant, Aaron, having just graduated from seminary, was openly pursuing his first call.

While in most cases various ordinary means were used in the initial contact with the calling church, the process of confirming God's call to the church was, in some cases, accompanied by what the participants described as meaningful and even extraordinary events. John's prospective church contacted him on the recommendation of third parties without his prior knowledge. He gave the following impression of his first visit:

> This is one hundred percent subjective- I can't tell you I heard a voice. I said, "This place is nice because these folks are Kingdom-minded, big K. They really were mission-minded, which is really in my D.N.A. And they wanted to see the gospel proclaimed from the pulpit, not so much academically, but more of the "so-what" sermon. And now I'm starting to feel in my heart- this could be a good place.

For John, this personal, internal interest had to be matched by external agreement from his wife. It was meaningful to him that, in spite of the new church's far greater distance from his wife's family, she had also come to a conviction that they should accept the call. When they moved to the new location, a worship service was arranged to transfer leadership from the prior pastor to John. In his description of the prior pastor's charge to him while handing him the pew Bible, followed by John's thanksgiving for the prior pastor, he noted that, without any conferring, the same passage was chosen by both men for the other – a detail that John described as a "God-thing."

Aaron experienced an important change of heart during his seminary preparation that set the stage for his first call. Following his Spiritual and Ministry Formation class

during his first semester at Covenant Seminary, he met with his instructor, Dr. Phil Douglass for direction on his gifts and fit in ministry. Aaron commented, "Personally, I saw myself as more of scholar/teacher maybe, when I first came to seminary; I didn't think of myself as a pastor at all. I can remember meeting with him at the end of the first semester…and at the end he said, 'I believe you might have the gifts to be in a rural pastorate.'" Aaron described his initial incredulity about this opinion, followed by a shift over the next year or so to seeing real possibilities as he began to pray. As he began to accept preaching opportunities in rural churches in the area, he was introduced to the church that eventually called him. In discussing that process, Aaron described his desire as "moving more and more" in the direction of the rural ministry. One important concern in taking the call was the effect upon his oldest daughter, who was living at home and working in a good position after college. His sense of confirmation was strengthened by the fact that on the same day as his scheduled move, his daughter was hired to a similar job in the town to which they were moving.

Michael vividly described his transition from a failed church plant to a willingness to consider something new. He said to his wife,

> Okay, we're done. So then the question was, "Where do I go next?" So I decided to take a step back and ask, "Okay, should I even be in ministry? I went back as far as I needed to go before making any assumptions about what kind of role I should be in, just to see what the Lord was calling me to…internally I was like, "I don't know, Lord. I am definitely walking by faith right now because I didn't have that 'gung-ho' sense of give me the next hill to climb"…It was more like, "I think I still want to do this."

His initial step was to send out his ministerial data form through the denominational administrative committee and to watch the opportunities listed by the same committee online. The process was quite ordinary – the church sent Michael information about its

ministries, goals, and personality, which sparked interest. This was followed by a phone interview, which sparked even greater interest in his heart. As he interviewed with other churches, he found himself always comparing them with this church that eventually called him, finally realizing that he really wanted to go to that church. He was strongly affected, not only by the worship style but also by the fact that the church was healthy and loving. He found his calling confirmed when he was able to conclude, "If they don't hire us, we're moving here to be a part of this church."

David found significant help understanding his own ministry style through discussions with Phil Douglass and involvement in the Pastor's Summit at Covenant Theological Seminary, leading him to conclude that a change of call was in order. The opportunity to candidate at David's present church came to him specifically through the personal recommendations of men who knew him and knew the church. He went through the normal process of contact, sharing information, and interviews, but two important events involving his family confirmed the call. While David had discussed the opportunity with his wife from the beginning, it wasn't until later that they engaged their oldest, elementary-aged child, whose ties to the present area were important. When she found out that the new calling would be in a place where snow fell, she was quite excited, relieving her parents of their considerable concern. David also shared that, while he and his wife had prayed for God to raise up two people to lead a Mothers of Pre-Schoolers ministry at their present church, nothing ever materialized. On his second interview at the new church, the elder who hosted him shared that two people had just volunteered to begin a MOPS ministry, suggesting to David that God had prompted their prayers, not for the old church, but for the new one.

Chris's search for a call was limited by a series of personal commitments. Because a close friend who had served on a search committee had been inundated by resumes, he and his wife determined not to "spam" search committees with their information. They sent only nine resumes to churches that, with the help of mentors, were deemed to be a good fit. While four were considering him, Chris's new church came to his wife's attention, and she urged him to send a resume. Though he was resistant, doubting his chances, he yielded to his wife's wishes, both because of her strong urging and because her geographic preferences, wanting to stay close to family, were stronger than his. As the church went through the interview process and issued a call, Chris noted his conviction of God's call:

> One of the philosophies that I had was, I believe in being passive...meaning, we've got to discern the Lord's will, my wife trying to discern the Lord's will, all these people trying to discern the Lord's will and our own passion. But if a pulpit committee, prayerfully-not based on just emotions, unanimously elects you, the onus is on you to discern a "no," not to discern a "yes"...if I don't submit to the elders, I'm basically saying to them...God did not tell you that; your prayers were not answered; you have misinterpreted all that. How can I distinguish that from my own indigestion?

Scott actually said "no" to initial inquiries from his new church for several reasons. He was only two years into his call to his present church. He enjoyed the work there and felt that he would hurt the congregation to leave so quickly. Also, his wife had not yet recovered from the move to his present church and asked him not to move again so soon. Yet, he expressed doubts as to whether he had declined for the wrong reasons. In his musings about calling, Scott noted some of his negative reaction to what he considered man-centered efforts to match personality and preferences rather than submitting to God's call. He expressed the idea that sometimes God "makes you a fit" for the place to which he calls you. He summarized his own questions about the real struggle

to find conviction of call, saying, "We tell people they're called, and then we tell them, 'No, you're not.' 'Oh, I thought I was.' 'Nope, the committee decided you weren't.' So it's hard to figure out."

For Brett, the whole process was systematic. While content in his current position, he was also open to the next stage of ministry. The church contacted him, after which he said, "I took every day from the time they called me until the day I had to decide whether or not to do it." And he commented, "every time I agreed to a next step, I was committing myself at some level." He summarized his final process:

> It was never a lightning bolt. It was very much a struggle internally and, in some ways, externally because I had people here saying "This is where you need to be"...but then I had people at [my old church] saying, "No, you need to be here." I felt that there was no rock left unturned, and I had considered every option from every angle, and I just realized at some point along the way that I had all the data...I felt confident in that, based on the information I had at the time.

Several of the participants included summary advice for pastors considering a new call, much of it reflecting a consensus. Perhaps the greatest consensus was the importance of having a free heart to discern God's call. Scott expressed, "I wasn't looking for a job, so when I talked with the session, when I talked with the search committee, I was brutally honest." Aaron noted that in his initial involvement with his new church, he expected to be called to a southern church and so interacted with the search committee as a disinterested advisor. Out of that experience, he advised pastors to "be yourself." David noted, "I felt I could be myself and that's who they wanted." Chris sounded the same note: "I would say the biggie is to be yourself. Don't try to get the job. Answer the questions exactly as you would answer them in a conversation with a friend."

Michael's advice was of a different nature, growing out of his experience with the people in his new church. He advised, "Ask yourself when you're there on Sunday

morning for the first time, 'If I were not the pastor, would I want to worship here?' Because if the answer to that is 'No' then you probably ought to step back and go, 'Maybe I need to look somewhere else.'"

Each of these responses, centered in the conviction that it is important to be honest and transparent, was given in answer to the question "Do you have any summary advice for pastors taking a new call?" So it represented for them something of importance to be transferred to others.

A Family Affair: Family and Transition

In the process of clarifying their calls and transitioning to the field, family involvement played an important role for each of the participants. As noted in the section on "Clarifying the Sense of Call," each participant conferred with and was influenced by their spouse. John, for example, as he returned enthusiastically from his first interview, commented that he still had three problems. He listed his wife and two children, noting that "If they had said 'no' it wasn't going to happen." The engagement and support of Aaron's wife through the transition was so important that he said, "She is the most supportive person. She has been from the beginning. I wouldn't be here, humanly speaking, if it weren't for her." David was also deeply influenced by his wife in his consideration and final decision about his call, mostly over concerns for her welfare. He explained, "That was another thing that made me willing to move, because I knew that to stay in a place where my wife was going to dry up on the vine was not good."

Chris's wife not only served as a constant encouragement through earlier trials, but was also the one to doggedly press him to candidate at the church that finally called him. In addition, he noted his wife's direct involvement in his candidating, saying that,

"the commitment that we made was, my wife said, 'you need to always (phone) interview in front of me, because that way you have an audience. Chris, you are more of a public speaker, and you need an audience or you won't do as well by yourself, so always interview in front of me.'" Brett also stressed the importance of his wife's involvement in the process, noting, "I really have felt that all along the way that she has been with me. The Lord has brought us along in such a way that we stayed together."

While children did not typically play as pivotal a role in determining a call, it was interesting to see ways in which God worked in their lives through transition. Scott gave particular thought to the involvement of his children:

> My situation might be different than most. I was a preacher's kid, and we moved a lot…and I never knew, so it was frustrating…. So with the kids, I discussed it with them when I felt it was appropriate. My youngest son was in high school, and I was really concerned about him; but he was the one who said it seemed right (to move) and that I should just "man up" and do it, and it would be all right.

He added to this the conviction, "[Kids] are given too much responsibility to make decisions that the dad needs to make. So I wrestle with that. It is God first. And trust him to care – so if God says to go someplace and your whole family says 'No' then you have to go."

Aaron noted that, while his children had already gone through their greatest transition by leaving their home of seventeen years so that he could begin seminary, their oldest daughter was affected by the move to the calling church. Having finished college, she enjoyed living with her family while beginning her career, and she had a good job in St. Louis while Aaron attended Covenant. The fact that God provided a comparable job for her at the new church's location was very meaningful to him.

David's children knew Orlando as home, as he had gone to seminary there and had since been in churches in the south. When the oldest child, who didn't want to move, learned that the new location had snow, she was ready to move. John also noted that the happiness of his children was important in the decision to take the call, saying, "Okay, Lord, I don't care where, I'll move wherever you want me to go, but [my wife] has to agree and my children have to agree that this would be a great place." He shared that during the time that he was interviewing, the family had been watching reruns of the show *Gilligan's Island.* When the children learned that their new home would be on an island, they quickly warmed to the idea.

While only one participant declared that unwillingness on the part of the children to move would determine the decision, those providential events that moved the children towards readiness to relocate were very significant to each of them as the action of God to help their families.

Getting Ahead

In addition to establishing a clear sense of call and preparing their families for transition, the participants recalled a variety of other efforts to prepare ahead of time for the new church. In several cases, the pastors were able to plan their preaching based on recent work already done. David, for example, said,

> One thing I did decide to do was that my first sermon series would be one that I had done before, because I knew that would give me a little freedom. I tend to preach through books of the Bible, so I picked Colossians…It's a shorter book, it's one of Paul's letters and so tends to be easier for most people, and one of the themes of the book is who Christ is to the church, which I thought was a good foundation to start on as we're starting this relationship as pastor and church.

While Brett, as an assistant in his previous church, had not preached frequently, he had taught every Sunday night and was able to reuse some of the exegetical work. Aaron

made his transition from seminary to the calling church and so reflected on the importance of his preparatory efforts at school: "People would say C=M.Div. What does that mean? It means, do what you have to do to get by. I never could accept that. I may end up with a 'C,' but I'm not going to settle for that. I want to do the best I can do, not because of me, but because that is what God called me to, I believe, and anything less than that is, for me, unacceptable." Michael briefly echoed this sentiment, saying, "I cannot imagine not being in seminary."

Four participants were able to talk with the church's previous pastor as a preparation for their own work. John's entrance to the field overlapped the exit of the previous pastor by a week, allowing him to learn about the church and about how the pastor carried out his work. Michael noted that his church-planting coach knew the previous pastor of his church and was able to learn about the state of the church from him, while Michael himself was able to engage the pastor for about ten minutes. Brett talked with his preceding colleague at length, and Scott noted that he had called the preceding pastor as a planned part of his preparation.

Two of the participants spoke of important preparations, conducted by or for the calling church before their arrival that smoothed the transition. Scott shared about a special study conducted by his calling church on the typical effects of transition on the congregation. This prepared both him and the church session for the fluctuations in attendance and giving that followed. Michael noted that the interim work of an experienced pastor in the year preceding his arrival cemented the fellowship of the elders and provided healing that Michael felt he could not have accomplished.

Along with these common preparations, several participants noted concerns that were specific to themselves or to their situation. Chris's preparations were specifically aimed at leadership skills:

> The biggest crisis for them was lack of leadership. There were very many strong personalities on the session, men who were older than my father, and men who were very accomplished in their careers…I knew that they were going to try to follow me, so I was going to try to be worthy of that. I really wanted to brush up on my leadership skills and gain wisdom, so I read probably a thousand pages…six or seven John Maxwell books that summer.

Aaron included in his preparations memorization of the Shorter Catechism, noting that "Just in those succinct statements you have your theology…so that when somebody comes to you and says, 'What is justification? What is sanctification?' you can…remind people, 'this is what God has done here.'"

Scott commented that his most important preparation was in readying his old church for his departure, knowing that they would be hurt. David echoed that concern and gave it attention before he left. He also remembered training that he had actually undergone to serve his prior church, but which became helpful preparation for his new church. Because the previous church had not engaged in any drafting of mission or vision, David said, "We had someone from Christian Education and Publications come and train whoever was interested in the church on how to go about doing that. So I had been through some training and had led my previous church through that process, and I felt that I had a decent handle on how to do it."

Of the preparations discussed, one stood out by its absence, perhaps because it was simply assumed: prayer. Yet, John did speak of the calling church's prayers for the transition, and several participants briefly mentioned their prayers with their spouses as

they prepared. Brett concluded his remarks on preparation with an observation from hindsight:

> My thought process was very systematic as I prepared, with a pro and con chart. At times I struggled with, "Should my first instinct be to call someone or to pray?" Even now as I have decisions to make, I've asked myself, "Shouldn't my first response be to ask the Lord?" I felt that at times I leaned too heavily on others' advice when I really should have been taking it to the Lord. Now it has to be both/and, but it is easier for me to talk this way for an hour than to pray for an hour.

Whether common or unusual, these preparations played an important role in helping the participants enter their first year of transition with a certain level of confidence.

Trials as Preparation

One of the more intriguing aspects of these discussions on preparation had to do with trials. In many cases, they served as the crucible in which men were trained to handle their present calling. More than once, participants declared that they could never have entered the present work had it not been for their previous trials. Michael commented,

> I could not have done this if I was still the person that I was leaving St. Louis and going to plant that church. The process of…watching it die a slow death was painful; it was painful because it exposed my own fear of failure and fear of man, and so those idolatries of significance and success still bind us up as ministers…The other thing I'll say real quick is that after I got the call, one of the elders that was on the search committee said to me within my first couple of months of being here, "You know, Michael, one of the reasons we hired you is because you failed. We wanted a guy who knew how to fail."

Aaron shared with great difficulty the deep emotional valley his wife went through as they prepared to take the call:

> I had just finished school, and I was getting ready to transition to licensure and ordination. She broke down and went for…literally weeks – she wouldn't eat a bite. She lost about thirty pounds and couldn't get out of bed…I didn't know what to do, and I needed to just take care of her. She wanted me to sit and read the Bible to her, and I would sit for hours…

Aaron concluded from this personal trial, "God grew me. There's a way that God uses that none of us can understand, but suffering can grow you as nothing else can."

Chris spent a fair amount of interview time recounting a four-year ordeal preceding his call. His first call out of seminary found him as an assistant pastor in the middle of a church split in a denomination that pressured him to gather and re-plant a group of seventy-seven people as a church. He tied himself closely to the local PCA church for oversight, and events ultimately led him to discontinue the planting effort and prepare the remaining people for membership in that church. He admitted, "I knew subconsciously that I was getting rid of something. I didn't feel like I was building anything. And so I was starting to doubt my calling, asking, 'What sort of person am I that the Lord has to protect these people from me? I'm getting rid of them.' Yeah, it was difficult."

Added to that trial was the additional experience of having his reputation damaged through false accusations lodged without his knowledge, a difficulty that cut him off from ministry employment for several years. And what purpose did Chris find in such a trial? Reflecting on his family's mode of handling adversity, Chris observed, "That whole mentality of feeling that you get over it, you just press through and keep on going is really good for leading through crisis, but if you aren't in crises, you tend to make them and you have this whole swath of casualties behind you." He concluded, "Yeah, I needed that. I would have destroyed a church…and if I had not gone through what I went through, neither my wife nor I would have been able to endure our first three years [here]. No matter how bad things got, it was never worse than what we had gone through, and we had seen God bring us out of that…"

Several participants mentioned the trial of overload that complicated their preparations to move to a new call. David shared that in the year of their transition, they traveled to China in April to adopt their third child, who then required two surgeries that summer, followed in October by the birth of their fourth child and the move to the new church in November. David noted that this left little time for preparation. He emphasized, "This is significant because in living life you can't always go through this whole cognitive 'How do I prepare? What do I read?'" Brett also faced significant events in the same year as his transition: "Our third son was due to be born in September…and my mom had, around the same time, been diagnosed with cancer, from which she since was able to be treated and recovered. So there were a lot of things happening simultaneously." Thus, the demands of life created considerable pressure for several participants.

Finally, Scott noted a certain psychological pressure that he faced as he entered the new call. It had helped him to know in advance that established churches will typically experience a loss of members after the first year with the arrival of a new pastor. Advance warning was especially important for him because, he said, "I had not been in a situation where I showed up and the numbers went down…ever! I mean, when you're planting a church, even if you're the worst at it, there are going to be more than two people- you and your wife. So you're going to see this tremendous growth. So I'd not been in a situation like that."

Each of these trials, whether emotional and psychological or circumstantial, played a significant role in the transition and sometimes proved to be the most important preparation the pastor experienced.

Priorities in the First Year

In order to better understand the participants' experiences of transition, each was asked to comment on the priorities they had set as they prepared to take their new call. They were queried as to those things that were important to them, the possible priorities that they rejected as unimportant, things that might have been done differently, and challenges or changes in their priorities.

What Was Important

Several of the men specifically mentioned an intentional focus on preaching the gospel. John mentioned that he was first drawn to his church by the fact that they were "kingdom-minded." Both he and the previous pastor shared a "high view of scripture" and preached gospel-centered messages. He added, "I almost give an invitation every Sunday because there are so many people coming through the door." This agreed with what John described as the desires of the congregation: "And they really wanted to see the gospel proclaimed from the pulpit, not so much academically, but more of the 'so what' of the sermon."

Aaron noted that he took every opportunity to teach without pushing others aside, saying, "you've got to have the means of grace and a strong pulpit ministry." He added to this a critical priority: "How quickly we can, without even realizing it, not lay that good grace foundation, that indicative that drives and informs the imperative." His concern led to the weekly practice of having his wife give back to him what she heard in his sermon plus his own review of the recording on Monday mornings, asking the question, "Is the grace there?" Chris described himself as a "normal means of grace guy" which meant, "read the word, preach the word" as the pastor's primary tool. Scott framed his goals for

Sunday morning in broader terms than preaching, but included in his description of his goals, "that I could with good conscience tell a person that, if you're here for a year it will be good for you. If you commit yourself to coming and just being a part of Sunday morning and K-group, you'll be a better person spiritually."

For each of the participants, very strong emphasis was placed upon the first-year priority of building relationships with the session and members of the congregation. This emphasis was expressed in both the question of what should be done and what should not be done. John emphasized, "I would say some basic people skills would go a long, long, way…I mean, listening – there are probably a lot more guys in the PCA who are holier than I am, who love Jesus far more than I do, but I wonder if people think that they really care." Aaron said, "you just have to come in and love people, you know…pulpit ministry – that's what they hired you for – and just build relationships." Michael agreed, stating, "The first year priority was to get to know the people and let the people get to know me." David also supported the priority of getting to know the congregation, saying, "I think that's your major concern moving into a new church; it's just learning who are these people…what's their story? What are their issues? What do they struggle with?" While each of the participants expressed this sentiment, Brett included his reasons for prioritizing people in his first year:

> Part of the reason for that is I really feel that change in a church is a transaction in trust. The question people want to know of their new pastor is "Can we trust this guy?"…I am just going to build relational capital, and as things come around that need to be changed, I want to be careful about the way that I lean on people's trust and not to do it for the wrong things.

There was also broad consensus on the particular importance of building relationships with officers, staff, and other leaders. John listed several key practices that

guided his actions in building those relationships. The first was a state of mind learned from Bear Bryant, the legendary coach of the University of Alabama, and translated into ministry practice by a pastor friend: "If there is success in the church, 'they' succeeded. If there is failure in the church, I screwed up." Applying this philosophy to operations with the staff, John noted that it created a greater freedom for the staff to carry out their work. He shared, "Knowing – for the people out there or in this office – knowing that I got their back, that's huge." The second key practice that John discussed was the need to honor the lay leadership by including them in the decision-making process:

> Listening is important. One thing that I did at month three, I got everybody in my fellowship hall, any ministry leader – I didn't care whether you led the nursery, whatever – there were about sixty people there. And I asked them four questions…and the smart thing was, I didn't facilitate it. I had a friend come in from out of town, so I became one of the sixty.

He went on to describe a patient, year-long process of drawing out of his leaders reasons for that church's existence, long-range goals, and decisions about what to begin with that year.

As he reflected on immediate priorities, Michael commented, "One of the things I've done – I'm not sure where I caught it – was the need to get together with each of the elders each month, one-on-one…no business – that can't be on the table. It's just relationship." David's comments on the priority of elder relationships were similar: "I think the main thing was just having conversations. I focused first on the elders. I wanted to get to know each of the elders, so I made sure that I scheduled one-on-one time." Brett echoed this commitment, but with greater frequency, meeting with one elder each week, though noting that it wasn't perfect.

Scott agreed with this priority, but framed it in a different way: "If I had to say the things that I've done right, I would say honesty with your session." David added another component to his priority of elder engagement. Speaking of Steve Brown's class on practical ministry, he shared,

> One of his stories that was very influential for me was the way he led session meetings. The way he approached his session meetings was each elder was responsible for one segment of ministry. Rather than discuss it in their session meetings, each elder would just give a report, and if there was an issue they had to decide on, they would decide on it, but most of the work they would leave in his hands. And so the session meetings became less of a business meeting and freed them to have more of their session meeting be a prayer time and a vision time for the church.

Coming to the new church with this lesson in mind, David commented, "Okay, I'm a little more experienced. I'm a little bit older. I'm a little closer in age to these guys. I want to go in feeling more like a spiritual leader and acting more like a spiritual leader on the session. I feel like we got a good start, and it's grown."

As another common priority, several of the pastors noted that they needed to make changes in the worship service almost immediately. Scott said, "I had to make Sunday morning an event that I could invite my neighbor to. That was first priority for me." Those adjustments were not simply in the form of the service; they focused also on removing cultural barriers that would hinder people in the community from engaging with understanding. Aaron was careful about immediate changes, but noted, "They handed me the worship service almost immediately." He changed the very loose liturgy to what he described as a Reformed style of worship, learned from his studies at seminary, which he said was well received.

John was also careful about immediate changes. He executed some early changes in worship to reflect a bit of his own personality, but more to secure the unity of the

church in worship. He sidestepped the music controversy affecting some churches by strongly supporting both traditional music and contemporary, while adding his own unusual twist of preferring Psalm singing, which he added from time to time. He also made sure that the highly regarded organist would play with every piece, regardless of style. Also, as a symbolic move, he undid the visual separation caused by placing the organ on one side and the contemporary instruments on the other, instead moving them all together as one unit. The resulting effort was an eclectic blend that produced virtually no friction in the congregation.

Chris made several changes to address symbolically and materially what he considered to be dangerous tendencies in the church. For example, because he recognized two strong factions in the church – one side that leaned towards legalism and the other side that leaned towards freedom from law – he guided the session through those concerns and almost immediately instituted the use of wine in communion. As he did so, he forthrightly instructed the congregation to follow conscience while, in observing other members, avoiding judging those who drank as immoral, or looking down on those who did not as weak. He also called them to repent of such thoughts. In addition, he noted that the worship music was primarily hymns using a contemporary style of music drawn from the Presbyterian Church in America's Reformed University Fellowship's published music. But he addressed what he viewed as a waste of God's gifts of musical talent – the barring of certain instruments from worship as unacceptable. He said,

> In a church of our size – my call was seventy-nine to one – we had two cello players, a banjo player, a mandolin player, two guitar players, a violinist, three incredibly gifted vocalists, and a lap dulcimer player. This is not a coincidence – you cannot deny this! And so, because it came from the congregation, it wasn't as divisive as it might have been if we had brought it in from the outside. These were their friends and neighbors up there playing.

In several cases, then, changes in public worship were viewed as necessary for the welfare of the church.

In addition to these common priorities, several participants listed important priorities of unique concern. Michael, who approached his new church with a primary commitment to take time to know the congregation and become known, still had a deep desire to support church planting. He recalled,

> I knew from what they told me that they were open to the idea of being a church-planting church. There wasn't a desire to be a mega-church, to get that big plot of land and build a huge sanctuary and become the one in the suburbs that everybody would come to. That wasn't what they wanted; that's not what I want. And I was up front with them about wanting to see churches planted throughout the region.

So toward the end of the first year, Michael invited a church-planting expert to first meet for a weekend with the session and then to address the congregation at a Saturday night meeting before preaching on church-planting on Sunday morning. This set the stage for an on-going but consistent process of becoming a church-planting church.

Chris, who felt called to exercise strong leadership at his new church, where there had been a leadership vacuum, placed great emphasis on re-building trust and respect for the session. The church had lost three highly regarded elders to an earlier split, and Chris noted that the congregation had a tendency to view the remaining elders as "the junior varsity team." Added to this problem was the tendency to operate as "a congregational church led by unanimity – even one vote could scuttle a plan." Following the example of a mentor, he began speaking of every decision as a decision of "your session." He also consciously exercised shepherding leadership himself without apology. He explained, "They needed pastoral leadership to come in…and say, 'Hey flock, you've been heading this way, you were headed in this direction, had a path, but I'm the shepherd. I'm going

over there and you are following me. And some of you are not going to like it, but we're going a different way.'"

Aaron had similar concerns about his new church. He explained, "This church came out of a Bible Church background, congregational government, not an elder-led church." Concerned about consistency in the church's teaching and structure, Aaron worked patiently his first year to simply build relationships with the elders and lead by example. So it was two years before he directly addressed this priority. John also noted several things that were priorities after the first six months. He acted on his commitment to foreign missions by pushing short-term missions for the congregation, including those who returned to their northern homes in the spring. He led by example through his own travels to a closed country to do evangelism. He also began to look for ways to tie the half-year members to the church while they were away. So regional events were initiated in cities where groups of members lived during the summer months, and John began to travel to these various cities to conduct services.

Thus, while the outstanding priority for each of the participants was to know the congregation and to become known, there were some matters that required immediate attention for the good of the church. And there were early, small steps towards what would become important foci for the pastors' later ministries.

What was Not Important or Priorities to Avoid

While discussing the issue of priorities for the first year, it became clear that the participants were focused as much on what not to do as on what should be done. This was typically framed as not moving too quickly or trying to move without adequate knowledge of the congregation. John, for example, commented that "the mistake I made

in [my former church] was thinking I could change the culture." Because this was due, at least in part, to not understanding that culture, John said, "Now I can tell you what I learned. My first six months here, I didn't change a thing…I went six months." When asked whether he had first-year priorities, Michael simply responded, "No, I didn't. The first year priority was to get to know the people and let the people get to know me; it was not to come in with an agenda." Brett agreed with this common position, noting, "To me those relationships were the main things I wanted to work on. I was not interested in making any changes to anything that wasn't completely broken." And Scott had seen, through his experience watching another pastor make sweeping changes in his first year, the damage it could cause. He concluded,

> Maybe those things needed to happen, but not in the first six months. Folks are mourning the loss of a pastor. They're feeling, if the pastor went on to another church, a sense of "we weren't good enough for him." And so if you're coming in and you're highlighting some of the differences and if you take away other things…if you take away those things too quickly, everything that they've held onto… So I would say, just be really careful and slow.

Aaron reflected on his own lessons as he agreed with these comments:

> I've kind of a driven personality anyway. If it had not been for the blessing of seminary, I would have been like a bull in a china shop. I would have stomped all over this church and made a mess. I'm used to getting things done…but I learned, not only through seminary but as God was working in my life, you can't just come in and start making changes…It's one thing to know that change is needed. It's important to be a strong leader – there's a place for that. But ministry takes time, and we have to love people and know that people grow at different paces, and you can't just come in gangbusters…it would have been a shambles.

But as he stated this position, Aaron also introduced, as a caution, that one not lean too far in the other direction, long neglecting changes that need to be made simply because an influential person in the church may resist such changes. He described the complexity as

"navigating those waters somewhere between doing nothing and stepping on everyone's toes."

A number of the men included as a non-priority the theme of trying to make sure every person would like them or like what they were doing. David shared about a particularly difficult relationship that "we had tried and tried to work through it, and it just kept blowing up." After being chastised for trying too hard and being counseled to "be himself," David internally realized, "I am being myself, and that's what you're rejecting." That realization freed him to let go of the relationship. He explained, "I can't change who I am. If this person can't accept me for who I am, that's okay. I don't have to be the former pastor." Michael commented in a similar way about a few families who left in anger before his arrival, returned when he came, and were leaving again, noting, "It's sad, but you can't do anything about it."

So while strong emphasis was placed upon maintaining the peace of the church, taking time to connect with people and build capital, it was also recognized that not everyone will be pleased, not all will stay, and that the incoming pastor must recognize that he will face people who either don't like him or don't like the actions he feels he must take at the right time for the good of the church.

What Might Have Been Done Differently

Even as these experienced men shared their counsel on priorities and non-priorities, they also recognized that they were learning along the way. John made this general observation,

> I was on the candidates committee of presbytery. If a person who came to us was not humble, I was trying to figure out why in the world they're going into the ministry. Did Jesus not say, "I came to serve and not to be served?" And I see

> some of these guys coming out, they've got the answer to everything in the world and I want to say, "You give me a break. I'm still learning."

With that admonition taken to heart, several of the participants shared lessons learned the first year. Aaron was pleased with church relationships and the smoothness of the transition. However, in speaking of his family connection to his new town, he admitted, "We tried to fit into the community to some degree. I probably have not done as well with that as I might have, but found out later – much later, that it's kind of a known thing around here that [this town] is a hard community to break into."

In at least one case, the demands of family led to some missed opportunities. David remarked,

> In retrospect, if I could have done anything different the first year, I would have tried to be more proactive, more intentional about getting together one-on-one with each family unit. I felt like I dropped the ball on that one. We would have people over to our house or meet with them in studies, but I really guarded my family time and felt like I needed to.

David added to this a statement of regret that he felt he had begun the vision-casting process too quickly, based upon the fact that he and the elders had to revise it so quickly. Because those revisions grew out of the realization that many were wounded and needed to grieve and heal, he concluded that a focus on knowing the congregation would have been a better use of the time. He observed, "I think my leadership would have been helped if I had taken more time to listen to everyone's story instead of jumping into that 'let's think forward.' You know, they weren't ready to think forward." Brett echoed this sentiment, saying, "[I] wish that I had met with more people…I think that seems to be time well spent…looking back, I wish I had done it more, as some relationships have been slower to develop because I was passive about that." Brett added that he felt that

there were lesser things for which he expended relational capital early on, wishing he had "kept his powder dry" for greater things.

In two cases, specific projects were missed or improperly changed. John mentioned one program that he regretted changing. "Here's a mistake I made," he said, "I tried to change Wednesday night into a one hundred percent teaching time." He went on to describe the importance of that time for so many as fellowship time. He responded to this mistake by admitting to the congregation, "I made a mistake," defaulted back to the old format, added some humor to the first part of the meeting, and relaxed the schedule. This direct admission and reworking of the original program resulted in a good response from the congregation. Brett noted that he also missed an opportunity before entering the field: "I talked to guys who were in my situation when they accepted the call to the church who wrote a letter to the congregation thanking them and saying, 'I'm looking forward to being with you.' I think it would have been a great thing to do."

In a few cases, the participants noted resources to which they were later introduced that they felt could have helped their transition. Michael has recently engaged in the Intersect Forum at Covenant Seminary, a program designed to stimulate conversation between pastors and family business owners. Due to his engagement, he said, "This book we're reading for Intersect, *Leadership on the Line?* Man, I would have loved to have had that." He added that the opportunity to dialogue through the program has been outstanding and could have been an earlier help as well. Brett also noted, "It would have been helpful for someone to say…'Here are some things to think about as you get started, beyond just finding a house, etc.' I got Callahan's book six months into [my transition], so the chapter on the first six months wasn't much use."

Challenges and Changes in Priority

At several points, the participants wanted to share about obstacles that they faced in navigating the priorities of the first year. At times, those obstacles or greater understanding led to changes in the initial priorities, and these, too, were captured in this section. Brett noted that the urgency of some important matters distracted him from relational priorities. Several sensitive staff and pastoral issues, searches for a youth pastor and children's minister, and walking the staff through transition, demanded much time. David's experience was more personal, but similar. He recounted the confusion of both a new baby and a new adoptive child from overseas in the family, making it very difficult to leave the family at night to do visitation.

David also shared an interesting challenge that changed his priorities. His efforts to press forward with a vision statement did produce a result, but as he became more familiar with the congregation, he discovered a strong and neglected need for members to be assisted with grief. In shifting his priority, he noted,

> Another thing that I've learned in the transition process is that whether a pastor leaves or a pastor dies, there is a grieving process that the church has to go through. And most of us are not equipped in leadership to know how to guide a church through the grieving process. So I feel like that's one of the areas where transition becomes hard.

John mentioned that his efforts to unify worship required adjustments in the worship bulletin, which is often a touchy issue. By introducing the church's prominent stained glass window as a motif, not only for the new bulletin, but also for stationery, shirt logos, and business cards, he was able to turn a potentially divisive move into a unifying process. Aaron came to his church with the goal of engaging in a good bit of home visitation, only to find that his rural church consisted primarily of non-rural, more

professional members who were not enthusiastic about home visits. "So we turned it on its heel" he said, "and we started inviting people to our home, so all the visitation was very relational, talking over a meal, and it worked very well."

Scott noted, with some regret, "There will be people who don't want growth. They don't want new people in the church. And it will surprise you and hurt you, but there will be people who are not as excited as you are when new people show up because they'll see it as more work." So his priority to reshape the church into a place where people in the neighborhood would feel welcome met some resistance. Chris noted that, as a general rule,

> I'm not a big fan of young guys coming in, changing things, and making the church in their image…but there are times when something's going down and you have to pull back on the stick. When I came in, I had to make, against better judgment…four or five major changes in the first four months. Again, I didn't want to, but someone had to pull back on the stick.

So, facing a congregation somewhat divided and in need of strong leadership, he had to operate in a decisive way, though he normally would have acted more slowly.

Aaron listed particular challenges to his desire to unify the church under a structure of biblical and Reformed theology. The congregational challenge was complicated by the fact that a prominent elder had overseen the Christian education program and resisted Aaron's efforts toward consistency. Along with this challenge, his experience with resistance to home visits led not only to a shift in venue to his home, but also to a new ministry. He explained, "Another thing that's interesting…is that in a small town like this there are three nursing homes, so we have an important nursing home ministry…there's a lot of visitation that goes on there, some that are members and some

that are not." So, in this case a challenge to the original priority led to an unexpected form of caring outreach.

While not all of the participants included challenges and changes in their original priorities, those mentioned indicate that such obstacles are not a rarity in transition.

Changes in Ministry Style

Recognizing that the congregation of a church, like any family system, will normally exert pressure on newcomers to the system to conform and find equilibrium, the researcher sought to explore this aspect of the transition experience. This was done through questions designed to identify the participants' normal mode of ministry style and to identify changes in style upon entrance to the field.

Set in Stone: What Didn't Change

For John, the most prominent trait that didn't change, one that appeared at almost every juncture of the conversation, was his natural attraction to people and his sensitivity to their feelings. Early in the interview, he shared his first experiences traveling to locations in the north where a number of his parishioners resided. Of the forty people who gathered for this first meeting, he knew perhaps four. But he noted that "After that, I knew them, and...do you see that fishing rod? That's an ice fishing rod they gave me.... What they give me, I put here (in the office) so as people return in January, they walk in, and that stuff is here. I know that it's a big deal. It's just people skills, just relating with people." That attraction and sensitivity demonstrates John's spoken commitment revealed in a variety of phrases, such as, "Yeah, I'm a people person," "You listen – listening is important," "I would say some basic people skills would go a long way."

Aaron described himself as a naturally proactive leader. In commenting on this, he shared that, according to the elders,

> The previous pastor was more passive than I am as a personality. And [regarding a power struggle over Christian education] that was a battle he didn't want.... Please hear how I'm saying this because I don't want to set myself over this. But I felt I had to die on that hill. You cannot preach one thing from the pulpit and be taught something else in a Sunday school class.

So while Aaron related a number of examples where he patiently bided his time, this trait of firm leadership remained an underlying reality. And it expressed itself in a difficult and important situation. Aaron discussed his decision to confront the theological inconsistency in his church that was, in large part, sustained by the leadership of a prominent elder. "That was one of the first things," he said, "that I finally stepped in and did after nearly two years, which wasn't easy, but I felt like it was the right thing to do." He noted that the man had exercised considerable leadership power for some time, "but he had run roughshod over people for too long, and by the time it was time to make that change they were ready...part of that was they were glad that I was able to stand up against this guy." On a separate note to this trait, Aaron shared his conviction about the pastor being himself: "When you get to seminary, you're sitting around all these wonderful professors and you wish you could be just like them...but [God] didn't call R. C. Sproul or Tim Keller here. God has put you in a place where he wanted you." So the desire to be consistently faithful to God's call in the face of opposition emerged as a part of Aaron's character.

For Michael, willingness to walk through difficulty shines through as an unchanging commitment. Reflecting on his experience in the failed church plant, he said,

> Yeah, failure has been crucial for my ministry (laughs). But it has...it has. I can't remember the Psalm, that God's way is through the sea. That's life. There's no

> circumventing failure, risk, or hurt in order to be used by God in his kingdom. His way is through the sea, always through the sea in relationships; his way is through the sea in terms of suffering. You don't get to do the flyover – you don't. It's his way.

David repeated his conviction that he needed to be free to be himself rather than affecting a style pleasing to someone else. So, concerning his previous church, he said, "I love this church, I love these people, but I'm probably not the right person to lead them because I felt like I had to be different." And, at the new church, "That was important to me. I felt like I could be myself, and that's who they wanted. And that was important to me."

Chris came to his new church with a certain understanding of himself. That understanding, impressed upon him by a mentor/friend, was expressed this way:

> Yes, I am preparing my church for a soft, lovely man to come in…at the time I said to [my mentor], "I thought we were friends!" He said, "Some guys get to go places and do twenty years of ministry, but you're the guy who gets to come in and fix everything, take the slings and arrows – it doesn't bother you. And you're going to move on and do it in another church." I said, "I don't want to be that guy." And he said, "Well, maybe the Lord will change that, but for now that's who you are."

For this reason, Chris entered his church with the idea that he needed to exercise strong leadership, absorb the blows that come with aggressive change, and be prepared for the possibility of limited time in his calling. His efforts have consistently reflected this early conviction.

When Brett was asked whether the long and storied pastoral history of his new church created pressure to be someone other than himself, he responded,

> That's a good question. In some ways I did feel the external mantle…I will tell you, and this is not because I'm super-spiritual at all, but the way I was, the way the Lord brought us here in rather dramatic, rapid fashion, actually gave me more confidence to be myself…free to be myself because I felt called to be here.

Scott expressed a strong inner need to have impact, to make a difference in his calling. Concerned that he might find himself a "chaplain," that is, serving as caretaker for Christian people, he has been committed to "leading a charge, leading a mission." Along with this, he noted an inner tendency to be affected by "boredom with the long haul" so that he would "jump from thing to thing almost like it was a dating relationship." This led to a commitment to think long-term, to watch his tendency to wander. Added to these early commitments was another commitment. He explained, "It wasn't just for me to come and do things my way…that's not how I operate. No, it's 'What do we have and where are we? What's God given?'" This commitment to see how God has equipped and situated the church has served as a sustained underlying trait in Scott's approach to ministry. In addition, Scott articulated a view of church ministry founded on personal discipleship. He said, "The vision is, 'What is that person going to be like? What is their life going to be like? What are they going to learn, experience, and change so that- when it says about the Sanhedrin that they took note that [the disciples] had been with Jesus, that there was something about those disciples.'"

An Old Dog Learns New Tricks: What Changed

Having discussed areas of commitment where the style of ministry operation wouldn't change, the participants also shared areas where their mode of operation did change with the church's influence. While John was rooted in a style of ministry he described as being a "people person," he learned a structured kind of care from the previous pastor that he then shaped to his own personality.

> [The previous pastor] had a knack for being able to memorize everybody's name. So if you were here two weeks in February, he would know. And the way I found that he would do this is he kept a master list of people coming in. There would be this list and he would say, "The Smiths are due in, the Jones' are coming" and he

> would go through this and refresh his memory so when they'd walk in the door, he'd say, "Hey Bob and Barb- glad to have you."

John's response to this practice was to apply himself to the same practice. "Now I'm learning this, but I'm nowhere near..." In similar fashion, he learned that the previous pastor sent cards for birthdays and anniversaries to those members who had returned to homes in the north for the summer as a way of maintaining contact. Bill added to that practice: "My first summer...I realized that about a third of our people came from around a hundred miles from Grand Rapids, Michigan. And so I went up on a Thursday and had a couple of parties, just as celebration, and then preached in two different churches and had a...service in July in Grand Rapids." This grew into an annual trip north to various centers like Grand Rapids, allowing year-round connection with the larger congregation. These changes reflect Bill's basic commitment to care for people combined with structural tricks learned from the previous pastor.

Aaron also discussed some areas where his normal mode of ministry operation changed with experience. Of note was his growing sense that ministry is an engagement in warfare. He commented,

> I used to wonder why in the world...this is such a small church. Why are these attacks coming, and why is the conflict the way it is? And the thing is, first of all, God's word is God's word and the Spirit works with it. That's what we believe, and it's just like ripples in a pond. We've got a little bitty church, but who knows who that will impact over years of time as you're trying to be faithful to the word, and the enemy of our souls doesn't want that. I'm nobody. I mean, I used to be a truck driver; nothing about me has anything to hold myself up in front of anybody. But you try to be faithful, and there are going to be these attacks.

This insightful perspective on conflict and its wider implications came through the experience of trial over the past several years at his church.

Michael noted that, while he had learned much from the experience of suffering, he had much to learn of a practical nature about the orderly leadership of a church. He cited such issues as "What does it mean to moderate a session? Running a meeting like that, developing an agenda, was all new. Leading a staff was new. I went from being me, working out of the bedroom in my house, to I've got an administration and I've got another guy on staff doing ministry with me, so that was new." All of this required the development of new skills and disciplines not previously required. In addition, Michael mentioned his realization that he needed study leave time. "When I'm in context, it is all about the day-to-day, week-to-week stuff of ministry. And nothing allows me to think big picture and start to think strategy [other] than to get out of context, even if it is just outside the city limits."

David noted two specific areas where his mode of ministry style changed with experience in his new church. The first was a sobering realization:

> I feel like that's where transition becomes hard. Because a new guy comes in who has a different worldview, a different set of experiences, a different personality, and the people who are here have their set of expectations and habits that…can never line up perfectly. And so that's what transition is; it is working together through the process.

The very entrance of someone new into the existing system of the church virtually assures disruption and even conflict. That understanding led David to another realization: "It's hard…every pastor wants to be liked. You're going to be liked by most and not liked by some, and that's where we have to develop a thick skin and realize that if it really is Christ's church then it really is Christ's church." Through this conviction, David was able to release those who could not rest under his leadership to another fellowship

without taking it personally. Yet he noted, "It's very easy to be discouraged at a very deep personal level and to feel rejected when people leave."

Scott spoke of the changes required of him as he stepped into a larger church. "I felt that when I planted, I was a good pastor of about one hundred and fifty people. Once we got to one hundred and seventy, and I couldn't keep in touch with all those people- that next level of organization and infrastructure, I didn't think I could set it up." On one level, the larger church challenged his commitment to discipleship. He questioned, "Am I right for this if I really want to go deeper with a dozen men but it can't be done?" Discipleship, then, had to take a different form in a large church. The style of ministry in a larger church required changes as well. Scott expressed the daily challenge of that change: "I like spending time with people, studying the word and preaching the word, and I just love that, but I probably should go to Grandparents Day at our church school...probably should be there, shouldn't I?" He noted in this respect the challenge of developing a passion for ministries formed before his arrival, asking the question, "Do I need to change or does it need to change?" All of these challenges have grown out of a shift from small church ministry to large church ministry, much of it requiring a shift in Scott's mode of operation.

Chris described the change in his style of ministry as something rooted in his trials before coming to his church. His youthful tendency to face all adversity with a determination to "suck it up and move on" was deeply affected by trials that he could not simply forget. Yet he noted that the strength to face opposition and provide strong leadership to his present church has been a constant provision beyond his human ability: "I couldn't – I couldn't. I lacked the personality to do that."

Finally, Brett described the most difficult shift in ministry style that he faced as he moved from assistant pastor to senior pastor – the problem of isolation. Having left a circle of meaningful relationships in his previous church, he described the experience as "a slinky effect," where the sense of call and the commitment to the work appeared long before the "emotional commitment." He commented, "We really felt that more strongly in this move than we have previously." The reason he gave was,

> I think part of that is that the senior pastor position is just a different relational network. It is a different place, a more isolating place. I think not having the same kind of relationships when we got here and still not having the same kind of relationships has delayed that move to a more stable place. People look to you in a different way than when you don't have that kind of responsibility.

Thus, operating as a shepherd with a dearth of emotional support required a different mode of operation than previously. Brett added to this "the burden of responsibility-of vision, where are we going, and people – how are they doing…It's the weight. I was not ignorant of it; I just had not experienced it." So as responsibility increased, the level of personal support decreased, exacerbating his sense of isolation. The change in Brett's mode of operation has been to try to function effectively within that state of isolation.

Here, then, are a number of ways in which the relational and structural system of the established church required changes in the normal mode of operation under which the participants previously served. Sometimes the participants viewed these adjustments as maturing in ministry, and sometimes they described them as an unresolved challenge. While not every pastor experienced the same stresses in the face of such adjustments, each of them was aware that the adjustments were a challenge.

Influences on Ministry

Finally, each of the participants was asked about important influences that impacted the transition to their new church. Two categories of influence were discussed: that of written material and that of mentors.

By the Book: Written Influences

Participants were asked to share about books they read in preparation for or during the first year of transition. John was emphatic in his recommendation of reading preparation: "I want to recommend one book that's the most theologically astute book that any minister should read. I think it should be required reading for any M.Div. student or anyone going into the church: Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*." While speaking tongue-in-cheek about the theological astuteness of Carnegie's book, John was serious about the implications, suggesting that pastors could avoid damage to the church by sharpening people skills and sharpening theological acumen. John also noted a collection of articles by Gordon Reed, no longer in print, entitled *The Ministry: Career or Calling* or *Where Do You Find Senior Pastor in the Bible?* He summarized the theme of the articles as the story of a young seminary graduate working his way to greater positions in the church, who then finds himself in a church of twenty-seven, with one persevering elder. John noted that, at the end of the story, "The man realized that that old elder, who was always in the office every Sunday for prayer, was his most important relationship." Finally, as influences well beyond his first year, but those he would recommend, John included James Belcher's *Deep Church* as a book that would "kind of help the new guys with temporary stuff," and Dietrich Bonheoffer's *The*

Christian Mind, commenting, "read that or read his biography; that will set your world on fire."

Aaron noted that, in his case, "For the most part, the reading that I was doing at that time was primarily what I needed to do for school." Of those, he said, "I'm a big fan of Calvin, and I was reading *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* a lot and even Berkhoff's *Systematic Theology.*" Through the course of the first year, and since then, Aaron reviewed Sidney Greidanus' *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* at each point that he planned to preach from an Old Testament book, "to make sure that I understand what I'm doing so that it doesn't just turn into a moral lesson." He also used Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* as well as Graeme Goldworthy's *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* for this same purpose, explaining, "different ones that are good for making sure that you are getting the grace, that you're preaching Christ in all of scripture." Aaron also mentioned two authors who have had a lasting impact on him: D. Martin Lloyd-Jones and John Stott. Therefore, the focus of his reading was not specifically on transition, but rather on sound preaching.

David made particular reference to Dr. Phil Douglass' church personality categories found in *What is Your Church's Personality?* in his investigation of the call to his new church. Regarding this reference, he said, "It helped me to be conscious about how personality affects the relationship of a pastor to the congregation. Asked further about whether the book was a factor in his transition, David commented, "Yeah, but not even so much technically [Dr. Douglass'] approach. I'm thinking more broadly. I think Phil's approach is helpful to put some labels to it, but I don't thinks it's sufficient by itself. It's a great front door to think through that process." David did not reference other

written material, as he felt that the greatest influences came from conversations with people.

Only Chris and Michael referred to helpful business literature, and in both cases the subject of interest was leadership in general rather than the specifics of leadership in transition. Chris had the greatest exposure, having read "six or seven John Maxwell books" the summer before his transition. He viewed this reading as important because "The church is a volunteer army; you can't fire anybody, so you've got to lead them." He specifically mentioned Maxwell's *The Twenty-One Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* as helpful not only for himself but also for his officers, for each of whom he bought a copy. This he did "just trying to get a leadership mentality in the church." Michael's singular exposure to business material actually came after the year of transition. He discovered *Leadership on the Line* by Ronald Heifetz and Martin Linsky at an Intersect Forum conference. This book is included because of its impact upon him after the fact. He recalled, "...this book we're reading for Intersect? Man, I would have loved to have had that." Otherwise, Michael was somewhat pointed about the fact that he did not read books on transition in preparation for his move. He stated, for example, "I didn't go read a lot of books during that time. You know, I was reading, but wasn't reading books on how to be a pastor." He continued, "Well, there was plenty that I read through my early years at [my church], but it wasn't leadership reading. It was mainly theological reading."

Brett also was direct in commenting on his use of reading as preparation for transition. He said, "I didn't find any books that were especially helpful or influential or clarified my thinking so much. I spent a lot of time talking to people." He did mention

that he found Kenton Callahan's *A New Beginning for Pastors and Congregations* to be helpful after the fact, as he only discovered it six months into his transition.

Interestingly, Scott pressed beyond the written medium, citing a film as quite influential in his transition. "The Apostle," starring Robert Duvall, chronicles the life of a powerful, yet flawed evangelist/preacher who wrestled with God over lost souls, and yet was a womanizer. Scott commented about the film, having watched it years prior to his transition "as a warning that if the size of the church or the approval of the church becomes your god, then you're in a dangerous position." Scott also noted the impact of Eugene Peterson's *Under the Unpredictable Plant,* having committed himself to reading it before any transition "because the book really encourages you to stay put." This was significant in light of his struggle with restlessness. In reflecting on this tendency, he quoted from another film, "No Country for Old Men," saying, "Age will flatten a man,"[267] which for him meant, "I can't go anywhere. I've got to make this work." No other written material was mentioned as a part of his preparation for transition.

It appears from this section of the interviews that written material played only a small part in the preparations of these pastors for transition. Of the books cited in the literature review's pastoral transition material, only Callahan's *A New Beginning for Pastors and Congregations* was mentioned by one pastor as helpful. Also, in the business literature, only Heifetz and Linsky's *Leadership on the Line* was cited by one pastor as a valuable influence after the fact. None of the material on family systems theory was noted.

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[267] Joel Coen and Ethan Coen, "No Country for Old Men," (U.S.A.: 2007).

People Who Need People: The Influence of Mentors

Each of the participants named mentors that played a signficant role in their transition. John spoke warmly of his spiritual father, who counseled him to be open to the call of God to move him in ministry. He said about this mentor that "God gave him at least six weeks' notice before he moved him. And God moved him to three different continents, doing everything from church planting to heading up the L'Abri Conference on World Evangelism...he was in Japan, Taiwan, Chicago...he'd always laugh and say, 'God always gave me six weeks' notice.'" John added to this a practice that he has had for much of his pastorate:

> [In my previous church] I was an hour north of an elder, Jack, and an hour south of Frank, a pastor. And with Jack, about three times a year I asked him if I could come down to [his city]. I would take him to lunch anywhere he wanted, and I would have three questions that I would ask. I mean, he fought the battles. Frank, I think he had two because he was so busy. But Jack, who is a lawyer and charges by the second, always gave me two hours. I never paid for a meal that was with him. And at General Assembly, this father of the faith would make sure that this young kid who was dripping wet – he would speak to me...I would say to you, find one or two ruling elders in your church, and usually they're the quiet ones, and find one or two outside the church, and make that deal with them: "I'll take you to lunch if you'll answer two questions for me."

So while John did take advantage of some written material, these close relationships were clearly the greatest influence on his practice of ministry.

Aaron spoke of the importance of Dr. Douglass' conference with him as a part of his seminary's Spiritual and Ministry Formation class. Dr. Douglass' suggestion that he consider rural ministry, along with his parallel suggestion that Aaron take advantage of rural preaching opportunities, were decisive in moving him in the direction of the church he now serves. So, about that relationship, Aaron commented, "...there was not a professor that I had that I didn't...I mean, I loved them all – Dr. Calhoun has been a great

friend. But Dr. Douglass has been one in whom you sense a love, so there was a relational context there that God used." He noted, in addition, that

> One of the things that I had from Dr. Chapell – I can remember how helpful this was for me – talking about his own personal ministry when he was starting early on, and the mistakes he made about telling people that they had to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps…how quickly we can, without even realizing it, not lay a good grace foundation. Just that reminder that someone even of Dr. Chapell's caliber would open up and say, "Guys, I've messed up in the pastorate I was in." This guy who has written books about how to preach, opening up and being honest, I think about that often.

Aaron not only benefited from the mentoring he found at seminary, he also sought spiritual support from other pastors in his presbytery. Having been accused of neglecting the gospel in his messages, he sent a series of about six sermons to a fellow pastor that he firmly trusted. After briefing him on the situation, Aaron asked simply, "If you don't hear the grace in this text, tell me. I'm fallible. I mess things up. Tell me what you would suggest." The resulting feedback was not only positive, but very encouraging, as his colleague assured him that he had been deeply edified by what he heard. So Aaron found support in both the godly guidance of seminary mentors and the honest feedback of fellow pastors.

When asked about important influences in his transition, David immediately brought up two mentoring influences: "How I managed my transition? Two things come to mind. One is being able to talk to a few men that I respected that knew me and knew the church. That was helpful." Added to this was David's experience at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando:

> Steve Brown was one of my instructors in practical ministry, and if you know anything about Steve Brown, his classes – there's no agenda or syllabus – it's his stories. And in some ways that's helpful, and in some it's not. The ways that it's not helpful is that I didn't get the process to think, "Okay, when you go to a new church what do you need to think through?" No one ever trained me in that, and I

> don't think many seminaries can very easily approach it that way. What was helpful about it was just listening to his stories gives you a framework for all of life as a minister.

While David's preparatory experience at seminary had some important gaps, he gained from the group mentoring he enjoyed as a part of Steve Brown's class.

Chris was deeply influenced by mentors throughout his earlier trials and through the process of preparing for transition to his new church. The pastor who saw him through his trial of false accusation and exoneration also mentored him in preaching. He recalled,

> I went back and listened to [his] entire first year of sermons. And I asked, "What did he do in the pulpit as a new pastor? What kinds of phrases did he use? How did he use the pulpit?" And I noticed that, especially the first three months there, he always said, "Your session believes this." He would always say, "your session, your session, your session…"

Another seasoned pastor walked him through what to expect as he began his work. This pastor had remarkable insight and experience in the particular challenges in his new church and was able, with some precision, to prepare him to effectively lead the session and the church. His insights were so "on the mark" that Chris commented, "he's like the 'church whisperer,' and I told him that, too!"

Brett noted that he found it hard to leave the previous church where he served as assistant pastor because "I enjoyed my relationship with [my mentor]." The loss of that boss/mentor relationship played a role in what Brett called a "sense of isolation" in his new role as senior pastor. Michael noted that he too had found the guidance of his senior pastor while an assistant to be a critical mentoring relationship. He recalled, "I think over the years I've looked back and caught myself, kind of intuitively asking, 'What would Tom do?' because he was my leadership model. and I'm thankful for that. I really learned

a lot just by watching him that helped me in my ministry." He added, "You don't discount what you can pick up from books, but to have the benefit of being under a good leader or even the wisdom to be able to discern what's good when you have a bad leader can set you up for success in the future." He described the care he received from his church planting coach as "huge," saying, "he is a guy who preaches the gospel and speaks the same language, recognizing the root of sin as idolatry, and so he was able to shepherd me through that. I don't know if that would have happened if I hadn't had that kind of coaching." Michael's experience of failure would not, in itself, have produced a good result. It had to be accompanied by the good guidance of a caring mentor.

Finally, Scott talked about preparing by talking, not only with the long-term previous pastor, but also with his own father, "who had pastored churches larger than my church and smaller than my church." He took time to meet with an experienced pastor of a large church in the area, receiving the helpful advice to choose an area each year on which to focus, sharing that choice with the session so that there would be understanding and agreement. He also noted the involvement of friends who knew him well, who could remind him of tendencies to give in to the desire to wander.

Thus, in every case, mentors played an important role in the preparations of these participants. And in several cases, a definitive comparison was given, stating that the engagement of mentors was of much greater importance than the influence of written materials. The experiences of these seven men, sharing their preparations, priorities, modes of operation, and changes in those modes, as well as outside influences through reading and through people, provides a window into the great challenges of pastoral

transition. The men who shared did so with the hope that their experiences would be of service to younger men stepping into their own new callings.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore how experienced pastors prepare, set priorities, and make adjustments to their mode of operation when taking a call to an established church. This data was then used to determine the degree to which literature on pastoral transitions, business transitions, and family systems theory influenced the interviewees during their transitions. While a good bit of literature is available in each of these areas that could be useful in preparation for a move, little research exists as to the actual preparations, priorities, and adjustments to the mode of operation of transitioning pastors. As a result, it is not clear that the written material actually influences such pastors. This study was conducted to meet this need, exploring the thought processes of seven pastors who have transitioned to an existing church within the past five years.

This study was guided by the following four research questions:

1. How did the pastors prepare themselves for the transitional entrance into pastoring an already established church?
2. What did the pastors consider to be their priorities for the first year of transition?
3. In what ways did the pastors make changes in their typical ministry style in the first year of transition?
4. In what ways and to what degree were the pastors' preparations, priorities, and changes in style informed by the findings of published transition literature?

First, the current literature on pastoral transitions, business transitions, and family

systems theory was reviewed for insights into these four research questions. Then, interviews guided by these four research questions were conducted with seven pastors who have experienced a transition to an existing church within the past five years. While all of the pastors were from the same denomination, they were called to churches that varied in size, demographics, and personality. Their answers to the four research questions were analyzed and presented in chapter four.

Preparations

Research on the preparations made by the participants included what was done to clarify their sense of call, ways their families were prepared for or helped in preparing for transition, and other preparations, such as getting ahead on sermon preparation before moving to the field. The most conversation was generated over the question of confirming a call to a specific church. In the literature review, several authors were cited supporting the idea that God's call to a particular church is both complex and personal. In fact, even as he provided some objective characteristics of a sound call, Bratcher still called the process "mysterious."[268]

This was clearly borne out in conversation with the participants. All spoke of factors that made the process a personal journey with family, passing through the waters of trial to find resolution in God's call, and deeper self-understanding through the help of mentors and prayer. Scott's comment on the frustration of feeling a call, yet being rejected by the search committee, also underscores the personal wrestling inherent in the process. Mick Boersma is almost certainly accurate in stating, "One's calling is usually a unique personal experience. Some calls are dramatic and some are slow to form. It isn't

[268] Bratcher, Kemper, and Scott, 16.

that one is right and the other is wrong – they're just different."[269] In spite of the fact that Anthony and Boersma include a section in calling entitled "God's will and your emotions are not linked," emotions are not irrelevant; calling seems to be intricately tied to the pastor's whole person and a part of his spiritual growth. The trials recounted, the conversations with spouses and close friends, and the internal emotional wresting are all indicators of work going on in the pastor's heart that moves beyond landing a job.

All of this suggests at least one application for pastors considering new calls: the issue of prayer. Joseph Umidi was cited in the literature review as counseling that the call process should be "bathed in prayer."[270] In the research interviews, the topic of prayer did not often arise. One or two participants spoke in passing about praying with their wives over the opportunity before them. This may well be because they simply prayed without overtly referring to it. But in the section of the research findings above entitled "Getting Ahead and Other Preparations," Brett was the most poignant in his musings after the fact, confessing that "I've asked myself, shouldn't my first response be to ask the Lord? I felt that at times I leaned too heavily on other's advice when I really should have been talking to the Lord." Pastors may be aided at these weighty points in their lives by a strong appeal to "ask the Lord."

The literature review also included the study conducted by Wildhagen, Mueller, and Wang, whose findings concluded,

> Although many ministers become members of the clergy in order to fulfill their devotion to their religion, most ministers apparently are not driven by this same religious devotion in making decisions about employment at individual churches. Like other kinds of employees, clergy assess economic benefits, workplace

[269] Anthony and Boersma, 24.
[270] Umidi, 20.

> justice, job satisfaction, and work expectations when they decide whether to search for other positions.[271]

While noting that Wildhagen, Mueller, and Wang did recognize in those findings that faith-based criteria still played a significant role in deciding on a calling, the interview data did not match those findings. In fact, none of the participants mentioned any category of personal benefit comparable to those mentioned in the Wildhagen study. Rather, each of the men focused on the question, "Where would God have me serve?" They were, in many cases, deeply concerned about the impact of a move on their families, but in terms of personal preferences, several specifically said that they would be willing to go anywhere that God called them.

Another issue that arose in the literature was that of matching pastoral gifts and personality with church personality. Several authors commented about this as a qualifying factor in their determination of call, and David referenced both the advice and the writing of Dr. Douglass – specifically *What Is Your Church's Personality?* – in his consideration of calling. This turned out to be the only specific reference to that volume and its categories, though several noted the importance of the mentoring counsel of Dr. Douglass and other seminary faculty in matching personality to calling churches. David did, in his comments, suggest that the process of matching personalities is not in itself a sufficient test of proper fit, and Scott commented that "God can make you a fit" or mature you into a fit over time, even if the categories don't match at first. As he mused over the problem of calling becoming too man-centered, Scott seemed to be putting forth the idea that God will sometimes sovereignly confound that man-centered approach by placing a man where no one would have expected him to prosper. It is a good caution not

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[271] Wildhagen, Mueller, and Wang: 380-402.

to fall into the trap of assuming that our human analysis can adequately predict a successful match. In this mysterious process, we are constantly being driven back to the humble position of doing our best while waiting on God to lead.

Concerning the trials that often accompany a transition to a new call, it is good to note that often, best intentions are offset by reality. Several of the men were preoccupied during the transition time by both predictable and unpredictable issues that mitigated their opportunity to make the kind of transition they desired. Two faced the daunting task of preparing for ordination, one had a personal crisis of helping his wife through an emotional collapse, two mentioned their concern over the significant time and energy it took to minister to their prior church, and all had to face the normal issues of house-hunting and other family transition concerns. Even as the pastoral transition literature provided a number of very useful ideas, I was sobered by this reality coming out of the research interviews. Such pressures at the time of transition, mixed with the expressions of regret over missed opportunities to lay a good foundation, suggest that a primary focus on a few things is better than an ambitious attempt at a broad list of things to do in preparation for a new call. Sending a letter to the receiving congregation seemed to be one of those efforts that paid dividends for the investment of time. Some conversation with the prior pastor also benefited the pastors who were able to do so. And those pastors who were able to draw on past study to give themselves time early in the transition for connecting with people were happy that they had done so.

One final observation about preparations deserves attention. Michael commented in his interview that his new church benefited greatly from the interim care of a skilled pastor. He noted that this pastor was able to build unity within the session and bring

healing to the congregation in a way that he, as the new pastor, probably could not have done. The literature review included Loren Mead's *Critical Moment of Ministry*, where he introduces the work of the Alban Institute and its efforts to use church transition time and skilled pastors to prepare churches for a new pastorate. Michael's experience underscored the value of this approach.

Priorities

Several significant patterns emerged from the interviews in the area of priorities that sometimes confirmed and sometimes challenged the literature. The research findings strongly supported the avoidance of change for a period of time ranging from the first six months through the first year. The same concept found significant support in pastoral transition literature, with the only apparent dissent coming from Kenton Callahan's cited quotation: "Sadly, they lose the best first days of their ministry with their new congregation…In the first few days and weeks you and your congregation teach one another who you plan to be together."[272] But, as shown by his following explanation, what he meant was an ambitious and studied effort to shepherd and know the congregation, a point supported by the research participants.

Also in the pastoral transition literature, Michael Coyner argued that the trust that the congregation has in a leader is often enhanced by his demonstration of the ability to read and act on problems effectively. That building of trust cannot always wait for a year or even six months. Aaron alluded to this in his experience confronting a strong but misguided elder at his new church- something the previous pastor had failed to do. Chris also, against the conventional wisdom, could read that his church's greatest need was for restored confidence in strong leadership, and so acted definitively in several areas within

[272] Callahan, 7.

the first few months. This is why Coyner, in *Making a Good Move,* wrestled with this balance between action and patience. Thus, while it often works quite well to follow John's example in his new church: "For the first six months I did nothing," that prescription does not always fit every church situation. Whereas Michael Watkins' *The First 90 Days* demonstrates consistent theme of urgency for business managers – that time simply passing without change may mean important leadership opportunities lost – still, the weight of advice and experience for pastors is to err on the side of patience. Nonetheless, Watkins has something valuable to contribute to the practice of pastoral transition. He echoes Callahan's urging to be intentional in building relationships, and to treat the first months as formative and valuable, setting a plan and following it. David echoed this advice when, out of his own experience, he noted that, "In retrospect, if I could have done anything different the first year, I would have tried to be more proactive, more intentional about getting together one-on-one with each family unit."

A related pattern had to do with vision casting and the exercise of leadership. George Barna's book *Today's Pastors,* supported by Coyner, Means, and Schaller, notes that casting a vision and gathering the church around that vision was critical to the leader's role. While virtually every one of the pastors cautioned against moving too quickly in this area, several noted the importance of providing vision in time. John signaled the vision of building the unity of the church through efforts to unify worship music and to include migrating members in the church's work year-round. Scott acted quickly to make adjustments in public worship because he wanted the church to welcome non-churched friends of members. Michael began working with his session early in the first year on owning his church planting vision; he then began drawing the church into

that commitment before the first year ended. Chris established a commitment to the power of the Bible as a means of grace and to the view that God leads the church through the session.

David, on the other hand, cautioned that he had made such vision formation a priority and regretted it. This was because the congregation to which he had been called was in a grieving process so that, in his words, "they weren't ready to think forward." Brett noted the importance of earning or building trust before attempting to set a new path, a notion that reflected James Glasse's concept of "paying the rent," which appeared in the pastoral transition literature.[273] So, while the research indicated that vision casting is important, it was almost always secondary to getting to know the congregation and building trust.

In the business literature, Michael Watkins' *The First 90 Days* was careful, in calling for leadership vision, to include a studied process of understanding and preparing the employee team for that vision. However, the process was quick, occurring within ninety days. This may suggest that the process of vision casting and leading in a church is different from the same process in the business world. Chris sought to capture this difference when noting, "The church is a volunteer army. You can't fire anybody, so you've got to lead them." For these men, the right to lead was not simply conferred, but rather earned through the process of building relationships. This idea was supported in the literature by such authors as Kenton Callahan and James Means.

That concept of team leadership has also made an appearance in recent business literature at several junctures. For example, Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* was cited above as positing the conviction that "Only by changing how we interact can shared

[273] Glasse, 55.

visions, shared understandings, and new capacities for coordinated action be established."[274] He had in mind something like the action taken by John, noted in the section, "Priorities: What Was Important." There, he gathered all of his leaders into the fellowship hall of the church to ask them for their input on four questions about the mission of the church. In this way, the individual contributions of the leaders were supported as valuable.

Peter Drucker also commented in the Priorities section of the business literature about changes in the way business leadership is viewed:

> We certainly could use people of much greater abilities in many places. We could use people of broader knowledge. I submit, however, that in these two areas, not too much can be expected from further efforts. We may be getting to the place where we are already attempting to do the inherently impossible or at least the inherently unprofitable.[275]

Drucker was reflecting on the level at which business leaders have been expected to function almost as supermen and the recent trend towards sharing responsibility in leadership. That trend, reflected in John's actions and leadership, could be a useful antidote to the sense of isolation described by Brett as he moved from an assistant position to that of senior minister. Isolation often stems from the more traditional corporate view of leadership – doing it all and knowing it all. As these recent business trends were reflected in the thinking and actions of a number of the pastors interviewed, it suggested a move away from this isolating view of the senior pastor.

At the same time, Chris felt that his church suffered from a weak understanding of ordination and biblical leadership such that they needed to be taught, both symbolically and materially, that God exercises his authority through ordained leaders. To that end, he

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[274] Senge, xiv.
[275] Drucker, *The Effective Executive*, 116-117.

made a point of saying, "Hey flock, you've been heading this way, you were headed in this direction, had a path, but I'm the shepherd. I'm going over there, and you are following me." Thus the issue of how to exercise leadership is not fully captured in earning the right to lead. Consideration may also have to be given to articulating a biblical view of ordination and rather quickly exercising that conferred authority for the good of the church.

The complicated question of being action-oriented or people-oriented as a leader appeared in the business literature under the section entitled, "Styles or Priorities of Leadership." There it was noted that Heifetz and Linsky challenged the concept that transitional styles are contrasted as either action-oriented or people-oriented. They asserted that the two must work together in a complex fashion. This is especially true in changes that are adaptive rather than technical. They do so because, in their concept of adaptive as opposed to technical problems, courageous leadership must be combined with the best that each member of the team has to offer in order to produce the best results.

The writers of *Adaptive Leadership* also noted that "The hope of leadership lies in the capacity to deliver disturbing news and raise difficult questions in a way that people can absorb, prodding them to take up the message rather than ignore it or kill the messenger." In my mind, the one issue that sparked the greatest interest in this section on priorities is found in these observations. For Heifetz, change is not simply a regrettable reality. It is intrinsic to the process of progressive development, in the same way that it is so in biological evolution. The leader who will not press beyond his authority and drive people to discomfort in order to engage his team in solving adaptive problems is not an effective leader.

Of particular value in Heifetz' observations is the distinction between technical problems, which simply require application of solutions already known, and adaptive problems – those never before faced – requiring freedom to think in new ways and in ways that draw upon the insights of the whole team. Churches, like businesses, have long suffered from delayed reaction, and they tend to remain stuck, sometimes for decades, in solving technical problems rather than engaging adaptive ones. Thus, they continue applying solutions that no longer fit the cultural changes that have taken place. Michael alluded to this in his description of what his new church did not have as a vision for the future: "There wasn't a desire to be a mega-church, to get that big plot of land and build a huge sanctuary and become the one in the suburbs that everybody would come to. That wasn't what they wanted." This shift in priority from goals commonly held by suburban churches reflects adaptive thinking about ways that the culture is changing from one generation to the next. So where the primary goal of our participants was to pass through transition without creating disruption for the receiving church, we find a healthy challenge, especially in *Leadership on the Line*: Should we not consider carefully those points where the congregation must be disturbed, pushed out of the familiar, and made to think more adaptively about its mission to the world?

Yet even as we applaud many of the insights about the importance of adaptive thinking found in *Leadership on the Line* and *Adaptive Leadership*, we should do so with caution. The worldview upon which Heifetz and Linsky build their business approach embraces change as the defining characteristic of good. Progress is good, and progress is achieved by the constant application of adaptation. In critiquing this evolutionary view of leadership, the church has to ask, "Are we to think of change in the same way?" The

church is founded on one savior who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It embraces one unchanging word. Books like Ecclesiastes teach that there is a certain consistency to the heart of man and to the way God designed the world such that, "There is nothing new under the sun." So we recognize, as the church, the axiom that our methods are fluid with the culture while our message remains constant.

But even beyond this axiom, the church's leadership has to exercise caution in the application of adaptive leadership on at least two fronts. First, the peace of the church is as important as its cultural relevance. Therefore, while it was noted in the books on adaptive leadership that caution should be exercised in applying pressure so as not to push to the point of major disruption, this consideration is even weightier for church leaders who oversee Christ's church. And the church must exercise caution in not losing those things that remain constant because human nature remains constant – the long-standing guidance of the Bible does not become irrelevant because man's need and God's provision do not change.

As the interview discussion turned to changes in priority as lessons were learned, David and Scott touched on an area worthy of consideration for any pastor. David expressed, "That's another thing that I've learned in the transition process. Whether a pastor leaves or a pastor dies, there is a grieving process that the church has to go through. And most of us are not equipped in leadership to know how to guide a church through the grieving process."

Changes in Mode of Operation

In the interviews, the questions about the pastors' normal modes of operation and changes in that normal mode were designed to uncover some of the effects of entering an established family system as an outsider. While most of the participants talked of some changes and adjustments during the transition, it seems that the kinds of pressures exerted by a system, as discussed in the family systems theory literature, take time to emerge. That process hardly begins within the first year of transition, as everyone typically remains on their best behavior, disguising some of those system pressures. There were only a few interview comments that reflected the kinds of conflicts and power plays discussed in the family systems material, and most of those did not apply to the first year, but rather to inapplicable events after the first year.

However, two exceptions appeared in the interview material. The first was Aaron's experience, at the end of the first year, in dealing with the elder who oversaw Christian education and had to be confronted about inconsistencies. Interestingly, that conflict did not generate discussion about family systems or other psychological factors. Rather Aaron observed that speaking the truth from the Bible will generate spiritual opposition from Satan. Thus, where such authors as Edwin Freidman find the primary source of conflict in the psychology of family systems, Aaron would remind us that the roots of conflict are complex. So the remedy for conflict would certainly include attention to self-differentiation and other forms of human adjustment and interaction. But it would also include the tools of spiritual warfare, such as prayer. The second relevant comment made in the interviews was David's, reflecting the challenges of entering a relational system as an outsider:

> I feel like that's where transition becomes hard. Because a new guy comes in who has a different worldview, a different set of experiences, a different personality and the people who are here have their set of expectations and habits that those can never line up perfectly. And so that's what transition is; it is working together through the process.

David supported the idea that systems theory has much to say to pastors about the complex system into which they step as they transition. I believe that pastors would be greatly helped in their preparations for the long term by reading the insights found in Murray, Freidman, Richardson, and other systems authors.

Even though the concepts of systems theory did not find great expression in the interviews, certain traits and experiences mentioned by the participating pastors were encouraging from a family systems perspective. For example, Edwin Freidman's observations about the differentiated self indicate that unless members of the system are able to create and maintain a clear sense of themselves, they will always be working to simply maintain the role demanded by the system so that change cannot take place. As was noted in the interviews, a number of the pastors strongly emphasized their need to be themselves. Several mentioned the importance of this self-differentiated authenticity in their comments. In David's case, this self-differentiation produced a painful break in one relationship, but could be accepted because it was due to the fact that the other party couldn't accept who he was. This steadiness of heart was maintained in spite of his confession, "It's hard...every pastor wants to be liked." Again, it should be noted that David, like Aaron, did not center his conviction only in a healthy self-differentiation, but also in his theology. He explained, "We have to develop a thick skin and realize that if it really is Christ's church then it really is Christ's church."

Influence of Literature and Mentors

One of the primary purposes of this study was to uncover influences that contributed to the success of pastoral transitions. It was noted in the literature review that much has been written on pastoral and business transitions, as well as family systems theory. But research on the degree to which pastors are actually influenced by this literature is lacking. In querying these seven pastors as to the types of written material they found helpful in transition, virtually none of the material touched on in the literature review surfaced. The exceptions included Callahan's *A New Beginning for Pastors and Congregations*, Douglass' *What Is Your Church's Personality?* and, somewhat after the fact for Michael, *Leadership on the Line*. At the same time, some books were read at the time of transition that did not appear in the literature review, primarily because they did not fit within the parameters of the study. John Maxwell's writings on leadership and Eugene Peterson's book on Jonah were mentioned. John noted the importance something he had read in college, Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, for his preparation. He also recommended Gordon Reed's *The Ministry: Career or Calling?* and the writings of Dietrich Bonheoffer as valuable.

At least two factors were significant in this dearth of preparatory reading. One was a preference for guidance from mentors rather than writings, and the other was the circumstantial restriction of time. Added to these was the inference made by both Michael and Brett that they had, at the time, been unaware of the available material and only found it after the fact. In both cases, the men expressed regret that they had not known about the material at the time of transition.

In contrast to this relatively light impact from written material, it was remarkable to hear of the powerful impact that mentors made upon these pastors. Each one had talked to fathers, fellow pastors, elders, friends, and spouses who significantly impacted their decisions. A number of them specifically eschewed reading in favor of this human interaction. Chris' comment about his insightful mentor as "the church whisperer" is a colorful example of this impact.

One area of limited research findings was that of the impact of seminary background on the transition. I noted in chapter three that in order to attempt to capture differences in seminary preparations for transition, some variation in seminary background was also included. Three seminaries were represented by the interview sample: Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, Reformed Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, and Reformed Seminary in Orlando, Florida. Several pertinent comments surfaced with respect to these institutions. Aaron, who attended Covenant Seminary, made a number of references, not only to the training received from his professors, but also to the personal mentoring conducted and the impact of that mentoring on his transition. David mentioned that the mentoring provided by Steve Brown during his studies at Reformed Seminary in Orlando taught him about pastoring. At the same time, he noted that the lack of a thorough, detailed curriculum left him without specific guidance on how to pass through a transition.

Recommendations for Practice

One priority worthy of attention during pastoral transition is training in recognizing and responding to the normal grief that accompanies almost any disruption in the pastor/congregation relationship. David's reminder could assist pastors who wonder

why congregations may have real trouble warming to them and to their ministry. Failure to work through grief often leads to conflict. In addition, Michael's treasured experience of following in the footsteps of an effective interim pastor suggests that the Presbyterian Church in America would benefit from a more concerted effort to develop a team of skilled interim pastors to assist churches during times of transition.

In light of the findings on the use of literature and mentors, several suggestions come to mind. The first is that circumstantial pressures are present in transitions, and this should be factored into the mix of pastoral preparation for the transition process. It is therefore unlikely that simply producing more books on transition will aid these pastors. It may better serve pastors for seminary faculties to provide a transitional short-list, a few "must-read" suggestions for pastors with little time, placed in their hands before they feel that pressure. However, attention should also be given to the lesson on mentors learned from this research. The preference for mentors rather than reading material seems to reflect an enduring trait. In times of pressure and uncertainty, we desire the human touch. Michael noted the value of his recent exposure to the Intersect Forum at Covenant Seminary. Such efforts to mix the human mentoring touch with the growing wealth of written material in a form that works for busy pastors seems to offer the greatest promise in preparing those already on the field for their next transition.

It should also be noted with regard to useful literature, that John felt so strongly about the people skills of many pastors that he recommended Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* as a part of every seminary curriculum. While Dale Carnegie's approach may not be the best tool for exposing students to skills in diplomacy, the issue itself deserves some consideration.

The comments made by these pastors about seminary preparation, both positive and negative, suggest that at least a section of seminary practical theology curriculum should be developed on the issue of transition.

Recommendations for Further Research

The research conducted in this study was limited to the experience of pastors who remained at their churches and so were termed "successful." It would be helpful to conduct a similar study with pastors who moved on or were asked to move on within a short period of time, perhaps one to two years, to determine, from their perspective, factors that undermined their transition. This study purposely avoided the complexities of transition to the church-planting field, which is a calling quite different than that of an established church. Study of the unique pressures faced by church planters would be a valuable aid to those preparing for this calling. Also, while some effort was made to track the impact of seminary training on these pastoral transitions, it would be helpful to investigate the thinking of men just finishing their seminary training as to their understanding of and expectations for transition into ministry.

In conclusion, the research findings indicate that, while valuable insights have been captured in the literature on pastoral transitions, business transitions, and family systems theory, the church is not presently taking full advantage of those insights. Because pastors are and will always be extremely busy during times of transition, brief summarized reading lists and some form of on-the-job training that mixes written material and mentoring for transition would be most effective. At the same time, what was clearly demonstrated in the comments of the participants is that the church is gifted with thoughtful and committed men who are serious about their calling.

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