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**HOW CONGREGANTS EXPERIENCE PASTORS
LEADING CHANGE IN ESTABLISHED
CONGREGATIONS**

BY

MICHAEL K. LEARY

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

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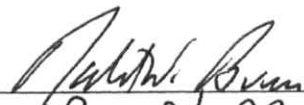
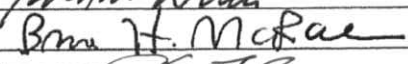
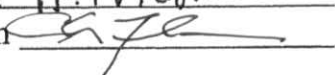
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Abstract

The two most pressing pastoral leadership challenges are the need to convince the church congregants that they must change, and the responsibility to lead that change. The task is complicated by several factors. First, the congregation may not want to change. Second, the pastor may not have experience in leading change. Finally, the change required is difficult because it involves an adaptive change at the level of the values and beliefs which have been imbedded in the congregation for many years. The purpose of this study was to explore how congregants experience pastors leading adaptive change in an established congregation.

This study was designed to answer the following questions. How did the pastor motivate the congregation to change? How did the pastor lead the change? How were the cherished beliefs of the congregation challenged? What adaptations did the pastor make throughout the process? All of these processes involve leadership challenges and require skills to meet those challenges. In order to understand the process of change within an established congregation, the following areas of literature were considered: works that discuss the dynamics involved in leading change, works that demonstrated leadership within organizational systems, and a brief discussion of leadership within a biblical and theological framework.

The researcher designed the study to utilize the case study method of qualitative research. The study was limited to the period of time involving one church's decision to join a new denomination, and the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with eight members of the congregation who were active in the church at least three years prior to the pastor's arrival. The researcher found that to successfully lead such adaptive

change in a church environment, leaders must emulate Christ, listen to the heartbeat of the people, learn to be real, and give themselves to personal times of refreshment, study, and self-improvement.

The study is important because the statistics indicate that success in these areas is not as common as it should be. Instead, pastors are disillusioned and congregations are broken. The researcher hopes that this study will encourage pastors as they endeavor to lead in their local congregations.

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Last but certainly not least, to Susie, my loving wife and an exciting companion. Your patient encouragement and kindness are a beautiful reflection of our savior.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.
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Chapter One

Introduction

It is the first Sunday in November. Pastor Mark arrives early as he prepares to deliver his first sermon at his new church. He is received warmly; there is a sense of anticipation in the air. His new congregation is excited about the possibilities for their church. He is excited as well. Mark looks around, and almost immediately he sees some changes he would like to make. The lighting is dim, and the carpet is old and worn. The old piano is out of tune, and the hymnals are tattered. He makes a mental note to investigate these and many other practical considerations for potential updating or eliminating.

The service ends with Pastor Mark's benediction from the back of the church. He observes that many within the congregation do not get up from their seats but remain to socialize with their fellow worshippers. The visitors exit as he greets them, and then he is left alone for a few minutes to ponder what he is observing. He is reminded of a question that he was asked by the pastoral search committee when interviewing for this job. They had asked him why no visitors stayed in the church past the first or second visit, and they wanted to know whether he had any ideas about how to fix the problem. He makes more mental notes. Mark receives a few encouraging comments from the congregation as they break up their conversations and head toward the door.

As Mark leaves the church after the service, he hopes that he has not made a mistake. He observed so much that he feels the need to change. He considers the

members of the congregation and wonders about their maturity level. As he considers the obvious, he is aware that an additional reality exists. According to Phil Douglass, professor of practical theology at Covenant Seminary, in his book *What Is Your Church's Personality? Discovering and Developing the Ministry Style of Your Church*, "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 these goals."¹ Douglass continues to explain, "Strongly held convictions and mutually exclusive plans can lead to conflict."² Mark is concerned that his own convictions may conflict with those of the church membership. This is just his first day, and already he can see the potential conflict. They forgot to mention this part of the job when he was in seminary.

In the weeks that followed, Mark discovered many other areas of the church's established structure that needed to be over hauled. He wondered where to begin? How to begin? This was a long-established congregation. They had existed on this property for more than one hundred years. The out-of-tune piano was a gift from one of the elderly women in the church, given in memory of her deceased mother, alongside a brass nameplate bearing her name. Mark has been informed several times of its significance. The sentimental value of the piano makes proper evaluation of its usefulness by the congregation very difficult. The church has been functioning the same way for a very long time. Mark is going to have to help them learn to evaluate their situation and adjust their expectations. The expectations that have been in place for years are going to need to

¹ Philip D. Douglass, *What Is Your Church's Personality?: Discovering and Developing the Ministry Style of Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 3.

² Ibid., 3.

change. According to Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, in their book *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving*, “Ministry nearly always involves working with people, and people have divergent amounts of influence and differing interests.”³ They wryly continue, “Where two or three are gathered together, there are politics.”⁴ Pastoral ministry involves working with people, and Mark is learning that those people have various ideas about how things should be done.

Mark was not adequately prepared for the task ahead of him. He thought his days would be spent in study and visitation, encouraging the church members in their spiritual growth. He soon discovered that practical leadership and spiritual growth are closely linked. According to Burns, et al., “In order for pastors to survive in ministry, they must accept the fact that they are leaders and managers.”⁵ He now realizes that the organization he is called to lead needs a major overhaul. The change will begin with his sermons and teaching, but it must be worked out with actual people, possibly including real conflict along the way. The church will need to be willing to change. Mark will need to be patient as he waits for change. Unfortunately, people don’t like to wait. The Barna Research group explains:

Many pastors are not given an adequate opportunity to shine. Our work has found that the typical pastor has his or her greatest ministry impact at a church in years five through fourteen of their pastorate. Unfortunately, we also know that the average pastor lasts only five years at a church -- forfeiting the fruit of their investment in the church they’ve pastored.⁶

³ Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 28.

⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁶ The Barna Group, “A Profile of Protestant Pastors in Anticipation of ‘Pastor Appreciation Month,’” Barna.org, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/59-a-profile-of-protestant-pastors-in-anticipation-of-qpastor-appreciation-monthq> (accessed February 8, 2013).

The Barna research points to an atmosphere that requires quick results. A pastor has only so much time to effect change. The long-established church may desire real change, but such systems do not change easily. The road ahead will be difficult.

Pastor Mark's experience is not unusual. When a new pastor arrives, there is great hope for fresh ministry in both the congregation and the pastor. The sad reality is that in many cases, those hopes are not realized. The pastor and congregation often become locked in a battle of wills or confused in a sea of misunderstanding. There is pressure for change to happen quickly, before both pastor and church lose interest. This reality underscores the difficulty of the task at hand. A pastor is called to lead a group of people who volunteer their participation. Pastors are not in a position to hire and fire in order to become more successful or proficient. They are charged with the task of leading those who have chosen to attend their church. They are charged to work within the organization as they attempt to bring about the needed change.

The church members form an organization, which according to Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky is not a single system. They explain that such organizations are complex, advising, "Every organization is not only one overall system but a set of subsystems."⁷ There are those within the church who are interested in a quick solution. They are hoping the new pastor will get right to work. There are some who want change, but are convinced that they do not need to change themselves – rather it is others who need to change. And there are also those members who just want everything to stay the way it is. The effective pastor must walk a delicate balance of leading a group of people

⁷Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 54.

with different expectations, all of whom may or may not want to be led. James Plueddemann, Professor, and chairman of the mission department at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School states, “Effective leaders are those who are able to assess their followers for their level of interest, competency, maturity, and motivation and adapt their leadership style accordingly.”⁸ The pastor needs time to make these assessments.

The concept of leadership strategy, which requires the intentional assessment proposed by James Plueddemann, resounds throughout much of the research on leadership. The authors express their understanding of this principle in variety of ways. In Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Glashow’s *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, the writers substitute the word diagnosis for Plueddemann’s assessment, arguing, “The single most important skill and most undervalued capacity for exercising adaptive leadership is diagnosis.”⁹ An important part of that diagnosis is knowing how to manage the exceptions of one’s allies as well as those who are not yet convinced of one’s direction. The pastor must also manage the hopes of those who are on his side. Heifetz and Linsky explain, “Disappointing your own core supporters, your deepest allies on your issue, creates hardships for you and for them. Yet you make yourself vulnerable when you too strongly give in to the understandable desire to enjoy their continuing approval.”¹⁰

⁸ James E. Plueddemann, *Leading Across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 152.

⁹ Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009), 7.

¹⁰ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 46.

Pressure from allies can cause the leader to act too early or too strongly on a project, leaving the large group alienated from the process and costing the leader valuable credibility. The leadership challenge is complex, requiring careful assessment and diagnosis of the present organizational system. There must be careful attention paid to each subsystem, including allies and those who are not yet convinced.

Leadership begins by determining what the participants actually need. This involves a comprehensive look at the system as well as the participants. Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow suggest that in leading, one may become oblivious to what the real need is. They note, “Maybe our product, even though we love it, is not what the market wants.”¹¹ The challenge is to do the difficult and tedious work of diagnostic assessment: to differentiate between the need for an adaptive change or simply a technical change. Heifetz and Linsky teach, “What makes a problem technical is not that it is trivial; but simply that its solution already lies within the organization’s repertoire.”¹² An adaptive change means that fundamental change is necessary at the place where the problem originates. They postulate that most often the changes that take place are on a technical level, because a technical change involves using current understanding and know-how. They recount:

Indeed the single most common source of leadership failure we’ve have been able to identify – in politics, community life, business, or the nonprofit sector – is that people in positions of authority treat adaptive challenges like technical problems. In times of distress, when everyone looks to authorities to provide direction, protection, and order, this is an easy diagnostic mistake to make.¹³

¹¹Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009), 117.

¹²Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

When people look to a leader for answers, it is difficult for them to have the leader respond with diagnostic questions. Leaders are often reluctant to do diagnostic assessment because the “people who look to you for solutions have a stake in keeping you focused on what is right in front of your eyes.”¹⁴ It is in the tasks that are presented each day that leaders find a measure of completion which demonstrates their competency, as well as meeting their own need to feel a sense of accomplishment. This must be kept in check if these leaders are going to make time to craft change. Heifetz and Linsky address this problem when they write, “Without the willingness to challenge people’s expectations of you, there is no way you can escape being dominated by the social system and its inherent limits.”¹⁵

Heifetz and Linsky explain, “The deeper the change, the greater the amount of new learning required, the more resistance there will be.”¹⁶ This principle makes the change process difficult for all involved. Congregations have an interest in the status quo. They do not invite new pastors to upset their lives. As Heifetz and Linsky say, “Generally people will not authorize someone to make them face what they do not want to face.”¹⁷ The average church member is often aware that change is needed. They hired their new pastor in hope that things would change. What they are not interested in is change that

¹⁴ Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 7.

¹⁵ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 20.

¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷ Ibid., 20.

costs them something as an individual. Thus, Heifetz and Linsky teach, "...leadership requires disturbing people, but at a rate they can absorb."¹⁸

The challenge that is presented involves both pastor and church. The church has been functioning in its present system for a long period of time. The system may not be perfect, but it works as it is. The church has implemented the present system in response to challenges that they have faced. The responses that have worked are now part of the system they know as their church. The new pastor sees some problems. The church members may see problems as well, but they are content to think they have dealt with them in the best possible way.

The church has organized around a culture which works for them. Church pastor, author and seminary professor Glenn Daman, writes, "Culture involves how people formulate their understanding of life, how they view their world, what motivates them to action."¹⁹ The church's culture requires change at the level of the members' belief structure. Heifetz and Linsky call this change process an "adaptive challenge"²⁰ because it requires learning a new skill set that is not already part of the church culture. It also requires the pastor to demonstrate a unique set of leadership skills. As Heifetz and Linsky point out, "You appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits."²¹ The pastor's leadership task would be "a safe undertaking"²² if the church members already had the skill set they needed to deal with their problems.

¹⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹⁹ Glenn C. Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2002), 33.

²⁰ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 14.

²¹ Ibid., 12.

However, if the organization is dealing with an adaptive challenge, then by definition the members do not have the skills to solve it. The challenge will be to identify the necessary changes and then convince the church to do the hard work of accomplishing the change. The pastor is in a position which requires a deliberate but flexible plan of action. Michael Fullan, professor of policy studies at the Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto says, “Leaders need to become more confident in the face of complexity than the circumstances warrant, but not so certain that they ignore realities that don’t fit their action plan.”²³ In order to survive in ministry, pastors must learn the art of leadership.

A pastor must identify the changes necessary in the church and move people towards those changes at a workable pace. Michael Fullan asserts, “Change is a process, not an event.”²⁴ This requires an understanding of those the pastor is trying to lead. Pastors must learn to listen to their people. Steven R Covey is cochairman of the Franklin Covey Company an international firm devoted to helping individuals, organizations, and families to become more effective writes, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”²⁵ The Apostle Paul reflects Covey’s understanding in his instructions to his disciple Timothy when he writes, “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as

²² Ibid., 13.

²³ Michael Fullan, *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 119.

²⁴ Michael Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 40.

²⁵ Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, 2004), 237.

sisters, in all purity.”²⁶ These instructions teach Timothy the correct posture he should have towards the people he is to lead. According to Paul, leaders must identify the persons they are addressing and respond according to who those persons are. The principle is one of respect and acknowledgement of their particular place in the organization. Pastors must hold the change process in tension with the fact that the reason they exist within the organization is to serve the people. For example, if the budget sheet is in the black, then the end product is not a simply a financially healthy system, but mature and healthy congregants.

Problem and Purpose Statements

The two most pressing pastoral leadership challenges are the need to convince the church congregants that they must change, and the responsibility to lead that change. The task is complicated by several factors. First, the congregation may not want to change. Second, the pastor may not have experience in leading change. Finally, the change required is difficult because it involves an adaptive change at the level of the values and beliefs which have been imbedded in the congregation for many years. The purpose of this study was to explore how congregants experience pastors leading adaptive change in an established congregation.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1. What leadership challenges did the pastor face as the church considered a denominational change?

Interview questions:

- 1) Tell me what your church was like before the new pastor arrived.

²⁶ I Timothy 5:1.

- 2) What were some of your favorite things about your church?
- 3) How would describe your friendships within the church?
- 4) How had the church changed during the time you were a member before the new pastor arrived?
- 5) What were some of the things that you wanted to see changed in your church?

RQ 2. What was it about the pastor that caused the congregation to stay in the change process?

Interview questions:

- 1) What were some things the new pastor changed that surprised you?
- 2) How did the pastor begin to implement the changes?
- 3) Were you able to talk over some of the changes with others in the church?
- 4) What, if anything, did the pastor do to help build trust within the congregation?
- 5) Were there any specific changes that were difficult for you personally?
- 6) Would you be willing to describe how you were feeling during that time?
- 7) How did you feel about changing denominations?

RQ 3. What was the cost for the congregation?

Interview questions:

- 1) Throughout the process was there anything specific that you are willing to describe that was particularly difficult?
- 2) Will you tell me about how you were feeling during that time?
- 3) How did you feel when some of the church members determined they did not want to be part of the change and left the church?

Significance of the Study

It is easy to misjudge the challenges presented in pastoral leadership. The Schaeffer Institute published a study covering eighteen years of research in which they explain that “Pastors are in a dangerous job.”²⁷ Their research points to leadership issues as one of the primary hazards of the pastorate. In a survey of 1050 pastors, 825, or seventy-eight percent, said they were forced to resign. They report, “Four hundred and twelve (or 52%) stated that the number one reason [they resigned] was organizational and control issues. A conflict arose that forced them out based on who was going to lead and manage the church – the pastor, elder, key lay person, or faction.”²⁸

The driving force behind such pastoral resignations is the challenge related to congregational leadership. Seminary training does not prepare pastors for the challenge of leading an established organization. The trend shows no sign of diminishing. In the same survey, “sixty-three percent said they had been fired from a pastoral position at least twice.”²⁹ It is apparent that some pastors are not learning from their mistakes. As a result, both pastors and churches are suffering.

This study was designed to hear from a pastor and a congregation to determine what type of leadership skills was helpful in guiding the congregation during a period of adaptive change. The researcher explored the process by which an established church transitioned from one denomination to another. The change required significant adaptive change on the part of an established congregation. The study was designed to answer the

²⁷ Richard Krejcir, “Statistics on Pastors,” IntoThyWord.org, <http://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36562&columnid=3958> (accessed February 13, 2013).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

following questions. How did the pastor motivate the congregation to change? How did the pastor lead the change? How were the cherished beliefs of the congregation challenged? What adaptations did the pastor make throughout the process? All of these processes involve leadership challenges and require skills to meet those challenges. The study is important because the statistics indicate that success in these areas is not as common as it should be. Instead, pastors are disillusioned and congregations are broken. The researcher hopes that this study will encourage pastors as they endeavor to lead in their local congregations.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are given to help guide the reader's understanding.

Adaptive challenge – The gap between the values people presently stand for (that constitute thriving) and the reality that they face (their current lack of capacity to realize those values in their environment.)³⁰

Adaptive work – Holding people through a sustained period of disequilibrium during which they identify what cultural mores to conserve and which to discard, as well as inventing or discovering the new cultural mores that will enable them to thrive anew.³¹

Technical problem – Problems that can be diagnosed and solved, generally within a short time frame, by applying established know-how and procedures.³²

³⁰ Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009), 303.

³¹ Ibid., 303.

³² Ibid., 307.

Technical work – Problem-defining and problem solving that effectively mobilizes, coordinates, and applies current sufficient expertise, processes, and cultural norms.³³

³³ Ibid.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

There are many leadership books written from the perspective of the leader. The research points to recognized principles successfully used to bring about change in organizational structures. These books, of which there are many, are very helpful. What their research does not discuss is how those who are being led in the change process experience the change at the grass roots level. For example, what motivates the assembly line employee to embrace change; or, in the case of the present study, why did the average church member remain in the change process -- a change that involved a significant different direction from that to which they had been accustomed? Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how the members of an established congregation experience pastoral leadership involving adaptive change. In order to understand the process of change within an established congregation, the following areas of literature were considered: works that discuss the dynamics involved in leading change, works that demonstrated leadership within organizational systems, and a brief discussion of leadership within a biblical and theological framework.

Leading Change

What Does a Change Leader Look Like?

Those called to lead change come in all shapes and sizes -- men, woman, young and old. There is no one specific profile. Effective change leaders, however, do have several things in common with others who have demonstrated success. The literature

points to several factors that have led to success. Change leaders have a vision of where the organization needs to go; they demonstrate courage in the face of difficulty and care for the people they are leading.

The role of the pastor in this study was one of a change leader. The congregation had been in one denomination for many years. The pastor led the congregation into a different denomination, which included some significant changes in governmental structure as well as the observance of sacraments. It is because of the magnitude of that change that literature on leading change was selected as an area for review. The topic of leading change has been a part of conversation since the first people formed the first human organization. The desire for change is everywhere. However, people who possess the skills to effectively lead change are not common. The literature reviewed contained several recurring themes, which will be summarized and presented below.

Change Leaders as Learners

Effective change leaders understand that they are first of all learners. As professors of leadership and authors of several books on leadership, James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner explain: “The more you are engaged in learning, the more successful you are at leading.”³⁴ Change leaders must possess an attitude of humility; they must always be in a position to learn. They question the status quo, asking, “Why do we do this?” and “Is it necessary?” They seek to determine whether each established mode of operation is a “tradition or a necessity.”³⁵ If it is a tradition and not a necessity, they look

³⁴James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 203.

³⁵ Ibid., 184.

for ways to move toward changing the process, and they encourage those they lead to do the same.

Professor emeritus and author Michael Fullan expresses learning in leadership as one of his secrets of change. He proposes, “The secret behind ‘learning is the work’ lies in our integration of the precision needed for consistent performance – using what we already know – with the new learning required for continuous improvement.”³⁶ Fullan is making the assertion that the change leader must be ever ready to add to what he already knows. There is a necessity for individuals in leadership to grow as they lead. Pastors and authors Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr advise that leaders often struggle to acknowledge that they must be learners as well. They confess, “Our own role of leadership made it difficult to accept the role of learner.”³⁷ They continue self-disclosure by asserting: “There is a certain vulnerability that comes from acknowledging that we don’t know what we need to know to succeed. Yet in today’s rapidly changing environment, leaders are increasingly required to be learners.”³⁸ They invite leaders to join them on the journey to success that requires an attitude of humility. The type of humility they are speaking of recognizes that in order to survive as a change leader, ongoing learning is a must.

The internationally recognized leaders in the area of emotional intelligence, Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, point out, “Too many leaders fail to invite truth, which can leave them prey to the CEO disease – being a leader who is out

³⁶ Michael Fullan, *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 76.

³⁷ Jim Herrington, James H. Furr, and Mike Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

of touch and out of tune.”³⁹ They imply that the change leader must be in touch with the times and ready to learn what the times demand. They propose a “learning agenda”⁴⁰ in place of the typical performance plan designed to fix a current problem; they encourage focus on the possibility of change, tying change to an individual’s hopes and dreams. The idea is a full involvement on the part of the leader’s intellect as well as emotion. Change leaders inspire those they are leading to do the same. Leading others to change involves getting others to grasp the change on an emotional level. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee argue, “Life is the laboratory for learning,”⁴¹ declaring, “It’s important to bear in mind that plans that tend to simply focus on specific performance goals are less effective than those drawn from comparing your ideal self with your real self.”⁴² They call for a total learning experience, not merely a change in habit, but a change at the emotional level. It is at the emotional level that the change is more likely to become permanent.

Change leaders are called upon to recognize willingly that they are not in a place of absolute certainty concerning every detail. John P. Kotter is a professor emeritus at Harvard Business School and cofounder of Kotter International, an international leadership organization. His writing includes twelve best sellers; he asserts that great leaders are “lifelong learners.”⁴³ They must be ready and able to learn not only about the organization they lead but also and just as importantly about their inabilities. Kotter

³⁹ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004), 193.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 141.

⁴¹ Ibid., 140.

⁴² Ibid., 141.

⁴³ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change, With a New Preface by the Author* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 190.

continues, “Lifelong learners humbly and honestly reflect on their experiences to educate themselves. They don’t sweep failure under the rug or examine it from a defensive position that undermines their ability to make rational conclusions.”⁴⁴ This can be very difficult at times. It means admitting that the leader is fallible. The change leader learns from mistakes and moves on. Leading change is not for the faint-of-heart.

Leading Change Is Not for Wimps

In order to be successful in implementing change the leaders must be willing to take responsibility for their actions; that is, for what they do and what they fail to do. The leader is always in a position to be observed as well as criticized. Kotter acknowledges, “Risk taking brings failure as well as success. Honest reflection, listening, solicitation of opinions, and openness bring bad news and negative feedback as well as interesting ideas.”⁴⁵ Leaders open their lives to a steady flow of feedback. There is no guarantee that it all will be positive. Heifetz and Linsky advise, “You appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits of a lifetime.”⁴⁶ When the change leader desires to challenge a lifetime habit or belief, caution must be observed. There is no assurance that the feedback will be given in a professional manner or with a philosophical attitude. It may become very personal and hurtful. Herrington, Furr, and Bonem, speaking about their own journey, add, “On many occasions the conflict became very

⁴⁴ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 12.

personal. Our motives and character were challenged many times.”⁴⁷ When an individual’s character is challenged, there is anguish, even when the intention was not to attack. There are times when well-meaning people can become hostile and insensitive. The leaders, as they respond, are also capable of expressing hostility. The position of leadership requires a significant measure of self-control and restraint. There is constant pressure surrounding leadership. Heifetz and Linsky offer encouragement in the face of difficulty:

Receiving anger, then, is a sacred task because it tests us in our most sensitive places. It demands that we remain true to a purpose beyond ourselves and stand by people compassionately, even when they unleash demons. Taking the heat with grace communicates respect for the pains of change.”⁴⁸

A gracious response to the heat on the part of a leader demonstrates the leader’s own commitment to the change process.

Heifetz and Linsky suggest that the leader is vulnerable to four basic forms of danger. They say, “When exercising leadership you risk getting marginalized, diverted, attacked, or seduced.”⁴⁹ These forms are only a generalized list; there are variations in each category. The dangers presented are real and often catch those who lead unaware, complicating the response. They acknowledge:

It is difficult to resist responding to misrepresentation and personal attack. We don’t want to minimize how hard it is to keep your composure when people say awful things about you. It hurts. It does damage. Anyone who

⁴⁷ Jim Herrington, James H. Furr, and Mike Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 7.

⁴⁸ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 146.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

has been there knows the pain. Exercising leadership often risks having to bear such scars.⁵⁰

The reality is that leadership in any capacity invites criticism. The criticism may be based on facts but that does not diminish the pain. All criticism is personal, because a person receives it. The criticism, which is unfounded, can be more difficult. The words spoken cause pain and leave scars. The leader must be prepared for this eventuality.

The literature confirms the difficulty of leading change, though not all authors speak about the potential for personal criticism. The best-selling author Jim Collins says, “The good to great leaders never wanted to become larger-than -life heroes. They were seemly ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results.”⁵¹ The change process is long and painful; leading change is not for the faint-of-heart. Fullan agrees that change does not come easily. He calls the change process “reculturing,”⁵² explaining that change has to be implemented, not just structurally, but at a cultural level. Commenting on the change process he says wryly: “Reculturing is a contact sport that involves hard, labor-intensive work.”⁵³ The difficulty in stimulating change must not be underestimated.

John Kotter remarks, “Ask almost anyone over thirty about the difficulty of creating major change in an organization and the answer will probably include the equivalent of “very, very, tough.”⁵⁴ Wise leaders are aware that they will encounter difficulty within the organization they seek to change. They are always observing and

⁵⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁵¹ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't* (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 28.

⁵² Michael Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 44.

⁵³ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁴ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change, With a New Preface by the Author* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 37.

growing both in work- related knowledge and emotional understanding of themselves and those they lead. The difficulties may not be restricted to organizational problems but as already proposed can become personal. Once aware of these realities successful leaders will need to approach their task with a sense of freshness each day, accepting the possibility of attack, which comes with the territory.

The process of change, though exciting, can at times become demanding. Kouzes and Posner encourage their readers to “think of your leadership assignment as an exciting adventure through unexplored wilderness.”⁵⁵ The wilderness metaphor implies hardship, giving leaders a renewed perspective as well as a sense of excitement about the value of what they are doing. Such enthusiasm is contagious.

Creating and Sustaining Motivation

One of the great challenges of leadership is motivating people to a sustained movement in a new direction. John Kotter emphasizes that the process must be embraced by a segment of the group. He suggests, “establishing a sense of urgency is critical for gaining needed cooperation.”⁵⁶ The organization must be convinced of the need for change.

The motivation for change must begin with a clear vision for why the change is necessary and where the change will lead. Kotter maintains, “Whenever you cannot describe the vision driving a change in five minutes or less and get a reaction that signifies both understanding and interest, you are in for trouble”⁵⁷ The vision must

⁵⁵ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 184.

⁵⁶ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change, With a New Preface by the Author*. (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 37.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

connect to those who are being called to engage in the change process. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee echo Kotter's call for clarity of vision. However, they encourage an additional feature as part of the call, saying that the goal is "to connect with the possibilities of the future, to be given a chance to do something about it."⁵⁸ They are proposing an emotional connect with the process. This gives the participant a stake beyond the intellectual only. They gain commitment at the emotional level as well, generating ownership of the process. According to Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, "People change when they are emotionally engaged and committed."⁵⁹ This does not mean the process will go quickly or without its challenges. As people engage on an emotional level, the prospects for success increase. Kouzes and Posner would agree. They explain, "If a vision is to be attractive to more than an insignificant few, it must appeal to all who have a stake in it. Only shared visions have the magnetic power to sustain commitment over time."⁶⁰ The goal is get as many as possible to buy into the vision, not only because it is a good idea but because they will benefit personally from the change as well.

The change process requires patience and vision. John Kotter observes, "When it becomes clear that the effort necessary for quality programs or cultural change will take a long time, urgency levels usually drop."⁶¹ He continues to explain that such a condition requires a clear diagnosis of the present circumstance and "a multi-step process that

⁵⁸ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004), 239.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 125.

⁶¹ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change, With a New Preface by the Author* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 12.

creates power and motivation sufficient to overwhelm all the sources of inertia.”⁶²

Therefore Kotter encourages the creation of “short term wins.”⁶³ The short term wins combat complacency, encouraging those in the change process to continue. These short-term wins are crucial to the long-range plan. They become a helpful tool in maintaining enthusiasm for the process and building a patient willingness to remain in the process.

Kouzes and Posner concur. They explain:

Leaders know they have to break down big problems into small, doable actions. They also know that you have to try a lot of little things when initiating something new before you get it right. Not all innovation works, and the best way to ensure success is to experiment with a lot of ideas, not just one or two big ones. Successful leaders help others to see how breaking the journey down into measurable milestones can move them forward.⁶⁴

The successful leader sets measurable goals. The goals are both reachable and tangible. Attaining the goals builds enthusiasm for those who are committed and adds interest to those who may still be unsure of the process.

Kotter is careful to remind the reader that it is just as important not to declare a victory before it has happened. A premature declaration can cause people to assume the change has been accomplished and no further work is necessary. A delicate balance between declared victories and further goal-setting must be reached.

Managing the Pace of Change

The change leader is tasked with orchestrating the pace of change. If change is attempted too rapidly, the existing system may not be able to support it. On the other

⁶² Ibid., 22.

⁶³ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁴ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 192.

hand, the process must not drag or enthusiasm will wane. There must be a careful plan of a systematic change process in place with measurable goals. Then it is a matter of trusting the process. If the change process is constantly being overhauled, the mixed messages will lead to confusion. Fullan concurs, “Successful organizations deliberately build in differences and do not mind disturbing the equilibrium; they trust the learning process they have set up.”⁶⁵ The change leader must allow time for the plan to work. The disturbing of the equilibrium is as much an art form as a science. Heifetz and Linsky explain, “Conflicts can generate casualties. But deep conflicts, at their root, consist of differences in fervently held beliefs, and differences in perspective are the engine of human progress.”⁶⁶ The process of change does not happen without some form of discomfort. The desire is to create an atmosphere of change without exhausting those in the process. The differences in perspective give rise to the possibility of change as well as its difficulty. Pace and timing are critical.

It is not to be assumed that just because a leader can see the direction an organization must take that those within will see it as well. The motivation as we have seen must be both an intellectual as well as an emotional process if it is to be effective. The leader then is tasked to bring about the conditions that allow the organization to see its need. This is done in several ways. Heifetz and Linsky propose that the leader must allow an issue to “ripen.”⁶⁷ They explain that a responsible leader who is thinking and acting ahead of the organization must make sure those they are leading can see the issue

⁶⁵Michael Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 43.

⁶⁶ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 101.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 146.

as well. They propose allowing an issue to ripen. Heifetz and Linsky declare, “An issue becomes ripe when there is widespread urgency to deal with it.”⁶⁸ The importance of an issue is now apparent to the group. Leaders are required to demonstrate both wisdom and patience as they wait for this development. When the issue is obvious, the leader then acts and/or motivates others to act.

Heifetz and Linsky suggest that there are times when leadership needs to cause an issue to ripen. While referring to the concept of ripening they explain, “Sometimes you have to hold steady and watch for the opportunity. However, if you notice that there is never a time for your issue, you may have to create the opportunity by developing a strategy for creating urgency.”⁶⁹ They are proposing an intentional ripening on the part of leadership. They suggest intentional ripening by controlling the heat of an issue. They explain:

If you try to stimulate deep change within an organization, you have to control the temperature. The first is to raise the heat enough that people sit up, pay attention, and deal with the real threats and challenges facing them. Without some distress, there is no incentive for them to change anything. The second is to lower the temperature when necessary to reduce a counterproductive level of tension.⁷⁰

The balance of tension between the present situation and the future change within an organization is critical. A leader must be vigilant to monitor the amount of tension the organization is capable of withstanding and controlling the heat through the process, at times turning up the heat and at others dialing it back down.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 148.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 108.

Herrington, Bonem, and Furr agree. They call for the leader to “generate and sustain creative tension.”⁷¹ The idea is that a leader must bring an issue to light and allow the organization to wrestle with the implications. They believe:

Change is driven when a significant gap exists between a vision of the future that people sincerely desire to achieve and a clear sense that they are not achieving that vision. At this point recognition grows, so does their willingness to change their perspective and try new approaches. This is the point at which they are experiencing creative tension. The discipline to generate and sustain this driving force is indispensable for change leaders.⁷²

The tension necessary for change must be regulated with care. The organization must be able to handle the process without unnecessary destruction. Herrington, Bonem and Furr suggest that the ability to regulate the creative tension which an organization can live with is an “art.”⁷³ It is an art because it involves an intellectual understanding combined with emotional maturity, each in correct measure and rightly timed.

The literature involving leading change is considerable. The reason for the vast literature is the fact that change is difficult. The leader is challenged both intellectually and emotionally, which requires continual learning. There is no room to become complacent. Each day brings with it a new opportunity to learn and grow.

The change leader must also be prepared to invest personally in the process. This is because there will be difficulty along the way, leading some to respond out of fear and then possibly attack. It is during those times that leaders must demonstrate that they are fallible and human. At the same time they must believe in their plan and remain willing

⁷¹ Jim Herrington, James H. Furr, and Mike Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 100.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 101.

to continue to move forward. The greatest challenge is in creating and sustaining the motivation to change through the process. Those involved may lose focus or interest if there is no creativity in the process. This can be avoided when the leader learns to control the pace of change by waiting for some issues to ripen and turning up the heat on others.

Systems Leadership

Literature concerning systems leadership was reviewed because of its relevance to the present study. The pastor involved in the study stepped into a functioning organization. The organization had been in place in the present location for more than one hundred years. That meant that there was already a system; that is, a way of doing things that first had to be observed and understood and then changed for the better, if possible.

Systems leadership is critical for each change process. The system itself, rightly understood, includes not only each of the individual parts but something additional -- each component of the system as it is related to all the other parts. The systems approach does not isolate problems without an understanding of how they relate to the whole. No part changes outside of the whole.

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking begins with the acknowledgment that there is a system in place. That may seem obvious, but in many cases leaders fail adequately to account for the system causing heartache and failure. The leadership challenge never occurs in a vacuum. Leadership, according to pastors and counselors Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor, “always takes place in the context of a living system, and the system plays

by a set of observable rules.”⁷⁴ The rules may be observable but not always obvious at first glance. The leaders are confronted with a system that was functioning before they arrived. The system itself has worked to some degree and is resistant to change.

Herrington, Bonem, and Furr define systems thinking: “Systems thinking considers interactions between different parts and causes that may not be obvious.”⁷⁵ The system in place brings about a cause and effect that is not always the sum of the parts.

There is, according to Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, the power of culture within an organization. They explain: “Even the best development processes – those based on exploring the five discoveries -- will not help to change the organization if they focus only on the personal and do not take into account the power of the emotional reality and the culture.”⁷⁶ They are suggesting that a change program will not work if the system itself is not accounted for. The system requires conformity to itself. New employees are often unaware of how they have conformed to the system within a short period of time.

The system must be accounted for, according to Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky. Systems prove to be “tenacious.”⁷⁷ They explain that systems become tenacious quickly. They add:

As early as the second gathering of any group of individuals, the structures, the cultural elements, and defaults that make up the

⁷⁴ Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha L. Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 30.

⁷⁵ Jim Herrington, James H. Furr, and Mike Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 144.

⁷⁶ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004), 244.

⁷⁷ Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009), 50.

organization's systems begin to take root. Behaviors begin to transform into patterns, and patterns over time become entrenched. Everyone present contributes to the creation and maintenance of the system with every action they take.⁷⁸

When people gather together, patterns of behavior emerge. Each participant acts and reacts to the other members of the gathering. A new system is born, a system that must be reckoned with if a change in direction is going to take place. The interesting phenomenon is that for the most part those involved are unaware of the system. Or they are complacent within the system. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky point out ironically, "Six months into a new job, you are probably no longer even aware of your organization's unique systematic characteristics."⁷⁹ The organization becomes an entity in and of itself. It is not merely a sum of its collective parts.

The leadership challenge is to recognize this reality and remember that leaders are also a part of the organizational system they seek to change. Change leaders of any organization are charged with seeing themselves as a part of the system, and they must learn to think about systems while engaged within the system. According to Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, "learning to think systems means learning to ask and answer two questions: 'What is my role in keeping this problem in place?' and 'How can I change my role?'"⁸⁰ They are suggesting that the leader is responsible for perpetuating the system as it is. The only way to effect change is for change leaders to acknowledge their own role and then work from that understanding toward change.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha L. Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 50.

The Nature of Systems

Systems develop their own cultural environments, so leaders must acknowledge and work within those cultural environments, even as they work to change them. A delicate balance must be struck in order to gain the cooperation of those impacted by the change. The atmosphere has to remain positive and affirming. Michael Fullan has observed, “When the environment turns nasty, people focus on self-preservation. Managers become more concerned with taking credit and blaming others for poor performance.”⁸¹ This type of contentious environment is counter-productive to change because it takes the focus off the goal and places it on the individual. The system will thrive when all participants are involved in “meaningful pursuits”⁸² that go beyond the bottom line. These pursuits engage the individual within the whole, causing both to grow and move towards a productive change.

Technical Challenge

Within every system there is an ability to meet challenges and adjust to the specific challenge. A system grows stronger as it continues to meet these new challenges and adapt to them. It is in this way that a system actually learns. The learning can be a healthy response, provided the new learning brings growth and a measure of innovation. The difficulty within most systems is the need to maintain a level of stability. The typical response to challenge within a system that desires to remain stable is what Heifetz and Linsky call a technical change. They assert, “What makes a problem technical is not that

⁸¹Michael Fullan, *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 62.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 30.

it is trivial; but simply that its solution already lies within the organization's repertoire"⁸³; that is, the people within the organization already have the skill set necessary to make the change. The organization then is not challenged past its own boundaries.

Jim Collins says it this way: "Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for the good life. The vast majorities of companies never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good – that is their main problem."⁸⁴ The response to the next challenge is most likely to be met with a tried and true method that is within the organization's present skill set. This approach keeps many organizations from growing to greatness.

All change scenarios require some technical changes; therefore, to respond with a technical change is not always invalid. The difficulty is found in the fact that technical solutions are often not enough. Those within the organization will need to be challenged beyond their existing skills and patterns if they are to experience change. The change leader is challenged to lead within this dynamic. It is important to note that the organization has become what it is because of its past and present leadership. The organization cannot bear all of the responsibility; there were those in leadership who allowed the process to continue.

Adaptive Challenge

An organization is challenged when it does not have the present skills or mind set to meet a new opportunity for change. The authors Heifetz and Linsky propose that an

⁸³ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 18.

⁸⁴ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't*. (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 1.

adaptive change must take place. They explain that an adaptive challenge is when the skills to meet the challenge are not presently a part of the organization. An adaptive challenge according to Heifetz and Linsky will:

Require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community. Without learning new ways -- changing attitudes, values, and behaviors -- people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment. The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself.⁸⁵

The people within the organization then are called upon to go beyond the technical change, solution only, to new ways of thinking. New learning is required. These new ways of thinking may challenge their cherished held beliefs or deeply seated values.

This is something they did not sign up for. Heifetz and Linsky advise:

Generally, people will not authorize someone to make them face what they do not want to face. Instead, people hire someone to provide protection and ensure stability, someone with solutions that require a minimum of disruption. But adaptive work creates risk, conflict, and instability because addressing the issues underlying adaptive problems may involve upending deep and entrenched norms.⁸⁶

The conflict created by the adaptive change leaders puts them at risk within the organization. The adaptive change is going to cost something. For most people the cost at first appears too great. Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee agree, explaining, “Because most groups and organizations revolve around the status quo, fighting off anything that threatens it, this level of change requires courageous leadership, stamina, and unswerving

⁸⁵ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 20.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

commitment.”⁸⁷ The work of adaptive change is, as noted earlier, not for those leaders unwilling to endure conflict. At times the conflict can be intense and personal.

Working Within the System

It is the nature of a system to engage participants at various levels through the organization. There are “power people” embedded in the system. James Plueddemann suggests, “Certain people have more power, influence and status than others.”⁸⁸ The power of people’s influence cannot be underestimated. Leaders must learn to identify who the power people are. And gauge their influence on the others in the organization. They must understand who and what is valued before they can effectively move towards change. Misunderstanding in this area will lead to failure. A system, no matter how convoluted, must be understood and respected before real change can be realized. The system has within it a set of expectations. As leaders acquire understanding of the system, they place themselves in a position to effect change.

A change at the adaptive level, which is at the level of belief and values, is the challenge of the change leader. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee report, “People can and will change when they find a good reason to do so. Leadership change takes people to the point of understanding what they want and how.”⁸⁹ Leaders then must gauge the ability of their people to respond to the change effort. They must be ready to move things at a pace that the system can handle. They are called to make the reason for change not only acceptable but also preferred by those they lead.

⁸⁷ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004), 230.

⁸⁸ James E. Plueddemann, *Leading Across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 93.

⁸⁹ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004), 244.

Managing Expectations

A great challenge of leading change is working with the differing expectations of those in the process. Those who are willing to follow the leader are often in a hurry because they have seen new possibilities. Leaders must now learn to be prepared to upset their allies for the greater good of the system. Heifetz and Linsky point out, “When you are trying to create significant change, to move a community, the people in your own faction in that community will have to compromise along the way.”⁹⁰ These people support the change but usually at the expense of those in the other faction. Heifetz and Linsky continue, “Disappointing your core supporters, your deepest allies, creates hardship for you and for them.”⁹¹ A balance must be struck if the process is to succeed. The leader enjoys having allies. The strength of support must not push change leaders past where they want to go. Again Heifetz and Linsky report: “Over and over again we have seen people take on difficult issues, only to be pushed by their own faction so far out on a limb that they lose credibility in their own community.”⁹² The challenge is significant to maintain a balance. A measure of courage and confidence in the plan will be necessary.

Edwin Friedman uses the term “well-differentiated leader” to describe the type of person who can manage expectations. Friedman’s leader is “someone who can manage

⁹⁰ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 45.

⁹¹ Ibid., 46.

⁹² Ibid., 46.

his or her own reactivity to the automatic reactivity of others, and therefore be able to take a stand at the risk of displeasing.”⁹³ Friedman continues as he observes:

Living with crisis is a major part of leaders’ lives. The crises come in two major varieties; (1) those that are not of their making but are imposed on them from outside or within the system; and (2) those that are actually triggered by the leaders though doing precisely what they should be doing.⁹⁴

The leader must prepare to manage expectations, including their own. Their leadership may cause a crisis that they must be ready to deal with, even those crises that were unanticipated.

Considering the daily pressure of the change process, the leader is often caught up in a myriad of detail. The detail can obscure the effect the process is having on the leader. Heifetz and Linsky suggest that the leader “get on the balcony”⁹⁵ This is their simile for separating the leader from the action in order to observe from a different vantage point. They suggest that the leader is also an active player in the change process. This makes the leader vulnerable to mistakes if they do not take the time to see the larger picture. They explain,

Typically only a few people see these dynamics as they happen. Swept up in the action of the meeting, most never notice. They simply play their parts. The observational challenge is to see the subtleties that normally go right by us. Seeing the whole picture requires standing back and watching even as you take part in the action being observed. But taking a balcony perspective is tough, too, when you are engaged on the dance floor, being pushed and pulled by the flow of the events and also engaged in some of the pushing and pulling yourself.⁹⁶

⁹³ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church Publishing 2007), 14.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁹⁵ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 46.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 52.

All leaders are part of the organization they are leading. They contribute to the system as it functions, and care is needed to observe their own as well as others' behaviors.

Herrington, Creech, and Taylor point out, "We are, however, also emotionally wired together in systems such that we react to one another, often without even being aware that we are doing so."⁹⁷ They continue: "When anxiety rises, we become rather predictable. Our thinking becomes less clear and more reactive."⁹⁸ They define anxiety as a response to a threat, real or perceived. Heifetz and Linsky's balcony approach presents an opportunity to gain perspective. Herrington, Creech, and Taylor add, "It is easier to know and do the right thing if we can be clear on what is going on emotionally for us."⁹⁹ They are encouraging the leader to be aware of their own person in the process. This involves careful attention to emotional intelligence.

In Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee's define "emotional intelligence," which they define as "how leaders handle themselves and their relationships."¹⁰⁰ That is the leader's ability to be part of an organization and at the same time lead. The challenge is complicated by the fact that leaders find it difficult to obtain accurate information about themselves and their performance. Again Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee suggest,

Whatever the motives, the result is a leader who has only partial information about what is going on around him. This disease can be epidemic in an organization – not just among CEOs, but also for most high-level leaders. It is fed by the natural instinct to please the boss,

⁹⁷ Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha L. Taylor, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 30.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004), 6.

resulting in a widespread tendency to give positive feedback, and withhold the negative whenever information flows upward.¹⁰¹

The information flow is complicated if leaders have not positioned themselves to receive it. The balcony as a tool works as the leader steps out of the fray, observes, and steps back in to lead. By demonstrating emotional intelligence leaders acknowledge their part in an organization, including their own limitations. They control their reactions through self-understanding.

Biblical/Theological Framework

The research that guided this study concerned itself with the dynamic of leadership in an established church organization. The type of leadership examined concerned a local church pastor and the church members' response to the change leadership process. Therefore a biblical and theological study was conducted, because the Bible has a great deal to say about leadership and specifically leadership within the church setting. The church setting is not immune to the struggles involved in the change process. The purpose of biblical leadership, as in all other leadership, is to effect positive change.

The local pastor is not able to avoid the responsibility of leading. Burns, Guthrie, and Chapman advise, "Once pastors come to grips with the fact that ministry requires them to lead and manage, they must learn to confront the political realities and expectation embedded in these tasks."¹⁰² They add somewhat humorously, "In short, Jesus might well have also said, 'Where two or three are gathered together, there are

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰² Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 27.

politics.”¹⁰³ The pastor and the people make up an organization. The organization by its very nature has its own unique way or system of functioning. The result is politics. The church, because it is a system, is not immune to its own brand of politics.

Both the older and newer testaments of the Bible call for change. The Bible calls the individual to change from a “me- centered” understanding of the world to a God-centered attitude. This call to change is radical because it goes against the very nature of the human condition. Because it is radical, biblical change is very uncomfortable. It is, however, the beginning of a call to leadership. Best-selling authors and management experts Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges define leadership as follows: “Leadership is a process of influence. Anytime you seek to influence the thinking, behavior, or development of people in their lives, personal or professional, you are taking the role of a leader”¹⁰⁴ The biblical writers give to us examples of leadership in the context of real people who have differing goals, and differing goals often lead to conflict. One of the many challenges of biblical leadership is to influence people to set aside some of their personal goals in favor of other objectives. The call is to move away from the individual as the central focus; the individual is to be a functioning part of the greater whole.

Servant Leaders

When looking at leadership in the Bible, the leadership presented is servant leadership. The biblical model of servant leadership is demonstrated in multiple ways and places throughout the scriptures. The Apostle Paul introduces himself as a “servant of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁵ He repeats this theme in the letter to the Corinthians, saying, “Though I

¹⁰³ Ibid., 28.

¹⁰⁴ Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodge, *Lead Like Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson 2005), 4.

am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all.”¹⁰⁶ The title of servant is also the designation assumed by James,¹⁰⁷ Peter,¹⁰⁸ Jude,¹⁰⁹ and John.¹¹⁰ Jesus, whose favorite self-reference was “son of man,”¹¹¹ declares, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”¹¹² One of the primary themes of biblical leadership is servanthood.

The biblical leader first learns to serve. Leaders understand that their first service is to God, who is the true leader of his people. For the purposes of this study three examples of biblical leadership will be examined. It is not the intention of the present work to be exhaustive, so highlights of preparation for leadership as well as implementation of leadership style will be considered. We will look briefly at Moses in the older testament of the Bible and Jesus and Timothy in the newer testament.

A Bush Blazing

The leaders who emerge from the pages of scripture are called and prepared by God for their tasks. The preparation of Moses began at his birth. His mother, Jochebed, was Hebrew slave woman, and her people were under the yoke of Egyptian bondage. The male children of the Hebrew slaves were to be put to death by Pharaoh’s command.

¹⁰⁵ Romans 1:1.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Corinthians 9:19.

¹⁰⁷ James 1:1.

¹⁰⁸ 2 Peter 1:1.

¹⁰⁹ Jude 1:1.

¹¹⁰ Revelation 1:1.

¹¹¹ Mark 10:45.

¹¹² Mark 10:45.

When Moses was born, Jochebed remarked at his birth saying, “He was a fine child.”¹¹³ She hid him from the Egyptians. When she could hide him no longer, she set him into a basket and put him into the river. The daughter of Pharaoh rescued Moses from the river, adopted him, and raised him in the house of her father. The New Testament book of Acts records, “And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.”¹¹⁴ It was during his time in Egypt that Moses discovered his true nationality. The Bible states, “One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.”¹¹⁵

Moses committed murder, thinking he was helping his people. And the writer of Acts explains, “He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.”¹¹⁶ Moses acted in the way of the Egyptians, thinking that he would win favor and understanding from the Hebrew people, his people. Because of the murder, Moses fled from Egypt and lived as an exile in the land of Midian.

Moses’ preparation for leadership that began in Egypt was completed during his exile on the backside of the wilderness. After forty years of life in the wilderness, God called Moses. The book of Exodus reports:

¹¹³ Exodus 2:2.

¹¹⁴ Acts 7:22.

¹¹⁵ Exodus 2:11-12.

¹¹⁶ Acts 7:25.

And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning; yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.” [4] When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”

Moses is busy tending sheep when God calls to him and sends him back to Egypt.

Moses is going to lead the Hebrew people out from the land where they have been enslaved for the past four hundred years. His preparation includes forty years in the finest schools in the world at that time and forty years tending sheep. God calls Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, yet Moses, despite all his experience, is reluctant. Pastor, counselor, and author Paul Tripp, writing about the call of Moses, comments:

But Moses is neither willing nor hopeful. Exodus 3 and 4 record Moses’ argument with God. Moses’ personal assessment is that he is completely unable, unprepared, and unqualified to do the thing that God has called him to do. God’s response is simple: “I will go with you.” Moses’ bottom line is just as simple: “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”¹¹⁷

The reality is that Moses does not want to go. He is not the same man who killed the Egyptian forty years earlier. His education is not enough to inspire the necessary confidence. Tripp suggests the reason for Moses’ reluctance is “because he is being betrayed by the fear of his own heart.”¹¹⁸ The man Moses is no longer able to rely on his understanding of Egyptian politics or culture. He is frightened by his own inadequacies. Moses has learned humility. He has learned to be irrelevant, and to go back into a prominent position is frightening. This is the man God has chosen to lead. The

¹¹⁷ Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 66.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 66.

preparation God had designed for Moses had accomplished its work. Moses, the one-time prince of Egypt, has learned humility.

After God, through Moses, has led the children of Israel out of Egypt, God commands Moses to ascend Mount Sinai. It is on Mount Sinai where Moses meets with God. In the valley below the children of Israel grow tired of waiting for Moses. They fashion for themselves a golden calf and worship it in the manner of the pagans. The ruckus of their activity is so great that Joshua, who is waiting further down the mountain, interprets the noise as war.

In this moment Moses' leadership is tested. God offers Moses a new beginning. In the book of Exodus we read, "And the LORD said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.'"¹¹⁹ God is telling Moses that he will make a great nation from Moses in place of Abraham. This is an overwhelming proposal given to Moses. To this proposal Moses responds by asking God not to do it. Moses reminds God of His mercy. Moses, the servant of God, is essentially arguing for the lives of the children of Israel. Pastor and author James Montgomery Boice calls this moment Moses' "finest hour."¹²⁰ The servant of God, Moses, in service to his own people argues with God, contending for their lives. The murderer educated by the Egyptians is now a humble servant. He places his own life on the line for the lives of his people. He has learned the meaning of servant leadership.

¹¹⁹ Exodus 32:9-10.

¹²⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *Ordinary Men Called by God: a Study of Abraham, Moses, and David* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 92.

The man Moses has been molded by God to be a servant first of God. He demonstrates the transformation as he serves the people of Israel. He willingly pleads for the lives of the people of Israel. He does this refusing God's offer to make of him a "great nation."¹²¹ Moses the man has become Moses the man of God.

Son of Man

Jesus' leadership began with his incarnation. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, an infant laid in a feeding trough made for livestock is a visual demonstration of his leadership style, which is one of humility and a complete understanding of himself. In John's gospel we read Jesus' own words: "For I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me."¹²² By his own admission Jesus was following the plan of another. The plan he followed was his Father's. His leadership was a reflection of what his Father wanted. In John's gospel Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise."¹²³ His purpose, his understanding, is tied up in his Father's purpose and understanding. Jesus demonstrates how leadership in the church is to be conducted. He knows whom he is following and whom he is leading. Jesus explains, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to

¹²¹ Exodus 32:9-10.

¹²² John 8:42.

¹²³ John 5:19.

snatch them out of the Father's hand.”¹²⁴ Jesus never claims to be on his own. His identity and his leadership flow out of relationship with his Father.

It is out his relationship with the Father that Jesus prepares his followers for the leadership he would require of them. In the gospel of Matthew, chapter twenty, Jesus is speaking about leading. He contrasts the leadership style of the Gentiles to what he expects from his followers. Jesus says to them, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you.”¹²⁵ The disciples are told they will not lead as the Gentiles lead. This will require a change at the very baseline of their understanding. What makes this so interesting is that Jesus gives these instructions immediately following a request from his disciples for honor and notoriety. The biblical answer to that request is the greatest among men will be “servant of all.”¹²⁶ Jesus does not merely call his disciples to serve. To serve implies “helping.” Jesus tells them they are to become like a “slave.”¹²⁷ Theologian and author D. A. Carson, commenting on Jesus’ use of the word “slave” in this passage, says, “In the pagan world humility was regarded, not so much as a virtue, but a vice. Imagine a slave being given leadership! Jesus’ ethics of the leadership and power in his community of disciples are revolutionary.”¹²⁸ Carson’s use of revolutionary implies a major shift from how leadership was understood at the time of Christ. The

¹²⁴ John 10:27-29.

¹²⁵ Matthew 20:25-28.

¹²⁶ Mark 9:35.

¹²⁷ Matthew 20:27.

¹²⁸ Frank Ely Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with the New International Version of the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 432.

leader was not a servant and certainly not a slave. Leaders used their authority to serve themselves.

The late J. Oswald Sanders, former director of Overseas Missionary Fellowship, adds, “If the disciples figured to learn about leadership on the fast track and with the appropriate perks and bonuses, Jesus soon disillusioned them. What a shock it was to discover that greatness comes through servanthood, and leadership through becoming slave of all.”¹²⁹ The disciples were often confused by the way Jesus did things. At one point two of them asked Jesus if they should command fire to come down on a group of people who did not receive them. Jesus rebuked them for their understanding. The disciples were part of a culture where might made right. The submission of slavery was to be avoided.

Francis Schaeffer, theologian, author, and the founder of L’Abri Fellowship, adds, “We are not greater than those over whom we have authority. If we have the world’s mentality of wanting the foremost place, we are not qualified for Christian leadership.”¹³⁰ The disciples will be taught this principle time and again through the life and teachings of Jesus.

The biblical leadership model begins with a change of heart. According to author and university professor Henri Nouwen, the biblical leader does not strive to be the most “relevant”¹³¹ of people. The Christian leadership that is so desperately needed is not that of the super competent person. Rather, it comes from Christians who, according Nouwen,

¹²⁹ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: a Commitment to Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 2.

¹³⁰ Francis A. Schaeffer, *No Little People* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 69.

¹³¹ Henri J. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 30.

are “called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self.”¹³² The life and ministry of Jesus demonstrates his understanding of self and purpose. Leadership is not self-driven; it originates in another.

Jesus’ life demonstrates the type of leader he calls his followers to be. He teaches his disciples to follow him using his own example. Jesus carries out the plan of his father. A plan that calls Jesus to become the “servant of all.”¹³³ His disciples learn to lead others by learning to follow Jesus. The path of Jesus’ leadership is humility.

What Paul Told Timothy

The Apostle Paul’s disciple Timothy is charged by Paul to carry on the work in Ephesus. The once-strong church has fallen under the influence of the surrounding culture as well as false teaching from within.¹³⁴ Paul tells Timothy to remain in the city and work within the church to correct what appears to be some severe problems. Timothy is young and timid. Paul has to remind him of the true faith he has been taught by his mother and grandmother. He encourages Timothy; “Let no one despise you for your youth.”¹³⁵ The task ahead is going to be difficult.

There is pressure for Christian leaders to do something big in response to big problems. Pastor and author Eugene Peterson observes, “Conventional wisdom tells us that when a problem is large, the strategy must be large.”¹³⁶ Yet Paul’s instruction to Timothy about how to handle the goddess Diana spirituality and false teachings in

¹³² Ibid., 30.

¹³³ Mark 9:35.

¹³⁴ I Timothy 1:3-7.

¹³⁵ I Timothy 4:12.

¹³⁶ Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*, ed. Peter Santucci (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 128.

Ephesus is “to remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.”¹³⁷ Peterson explains, “Pastors are in charge of keeping the distinction between the world’s lies and the gospel’s truth clear.”¹³⁸ Certain teachers who were deceived and attempting to mislead people troubled the church at Ephesus. Timothy’s instruction from Paul was not to attack, but to teach and instruct. He was to teach those in the church and to rebuke false teaching inside the church.¹³⁹

Timothy is commanded to demonstrate what Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie call “fruitfulness in ministry.”¹⁴⁰ They explain, “We came to believe that Christian leaders are to bear fruit by sharing their faith and nurturing the fruit of God’s grace in their own lives and in the lives of others.”¹⁴¹ The way false teaching is overcome is by faithfulness to correct teaching. Timothy is called to guard his own understanding and then to display that understanding before the church. Again Paul’s words to Timothy: “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”¹⁴² The straightforward act of holding to the truth and demonstrating that truth is what Paul commands Timothy to do. This is not ostentatious instruction; it is a call to trust the faithfulness of God and his word.

¹³⁷ 1 Timothy 1:3.

¹³⁸ Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*, ed. Peter Santucci (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 2.

¹³⁹ 1 Timothy 5:1-2.

¹⁴⁰ 1 Timothy 4:14-15.

¹⁴¹ Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 12.

¹⁴² 1 Timothy 4:16.

Biblical leadership begins with recognition that God himself is leading his people. The call to lead the people of God is a call to truth. Paul gives these instructions because he says, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”¹⁴³ Paul does not command Timothy in this instance to confront the cultural spirituality head-on, but rather to instruct the church. His instruction is to be carried out in humility. Paul’s teaches Timothy with these words, “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.”¹⁴⁴ Instruction in truth and godliness is the primary call of the pastoral leadership.

The Christian leader serves the church in humility. True humility recognizes the call to lead comes from outside themselves. The biblical leader is leading at the command of another. Moses was called by and equipped God to go back to Egypt to carry out God’s plan for his people. Jesus submitted to the will of his Father. His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane is “not as I will but as you will.”¹⁴⁵ This speaks to his commitment to his Father’s plan. And Timothy obeyed the instructions of Paul in the face of the difficult task in Ephesus. The call to biblical leadership is not for the faint-of-heart but for those who understand that it is God himself who calls and who equips his people to carry out his purpose.

Summary

In chapter two three areas of literature relating to leadership were reviewed. The three areas examined, involved leading change, systems leadership, and a biblical and

¹⁴³ 1 Timothy 1:5.

¹⁴⁴ 1 Timothy 5:1-2.

¹⁴⁵ Matthew 26:39.

theological study of leadership. The research's review of the literature was not intended to be exhaustive but chose a sampling of the literature as representative. In chapter three the researcher will present the methodology for the present study.

Chapter Three

Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how congregants experience adaptive change led by pastors in an established congregation. A qualitative research study was designed to examine and analyze the experiences of a particular congregation. The researcher focused on certain individual members who were actively involved in the church before, during, and after the adaptive change took place. A qualitative study was chosen because it is designed to identify and present the experience of the participants. Sharon Merriam, author and professor of adult education at the University of Georgia, explains, “The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience.”¹⁴⁶ Therefore, this study was conducted to ascertain the point of view of the congregants, as well as that of the pastor, and to determine how the congregants experienced change within the church system.

The study presented here utilized a case study method of qualitative research. Merriam states, “The single most defining characteristic of case study is delimiting the object of study, the case.”¹⁴⁷ That is, the study has a specific group of people involved in a specific event. The event happens within a measurable period of time. The case study

¹⁴⁶Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 14.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 40.

method was also selected because the actual events that led to change were not readily predictable. A distinct advantage of the case study is that, according to Merriam, it allows the investigators to learn about what they have minimal control over. She expresses, “Also, the less control an investigator has over ‘a contemporary set of events’ or if the variables are so embedded in the situation as to be impossible to identify ahead of time, case study is likely to be the best choice”¹⁴⁸

There were many variables involved in the change process, including individual people with different experiences and expectations. It was the variables embedded in the specific situation that were of interest to the researcher. For the purpose of this study, the perceptions and bias of the participants were observed and recorded by the researcher. It was the perceptions and bias of the participants that added color to the phenomenon of change. Merriam concludes, “The decision to focus on a qualitative case study stems from the fact that the design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing.”¹⁴⁹ This study was designed to gain insight into the interpretation of the change process by church members.

The qualitative study was limited to the period of time involving the church’s decision to join a new denomination. The decision process took place over an eighteen-month period. Each interviewee was an active member of the church. An active member is described as a person who attends regular Sunday services and participates in congregational meetings involving regular decision-making for the church, as well as ongoing participation in church ministry. Each interviewee was an active member in the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 45.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 42.

church for a minimum of three years prior to the denominational change process, and each continued as an active member of the church after the change took place.

Participant Sample Selection

This study includes interviews of eight members of the congregation who were active in the church at least three years prior to the pastor's arrival. The interviewees ranged in age from approximately twenty to eighty years. There was a mix of both male and female interviewees. Their participation in the church varied from leadership roles to regular attendees. The criterion for those being interviewed was specific to the overall question. The interviewees were those who had been most invested in the church. Their active role in the church had set the direction of the organization prior to the change.

The researcher determined to study an established congregation. The established members were not necessarily interested in change when they hired the new pastor. In the church being studied, which had been in the same location for over a hundred years, the average pastor served for four and a half years. The significance of this particular congregation was simply that they were a typical example of today's church. They were accustomed to new pastors making changes. These changes, however, had always been technical changes, the type of change they already had the skill set to accomplish. New paint colors in the sanctuary, a change of rooms for the nursery were the types of changes that had happened before. A change in denomination required new learning. The re-evaluation of how the church should be governed as well as how sacraments should be observed involved rethinking cherished beliefs. All of these changes needed to be made at a personal level. The church members experienced a change in their value system, which was a difficult and painful process. The length of active participation and age

range were important aspects in determining what leadership skills were helpful in facilitating change. The insights gathered from those who experienced life in the congregation were also helpful. In examining how their new pastor guided them through the hard work of change, the researcher hoped to provide valuable understanding from the members' experiences.

Data Collection

The data was collected through interviews using the semi-structured interview method. According to Merriam, "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."¹⁵⁰ The semi-structured format allows freedom within the interview for the interviewee to give factual accounts of the incident, as well as to comment on the outcome. The result is a dialogue that is directed but remains fluid, opening the incidents to a comprehensive analysis. The participants are contacted by the researcher before the interviews and asked to reflect on the process involved in the change of denominations. They are encouraged to express their own presuppositions, questions, and concerns involved in making their decision.

The interviews in this study were conducted in person, recorded on a digital recorder, and transcribed for further study. There were follow-up conversations, if necessary, to ensure that the researcher understood what each interviewee intended to convey. The names of those who participated are changed in order to protect the privacy of the participants. The interviewees were given a Research Participant Informed Consent Form for the Protection of Human Rights. The interviewees were asked to read carefully and then sign the form, which was forwarded to the researcher's educational institution.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 90.

Interview Protocol

The following is an interview protocol. The questions are formulated around a semi-structured interview, using the primary research questions presented in chapter one as a guide. A sample of pilot interviews was conducted to evaluate the clarity and effectiveness of the questions in extracting appropriate data. The interview process also required the use of probe questions, which were designed to gather clarity and depth from what has already been stated. Probe questions were also used to redirect the interviewee as necessary.

Interview Questions

RQ 1. What leadership challenges did the pastor face as the church considered a denominational change?

Interview questions:

- 1) Tell me what your church was like before the new pastor arrived.
- 2) What were some of your favorite things about your church?
- 3) How would describe your friendships within the church?
- 4) How had the church changed during the time you were a member before the new pastor arrived?
- 5) What were some of the things that you wanted to see changed in your church?

RQ 2. What was it about the pastor that caused the congregation to stay in the change process?

Interview questions:

- 1) What were some things the new pastor changed that surprised you?
- 2) How did the pastor begin to implement the changes?

- 3) Were you able to talk over some of the changes with others in the church?
- 4) What, if anything, did the pastor do to help build trust within the congregation?
- 5) Were there any specific changes that were difficult for you personally?
- 6) Would you be willing to describe how you were feeling during that time?
- 7) How did you feel about changing denominations?

RQ 3. What was the cost for the congregation?

Interview questions:

- 1) Throughout the process was there anything specific that you are willing to describe that was particularly difficult?
- 2) Will you tell me about how you were feeling during that time?
- 3) How did you feel when some of the church members determined they did not want to be part of the change and left the church?

Data Analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative method of analysis. Sharan Merriam says, “[This] method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. The overall object of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data.”¹⁵¹ The patterns in the data demonstrated a “rich description”¹⁵² of the individual experience of the interviewee. This allowed the researcher to see beyond statistics into an actual experience through the eyes and ears of the interviewee.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁵² Ibid., 16.

Researcher Position

The researcher in this study has the position of an “insider–outsider.”¹⁵³ The researcher experienced the change process that was being studied alongside those in the established congregation. In that dimension, the researcher was an insider. The fact that researcher was the new pastor who led the change process being studied gave the researcher an outsider perspective. The researcher acknowledges limitations concerning both positions. Merriam states, “Both parties bring bias, predispositions, attitudes and physical characteristics that affect the interaction and the data elicited. A skilled interviewer accounts for these factors in order to evaluate the data being obtained.”¹⁵⁴

The researcher is an evangelical Christian who has been ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). The researcher holds an undergraduate degree in education, as well as a Master of Divinity degree. In addition to these degrees, the researcher is a Master Licensed Plumber and has been an independent business owner. As a pastor, the researcher is functioning in a second career. The researcher’s previous experience as an active church member and lay leader adds unique perspective to the research. As a former church member and lay leader, the researcher is interested in the experiences of the average church member who has been active in church for many years. The researcher examined the attitudes and actions of the congregation in order to determine what helped them to consider and ultimately decide to stay involved in the change process.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 108.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

This section has detailed the proposed methodology of research and data collection process. In the next section, the stories of these church members' individual experiences during the process of change will be presented.

Study Limitations

The study was limited to one group of people who were part of one congregation. The interviewees were limited to members who have been with the church at least five years; however, the group did not include all of the church members who met that criterion. The goal was to select a representative sample and to limit the number based on time constraints and resources. The study did not attempt to review all literature on this topic. The researcher has considered as much literature as possible, given the parameters of the study, limiting the areas of literature to specific themes. The conclusions of this study are limited to the experiences of those participants as well as the literature as presented in representative readings. The researcher does not claim that the results presented are universally applicable in every place at every time. They do, however, represent a real-time case study. The findings in this study may apply to similar church congregations and should be viewed as such. As with all qualitative studies, the readers are responsible to determine what part, if any, apply to their specific circumstances.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how congregants experience adaptive change led by pastors in an established congregation. In order to research this subject, it was important for the researcher to understand how congregants experience leadership during the process of change. The following research questions guided this study.

1. What leadership challenges did the pastor face as the church considered a denominational change?
2. What was it about the pastor that caused the congregation to stay in the change process?
3. What was the cost for the congregation?

In this chapter, eight research participants will be introduced and their insights concerning the study questions will be presented.

Study Participants

In the following paragraphs the study participants will be briefly introduced. The names have been changed in order to maintain anonymity. The introductions will allow comparisons and contrasts to be made as the researcher presents their responses to the interview questions.

Jason's family attended the church before he was born. He was raised in the church, attending regularly each Sunday. He participated in the youth group program

through high school. He also volunteered his time as a youth assistant. Jason was married in the church and has one child. He continues to attend with his family each Sunday.

Michele has attended the church regularly since 1979. She has assisted with the financial records of the church and “served on multiple committees” over the years. She has been active in Bible studies and teaching fellowship each Sunday morning.

Bill was also raised in the church. He was married in the sanctuary and continues to attend with his wife and children, though recently his children left to attend college and settled in different communities. Bill has been active in youth leadership as well as in the role of deacon. He attends church regularly and is involved in Bible studies.

Mary likes to say that she was carried in her mother’s womb to the church. She does not like to divulge her age but says only, “I have been around here a very long time.” Mary has been active in the church choir and served for many years as a “deaconess.”

Lou has attended the church for approximately eleven years; he is the least tenured of those interviewed. He is a small group leader and cares for several elderly members of the church family. Lou also serves the church as an elder.

Karen has attended the church for fifty years. She has served faithfully as a children’s Sunday school teacher for approximately forty of those years. She also led Pioneer Clubs, which is an outreach to children of the community.

Dave was married in the church in 1957 and has been a regular attendee with his wife, children, and grandchildren. He has served in a leadership capacity for more than forty years. He presently serves as an elder in the church.

Samantha has attended the church for many years with only one exception. She left for a time just before the new pastor arrived. She explains that the former pastor was difficult to get to know, which made her and her husband uncomfortable. She returned because many of her friends still attended and they invited her to meet the “new guy.”

Leadership Challenges

The researcher has divided leadership challenges into four categories based on the interviewees’ responses during the interview process. According to those interviewed, the new pastor faced at least four leadership challenges. The four leadership challenges identified by the researcher were as follows: hurting from past experiences, division over how to proceed, fear of an uncertain future, and starvation for the word of God. The researcher will present findings categorized by these four challenges.

A Hurting People

While the researcher was primarily interested in the change process, he recognizes that change does not happen in a vacuum. Change occurs in a real place in real time. To that end, the researcher began by identifying the condition or situation in which the change occurred. During the research process, those interviewed explained the preexisting condition of the church before the new pastor arrived. Those interviewed gave their impressions, including examples of the condition of the church. The interviewees’ own words are recoded and presented here.

The church members were hurting as a group as well as individually. The pain which the church endured assailed the congregation from several directions simultaneously. The interviewees explain that the hurt did not only come from leadership. They also hurt one another, which led to confusion and personal pain. Jason commented,

“It was a church that had been, I would say, hurt numerous times -- a church that also really does a good job of wearing out a pastor. It was just pretty much a mess.” Michele concurred, “We were pretty much at odds, with continual dissention. The last one out of town turned out the lights, you know?” She continued, “The church had gone down from two services to one; maybe on a good Sunday we might have thirty or forty people. Jason remembers those days as well. He said, “Some Sundays there were thirty people in church, and I was hoping for someone to come in and shake things up.” The dwindling numbers indicated the hurt of those who left as well as those who remained. Dave explained, “We have been through some disappointing things; there were some conflicts; some leaders had resigned out of frustration and left the fellowship.”

The hurt was not limited to those who left the church. Individual members who stayed carried the emotional pain as well. Samantha explained that her “husband would no longer go to church” because of the strife. He was raised in a pastor’s home and never missed church. Karen added that all the “coming and going bothered me.”

Bill suggested that it was not always the congregants who were hurtful to one another; sometimes the pastor was insensitive and caused hurt. He described the former pastor’s inability to relate to the people, explaining:

He was very literal in his transcribing and applying in the books he read to the practice that he used. And he left out the love part. It was not that these are not great theoretical concepts; they just do not work unless you implement them with some compassion and love. And that was not there, and that hurt a lot of people. I know a lot of people left. They said that regardless of what changes happened, they were not coming back.

The hurt inflicted by the church members toward one another, as well as by the leadership, left in its wake a hurting community of people who were divided in purpose. Those who remained carried the scars of a broken fellowship.

A Divided People

As the participants told their stories, they recognized that they were a church divided. Their suffering had not produced a clear direction. Mary conceded, “We were a church in turmoil; we had been in turmoil twice fairly recently.” Speaking about the new pastor decision to come to the church, she added, “I would not have wanted to come into this church.” Michele agreed with Mary’s sentiment, commenting, “People were at odds with one another. We were not learning. We were not growing as Christians. Everybody was more out to get each other -- that type of situation. The fact was that we were losing people; we did not see them anymore.”

Jason remembered, “There was a lot of dissention; there were people yelling in the middle of the services sometimes, which does not work and is not good. It was not that close friendship that I talked about earlier; that bond was starting to fall apart.” Michele agreed, explaining: “A few of the people kind of ruled the church, rather than the leadership. At that point, throughout this, we had deacons who would not stand up and take charge. It got to the point where people were running the church and not the deacons and the pastor.”

Karen’s understanding is reflected in her statement, “We needed focus, direction, and unity. I saw a lot of divided opinions.” Bill described the church as “a divided congregation.” He explained,

There were a lot of people that had been alienated and turned off. I mean, again in the past, there were and there may still be... a lot of “us” and

“them” between people who were newer or who had not been as involved in leadership roles within the church before. And they would look at families, my family being one of them, that had been with the church a couple of generations (and say,) “Oh, they are the church and they control everything that goes on in the church.”

The disunity surfaced during the pastoral search process. Mary commented on the way the church chose pastors; she remembers two different incidents. When speaking of the first, she said, “There was something with (name withheld). Well, he was voted on also – and voted down. That was very hurtful.” Remembering a second incident, Mary explained the way the congregation confronted one of their pastors:

When a previous pastor was not making people happy, we had a meeting and it was in what I call the Prayer Meeting Room, now the Nursery. But they had tables in the center, you know, big tables and chairs all the way around the edge. But if you did not pick your seat, you could not have gotten out of there without a lot of notice. And I was talked into going, and, of course, I dragged my mother with me. And, oh, it was awful. I thought it was awful. I did not say anything, but some people did. And he (the pastor) was there. I just felt so bad for him.

The people of the church, suffering from a lack of clear direction, struggled to treat one another in a civil manner. The pastors, who were attempting to lead, were subject to insensitive people as they tried to make things right. Jason explained that it was a time when “there were just a lot of interim pastors that were like ‘I want to be full time’ and that is not what they came for.” He continued, “They had been called to be interim; but because of the leadership void, they tried to take the pastorate. Those who were called to be pastors said they were going to do one thing and then did not follow through with that.”

Jason, then speaking about the challenge to a new pastor, explained:

He has the challenge of a church that is divided. It was pretty much old people, young people, which was pretty much how it worked. The old people listened to their old people music and the young people listened to

their young people music. I mean that was the biggest problem I saw. How is whoever comes in going to take these people that are, I do not want to say, two separate churches and mash them together?

The church congregation was damaging itself and others. They were divided over how to repair the church, as evidenced by the ongoing division and struggle. Dave summed it up very simply; he wryly said, “There has to be some patching up of relationships.”

A Fearful People

Along with the hurt and division, the church expressed a measure of fear concerning the future. Karen explained that things were “kind of up and down; we were wondering what could happen.” Bill stated, “There were people fearing change, inevitable in any transition, although the church had been through multiple changes.” He pointed to the number of different full-time pastors he experienced in his time at the church. He said, “There is an average of a six-year stay for most of our previous ministers over several decades.” He speculated that this has led to the uncertainty that the church feels and added, “We were in limbo, and the people were struggling with what our identity was going to be.”

A Hungry People

In the midst of the pain, division and fear, those remaining in the church were hungry for God. They expressed a desire for something good to happen. Michele said in exasperation, “It got to the point where people were asking the former minister, ‘When are you going to preach? When are you going to do a Bible study?’” She continued, “Most of us that were still left were not willing to let it go.” The desire to hang on was expressed by Bill when he said, “There is a core belief that God was here, is here.”

The hunger for biblical preaching and teaching was evident. The fact that sound exegesis was not happening accounts for the trouble in the church. Jason pointed to “pastors that were preaching on the signs of the zodiac....Yeah, there were twelve of them and twelve apostles.” He added, “I mean, that is what it was like; that is why the church was hurt, and it was divided in that respect because some people could not see it because they were being led astray.”

Dave, who has served the church in a leadership capacity his entire adult life, understood the frustrations of those who remained. He believed that the church had drifted in a direction different from its heritage. He pointed out, “There was a long tradition of Baptists preaching in that church.” The core of that teaching, he believed, left people hungry for the scriptures. As he further considered the question of the teaching and preaching, he admitted that there were problems. He explained:

Well, as I have already said, when you had seeker friendly and then there was a lot more illustration from TV programs and other sources, not total neglect. But I can remember people saying, “I am not getting anything; I am not being spiritually fed.” That said to me that we did not have good expository preaching at that period.

The missing dynamic of biblical teaching and preaching, according to Dave, left the church community without a clear direction. He shared, “It is true; we were looking for someone who had direction. We had been through a couple of disappointing experiences previous to this, and therefore, we were somewhat open for change.”

Staying in the Change Process

The researcher uncovered the conditions into which the new pastor was called to lead change. Those challenges were experienced at the church organization level and also

on a personal level for the church members. The researcher then sought to determine what caused the individuals to remain in the painful process of change. The participants identified at least four motives and/or values that caused them to stay in the process. Those values will be presented below.

This Church is My Home

In dealing with an established congregation, one aspect that cannot be overlooked is the perception of ownership. It was stated over and over by the participants that this is “my church,” and the feeling that the church is where they feel comfortable, where they know people, proved to be a strong motivation for staying. Jason expressed:

The great thing about the church was that you had all the people that you knew, loved, and grew up with. It was full of a lot of people that had always been there. I mean the friendships; there are people in that church that I have known my entire life and they are still here. These are people that I have grown up with. Those are some things, that no matter what your denomination is, that no matter what changes are going on, they are not going to change. It is a very nice tight-knit community, and that has stayed the same through any change that we have had.

The church endured change in the past, but the relationships of family and friends remained throughout the process. The strength of familiarity helped the congregants to process the changes.

As Mary reflected on the church as her home, she related a story that summed up her feelings; she smiled as she began:

Well, you know, like I said before, I am a little inclined to think I wish it were just the same as it used to be when I was a kid and you came in, you knew what you were going to see and when you were going to sing and when you were going to do this. And then because I got older, and you got to stop telling people I was here all my life.

As Mary continued to explain her perception of the church as her home, she admitted that for a time she left the church. Her reason for leaving was simple: “I did not like the

pastor.” In that time she visited other churches. What brought her back was the familiar. She admitted, “You know, they were not home to me. And he (the pastor) cannot last forever.” She added in closing, “And I swore I would never do that again. So you are not getting rid of me that easy.” The sense that “this is mine” is a powerful motivator.

Michele revealed that the church has always been home for her. She explained that she trusted some of those who were leading. Her trust was expressed in comments concerning the denominational change. She explained, “I guess I figured when we changed that is people like (name withheld) and guys like that could be okay with this, I guess it is okay.” The presence of the church and church family plays an important role in all of her decisions. She related a recent conversation:

My cousin and I were talking recently, and this has nothing to do with this thing, but eventually I am going to sell the house. It is getting to be more than what I can really take care of. He asked me if I was thinking of going someplace. My kids want me to move in with my sister, whatever. I said, “I really do not want to leave, because my church is here. My friends are here and that type of thing.” The church has been a savior a lot of times for me.

The thought of leaving what is familiar about her church gives her pause as she makes plans for the future.

Karen stated simply, “I had been in that church forever. It was like home to me. It was a place to go where I was welcome and accepted. I found friends.” Lou expressed his feeling concerning the first time he attended the church, “I felt this enormous relief that we don’t have to go to every church in the country anymore to find a home. We found the home.” And Dave added, “My commitment has been to the community of believers at this church.”

The Pastor Taught From Scripture

The desire to remain in the change process expressed by the interviewees was fueled by the pastor's teaching and preaching from scripture. As previously discussed, the church members were displeased by the fact that they had not been hearing sermons or having Bible studies expounding the scriptures. Mary observed that the teachings were more like a "gloss over of the good life." Instead, the participants expressed their desire to learn from the Bible.

Dave explained, "We had had a problem...finding a pastor who was an expository teacher." What the church desired was a pastor and teacher who would spend time teaching from the Bible, a pastor who would "give us some sense of being part of the church universal, a sense of Christian community." Dave conceded, "There were things that we had not thought a lot about previously. The new pastor helped us broaden our thinking and put a better foundation under us." He turned their attention to "focusing on Christ rather than all of the immediate problems or struggles that can happen in a fellowship, and that brought harmony in place of power-struggle types of things." Dave summarized his thoughts by asking and then answering a question. He added, "And of course, why did they stay? He brought teaching and was open to share who he was."

Jason, speaking of the new pastor, pointed out:

He taught what was in the scriptures; he looked at the scripture and said, "Look we cannot just look at this verse; we have to look at this whole book behind it. We cannot just look at chapter four; we have to look at chapter five and six; we have to look at chapter three; we have to look at chapter one and two before that. We cannot just look in Romans; we have to look in Matthew."

The new pastor spent time opening the Bible, teaching the congregation how to read and study the scriptures for themselves. Lou explained that as the new pastor

began in the scriptures, he observed, “Well, the very first thing was that we heard a different approach to the gospel and a challenge that just because he (the pastor) said it, that was not enough ...he (the pastor) challenged us to go back to the Bible, go through it, research it ourselves, and become well versed in it.” Lou went on to explain that the pastor was not to be the ultimate authority but the pastor’s desire “was to help.” His leadership was demonstrated as more of a “servant-hood type of leadership, saying, ‘This is what the Bible says and I’m here to help you to understand.’”

Jason agreed with Lou’s assessment that the pastor did not take an authoritarian role but explained the teachings. That did not mean the pastor was unsure of himself. Jason explained, “The pastor presented the information in a way that he was right. I mean, when the facts are there, they are there, and you cannot deny them.” He went on to make the point that some did try to argue. But he was left with the conclusion that “the facts are so straightforward; they are so well thought out; they are there and it is a fact you cannot argue with. It is not an opinion...it is right there in front of you.”

Michele remembered the first sermon the new pastor delivered. She recalled, “I remember the first day that we walked in the church and (the pastor was) preaching. The whole atmosphere of the church was so that you could tell the Holy Spirit was in the church that day.” She went on to say, “We had not felt that for a long time.” The content and delivery of the sermon was one of “love, forgiveness, and grace.” She remembered hearing others say, “This guy is okay; he preaches from the Bible.” She added, “I love the sermons. I love the Bible studies. I am learning.”

Mary would agree with Michele's assessment of the preaching. She shared, "There would be great agreement that the new guy can really preach a sermon." She further agreed with Michele, saying, "I like all the Bible teaching. It is not only the teaching and preaching but also the delivery as well. I do not want somebody to stand up there and give you what you should do during the day. That is boring; you can hear that on any talk show." The sermons related to where the people live.

Samantha remarked, "I got a lot out of the sermons because I was not brought up in a Christian family. The preaching made the service interesting and made it so that a person like me could understand." She further explained that she did not attend church until she married the son of a Baptist minister. Samantha repeated, "I mean, I really get a lot out of them; they include things that help me to understand the why and the what of the Bible." And the Bible classes "are very, very helpful to me."

Bill explained that not only did the biblical teaching and preaching help him, but he also really enjoyed the biblical theology classes. He especially liked the pastor's approach to the classes, describing them as an opportunity to learn. The pastor, according to Bill, would say, "This is where I am coming from. I understand this is where you have been, and this is where it meets up. And this is where there are differences." Then the differences were examined against the scriptures. Bill said it was "very important" to take that type of approach because "as the men walked through the Westminster Confession," the men felt as though they were heard as well as taught. He remarked, "I thoroughly loved it."

The pastor met the church's desire for sound teaching and preaching, and the congregation was pleased with the result. Jason remembered that his aged grandmother,

who was a regular attendee in the adult teaching classes, used to say when the pastor asked what she thought about the class, “Well, that is what it says in my Bible.”

The New Pastor Respected Us

The participants in the study believed that the new pastor demonstrated respect for them as individuals. The subject of respect was present in each interview. The participants commented that the pastor was actively involved with them as a group during “family talks” as well as on an individual basis. The pastor held multiple “family talks.” “Family talk” is a reference to a type of town meeting where the congregation and the pastor discuss what is happening in the church in an open forum-type format.

Dave remarked that the pastor “earned our respect because of his insights.” The teachings as presented were new in some ways, yet according to Dave, “He was not dogmatic; he never wavered in terms of his commitment to the principles, but he did not treat us in a way that made it sound like anyone who did not agree was ‘out to lunch,’ if I can to put it that way. But I think that he was consistent; he has always been consistent.”

An important demonstration of the pastor’s respect for the participants was a willingness to listen. Dave said simply, “He listened to people.” Karen concurred with Dave when she remarked, “He went around and got acquainted with everybody and talked to everybody. He was pleasant. He was able to listen.”

The Reformed perspective of the scriptures was new to the congregation, as well as the polity of the Presbyterian Church in America. Karen felt “challenged” by the Reformed perspective. She added, “He was challenging. He was a little intimidating, but you felt like he knew who you were and you could go to him any time you wanted to.” Dave remembered that the new pastor “carefully explained those changes and gave

opportunity to respond, like in family talk sessions and what have you, to help people understand what changes were happening.”

The changes implemented by the pastor were not forced upon the congregation without discussion. The process moved slowly at a pace that helped the congregants to feel comfortable. There was not “a lot of push; it was a reasonable approach,” explained Karen. She also observed that the pastor was not wavering in his commitment to the teaching of the Reformed understanding. She remembered that he would say, “Accept me or do not accept me. This is the way I am.” She also liked the emphasis on involving the men more in leadership. She explained:

We began to be acquainted with the process and the differences that were going to be there. They were not objectionable. They were challenging, like something to take on. Maybe this is worth it. It was slow. It was certainly involving the men to be responsible, letting loose on the women a little. I thought that it was agreeable. It was a good atmosphere.

The atmosphere was an important factor identified by the participants. The feeling that the pastor respected who the people were and was willing to take time to explain was very important for Bill. He observed that the pastor approached the congregation “respectfully.” He explained his understanding of the pastor’s approach:

The pastor began respectfully. I think out of consideration for where everyone had been; very honestly, he (the pastor) said, “Look, I am here. I may not be what you want, but this is who I am” --you know, being honest and open. “This is where I am coming from and I will lead as long as I am asked to lead or guided to lead. And if it is not what is needed, if it is not what God wants, then I will move on so the right person can be here.”

The respectful attitude of the pastor helped the congregation as they considered the changes that they were being asked to embrace. According to Bill, the pastor was willing to answer the challenging questions that those in the congregation had concerning the changes. The pastor understood and “respected why those challenges were there.” Bill

said they resulted from “some of the misdirection that had been there in the past.” He conceded, “I do not believe I ever heard the pastor belittle anyone or discredit their belief on any subject.” Those conversations included the family talks, as well as “overheard conversations, especially some of the discussions that followed sermons.”

The pastor’s willingness to “respect why those challenges were there” went a long way in building trust within the congregation. Lou, commenting on the pastor’s attitude, said, “He was here to help us; his leadership was a servant-type, which says, ‘I am here to help you.’” That was very encouraging for Lou. He said that even though a “few resisted, they were not singled out and torn apart, but were still included and were a part for quite a while.” Those who chose not to stay were, according to Lou, “extended the right hand of fellowship as they went out the door.” He said that those who left were “told that any time they wanted to come back we would hug them, and we would and still would.” The congregation was reflecting the attitude of the pastor. They were demonstrating the respect that they had seen in the pastor towards those few who chose to leave. Jason revealed that some of the people were mean to the pastor during that time. He acknowledged that he did not know what they said to the pastor in private, but in public it was difficult.

Jason agreed that the atmosphere and tone set by the pastor was very helpful and encouraged the congregation to consider the changes. The congregation had time to consider these things before they voted to change denominations. The process was done in an open manner, not just decided by a few. He asserted, “I mean it was an open discussion. It was always open. I mean, we always said, ‘Hey we are going to talk about this; come down and talk about it; get here and talk about it.’” The talks he is referencing

were the family talks as well as the adult Sunday school. As the scriptures were taught, the principles of Reformed theology were expounded. The attendees had ample opportunity to listen, ask and discuss. Jason explained,

I would definitely say that he (the pastor) did not just stand up and say radically, “This is what I am; this is what I believe.” It came with forewarning. He definitely said that he did not believe everything that others might believe and that we are going to talk about it, and that if you decide that it is not what you believe and that you do not want to change, then that is fine. It was the right way to do it; it was slow; it was not dramatic; it was not just “drop the hammer, and here it is.”

The practice of meetings, which included an open invitation to all who were interested, set the tone for the change. The changes, according to Michele, “did not come at the start.” The pastor spent a great deal of time and energy building trust, “trying to convince people” that the changes were good changes. She added, “He was very slow in taking on the changes.” Mary’s words echoed Michele’s; she commented, “He drew us in before he said, ‘We are going to change, and this is how it is going to be.’” Jason thought the process was done at the correct speed and in a helpful order. He interpreted the process this way:

It started out the right way; we did not jump right into why we should baptize babies, and the pastor said, “We are going to talk about that, but we are not going to talk about that right now.” It was a good phrase because there were so many people that wanted to talk about those kinds of things right then. It was not important at the time, because you cannot talk about it if you do not understand what being reformed means.

Jason felt that the reason the congregation called the pastor was because of his ability to relate to the people where they were at the moment. He talked in a way that they could understand. Jason said that the new pastor “had stories that related to the people.” The pastor explained his own walk, saying, “This is how I struggle, how I

grow.” The openness of the pastor demonstrated respect for the congregation and encouraged their desire to stay in the change process.

The Pastor Became One of Us

The researcher uncovered an additional theme that those interviewed considered important for them as they continued in the change process. It is the idea that the pastor became “one of us.” The researcher has separated out this theme from the theme of respect because although the themes are similar, the participants discussed the “transparency” and “humanness” of the pastor. These traits, along with his willingness to become one of them, were contributing factors to their staying involved in the change process.

As Mary reflected on previous pastors of which she has “experienced many,” she said, “I think some ministers get all over being a minister, you know, they just.... You know what I mean?” She added that it wasn’t so with the new pastor. “Like, I think I could tell him about anything and he would understand it because he is more human than a lot, you know; some are just so holy.” A “holier than thou” attitude on the part of the pastor can inhibit trust in a congregation. Samantha liked the fact that the pastor was “real,” saying, “He lets me pick on him.”

Michele, speaking about the new pastor, said, “He is human; he admits his wrongs; he was right there along with the rest of us. He could step down off the pulpit and be preaching to himself.” Dave, in his usual way of saying things clearly and simply, concurred, “The pastor was certainly transparent; he had been right from the beginning. He identified himself with those of us in the congregation as opposed to setting himself apart.”

The congregation expressed that the pastor's participation in the church member's lives in ordinary ways was encouraging. Dave explained:

I think that the unique set of talents that he brought to our ministry has made some difference -- the fact that he can and does work with members of our church to improve the facility and that sort of thing. A little thing along that line, perhaps, is the fact that he recognized that many of our congregation are what we call "blue-collar workers," and therefore he did not overdress in terms of his presentation from the pulpit, along with the warmth that he brings to the relationships. That pays dividends; I mean there is no question in my mind.

The pastor recognized the make-up of the congregation and worked within their identity, which helped form trust in relationships.

Lou expressed the same theme in terms of the sermons that the pastor preached. He said, "In the sermon, whenever he would talk about things, he would include himself; he wouldn't put himself on a pedestal as lofty something. He put himself right down where we were at." It was as if the pastor was "also out in the pews listening to himself." This posture went a long way to gaining the trust of the congregation. Lou believed, "It gave the pastor credibility, because he's really talking to himself, too." Karen, reflecting on the human approach of the pastor's preaching, explained, "He went visiting, getting to know individuals, as well as sharing his humanness and his struggles. He is real, not just there for the sermon."

As Bill reflected on the humanity of the pastor and his willingness to be a part of the congregation, he explained that the pastor demonstrated "a compassionate approach, a Christ-like approach to leadership." Bill said,

The pastor made himself a real person; I mean, he did not lead by sitting on a cloud and lording it over everyone. He came and lived among the people and shared in their pains and sorrows and experiences and was tangible. The pastor shared himself with the people from the first day and continues to do so. It was just last Sunday morning when the pastor said, "This is my life. This is my family.

We are not perfect. We struggle. My kids are not perfect. My marriage is not perfect. But it is a work in progress, and we rely on God to make it work. And we rely on our fellowship with you to make it work.”

Bill continued,

With the pastor it was never an “I-am-holier-than-thou” sort of thing. And that goes a long ways toward having people understanding their own relationship with God. And, again, within the congregation, I think people said, “This guy is real.” I mean, he was real both from the pulpit and on a personal level.

The congregation saw in the pastor a real person who from the beginning of their relationship was willing to admit to struggles and the need for ongoing grace and encouragement. The pastor admitted his need to walk among the congregation as one of them even as he was called to lead them. The congregation responded with trust and respect.

The Cost for Congregants

The researcher has explained the condition of the church congregation in this study as a people divided, hurting, and longing for sense stability. Their new pastor led them through a process of painful and difficult change. The researcher has examined and presented some of the prominent factors that encouraged the congregation to stay in the change process. In this last section the researcher will present in the words of those interviewed some of the costs related to the change process. Those findings will be divided into three sections: growing pains, letting go of long-held cherished beliefs, and the testing of longstanding family relationships and friendships.

Growing Pains

The participants expressed the cost of the change process in terms of various types of pain. Those interviewed recognized that some of the pain was a necessary part of

growth. In that regard, each of them pointed to different circumstances that resulted in painful but healthy growth. Lou remarked, “I think there was somewhat of a problem in the early leadership. There was an understanding that wasn’t appropriate for the Reformed doctrine that was being taught.” He went on to say that the church had previously been going in a different direction and he “recognized that the church leadership needed to be changed.” The change would bring the leaders in line with Reformed theology. Jason agreed that the teaching was becoming clearer and the church was going to have to grow in a new direction. He observed:

We are growing; it is not about numbers but our numbers are up as well. People who had left the church because they disagreed with doctrine are coming back and they are embracing it now, and it is nice to see them here. I like all the changes, even though they are like those growing pains that hurt and they are tough; they are hard to get through.

Jason’s perspective is that growth is painful but necessary. Bill agreed, “I had a lot of mixed feelings. There was a lot of angst, I guess, over some of the friends that I had grown up with in the church.” He was expressing the pain concerning the change of direction. He was distressed that there were some unwilling to make an effort to look at things a bit differently. From his own observations, he concluded, “Having matured and looking back in a more objective way, I believe it was my friends’ personal egos saying things are not happening the way they think they ought to.” And because they thought differently, they left. Bill suggested that they “were not yielding to the way God was showing them.”

Jason understood their difficulty; he said, “Those issues that we talked about, predestination and baptism, those were the big ones for us. They’re hard things to wrap your brain around.” He continued to say that when they were

taught, “we took time; we did not rush through it.” Bill agreed with Jason; he summarized the growing pains as a good thing concluding, “The changes that we were making, the hurt that people had suffered before, and some of the hurt that people were experiencing was because things were changing; we were not going back to what we had been, which was really a good thing.” The participants expressed that growing pains, tough painful, were ultimately fruitful for the church as well as the individuals involved.

Cherished-Held Beliefs

The growing pains that the congregation experienced involved areas of biblical understanding as well as everyday procedural activities. Those interviewed were people who were the product of a lifetime of teaching. The new pastor was challenging what could be termed “cherished-held beliefs.” For the purpose of this study, a cherished-held belief is a belief system that has been taught and believed for many years. Furthermore, any questioning or challenge to that system results in a measure of anxiety on the part of the belief holder. In other words, to let go of a cherished-held belief will cause a measure of pain.

As Bill explained concerning the doctrinal changes, “There were people who just said, ‘No, it is different. I do not want anything to do with it, and I am not going to try to understand it.’” Others, he admits, had questions for him. The questions involved the change in doctrinal understanding. The doctrinal changes threatened the heart of their faith as evidenced in a question like: “Is it God’s church? Have we gone too far over the edge? Is it not a Christian body anymore?” The distress of letting go was very painful for some. They began to question

whether the church was even Christian. Jason agreed with Bill, explaining that those who left “never opened it up really to try and understand it.” Jason observed that the few who left were “harsh” in their conversation with the pastor. He added that the pastor “did an incredibly gracious job of allowing them to leave nicely.”

Dave, who has been a member of the Baptist church for fifty-plus years, explained that the questions surrounding baptism were the most difficult. He shared, “I have been brought up in the tradition of baptism by immersion, and that was opened to some question.” Dave eventually was able to reconcile the question of infant baptism in his heart and mind. It was not the same for Michele, who was raised as a Baptist. She explained that she had “problems with the changes in baptism.” She admitted, “I still struggle with that one, but I convinced myself that it does not affect me. I do not have anybody being baptized.”

Tested Relationships

The researcher has noted that the congregation in this study has been in existence on the same property for more than one hundred years. The significance of this fact is observed in the longstanding relationships seen in multi-generations of families who attend the church. These family relationships also involve deep friendships with other families who have long attended the church. The change process strained relationships within families as well as friendships. The interviewees talked about some of their experiences.

Bill was frustrated as he watched people leave. He explained, “I could see what was developing; what was coming was something better -- you know, not only for the immediate church, but also for the community.” He was referring to some people who

had spent a long time in the church. He conceded, “There were people who walked away who really had contributed a lot to the church in a lot of positive ways in the past.” He added, “There were relationships that had been there, and those were strained with questions.” The questions he was referring to were the questions of doctrine – specifically, baptism. Bill admitted, “It was hard to watch.” Michele acknowledged her feeling of sadness, “I was sad that I could not convince them to stay and be part of the change; I just could not convince the people to understand where the pastor was coming from.” One of the friends who walked away was the choir leader. Michele, Mary, and Samantha all grieve the loss of the choir.

Jason’s relationship with his in-laws was strained because they are “very Baptist, who believe you need a choir, that you need an organ and a piano because that is part of every good Baptist Church.” The doctrinal changes caused “some intense conversation.” That is still happening. Michele understands Jason’s point; she has had similar conversations with her Baptist family. She related, “Any time I get together with anybody on that side, if something comes up about church or something, I have to sit and argue my point.”

Karen summarized the feeling of those interviewed when she remarked:

I was sorry to see the break-up of people that I had known for a long time. I felt sorry for them and felt that it was good for us. On the other hand, it is sad to see disagreement and people wanting their own way. That thing bothered me. I just felt that it was sad in a sense, to see a small group of people, rather than other people appreciating what was really there for them. It was something you live with and you eventually get over.

The change process brought pain. The growing pains tested family and friends as it revealed the cherished-held beliefs of the congregation. The testing resulted in a few people walking away, leaving the congregation in need of healing.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented the data collected from the interview process discussing the four leadership challenges that were identified. The data was presented in the words of those interviewed in order to give a thick and rich description of the events, thoughts and attitudes of those who participated. In the next section, the researcher will present the literature reviewed in chapter two along with the data of chapter four in order to compare and contrast the literature with the actual experience of the interviewees.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how congregants experience adaptive change led by pastors in an established congregation. In order to research this subject, the researcher needed to understand how congregants experience their pastor's leadership during the process of change. The following research questions guided this study.

1. What leadership challenges did the pastor face as the church considered a denominational change?
2. What was it about the pastor that caused the congregation to stay in the change process?
3. What was the cost for the congregation?

In chapter two, the researcher examined literature related to the effectiveness of leadership in guiding organizations through the change process. The three literature areas included works that discuss the dynamics involved in leading change, works that demonstrated leadership within organizational systems, and a brief discussion of leadership from a biblical and theological framework.

In chapter three, the methodology of the study was presented. The researcher designed the study to utilize the case study method of qualitative research. Sharon Merriam states, "The single most defining characteristic of case study is delimiting the object of study, the case."¹⁵⁵ The study was limited to the period of time involving one

¹⁵⁵ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 40.

church's decision to join a new denomination. In chapter four, the data from the interview process was presented in relationship to the research questions. In this final chapter, the researcher will draw conclusions and make recommendations. The conclusions and recommendations will be presented through comparing and contrasting the literature from chapter two with the data analysis presented in chapter four as they pertain to the research questions.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, the data gathered from the literature review will be used to analyze the interview process and will demonstrate the positive outcome of the leadership approach pursued by the new pastor in this study. It is the desire of the researcher that other pastors called to lead in difficult church circumstances might gain valuable insight as they plan their own leadership strategy.

The Nature of Systems

Leadership does not happen in a vacuum. Each leadership opportunity takes place within a system. The system is a preexisting condition that must be acknowledged, studied, and managed if lasting change is to be accomplished. Every congregation has an existing system. The system includes procedures as well as "power people."¹⁵⁶ The power people in a congregation are those within the system who have the most influence. They may often be a small group with a larger following. James Plueddemann suggests, "Certain people have more power, influence and status than others."¹⁵⁷ It was observed that the congregation that the researcher studied was watching to see how this group

¹⁵⁶ James E. Plueddemann, *Leading Across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 93.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 93.

would respond to a given circumstance, as suggested by Michele's comments: "A few of the people kind of ruled the church, rather than the leadership." Within a system, there is the additional factor of the collective. Individual identities make up the system, but the system has an identity of its own. There is, according to Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, the power of culture within an organization. They explain, "Even the best development processes, will not help to change the organization if they focus only on the personal and do not take into account the power of the emotional reality and the culture."¹⁵⁸ They are suggesting that a change program will not work if the system itself is not taken into account. Change cannot happen in the parts of the system without touching the whole. An example of this is when the church being researched for this study was working through some changes. Michele remarked, "I figured when we changed that if people like (names of leaders omitted) could be okay with this, I guess I was okay." She allowed those whom she respected to help her as she struggled to understand.

Leadership Challenges

The new pastor whose leadership of change was the subject of this study encountered leadership challenges from the very first Sunday he entered the church. Mary explained, "We were a church in turmoil." She added, "I would not have wanted to come into this church...People were at odds with one another. The fact was that we were losing people; we did not see them anymore." Jason remembered, "Some Sundays there were thirty people in church, and I was hoping for someone to come in and shake things up."

¹⁵⁸ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004), 226.

The condition of the church at the time of the new pastor's arrival was difficult. There were several contributing factors that led to an atmosphere of unrest. Michele confessed that they were "pretty much at odds, with continual dissention." The church, according to Karen, was a place of "disunity" and "divided opinions." Karen added that the church organization was in need of "focus and direction." It was not surprising because the leadership was unable "stand up and take charge," conceded Michele. There was a hunger for Bible-centered teaching and preaching. It was Jason who uncomfortably admitted, "Pastors were preaching on the signs of the zodiac; yeah, there were twelve of them and twelve apostles." He added, "I mean, that is what it was like; that is why the church was hurting."

Leader as Learner

The pastor is often blind to their own need to become a learner. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr confess, "Our role of leadership made it difficult to accept the role of learner."¹⁵⁹ Michael Fullan proposes, "Learning lies in our integration of the precision needed for consistent performance – using what we already know – with the new learning required for continuous improvement."¹⁶⁰ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner explain, "The more you are engaged in learning, the more successful you are at leading."¹⁶¹ Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee agree, "Life is the laboratory for learning."¹⁶² The

¹⁵⁹ Jim Herrington, James H. Furr, and Mike Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 5.

¹⁶⁰ Michael Fullan, *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 76.

¹⁶¹ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 203.

¹⁶² Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004), 193.

difficulties identified in the church were the result of various influences. Bill points out, “The church had been through multiple changes.” He said, “There was an average of a six-year stay for most of our previous ministers over several decades.” He speculated that this has led to the uncertainty that the church feels, and he sighed as he added, “We were in limbo, and the people were struggling with what our identity was going to be.” Dave explained that the new pastor “listened,” and Karen added that he “acquainted” himself with the congregation. She went further, saying he “talked to everyone,” and he was “pleasant.” It is the observation of the researcher that the comments concerning the pastor’s willingness to listen and to become acquainted with the church members underscore Michael Fullan’s “integration” of present knowledge with “new learning.”¹⁶³

Teaching and Preaching

Dave conceded, “I can remember people saying, ‘I am not getting anything; I am not being spiritually fed.’ That said to me that we did not have good expository preaching at that period.” Biblical preaching and teaching were very important for this congregation. In this study, the congregation in its recent past had not received a balanced biblical regimen. In the words of Michele, “It got to the point where people were asking the former minister, ‘When are you going to preach? When are you going to lead a Bible study?’” Dave explained, “We had had a problem...finding a pastor who was an expository teacher.” After the new pastor arrived, Mary remarked, “I like all the Bible teaching. It is not only the teaching and preaching but also the delivery as well. I do not

¹⁶³ Michael Fullan, *The Six Secrets of Change: What the Best Leaders Do to Help Their Organizations Survive and Thrive* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 76.

want somebody to stand up there and give me what I should do during the day. That is boring; I can hear that on any talk show.” The pastor related scripture to the congregation. Samantha concurred, “The preaching made the service interesting and made it so that a person like me could understand.” Mary added, “There would be great agreement that the new guy can really preach a sermon.”

Leading is Not for Wimps

The leader is always in a position to be observed and criticized. John Kotter acknowledges, “Risk taking brings failure as well as success. Honest reflection, listening, solicitation of opinions, and openness bring bad news and negative feedback as well as interesting ideas.”¹⁶⁴ Leaders open themselves up to a steady flow of advice. It is, after all, their church, but the pastor needs to be sensitive to the needs and desires of those in the church. At the same time, however, the pastor must not be swayed from the path he knows is necessary to bring about change. Dave’s comments underscored this principle. He explained that the pastor “earned our respect because of his insights.” The pastor had understanding and insight into what the church needed. And though the pastor “was not dogmatic,” Dave added, “He never wavered in terms of his commitment to the principles.”

In the face of challenges, the pastor demonstrated a willingness to persevere. According to Jason, “even when people were mean,” the pastor did not lash out. Instead, he remained in open conversation, even though it hurt. Herrington, Furr, and Bonem, speaking about their own leadership journey, admit, “On many occasions the conflict

¹⁶⁴John P. Kotter, *Leading Change, With a New Preface by the Author* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 190.

became very personal. Our motives and character were challenged many times.”¹⁶⁵ The pastor faced contention from some of the members in a response to the fear of losing something. Bill stated, “There were people fearing change, inevitable in any transition.” The difficulty of the change process is underscored by Heifetz and Linsky who advise, “You appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits of a lifetime.”¹⁶⁶ The directional change was shedding light on questions they had never examined. The congregation was asked to consider the idea that there could be another way to do things. Bill admitted, “The changes that we were making, the hurt that people had suffered before, and some of the hurt that people were experiencing was because things were changing; we were not going back to what we had been, which was really a good thing.”

Heifetz and Linsky suggest that the leader is vulnerable to four basic forms of danger. They say, “When exercising leadership you risk getting marginalized, diverted, attacked, or seduced.”¹⁶⁷ The dangers presented are real and often catch those who lead unaware, complicating the response. They acknowledge:

It is difficult to resist responding to misrepresentation and personal attack. We don’t want to minimize how hard it is to keep your composure when people say awful things about you. It hurts. It does damage. Anyone who has been there knows the pain. Exercising leadership often risks having to bear such scars.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Jim Herrington, James H. Furr, and Mike Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 7.

¹⁶⁶ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 12.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 44.

Fullan asserts that change does not come easily. If there is to be lasting change, it will require a sustained effort over a long period of time. He calls the change process “reculturing,”¹⁶⁹ explaining that change has to be implemented, not just structurally, but at a cultural level. Commenting on the change process, he says wryly: “Reculturing is a contact sport that involves hard, labor-intensive work.”¹⁷⁰

The difficulty of trying to stimulate change must not be underestimated. If there is to be lasting change, it will require a sustained effort over a long period of time. The motivation to stay in the change process is difficult to maintain. John Kotter observes, “When it becomes clear that quality programs or cultural change efforts will take a long time, urgency levels usually drop.”¹⁷¹ In the present study, the congregation was weary; they had endured several seasons of contention. The previous leadership had failed to direct the church. Jason explained some of the mistakes, “Some had been called to be interim; but because of the leadership void, they tried to take the pastorate. Those who were called to be pastors said they were going to do one thing and then did not follow through.” The church was in a state of confusion, which is not unusual when so many changes occur. Two keys to motivating people to change are clear communication and attainable goals. Kouzes and Posner explain, “Leaders know they have to break down big problems into small, doable actions. They also know that you have to try a lot of little things when initiating something new before you get it right.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Michael Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 44.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁷¹ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change, With a New Preface by the Author* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 12.

¹⁷² James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 192.

The atmosphere and tone set by the pastor was very helpful and encouraged the congregation to consider the changes. The congregation had time to consider these things before they voted for change. The process was done in an open manner, not just decided by a few. Jason asserted, “I mean it was an open discussion. It was always open. I mean, we always said, ‘Hey, we are going to talk about this; come down and talk about it; get here and talk about it.’” The talks Jason was referring to were the “family talks” as well as the adult Sunday school. The changes were discussed in public meetings where all church members could attend. In each of the meetings, the reasoning was presented without a heavy hand. Again Jason explained, “It was not just ‘drop the hammer, and here it is.’” Lou, commenting on the pastor’s attitude, said, “He was here to help us; his leadership was a servant-type, which says, ‘I am here to help you.’” That was very encouraging for Lou. He added that even though a “few resisted, they were not singled out and torn apart, but were still included and were a part of things for quite a while.”

As Bill reflected on the humility of the pastor, he explained that the pastor demonstrated “a compassionate approach, a Christ like leadership.” Bill said, “The pastor made himself a real person; I mean, he did not lead by sitting on a cloud and lording it over everyone.” Dave agreed: “The pastor did not treat us in a way that made it sound like anyone who did not agree (with him) was ‘out to lunch,’ if I can to put it that way.” The best-selling author Jim Collins says, “The good to great leaders never wanted to become larger-than -life heroes. They were seemingly ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results.”¹⁷³

¹⁷³ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't*, (New York: Harper Business, 2001), 28.

Manage the Pace of Change

The literature suggests that managing the pace of change is a leader's responsibility. Heifetz and Linsky propose that there are times when leaders need to cause an issue to "ripen."¹⁷⁴ While referring to the concept of ripening, they explain, "Sometimes you have to hold steady and watch for the opportunity. However, if you notice that there is never a time for your issue, you may have to create the opportunity by developing a strategy for creating urgency."¹⁷⁵ Herrington, Bonem, and Furr agree; they call for the leader to "generate and sustain creative tension."¹⁷⁶ This is the idea that the leader must bring an issue to light and allow the organization to wrestle with the implications. They believe:

Change is driven when a significant gap exists between a vision of the future that people sincerely desire to achieve and a clear sense that they are not achieving that vision. At this point recognition grows, so does their willingness to change their perspective and try new approaches. This is the point at which they are experiencing creative tension. The discipline to generate and sustain this driving force is indispensable for change leaders.¹⁷⁷

Herrington, Bonem and Furr suggest the ability to regulate the creative tension that an organization can live with is an "art."¹⁷⁸

The church members agreed that the pace of change was important. The changes, according to Michele, "did not come at the start." The pastor spent a great deal of time and energy building trust, "trying to convince people" that the changes were good

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 146.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 148.

¹⁷⁶ Jim Herrington, James H. Furr, and Mike Bonem, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 100.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 101.

changes. She adds, “He was very slow in taking on the changes.” Mary’s words echo Michele’s; she comments, “He drew us in before he said, ‘We are going to change and this is how it is going to be.’” Jason thought the process was done at the correct speed and in a helpful order. He remarked, “It started out the right way; we did not jump right into why we should baptize babies, and the pastor said, ‘We are going to talk about that, but we are not going to talk about that right now.’”

Why Stay in the Change Process?

As previously stated, the change process can be long and at times difficult. Heifetz and Linsky advise, “You appear dangerous to people when you question their values, beliefs, or habits of a lifetime.”¹⁷⁹ They add, “It demands that we remain true to a purpose beyond ourselves and stand by people compassionately, even when they unleash demons. Taking the heat with grace communicates respect for the pains of change.”¹⁸⁰

The researcher desired to know why the congregation was willing to remain in the process. Three factors were observed, including but not limited to the following: the pastor gained trust, the pastor stuck to his convictions, and the congregation felt that the church was their home. These influences, though they overlap with others that have already been mentioned, are significant enough to be examined here.

Trust Gained

The interviewees explained that they came to trust the new pastor. Mary commented, “I think I could tell him anything and he would understand; he is human.” That attitude was reflected by Karen who said, “You could go to him any time you

¹⁷⁹ Marty Linsky and Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 12.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 146.

wanted to.” “He admits his wrongs, He was right there along with the rest of us,” said Michele. Dave added, “The pastor was certainly transparent; he had been right from the beginning. He identified himself with those of us in the congregation as opposed to setting himself apart.” Karen stated, “He was able to listen.” Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, assert, “Too many leaders fail to invite truth, which can leave them prey to the CEO disease – being a leader who is out of touch and out of tune.”¹⁸¹

The congregation learned to trust, as the pastor was honest and authentic in the presence of the people. Karen said, “He was pleasant. Michele’s impression of the pastor was that “he could step down off the pulpit, and be preaching to himself.” The interviewees expressed their appreciation of the pastor’s honesty. He was willing to stay open to what the Holy Spirit wanted to do in the church. Jason explained:

The pastor began respectfully. I think out of consideration for where everyone had been; very honestly, he said, “Look, I am here. I may not be what you want, but this is who I am”—you know, being honest and open. “This is where I am coming from and I will lead as long as I am asked to lead or guided to lead. And if it is not what is needed, if it is not what God wants, then I will move on so the right person can be here.”

The congregation appreciated the open and honest dialogue that took place as the change process continued. The conversations continued, even though some were very difficult, and in Jason’s words “challenging,” meetings. It is the researcher’s observation that this open and honest attitude went a long way in building trust. As Bill remarked, “I

¹⁸¹ Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2004), 193.

do not believe I ever heard the pastor belittle anyone or discredit his or her belief on any subject.” He added the pastor attitude demonstrated willingness to “respect why those challenges were there.” As trust was built, the change process was able to move forward.

Convictions Held

Dave remarked that the pastor “earned our respect because of his insights.” The teachings as presented were new; yet according to Dave, “He was not dogmatic; he never wavered in terms of his commitment to the principles, but he did not treat us in a way that made it sound like anyone who did not agree was ‘out to lunch,’ if I can to put it that way. But I think that he was consistent; he has always been consistent.”

Jason agreed that the pastor held to his convictions in the presence of differing opinions. He commented, “He definitely said that he did not believe everything that others might believe and that we are going to talk about it.” The fact that he was willing to talk about things encouraged people in two ways: first, they felt that they were not going to have things “pushed” on them, according to both Jason and Karen. And secondly, the conversations with the congregation demonstrated the strength of the pastor’s conviction. Jason explained that the pastor taught what was in the scriptures; he looked at the scripture and said, “Look, we cannot just look at this verse; we have to look at this whole book behind it.” Lou added, “Well, the very first thing was that we heard a different approach to the gospel and a challenge that just because he (the pastor) said it, that was not enough ...he (the pastor) challenged us to go back to the Bible, go through it, research it ourselves, and become well versed in it.”

The pastor, according to Bill, would say, “This is where I am coming from. I understand this is where you have been, and this is where it meets up. And this is where

there are differences.” Then the differences were examined against the scriptures. Bill said it was “very important” to take that type of approach because “as the men walked through the Westminster Confession,” the men felt as though they were heard as well as taught. He remarked, “I thoroughly loved it.” These two factors helped the congregation stay in the change process.

My Church

Mary said, “This is my church,” and Dave commented, “My commitment has always been here.” Michele said that the congregation was her church and that the church had been “a savior a lot of times for me.” Mary likes to say that she was carried in her mother’s womb to the church. She does not like to divulge her age but said only, “I have been around here a very long time.” She recalled one incident when she left the church for a while because she “did not like the pastor.” In that time, she visited other churches, and what brought her back was the familiar. She admitted, “You know, they were not home to me. And he (the pastor) cannot last forever.” She added in closing, “And I swore I would never do that again. So you are not getting rid of me that easy.” For some members of the congregation, their willingness to stay in the process was the fact that they had attended the church for a long time. They considered the church to be their home.

What Did it Cost?

Bill admitted, “I had a lot of mixed feelings. There was a lot of angst, I guess, over some of the friends that I had grown up with in the church.” They were leaving because of the doctrinal changes. The pain was more acute for Bill because they were people who just said, “No, it is too different. I do not want anything to do with it, and I

am not going to try to understand it.” It was hard to watch because Bill “could see something better coming.” Jason and Michele explained that it was difficult to be around extended family. There were some “intense conversations,” said Jason. Michele added, “Any time I get together with anybody on that side, if something comes up about church or doctrine, I have to sit and argue my point.” The congregation’s willingness to stay in the change process was costly. They felt the heartache of watching relationships drift apart because of the changes.

Recommendations for Practice

The researcher, having presented the findings of this study, suggests several words of encouragement for pastors who are called to lead. First, consider your calling as a pastor; you are there on behalf of another, the Lord Jesus Christ. Francis Schaeffer points out, “We are not greater than those over whom we have authority. If we have the world’s mentality of wanting the foremost place, we are not qualified for Christian leadership.”¹⁸² This means that the people you lead are God’s people before they are yours. The success or failure of the church is ultimately in Jesus’ hands. The pastor is called by God and invited by a congregation to shepherd. He is not there to satisfy his own needs, but to meet the needs of others, a task that is impossible outside of the grace of God. Careful attention must be given to this fact. The call to faithful service can only be answered if the pastor keeps his eye on his own shepherd, Jesus. By his own admission, Jesus was following the plan of another. The plan he followed was his Father’s. His leadership was a reflection of what his Father wanted. In John’s gospel, Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only

¹⁸² Francis A. Schaeffer, *No Little People* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 69.

what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”¹⁸³ The pastor is to emulate Christ.

Secondly, learn to listen to the heartbeat of your people. Dave, Karen, and Michele each remarked that the pastor “listened.” It is too easy to make those who attend your church the enemy of those you want to attend. Bill acknowledged that the pastor valued the congregation in the midst of the challenges and was willing to “respect why those challenges were there.” This insight made a strong impression upon the researcher; the congregation is called into being by God, not by any individual pastor’s call.

Thirdly, learn to be real. As a member, Mary watched how the pastor interacted with the congregation. She said, “I think some ministers get all over being a minister, you know; some are just so holy.” This insight led the researcher to conclude that the pastor must always be mindful of the advantage that he has. He has the benefit of an advanced degree, time to study, and time to reflect on the scriptures during the week. Bill agreed:

With the pastor it was never an “I-am-holier-than-thou” sort of thing. And that goes a long ways toward having people understanding their own relationship with God. And, again, within the congregation, I think people said, “This guy is real.” I mean, he was real both from the pulpit and on a personal level.

Finally, give yourself to personal times of refreshment, study, and self - improvement. The researcher was impressed by the amount of work the change process entailed. The pastor as well as the congregation was fully engaged in the activity. The lines between events became blurred over time. Herington, Creech, and Taylor point out, “We are emotionally wired together in systems such that we react to one another, often

¹⁸³ John 5:19.

without even being aware that we are doing so.”¹⁸⁴ They advise, “When anxiety rises, we become rather predictable. Our thinking becomes less clear and more reactive.”¹⁸⁵ They further explain, “It is easier to know and do the right thing if we can be clear on what is going on emotionally for us.”¹⁸⁶ They are encouraging the leader to beware of himself in the process. This involves careful attention to emotional intelligence. The congregants were looking to the pastor’s leadership through the Bible studies, Sunday sermons, and personal visits. The congregation needed a pastor who was alert and engaged. Rest and refreshment is critical if a pastor is to maintain perspective.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are many wonderful churches that have weathered dramatic changes and have grown stronger as a result. Their stories are very seldom told; the reason for this may be that the numbers of such churches are small or their locations may be out of the way. The research most often covers the big success stories. These stories are not easily imitated because in a small congregation, resources are limited.

The researcher would recommend, first of all, more studies of small, ordinary churches that are doing extraordinary things. The purpose of this would be to look for discernable patterns of success. The stories of these churches could be published, and other small churches could identify with the stories and find encouragement. These stories would also be beneficial for pastors of small congregations who need refreshment and encouragement to continue in the good work they are called to do.

¹⁸⁴Jim Herrington, Robert Creech, and Trisha L. Taylor, *The Leader’s Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 30.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 34.

Secondly, because of the limited scope of the present study, more research into the dynamic of change needs to be undertaken, particularly as change touched the various ministries within the church. A study of how a denominational transformation impacts the way youth ministry is conducted or how the women's ministries respond to the larger context of change would be very interesting.

Third, a study of how the preaching and teaching of the scripture (specifically from the reformed perspective) influenced the congregation to navigate the change process would give valuable insight into the change process.

Finally, the researcher would recommend a follow-up study of this particular congregation at the time of their next pastoral search to determine whether the changes made under the present pastor were driven solely by his personality or by an actual change in the church culture.

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