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Building Long-Term Pastoral Sustainability through Lay Caregiving Teams

The Impact of Stephen Ministry on Pastors, Congregants, and the Community

By
Justin M. Schlueter

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry.

Saint Louis, Missouri

2025

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how solo pastors describe the benefits to their ministry sustainability of having lay caregiving teams in their congregations. Solo pastors from a variety of settings face similar challenges including the expectation to meet more caregiving needs than they could handle. These challenges lead pastors feeling pressure and stress with maintaining the demands of the ministry, overwhelmed by the workload, and exhaustion and burnout, which contribute to them leaving the ministry.

This study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with ten solo pastors from various denominations and geographic regions who were able to communicate in-depth about the benefits they received from expanding pastoral care through a Stephen Ministry team of well-equipped lay caregivers. The interviews focused on gaining data with four research questions: what challenges to ministry sustainability do pastors face before establishing a caregiving team, what benefits to ministry sustainability do pastors experience after establishing a caregiving team, what theological beliefs help motivate pastors to establish a caregiving team, and how do pastors describe the benefits that a caregiving team has on the congregation, including those on the team, those who receive care, and the congregation and community?

The literature review focused on three key areas to explore how solo pastors describe the benefits to their ministry sustainability of having lay caregiving teams in their congregation: an exploration of Ephesians 4:11–13, which provides the theological foundation for the role of laity in the work of the ministry, the use of empathy in client-centered approaches to pastoral care, and forming and maintaining teams.

This study concluded that there are four principles that churches and pastors can embrace that will promote long-term ministry sustainability: pastors should not be the only ones who do the work of the ministry, there needs to be an effective team established to expand pastoral care, the team can provide high-quality ministry when they are equipped to offer empathy and client-centered care, and pastors will experience several benefits to long-term ministry sustainability when this team is sharing ministry responsibilities.

To address these challenges, this study identified recommended practices for denominational leaders, congregation members, and pastors to establish caregiving teams.

To all my brothers and sisters in Christ, whom I have known over the years and who had a heart to care for people, but did not have the equipping or confidence for how to do it. To all the pastors who have run themselves ragged trying to meet all the needs in their churches and communities. And to all those who were hurting and did not receive the care they needed, not because pastors didn't want to help, but because pastors needed help themselves.

When dedicated laymen become informal pastors to their neighbors, associates, and fellow church members, *they become the church*—the body of Christ serving those in need.

— Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling*

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Thank you to my loving, beautiful, and supportive wife who encouraged me to start this journey. I appreciate all your prayers and all your patience as I spent many hours researching and writing. You don't know how grateful I am for you.

Thank you also to my colleagues, who gave me the time and space to work on this. I know that meant more for you to do in the meantime, and I want you to know I deeply appreciate it.

Thank you also to Dr. Kenneth Haugk, who started Stephen Ministries over fifty years ago. Your vision has meant that well over 600,000 people in 30 nations and in more than 190 Christian denominations have been trained and served as Stephen Ministers. We will never know on this side of life how many lives have been changed by this ministry.

Abbreviations

ESV	English Standard Version
KJV	King James Version

Chapter 1

Introduction

The responsibilities that pastors face can feel endless. Along with ministering to people through preaching, teaching, and pastoral care, they manage leadership conflict, help balance the budget, make appearances at committee meetings, respond to emails and social media posts, field late-night crisis calls, and stay attentive to world events to address concerns from the congregation. One pastor described his experience this way: "It's not the things in ministry that kill you, it's the things you don't get done…every night you leave you know that there's another twelve people you should call, another three books you should read, another eight people that you need to visit in the hospital."[1] Such a demanding pace of ministry can be challenging for pastors to sustain.

The challenges have increased in recent years. The author of a recent *New York Times* article explored why pastors were burning out in ministry. One rector of a church listed several factors: the pandemic and church members getting sick and dying, political polarization, church members struggling financially, and disputes over racial injustice. The rector said it felt like "everything snowballed," and when close friends asked how he was doing, he would smile, say he was fine, and then burst into tears. The author wrote that other burned-out pastors shared similar experiences, saying an unceasing discontent

[1] Katheryn Rhoads Meek et al., "Maintaining Personal Resiliency: Lessons Learned from Evangelical Protestant Clergy," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 342.

filled people in their churches, all angry about different issues, and all looking to the pastor to respond in exactly the right way to that anger.[2]

In his essay on pastoral burnout, Michael Shapiro, a professor of Christian marriage, family, and mental health, cites several studies across denominations showing factors that contribute to or predispose a leader to exhaustion: 52 percent felt overworked and unable to meet their church's unrealistic expectations; 54 percent found their roles overwhelming; and 80 percent believed ministry negatively affected their families.[3] In 2021, Lifeway reported that 63 percent of pastors surveyed said they were frequently overwhelmed.[4] These statistics are consistent with a study done five years earlier with clergy in Minnesota, where 65 percent of participants reported bordering on burnout or experiencing it to some degree.[5]

The increasingly challenging demands of ministry can threaten the wellbeing and sustainability of pastors, especially those in congregations without other professional clergy. This issue has contributed to pastoral shortages, and while some literature has addressed the concern through increased awareness and suggestions for self-care, more could be done on how to lighten ministerial responsibilities. This study explores a

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[2] Tish Harrison Warren, "Why Pastors Are Burning Out," *New York Times*, August 28, 2022, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/28/opinion/pastor-burnout-pandemic.html.

[3] Michael S. Shapiro, "Ministry Burnout and Compassion Fatigue," *Τέλειος/Teleios* 2, no. 2 (2022): 24–25.

[4] Aaron Earls, "Why Are More Pastors Thinking About Quitting?," Lifeway Research, April 10, 2024, https://research.lifeway.com/2024/04/10/why-are-more-pastors-thinking-about-quitting/.

[5] Joseph Visker, Taylor Rider, and Anastasia Humphers-Ginther, "Ministry-Related Burnout and Stress Coping Mechanisms Among Assemblies of God-Ordained Clergy in Minnesota," *Journal of Religion & Health* 56, no. 3 (June 2017): 954.

practical way to do that through equipping and mobilizing congregational members to assist in pastoral care.

The Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry

The work week of pastors is often long and challenging. One study suggests that pastors averaged 54.5 hours of work per week, compared to 27.7 waking hours with their families.[6] These hours are not typically standardized as pastors are on call for crises and unexpected needs in the church. Congregational members have high expectations for pastors to be present at various events to add value and priority and to attend committee meetings to communicate their importance.[7] The other hours are filled with teaching, sermon preparation, administrative duties, discipleship, leadership development, and short-term and long-term planning.

A major responsibility is pastoral care. Providing emotional and spiritual care creates several challenges. First, unlike other helping professionals, pastors do not have set guidelines for dual relationships. Boundary or attachment issues may occur as they simultaneously counsel an individual who is also a friend and a co-member of a church committee. One study showed how blurred boundaries were a significant stressor for both

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[6] Carol Anderson Darling, E. Wayne Hill, and Lenore M. McWey, "Understanding Stress and Quality of Life for Clergy and Clergy Spouses," *Stress & Health: Journal of the International Society for the Investigation of Stress* 20, no. 5 (December 2004): 266.

[7] Gary William Kuhne and Joe F. Donaldson, "Balancing Ministry and Management: An Exploratory Study of Pastoral Work Activities," *Review of Religious Research*. 37, no. 2 (December 1995), 155.

pastors and their spouses.[8] There is also an expectation that pastors—and possibly their spouses—are available any time day and night to show high levels of compassion.[9]

Second, pastors are frequently called to provide care better suited to a mental health professional. In 2003, it was estimated that one-quarter of those who sought treatment for mental disorders did so from a clergy member, a higher percentage than those who contacted psychiatrists or general medical doctors. Nearly one-quarter had seriously impairing mental disorders, and the majority were seen exclusively by the clergy, without assistance from a physician or mental health professional.[10]

Third, the stress of providing pastoral care is compounded because pastors often do not feel they can confide in others about their struggles. Since there is a sense that pastors should have model families in the congregation, and the expectation is that they should only offer help and not need it themselves, they are limited in the resources necessary to continue offering high-quality pastoral care.[11]

The extrinsic demands of ministry work and the intrinsic demands pastors meet, such as guilt about not doing enough, take their toll. One study showed how these demands significantly predicted depression and anxiety for clergy.[12] When pastors

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[8] Carl R Wells et al., "The Relationship between Work-Related Stress and Boundary-Related Stress within the Clerical Profession," *Journal of Religion and Health* 51, no. 1 (March 2012): 217.

[9] Darling, Hill, and McWey, "Understanding Stress," 271.

[10] Philip S. Wang, Patricia A. Berglund, and Ronald C. Kessler, "Patterns and Correlates of Contacting Clergy for Mental Disorders in the United States," *Health Services Research* 38, no. 2 (April 2003): 647.

[11] Wells et al., "Work-Related Stress," 216.

[12] Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell et al., "Using Effort-Reward Imbalance Theory to Understand High Rates of Depression and Anxiety Among Clergy," *Journal of Primary Prevention* 34, no. 6 (December 2013): 439.

struggle with these issues, it may hinder their ability to meet unique pastoral care needs, which then exacerbates the problem.

Ministry Challenges and Pastoral Wellbeing

The increasing and ongoing ministry challenges can adversely affect pastors' overall sense of wellbeing. If pastors are not able to find healthy ways to cope with these challenges or find practical solutions to address the underlying causes, it may lead to burnout or depression.

The World Health Organization includes burnout in the International Classification of Diseases and defines it as a "syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress," characterized by "feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job, and reduced professional efficacy."[13] One study done on family-related stress among pastors concluded that "the more demanding the congregation, the lower the pastor's well-being and life satisfaction, and the higher his or her burnout."[14] Another study on pastoral burnout warned that even for pastors who experience satisfaction in consistently meeting ministry challenges, over time the positive and exciting dimensions

[13] World Health Organization, "Burn-out an 'Occupational Phenomenon': International Classification of Diseases," May 18, 2019, https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases.

[14] Cameron Lee and Judith Iverson-Gilbert, "Demand, Support, and Perception in Family-Related Stress among Protestant Clergy," *Family Relations* 52, no. 3 (July 2003): 255.

of the ministry can "contribute to physiological over-arousal and, consequently, adrenaline exhaustion."[15]

Dr. Ronald S. Beebe, a professor of educational research at the University of Houston, studied a pattern in pastoral burnout. When clergy became emotionally and functionally overwhelmed by the demands of the ministry and faced conflict that led to emotional distancing, they grew increasingly unable to meet the responsibilities in the position. This progression left them with a reduced sense of self-efficacy. As a protective strategy, pastors may cut themselves off emotionally from the congregation and eventually leave the ministry.[16]

Another possible consequence of unaddressed ministry challenges is depression. Dr. Kristen Kansiewicz, an assistant professor at Evangel University who has conducted several studies on pastors' mental health, said in an interview that her research consistently shows about 25–35 percent of clergy experience mild depression. She also estimates that 14–17 percent experience moderate to worse depression, which would mean somewhere between 84,000 and 102,000 pastors are struggling at this level.[17]

The effects of burnout and depression may be compounded because of a pastor's sense of obligation to care for the congregation. As Beebe writes, pastors can find themselves in a double bind by "having a heartfelt desire to engage others at a deeply

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[15] Christopher J Adams and Holly Hough, "Clergy Burnout: A Comparison Study with Other Helping Professions," *Pastoral Psychology* 66, no. 2 (April 2017): 150.

[16] Ronald S. Beebe, "Predicting Burnout, Conflict Management Style, and Turnover Among Clergy," *Journal of Career Assessment*, 15, no. 2 (May 2007), 259.

[17] The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, "The Truth about Pastors and Mental Health Challenges," ERLC, October 25, 2023, https://erlc.com/resource/the-truth-about-pastors-and-mental-health-challenges/#:~:text=Stressors%20like%20financial%20strain%20and,contribute%20to%20pastoral%20well%2Dbeing.

personal and spiritual level and yet often finding these same individuals to be the cause of vocational burnout because of parishioners' expectations to fulfill a multitude of emotional demands."[18] The result is not only to the detriment of the pastors' wellbeing but the wellbeing of the congregation as well. When clergy are stressed and depressed, then they are less able to provide support to others.[19]

Ministry Challenges and Solo Pastors

In January 2024, Peter Smith wrote an article for the Associated Press on the post-pandemic burnout experienced by clergy and the alarming data from a study by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. The study indicated that more than four in ten clergy surveyed had seriously thought about leaving their congregations and more than half had seriously thought about leaving the ministry. Those considering leaving the ministry were more likely to be pastors of smaller churches and working solo than those in larger churches and with several staff members.[20]

The Harford study showed that the size of the church correlated with ministerial discontent; pastors had fewer thoughts of leaving when they served in larger churches. The study suggested that the correlation could be attributed to larger churches providing a better salary, a built-in network of relationships, and a more distributed workload among

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[18] Ronald S. Beebe, "Predicting Burnout," 258.

[19] Glen Milstein, Celia F. Hybels, and Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, "A Prospective Study of Clergy Spiritual Well-Being, Depressive Symptoms, and Occupational Distress," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 12, no. 4 (November 2020): 415.

[20] Peter Smith, "US Pastors Struggle with Post-Pandemic Burnout. Survey Shows Half Considered Quitting since 2020," *AP News*, January 11, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/christian-clergy-burnout-pandemic-survey-24ee46327438ff46b074d234ffe2f58c.

additional staff. The highest rates of pastors thinking about leaving the ministry occurred among those serving in congregations between fifty-one and 250 worship attendees.[21] This statistic is significant considering that more than 90 percent of all congregations have fewer than 400 worship attendees and about 70 percent of all full-time ministerial staff are employed by these churches.[22]

The challenges of ministry can be heightened for solo pastors because they often feel alone in their work. Benjamin Doolittle, a professor at the Yale University School of Medicine, writes that loneliness is a significant contributing factor to burnout for solo pastors because "the close bonds formed with parishioners do not replace the more equitable bonds of friendship established outside the church." Often solo pastors do not have close connections outside of their church context.[23]

A study specifically on burnout among rural pastors came to a similar conclusion, showing that pastors in these small churches experienced isolation. The most common sentiment shared by these pastors was that their interests and ideas were not shared by others and that people were around them but not with them.[24] The study also concluded that pastors with their heavy workload found it difficult to keep their ministry and personal lives separate, which increased the risk of burnout. Often, these pastors viewed

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[21] Hartford Institute for Religion Research, "I'm Exhausted All the Time: Exploring the Factors Contributing to Growing Clergy Discontentment," March 2024, www.covidreligionresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Clergy_Discontentment_Patterns_Report-compressed_2.pdf, 16.

[22] Mark Chaves and Alison J. Eagle, "Religious Congregations in 21st Century America," 2015, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63e5578f1b55bd1c25cf2759/t/645a3b36825dd571f1941069/1683635001786/NCSIII-report.pdf.

[23] Benjamin R. Doolittle, "Burnout and Coping among Parish-Based Clergy," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 10, no. 1 (2007): 37.

[24] Greg Scott and Rachel Lovell, "The Rural Pastors Initiative: Addressing Isolation and Burnout in Rural Ministry," *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 1 (February 2015): 78.

self-care as “self-indulgence” and a “luxury” that they could not afford because of the ministry demands placed on them.[25]

Struggles with Wellbeing May Contribute to Pastoral Shortages

An article in the *Washington Post* in the summer of 2023 described the clergy job market as a “train wreck.” It explained that a wave of pastors are expected to retire in the coming decades, with fewer seminary students able to replace them. Given the ongoing polarizing politics and the aftereffects of the pandemic adding to the difficulties of ministry, the landscape for churches seeking pastors will be uncertain for years to come.[26]

As referenced earlier, the Hartford Institute on Religion Research suggests that pastors may be leaving the profession sooner rather than later. In the fall of 2023, over half of religious leaders considered leaving the ministry, which is nearly a 20 percent increase from a study they did in 2021.[27]

Some of the reasons include conflict with church members, unwillingness of the congregation to meet new challenges, diminished congregational vitality, and shrinking attendance. The study found that the primary factor, however, was relational issues with the congregation.[28] Since the ongoing workload and lack of relational support contribute

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[25] Scott and Lovell, "Rural Pastors Initiative," 92–93.

[26] “As Churches Shrink and Pastors Retire, Creative Workarounds Are Redefining Ministry,” *Washington Post*, July 31, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2023/07/31/churches-shrink-pastors-retire-creative-workarounds-are-redefining-ministry/.

[27] Emily Brown, “The Great American Clergy Shortage Is Coming,” *Relevant*, February 22, 2022, https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/church/the-great-american-clergy-shortage-is-coming/; Hartford Institute, “Exhausted All the Time,” 2.

[28] Hartford Institute, “Exhausted All the Time,” 12, 14.

to pastors considering leaving the ministry, it may also be a factor for why it is not appealing for others to enter the profession.

The shortage of pastors is occurring across churches of different backgrounds. One report indicates that roughly 3,544 Catholic parishes lack a parish priest.[29] The decline in priests has been happening for decades, from 45,699 in 2000 to 39,993 in 2010, and then to 34,092 in 2023.[30] In 2021, before the full ramifications of the split in the United Methodist Churches were realized, there was a 35 percent drop in membership since 1990 but 53 percent drop in elders.[31] Between 128 and 154 Christian Reformed Churches were looking for a pastor, and 40 percent of those vacancies had been for more than two years.[32]

This data does not indicate a massive exodus from the ministry. Some studies have suggested a 1–2 percent attrition rate across Protestant churches. There has been a modest, yet consistent, decrease in overall seminary enrollments since 2013. However, the concern is that the trends may rise in the increasingly challenging ministry environment as more Baby Boomers retire in the next decade.[33]

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[29] Emily Brown, "The Great American Clergy Shortage Is Coming."

[30] Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, "Frequently Requested Church Statistics," 2023, https://cara.georgetown.edu/faqs.

[31] Tom Lambrecht, "United Methodist Clergy Trends: Fewer, Older" *Good News Magazine*, October 6, 2023, https://tomlambrecht.goodnewsmag.org/united-methodist-clergy-trends-fewer-older/.

[32] "Pastor Shortage?" *The Banner*, April 26, 2024, https://www.thebanner.org/news/2024/04/pastor-shortage.

[33] Kyle Rohane, "Our Pulpits Are Full of Empty Preachers," ChristianityToday.com, April 19, 2022, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/may-june/great-resignation-pulpits-full-of-empty-preachers.html.

While several factors contribute to pastoral shortages, building ministry resiliency can help keep pastors from leaving sooner than planned and possibly help make the profession more appealing.

Addressing Ministry Resilience

Some current literature offers suggestions for pastoral sustainability, including practical ideas for self-care and resources for spiritual renewal. Research has shown that having more spiritual resources available reduces compassion fatigue for clergy.[34] Training and support in prayerfulness, managing anxiety, and handling conflict can also mitigate burnout.[35]

These are all effective ways to build ministry resilience, but problems still exist. One study showed that pastors who scored higher on a spirituality assessment also tended to score higher for emotional exhaustion.[36] Few studies have dealt with pastors and secondary traumatization experiences, possibly because many hesitate to discuss negative experiences resulting from their work.[37] Solo pastors may hold back from reaching out for support because it would require extra effort, in addition to the overwhelming demands they already face.[38]

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[34] Darling, Hill, and McWey, "Understanding Stress," 268.

[35] Scott Dunbar et al., "Calling, Caring, and Connecting: Burnout in Christian Ministry," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 23, no. 2 (2020): 183.

[36] Doolittle, "Burnout and Coping," 36.

[37] Jill Anne Hendron, Pauline Irving, and Brian Taylor, "The Unseen Cost: A Discussion of the Secondary Traumatization Experience of the Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (April 2012): 227.

[38] Scott and Lovell, "Rural Pastors Initiative," 91.

Dr. Wesley Cohoon, a certified clinical sociologist, suggests that often literature provides "surface-level preventative measures to keep people in vocational ministry." While those measures may be helpful, studies are not "addressing the structural problems inherent in the profession." Instead, authors have typically put the onus of change on pastors to prevent burnout.[39]

A consultant on healthy ministry, Dr. Tracey Dawson, agrees with this assessment. In an article she wrote for *The Christian Century,* she stated the importance of pastors learning healthy boundaries for ministry, but this action alone "places the burden for the health of the congregation entirely on the pastor." She recommends training and resources for other staff and lay leaders so they can work more effectively with the pastor. Dawson says that it's rare for the laity to be given the support and resources to serve in ways that benefit the clergy and the entire church.[40]

The importance of congregational support for ministry sustainability is reinforced in several studies. One study concluded that clergy were more satisfied in their positions when they had more supportive relationships in the congregation.[41] The Hartford study came to a similar conclusion.[42] Another study said that clergy repeatedly expressed a need for others to walk beside them in solving problems, to "be available," "carry some

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[39] Wesley D. Cohoon and Jessica Smartt Gullion, "'Maybe I'm Just Too Damaged': Revisiting Clergy Reasons for Leaving the Profession," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* 9, issue 1 (2023), 43.

[40] Tracey Dawson, "Whose Problem Is Clergy Burnout?: Training in Healthy Ministry for Pastors--and Congregations," *The Christian Century* 137, no. 24 (November 18, 2020), 23.

[41] Lee and Iverson-Gilbert, "Demand, Support, and Perception," 255.

[42] Hartford Institute, "Exhausted All the Time," 25.

of the load," and provide "active support not in words but in deeds."[43] A fourth study concluded that clergy who experienced support from their congregations reported greater personal accomplishment in the ministry and overall positive mental health, while those who perceived their congregations as making too many demands reported higher levels of negative mental health traits.[44] In a 2021 survey of 345 pastors in 27 countries, the greatest need pastors reported is sharing responsibilities with others.[45]

Julian DeShazier, the Director of Experiential Education at McCormick Theological Seminary, wrote an article challenging pastors and congregations to curb clergy burnout by alleviating the burden of ministerial responsibilities. "At some point," he writes, "we seem to have stopped taking seriously the biblical notion of church as a community of collaborators." He is convinced a major contributor to unhealthy clergy health is congregations relying on pastors to do all the work of the ministry. He calls for congregations to consider more than giving their pastors a break and rather "how to help them overfunction less" by working together.[46]

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[43] Meek et al., "Maintaining Personal Resiliency," 343.

[44] Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell et al., "The Glory of God Is a Human Being Fully Alive: Predictors of Positive Versus Negative Mental Health Among Clergy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54, no. 4 (December 2015): 717.

[45] Faithlife Corporation, "2021 Pastoral Mental Health Report," 2021, https://files.logoscdn.com/v1/files/51366259/assets/11995656/content.pdf?signature=cegLLmLmZx-_0XIJQxue7SqtHNM, 11.

[46] Julian DeShazier, "The Little Engine That Needed Collaborators: Clergy Burnout Happens When Churches Expect Pastors to Do Everything and Pastors Oblige," *The Christian Century* 140, no. 3 (March 2023): 29–30.

Purpose Statement

Addressing the problem of pastoral burnout is multifaceted. Providing pastors with coping strategies and self-care tools will help them in their demanding work, but for long-term ministry sustainability, pastors must also find ways to share congregational care needs. This issue is especially true for solo pastors, who are more likely to sense that they have all the responsibility for pastoral care. One solution is to equip and mobilize the laity to share in the care of the congregation. The purpose of this study is to explore how solo pastors describe the ministry sustainability benefits of having lay caregiving teams in their congregation. This will be done by looking at Stephen Ministry in congregations as a particular type of a caregiving team. The following questions guided the research.

Research Questions

To address this purpose, the following research questions served as areas of focus for the qualitative research:

1. What challenges to ministry sustainability do pastors face before establishing a caregiving team?
2. What benefits to ministry sustainability do pastors experience after establishing a caregiving team?
3. What theological beliefs help motivate pastors to establish a caregiving team?
4. How do pastors describe the benefits that a caregiving team has on the congregation?
    a. How does a caregiving team benefit those on the team?
    b. How does a caregiving team benefit those receiving care?

c. How does a caregiving team impact the congregation and community at large?

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for clergy, especially those in a solo pastor role, congregation members, and denominational leaders to address the problem of burnout and pastoral shortages.

While some recent literature has offered coping strategies and self-care for pastors handling the stresses of the ministry, the burden of ongoing pastoral care still needs to be addressed. Often pastors feel they are not able to meet all the pastoral needs in their congregation, which can lead to guilt, a sense of failure, conflict with church members, burnout, and depression. The situation is more common with solo pastors, who do not have other clergy with whom to share responsibilities. This study may provide a practical way to expand pastoral care, alleviate the burden that pastors carry, encourage wider congregational support for the pastor, and help promote long-term ministry sustainability.

This study also has significance for congregation members. Laity benefits from better leadership and shepherding when their pastors have a positive outlook for ministry. Congregations are healthier and more stable when the pastors' overall sense of wellbeing keeps them in their position longer. In addition, when the laity is equipped and mobilized to provide pastoral care, they have more opportunities to mature in their faith and offer better support for their pastors as they actively work alongside them.

Denominational leaders may also benefit from this study. Providing financial support to establish caregiving teams in congregations can help prevent burnout for pastors by spreading the burden of care. Caregiving teams can also fill a need for

congregational care when churches are looking to hire a full-time pastor or supplement a part-time one. It may also be more inviting for clergy to take a solo pastoral position if they know there is a caregiving team in place at the church. In addition, more lay people could be interested in attending seminary and entering vocational ministry after they have had an opportunity to be equipped and to serve on a caregiving team.

Definition of Terms

In this study, key terms are defined as follows:

Caregiving Team – A team made up of laity equipped to provide emotional and spiritual support to other members of the congregation and the wider community. In this study, the caregiving team discussed is also referred to as Stephen Ministry.

Care receivers – Individuals who receive one-to-one care from a Stephen Minister. They meet first with a Stephen Leader or pastor to determine if their need for care is appropriate for a lay Stephen Minister to handle. If it is appropriate, then they meet with their Stephen Minister for as long as they need. Care receivers may be members of the church or community. Typically, male care receivers are matched with male Stephen Ministers, and female care receivers are matched with female Stephen Ministers.

Solo pastors – Pastors who serve in congregations with only one professional clergy position.

Stephen Ministry – A system of lay caregiving ministry that equips lay people to provide emotional and spiritual support to other members of the congregation and the wider community. Besides the tools to train laity in pastoral care, the system also

includes a framework to recruit and select individuals to serve in this capacity and provides ongoing accountability and support through regular supervision meetings.

Stephen Leaders – Laity, church staff, or pastors trained by Stephen Ministries to lead Stephen Ministry in their congregations. The training for Stephen Leaders includes how to work with the pastor to expand care in the church, how to publicize and educate the congregation on the ministry, how to use the curriculum to train Stephen Ministers, how to find those who need care and matching them up with Stephen Ministers, and how to provide ongoing supervision for the Stephen Ministers.

Stephen Ministers – These are lay people trained through the Stephen Ministry curriculum to give emotional and spiritual care to those in the congregation and community. The curriculum includes twenty sessions on topics such as active listening, handling feelings, helping a person to process challenges, crisis theory and practice, boundaries, confidentiality, mental health issues, grief, depression, and responding to suicidal ideation. Stephen Ministers commit to meeting with their care receivers for about an hour once a week and attend supervision meetings and continuing education for the duration of their service.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to explore how solo pastors describe the ministry sustainability benefits of having lay caregiving teams in their congregation.

The literature review begins with an exploration of Ephesians 4:11–13, which provides the theological foundation for the role of laity in the work of the ministry. Then, two particularly relevant areas of literature were reviewed to provide a foundation for the qualitative research. These areas explore the use of empathy in client-centered approaches to pastoral care and forming and maintaining teams.

The Role of Laity in the Work of the Ministry in Ephesians 4:11–13

Ephesians 4:11–13 is often used by churches and organizations as the theological grounds for equipping laity for ministerial work. The text is "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." It appears to give a mandate for all people in the church to use their gifts to be involved in the ministry. Creating caregiving teams is justified if pastors are expected to deploy members of the church to use their gifts to build up the body of Christ.

There is debate, however, on what the text says about whose responsibility it is to minster. This section will look at who is being referred to in Verse 11, the different

interpretations of what they are to do in Verse 12, and the overall goal of these efforts in Verse 13.

The Context of Ephesians 4:11–13

Before concentrating on Ephesians 4:11–13, it is important to understand the context of these verses. Leading up to Chapter 4, Paul reminds everyone in the church of their spiritual blessings, how both Jew and Gentile have been brought into the body of Christ through grace, and that he is praying that they may know the depths of Christ's love. The first six verses of Chapter 4 emphasize the need to walk together in unity. This is followed by Verses 7–16, a section that begins with how "each one" receives grace "according to the measure of Christ's gift," and ends with focusing on how "each part" assists the body in its growth "when each part is working properly."[47] The thrust of this passage is that all the individuals within the community of faith play an important role in carrying out the mission of the church.[48]

Verse 8 is "Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men,'" and it is foundational to Verses 11–13. Paul quotes part of Psalm 68:18 ("You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men") and changes the verb "receive" (ἔλαβες) in the Septuagint to "give" (ἔδωκεν). This verse, along with the passive voice that grace "was given" (ἐδόθη)

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[47] Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 278.

[48] Dale L Lemke, "A Philosophy of Disciple-Centered Leadership," *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (2017), 279.

in Verse 7, focuses the audience's attention on Christ as the source and giver of the gifts to the church.[49]

The point comes clearer in Verse 10, where Paul uses the intensive pronoun (αὐτός) with "he is" (ἐστιν) to stress that Jesus is the one who ascended above the heavens and has supremacy over all things.[50] Having achieved dominion over all powers, Christ is able to give gifts to the members of his body for "filling all things."[51] Thus, Christ has inaugurated a greater reign over his enemies—the theme of Psalm 68 that was quoted earlier—redeeming what was lost by expanding the church and helping it to grow to the stature of his fullness.[52] In Verse 11, the intensive pronoun is repeated (αὐτὸς) with "he gave" (ἔδωκεν), connecting the specific gifts in this verse with the gracious gifts mentioned in Verse 8.[53]

The Who of Ephesians 4:11

Paul rooted the theme of unity in the church through a common confession of faith described in Verses 4–6. In Verse 11, he now names five specific gifts given to the church by Christ because they affect the proclaiming and applying the Word of God: "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherd, and teachers." An accurate

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[49] Juan Manuel Granados Rojas, "Ephesians 4:12. A Revised Reading," *Biblica* 92, no. 1 (2011), 89.

[50] Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 541; Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2011), 255.

[51] Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 297.

[52] Arnold, *Ephesians*, 255.

[53] Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 127; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 540.

understanding and acceptance of God's Word is essential for the church's growth and maturity described in Verse 13 and its discernment of truth in Verse 14.[54]

The interpretive question in this verse concerns whether this list names the gifting of different types of ministries, offices in the church, or specific people. How this question is answered helps set the stage for what these individuals are to do with these gifts.[55] Is the intention of this verse to establish the leadership structure of the church, which will be explored further in the next verse, or is it to explain the distribution and use of the charisma available to all members?[56]

Ministry, Offices, or People?

There are three main interpretations for the list. The first views the groups as gifts given to certain people to use in ministry. The second understands the groups as identifying different offices in the church. The third sees the gifts as people themselves. The following briefly explores each option.

Gifts of Ministry

The structure of the passage (τοὺς μὲν…, τοὺς δὲ…, τοὺς δὲ…, τοὺς δὲ…) could mean that the nouns that follow serve as a predicate ("[he gave] some as apostles, some as prophets…") or simply as nouns following a definite article ("[he gave] the apostles, the prophets…"). The late Harold Hoehner, a New Testament professor at Dallas

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[54] Arnold, *Ephesians*, 256.

[55] Stephen E. Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 140.

[56] Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, World Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: World Books, 1990), 252.

Theological Seminary, preferred the former because "it brings out the distinction that each gifted person has a particular function among the assembly of believers."[57] The late theologian Markus Barth agreed, writing that the verse shows "certain ministries are given by Christ (vs.11) in order that the church fulfills her present task (vs. 12), and, at the end, reach the goal set for her (vs. 13)."[58]

New Testament scholar Frank Thielman agrees that the emphasis is on the work these individuals do. This view fits well with the following verse, which he argues extends the focus of ministerial work to the entire church rather than focusing on offices or select people in the church.[59] Hoehner, Barth, and Thielman agree that Verse 12 names the functions of all individuals in the church.

Gifts of Office

Another view understands this verse as establishing offices of the church. Sixteenth-century Reformed scholar John Calvin wrote that this verse "teaches that the government of the Church by the ministry of the Word is not contrived by men, but set up by the Son of God….That we have ministers of the Gospel is His gift."[60] Lutheran scholar Thomas Winger also sees these as specific offices, arguing that it would not make sense to say Christ is actively giving the spiritual gift of being an apostle when those

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[57] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 538.

[58] Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974), 34A: 478.

[59] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 290.

[60] John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), 178; See also Charles Hodge, *Ephesians*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 135.

positions had been filled and were not to be repeated.[61] Rather, he suggests the articles should not be translated as "some as," but as definite articles. He goes on to say that the first three terms (apostles, prophets, evangelists) are foundational and closed offices, while pastors and teachers are distinct, ongoing offices.[62] Both Calvin and Winger see the following verse as explaining how officeholders are to carry out their position.

The challenge with this position, as Mennonite theologian Thomas Yoder Neufeld points out, is that Ephesians does not mention the known offices of elders, deacons, or bishops named elsewhere in the New Testament. It is also unclear how these ministries might be organized in the early Ephesian church.[63] New Testament scholar Klyne Snodgrass also challenges the idea that Paul is focused on offices or church order here. Instead of formal positions, attention should focus on how the community cannot exist without leadership gifts to assist the service and edification of the church.[64]

Gifts of People

A third approach sees the list as the actual apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers themselves. As the late Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow Ernest Best wrote, "The gifts are not made to people but gifts of people."[65] New

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[61] Thomas M. Winger, *Ephesians*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 450.

[62] Winger, *Ephesians,* 452.

[63] Thomas Yoder Neufeld, *Ephesians: Believers Church Bible Commentary*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), 181.

[64] Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1996), 202–3.

[65] Ernest Best, *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary* (New York, NY: A&C Black, 2003), 388.

Testament scholar Peter O'Brien agrees, writing, "Those listed are ministers of the Word through whom the gospel is revealed, declared, and taught."[66] Associate Professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Benjamin Merkle states that the list defines not merely spiritual gifts but "the persons themselves given for the unity and maturity of the church" and that the structure of the passage distinguishes the various gifts given to the church.[67]

Another New Testament scholar, Andrew T. Lincoln, supports this view by suggesting that the Greek articles separate different nouns, and therefore the verse should be simply translated as articles and nouns instead of taking nouns as predicates. He acknowledges that scholars often compare this verse to the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, but the difference is that all these groups are ministers of the Word. Thus, he writes, "He gives people, these particular people who proclaim the word and lead."[68] Catholic scholar Rudolf Schnackenburg agrees, pointing out that no gifts of tongues, healing, or charity are mentioned here, but only preaching, leading, and teaching, which are set apart for establishing the body of Christ and helping it to grow.[69]

Although these scholars would agree that the verse's focus is the gift of people for unifying and maturing the church, they would differ on whether this sets up Verse 12 as

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[66] O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 298.

[67] Merkle, *Ephesians*, 127.

[68] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 42:249.

[69] Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 2001), 180; See also Peter S. Williamson, *Ephesians*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scriptures (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 116.

describing only their responsibilities[70] or if it defines how they are to use their gifts to equip others in theirs.[71]

Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists

The first three groups may be separated from the last two, either because, as Winger suggested, these are no longer functioning today as in Paul's time, or, as some suggest, these three traveled from place to place while pastors and teachers were local.[72]

Apostles and prophets were already mentioned as serving a foundational function for the church in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5. They receive and authorize the correct doctrine and teachings.[73] Based on Romans 15:20, Hoehner suggests the apostles' main function is to establish churches in areas that haven't been reached by others.[74] They may have been mentioned first because of their importance in being immediate messengers of Christ.[75]

Besides the two references earlier in Ephesians, Paul lists prophets in Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, 28–30 and tells the Corinthians that those who prophesy speak for strengthening, encouraging, comforting the church (1 Corinthians 14:3), and building up the body (1 Corinthians 14:4, 5). New Testament scholar Clinton

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[70] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 249.

[71] Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 180; See also Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1969), 245–46.

[72] B. F. Westcott, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1952), 62. See also Chrysostom, *Hom. Eph.* Hom 11.

[73] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 249.

[74] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 542.

[75] Hodge, *Ephesians*, 135; See also Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas Scripture Series: Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Matthew L. Lamb, (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1966), 2:163.

Arnold concludes that the operation of this gift is essential for new churches, especially when there could be opposition and discouragement.[76]

The Greek word translated as "evangelists" (εὐαγγελιστάς) typically refers to a messenger proclaiming good news of diplomatic success or a victory in battle. Similarly, evangelists have the duty of preaching the good news and victory of Christ, and Paul may also have had in mind that they are to write down the message.[77] The term is not often used in the Bible. Philip is described as an evangelist in Acts 8:26–40 and 21:8, when he helped a Gentile understand the Word of God. Related terms in Ephesians 3:8 (εὐαγγελίσασθαι) and Ephesians 6:19 (εὐαγγελίου) refer to the good news of including both Jews and Gentiles into the church. In 2 Timothy 4:5, Paul told Timothy to do the work of an evangelist, but the context was within his congregation.[78] Thus, the word in Verse 11 may be more about proclaiming the gospel to recent believers locally than traveling and addressing outsiders.[79] While not all scholars would agree, many reach a similar conclusion since the recipients of the gifts in Ephesians 4 are primarily the church.[80]

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[76] Arnold, *Ephesians*, 257.

[77] Aquinas, *Aquinas Scripture Series*, 2:164.

[78] O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 299.

[79] Fowl, *Ephesians*, 141.

[80] Best, *Ephesians*, 163–65; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250; Schnackenburg, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 184; Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 180.

Pastors and Teachers

The term usually translated as "pastors" (ποιμένας) literally means "shepherds." It is rarely used as a title in the New Testament: twice for Jesus (Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25) and one other occasion when Paul uses the shepherding imagery for how elders were to care for the church (Acts 20:28, 29). Jesus described himself as the good shepherd of his flock, referring to how he led and took care of his followers.[81] From Jesus's use of the shepherding image, especially in John 10, the role involves knowing the people intimately, leading them, protecting them from harm, and sacrificing for them. Since Paul has used this term already with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, he is again connecting the office of overseer to ministering to the people this way.[82]

The second term "teachers" (διδασκάλους) is used nearly sixty times in the New Testament, and seven of those are found in Paul's letters. Teaching was a qualification of those serving as an overseer or elder.[83] Evaluating the usage of this term, Lincoln states that teachers served as "preserving, transmitting, expounding, interpreting, and applying the apostolic gospel and tradition along with the Jewish Scripture."[84] Since Jesus was called a teacher by his followers and enemies, he modeled for others that teaching involved facts and moral instruction.[85]

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[81] Matthew 9:36; 25:32; 26:3; Mark 6:34; 14:27; Luke 2:8, 14, 18, 20; John 10:2, 11, 12, 14, 16.

[82] Arnold, *Ephesians*, 261.

[83] 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:24; Titus 1:9

[84] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 251.

[85] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 545.

There is debate on whether these last two words refer to one or two groups. Those who support grouping these into one ("pastor-teacher") point out that there is an article before each preceding noun except here where one article is before both nouns. Snodgrass acknowledges that while teaching is a gift others have, some have a more formal role of teaching and are compensated for it, citing Acts 13:1, Galatians 6:6, 1 Corinthians 12:28, and 1 Timothy 5:17.[86] Catholic scholar Peter Williamson sees this group most similar to bishops and priests who preside over their local community by shepherding and instructing.[87] This view was also adopted early on in church history.[88]

Those who see Paul as referring to two groups note that the use of one Greek article does not require the two terms to be combined into one. Thielman points out that Paul uses one article to modify "apostles" and "prophets" in Ephesians 2:20, but clearly, he is referring to two separate groups. He suggests that Paul may have implied that "pastors" and "teachers" are overlapping but not identical groups.[89]

Daniel Wallace, professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, agrees and suggests that the second term may be a subset of the first. In other words, "all pastors were to be teachers, though not all teachers were to be pastors."[90] Many other scholars agree, including Hoehner, Arnold, and Lincoln.[91]

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[86] Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 204.

[87] Williamson, *Ephesians*, 117.

[88] John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, ed. W. Young (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 304; See also Aquinas, *Aquinas Scripture Series*, 2:164.

[89] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 275.

[90] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 284.

[91] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 544; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 260; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250.

Regardless of whether there are four or five groups listed in Verse 11, all of them share the role of establishing the church on the firm foundation of sound instruction through leading, teaching, and protecting. Whether these are ministries, official offices, or the people themselves, Christ gave these gifts to the church for it to grow and mature. Exactly what these groups are to do for that to happen is expounded upon in the next verse.

The What of Ephesians 4:12

There is much disagreement over how to understand the relationship between the three prepositional phrases in Ephesians 4:12. How this verse is interpreted can point to a strong distinction between clergy and laity or reinforce the concept that clergy have the responsibility to use their gifts to equip laity in the church to use theirs. The controversy comes down to a question drawn from Verse 11: are the groups listed to do the work of the ministry themselves or to equip others to join in the ministry work?

The debate intensifies when some interpreters assume that other scholars are driven by their support of current church structures rather than by unbiased study. Lincoln, who sees this verse as a directive to what church leaders are to do themselves writes that it's "hard to avoid the suspicion that opting for the other view is too often motivated by a zeal to avoid clericalism and to support a 'democratic' model of the church."[92] On the other hand, Barth, who sees the verse as telling leaders to train others for ministry, writes that the other side's interpretation "has an aristocratic, that is, a clerical and ecclesiastical flavor; it distinguishes the (mass of the) 'saints' from the

[92] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 253.

(superior class of the) officers of the church….laymen are ultimately only beneficiaries."[93]

One of the major issues in interpretation is the change in the preposition before the three phrases: "**πρὸς** τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων **εἰς** ἔργον διακονίας **εἰς** οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ." Are the different prepositions simply a stylistic change, making all three phrases coordinate with one another so ministers of the Word have three tasks: *to* equip the saints, *to* do the work of the ministry, and *to* build up the body of Christ? Or does the change in prepositions from πρὸς to εἰς… εἰς indicate that the second and third phrases depend on the first, which means the groups in Verse 11 are *to* equip the saints *for* the work of ministry and *for* building up the body of Christ?

Often, those who see this verse as three roles for the groups mentioned in Verse 11 are called "traditionalists," while those who take this verse as a call to equip laity are called "revisionists."[94] The early church took the former interpretation, according to most scholars. They point to the fourth-century church leader John Chrysostom's homily where he takes the three prepositional phrases as coordinates of one another.[95] The Vulgate and the King James Version (KJV) also reflect this view. Winger represents other traditionalists when he writes "from the mid-twentieth century onwards [there was] a wholesale shift in interpretation…reflected in the translations of that era. With the

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[93] Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 479.

[94] Despite the possible misnomer, for this discussion those who favor Verse 12 as talking only about the role of leaders will be referred to as "traditionalists," while those who favor seeing it as a call to equip the saints for ministry will be referred to as "revisionists."

[95] Sydney H. T. Page, "Whose Ministry?: A Re-Appraisal of Ephesians 4:12," *Novum Testamentum* 47, no. 1 (2005): 45.

removal of the comma between the first two phrases…the doers of *diakonia* shifted from the apostolic offices themselves to the 'saints.'"[96]

There is doubt, however, on these assertions. New Testament and Jesuit scholar Juan Manuel Granados Rojas contradicts the claim that Chrysostom saw these phrases as parallel to each other, but rather all in "agreement between the unity of Christ's gift and its manifestation to build up his body."[97] Before the KJV was written, the 1534 translation of William Tyndale's translation presented the latter two phrases as subordinate to the first.[98] Nineteenth-century theologian B.F. Westcott writes, "The change in preposition shews (sic) clearly that the three clauses…are not coordinate, and however foreign the idea of the spiritual ministry of all 'the saints' is to our mode of thinking, it was the life of the apostolic church."[99] Other scholars from that similar period draw similar conclusions.[100]

The prepositions, however, are not the only point of contention. The word καταρτισμὸν may be translated as "perfecting" or "equipping." There is also some question on whether the word διακονίας should be rendered as a special or general ministry. And, of course, that debate leaves uncertain who is involved in "the building" (οἰκοδομὴν) of the body of Christ. Each of these questions will be explored.

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[96] Winger, *Ephesians*, 459.

[97] Granados Rojas, "Ephesians 4,12," 94–95.

[98] Bradley Trout and Gordon Miller, "To Whom Does 'The Work of Ministry' In Ephesians 4:11-12 Belong?," *South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 22 (2013), 144.

[99] Westcott, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, 63.

[100] See T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1897), 119; J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London, England: James Clarke, 1904), 182.

The Challenge with Prepositions

There is not a clear way to translate how the three prepositions relate to each other. Even in Ephesians, some prepositional phrases are coordinated with one another (4:13; 6:12), and others are not (1:3, 20; 2:7). Although scholars interpret the function of the prepositions in this verse with some nuance, the conclusions create two major categories: coordinate phrases describing the roles of the groups named in Verse 11 or subordinate phrases describing the roles of everyone in the church.

Coordinate Phrases Describing the Roles of the Groups Named in Verse 11

Most traditionalists see these prepositional phrases as coordinates as demonstrated in the KJV translation: "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The prepositions introduce purpose phrases of why Christ gave gifts in Verses 7–11; the work of the ministry is to be done by those named in the previous verse.[101] As mentioned earlier, the change in wording is explained simply as a variation of style.[102]

Professor of New Testament Sydney H. T. Page compares the similar construction of Verses 11 and 12 with Verse 13. In the former, the verb in Verse 11, "he gave," is followed by three prepositional phrases, all of which express purpose. In Verse 13, the verb "we all attain," is also followed by three prepositional phrases expressing purpose. Since the prepositional phrases in Verse 13 are coordinated with one another, and Verses

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[101] Winger, *Ephesians*, 458.

[102] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 254.

11 and 12 are similarly constructed, the three phrases might also be taken as coordinated with one another as well.[103]

Some consider the first preposition as the ultimate purpose of the main verb "he gave" in Verse 11, and the last two prepositions coordinate with each other and subordinate to the first. In other words as theologian Dale Lemke translates, "He gave apostles, etc., to fulfill the work of the ministry and to build up the body of Christ, His object being to perfect the saints."[104] Revisionists point out that it seems odd to have the ultimate purpose mentioned in the first phrase instead of last.[105] Even nineteenth-century Scottish theologian John Eadie, a traditionalist, noted that the order "appears somewhat inverted."[106]

However they get there, scholars in the traditionalist camp conclude that Verse 12 is talking about the ministerial work of the groups in Verse 11 and not about the ministry of others in the church.

Subordinate Phrases Describing the Roles of Everyone in the Church

Those who see the second and third prepositional phrases as subordinate to the first take the understanding stated in the ESV: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." Some see the change in prepositions as the key that these phrases are not coordinated with each other. While this particular

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[103] Page, "Whose Ministry?," 31.

[104] Lemke, "A Philosophy of Disciple-Centered Leadership," 88.

[105] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 548.

[106] Eadie, *Commentary on the Greek Text*, 308.

construction occurs only here, Arnold points out that the same series is found several times in the Septuagint, and in all those instances, the first prepositional phrase (starting with πρὸς) is not coordinated with the other two phrases (starting with εἰς).[107] Scholars like Thielman, who interpret these verses as subordinate, do not find this point convincing on its own, because they acknowledge the shift from πρὸς to εἰς might simply be stylistic.[108]

Thielman and Merkle note another structural difference in the prepositional phrases. There is the presence of the article before the object of the first prepositional phrase (πρὸς **τὸν** καταρτισμὸν) but not before the objects of the next two. This variance may indicate that the goal is in the first phrase and the function of the other two phrases is to support it.[109] Linguistic scholar Edna Johnson agrees and sees the first and last phrases as similar, referring to "the saints" and to "the body of Christ," and concludes that the second phrase is dependent on the first. This interpretation makes it clear who is doing the work of the ministry—all the saints who make up the body of Christ.[110]

Those in this camp make their strongest case based on the overall context. O'Brien states that the entire Ephesians letter emphasizes Christ's riches given to all the saints (1:3–19; 3:20), and Chapter 4, Verses 7–16, starts with how every believer was given grace (v. 7) and concludes that the whole body of the church grows from the head as each part does its work (v. 16). He concludes that if only leaders of Verse 11 are

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[107] Arnold, *Ephesians*, 262.

[108] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 278.

[109] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 278; Merkle, *Ephesians*, 129.

[110] Edna Johnson, *A Semantic and Structural Analysis of Ephesians* (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 153.

perfecting the saints, doing the work of the ministry, and edifying the body of Christ, then Paul is departing from his theme that everyone is gifted to contribute to the ministry.[111] Barth offers a similar argument and writes that Paul's interest is "focused upon the mutual contact of all members, not upon special members that reserve for themselves the function of joints."[112] Hoehner stresses that since Verse 16 states that every individual in the church is required to edify the body, it seems strange that this verse would focus on only a select few.[113]

Since the attention of Verse 13 is on all church members, several scholars also point out that if the three phrases in Verse 12 describe what the groups in Verse 11 are to do themselves, then a transition in the last phrase should introduce the rest of the saints. Since they are named in the first prepositional phrase, the other phrases should also refer to them and continue this focus onward.[114]

The Meaning of *καταρτισμὸν*

Another factor in understanding this verse is the interpretation of the Greek word καταρτισμὸν in the first phrase. Some say it should be translated as "completing" or "perfecting," and others say it should be read as "equipping" or "preparing." Most traditionalists prefer the former translations, and most revisionists prefer the former.

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[111] O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians,* 303.

[112] Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 480.

[113] Hoehner, *Ephesians,* 549.

[114] O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians,* 303; Arnold, *Ephesians,* 263; Best, *Ephesians,* 204; Merkle, *Ephesians,* 129.

The difficulty is that this word is used only here in the New Testament, and its verbal form includes all those definitions. To arrive at a conclusion, scholars must rely on variations of the root word in outside literature and context clues. The following will look at the arguments for both main interpretations of this word.

Completing or Perfecting

In classic use, this word can mean "restoration, reconciliation," the "setting, mending, healing" of a bone, or the "furnishing, preparing" of a hall or garment.[115] Page cites letters written in the first and second centuries where the word is used for getting ready the furnishings and furniture, and for preparing clothing. While none of those situations are similar to the one in this verse, he concludes that they all share the idea of provisions needed to make something complete or whole.[116] Lincoln agrees and cites examples used of an educator preparing students to complete their studies. He writes that the text refers to bringing believers to a state of completion, and that "the ministers Christ has given . . . are the means to this end as they exercise their ministries of proclamation, teaching, and leadership."[117]

Winger shows that the verb is used in the Septuagint for "rebuilding" and "completing" Jerusalem and its temple, and the cognate noun is translated as "training, maturation" when Paul shares his hope that Christians will move from being weak to

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[115] Winger, *Ephesians*, 463–64; See also Henry Paul Hamann, "The Translation of Ephesians 4:12--a Necessary Revision," *Concordia Journal* 14, no. 1 (January 1, 1988), 44.

[116] Page, "Whose Ministry?," 33.

[117] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 254.

strong in their faith.[118] Page adds that Paul uses a form of this word in 1 Thessalonians 3:10 (NASB), when he says, "as we may…complete (καταρτίσαι) what is lacking in your faith." This verse states that Paul prays for an opportunity to "remedy the deficiencies" in their faith, which means he is as a leader taking responsibility for the church's growth and maturity.[119] Schnackenburg also includes these verses and additional ones that contain a variation of this word (Hebrews 13:21; 1 Corinthians 1:10) as examples that the early church had to be made "perfect" in the faith. He contends that the word in Verse 12 does not need a prepositional phrase to modify it because it can stand alone to mean encouraging or strengthening people in faith. It is interesting to note, however, that Schnackenburg goes on to say that the implication is that the perfecting work of leaders is for the saints to participate in active service.[120]

Winger suggests that context supports the translation of καταρτισμὸν as "completion." He sees its use in the Septuagint translation of Ezra as a gradual completion of the temple and applies it here as the leaders' responsibility to gradually complete the building of the spiritual temple of the church. Winger says that it implies growth towards the image of Christ, who is the completed man referenced in Verse 13, and may also look forward to the illustration of the armor of God in Chapter 6, Verses 10–17, where the full equipment of all individuals could be like a "quartermaster's provision for a new soldier." Winger concludes, "The first purpose of the ministers Christ gives to the church is to provide the saints with what they need to complete…. By this

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[118] 2 Cor. 3:19; Winger, *Ephesians*, 463.

[119] Page, "Whose Ministry?," 34.

[120] Schnackenburg, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 182–83.

process the spiritual temple, the church, is itself built up stone by stone and brought to perfection."[121]

Equipping or Preparing

Those who prefer a different translation also see the ultimate purpose of Christ's gifts as perfecting the saints, but this goal is stated in Verse 13. They contend that the idea of Verse 12 is to "equip" or "prepare" the saints to do the work of the ministry to move towards that goal.

Arnold notes that a form of this word is used in Luke 6:40 ("…everyone when he is fully trained [κατηρτισμένος] will be like his teacher") and has a sense "to prepare" or "to equip." He then suggests the closest conceptual and cognate lexical parallel to Verse 12 is 2 Timothy 3:16–17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." This view assumes the cognate verb has a sense of "equip," and the prepositional phrase that begins with πρὸς offers the idea of the completion of equipping.[122] Other scholars agree that the use of the verbal form is usually in the context of preparing someone for a purpose, through correcting (Galatians 6:1), completing (1 Thessalonians 3:10), or training (Luke 6:40).[123]

Thielman also cites outside sources from the time of Ephesians, where the word is used as "preparation" of the woof and warp necessary for weaving a garment, and links it

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[121] Winger, *Ephesians*, 463–64.

[122] Arnold, *Ephesians*, 263.

[123] Granados Rojas, "Ephesians 4,12," 92; O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 303.

to this verse: the saints are being prepared for a purpose described in the phrases that follow.[124] Some scholars point out that the verb form is also used to mean equipping people to bring reconciliation to political factions, and likewise, the saints are equipped for the work of the ministry to bring all of God's people together.[125]

Hoehner makes the point that all the saints are being prepared or equipped for the perfection described in Verse 13, rather than ministers being called to do the perfecting.[126] South African Pastor Bradley Trout and Cape Town Baptist Seminary Professor Gordon Miller agree, stating that it would not make sense to say that the groups in Verse 11 were given so the saints would be perfected (v 12) until they all reach perfection (v 13).[127]

If καταρτισμὸν is taken as "equipping" or "preparing," then such action would require a purpose. Revisionists suggest that the next two phrases give intermediate purposes—"for the work of the ministry" and "for building up the body of Christ"—before the ultimate purpose in Verse 13: "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

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[124] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 279–80.

[125] Walter F. Taylor, Jr. and John H. P. Reumann, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 66. O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 303.

[126] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 549–50.

[127] Trout and Miller, "To Whom," 148–49.

The Meaning of *διακονίας*

There is also disagreement on the meaning of the noun διακονίας in the second prepositional phrase. Some see it as referring to a special ministry, only given to the groups in Verse 11, while others see it as a general ministry for everyone in the church.

Special Ministry

To understand this phrase, Winger connects the terms in this prepositional phrase, "work" ἔργον and "service/ministry" διακονίας, to 2 Timothy 4:5: "do the *work* of an evangelist, fulfill your *ministry*." Here, he argues, the word διακονίας is understood as an official task given to Timothy, an ordained minister. He also notes that διακονία is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to the official collection of money for famine relief in Jerusalem and the special ministry of the Word that apostles were called to do. Winger concludes that the term in Verse 12 should be understood as "the apostolic proclamation of God's Word with his authority to the saints."[128] Page agrees, pointing out that the groups mentioned in Verse 11 are engaged in the ministry of the Word, so the ministry here refers to their special calling.[129]

Schnackenburg admits that the word can denote a specific ministry of preachers (2 Corinthians 3:6–8; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; Romans 11:13; Colossians 4:17) or a general ministry of individuals in the church (1 Corinthians 12:5; 16:15; Romans 12:7). He favors the former understanding here because no other activities are mentioned in Verse 11

[128] Winger, *Ephesians*, 464–65.

[129] Page, "Whose Ministry?," 39.

besides preaching, guiding, and teaching, so the service should be understood as only the ministry done by "preachers, pastors, and teachers."[130]

General Ministry

Other scholars suggest that without an article preceding διακονίας and no clear indication that it means anything specialized, it should be taken as a general sense of "ministry."[131] There are many accounts of the term used as general ministry, such as Ephesians 5:19, Romans 15:14, 1 Corinthians 14:26, Philippians 1:15, Colossians 3:16, and 1 Thessalonians 5:11, and Best points out that the church is being built up in every case by the work of non-ministers.[132] Hoehner suggests that the word is frequently used to mean a service of the Lord to others (Acts 20:24; 21:19; Romans 11:13; 1 Corinthians 16:15; 2 Corinthians 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 1 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:5, 11), and that is the idea in this verse. He concludes, "Gifted individuals are given to the church for the purpose of preparing all the saints toward the goal of service or ministry....The believer is being readied to become involved in ministry to others."[133]

Lincoln differs from other traditionalists because he understands διακονίας here in the general sense. The purpose of this general ministry, he says, is to bring the saints to

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[130] Schnackenburg, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 183.

[131] William J. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 79; Best, *Ephesians*, 201–2.

[132] Best, *Ephesians*, 204.

[133] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 550–51.

completion, so altogether their ministry efforts result from devotion to the work of "building up the body of Christ."[134]

Scholars will note that the term cannot refer only to a teaching ministry reserved to select groups because in Verse 15 all believers are tasked with "speaking the truth in love," which involves edifying others with the truth of the gospel.[135]

The Meaning of *οἰκοδομὴν*

The definition of the noun in the last prepositional phrase, οἰκοδομὴν, is more straightforward. Commentators generally agree that the term means "building up" or "edifying." Paul uses this word in Ephesians 2:20–21, where he describes the church as a temple that God is constructing. The metaphor is of a living and growing body of believers who belong to Christ, and Paul uses this word fifteen times in his letters (Ephesians, Romans, and 1 and 2 Corinthians) when referring to strengthening the church and its members.[136] Since the following verse is focused on believers growing and maturing, the idea of building should be primarily seen as qualitative rather than adding new members, although both may be in view.[137]

One area where scholars do differ is the role of apostles and prophets mentioned in Ephesians 2 in the building up of the church. Thielman says they are foundational, with Christ as the guiding and crowning stone, and believers are the church's building

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[134] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 254.

[135] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 279; Trout and Miller, "To Whom," 178–79.

[136] Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 205; Williamson, *Ephesians*, 118.

[137] Larkin, *Ephesians*, 79; Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 205.

blocks. Now in Ephesians 4:12, evangelists, pastors, and teachers join in with apostles and prophets to equip all the saints to participate in the construction.[138] Page agrees that the apostles and prophets are foundational because of their unique role in authoritative teaching and instruction. Since evangelists, pastors, and teachers are their successors, Page concludes that the building up must be done by them without member participation.[139]

Different Conclusions about What Is to Be Done

Revisionists stress the importance that every person in the church is gifted for service. They are being prepared to build up the body. The ministry does not belong to offices of the church or a select few individuals, because everyone is responsible for using their gifts.[140] The groups in Verse 11 are called to equip members of the church to use their gifts. The late New Testament scholar William Hendriksen wrote, "The important lesson taught here is that not [those mentioned in Verse 11] but the entire church should be engaged in spiritual labor. The universal priesthood of believers is stressed here."[141] Trout and Miller note that although the Bible still makes a distinction between those entrusted in teaching and instructing and everyone else, "the work of the ministry is for all."[142]

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[138] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 280.

[139] Page, "Whose Ministry?," 40–41.

[140] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 551.

[141] William Hendriksen, *Ephesians: New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House Books, 1967), 198.

[142] Trout and Miller, "To Whom," 151.

Even Page, a traditionalist, admits that features in the context of this verse "lend support to the view that every believer ought to be involved in ministry." He acknowledges that all the saints are given gifts according to Christ's grace, and the idea that believers should use gifts is expressed notably in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12.[143]

Other traditionalists would also support the participation of others in the work of the church. Lutheran theologian Henry Paul Hamann, whose work is often referred to by traditionalists, writes that Verses 11 and 12 "do not carry implications of superiority, aristocracy, and lack of lay activity." He points out that Verses 11 through 16 shows believers engaged in carrying out specific functions in the body.[144] He goes on to say that while certain people are called to do special ministry, all who assemble in the church are to go about their daily lives doing good works and attracting unbelievers to the faith.[145]

Theologian John Jefferson Davis agrees with Hamann and Page but shifts the perspective: "[Paul's] chief concern is not so much what the saints are doing as acts of ministry, though this is important, but rather what they are and are becoming, as those whose Christian faith and character reflect the character of Jesus Christ." He concludes that every member has an important role in ministry, but Verses 11 and 12 stress that it is even more vital to be like Christ.[146]

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[143] Page, "Whose Ministry?," 42.

[144] Hamann, "Translation of Ephesians 4," 46.

[145] Hamann, "Translation of Ephesians 4," 48–49.

[146] John Jefferson Davis, "Ephesians 4:12 Once More: 'Equipping the Saints for the Work of Ministry?,'" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 24, no. 2 (April 2000), 64.

The Why of Ephesians 4:13

Verse 13 is "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." It also contains three prepositions, and many scholars see the repetition of the same preposition εἰς as a mark that these are parallel.[147] The verse starts with the word "until" (μέχρι), which functions as a conjunction and introduces a temporary clause that has a final goal.[148] Interestingly, the church has already been told it is the "fullness of Christ" in Chapters 1 and 3, implying that the ministry work in Verse 12 has to do with fully realizing who they already are.[149]

The next word is "we all attain," καταντήσωμεν, which is focused on reaching an endpoint. Scholars are quick to point out, especially revisionists, that this word applies to all the church, meaning everyone is involved in attaining what follows.[150] As Hendriksen writes, "There is no room in Christ's church for drones, only busy bees."[151]

Thielman points out that "until we all arrive" should not be attached to "he gave," ἔδωκεν, in Verse 11, but to the verbal idea expressed in the noun οἰκοδομὴν in Verse 12. Paul is not saying Christ continues to give the groups in Verse 11 to the church "until we arrive" but that the work of building up the church continues "until we arrive."[152]

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[147] Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians (Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 115; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281; Merkle, *Ephesians*, 130.

[148] Merkle, *Ephesians*, 130; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 264; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 255.

[149] Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 184.

[150] O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 305; Fowl, *Ephesians*, 142.

[151] Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, 199.

[152] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 280.

The "who" and "what" of the past two verses then point to three goals: 1) unity of faith and knowledge of God's Son, 2) maturity of manhood, and 3) the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Unity

The concept of the unity of Christian faith is holding onto true beliefs with shared convictions. In Ephesians 2, the church is told that they are to "maintain" unity. Being told they are now to "attain" unity recognizes the tension between what is true in the present and what will be fully realized in the future.[153]

Whatever role the groups have in Verse 12, the saints are collectively to move towards truth and away from the false teaching mentioned in Verses 14 and 15. This unity includes "knowledge" (ἐπιγνώσεως) of the Son of God. The term is used earlier in Ephesians 1:17, where it refers to making God known through the Holy Spirit's work. Johnson states that the Greek word has a sense of "experiential knowledge" or "full knowledge" rather than simply knowing about someone.[154] Thielman agrees, emphasizing that one of the goals of ministry is a sharing of common doctrines based on the common experience of knowing the person of Christ "on whom all the doctrines are focused."[155]

Traditionalists, such as Winger, say that leaders who protect their flock from false and corrupting teaching and steer them towards knowing Christ more deeply are a gift

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[153] O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 306.

[154] Johnson, *Analysis of Ephesians*, 155.

[155] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281.

from Christ to the church.[156] Other scholars say that when all members use their gifts, a richer knowledge of Christ comes to each individual through work in the ministry, promoting a unified faith.[157]

Maturity

The Greek word τέλειον is found in the next phrase, and it can be translated as "perfect" or "mature." Some commentators prefer the former option, comparing the word's use here to Matthew 5:45, where it refers to God's perfect righteousness and the call for Christ's followers to imitate this type of perfection. They also see it alluding to the time when the church reaches its final stage of development after Christ's return.[158]

Other commentators prefer the definition "mature," looking at how the word is used similarly in 1 Corinthians 2:6, 14:20, and Hebrews 5:14, contrasting with the image of children in Verse 14, and connecting with the growth and maturity of the body discussed in Verse 16.[159]

Several scholars point out that Paul writes earlier that Jews and Gentiles were brought together to make "one new man in place of the two" (2:15), and that these two groups "are joined together" to "grow into a holy temple in the Lord" (2:21). The mixture of architecture and body imagery is extended here so that the result of "building up the

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[156] Winger, *Ephesians*, 467.

[157] John Philipp Koehler, *A Commentary on Galatians and, Paul's Rhapsody in Christ: A Commentary on Ephesians* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 400–401; O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 307; Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, 199.

[158] Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 186; Hodge, *Ephesians*, 141.

[159] Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 205; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 256; O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 307.

body of Christ" in Verse 12 results in "a mature man." Because of the shared theme with these other verses, this verse describes a corporate maturity, not an individual one.[160]

Notably, Paul uses the gender-specific noun "man" (ἄνδρα), rather than a mature "person" (ἄνθρωπος). The purpose is most likely to call the entire church to identify with Christ himself, a point made more explicit in Verse 15, where the church is "to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."[161] Williamson agrees and writes that this maturity happens "as members of the Church unite themselves to him….The focus is on *corporate* maturity. We are accustomed to think about Christian maturity in individual terms, but here the emphasis is on the Church." He goes on to suggest that when each member of the church is equipped to do the work of the ministry to build the body of Christ, the church becomes more mature and looks differently than it often does now.[162]

Fullness

Paul tells the church earlier that it is already the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 1:23; 4:10), so this is already a dimension of their current state. On the other hand, Paul prays that they would be "filled with the fullness of God" (3:19), so there is also a future anticipation yet to be fully realized.[163] The church is to work towards this future reality by making its goal the fullness of Christ. Johnson contends that the Greek construction may make "fullness" (πληρώματος) a characteristic of "stature" (ἡλικίας), which used

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[160] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 256; Koehler, *A Commentary on Galatians*, 401–2; Schnackenburg, *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 185.

[161] Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 185; Winger, *Ephesians*, 468; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 281.

[162] Williamson, *Ephesians*, 121.

[163] O'Brien, *Letter to the Ephesians*, 307; Neufeld, *Ephesians*, 186.

together implies perfection. Thus, the "measure" (μέτρον) or standard that the church strives for is perfection or full conformity to Christ. She writes, "The church is to become perfect, as Christ is perfect, which entails each individual member's conforming to that standard of perfection."[164] Winger agrees and says, "The ministry is not intended to 'bring out the best in people,' to help them achieve their potential, as if the measure of growth were distinctive to each, but to draw them to the fullness of Christ as their common goal."[165]

Thielman sees that the word "fullness" should be taken in the context of the passage's building metaphor and the concept of growth in Verse 15. So, the believers should think of the church as the body of Christ that grows to attain Christ's full height to face the challenges that will be discussed in Verses 17–19. He concludes that all believers must exercise the gifts that Christ has given them to build up the church "until it attains the full union with the victorious Christ that God intends for it."[166] Lincoln agrees, except he focuses on the ministers listed in Verse 11 as the crucial way for the church to progress toward unity and maturity.[167]

Conclusions

Traditionalists conclude that although Verse 7 emphasizes the grace given to all believers, there is a shift in Verse 11 to emphasize the importance of the teaching gifts to

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[164] Johnson, *Analysis of Ephesians*, 156.

[165] Winger, *Ephesians*, 468.

[166] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 282–83.

[167] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 257.

help the church reach unity and maturity in Verse 13. The goals in Verse 12 are all rooted in the role of sound teaching. The consistent communication of truth, entrusted by the groups of Verse 11, will result in the three prepositional phrases of Verse 13.[168]

Revisionists would disagree that there is a shift in focus from Verse 11. They suggest that Paul's emphasis is still on the people collectively because they are the ones who are built up in the body. They would agree that certain groups in Verse 11 are tasked with teaching sound doctrine, but everyone is actively involved in attaining the three prepositional phrases of Verse 13. That means all members use the gifts they received to build up the body and attain full union with Christ.[169] The late Russian Orthodox Archbishop and theologian Nikolai Afanas'ev wrote that all the lives of all Christians are constant ministry, which happens when they become members of the body of Christ and become "God's kings and priests." Because of this, everyone participates in "every manifestation of the Church's life." He concludes that "if any sphere of it were closed to God's people, that would mean that there is a secular sphere within the Church, or that the faithful have ceased to be God's people."[170]

Summary of the Equipping the Laity for the Work of the Ministry

Christ has graciously given gifts to all people in the church (v. 7), and his purpose is that to attain unity of faith and deeper knowledge of him, and to mature and grow in his fullness (v. 13). The groups in Verse 12 could be special gifts, offices of the church, or

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[168] Page, "Whose Ministry?," 43.

[169] Thielman, *Ephesians*, 283; Trout and Miller, "To Whom," 146.

[170] Nikolaĭ Archbishop Afanas′ev, "The Ministry of the Laity in the Church," *The Ecumenical Review* 10, no. 3 (April 1958): 263.

designated people. The biggest question is if those groups are tasked with perfecting the saints for ministry, building up the body of Christ, and especially through their teaching and leading, or if they are to equip everyone in the church to do the work of the ministry so the body can be built up. Traditionalists would favor the first interpretation, and revisionists would favor the second.

While the level of each member's participation is debated in these verses, scholars still acknowledge the importance of people serving according to their gifts. Everyone—not just a select few—is included in being unified, maturing, and growing to attain the full reality of Christ. They are all called in Verses 14–16 to guard against the challenges of false teachings so they can unite as an even stronger body. Every member has gifts to contribute, by submitting to the teaching of leaders whose responsibility is to ensure that those gifts are used appropriately for the church's growth or to be fully equipped by the leaders to collectively do the work of the ministry. In both cases, all members of the body of Christ have gifts to use for the overall good of the church.

The Use of Empathy and Client-Centered Approaches to Care

An important way for church members to be involved in building up the congregation is by providing care to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of others. Non-professional lay people can be equipped to use key elements of client-centered therapy, such as empathy, to those they are caring for. This second area of literature review will look at the use of empathy and client-centered approach to therapeutic care. It will begin by defining client-centered therapy, then consider how concepts of client-centered therapy help in medical health care, social work, and pastoral counseling. It will

then end by describing the impact and challenges of empathy, a fundamental part of client-centered therapy.

Defining Client-Centered Therapy

Carl Rogers was a clinical psychologist who significantly contributed to the field of clinical and counseling psychology in the mid-twentieth century. He emphasized the relationship between the client and therapist to foster the client's ability to grow and heal, as opposed to many of the prevailing theories that viewed the therapist's techniques as the primary agent of change.[171] Rogers did not approach therapy as a procedure where the therapist would give advice, direction, persuade, or diagnose, because he viewed these as prejudicial and misused. Instead, he focused mainly on what the client communicated and believed, defining the therapist's role in terms of understanding the client's viewpoint.[172] Thus, the client determines the direction and goals of therapy as the therapist helps the client process feelings along the way. According to Rogers, once clients better understand their experiences, they have greater self-exploration and improved self-concept.[173]

Rogers wrote that six conditions are necessary for constructive personality change in a client-centered therapeutic relationship. First, the two persons are in contact for psychological therapy. Second, clients realize that they need therapy because they feel vulnerable or anxious about a situation. Third, therapists are genuine, congruent persons, meaning that they are self-aware and represent themselves without presenting a façade.

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[171] Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 10th Edition (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2017), 165.

[172] Corey, *Counseling and Psychotherapy,* 166.

[173] Corey, *Counseling and Psychotherapy,* 167.

Fourth, the therapists experience unconditional positive regard for their clients; in other words, there are no conditions for therapists to accept or like their clients, and they view them as separate, with their own valuable experiences and feelings. Fifth, therapists experience an empathetic understanding of the clients' internal frame of reference and communicate this empathy to clients. Sixth, this communication of empathy and unconditional positive regard is recognized by the clients.[174]

The reason this approach is termed "client-centered" is because Rogers emphasizes perceiving reality as the client perceives and understands it. Rogers sees the most important value in the relationship between the client and therapist as the therapist's recognition of the worth and significance of the client. This value is demonstrated in the attitude and verbal behavior towards the client.[175] When therapists communicate genuine care for their client as a person, they are providing an environment where clients do not feel any stipulations on being accepted. The therapist is saying, through empathetic behavior, "I'll accept you as you are."[176] This acceptance gives clients permission to process their complicated feelings without fear or judgment.

He writes that the primary effort of the therapist should be "getting 'within' the attitudes of the client, of entering the client's internal frame of reference" by laying aside all perceptions from their frame of reference while doing so and then communicating this understanding to their clients. Through this type of relating, the person, their

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[174] Carl R Rogers, "The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change," *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 21, no. 2 (1957): 96–100.

[175] Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy* (London, England: Robinson, 2015), 35.

[176] Corey, *Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 175.

relationships, experiences, and background are all considered.[177] When this relating happens, therapists respect and rely upon the capacity of their clients to process their thoughts and beliefs to move towards healing.[178]

Rogers teaches that this type of relationship helps clients perceive themselves as more adequate and worthy as individuals. As they explore their own beliefs and thoughts, they can grow in self-awareness and achieve a more realistic appraisal of themselves, their relationships, and their environment.[179] They are more freely able to express feelings they had thought were too negative, moving them away from distortions of their self-perception. As clients feel more understood and accepted for who they are, they become less defensive and more open to process their experiences safely and accurately. This openness also helps them to perceive other people more accurately as well.[180] Rogers notes that as therapy progresses, clients talk less about their problems and symptoms and shift to talking more about their insights and understanding of past and present relationships and behaviors.[181] Professor Emeritus at California State University, Dominguez Hills, Arthur Bohart writes that this interactive process between the therapist and client helps clients to reflect, formulate, and re-formulate their circumstances and

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[177] Paul Wilkins, ed., *Person-Centered and Experiential Therapies: Contemporary Approaches and Issues in Practice* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2016), 44.

[178] Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, 29, 36.

[179] Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, 139.

[180] Corey, *Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 172.

[181] Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, 132–33.

experiences, see things in a broader perspective, and discover solutions rather than have them assumed by the therapist.[182]

This approach is not without criticism, though. When Rogers first introduced it, many therapists trained in behavioral or psychoanalytic therapy doubted that being nondirective would result in clients making a psychological adjustment. They also questioned if this approach would be effective when applied to those who had psychopathic tendencies or had an altered sense of reality.[183] There are studies that suggest an advantage for some therapies over others depending on the client's need, such as cognitive and behavioral therapy addressing anxiety issues like panic, compulsion, and phobias. Even so, studies have also shown that these approaches are more effective when client-centered elements are integrated.[184]

How Concepts of Client-Centered Care Is Used in Helping Professions

Due to the demands that helping professionals face, particularly healthcare workers, social workers, and clergy, it can be challenging to see each person as an individual needing care and provide the appropriate amount of attention. Many within these fields apply methods from client-centered therapy to meet this challenge.

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[182] Arthur C. Bohart, "How Does the Relationship Facilitate Productive Client Thinking?," *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 63.

[183] Starke R. Hathaway, "Some Considerations Relative to Nondirective Counseling as Therapy," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56, no. 7 (July 2000), 853–58.

[184] Clara E. Hill and Emilie Y. Nakayama, "Client-Centered Therapy: Where Has It Been and Where Is It Going? A Comment on Hathaway (1948)," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56, no. 7 (July 2000), 867–69.

Health Care Workers

University of Oxford professors Anthony Vincent Fernandez and Dan Zavahi note that it can be easy for those in the medical field to see patients as another instance of a particular disorder or injury instead of as a unique individual. They write that effective treatment requires an understanding of how patients are coping with their circumstances, in addition to an accurate diagnosis. Taking time to empathize with the patient helps medical providers see their patients as unique, stay open to accurately understand their concerns, and better able to offer high-quality care.[185] Additionally, while racial, ethnic, religious, or physical differences may create barriers for the medical provider, this approach alleviates tensions so as to increase understanding. Helen Riess, an associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and director of the Empathy and Relational Science Program at Massachusetts General Hospital, stresses that empathetic understanding is essential to avoid discrimination or unequal care. She points to research that suggests that those in the medical field can override bias no matter how different the patient is when they enhance the value they place on those they are caring for and increase their capacity to see the situation from the patient's viewpoint.[186]

A concern with applying a client-centered approach to nursing was raised by Janice Morse, an anthropologist and nurse researcher. She pointed out that Rogers developed his concepts to facilitate a psychotherapeutic relationship, which has a different aim than a relationship between nurse and a patient. Along with other

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[185] Anthony Vincent Fernandez and Dan Zahavi, "Basic Empathy: Developing the Concept of Empathy from the Ground Up," *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 110 (October 2020), 5.

[186] Helen Riess, "The Science of Empathy," *Journal of Patient Experience* 4, no. 2 (June 1, 2017), 75–76.

researchers, Morse contends that because of the distinctiveness of nursing, there needs to be development of unique nursing theory and practical knowledge as a distinct discipline rather than mimicking the therapeutic actions of other professions.[187] Fernandez and Zahavi counter this by saying that disciplines such as philosophy and theoretical psychology are not setting to resolve practical problems, but answer general questions that can be broadly applied. They give the example that a client-centered approach offers ways to be empathetic, and those concepts can be applied to the nursing field.[188]

Several studies further show how applying concepts from client-centered care result in a positive experience for patients. A study in Pusan, Korea, asked patients their perception of the physician's empathy, partnership, interpersonal trust, and expertise. When the physician showed empathy and high regard for the patient, there was an increased perception of expertise, higher compliance, and stronger overall satisfaction.[189] A study in Europe concludes that patient compliance to treatment increases significantly when the doctor builds a relationship of understanding and trust with the patient.[190] Another study shows that patients with diabetes are more likely to take measures to lower their cholesterol when their physicians empathetically engage with them.[191]A study in the United States reveals the positive effects on patients' health status when practitioners

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[187] Janice M. Morse et al., "Exploring Empathy: A Conceptual Fit for Nursing Practice?," *Image: The Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 24, no. 4 (1992), 279.

[188] Fernandez and Zahavi, "Basic Empathy," 2.

[189] Sung Soo Kim, Stan Kaplowitz, and Mark V. Johnston, "The Effects of Physician Empathy on Patient Satisfaction and Compliance," *Evaluation & the Health Professions* 27, no. 3 (September 2004), 244–46.

[190] E. Vermeire et al., "Patient Adherence to Treatment: Three Decades of Research. A Comprehensive Review," *Journal of Clinical Pharmacy and Therapeutics* 26, no. 5 (2001), 339–40.

[191] Mohammadreza Hojat et al., "Editorial: Empathy and Health Care Quality," *American Journal of Medical Quality* 28, no. 1 (January 2013), 6.

build mutual trust, respect, genuineness, and acceptance compared to practitioners who were impersonal and formal.[192] A related study looked at the effect of physicians being empathetic and asking more open-ended questions, resisting interrupting their patients, identifying and addressing fears and concerns, and checking the patients' understanding of the diagnosis and recommended treatment. Despite the complexity of the criteria, they conclude that such physician-patient relationships result in a small yet statistically significant effect on healthcare outcomes.[193] Research conducted in the United Kingdom shows that patients who experience an empathetic and supportive relationship with their physician within the first three months of treatment gain long-term health benefits.[194]

Using client-centered therapy concepts not only benefits the patient but also helps the medical provider. One study of nurses in Italy shows that those who are more empathetic towards their patients have lower levels of emotional exhaustion, while those who depersonalize their patients experience higher rates of burnout.[195] Research from the University of Pennsylvania shows that when employees of a nursing facility strengthen their compassion with residents, that compassion increases teamwork among the employees, increases job satisfaction, and lowers absenteeism and emotional

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[192] Zelda Di Blasi et al., "Influence of Context Effects on Health Outcomes: A Systematic Review," *The Lancet* 357, no. 9258 (March 2001), 761–62.

[193] John M Kelley et al., "The Influence of the Patient-Clinician Relationship on Healthcare Outcomes: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials," *PloS One* 9, no. 4 (April 9, 2014), 2–6.

[194] Annemieke P. Bikker, Stewart W. Mercer, and David Reilly, "A Pilot Prospective Study on the Consultation and Relational Empathy, Patient Enablement, and Health Changes over 12 Months in Patients Going to the Glasgow Homoeopathic Hospital," *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 11, no. 4 (August 2005), 598.

[195] Paola Ferri et al., "Empathy and Burnout: An Analytical Cross-Section Study among Nurses and Nursing Students," *Acta Biomed for Health Professions* 86, no. 2 (2015), 111.

exhaustion.[196] One study found that the risk of malpractice lawsuits is not predicted by patient characteristics, illness complexity, or physicians' technical skills but instead is related to the physicians' ability to establish rapport and communicate effectively.[197] Emory University's Goizueta Business School and the Laney Graduate School funded a study concluding that patients give higher reviews and make more recommendations to hospitals that reward compassion practices that involve noticing and responding to patients' feelings and experiences.[198]

Social Workers

As in the medical field, Rogers's client-centered therapeutic skills have also made a great impact with social workers. While surveys show only 25–50 percent of counselors and social workers identify as "Rogerian," elements of the client-centered, experiential, and humanistic methodology are often incorporated into their therapeutic approaches. Research has shown that most therapists identify themselves as "eclectic" or "integrative" in their approach, even while using client-centered concepts, which supports Rogers's assertion that the core conditions of client-centered care can be applied to other therapeutic models.[199]

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[196] Sigal G. Barsade and Olivia A. O'Neill, "What's Love Got to Do with It? A Longitudinal Study of the Culture of Companionate Love and Employee and Client Outcomes in a Long-Term Care Setting," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (December 2014), 551.

[197] Gerald B. Hickson et al., "Patient Complaints and Malpractice Risk," *Journal of American Medical Association* 287, no. 22 (2002), 2951.

[198] Laura E. McClelland and Timothy J. Vogus, "Compassion Practices and HCAHPS: Does Rewarding and Supporting Workplace Compassion Influence Patient Perceptions?," *Health Services Research* 49, no. 5 (October 2014), 1671–77.

[199] Howard Kirschenbaum and April Jourdan, "The Current Status of Carl Rogers and the Person-Centered Approach," *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 42, no. 1 (2005), 47.

Studies seem to support that the key characteristics Rogers emphasized in a patient-client relationship—empathy, positive regard, and congruence—are the most important for effective treatment. In a study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, three types of therapy were used to treat depression: cognitive-behavioral therapy, interpersonal therapy, and administration of the drug imipramine. Clients and therapists were randomly assigned, and a variety of well-known standardized evaluative procedures were used. In the end, there were no significant differences between the three treatments on the clients' outcomes. However, across all groups, the therapists' empathy, positive regard, and ability to authentically connect with them significantly correlated with better outcomes and changes in social functioning.[200]

Another study conducted in Brazil enrolled lower-class, non-White, at-risk children and adolescents in a program where therapists provided client-centered therapy. Participants met with their therapist once a week, in a unique, non-directive session, as their therapist focused on empathetic relating skills. The results conclude that the children and adolescents improve their interpersonal relationships, have a more positive performance at school, and improve their mood and emotional functioning. The study concludes that this type of counseling is effective and works across cultures, suggesting that it should be "implemented in service programs for other underserved populations in various cultural settings and minority contexts."[201]

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[200] Sidney J. Blatt et al., "Interpersonal Factors in Brief Treatment of Depression: Further Analyses of the National Institute of Mental Health Treatment of Depression Collaborative Research Program," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 64, no. 1 (1996), 168–69.

[201] Elizabeth Schmitt Freire et al., "Person-Centered Therapy with Impoverished, Maltreated, and Neglected Children and Adolescents in Brazil," *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 27, no. 3 (July 2005), 229–36.

Many other studies worldwide show clients have a positive experience and undergo lasting change when these elements are present in the therapeutic relationship.[202] Arthur Bohart points to his research and suggests that this type of relationship is consistently more effective than other interventions, believing it is because the client is more involved with the process of modifying behavior, they are better able to learn through their emotional experiences, and they feel more supported by the therapist.[203]

As with medical professionals, social workers with higher levels of empathy work more efficiently and productively. Empathy also lessens stress and burnout, because when social workers practice understanding and compassion towards their clients, they also demonstrate that care for one another.[204]

Clergy

Starting in the 1950s, many clergy began drawing from psychology to build their counseling ability, and Rogers's client-centeredness was a major contributor.[205] According to his theory, clergy—and anyone else providing counseling—did not need to have special psychological, psychiatric, medical, or even religious knowledge to offer

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[202] Jerold D. Bozarth, Fred M. Zimring, and Reinhard Tausch, "Client-Centered Therapy: The Evolution of a Revolution," in *Humanistic Psychotherapies: Handbook of Research and Practice*, ed. David J. Cain (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2002), 154–67; Kirschenbaum and Jourdan, "Current Status," 41.

[203] Bohart, "Productive Client Thinking," 65.

[204] Maria Moudatsou et al., "The Role of Empathy in Health and Social Care Professionals," *Healthcare* 8, no. 1 (March 2020): 3.

[205] Alfred R Brunsdon, "A Three Musketeering Approach to Pastoral Care: Reflections on Collaboration between Pastoral Care, Narrative Therapy and Positive Psychology," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35, no. 1 (2014): 3.

empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence.[206] Theoretically, clergy could offer quality therapeutic care if they demonstrate these skills in a relationship that allows others to talk freely, express attitudes, and safely discover inconsistencies in their thinking and beliefs.[207] Bohart writes that those who build a positive, proactive, empathetic relationship promote information-processing for the person receiving care.[208]

The late theologian Carroll Wise was an early proponent of clergy using client-centered methodology in their counseling. One advantage is that instead of pastors taking only a moralistic approach to care, which Wise reports as ineffective and injurious in some cases, they could concentrate on the parishioner's emotional suffering.[209] Wise also notes that allowing parishioners to lead the counseling relationship through the client-centered approach allows them to better reflect on God's work in their lives and experience acceptance and value.[210] He also writes that it safeguards clergy from trying to diagnose parishioners based on their limited knowledge of psychology, focusing instead on developing a caring relationship to help their parishioners understand their emotional situation and grow from it.[211]

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[206] Rogers, "Therapeutic Personality Change," 101.

[207] Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, 72–74.

[208] Bohart, "Productive Client Thinking," 68.

[209] Carroll A Wise, "Client-Centered Counseling and the Pastor," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 7, no. 3 (1953), 129.

[210] Wise, "Counseling and the Pastor," 131–32. Such an approach even predates Rogers, as Ignatius of Loyola's phenomenological approach to religious experience is described in Jean Evans, "Experience and Convergence in Spiritual Direction," *Journal of Religion and Health* 54, no. 1 (February 2015), 267.

[211] Wise, "Counseling and the Pastor," 132.

Another theologian, Robert C. Roberts, connects Rogers's concepts to Christian virtues. He points to how unconditional positive regard with full acceptance and recognition of their worth is analogous to God's call to love one another in Christian fellowship. Through such fellowship, Roberts contends, people experience God's gracious love and find healing.[212] And while Roberts disagrees with some of Rogers's theories, such as all dysfunctions are the result of feelings of self-worth without any eternal considerations, he does see how client-centered therapy promotes other Christian virtues such as honesty and tolerance.[213]

There may be several advantages for clergy using client-centered therapeutic methods. First, when clergy concentrate more on what the other person is experiencing instead of what they should be doing, they avoid viewing others as objects to be evaluated, diagnosed, and fixed.[214] Second, sometimes people avoid processing painful feelings by focusing only on spiritual discussions, and clergy can process the underlying emotional issues alongside them through empathy, open-ended questions, and the safety of unconditional positive regard.[215] Wise writes that giving others complete freedom to make their own interpretations in the safety of this type of relationship gives people an opportunity to see how the Christian gospel works in their lives.[216] Third, as people feel

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[212] Robert C. Roberts, "Carl Rogers and the Christian Virtues," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 13, no. 4 (1985), 267–68.

[213] Roberts, "Christian Virtues," 271–72.

[214] Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, 45.

[215] Philip B. Clarke et al., "The Straight Path to Healing: Using Motivational Interviewing to Address Spiritual Bypass," *Journal of Counseling and Development* 91, no. 1 (January 2013), 87–89.

[216] Wise, "Counseling and the Pastor," 133–34.

safer exploring their feelings, experience acceptance, and work through inconsistencies and denials in their lives, clergy are better able to help them be more fully who they really are.[217] Thus, this method can create a church culture with less judgment and discrimination and make it a place of refuge where individuals can find renewal.[218]

There are some scholars who are suspicious with such an approach because they believe it overemphasizes the experiential needs of the person over sound theology. This concern resulted in creating pastoral counseling methods that were focused on confronting the individual in the attempt to lead them to confession and repentance. Yet other scholars have suggested that client-centered therapy does not exclude biblical and theological direction. The worldview of pastors can still be evident in the types of questions they ask, and they are still able to provide teaching and correction. Implementing elements of client-centered therapy can build trust between the pastor and individual so that the individual is more inclined to consider what the pastor is saying.[219]

The Role of Empathy in Therapeutic Care

Empathy is a key part of Rogers's client-centered therapy. While other aspects of this therapeutic approach are effective, empathy can have the greatest impact and pose the most challenges for those in the helping professions.

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[217] Sung Il Moon, "A Reciprocal Conversation on Empathy between Biblical and Rogerian Thoughts," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 121 (July 2021), 271.

[218] Nancy Peters, "HIV/AIDS and Grief: Implications for Practice," *Social Work and Christianity* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2013), 175.

[219] Brunsdon, "Three Musketeering Approach," 3–4.

Defining Empathy

Before exploring its impact and challenges, empathy ought to be defined. Rogers describes it as the ability to sense the other person's perspective as if it were the therapist's own, without losing the "as if" quality.[220] Empathy is less about feeling sorry for the other person and more about sharing the other's subjective world without losing separateness.[221] Others have described empathy as being "with" clients in their thinking, being on the same track and join them in experiencing their world, momentarily identifying with clients through imagining what it's like to be them, and the ability to see through the eyes of someone different.[222]

Fernandez and Zahavi make it clear that maintaining the distinction of self and other is crucial for understanding empathy. Rather than fusing self with another person and merging personalities, empathy keeps the experience "located in the other and not in myself."[223] It also does not take away the empathizer's ability to maintain moral judgment. Roman Krznaric, an advisor on empathy to many organizations including the United Nations, writes that one can "gain an understanding of someone's worldview without having to agree with his beliefs or principles."[224]

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[220] Rogers, "Therapeutic Personality Change," 99.

[221] Corey, *Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 175.

[222] Bohart, "Productive Client Thinking," 67; Arthur J. Clark, "Empathy: An Integral Model in the Counseling Process," *Journal of Counseling and Development* 88, no. 3 (Summer 2010), 349; Helen Riess and Liz Neporent, *The Empathy Effect: 7 Neuroscience-Based Keys for Transforming the Way We Live, Love, Work, and Connect Across Differences* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2018), 23.

[223] Fernandez and Zahavi, "Basic Empathy," 4.

[224] Roman Krznaric, *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It* (New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015), 65.

The Impact of Empathy on Recipients

Many of the studies related to client-centered approaches to therapy involve empathy as a crucial element. Other studies, however, single out empathy for its impact on those experiencing it.

A study conducted in the Netherlands looked at how chaplains used empathy with their clients. The researchers conclude that when chaplains communicate empathetic understanding, their clients could focus on assessing their experiences more fully.[225]

Riess, along with journalist Liz Neporent, looked at randomized controlled trials published since 1990 that investigated how aspects of the physician-patient relationship impacted health outcomes, and these studies consistently identified empathetic relationships as leading to significant improvements in health issues such as obesity, arthritis, asthma, lung infections, and the common cold.[226] A review conducted by researchers in Europe concludes that when physicians are more empathetic, their patients experience lower levels of anxiety and distress.[227] Empathy also increases patients' active involvement and participation in treatment.[228]

Stephen Trzeciak and Anthony Mazzarelli, physicians at Cooper Medical School of Rowan University, looked at studies that show how empathetic actions such as

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[225] Jolanda van Dijke et al., "Empathic Flow: Dutch Humanist Chaplains' Experiences with Professional Empathy and Its Challenges," *Pastoral Psychology* 72, no. 1 (February 2023), 17.

[226] Riess and Neporent, *The Empathy Effect: 7 Neuroscience-Based Keys for Transforming the Way We Live, Love, Work, and Connect Across Differences*, 59.

[227] Frans Derksen, Jozien Bensing, and Antoine Lagro-Janssen, "Effectiveness of Empathy in General Practice: A Systematic Review," *British Journal of General Practice* 63, no. 606 (January 2013), 80.

[228] Melanie Neumann et al., "Determinants and Patient-Reported Long-Term Outcomes of Physician Empathy in Oncology: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach," *Patient Education and Counseling* 69, no. 1–3 (December 2007), 63–75.

unconditional positive regard and reflective listening reduce feelings of demoralization and the long-term effects of trauma. They conclude that empathy gives suffering people an improved, hopeful outlook in life because another person has taken a personal interest in them.[229]

Empathy can allow for relational connections that do not already exist. Nancy Peters, the late professor of social work at Walla Walla University, studied the impact of empathy for patients with HIV/AIDS. She notes that when those with the disease can share their experiences with an empathetic clinical practitioner, they experience safety, felt kindness and compassion, and were able to create a nurturing alliance.[230] Future mothers feel security, trust, and encouragement with their empathetic midwife and report less stress, agony, and pain.[231] Those who are dying in the hospital are more likely to reach out to empathetic chaplains, and empathy gives chaplains the ability to grasp experiences difficult for the patient to articulate.[232] The distance between the caregiver and person receiving care shortens when there is understanding based on empathy.

The Challenges of Empathy

Effective empathizing also involves several challenges. One is the risk of violating or replacing another's perspective by imposing one's own views and feelings on

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[229] Stephen Trzeciak and Anthony Mazzarelli, *Compassionomics: The Revolutionary Scientific Evidence That Caring Makes a Difference* (Pensacola, FL: Studer Group, 2019), 102–23.

[230] Peters, "HIV/AIDS and Grief," 173.

[231] S. Moloney and S. Gair, "Empathy and Spiritual Care in Midwifery Practice: Contributing to Women's Enhanced Birth Experiences," *Women Birth* 28, no.4 (December 2015), 327.

[232] Jolanda van Dijke et al., "'We Need to Talk About Empathy': Dutch Humanist Chaplains' Perspectives on Empathy's Functions, Downsides, and Limitations in Chaplaincy Care," *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 76, no. 1 (March 2022), 23.

them. Rogers realized this possibility and stressed that the therapist should not be asking, "How do I see this? How do I understand this material?", which focuses on the therapist's personal needs or distorts perceptions of the situation. Rather, Rogers teaches that the therapist should continually ask, "How does the client see this?" and check for accurate understanding. Paul Bloom, a professor of psychology at Yale University and outspoken critic of empathy, contends that no one is immune from imposing biases and preferences upon another person, so empathy is always limiting and misguided.[233] Jamil Zaki, a professor of psychology at Stanford University, acknowledges that biases always exist, but he disagrees with Bloom. He notes that feelings and reason are in constant dialogue, and since emotions are built on thought, people can train themselves to understand others better and be aware of the possibility of imposing feelings and thoughts.[234]

A second challenge of empathizing is the complexity in attempting to understand someone else. Sometimes the person receiving empathy is not even aware of all that influences their perspective, so the person giving empathy may struggle to be authentic or comfortable when attempting to understand.[235] For this reason, the other person's external factors, as well as their internal emotions and thoughts, must be explored. Limitations in understanding can also occur if issues of race, gender, and socio-economic circumstances are not considered.[236] While research shows that people generally

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[233] Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2016), 95.

[234] Jamil Zaki, *The War for Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2020), 37.

[235] Wilkins, *Person-Centered and Experiential Therapies*, 11.

[236] Wilkins, *Person-Centered and Experiential Therapies*, 36.

overestimate their ability to accurately understand others, research also shows that empathy still helps those of different backgrounds and experiences to gain insights of the other's worldview.[237]

A third challenge is that empathy could lead to irrationality. Bloom cautions that empathy "can sway us toward the one over the many." He blames this mentality as the reason governments go to war over the suffering of a few individuals and causes terrible consequences for many more. Bloom states, "Empathy is particularly insensitive to consequences that apply statistically rather than to specific individuals."[238] He also suggests that since empathy is biased, people give certain individuals preferential treatment "driven by immediate considerations" and empathy "fails us as a tool for fair and impartial moral judgment."[239] Riess and Neporent respond by saying such reasoning is "unduly shortsighted." They state that when there is an "interplay of cognitive and emotional factors, there is a growing awareness that tribal solutions no longer work in today's interdependent world."[240] In their research with Dutch chaplains, University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht in the Netherlands professor Jolanda van Dijke and her team note that since empathy can be "inaccurate, self-referential, or distorted by biases and prejudices," it cannot guarantee morally good behavior, so empathic responses need to be guided by the person's existing principles and values.[241]

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[237] van Dijke et al., "'Talk About Empathy,'" 16.

[238] Bloom, *Against Empathy*, 34.

[239] Bloom, *Against Empathy*, 163.

[240] Riess and Neporent, *The Empathy Effect*, 69.

[241] van Dijke et al., "'Talk About Empathy,'" 17.

Some will suggest that empathy leads to burnout. Bloom suggests that since therapists have to continually deal with people in emotional pain, asking them to experience emotional pain each time will hinder their capacity to provide therapy.[242] Zaki notes that over-empathizing can lead to caregivers developing secondary trauma that includes sleeplessness, flashbacks, and exhaustion.[243] A European study looked at "empathetic distress," a condition occurring when a caregiver blurs the self-other distinction to an excessive degree, and how it leads to negative health outcomes and social withdraw.[244] But as Fernandez and Zahavi point out, empathy is not about "having the same mental state, feeling, sensation, embodied response as another, but rather about me experientially acquainted with an experience that is *not* my own."[245] Riess and Neporent agree and warn against such "empathetic distress" by stating that emotional empathy must be kept in balance with self-regulation to "manage excessive levels of emotional arousal that can lead to blurred boundaries and personal distress," which could result in "depression, anxiety, and burnout."[246]

Another challenge is that empathy does not come naturally, especially towards those who are different. Riess writes that people are evolutionarily wired to recognize and respond to differences and "socially or culturally based perceptions can trigger

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[242] Bloom, *Against Empathy*, 144.

[243] Zaki, *The War for Kindness*, 103.

[244] Tania Singer and Olga M. Klimecki, "Empathy and Compassion," *Current Biology* 24, no. 18 (September 2014), 878.

[245] Fernandez and Zahavi, "Basic Empathy," 4.

[246] Riess and Neporent, *The Empathy Effect*, 21.

subconscious fears that threaten emotional homeostasis."[247] Thus, empathy can be weak or absent when someone is of a different race, gender, ethnicity, culture, or socioeconomic background. Zaki refers to studies that show when people encounter others different from them who are experiencing pain, they naturally feel less empathy and anxiety, and they also imitate the person's facial expressions less than if the person was more similar to their background.[248] Riess and Neporent state that empathy training is key for people to have more of an "intergenerational, interracial, and international perspective" to expand empathy "beyond our in-groups and borders."[249]

Since empathy can be learned, it can also be unlearned. Riess and Neporent warn that "inordinate amounts of screen time" may be desensitizing people to the nonverbal cues of empathy and creating empathy deficits. People's brains can become rewired to dissociate from connecting with others, and they may be less sensitive to eye contact and tone of voice and less able to engage in reflective listening. This dissociation creates a "growing sense of detachment, desensitization, and emotional indifference that increases the likelihood of misunderstandings and feelings of isolation, loneliness, and powerlessness."[250]

With less empathy, there may be less physical, mental, and spiritual understanding between people, jeopardizing all the benefits mentioned earlier. Even Bloom acknowledges that "you can't make it through life without some capacity to

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[247] Riess, "The Science of Empathy," 75.

[248] Zaki, *The War for Kindness*, 56.

[249] Riess and Neporent, *The Empathy Effect*, 71.

[250] Riess and Neporent, *The Empathy Effect*, 118.

understand the mind of others." So, if social understanding requires feeling the pain of others, Bloom states, "Giving up on emotional empathy would be giving up too much."[251]

Summary of the Use of Empathy and Client-Centered Approaches to Care

The methodology of client-centered therapy has been adapted for several helping professions. The medical field uses empathetic understanding and unconditional positive regard to help patients feel less anxious and more compliant in following through with their treatments. Healthcare workers thus have a more positive experience working with patients. Those in the field of social work witness long-term changes in their clients, and the approach may provide care across different cultures and for various needs. Clergy also benefit from applying client-centered therapeutic approaches with their parishioners to help them process emotional pain and grow spiritually.

Empathy is a major component of client-centered care, but there are challenges. It may lead to imposing one's feelings upon another, difficulty understanding others because of the complex factors that affect their worldview, possibly making biased and irrational decisions solely on the feelings from an empathetic experience, burnout by not keeping one separate from the other during the process of empathetic understanding, and the need to learn and constantly grow in the skill. Despite those challenges, studies have shown that growing in empathy can make a positive impact on others' physical and emotional health.

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[251] Bloom, *Against Empathy*, 70.

Forming and Maintaining Teams

A key way to organize and mobilize church members to provide care to meet emotional and spiritual needs is to form and maintain a caregiving team. Knowing the practical ways to keep this team functioning well is necessary to effectively support the pastor and provide quality care. The third area of the literature review looks at forming and maintaining teams by focusing on purpose and accountability, team building, training, and coaching, and ongoing communication within the team and between teams.

Purpose and Accountability

Numerous studies and reports have documented the effectiveness and benefits of teams, but there are distinctions between individuals grouped for a task and those working as an effective team.[252] Christine Thornton, a consultant and coach for business teams, defines "team" as a "work group with shared goals or tasks, usually in a broader organizational context."[253] Business consultants Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith separate people who share a common assignment from teams by defining a team as "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable."[254] Another consultant for organizational health and team management,

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[252] Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2015), 15–19; Stanley McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2015), 98–107; Amy C. Edmondson, *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy* (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 59.

[253] Christine Thornton, *Group and Team Coaching: The Essential Guide* (East Sussex, England: Routledge, 2010), 12.

[254] Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 45.

Patrick Lencioni, states that truly cohesive teams trust each other, engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas, commit to decisions and plans of action, hold each other accountable, and focus on the achievement of results.[255]

Thus defined, a team implies that organizations should form teams with a clear purpose and accountability to accomplish their goals.

Establishing a Purpose

Teams typically meet an organizational need, whether a short-term project or an ongoing demand. Individuals are grouped by a shared, meaningful purpose for the team's existence. Katzenbach and Smith write that the best teams invest time exploring, shaping, and agreeing on a purpose, which motivates members to put extra effort into their collective performance.[256] Amy Edmondson, a professor of leadership and management at the Harvard Business School, states that the team's purpose is framed by how it will impact the organization.[257] General Stanley McChrystal, the four-star general who commanded coalition forces in Iraq, writes that a team must know its purpose so members can work toward the same goal, especially when the goal may change in complex and unpredictable environments.[258]

The leader of the team establishes its purpose. Edmondson says that it takes leadership to build shared understanding and to coordinate actions to achieve its goals by

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[255] Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 189–90.

[256] Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 49–50.

[257] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 99.

[258] McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 99.

instigating discussions and encouraging exploration and experimentation of new practices.[259] Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow, who work globally with clients from corporate, nonprofit, and public sectors on leadership development, stress that leaders must look at how aligned the entire organizational system is to the overall mission. Teams must be aware of how they function to support the mission and what obstacles may impede it.[260] When leaders exhibit clear communication about the team's purpose and its related goals, they create the expectation that members talk openly about how they will perform and be successful. Such communication fosters self-awareness in the team and leads to better strategic planning, rather than falling back on ineffective methods or being carried off track by emotions.[261]

Having a clear purpose not only helps the team function effectively but also benefits its members. Thornton states that when people feel more connected to a larger, worthwhile undertaking, they work harder and stay longer in the organization because they see themselves as part of something bigger than themselves.[262] William Kahn, a professor of organizational behavior at Boston University, agrees. He conducted studies on employment engagement and concludes that people feel better about giving more

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[259] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 75.

[260] Ronald Abadian Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 53–56.

[261] Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2016), 179–80.

[262] Thornton, *Group and Team Coaching*, 4.

physically, cognitively, and emotionally to their work when they feel that their efforts are useful and valued for achieving a clear purpose.[263]

A recent example by researchers working with the Department of Clinical Research Informatics at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center examined post-pandemic burnout. They initiated a project to help employees connect with a deeper sense of purpose in their work. Researchers led teams in the department to discuss and develop a common purpose for what they were to do. After these efforts, employees reported higher levels of productivity, collaboration, and positivity than before.[264]

Creating Accountability

When the team's purpose is communicated, members can then hold each other accountable for carrying out their responsibilities for achievement. Katzenbach and Smith write, "No group ever becomes a team until it can hold itself accountable as a team," and at its core, team accountability means each member is committed and trusts others to follow through on their roles.[265] Peter Scazzero, a pastor who has established numerous teams in a large congregation, thinks that accountability is crucial for volunteers and staff to accomplish a task and writes, "In emotionally healthy cultures and teams…role

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[263] William A. Kahn, "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work," *Academy of Management Journal* 33, no. 4 (December 1990), 703–4.

[264] Jon McKeeby et al., "Reviving Purpose: Exploring the Potential of Purpose-Driven Work to Mitigate Burnout and Deliver on Mission," *Organization Development Review* 56, no. 2 (n.d.), 6–9.

[265] Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 60.

expectations are openly talked about and agreed upon. We speak respectfully, honestly, and clearly to one another in evaluating how we are doing."[266]

There are challenges with holding one another accountable for performance. Katzenbach and Smith note that because most people have deep-seated values of individualism and a reluctance to trust one's fate to the performance of others, there may be resistance to mutual accountability on a team.[267] Team members may also hesitate to hold each other accountable because of the fear of jeopardizing valued personal relationships.[268] Also, if the team does not have a clear purpose or commitment and buy-in as a team, then members will be less motivated to call their peers on actions and behaviors that may be hindering the team's performance.[269]

Lencioni states that relationships deteriorate when team members begin to resent each other for not living up to expectations or allowing team standards to erode. Holding each other accountable demonstrates respect for other members, leading to healthier relations and stronger performances.[270] One study indicated that initial team accountability is strongly related to trust, commitment, efficacy, and the effort and willingness for individuals to collaborate.[271]

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[266] Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective), 216.

[267] Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 90.

[268] Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions*, 213.

[269] Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions*, 189.

[270] Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions*, 213.

[271] Virginia R. Stewart, Deirdre G. Snyder, and Chia-Yu Kou, "We Hold Ourselves Accountable: A Relational View of Team Accountability," *Journal of Business Ethics* 183, no. 3 (March 15, 2023), 703.

Mutual accountability within a team may be the most effective way to improve and maintain the team's success. One study in a United States public university found that team members were more able to appropriately judge the importance of peer inputs and outputs for the team's success than the managers of those teams because they were in positions to better monitor one another's efforts. The researchers conclude that organizations can benefit from mutual monitoring and communicating feedback to improve the team's performance.[272]

For accountability to be in place, each member takes responsibility to keep everyone on track, facilitate group input, raise questions about procedures, and keep open communication.[273] Katzenbach and Smith say teams that succeed "evaluate what and how each individual can contribute to the team's goal, and, more importantly, do so in terms of the performance objective rather than a person's status or personality."[274] Lencioni also notes that without accountability, members will put their individual needs above the team, and that will result in team divisions and inattention to collective results.[275]

Practically, teams can create an expectation of accountability in several ways. Melissa Raffoni, who works with CEOs in professional and personal development, suggests that all members should have their roles and responsibilities on paper and have regular check-ins for feedback. There should be regular team meetings to stay aligned with the team's purpose, with checklists to stay organized, write-ups to evaluate what is

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[272] Markus C. Arnold, R. Lynn Hannan, and Ivo D. Tafkov, "Mutual Monitoring and Team Member Communication in Teams," *Accounting Review* 95, no. 5 (September 2020), 17.

[273] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership,* 180.

[274] Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams,* 54.

[275] Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions,* 189.

working and not working well, and project plans to outline future goals.[276] Another leadership coach, Sabina Nawaz, notes that teams need to have someone assigned to write down notes, action items, dates, and ownership before the end of each team meeting to help everyone to follow up on the commitments they have made.[277]

Team Building, Training, and Coaching

People may be grouped to contribute to a common purpose with some system of accountability, but this does not necessarily mean a team is formed. Katzenbach and Smith assert that a team "strives for a magnified impact that is incremental to what its members could achieve in their individual roles."[278] To create a team, there needs to be team building, training, and ongoing coaching.

Team Building

Researchers studying teams suggest four components to team building: goal setting, interpersonal-relationship management, role clarification, and problem-solving.[279]

Goal setting clarifies what needs to be done and how the team will carry it out. J. Richard Hackman and Ruth Wageman, professors of social and organizational

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[276] Melissa Raffoni, "Does Your Team Have an Accountability Problem?," *Harvard Business Review Digital Articles*, February 10, 2020, 6.

[277] Sabina Nawaz, "You're Delegating. It's Not Working. Here's Why," *Harvard Business Review Digital Articles*, November 12, 2020, 3.

[278] Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 88–89.

[279] Christina Lacerenza et al., "Team Development Interventions: Evidence-Based Approaches for Improving Teamwork," *American Psychologist* 73, no. 4 (2018), 523; Rebecca J. Jones, Uwe Napiersky, and Joanne Lyubovnikova, "Conceptualizing the Distinctiveness of Team Coaching," *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 34, no. 2 (2019), 63.

psychology at Harvard University, state that when team members first come together, they have to get oriented to one another by establishing boundaries that differentiate members from nonmembers, formulate norms of how to work together, and how they will approach the tasks on hand.[280] Some researchers of organizational communication suggest creating "scripts," which are written documents that establish the team's expectations, provide a guide for group procedures, and lay out how members will behave and interact with each other. This helps individuals to coalesce around shared norms, facilitates new members joining the team, and gives parameters for how goals are to be met.[281] From here, teams can then set measurable goals for how to accomplish tasks and improve individual and group performance, as they remain aligned with their purpose and the overall mission of the organization in which they serve.[282] Lencioni suggests six questions that help a team to set goals: 1) Why do we exist? 2) How do we behave? 3) What do we do? 4) How will we succeed? 5) What is most important, right now? 6) Who must do what?[283]

Interpersonal-relationship management is the second important element of team building. Edmondson writes that fast-moving environments require team members to know "how to team," meaning they have the skills and flexibility to act in moments of needed collaboration. These skills include learning to ask questions clearly and

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[280] J. Richard Hackman and Ruth Wageman, "A Theory of Team Coaching," *Academy of Management Review* 30, no. 2 (April 2005), 275.

[281] Michael Y. Lee, Melissa Mazmanian, and Leslie Perlow, "Fostering Positive Relational Dynamics: The Power of Spaces and Interaction Scripts," *Academy of Management Journal* 63, no. 1 (February 2020), 99.

[282] Lacerenza et al., "Team Development Interventions," 523.

[283] Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 77.

frequently, sharing information freely, and fostering trust.[284] McChrystal agrees that trust is essential for teams to meet changing demands because teammates getting to know each other intimately results in teams functioning with high-level adaptability and efficacy. He writes, "Great teams are less like 'awesome machines,' than awesome organisms."[285]

One piece to building interpersonal relationships is making the team a safe place for people to inquire, offer ideas, and give different opinions. Several researchers stress the importance of team members working through conflicts and relating to each other in healthy, constructive ways:[286] being genuinely open with each other about their mistakes and weaknesses to build trust,[287] making it a rule that when one person shares an idea the next person offers support before criticizing it,[288] and setting aside time to talk and build relationships.[289] Lencioni writes that teams that do not develop trust and healthy relationships "waste inordinate amounts of time and energy managing their behaviors and interactions…[members] dread team meetings, and are reluctant to take risks in asking for or offering assistance to others."[290]

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[284] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 14.

[285] McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 120.

[286] Thomas A. O'Neill et al., "Constructive Controversy and Reflexivity Training Promotes Effective Conflict Profiles and Team Functioning in Student Learning Teams," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 16, no. 2 (June 2017), 268; Edmondson, *Teaming*, 52; Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions*, 188; Thornton, *Group and Team Coaching*, 36.

[287] Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions*, 188.

[288] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 181.

[289] Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 65.

[290] Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions*, 196.

The third component of team building is clarifying roles. One study showed that teams with well-defined member roles were more adaptive to changing circumstances, less likely to have conflict, and had individuals more inclined to meet expectations.[291] Often, the roles are given by the team leader, based on individuals' strengths and contributions, and establish how members in different roles collaborate. These role definitions establish expectations, responsibilities, and channels of communication.[292] Other times, these roles are negotiated on the team as members develop relationships and assess each other's strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes roles defined this way can be more conducive to team performance.[293] Researchers have determined that the main ingredient for role effectiveness is collegiality. The team is less successful if everyone remains in their roles and is only concerned with doing what they are assigned to do, rather than everyone cooperating and communicating with others.[294]

The last piece for team building is empowering them to solve problems. For teams to do this well, they need a mindset for learning. Edmondson writes that people who adopt a learning frame "persist longer in unfamiliar, challenging tasks, but they ultimately learn more as a result."[295] Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow encourage a diversity

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[291] Aparna Pandey and Shailaja Karve, "Understanding the Relationship of Team Roles and Communication in Team Tasks," *International Journal of Business Insights & Transformation* 11, no. 1 (October 2017), 24.

[292] Hendrik J. van de Brake and Stefan Berger, "Can I Leave My Hat on? A Cross-level Study of Multiple Team Membership Role Separation," *Personnel Psychology* 76, no. 1 (March 2023), 224.

[293] Pandey and Karve, "Team Roles and Communication," 24.

[294] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 96; Pandey and Karve, "Team Roles and Communication," 24.

[295] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 86.

of voices so that members will start "considering and understanding each other's viewpoints and start discussing potential solutions that make sense across the table."[296]

The team leader plays a key role in creating a learning environment. Tod Bolsinger, a professor of leadership formation at Fuller Seminary, writes that the most transformative act leaders can do to foster a learning team is by communicating that they do not have the answers and they must *learn* what to do.[297] Nawaz agrees and cautions the leader from jumping in too early with insights because it takes away opportunities for the rest of the team to develop their expertise. The leader should not do most of the critical thinking, or the team and the organization may be more vulnerable to blind spots.[298] McChrystal relates how he would ask team members questions about the reasoning behind their thinking. This process allows others to see how problems are being considered and handled and "gave them the skills and confidence to *solve their own* similar problems without the need for further guidance or clarification."[299]

Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow suggest that teams most capable of learning for changing demands are shaped by leaders who observe events and patterns, interpret these observations by using several hypotheses, and design interventions based on the observations and interpretations.[300] Leaders shape the team's mindset for thinking experimentally, without fear of calculated risks, and without assuming one single solution

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[296] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 123.

[297] Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 22.

[298] Nawaz, "You're Delegating," 3.

[299] McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 168–69.

[300] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 32.

without considering multiple perspectives.[301] Edmondson agrees and writes that collective learning includes gathering, sharing, and analyzing information, and individuals on a team can learn by asking questions, seeking help, experimenting with unproven actions, talking about mistakes, and seeking feedback."[302]

In addition, several researchers emphasize that problem-solving skills are enhanced when the team has time for debriefing or reflection. Members discuss performances, analyze past events, uncover issues, confirm successes, and prepare for future goals. Times of reflection might be done daily, at regular intervals, at a midway point during a project, or after a project has been completed.[303]

Training

Closely related to team building is training. Team training is a structured learning experience with determined objectives and curriculum aimed at giving the team the necessary skills to carry out its purpose.[304] Training encompasses three main learning initiatives: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Knowledge provides the foundational understanding and context of the team's purpose. Skills are the specific means by which the team will carry out its purpose, and attitudes are how individuals will behave and relate as a team.[305]

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[301] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 36–37.

[302] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 27.

[303] Lacerenza et al., "Team Development Interventions," 525; Edmondson, *Teaming*, 55; O'Neill et al., "Constructive Controversy," 269.

[304] Lacerenza et al., "Team Development Interventions," 519.

[305] Rylee M. Linhardt, Tiffany M. Bisbey, and Salas Eduardo, "The Science and Practice of Team Training: Historical Progress and a Research Agenda," *Consulting Psychology Journal* 76, no. 1 (2024), 71.

Training enhances the team's performance with the tools to work together for higher performance.[306] Individuals discuss and learn from one another, providing a better awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and estimation of the strengths and weaknesses of the team.[307] Through the training curriculum, teams coordinate tasks and assign appropriate members to specific duties, establish goals, and use active listening techniques to foster open communication.[308]

Team training is geared to what the team is capable of doing and evaluated at that level. It is recommended that members be evaluated through measurable objectives during training and how they function as a team—both of which are essential for team performance.[309] When a team is trained on how to collaborate and cooperate, it creates a climate that encourages new ideas and innovation.[310] As previously mentioned, a major part of training establishes psychological safety so members are more willing to speak up and contribute more freely.[311] Leaders can empower learning by helping members build trust, consider multiple perspectives, interpret dynamic interactions, and safely reflect on individual and team growth.[312]

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[306] Lacerenza et al., "Team Development Interventions," 519.

[307] Lacerenza et al., "Team Development Interventions," 524.

[308] Desmond J. Leach et al., "Team Autonomy, Performance, and Member Job Strain: Uncovering the Teamwork KSA Link," *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 54, no. 1 (January 2005), 4.

[309] Lacerenza et al., "Team Development Interventions," 523.

[310] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 174; Edmondson, *Teaming*, 104.

[311] Lacerenza et al., "Team Development Interventions," 523.

[312] Jones, Napiersky, and Lyubovnikova, "Team Coaching," 73.

Ongoing Coaching

Hackman and Wageman note that leaders focus less on team coaching than on other aspects of team leadership. They suggest leaders are underestimating the benefits of coaching but, more likely, they are not sure how to coach effectively.[313] Yet maintaining a team requires consistent interventions designed to preserve and enhance the team's effectiveness.[314] Coaching a team keeps members honest and open in assessing how they are functioning, creates new habits that correct poor ones, and builds support for taking risks in their learning and performance.[315]

According to Thornton, there are several factors that a coach should nurture. The team needs to maintain a sense of connectedness, be aware of its patterns in relating to others, realistically assess the group's output, foster courage to speak up and contribute to discussions, encourage making positive changes, and learn how to effectively help others so the entire group benefits.[316] The coach helps the group internalize how to discuss options, dissent and disagree, and work for a mutually agreed upon decision.[317]

Several scholars emphasize that coaching should be primarily on maintaining safety in the team. Dutch psychoanalyst and consultant Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries states, "The most important factor in making leadership coaching successful is the quality

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[313] Hackman and Wageman, "Theory of Team Coaching," 269–70.

[314] Lacerenza et al., "Team Development Interventions," 517.

[315] Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, *Primal Leadership*, 189.

[316] Thornton, *Group and Team Coaching*, 66–79.

[317] Thornton, *Group and Team Coaching*, 105.

of the coach-client working alliance."[318] This safety is fostered between members, so that a high level of trust and mutual respect is present, which results in more focused and less conflicting communication.[319] Lencioni agrees that encouraging vulnerability between group members will keep trust among individuals, and Thornton states that effective group coaching must be about keeping the group safe enough to enable learning and the exchange of ideas.[320]

While Hackman and Wageman acknowledge that safety is vital to a team's performance, they suggest that coaches address a team's task performance, rather than their interpersonal relationships. The coach should look at how individuals are motivated, provide consultation as conditions change, and sharpen members' skills and knowledge. They contend that if performance skills are sharpened, then interpersonal skills improve, citing that groups relate better after they had received high-performance feedback.[321]

Communication and Collaboration

Communication plays a significant part in establishing and maintaining teams. As one scholar writes, "Communication and organization are strongly complementary….the process of communicating is the act of organizing, and efforts to organize are communication bound."[322] Katzenbach and Smith stress that teams should "invest just as

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[318] Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries, "Leadership Group Coaching in Action: The Zen of Creating High Performance Teams," *Academy of Management Executive* 19, no. 1 (February 2005): 65.

[319] Kets de Vries, "Leadership Group Coaching," 68.

[320] Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions*, 201; Thornton, *Group and Team Coaching*, 32.

[321] Hackman and Wageman, "Theory of Team Coaching," 273–74.

[322] Idriz Kovaçi et al., "Communication Process in Enterprises in Kosovo: Types and Direction of Flow," *Quality - Access to Success* 22, no. 183 (August 2021), 14.

much time and effort crafting their working approach as shaping their purpose."[323] Team communication includes how members relate to one another and how the entire team relates to other teams.

Communication Between Team Members

The late professor Edgar Schein and consultant Peter Schein note that the emphasis individuals have on performance and competition can create barriers to ask questions or listen to other people's ideas for fear of being seen as weak.[324] Individuals bring their preconceived ideas, emotions, and experiences to the team, and these may hinder true understanding.[325]

A significant challenge to healthy communication is handling conflict. Lencioni advocates for "productive conflict," where the team engages in heated debates that lead to a readiness to take on the next issue. When members avoid conflict, they become less committed to finding a solution and would rather feign agreement to maintain peace.[326] What is ironic, he writes, is that there is more tension when teams avoid disagreements, leading to "back-channel personal attacks, which are far nastier and more harmful than any heated argument over issues."[327]

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[323] Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 56.

[324] Edgar H. Schein and Peter A. Schein, *Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2021), 81.

[325] Kovaçi et al., "Communication Process," 16.

[326] Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions*, 189.

[327] Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions*, 203.

While Lencioni may favor more heated exchanges, others assert that conflict should be handled more calmly. Edmondson states that healthy communication involves candidness as people engage each other directly and openly, while also listening, seeking feedback, asking for help, and offering suggestions.[328] She writes that team members must understand that "winning" the argument typically does not produce the best solutions, but the best solutions happen when there is collaboration and a synthesis of ideas.[329] One study identified patterns of healthy communication across different groups including university students, full-time employees, and top management teams. Researchers saw that respectful engagement (i.e., communicating by affirmation), active listening, and positive regard for others, has a direct correlation to how creative teams are in solving problems and performing tasks.[330]

Another study looked at different types of conflict and analyzed how each one can impact a team: relational conflict involves anxiety, fear, threat, and personality clashes; process conflict involves incompatible perspectives about timelines, roles, and responsibilities; and task conflict involves disagreements of ideas, opinions, and viewpoints on the task. The researchers said that task conflict is the only one where a team can help the team progress, and teams are harmed when elements of the other two types of conflict are present.[331]

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[328] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 53.

[329] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 74.

[330] Abraham Carmeli, Jane E Dutton, and Ashley E Hardin, "Respect as an Engine for New Ideas: Linking Respectful Engagement, Relational Information Processing and Creativity among Employees and Teams," *Human Relations* 68, no. 6 (June 2015), 1021–39.

[331] O'Neill et al., "Constructive Controversy," 258.

This research relates to the theme of psychological safety. Edmondson said it occurs when dissenting views are expected and welcomed, and there is a tolerance of dissent, which leads to productive discussions.[332] Kahn stresses that this type of environment promotes more individual engagement and strengthens the team's overall performance.[333]

Psychological safety is built on trust. McChrystal writes that teams with solid training, established processes, and a clear purpose may perform adequately, but teams with members who trust each other are "more potent" because trust allows them to "improvise a coordinate response to dynamic, real-time developments."[334] Kets de Vries agrees and states that when teammates trust each other, they are better able to address complicated issues with openness, honesty, consistency, competency, and fairness.[335]

One case study looked at how a team made up of members from the United States and India worked together. When the team first formed, the researchers found a lack of openness in communication. Those from the United States simply gave orders to the Indian team members who executed the tasks, but the divide between the two groups resulted in minimal interactions and inefficient output. Researchers then intervened and facilitated time for the two groups to share personal matters and work issues. Eventually, the team was sharing more openly, surfacing and addressing issues in how they worked together. By the end of the intervention, researchers observed increased respect and

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[332] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 119.

[333] Kahn, "Engagement and Disengagement at Work," 708–14.

[334] McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 98.

[335] Kets de Vries, "Leadership Group Coaching," 70.

support across the two groups, and they were more effective in working together. The study concluded that teams needed to give space for members to share personally and build relationships to foster respect, openness, and connectedness.[336]

Edmondson drew a similar conclusion when she studied quality improvement teams at twenty-three hospitals. She notes that while being trained in the most recent medical knowledge was important, the most successful teams communicated, coordinated, and asked questions. Open, respectful communication made the team experience more "interesting, enriching, and meaningful" for all members, and it enabled them to better see and act on ways to improve.[337]

Developing Communication Between Teams

Most organizations have several teams working at the same time, and the communication between them helps the entire system to carry out its goals. McChrystal writes about his time overseeing the military campaign in Iraq and how collaborative teams helped them become a "single, cohesive unit far more agile than its size would suggest."[338] Researchers found that team members who worked with other teams were more likely to persist in their efforts when they encountered challenges and were also more likely to view these challenges as "opportunities to learn and excel rather than as threats or insurmountable challenges."[339] Alex Pentland, a professor at Massachusetts

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[336] Lee, Mazmanian, and Perlow, "Fostering Positive Relational Dynamics," 103–20.

[337] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 59–60.

[338] McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 245.

[339] Jennifer A. Marrone et al., "Can Supportive Coaching Behaviors Facilitate Boundary Spanning and Raise Job Satisfaction? An Indirect-Effects Model," *Journal of Management* 48, no. 5 (May 2022), 1137.

Institute of Technology, observed that teams that communicated well internally and with other teams had the highest levels of creative output.[340] Individuals who are encouraged to collaborate with other teams also report higher job satisfaction because they are better able to share resources and information that will benefit all parties in achieving their goals.[341] One study looked at how different teams operated in different organizations, and one clear pattern they observed was that all successful teams continually communicated to other teams.[342] Another study showed that the overall system is more successful when teams balance intra-team and inter-team communication and collaboration.[343]

For this cross-team collaboration to work, McChrystal says that while every team member cannot know everyone on the other teams, each team must have one point of contact from the other teams so that they "envisioned a friendly face rather than a competitive rival."[344] These connections were created for shared information and trust. McChrystal writes that these relationships "have roots that go deeper than simply bartering" by having an understanding between partners where one team might be able to urge the other to trust them and work out an organizational challenge.[345]

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[340] Alex Pentland, *Social Physics: How Good Ideas Spread--The Lessons from a New Science* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2014), 101-03.

[341] Marrone et al., "Supportive Coaching Behaviors," 1139–51.

[342] Deborah G. Ancona and David F. Caldwell, "Bridging the Boundary: External Activity and Performance in Organizational Teams," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (December 1992), 649.

[343] Jonathan C. Ziegert et al., "Addressing Performance Tensions in Multiteam Systems: Balancing Informal Mechanisms of Coordination Within and Between Teams," *Academy of Management Journal* 65, no. 1 (February 2022), 158.

[344] McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 129.

[345] McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 175.

According to Edmondson, leaders can take three actions to encourage communication across teams. First, they should express a shared goal or mission that motivates teams to work together. Second, leaders should display curiosity and support sharing information between teams. Third, they should set guidelines for how to collaborate.[346] A study on cross-team communication and collaboration showed results that supported Edmondson but emphasized that leaders must provide adequate guidance because members who did not have a framework reported work overload because of conflicting expectations and demands from external parties.[347]

As important as cross-team communication and collaboration are, one study warns that it needs to be in balance with healthy communication within the team. Researchers observed that if there is more communication with other teams compared to within the team, it may increase interpersonal conflict and lower production. But when the amount of intra-team communication corresponds with inter-team interactions, team members are most effective in adjusting their actions in response to external information.[348]

Overall, cross-team communication can benefit not only individual teams but the entire system. When teams coordinate and collaborate, they are more united to address problems and make necessary changes for the organization.[349]

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[346] Edmondson, *Teaming,* 212.

[347] Marrone et al., "Supportive Coaching Behaviors," 1132–33.

[348] Ziegert et al., "Addressing Performance Tensions," 175.

[349] Marrone et al., "Supportive Coaching Behaviors," 1132.

Summary of Forming and Maintaining Teams

Effective teams have a clear purpose, which gives team members defined roles and responsibilities. When members know what is expected of them, they are better able to hold each other and the team accountable for performance.

Leaders are tasked with team building through goal setting, interpersonal-relationship management, role clarification, and problem-solving to create a team that functions together. They must also provide training that equips individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to meet their goals. A crucial element to keep the team functioning well is to give ongoing coaching that will address issues and reinforce teamwork and skills.

Once formed, teams operate most effectively when they communicate in healthy and constructive ways that rely on psychological safety and trust. Teams must also be able to work with other teams in the system to maximize their performance, increase members' job satisfaction, and meet the organization's overall goals.

Summary of Literature Review

In light of the literature examined, a few themes are foundational to researching how solo pastors describe the benefits to their ministry sustainability of having lay caregiving teams in their congregation.

First, Ephesians 4:11–13 was examined to see if it provides a direct mandate for pastors to involve congregation members in the work of the ministry. Although there are different viewpoints on the extent of lay participation in ministry, the overall context indicates that pastors should support and encourage members of the church to use their

gifts to build the body of Christ. Creating caregiving teams is justified if pastors are not expected to be the only participants in the ministry.

Second, understanding the importance of empathy and client-centered therapy provides a background on the care offered by these caregiving teams. Non-professional lay people can be trained to use client-centered approaches to care, which include being genuine, offering unconditional positive regard, and empathy. These actions are effective in providing care and support in various settings. While being empathetic is challenging, people can grow in the skill to be better able to help others process difficult emotions.

Third, knowing the practical ways to keep caregiving teams functioning well is necessary for their effectiveness. When forming these teams, there must be a clear purpose of what they intend to do and a mechanism set up to hold members accountable for the care they provide. There must be time for team building, training, and ongoing coaching so they can function to give high-quality care. Throughout the team's existence, they need to emphasize safe and respectful communication between team members and with other congregational teams so they can coordinate to meet the needs of the church.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore how solo pastors describe the ministry sustainability benefits of having lay caregiving teams in their congregation. The study assumed that solo pastors who institute and collaborate with a structured, well-equipped team of lay caregivers will be more resilient in their ministry by experiencing more personal wellbeing and healthier congregations. These lay caregiving teams help shoulder the burdens of providing pastoral care, which relieves pastors from attempting to meet all these needs in the church. As more members are trained in these teams, their skills contribute to the caring culture of the church, which results in pastors being more satisfied in their positions.

To address this purpose, the following research questions served as areas of focus for the qualitative research:

1. What challenges to ministry sustainability do pastors face before establishing a caregiving team?
2. What benefits to ministry sustainability do pastors experience after establishing a caregiving team?
3. What theological beliefs help motivate pastors to establish a caregiving team?
4. How do pastors describe the benefits that a caregiving team has on the congregation?
    a. How does a caregiving team benefit those on the team?
    b. How does a caregiving team benefit those receiving care?

c. How does a caregiving team impact the congregation and community at large?

Design of the Study

The research design of this study used a basic qualitative approach. Professor emerita of adult education Sharan B. Merriam, in *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, identifies four characteristics of qualitative research: a focus on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; an inductive process; and a richly descriptive product.[350] Merriam summarizes that in essence, general, basic qualitative study is "interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. The primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings."[351] In studying how lay caregiving teams benefit solo pastors for ministry sustainability, qualitative research was most appropriate because it "offers practitioners access to practical knowledge in one's field of practice that leads to the improvement of one's craft."[352] The research relied on the researcher gathering and analyzing the data, which was based on the interpretation of the participants' experiences.[353]

This study applied a qualitative research design and conducted semi-structured interviews as the primary source of gathering data. This qualitative method provided for

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[350] Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research : A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2016), 15.

[351] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 25.

[352] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 1.

[353] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 24.

the discovery of the most comprehensive and descriptive data from participant perspectives in the narrow phenomena of solo pastors collaborating with a team of lay caregivers to meet emotional and spiritual needs in the congregation and community. This method was preferred because it involved the study of contextual, non-repeatable events interpreted by those participants who evaluated how those events shaped their perspective of their vocation. This format gives the researcher the flexibility to determine the order and wording of questions "to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic."[354] The researcher can gather rich descriptions of experiences and opinions, evaluations, and reflections of the participants' unique situations.

Participant Sample Selection

This research required participants who were able to communicate in-depth about the benefits they received from expanding pastoral care through a structured team of well-equipped lay caregivers. The study focused on investigating how these benefits affected pastors' feelings about ministry sustainability when they were primarily responsible for pastoral care in the church and community. Therefore, the purposeful study sample consisted of a selection of solo pastors who ministered at a church before and after establishing and collaborating with a specific type of lay caregiving team.

Participants were purposefully chosen for a maximum variation type of sample in terms of different geographical and theological contexts to capture the widest range of

[354] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 111.

characteristics of interest.[355] Since the goal of the research was not to generalize the results of the study, but rather, to discover the implications for pastors who have successfully started and worked with lay caregiving teams, the sampling strategy was nonprobabilistic.[356]

To gain data towards best practices, participants self-reported to the researcher the following: they were the solo pastor of a congregation for at least a year before establishing a lay caregiving team; they were formally trained in how to lead the team; they actively worked with the team's leadership; they described their experience of having the team as positive; and they continued to serve as solo pastor in the church for at least a year after the team began providing care.

There was minimum variation in the structure and training of the lay caregiving teams so that the research could analyze how this particular type of team benefited pastors. The lay caregivers were trained through and functioned under the Stephen Ministry System, and pastors completed the Stephen Leader Training Course.

The final study was conducted through personal interviews with ten clergy who each served as the solo pastor of their local congregation. They were invited to participate via a personal phone call, followed by an introductory letter. All expressed interest and gave written informed consent to participate. In addition, each participant signed a "Research Participant Consent Form" to respect and protect the human rights of the research participants.

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[355] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 98.

[356] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 96.

The Human Rights Risk Level Assessment was "minimal" to "no risk," according to the Seminary IRB Guidelines. The following is a sample of this consent form.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM
FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

I agree to participate in the research which is being conducted by *Justin Schlueter* to investigate *the benefits of lay caregiving teams for ministry sustainability* for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Covenant Theological Seminary. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, and/or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1) The purpose of the research is to investigate *how solo pastors describe the benefits for their ministry sustainability by having lay caregiving teams in their congregations.*
2) Potential benefits of the research: *although there are no guaranteed direct benefits for participants, the researcher hopes participants will be encouraged by the experience and potentially gain helpful insights for their ministry through findings and research synthesis.*
3) The research process will include *ten solo pastors from various denominational backgrounds who will be interviewed via in-person or over Zoom. Interviews are recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for the purpose of the research.*
4) Participants in this research will *participate in person or via Zoom for an interview of approximately 90 minutes.*
5) Potential discomforts or stresses: *Participants may experience discomfort describing the challenges of providing congregational care as a solo pastor.*
6) Potential risks: *None*
7) Any information that I provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will my name be reported along with my responses. The data gathered for this research is confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of interviews will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. By my signature, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research project.
8) Limits of Privacy: I understand that, by law, the researcher cannot keep information confidential if it involves abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, or plans for a person to harm themselves or to hurt someone else.
9) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the study.

_____

Printed Name and Signature of Researcher Date

_____

Printed Name and Signature of Participant Date

Please sign both copies. Keep one. Return the other to the researcher. Thank you.

Research at Covenant Theological Seminary which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Director, Doctor of Ministry; Covenant Theological Seminary; 12330 Conway Road; St. Louis, MO 63141; Phone (314) 434-4044.

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for primary data gathering. The open-ended nature of interview questions facilitated the ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues to explore them more thoroughly.[357] Ultimately, these methods enabled this study to look for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variation of participants.[358]

The researcher performed a pilot test of the interview protocol to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature but evolved around the explanations and descriptions that emerged from doing constant comparison work during the interviewing process. Coding and categorizing the data while continuing the process of interviewing also allowed for the emergence of new sources of data.[359]

The researcher interviewed ten pastors for at least one hour each. Prior to the interview, a brief description of the research topic along with a sampling of the interview protocol questions were sent to each participant. To accommodate participant schedules, the researcher scheduled the interviews several weeks in advance. The researcher video

[357] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 124–125.

[358] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 202.

[359] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 199–200.

recorded the interviews conducted over Zoom. By conducting one to two interviews a week, the researcher completed the data gathering in the course of eleven weeks. Directly after each interview, the researcher had them transcribed and made reflective observations on the interview time.

The interview protocol contained the following questions.

1. Before you started this caregiving team, tell me some of the challenges you faced as a pastor, ones that made staying in the pastorate seem unsustainable at times.
2. What are some ways having a caregiving team has benefitted you in being a pastor?
3. What were some of the theological beliefs that motivated your decision to form the lay caregiving teams?
4. How would you describe your sense of pastoral ministry sustainability before and after establishing a caregiving team?
5. In what ways have you seen the caregiving team benefit the people on it?
6. Tell me about a few times you have seen others benefit from the care provided by the caregiving team?
7. What other ways have the congregation and community seem to benefit from the caregiving team?

Data Analysis

As soon as possible and always within a day of each meeting, the researcher personally transcribed each interview by using computer software to play back the digital recording on a computer that typed out each transcript. The software allowed for color

coding and word searching, and for the complete transcript to be accurately typed out in its entirety. This study utilized the constant comparison method of routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process. This method provided for the ongoing revision, clarification, and evaluation of the resultant data categories.[360] According to Merriam, the categories determined during data analysis should be responsive to the purpose of the research, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitizing, and conceptually congruent.[361]

When the interviews and observation notes were fully transcribed into computer files, they were coded and analyzed using a word processor and coded by hand on printed transcripts. The analysis focused on discovering and identifying (1) common themes and patterns across the variation of participants, and (2) congruence or discrepancy between the different participants.

Researcher Position

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, but every researcher has certain biases or subjectivities that may have an impact on the study.[362] Merriam maintains that to help the reader understand how the researcher may have come to interpret the data, it's essential for the researcher to "explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken."[363] By being transparent about their position, researchers provide their

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[360] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 208–209.

[361] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 212–213.

[362] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 16.

[363] Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 249.

readers information to evaluate the potential impact of these subjectivities on the conduct and conclusion of their studies. This section reveals areas of researcher preference, relevant experiences, and potential researcher bias that may affect the findings.

The researcher is a committed Christian who has regularly attended church for almost forty years, mainly in congregations with one pastor. This background may have resulted in an acute awareness of the unique challenges solo pastors encounter.

The researcher has been employed by Stephen Ministries Saint Louis, which is a Christian educational organization that develops and trains leaders to implement the Stephen Ministry System in their congregations. He has been the Director of Training for four years and has been involved in the development of training resources. In addition, he has been a consultant for lay leaders and pastors who have questions about carrying out the ministry in their local contexts. This position is an opportunity for favorable bias towards Stephen Ministry in churches, with a particularly strong capacity to understand how the system is intended to support pastors. The position also provides an incentive to see how to implement changes or develop other resources for helping pastors remain resilient in the ministry.

Overall, the researcher believes that these experiences have prepared him to view the participants with empathy and gain deep understanding of their experiences from an insider perspective. The researcher desires to see the resources he is involved in creating benefit pastors facing the challenges of providing congregational care.

Study Limitations

Due to limited resources and time, this study was restricted to solo pastors who helped start a lay caregiving team through Stephen Ministry and had been trained as

leaders for the Stephen Ministry System. Therefore, the study does not include participants who work on a team of pastors or who were not involved with Stephen Ministry. It did not include solo pastors who created a lay caregiving team apart from Stephen Ministry. The study also was limited to participants from seven different denominations. Further research is needed to broaden the participant selection to include pastors of other denominations and ministry contexts that were not represented in this study. Research could also be done to look into how pastors who, on their own, developed a lay caregiving team, have benefited. Therefore, the results of this study are focused on the benefits that solo pastors experience from implementing an already-developed ministry system.

While the study was limited to solo pastors in particular denominations, some of the study's findings may be generalized to other similar ministry contexts. These may include bi-vocational pastors, solo pastors who oversee multiple churches near each other, or ministry leaders who are not ordained and are temporarily leading their congregations. Also, while participants in this study faced the unique challenge of being a solo pastor, the results were not exclusive to these types of pastors, and similar benefits may be experienced by pastors on a multi-staff or team of pastors. Readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of these conclusions about the benefits of working with a lay caregiving team should test those aspects in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context. The results of this study may also have implications for pastors in other geographies, denominations, and in churches of larger or smaller sizes than the sample.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study is to explore how solo pastors describe the ministry sustainability benefits of having lay caregiving teams in their congregation. To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the qualitative research.

1. What challenges to ministry sustainability do pastors face before establishing a caregiving team?
2. What benefits to ministry sustainability do pastors experience after establishing a caregiving team?
3. What theological beliefs help motivate pastors to establish a caregiving team?
4. How do pastors describe the benefits that a caregiving team has on the congregation?
    a. How does a caregiving team benefit those on the team?
    b. How does a caregiving team benefit those receiving care?
    c. How does a caregiving team impact the congregation and community at large?

This chapter provides the findings of the ten pastoral interviews and reports on common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions. The interview findings have been sorted and organized according to the four primary research questions.

Introductions to Participants and Context

Ten solo pastors were selected to participate in this study. All interviewees were serving as solo pastors before establishing Stephen Ministry at their church. All completed training for implementation and leading the ministry, and they all continued to serve as solo pastors after Stephen Ministry started operating. Names and identifiable participant information have been changed to protect their identities.

Richard is a Roman Catholic priest in a small city of nearly 20,000 in a Midwestern state. He had previously held another career and entered the seminary in his 30s. He has served at two different churches in his first five years of ministry and has been at his current parish for fourteen years. During his time there, two other churches have merged under his pastoral leadership, and now over 500 families are on the roll at these three parishes. The church started Stephen Ministry five years ago.

Leo is a Lutheran pastor in a city of nearly 50,000 in a Mid-Atlantic state. He had previously held another career and entered the seminary in his 40s. He has been in his current church for over six years. The church has grown 68 percent in membership since he started and now is nearly at 200. About half of the current members are 65 or older. The church started Stephen Ministry five years ago.

Lawrence is a Lutheran pastor in a rural area of a Southern state. He was previously a teacher and entered seminary in his 40s. He has been in his current church for twenty years, and they have about seventy to eighty-five regular attendees. The church started Stephen Ministry three years ago.

Benjamin is a Baptist pastor in a town of under 10,000 in a New England state. He felt a call to the ministry early in life and went to seminary right after college. He has

been serving at his church for eight years, and they have around thirty to fifty regular attendees, both younger and older members. The church began Stephen Ministry four years ago.

Bobby is a Baptist pastor in a town under 5,000 in a Mid-Atlantic state. He was involved in the ministry early in life. He served at his current church for several years before leaving to another church and then coming back nineteen years ago. The church has around 100 regular attendees, made up of younger and older members. The church started Stephen Ministry eight years ago.

Nick planted a non-denominational church in a large city in the Mid-Atlantic state where he pastors. He entered the ministry early in life and served a church for several years before starting his current church about twenty years ago. There are about 300 members of diverse ages and ethnicities. The church began Stephen Ministry over four years ago.

Nathan is a non-denominational pastor who planted the church after a split with his former congregation in a small city of a Midwestern state. He went into ministry immediately following college and has been both a solo pastor and a pastor on a large staff. His current church has grown to about 150 members since it was formed eight years ago and is a mixture of ages and demographics. The church started Stephen Ministry three years ago.

Emma is an Episcopal priest in a large metropolitan area in a West Coast state. She had been involved in teaching since an early age and eventually went to seminary. She served at a previous congregation before coming to her current church over six years

ago. The church has about forty to fifty regular attendees of various political and theological perspectives. The church started Stephen Ministry five years ago.

Connie is a pastor of a congregational church outside a large metropolitan area in a New England state. She felt called to the ministry early in life, was ordained in her 20s, and has served in various pastoral roles for twenty-three years. She has been the pastor of her current church for over eight years. She describes the church as theologically progressive, and the 80 to 100 regular attendees represent a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds. The church began Stephen Ministry over six years ago.

Preston is a Presbyterian pastor whose current church, in a large metropolitan area in a Southern state, started from a split about ten years ago. He had been a solo pastor before, then served as a senior pastor of a large church before his current solo pastoral position. Since its founding, the church has grown steadily to around 300 members of some ethnic diversity. Its largest demographic is between the ages of 50 and 75, but there are a growing number of younger families and children. The church established Stephen Ministry over a year ago. Preston also started a Stephen Ministry during his first solo pastor position earlier in his ministry.

Stephen Ministry is the caregiving team that all the respondents discussed in the research. Their churches enrolled in the Stephen Ministry System to work with the organization Stephen Ministries. Then, they, along with other lay people in their churches, were trained directly from Stephen Ministries to be Stephen Leaders through a leadership course. During that leadership training, Stephen Ministries trained these individuals on how to start and implement the ministry in their churches, including how to publicize and educate the congregation, how to recruit and select members of their

church to be Stephen Ministers, how to train them using the curriculum provided by Stephen Ministries, how to identify people in need of care and match them with Stephen Ministers, and then how to set up peer supervision groups for Stephen Ministers, which are twice-monthly meetings for Stephen Ministers to confidentially discuss their caring relationships and offer each other support, guidance, and accountability.

The training for Stephen Ministers is based on biblical principles and a client-centered approach to care, which focuses on attentive listening, empathizing, unconditional positive regard, and helping the care receiver process their emotions without giving counsel. Stephen Ministers meet with their care receivers for about an hour or so once a week until the person has moved past the difficult circumstance or can handle the situation better.

Care receivers can be members of the congregation or community. Typically, men are matched with men, and women are matched with women. If the need for care is greater than what a lay person can provide, the Stephen Minister will help connect them with another community resource.

Challenges in the Ministry Before Establishing a Caregiving Team

The first research question explored how solo pastors described the challenges they faced in the ministry before establishing Stephen Ministry as a caregiving team in their congregation. Three categories of challenges surfaced in the research: 1) the number of ministry responsibilities, 2) the internal and external expectations of the ministry, and 3) the emotional toll of the ministry.

The Number of Ministry Responsibilities

As respondents described the amount of ministry for which they were responsible, and the resulting challenges, three major factors emerged. These were administrative demands, caregiving needs, and balancing personal life and vocation.

Administrative Demands

Several respondents spoke about the many administrative tasks required of them because of a lack of staff and volunteers. Richard had been in a parish of thirty staff, which allowed him to reach out to specific people when certain jobs needed done. Once he was at his current church, he had to do some bookkeeping and maintenance work, while trying to find people in the parish with the skills to take on these tasks. Lawrence described himself as a "chief cook and bottle washer" and believed that "If I don't do it, it doesn't get done." Connie appreciated the volunteers in her church but admitted, "There are times when the pastor picks up things…that really aren't ours to pick up." Leo agreed, sharing that he has learned, "Congregations will let [pastors] do as much as they're willing to do. And then the pastor gets overwhelmed."

It was challenging to keep administrative demands from encroaching on Sunday worship preparation and determining how to prioritize tasks. Nathan stated how church planting provided a lot of freedom to establish a structure, but as a solo pastor, he ended up doing many tasks and finding it hard to delegate. For example, he would answer all the emails and phone calls to the church. He also did not have someone to prepare slides for his sermons. "And that's not my gift," he said. "They were basically black and white." Bobby felt a tension between urgent needs that came up and preparing for Sunday services. He said he consistently faced the question, "What claims my attention that

needs to be done versus what should I be doing in terms of…being prepared to bring the message?" Often, he would yield to the "tyranny of the urgent." Bobby was grateful for the Holy Spirit who was able to "translate those weaknesses into strengths," but he acknowledged that he "felt inadequate at times because of that tyranny."

Caregiving Needs

More often than administrative demands, respondents talked about the challenges of meeting the congregation's needs for emotional and spiritual support. Richard felt pulled to be in multiple places at once, as he joked, "I wasn't given the gift of 'bilocation' at ordination, nor do I think I'd want it." He then went on to describe how he had difficulty meeting the growing needs of his church while teaching and leading other ministries. Lawrence talked about how difficult it was to manage the day-to-day, weekly needs and add to them by visiting those who were in the hospital, had special needs, were homebound, or experienced a death in the family. Nathan agreed, and as they were establishing the church plant, he was making similar visits and doing weddings and funerals. Within a year, he concluded, "I can't continue to meet the needs of this congregation by myself."

Even if the number of needs was not too much for some of the pastors, waves of urgent needs would crash all at once, ranging from mental health, physical ailments, or spiritual crises. Connie said, "You're moving right along…and now my prayer list just went from three people to fifteen or twenty or more than I can handle." She admitted that at times in her ministry she was over-functioning.

Other factors made caregiving demands challenging. In a tight-knit community, like the one Benjamin was in, a person dealing with a painful event meant other family

and loved ones were affected. This context required visiting more than the person in the center of the crisis, and sometimes maneuvering around strained relationships. There were also general needs from the community requesting the pastor's services. When Emma started at her church, she received calls from outside the church requesting her services for end-of-life situations. The requests forced her to contact retired clergy to assist because, she said, echoing others, "I couldn't do it all."

Some pastors reflected on how the number of needs negatively impacted the quality of their ministry because they were not able to give the necessary time and energy to each one. Leo related his pastoral position to his previous career, where, due to time constraints, he could interact well with employees and customers and possibly have a rise in compliance issues, or he could focus on compliance issues and neglect some needs from employees and customers. "That's kind of the situation I found myself in…I could really focus on people all the time, but I wasn't doing leadership…and that wasn't going to work because this is a congregation that needed revitalizing. You have to let some things go, and nobody feels good about that."

Nick shared that same struggle. He questioned the sustainability of attempting to meet all the cares in his church plant and felt growing tension as the church grew. "The American model of churches, you always have to be wanting more growth. But there's a part of me that's like, 'I don't want more growth. I can't deal with what we've got now.'"

Several respondents talked about how the numerous demands meant some people were not getting the care they needed. Preston saw this both times he served as a solo pastor and shared his sadness that he had a great love for people but was not able to meet all their needs. This reminded him of Jesus looking into the crowd and stating that the

harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Benjamin shared this sentiment, talking about the struggle he had knowing someone was getting "shorted" with care that week because he was not able to get to everyone. "I don't like that because I know that I'm responsible for them. I want to give them time because I care about them, and I care about the call that God has put on my life."

Nathan noted that he could not reach every person in a church of 150, leaving some people "disillusioned." A few people left because they thought the church felt too large. Connie talked about her regrets in not being able to reach every person and give them the individual attention they needed. "That's the piece that makes me feel like I'm not doing a good job…I'm not getting to all the pains."

Not only did respondents talk about meeting the number of needs, but some acknowledged they were not able to provide ongoing care for people dealing with longer-term issues. Richard said he was able to reach out to grieving families soon after the death of their loved one but was not able to provide more than a couple of phone calls or visits afterward before turning his attention to other people's needs. Preston agreed, mentioning that those who were grieving, going through the effects of addiction, job losses, or challenges in family dynamics needed more consistent care than he was able to provide. He gave an example of a woman dealing with her husband's health and declining mental capacities. "I could see the toll that it was taking on her and it was breaking my heart. But I could not make that drive and spend an hour and a half a week that I felt like she needed."

A few respondents noted that this challenge was made harder because others in the congregation did not see themselves as caregivers. Years ago, Lawrence attempted to

incorporate elders into the ministry by having them make calls to church members, but these calls ended with them adding to his list of people to visit. Bobby had a similar experience when the church's prayer list was sent directly to him to handle. Benjamin said the congregation expected that he be the professional paid to meet their caring needs, and only over time did they accept that his work did not absolve them of their responsibility to minister to one another.

Balancing Personal Life and Vocation

A few pastors also mentioned how their personal lives also added to the challenge of meeting the number of ministry needs in their churches. Preston talked about how he thought he could handle all the ministry needs in his first solo pastoral position. When his two children were born and family responsibility increased and the demands of ministry also grew, he realized that the pace at which he was doing ministry and the way he was going about it could not be sustained. Nathan had planted out of a difficult church split, and while establishing the church and meeting other people's needs, he had to deal with his own grief and pain. Emma shared how daunting it can be when there are family losses. She related a time when she was at a different parish and her sister died. Soon after, someone from the parish called and asked for help during an end-of-life situation. She said it was a watershed moment of "Gosh, when you're on your own, what are you going to do? How do you find that support?" Nick described his experience, recalling, "I could be out every night and still not be getting everything done. And then I'm out every night and feeling the demands of my family. And that just becomes one more demand."

A couple of respondents mentioned that it was difficult to find support in the ministry when dealing with personal challenges. Emma said she would call in associates

at times to help, but they also had their own obligations. Benjamin stated that it was hard not having someone to "bounce stuff off of" to assist in navigating issues in ministry.

The Expectations of Ministry

Respondent also noted how expectations in ministry created unexpected challenges. These included the expectations of the congregation for how the pastor identified and handled ministry needs, as well as the expectations pastors had for how to sustain the church's future ministry.

Expectations for How the Pastor Identifies and Handles Ministry Needs

Most pastors in the study talked about how they perceived the expectation in the church that the pastor should know about all the ministry needs and how to handle them, sometimes also as the only one qualified to teach Sunday school or lead Bible studies. Connie said that before establishing a caregiving team, "There was a lot more on my shoulders. It was my job to know everything that is happening with everyone, whether they tell you or not," and people felt hurt that the pastor missed their difficult time and did not call or visit. In Nathan's church that split from a larger church, people assumed he had more time to handle any pastoral issue because the congregation was now smaller.

Other respondents faced a different challenge, that the church did not expect the pastor to be available for help, and it took extra effort to initiate ministry care for people. Richard shared that most people in his parish believed he was too busy to approach with their needs. He described it this way: "That kind of mindset [was] 'We don't want to bother you,' and I'm like, 'No, please bother me!'" Benjamin said people would sometimes call on him for certain situations because he was the pastor, but since he did

not grow up in the same town or state as his congregants, it took time for them to trust him and feel comfortable approaching him with deeper needs. His older congregation had strong connections with one another, but they sometimes left him out of communication, such as times when he would not find out a church member was in the hospital until the person returned home.

Expectations Pastors Have for How to Sustain the Church's Future Ministry

Several pastors faced challenges to set expectations for the church's ministry sustainability into the future. Lawrence expressed that planning was a major challenge, stating that most of his ministry was done week-by-week and month-by-month. He was able to sometimes plan three months ahead, but there were times when "I was just flying by the seat of my pants."

Nathan said the difficulty for him was helping the newly formed congregation prioritize ministry areas. He tried to cast a vision that each area, such as Sunday morning worship, outreach, and children's ministry, was like a bucket, and they should concentrate on filling one bucket at a time. This took a high level of intentionality, and he had to regularly communicate how certain areas would not be as strong as others because the church was not capable of focusing on all the areas at once. While he credits this approach with helping the church create a strong foundation for the future, it was still a challenging process.

The expectations for how to sustain the church's ability to minister can change as the congregation grows. Preston said that once the church had a building, he worked to implement structures to sustain the growth. He said it required shifting efforts in growing and starting programs into establishing and developing a diaconate and a caregiving team

of laity. Preston said, “There were some very heart-rending situations where I couldn’t let it continue to go on without some kind of a structure around the care that was needed.”

Another challenge is helping the church to set expectations for the future. Leo walked his congregation through an honest evaluation of who they were and how they wanted to engage in ministry in the years to come. The church went through a SWOT analysis that revealed misperceptions about their strengths. One significant point he made was that they were an aging congregation and that other churches in their district had closed recently because they were not able to bring in new members. He worked to get them thinking about what the next twenty-five years could look like, and the steps they could take to bring in new and younger members. They were motivated to keep the church thriving into the future, but he said it was a bit of “push and pull” to take steps to modernize and develop the ministries that reach the community.

The Emotional Toll of the Ministry

The third challenge identified in the research was the emotional toll of the ministry on the respondents. The pressures included feeling the pressure and stress of meeting the needs of the church, feeling overwhelmed by the amount of ministry, and feeling exhaustion or burnout.

Feeling Pressure and Stress

A few respondents talked about the internal pressure felt from trying to meet all the caring needs in their churches. They had joined the ministry to provide care, so being unable to meet needs often discouraged them. Connie said she had the greatest amount of stress in busy seasons of needs, and said, “I’m like, ‘Ugh, I can’t do all the things, and

I'm failing people.'" She added, "It's really hard when you feel like you're letting people down and you care so deeply for them…. [S]ustainability becomes an issue when you feel in your vocation as though you're called to something, but you cannot do it. So that can be a rub."

Others talked about the stress beyond seasons of increased need. Emma talked about how constantly keeping up the pace to meet the needs of her parish impacted her view of long-term ministry sustainability. "I was going to hit a wall at some point, right?" Leo described the weight on pastors to get to every person who needs care. "When you can't get there, it can weigh on you. And those kind of weights on a pastor take a toll. They could result in burnout."

Feeling Overwhelmed

Most respondents talked about feeling overwhelmed in their position, although their ministry contexts were all unique. Richard was the pastor over three different churches and the only Catholic priest in his county. He talked about how the needs of care had risen significantly, so much so that he had to travel more to meet with people. This increased burden led him to start looking for additional help.

Leo's church had tremendous growth in a few years, and he said that keeping track of 185 people was overwhelming. "I can't be around to visit all our homebound weekly, sometimes not even monthly…. I'm not happy with that." He expressed that as a second-career pastor, he was used to working eighty to ninety hours a week. However, he admitted that trying to keep up with all the needs himself left him feeling "overwhelmed a bit." He said others needed to step in to assist him, or "it just wasn't going to get done."

Benjamin was serving at his first church, and learning how to fulfill his role as a solo pastor felt overwhelming. “I didn’t fully realize all the ins and outs of pastoring and what that would be. And so, I went about [the ministry] with my heart…because of [the] call God had given.”

Before planting his current church, Nick had come from a larger church in the inner city. Even in that setting, there were great needs in his congregation and community: people struggling as single parents, those whose loved ones had addictions, and some who were dealing with a family member’s incarceration. “We didn’t have systems in place…. I really started to feel ‘I don’t know how I’m going to do this.’” In his current suburban church, the needs changed, but they still felt overwhelming. He recounted the “constant struggle” to keep up. It drove him to concentrate more on preaching. “In some ways, I almost retreated to that. [It] became my focus because I could do that myself. You just sit in your office...[and] do that on your own.”

Bobby recalled growing up in a small church where his pastor did everything. This model was challenging for him to follow, especially when he would have to plan for several funerals and visit congregation members having medical procedures at once. “It can kind of get overwhelming and so you need some help.”

Feeling Exhausted and Burned Out

Most of the respondents also brought up how they felt exhausted and were concerned about burnout. Lawrence and Emma mentioned how it was difficult to even plan for a vacation and how ministry needs could encroach on that time. Emma noted that she was told early on to leave town during a vacation or on a day off to get rest.

Nick got to a point where he felt drained. He shared that he had a sense of "I do not have it in me to have one more person demanding something from me…. you almost don't want to hear one more problem." Then, he admitted that he would feel guilty about these feelings. He asked himself, "How come I don't have a certain heart? Why don't I care about people more?" This made him question his long-term ministry sustainability.

Emma related how someone in the church lost a spouse and she knew the person needed more time and attention but did not feel like she could do it. "You start stretching," she said, "and then you start going, 'You know I love this person, and I'm fried.'" She added that it was not just the emergencies that exhausted her but "the ongoing care that made me wonder how much I could sustain." Preston agreed, saying he realized that without a structured team to provide care, his frustrations with missing needs would lead to burnout.

The feelings of exhaustion led to resentment and agitation in a couple of the respondents. Nick acknowledged that he had a "low-grade simmering anger" from the constant demands. Emma said she would try to "suck it up" and push herself and then felt agitated at the end of the day. She was also taking care of her father, and she would ask herself why at times she was snappy with him. She realized, "Oh, I'm stretched too thin. I don't need to be taking stuff out on him." She then added, "I completely understand why some pastors pack it in."

Summary of Challenges in Ministry Before Establishing a Caregiving Team

The respondents came from a variety of ministry contexts, from congregations of around 50 to 300 members, some established over 100 years ago and some church plants that began in the past two decades. Yet, the challenges these solo pastors faced were

similar. With few to no support staff, they had to handle administrative tasks that take time away from sermon preparation and caring for the needs of the congregation members. The care needs were often more than what one pastor could handle and were even more challenging when others in the congregation did not see themselves as caregivers. Sometimes the church expected the pastor to be the only caregiver; other times members would hold back from asking for help, leaving individuals in the church without care. Another challenge was for the pastor to raise awareness and establish structures for effective ministry in the future.

These challenges took an emotional toll. Some noted the pressure and stress of trying to keep up with the demands of ministry. Many reported feeling overwhelmed by the workload, and several shared how they felt exhausted and nearing burnout.

The Benefits of Establishing a Caregiving Team

The second research question investigated "What benefits to ministry sustainability do pastors experience after establishing a caregiving team?" Four themes surfaced in the research: 1) the relief of having fewer pastoral demands, 2) the formation of a supportive ministry team, 3) a more equipped congregation to meet ministry needs, and 4) an overall positive outlook for the pastor's long-term ministry.

The Relief of Having Fewer Pastoral Demands

Handling too many responsibilities challenged all the pastors, and so starting a lay caregiving team relieved that burden by lessening their pastoral demands. There were two main subthemes drawn from this shift in pastoral duties. The Stephen Ministry team

provided more pastoral care without extra involvement from the pastor, and it freed up the pastor to meet other responsibilities that may not have been met otherwise.

More Pastoral Care Without Extra Involvement Directly from the Pastor

Once respondents had set up a Stephen Ministry team in their congregations, many stated that they built the team's caregiving by identifying people in need and matching them with a trained Stephen Minister, requiring no extra work by the pastors.

One of the main reasons pastors did not have extra work was because of the Stephen Ministry team structure. Richard's confidence came from the skilled training Stephen Ministers received and the accountability and guidance through regular supervision. "I leave it all just as Stephen Ministry is designed," he said, "and I trust the process." He said he checked in only when they brought an issue to him. He was looking at the possibility of getting Stephen Ministry started in the other two churches he served, hoping it would link the parishes with the mission of caregiving.

Bobby was more involved when his church was starting Stephen Ministry, but once it was established, he trusted the lay leaders to oversee the team. "It's one less thing that I have to be totally connected to," he said. "So, I'm grateful for that."

Creating the training and structure from scratch would have required extra effort. Nathan said that the training his Stephen Ministry team received helped him "to not put so much pressure on myself" for how to equip others caring for others, especially since he had received only three courses of counseling and psychology in his formal training and did not feel gifted in one-to-one counseling. Benjamin agreed, stating, "I don't know that I would have been able to put [the training] together myself in such a succinct, encapsulated piece of training." He credited the training for empowering members to care

for others and giving them the confidence to serve in that role. In addition, he noted that organization was not his strength, but it was a strength of his Stephen Leader who took the lead overseeing the training and matching people with a Stephen Minister.

A few pastors noted how they did not need to constantly check in with the team because the Stephen Leaders would take the initiative to communicate with them. Leo said one of his lay Stephen Leaders approached him to give updates, and he knew she would follow through when he contacted her about a caregiving need for the team. Nick talked about how one of his Stephen Leaders had taken the lead in organizing the team. While Nick chose to be more involved with teaching and meeting with people before matching them with a Stephen Minister, he relied on the leader to oversee the supervision, help make caregiving assignments, and inform him of any issues.

Several respondents talked about how Stephen Ministry made it possible for more care. Nick said he used to sit with a person going through a difficult time and think, "I don't have the time. How am I going to do this?" Then, it became a pleasure to meet with someone struggling because he knew he could get them care through Stephen Ministry. Connie said she felt "less guilty" about not seeing an individual on a regular basis because he was meeting with a Stephen Minister. She added that when she did visit the individual, he was more able to talk with her because of the relationship he already had with the Stephen Minister, making her time with him easier. Preston said it was "gratifying" knowing that someone was able to consistently offer the person "love, prayer support, [and] compassion," without his direct involvement.

Occasionally, members of the team approached the pastor to get insight on a certain caregiving situation, but the respondents said this was minimal. Emma said

sometimes the other Stephen Leader would briefly ask her for guidance after a Bible study. Connie was called in to meetings only when larger issues arose or when specific continuing education was needed.

Lawrence stressed that pastors should trust the training and organization of the team, or they would micromanage it, and then "you've just added one more thing into your schedule." In his church, they have been shifting the mindset of shepherding care to others, including the church's Stephen Ministry. People have seen this caregiving team as another resource for support instead of always going to him. He added he still tells people that he will visit them, but Stephen Ministry "is additional care they can [have] week in and week out, where I can [visit] maybe once every four to six weeks." Benjamin agreed and said it was healthy for him to take a "hands-off" approach, letting the lay leaders call and conduct meetings, which they are empowered and excited to do.

Ability for the Pastor to Meet Other Responsibilities

Several respondents mentioned how having the caregiving team in place allowed them to meet other responsibilities they may not have been able to do otherwise. Leo shared how Stephen Ministry freed him to cast vision for the congregation, starting new ministries, such as disaster relief.

The team opened up opportunities and provided more time for pastors to do ministry. Benjamin, who said one of his challenges before Stephen Ministry was to know when people were in the hospital or needed care, credited the establishment of the team with helping him to be more aware of congregational needs, largely because the team was trained to be more aware of these and they communicated them to him. He now had more opportunities to visit someone in crisis. Emma shared how she had time freed up when

she visited a parishioner, who told her that she did not have to stay long because his Stephen Minister was stopping by later.

The Formation of a Supportive Team

Feeling alone in the work of the ministry was a common challenge, so one of the main benefits of establishing Stephen Ministry was that respondents had a supportive caregiving team. Two main subthemes emerged as respondents described having such a team. Stephen Ministry created a team of allies for the pastor, and they could rely on the team because it was structured to function well into the future.

Creation of a Team of Allies

Several respondents made comments about how Stephen Ministry provided a team of allies in the ministry. Benjamin expressed, "It's helpful long-term to have a team of people, that you're not going about this alone. Doing anything alone for a long time is difficult, and so if you can do it with people, that's going to make [ministry] more sustainable." He recounted that while using the Stephen Ministry curriculum, the lay Stephen Leaders would pause and ask him if he had experienced what was being taught. "It was helpful," Benjamin said, "because it was seeing worlds come together…. It was helpful just to give people a glimpse of what you know what pastoral care can look like." He added that it gave church members a greater understanding and appreciation for what he did between Sundays.

Bobby agreed, saying the team was "a place of confidence…people who are on the same page. You have an awareness that those people are there, and their understanding of ministry is the same as your understanding of ministry." He was

thankful that a team was committed to doing ministry alongside him, and that partnership gave him confidence in his position. Going through the training with them also built this trust. He said, "You have a shared experience…a shared vision of ministry. You have a shared understanding of confidentiality, of listening, of walking with someone."

Having a team of allies helped Emma feel less stressed. "I've got a group of people around me that can take up the care baton and run with it. I don't feel that I've got to push myself beyond my capacity and wear myself out." She went on to say how she no longer needed to reach out to retired clergy to meet pastoral needs.

Connie appreciated the support she received from the team and how they engaged in conversations that matter to her. She also had peace of mind when the Stephen Ministry team willingly provided extra care when she went on sabbatical. Lawrence noted that those on his Stephen Ministry team looked out for him, and someone gently reminded him of a training principle to keep him from overidentifying with a suffering person. Benjamin called his relationship with the team as "working arm-in-arm" in the ministry. Preston described his relationship with his lay Stephen Leaders: "They almost feel like colleagues…[T]hey get it."

Structured to Function Well in the Future

Most respondents mentioned how they could rely on the Stephen Ministry team because it was structured to function well into the future of the congregation. Lawrence was expecting to retire within the year, and he was looking to train more people in his congregation to provide care when he steps down. Bobby also mentioned that as he looked at the rest of his career in ministry, he was reassured that a team would be in place, trained to handle "the day-to-day tragedies." He was actively working with the

team to recruit and replenish its members with new individuals. Nick shared plans to double their team as more people in his congregation heard about what Stephen Ministry had done for Stephen Ministers and care receivers. He said, “I think it builds the ministry reach wide and deep because there is substance to it.”

A few respondents credited the training and structure with enabling the team to build trust and sustain ministry into the future. Nick described adding new members to the team as initially a time of awkwardly getting to know each other, but then after learning and participating in role-playing exercises to practice caregiving skills, they completed the course as a strong community. “The team ends up loving each other, supporting each other, praying for each other.” He said the church saw their love for one another, which played out as an advertisement for the team. Preston agreed and described the Stephen Ministry team as a “close-knit group…battle buddies, trusted friends.” This camaraderie kept the teams strong and attractive for new members. Preston added, “I think that it is going to be a defining characteristic of our culture and our DNA at the church and will outlive me and will be a gift to the pastor and pastors that follow me….[I]t is a key ingredient of sustainability of our congregation going forward.”

A Healthier Congregation

Three main subthemes emerged as respondents described having a healthier congregation because of Stephen Ministry, which relieved the pressure to make this happen on their own. The team enabled caregiving opportunities that may not have happened otherwise; there were ready-made opportunities for discipleship; and there was an ability to provide different levels of care.

Caregiving Opportunities that May Not Have Happened Otherwise

Most respondents talked about how the Stephen Ministry team enabled caregiving opportunities that may not have happened otherwise. Often, people were more willing to share their troubles with someone other than the pastor.

Richard said it's typical that Catholics come to church but avoid talking to the priest about their issues. That makes it challenging to know all the needs in his parish, but having a team on the lookout for people going through struggles increased his awareness. Leo related that sometimes a person would go to the hospital, and the Stephen Minister visited and informed him of the situation. Preston pointed out that there are times when a lay person was uniquely positioned to give more effective care than the clergy, which is why he appreciated more lay involvement in the ministry. Nathan appreciated how people no longer needed to wait for him to visit them to get their emotional and spiritual needs addressed, but that he could call on his Stephen Ministry team and they would immediately make the connection with them.

One factor that limited pastors from providing care was gender. Benjamin said as a male, he knew that sometimes a woman might hold back from sharing deeply personal issues with him, so he was glad trained female Stephen Ministers could meet with female care receivers. Similarly, Connie said that as a female pastor, there were men who may not relate as well to her as they would to another man, so she was glad to be able to refer them to a male Stephen Minister.

Another factor limiting pastors from providing care was personal relationships. Nick disclosed that his mother, who was a member of his church, was matched with a Stephen Minister. His mother was so thrilled to have a Stephen Minister to talk with that she told everyone at the church she had one. Nick was relieved that his mother could tell

her Stephen Minister about emotions and struggles that she would not feel comfortable telling him. He said, “She would have no other avenue to share some of those burdens.”

Ready-Made Discipleship Opportunities

Most respondents also mentioned how discipleship opportunities more naturally happened with members of the Stephen Ministry team. Leo was pleased that more lay people were getting involved with the life of the church, and it was helping them to grow in their faith. He said, “Some lay people have become Stephen Ministers that I never would have expected…. [T]hey weren’t very connected to the ministry or the activities of the church.” Benjamin also noted the personal growth in the team members and credited training within a structured commitment to service and the study of Scripture. He saw the team making a greater impact on the spiritual growth of his congregation as more people got involved. Benjamin emphasized that growth has happened because people were no longer just “having a cup of tea” with someone once a week, but they were being intentional about “being Jesus to this person.”

Preston talked about how people could grow as disciples by using their spiritual gifts in this ministry. Team members told him that they knew God wanted them to do more, but it was not clear what it was until they got involved in Stephen Ministry. “It’s healthy for the church to see people with those desires and those abilities to be used as part of the body.” He noted that in his church’s polity, elders and deacons were involved in care, but the laity was now able to come alongside them and provide a different and more consistent presence. It worked well to meet the needs for care, but, he added, it provided opportunities for those involved with Stephen Ministry to mature.

The team also gave pastors more opportunities to contribute to discipleship. Richard recounted times when those on the team approached him for advice on how to minister in a certain situation, and he saw them grow in their relational skills. Connie appreciated the times when she was asked to present a continuing education topic and received affirming feedback, as well as the personal growth and deepening relationships.

The Ability to Provide Different Levels of Care

Respondents mentioned how Stephen Ministry expanded care and provided appropriate care. This work also relieved pastors concerned about people receiving the right kind of support.

Leo said that several of his twenty Stephen Ministers visited homebound members of the church. He and some of his elders also made occasional visits, but the Stephen Ministry team ensured that someone was consistently checking in on these individuals. He said, "I don't feel badly because I have taken steps to make sure they are getting other levels of care." Nick also mentioned that the team gave another level of care, recalling one individual who expressed his deep appreciation that his Stephen Minister talked with him once a week. Nick acknowledged that the level and frequency of care "wouldn't come from anywhere else."

Nathan brought up how people in his congregation have the option to receive consistent, confidential care without the cost and stigma associated with a professional counselor. He said having Stephen Ministry "expands the spectrum of care…[and] ability that we had to reach people." Emma appreciated having another referral option. Those who needed a higher level of care were referred to professional counseling, but those who did not were referred to Stephen Ministry.

Connie and Leo both mentioned how the care given by the Stephen Ministry team complemented what they offered as pastors. Connie noted that the Stephen Minister "primed the pump" for her visit with care receivers, and they were willing to tell her what had already been discussed in those meetings. Leo felt more assured that he could focus more on pastoral matters, such as absolution, because the other issues in the person's life were being addressed with the Stephen Minister.

Others all talked about how Stephen Ministry influenced their existing ministries. For Leo, it shifted the elders' mindset toward being a part of the priesthood of all believers and taking more responsibility for pastoral care. Preston described his deacons as "junior firemen" who would deal with immediate, emergency needs, but then hand off the longer term needs to the Stephen Ministry.

Overall Positive Outlook for the Ministry

One of the biggest challenges respondents had before starting Stephen Ministry was feeling that they could not meet all the care needs in their churches. All of them noted how those feelings improved after establishing the team.

Richard said that as a priest, he was immersed in the life of the parish, so much so that its health and his ministry outlook were almost the same. He said as he saw "Christ more in those who are being helped and also in the helpers," he experienced deep satisfaction and joy. He went on to say that it "heartens me…gives me a reason to get up and do it again tomorrow."

A few pastors mentioned that they felt less guilty in their ministry because they knew more people were being cared for. For example, Lawrence talked about having "peace of mind" knowing a person he had not yet seen was being cared for by a Stephen

Minister. Leo said, “I guess the bottom line is Stephen Ministry keeps me from feeling like a total loser as a pastor because I don’t get around as often as I’d like…. You know, the pastor can’t do it all by himself.”

Nick stressed how he no longer felt drained by the needs of his congregation. He said he no longer feels “a simmering sense of anger” that people required care, when he used to “feel a sense of desperation of ‘I can’t hear one more [crisis].’” He also mentioned how his wife would attest that he no longer complained as he used to about the ministry. He then added, “Honestly, our marriage is better because I don’t feel as drained all the time. I don’t have that sense of having the life sucked out of me…. Because of Stephen Ministry, my marriage is better. I have something to offer her.”

Emma credited Stephen Ministry with helping her to be more relational. She shared how she used to lead a Bible study and was not excited about the time of mingling. But after she trained with the Stephen Ministry team, she felt equipped to be intentional about catching up with people and getting to know them on a deeper, personal level. She reflected, “I think I’m less agenda-driven and more person-driven…more patient…better at listening. There’s more time and attention and caring to the individual person, the whole person.”

Several respondents talked about their feelings of confidence in the pastorate after starting Stephen Ministry. Preston talked about the peace he had because he could make referrals to his church’s Stephen Ministry team instead of scrambling to find ways to support someone struggling. Nathan said he was more confident in his ministry because his church can offer care through Stephen Ministry “free of charge. The only thing that costs them is their time.”

Summary of the Benefits of Establishing a Caregiving Team

Many of the challenges the respondents shared about being a solo pastor were lessened when they established the caregiving team of Stephen Ministry, which provided them with a more positive long-term ministry sustainability. Stephen Ministry was able to expand pastoral care without extra involvement from the pastors, giving pastors more time to meet other responsibilities. The formation of a supportive team helped the solo pastors feel less alone in the ministry, since they had a team of allies to continue providing care well into the future. The respondents also noted how the team opened up caring opportunities that may have otherwise been missed, fostered more discipleship, and made different levels of care available, so that the respondents did not feel as if they needed to fill in the gaps. Stephen Ministry also gave pastors a more positive outlook by relieving guilt from not meeting needs and feeling drained, They instead found joy and confidence in knowing people in the church were growing and being cared for.

The Theological Beliefs Behind Establishing a Caregiving Team

The third research question explored "What theological beliefs help motivate pastors to establish a caregiving team?" Three themes emerged from the research: 1) the belief in sharing ministry responsibility, 2) the desire for a Christ-centered and biblically rooted ministry, and 3) alignment with the mission of the church.

The Belief in Sharing Ministry Responsibility

All respondents stated that a motivating factor in getting Stephen Ministry started was their belief that the ministry of the church should not be solely dependent on the pastor. Richard said his goal coming to the parish was never to set up programs that

required him to run them. He wanted to involve lay people in the work of healing and also to have the ministry continue when he left. Lawrence shared that 1 Thessalonians 2:8 drives his ministry: “So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.” He saw setting up Stephen Ministry where lay people teach, supervise, and care for others as a significant way to share the church’s ministry. Nathan also stressed that the ministry was not reliant on him alone. He pointed out that the Apostle Paul appointed leaders in the church and then expected them to share the work of the ministry. He also mentioned that Jesus could have done the ministry by himself, but instead, he sent the disciples two-by-two to share in the work.

Bobby looked at how the Bible says that Christians all have a responsibility to care for each other. “In our theology, there’s no clergy that’s separated from the laity.” Benjamin said it is part of his call as a pastor to care for people as God cares for them, and involving people in the care of others is part of his pastoral responsibility.

Many pastors cited the theological concept of the priesthood of all believers, which comes from 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Several referred to this passage, saying that all believers are spiritually gifted, and that establishing a caregiving team gave individuals the opportunity to use those gifts. Connie mentioned that her church’s congregational polity was another reason to expand the ministry. Leo referred to the shared priesthood but made the distinction that while not everyone was in the office of the ministry, they could minister under the direction of the pastor and lay leaders. Preston

shared that he became sensitive to ways those in an ordained office, such as elders or deacons, may inadvertently take away the occasions for lay people to use their gifts for ministry. He saw Stephen Ministry as a way to empower those not ordained and get them actively involved.

Respondents also cited Ephesians 4:11–13 as justification for lay ministry. Preston said this passage makes it "mandatory" to equip people to serve as part of the church. Similarly, Lawrence said if he was not equipping members of his church for works of the ministry, then "I'm not doing what the Lord says in his Word." Practically, he added, he knows he is more functional as a pastor if he is equipping people. Others added that even though all Christians are gifted, they still needed training to skillfully use those gifts.

The Desire for Christ-centered and Biblically-rooted Ministry

The respondents wanted more than a care team. They wanted such teams to be Christ-centered and biblically rooted. Richard appreciated the core value of the team being Christ-centered, so Stephen Ministers could "make Christ real in a way that helps…in this moment." He added that since they were not expected to be theologians or proselytize, he was not worried that a priest was not involved in the direct care.

Lawrence valued how the ministry aimed to connect people to Jesus and how the caregiving approach emphasized that God does the healing through the relationship. Individual caregivers were not able to heal anyone on their own, Preston noted, and it was a "theological hallmark" that Stephen Ministers were trained on how to use Scripture and pray, relying on the power of God's word to penetrate people's hearts.

Respondents cited other biblical passages as part of the core of the caregiving team. Lawrence talked about how Jesus cared for the woman at the well in John 4 before he began teaching her. He also mentioned how the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 modeled someone going out of his way to provide ongoing care. Connie referred to Ecclesiastes 4:12, "a threefold cord is not quickly broken." She said, "Stephen Ministry is this additional cord. There are the care receivers, there's the Stephen Ministry, and then there's the pastoral relationship…. They create a stronger bond with the church because there's more connection and more caring. We just can't go alone."

Alignment with the Mission of the Church

Some respondents saw how having a lay caregiving team helped the church fulfill its mission. Richard said that this ministry was a way to promote intentional support and care, by being present in the moment of people's pain. Preston alluded to how quality education is highly valued in theologically Reformed churches. He could trust Stephen Ministry to train people to be "Christ-like caregivers." Others commented on how the church is called to multiply its ministry, and Stephen Ministry was a means to do that.

Some respondents pointed to how the church is called to love God and love one another. Nick said the call to love was the driving force behind establishing Stephen Ministry in his church, because "a practical way to love somebody [is] to learn how to care for them." Benjamin recounted how those who approached him to start the ministry did so because they had a heart to love the church and community. Connie noted how the command to love is foundational for her church, and how a caregiving team works with existing programs to provide meals to those who are grieving or to promote social justice in the community.

Summary of the Theological Beliefs Behind Establishing a Caregiving Team

Respondents had various theological reasons for establishing a lay caregiving team in their churches. All respondents held to the principle that the ministry work of the congregation was not exclusive to the pastor. For some, it was to empower lay people so they could represent Christ to those who were hurting. For others, they felt it was their duty to equip and mobilize others for ministry work because everyone shares the priesthood. Respondents also wanted the team to be rooted in the work of Christ and biblical teaching. Many mentioned how Stephen Ministry was a way to fulfill the mission of the church to expand the ministry and love God and one another.

Benefits for the Congregation

The final research question investigated the question "How do pastors describe the benefits that a caregiving team has on the congregation?" because the pastors' performance and overall job satisfaction are often measured by the impact their work makes on the individuals, congregation, and community where they minister. The following was explored: 1) how the caregiving team benefits those serving on the team, 2) how the caregiving team benefits those receiving care, and 3) how the caregiving team benefits the congregation and community at large.

Benefits for Those Serving on the Team

There were two main subthemes drawn from how respondents described the benefits of Stephen Ministry on those serving on the team: individual growth and relational growth.

Individual Growth

Several respondents shared how Stephen Leaders and Stephen Ministers grew as caregivers through their training, especially by improving their listening skills so they could focus on the person's struggles without attempting to fix their problems.

Bobby stressed how listening skills were fundamental to the team's effectiveness. "That's the hallmark of Stephen Ministry, in my opinion…learning how to listen and not feel like I have the answer." Benjamin appreciated how the team was challenged to listen well to stay focused on the other person's concerns instead of being "solution oriented." People realized they could not work out the problems for the other person, but instead, they could help the other person find solutions, all the while trusting God to bring healing. Lawrence said this mindset gave the team confidence to care for people in difficult situations. He quoted a principle of the Stephen Ministry training: "You're the caregiver, but God is the cure-giver." He said that principle helped everyone be an empathetic presence instead of taking the burden from the person and placing it on their own shoulders.

Emma said people on the team also learned boundaries: what they were responsible for and what the other person was responsible for. She saw how individuals on the team became a "sacred presence," avoiding pat answers and instead listening, caring, and praying for them. She added that the approach "can make [the hurting person] more open to…be a follower of Christ" because they show how much they care and allow the gospel to reach the hurting person through that relationship.

Connie emphasized that the skills the team learned led to "spiritual and psychological maturity" for the members. Preston said he also noted increased wisdom and maturity in the individuals on the team, as they learned how to look to Jesus to do the

healing. “They’re not trying to come in and fix anybody or anything…. [Y]ou and I both know that if we’re trying to play God or outstep our bounds, it’s not helpful.”

Some pastors noted that they saw individual growth because people on the team were able to use their gifts in meaningful ways. Nathan talked about one of the Stephen Leaders who felt a sense of fulfillment, thankfulness, and pride from helping to start the ministry and how it is now “one of the best things we’ve got going at our church.” Then he added that it has been rewarding to see how much fulfillment team members have for doing something God created them to do. Emma agreed and said there were people on the team who felt like they had the gift and calling, but until the training, they did not feel equipped. She said, “Once they’re equipped, oh my goodness! What a great feeling that they feel much more enriched and satisfied that they are honoring God and worshiping God the way he has built them. They are so empowered, and they feel so comfortable.”

Team members also grew because they were able to use painful experiences to help others. Leo talked about how one individual in his church had been a part of a men’s fellowship group that discussed being wounded by their fathers. He was inspired to be a “wounded healer” by becoming a Stephen Minister to care for those who also had difficult pasts. Nick shared how one of the founders of Stephen Ministry in his church was diagnosed with cancer and then started caring for another member who was battling cancer. Preston shared an example of a family in town for medical treatment for their loved one. One of the Stephen Ministers saw the prayer request in the church’s bulletin and reached out to the family because her son had suffered the same illness several years earlier. She started visiting the hospital to care for a family she had never met until then.

Most respondents mentioned how Stephen Ministry helped members to grow in their faith. Richard stated that some were weaker in their spiritual development when they started, but now he could see a deepening in their growth. Connie pointed out that the ongoing supervision meetings provided opportunities for prayer and encouragement, which helped everyone deepen their faith by caring for each other. She added that they were more eager to talk about insecurities in their faith, and she could encourage them in their spiritual development. Nathan said people on the team continued to thank him for the opportunity to be trained and serve because "they've grown through it. It's prepared them. It's made them depend so much more on God to guide their words and…to be able to be used."

Bobby gave an example of a woman who had ministered to those with addictions in a halfway house. She had grown discouraged by the people's lapses and continual struggles. Then she was trained as a Stephen Leader, and he witnessed "great growth in her" as she prayed and applied the gospel to her caregiving relationship. He said, "It was an encouragement to her to see that victory and how a life changed because of her connection to that person through Stephen Ministry."

Most of the respondents brought up how team members grew to be more sensitive to the needs around them and proactive in connecting people to the emotional and spiritual support that they needed. Richard said that he used to get the prayer list for the parish and be the one to reach out to those who were recently added. After their Stephen Ministry was established, members of the team began reaching out to him and offering to contact the person and connect them with a Stephen Minister. He said their mentality became "Can we help that person? How can we be Christ now?" Emma was surprised by

how organic the process of connecting people to Stephen Ministry had become. She expected that she would be the one referring people for care, but instead members of the team naturally "step in the gap" to offer support. Lawrence related that it was more common now that someone who was prayed for during the Sunday service would be contacted that afternoon by their Stephen Ministry team to offer its services. He said before training, most people would have told him they were reluctant to reach out because they did not know what to say, but now they could take the initiative and confidently make the call. Connie talked about individuals from the team coming to her because they identified needs not only in the church but also in the community. She described it as being "lookouts in the congregation" and taking "ownership in the spiritual well-being of the whole community." Preston shared how a Stephen Leader reached out to a man grieving his spouse's death and pulling away from the church. Although it was not a formal Stephen Ministry relationship, the Stephen Leader initiated regular meetings and used his training to forge a connection with him. Preston said the grieving man then reengaged with the church.

Relational Growth

Respondents noticed how individual growth impacted relational growth within their teams and churches. Richard saw the Stephen Ministry shared mission as key for when newly trained members joined an existing team. Leo described the team as "tight knit" because they had gotten to know each other through training, retreats, meetings, and shared experiences.

Deeper connections were made within the team among people who may not have connected otherwise. Nick was surprised by the bonds the team had formed. He said their

love for one another was visible to the church when they were commissioned as Stephen Ministers. He said the team brought together people who did not know each other before, and once they went through the training, he said, “Not only are they close friends, but when I say they love each other, they have this deep connection that is apparent.” He pointed to the discussions and role-play activities in their training that connected everyone at a deeper level that “never, ever, ever would have happened otherwise. There was no avenue for it to happen.” Connie agreed, and added that some individuals would have been more isolated if not for the opportunity to join this team. Nathan said it had “created a camaraderie and a friendship and a small community [of] people who didn’t all know each other.” He credited ongoing small group supervision where they pray and support each other and their relationships with their care receivers. He said, “It has blossomed into more than just working together. It blossomed into doing life together.”

The positive impacts went beyond how members relate to one another. It extended to how those individuals relate to coworkers, family, and others. Nick shared how one woman told him that her Stephen Ministry skills “transformed my work,” and other team members reported becoming better listeners, more empathetic, and more caringly assertive in their occupations.

Stephen Ministry skills also impacted marriage and family relationships. Leo recounted how one man was not very involved with the church and had visited with him a few times to discuss marital issues. The man was recruited to go through Stephen Minister training, and since then he has not needed to see Leo for counseling. “I think it helped him a lot in just being a better listener and being able to deal with problems in his own marriage.”

Emma said one Stephen Minister told her that what she learned on the Stephen Ministry team helped her with some difficult family situations. She also shared how another member of the team used his skills to minister to his brother who was not a Christian and was dying from cancer. Those same skills empowered him to speak at his funeral as well. Emma also noted that his training has given him the confidence to talk to people at the local dog park and train ushers and greeters at the church to be more sensitive to people's needs. She described his being on the team as "life changing. It really set him free to minister."

Lawrence shared how being trained as a Stephen Minister helped his head elder relate better to family and friends. The head elder told him that it had equipped him to support his daughter who was going through a difficult divorce. He told Lawrence, "Without Stephen Ministry, I don't know what I would have done." Because of the training, he was better able to handle his own emotions while ministering to her well.

The relational growth also helped some members of the team get more involved with the life of the church. Nick said, "You gain more confidence. Some of those introverted people who love each other, now they're on the hospitality team." Bobby has seen a rise in church commitment from the team's members. Connie noted that 10 percent of her church was involved with Stephen Ministry, and several come from "unexpected quarters or segments" of the congregation. She said it had given some people who did not know how to contribute to the ministry of the church a chance to serve. Nathan recalled a person who bounced around to different ministries trying to find a fit. When Stephen Ministry started, the person "threw themselves in."

How the Caregiving Team Benefits Those Receiving Care

There were two main subthemes from how respondents described the benefits of Stephen Ministry on those receiving care. These are the impact the caring relationship made on them individually and on their relationship with others.

Individual Impact

Almost all the respondents talked about how care receivers were given comfort and healing through consistent and reliable one-to-one relationships. Richard noticed that care receivers changed their outlook as they became happier or more at peace with what they were going through. Connie had several care receivers come to her to express their gratitude for receiving care from a Stephen Minister because they felt "unburdened" and that they were not "burdening my family as much" with their problems. Benjamin stated that meeting with a Stephen Minister has relieved pressure for care receivers. He said, "It made things seem more bearable. It brightened their situation. It brightened their lives. And it comforted them."

Bobby also described the person receiving care from a Stephen Minister as moving from darkness into light. "You see the light return to their eyes and light return to their life…to move beyond the darkness that [was] associated with that episode. You see them begin to thrive again just in life in general." When that happened, the caring relationship moved to a satisfactory close.

Many shared examples of how encouraging it was to see care receivers in a better place after the caring relationship closed. Leo shared an example of a man whose wife was dealing with depression, and so he started meeting with a Stephen Minister. The relationship offered him "moments of release from the gravity" of his situation. Leo said

that although the situation had not changed, the individual had more hope than he did before. Emma talked about a man whose wife unexpectedly died, and he started receiving care from someone on the Stephen Ministry team. Four years later, he still mentioned how much he appreciated those visits and the support he received during a horrific time in his life. She also shared about two women who went through unwanted divorces, and how healthy they were after receiving comfort and support from the Stephen Ministry team. Nathan gave an example of a person who lost both of her parents in a short period and seemed stuck in her grief. After being matched with a Stephen Minister, he said, her demeanor changed, and she was more hopeful in talking about eternity and her faith. Preston talked about a woman who was the primary caregiver for her husband, and she had become distraught about what life was going to look like for them. After she received care from a Stephen Minister, he saw "life in her" and "she does not seem to be burned out on what is going on with her husband….I see a kind of light [in] her eyes. I see a different kind of hope in her vocabulary."

A couple of respondents added that the care people received may have prevented worse issues. It increased their overall mental health, and it may have kept some people in difficult and dark times from spiraling into self-harm.

In the process, a couple pastors mentioned that the care receivers also felt loved by their Stephen Ministers. Nick said someone receiving care could not believe someone would check in on him weekly. He told the care receiver that his Stephen Minister loved him. "And who doesn't want that in life?" he asked. "Who doesn't want somebody that loves them?"

The Impact on Care Receivers' Relationships with Others

Most respondents also talked about how Stephen Ministry helped care receivers relate to others. Several pastors talked about how the care the people received kept them connected to the church community. Nathan said he believed numerous care receivers may have dropped out of fellowship if they had not had someone from the church meeting with them every week. Emma acknowledged that a few regular attendees did not have a personal relationship with Jesus, but receiving care from the Stephen Ministry team kept them from leaving, and "they're coming out on the other side of things in a better position." Lawrence related how a woman had been making calls to church members to stay in touch with them during the height of the pandemic while her husband was struggling with the effects of Covid himself. She received a Stephen Minister to help with her difficulties as she cared for others. Lawrence retold how she expressed gratitude for the ways "Jesus showed up in that journey." He said those who are ministering but who are not being ministered to can result in their leaving the church because "nobody cared enough to show up."

The care receivers may also be better able to relate to the loved ones in their lives. Nick gave the example of a man whose wife was in the beginning stages of dementia, and he was struggling with his communication with her. After having a Stephen Minister help him process the circumstances, he could think through how to have better conversations with his wife. Not only has that improved their relationship, but it has given the care receiver tools to improve his relationships with his children and grandchildren.

There were instances when the care receivers eventually became caregivers. Richard recounted how one of the Stephen Ministers received care from the team when her child died. After her caring relationship closed, she wanted to give back and joined

Stephen Ministry to be "Christ for another." Connie shared about a man matched with a Stephen Minister, and after the caring relationship ended, the Stephen Minister started having health issues. The former care receiver approached her with his concerns and offered care to the person who had cared for him.

Benefits for the Congregation and Community at Large

Respondents discussed how Stephen Ministry benefited the wider congregation, outside of the Stephen Ministry team and care receivers, and the community at large.

The Benefits to the Congregation

Many respondents mentioned how Stephen Ministry indirectly fostered a more caring dynamic in their congregations. Some pastors emphasized how it made a difference in the church's leadership. Both Lutheran pastors talked about how their elders received the training even though they were not necessarily going to join the Stephen Ministry team, which helped them be more aware of the needs of the church and how to offer care in their existing ministry. Preston appreciated how the Stephen Leaders equipped the church's elders and deacons to be more sensitive to the needs for care in the church. He said, "It's kind of raising all of our awareness." Connie said something similar and noted that the other lay leaders of her church were more on the lookout for those in need of care in the church and the community.

Several respondents talked about how starting Stephen Ministry changed the culture of the church. Lawrence noted that the team influenced the congregation to have greater connectivity among its members and more intentionality to check in on how people were doing. Leo recounted that when he first arrived, the church was dealing with

several incidents that left it with a poor reputation. “With Stephen Ministry, I think it has been a real positive step forward with our congregation and saying, ‘We are a church of a caring culture.’” Similarly, Connie said the Sunday morning corporate prayers for Stephen Ministry benefited the congregation because it communicated that they are a caring community of Christ. She said people in the church began to approach her to see if those they knew could benefit from being connected to their Stephen Ministry. Emma noticed that the conversations at parish-wide Sunday morning breakfasts changed. She said there was more listening and “a different quality of questioning and caring that happens…because of Stephen Ministry. It’s just changed some of the relationships, whether [they’re] outside of our church or inside of our church. That’s a big deal.”

The caring culture was also noticed by visitors to the church. Nick acknowledged that the church he had planted reflected some of his introverted personality. He said, “I [felt] like I created a monster because I created a church of introverts. I would see on a Sunday morning a new person come in and stand there and nobody talked to the new person. And that would bother me.” Although he did not say Stephen Ministry was entirely responsible for it, he said that starting the team significantly contributed to changing his church’s introverted nature. “Guarantee you now, it’s a totally different environment on a Sunday morning because now there are people who do love each other, and it shows, and that is contagious.” Lawrence noticed a similar change in his church. He observed that people were more isolated since the pandemic, and guests of the church were looking for a connection to a community. Stephen Ministry influenced his elders and others in the church to be more welcoming of guests. Emma also appreciated the influence of the Stephen Ministry team toward welcoming new people, recalling how

three visitors told her they had never been at a more welcoming church. She credited Stephen Ministry for bringing a new level of listening and willingness to come alongside people. Connie noted that Stephen Ministry was a nice fit with other programs at the church that involved mental health. Thus, the church strengthened its identity as a caring and welcoming congregation for all types of people. “It makes it easier for us to reach out into the community too.”

Many respondents credited Stephen Ministry with their numerical church growth, even during the pandemic. Leo’s church advertised Stephen Ministry on their electronic sign near the highway, and several people started coming to the church because they wanted to become a part of the ministry. Although it was only one factor, he said it was part of the 33 percent growth they have experienced in the past six years. Lawrence has also seen around a 30 to 40 percent growth rate since the pandemic. Benjamin has seen some care receivers from the community attend the church. Nick said some of the influence of Stephen Ministry during the pandemic years helped the congregation become more welcoming, which contributed to bringing in new families. Bobby shared that those in Stephen Ministry were committed to continue providing care for people during the pandemic, and he said that commitment may have helped the church grow numerically and financially during those years.

The Benefits to the Community

Respondents also mentioned how Stephen Ministry enabled the congregation to minister to the outside community. Lawrence mentioned that two people trained as Stephen Ministers became chaplains at the hospital, and Emma is planning to create ways for trained Stephen Ministers to volunteer at the hospital. Connie said that her Stephen

Ministry team was more comfortable seeking out and providing care for people from the community.

Several congregations trained care receivers from outside of the church. Bobby gave an example of an elderly woman who lived near the church and did not have any family in the area. Members of the church would occasionally help her with house projects and eventually they connected her to the Stephen Ministry team. Someone met with her weekly during the pandemic when she would have been more isolated otherwise. Connie recalled three or four times when the care receiver had no previous connection with her church, and she said those have "worked out phenomenally. It's never gone poorly." She appreciated how Stephen Ministry augmented her church's involvement with mental health awareness programs in the community.

Nick estimated that a third of the care receivers were from the community. Many of these connections were through church members who connected their friends to their church's Stephen Ministry. Other care receivers came from those connected with outreach ministries that the church offers. He recalled one care receiver who had viewed church as showing up and leaving without a personal connection with others or God. She was not attending church when she was matched with a Stephen Minister. Nick said the relationship was "revolutionary for her," and introduced her to a faith that "is lived out and is personal." She became a Christian and joined the church. He said this was just one example of others coming to faith through the church's Stephen Ministry.

Summary of the Benefits to the Congregation and Community at Large

Respondents noted several benefits that Stephen Ministry had on those on the team, those who received care, and the congregation and community at large. Those on

the team grew individually by learning and being mobilized to provide care to hurting people. They were equipped in how to use their gifts and experiences to offer support to others and were more proactive in identifying people with needs. They also grew spiritually as they witnessed God's work in and through their service. In addition, members of the team grew relationally, as they became a strong community through their training and ongoing supervision meetings. The training also made an impact on their relationships with family, coworkers, and others. Pastors also noted that in some instances, the members of the team became more involved with the life of the church.

Those who received care from the Stephen Ministry team experienced comfort and healing, and some became caregivers themselves after the caring relationship ended. The care they received also impacted their relationships, as it kept some connected to the church community and strengthened their relationships with family and others.

Respondents also mentioned how Stephen Ministry led the congregation to become more caring and welcoming, and often this internal shift contributed to church growth. The teams also reached out to the wider community. Sometimes this meant individuals used their skills to serve in other capacities. Other times, it meant care receivers came from outside the church, which occasionally resulted in someone coming to faith and joining the church.

Summary of Findings

This chapter explored how solo pastors describe the benefits of having lay caregiving teams in their congregation, building their ministry sustainability. The data was categorized according to four research questions: the challenges that pastors faced before establishing a caregiving team were collected; the benefits to ministry

sustainability that pastors experienced after establishing a caregiving team were examined; the theological beliefs that motivated pastors to establish a caregiving team; and the exploration of the benefits that a caregiving team had on the congregation through its impact on the caregivers, care receivers, and the community at large.

Solo pastors from a variety of settings faced similar challenges. Since they could not delegate to support staff, they often handled administrative tasks that took away from unique pastoral duties and caring for the emotional and spiritual needs of the congregation. These needs were often more than what a solo pastor could handle, and they struggled to give people the time and attention they wanted. The expectations of the congregation were also a factor in how people were cared for, and the pastors were concerned about how to establish a structure for effective ministry in the future. These challenges led to respondents feeling pressured and stressed in maintaining the demands of the ministry, overwhelmed by the workload, and exhausted to the point of burnout.

Many of the challenges shared were lessened when they established a Stephen Ministry caregiving team, and the ministry helped them have a positive perspective for long-term ministry sustainability. The training and structure of Stephen Ministry allowed pastors to expand care without extra involvement, which freed up time to meet unique pastoral demands they could not meet before. Pastors also reported that because the team was supportive of the work of the ministry, they did not feel as alone. The team opened up new caring opportunities that may have otherwise been missed and naturally provided more discipleship and different levels of care, which relieved responsibilities and expectations pastors had for themselves. Pastors also had a more positive outlook in their ministry because they had less guilt in meeting the needs of the church, they did not feel

as drained in attempting to do too much, and they experienced more joy and confidence in knowing more people were receiving care.

Respondents provided various theological reasons for starting a lay caregiving team in their churches. They believed that the work of the ministry should be shared. Some wanted a way to empower lay people to represent Christ to others, while others felt it was a biblical principle to equip and mobilize lay people to share in the priesthood of the ministry. They also wanted a ministry structure and training rooted in biblical teaching to fulfill their mission of loving God and one another.

Beyond the personal benefits pastors experienced in their ministry, they also benefited because of the positive impact Stephen Ministry made on their congregation and community. Those on the team grew individually by being equipped in using their gifts and experience to care for others. They also grew spiritually as they relied upon God in their relationships with hurting people. Team members grew relationally, becoming a loving, supportive community through their training and ongoing supervision meetings. They used their skills to strengthen relationships with family, coworkers, and others, and often they also became more involved in the life of the church. Those who received care experienced comfort and healing, some became caregivers after the caring relationship ended, and others remained connected to the church community and strengthened their relationships with family and others. Stephen Ministry also helped the entire congregation become more caring and welcoming to outsiders, and those from the community have received care and sometimes have joined the church because of it.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how solo pastors describe the benefits to their ministry sustainability of having lay caregiving teams in their congregation. In Chapter 2, the review of literature explored Ephesians 4:11–13, the use of empathy in client-centered approaches to pastoral care, and forming and maintaining teams. In Chapter 4, ten participants were interviewed, and the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. What challenges to ministry sustainability do pastors face before establishing a caregiving team?
2. What benefits to ministry sustainability do pastors experience after establishing a caregiving team?
3. What theological beliefs help motivate pastors to establish a caregiving team?
4. How do pastors describe the benefits that a caregiving team has on the congregation?
    a. How does a caregiving team benefit those on the team?
    b. How does a caregiving team benefit those receiving care?
    c. How does a caregiving team impact the congregation and community at large?

Summary of the Study and Findings

This study reviewed relevant literature in three areas and analyzed interview data from ten solo pastors from various denominations, ministry settings, and geographic

regions. The literature review consisted of research and analysis across three areas: 1) an exploration of Ephesians 4:11–13, which provides the theological foundation for the role of the laity in the work of the ministry; 2) a look at the use of empathy and client-centered approach to therapeutic care across different helping professions; and 3) a study in forming and maintaining teams by focusing on purpose and accountability, team building, training, and coaching, and ongoing communication within the team and between teams.

This first area of literature analysis examined Ephesians 4:11–13 to see if it provides a direct mandate for pastors to involve congregation members in the work of the ministry. Although there were different viewpoints on the extent of lay participation in the ministry, my conclusion is that the overall context indicates that pastors should support and encourage members of the church to use their gifts to build the body of Christ to be unified, mature, and grow to attain the full reality of Christ. It is justified for pastors to establish and support caregiving teams because clergy are not the only ones with gifts to participate in the ministry.

The second literature review section explored the use of empathy and a client-centered approach to therapeutic care. The methodology of client-centered therapy has been adapted for several helping professions, including pastoral ministry, where clergy can apply this approach to help congregants process emotional pain and grow spiritually. Empathy is a major component of client-centered care, and studies have shown that relating with empathy can improve others' physical and emotional health.

Understanding the importance of empathy and client-centered therapy provides a foundation for the care offered by these caregiving teams. Non-professional lay people can be trained to use client-centered therapeutic approaches to care, which include active listening, offering unconditional positive regard, and empathy. These actions are effective in providing care and support in numerous situations and helping others process difficult thoughts and emotions.

The third literature review section explored practical ways to establish and maintain effective teams. Teams need to have a clear purpose with defined roles and responsibilities. When members know what is expected of them, they can better hold each other accountable for performance. Additionally, there must be time for team building, training, and ongoing coaching to meet their goals. They must also communicate in healthy and positive ways within the team and with others outside of the team. Knowing practical ways to keep teams functioning well is necessary for the effectiveness of establishing and maintaining a caregiving team.

In addition to the literature review area, data collected from participant responses were categorized according to four research questions. First, the challenges that pastors faced before establishing a caregiving team were collected. Second, the benefits to ministry sustainability that pastors experienced after establishing a Stephen Ministry caregiving team were examined. Third, there was a look at the theological beliefs that helped motivate pastors to establish a caregiving team. The last category was the exploration of how a caregiving team benefits the congregation through its impact on the caregivers, care receivers, and the community at large.

Participant data from a variety of settings showed that pastors faced similar challenges. Since they could not delegate to support staff, they often handled administrative tasks that took away from other unique pastoral duties and caring for the emotional and spiritual needs of the congregation. These needs were often more than what a solo pastor could handle, and they struggled to give the amount of time and attention they wanted to give. The expectations of the congregation were also a factor in the ways people were cared for, and the pastors knew an effective structure for future ministry was necessary. These challenges led to respondents being pressured to maintain ministry demands, overwhelmed by the workload, exhausted and nearing burnout.

Many of these challenges were lessened when they established a Stephen Ministry caregiving team, which created hope for long-term ministry sustainability. The training and structure of Stephen Ministry allowed pastors to expand care without extra involvement, which freed up time to meet the unique pastoral demands they could not seem to meet before. Pastors also reported that because the team was supportive of their ministry work, they did not feel as alone in their positions. The team relieved some of the responsibilities pastors had for themselves by opening up new caring opportunities otherwise missed and naturally provided more discipleship and different levels of care. Pastors also had a more positive outlook in their ministry because they harbored less guilt in meeting the needs of the church, they did not feel as drained in attempting to do too much, and they experienced more joy and confidence in knowing more people were receiving care.

There were various theological reasons respondents had for starting a lay caregiving team in their churches. All of them believed that the work of the ministry

should be shared. Some wanted a way to empower lay people to represent Christ to others, while several others believed it was a biblical principle to equip and mobilize lay people to share in the priesthood of the ministry. Pastors also wanted a ministry structure and training that would be rooted in biblical teaching to help fulfill the mission of the church by loving God and one another.

Beyond the personal benefits pastors experienced in their ministry, they also benefited from the positive impact the Stephen Ministry team made on their congregation and community. Those on the team grew individually by being equipped in how to use their gifts and experience to care for others. They also grew spiritually as they relied upon God in their relationships with hurting people. Team members also grew relationally and became a loving, supportive community through their training and ongoing supervision meetings. They used their skills to strengthen relationships with family, coworkers, and others, and often they also became more involved in the life of the church. Those who received care experienced comfort and healing, some became caregivers after the caring relationship ended, and others were more closely connected to the church community, family, and others. The Stephen Ministry team also influenced the entire congregation to become more caring and welcoming to outsiders, and those from the community also received care and sometimes joined the church because of it.

Discussion of Findings

Concern for the long-term ministry sustainability of pastors has drastically increased. Studies show that a disturbing number of pastors are feeling exhausted and burned out trying to meet the needs of their congregations. When they feel drained, they

tend to cut themselves off emotionally from the congregation and sometimes leave vocational ministry.

This problem is more pronounced with solo pastors, who often take on the sole responsibility of the spiritual, emotional, practical, and administrative needs of the congregation. A recent study has shown that pastors of smaller churches, who tend to be in solo pastoral positions, are more likely to consider leaving the ministry.[364] This is a major issue because the vast majority of pastors and churches are in this category.[365]

There are resources available that provide practical ideas for self-care and spiritual renewal for clergy. While these are beneficial to build ministry resilience, problems still exist. Most do not address the structural problems at the source of the exhaustion and stress, which means pastors still have the burden of making the congregation healthier and more supportive of their ministerial work. For pastors already feeling overworked, this may seem like an impossible task. Church members must take an active role addressing the structural issues pastors are facing for their long-term ministry sustainability.

In this section, through the literature and interview research, I identified four principles that churches and pastors can embrace that will promote long-term ministry sustainability. First, pastors should not be the only ones who do the work of the ministry. Second, there needs to be an effective team established to expand and sustain pastoral care. Third, the caregiving team can provide high-quality ministry when they are equipped to offer empathy and client-centered care. Fourth, pastors will experience

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[364] Hartford Institute, "Exhausted All the Time," 16.

[365] Chaves and Eagle, "Religious Congregations."

several benefits to long-term ministry sustainability when this team is sharing ministry responsibilities.

Pastors Should Not Be the Only Ones Doing the Work of Ministry

I spoke with pastors representing several regions of the United States in urban, suburban, and rural settings. They came from churches that varied in church polity and theological perspectives; their churches started as a church plant or had been in existence for over a century; and they had forty to several hundred congregants worshiping on a Sunday morning. Although they came from different contexts, these solo pastors shared common struggles and challenges in long-term ministry sustainability.

In addition to leading, preaching, and teaching, they often took on administrative responsibilities and other tasks around the church. These individuals went into the ministry because they had a heart for service, which made it easy to pick up more and more responsibilities. As one pastor said, "Congregations will let [pastors] do as much as they're willing to do. And then the pastor gets overwhelmed."

This dynamic is especially challenging when pastors are unable to meet all the caregiving needs of the church. The challenge becomes harder when the church experiences growth or during seasons when there are suddenly more crises and urgent needs. The pastors I spoke with often had to choose to not give the necessary attention to their other pastoral responsibilities to meet caregiving needs or decide that certain individuals were not going to get the pastoral support they needed. Seeing that she could not reach every person she wanted to, one pastor expressed, "That's the piece that makes me feel like I'm not doing a good job…I'm not getting to all the pains."

On top of that, pastors also struggled to then give time and energy to their own families. One pastor made a statement shared by several others: “I could be out every night and still not be getting everything done. And then I’m out every night and feeling the demands of my family. And that just becomes one more demand.”

The ministry demands take their toll on pastors. They have a call to care for their congregation, but when they see emotional and spiritual needs being unmet, ministry becomes stressful and exhausting. One pastor commented, “Sustainability becomes an issue when you feel in your vocation you’re called to something, but you cannot do it.” Another said, “It can kind of get overwhelming and so you need some help.” One pastor in a growing church admitted that he would feel guilty about not wanting to hear another problem from a congregant and ask himself, “How come I don’t have a certain heart? Why don’t I care about people more?” Over time, such exhaustion can lead to burnout and resentment. A pastor reflected on why she had become more irritable with her family: “I’m stretched too thin…. I completely understand why some pastors pack it in.”

While there will always be a great number of ministry needs, Ephesians 4 provides directions for sharing the burden with others. Leading up to Chapter 4, Paul reminds everyone in the church of their spiritual blessings. The first six verses of Chapter 4 emphasize the need for everyone in the church to walk together in unity. This is followed by Verses 7–16, a section that begins with how “each one” receives grace “according to the measure of Christ’s gift,” and ends with how “each part” assists the body in its growth “when each part is working properly.” The thrust of this passage is that all members of the congregation play an important role in carrying out the mission of the church.

It seems unlikely that the establishment of church offices is given in Verse 11: "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers." The list points to specific gifts because preaching, teaching, and leading are necessary for the equipping of others to do the ministerial work stated in Verse 12.

There is much disagreement over the relationship between the three prepositional phrases in Ephesians 4:12, "*to* equip the saints *for* the work of ministry, *for* building up the body of Christ." Are the groups listed in Verse 11 to do the work of the ministry themselves or to equip others to join in the ministry work? There are several reasons I believe this verse calls members to be trained and mobilized to join in the ministry.

First is the overall context of the verse. A major theme of the Ephesians letter is how Christ has given riches and gifts to all the saints (1:3–19; 3:20), and in Chapter 4, Paul emphasizes how these gifts are to be used to build up the body of Christ. Peter Thomas O'Brien contends that if only those listed in Verse 11 are doing all the work of ministry, then it deviates from Paul's message throughout the letter that everyone is gifted to contribute.[366] Such a ministry restriction also contradicts Verse 16, which requires every individual to participate in building up the body: "from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

Second, the context helps to translate the word καταρτισμὸν, which could be translated as "perfecting" or "equipping." The latter translation is preferable because Verse 12 describes the work it takes for the church to pursue the goal stated in Verse 13, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to

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[366] O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 303.

mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The use of this word to mean "equipping" is found in other Scripture references including 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Galatians 6:1, 1 Thessalonians 3:10, and Luke 6:40. Ephesians 4:11–12 describes people with specific gifts equipping others to use their gifts effectively.

Third, the "ministry" mentioned in Verse 12 does not refer to a special service designated for appointed offices or officers of the church. Because there is no article in the Greek text before the word, it should be understood as a general ministry that everyone is tasked to do as in Ephesians 5:19, Romans 15:14, 1 Corinthians 14:26, Philippians 1:15, Colossians 3:16, and 1 Thessalonians 5:11. Harold Hoehner cites several other verses that use this word as a service to the Lord and others, and he concludes, "Gifted individuals are given to the church for the purpose of preparing all the saints toward the goal of service or ministry....The believer is being readied to become involved in ministry to others."[367] In addition, all groups are tasked with "speaking the truth in love" in Verse 15, which involves edifying others with the truth of the gospel, so it would not seem congruent if the ministry in Verse 12 is limited to only a select group.

Every person is gifted for service, and they are being prepared for the responsibility of building up the body of Christ. Even Henry Paul Hamann, who argues that Verse 12 refers to certain officers ministering to the church, writes that these verses "do not carry implications of superiority, aristocracy, and lack of lay activity."[368]

It makes sense that Verses 11 and 12 are a call for all lay people to be doing ministry, because the goals stated in Verse 13 are too weighty for only a select few to

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[367] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 550–51.

[368] Hamann, "The Translation of Ephesians 4," 46.

carry out. The pastors I spoke with believed this, practically and theologically. From the Catholic priest to the congregational pastor, everyone stressed that the work of ministry should not be solely reliant upon them. The Presbyterian pastor went so far as to say that these verses in Ephesians made it "mandatory" to equip people to actively serve as part of the body of the church, and a Lutheran pastor said if he is not equipping others to do ministry, then "I'm not doing what the Lord says in His Word."

When the work of the ministry is shared by others in the church body, pastors are relieved from attempting to do it all on their own. Once they had Stephen Ministry set up as a caregiving team in their congregation, the participants trusted the team to expand ministerial care to others without any extra involvement. They described their team ministry as "gratifying" and felt more at "rest" and "less guilty" for not meeting congregational needs. The team gave pastors more time to perform the unique responsibilities of their office. One pastor shared how he used to sit with a person going through a difficult time and thought, "I don't have the time. How am I going to do this?" After the caregiving team was established, he said it was a pleasure to meet with someone struggling because he knew he could get them consistent care through his church's Stephen Ministry. Another pastor described his relationship with the Stephen Ministry team as "working arm-in-arm" in the ministry, while another said, "They almost feel like colleagues…. [T]hey get it."

There are practical and theological reasons why pastors should not do the ministry by themselves. This dynamic may require a shift in expectations for congregations and clergy, but it is necessary for pastors' long-term ministry sustainability and churches' health and growth. Members of the church are obligated to use their gifts to assist the

pastor, and they cannot rely on pastors to take care of all the needs of the church. Pastors, while retaining their unique role, have a responsibility to equip others for ministry work, and they cannot sustain the idea that they can or must meet all the care needs.

Establishing an Effective Team to Expand Pastoral Care

Establishing lay teams equipped for ministry is one significant way to expand pastoral care. Based on my research on teams, a caregiving team requires key characteristics to be effective. It needs to have a structure built on a clear purpose and accountability for carrying it out. Individuals need to have fostered trust and relational connection with each other to function cooperatively. Team members need to be well-trained and coached to continue providing high-quality care. The team also needs to communicate well between members and with others outside of the team.

Although these principles apply to lay caregiving teams, I believe they can also be used for church staff, elders, deacons, and others in paid or ordained offices. Pastors can consider how well the ministry's purpose has been communicated and how the team's structure holds members accountable to carry out their roles. Staff and officers need opportunities to foster relational connections with each other and have sufficient training to fulfill their responsibilities successfully. They should also have systems in place to effectively communicate with other ministry teams in the church. If staff and officers function more like the effective teams described, then they will be better able to support the pastoral work of the church and will be in a good position to cooperate efforts with lay caregiving teams.

Structure Built on Purpose and Accountability

Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith suggest that the best teams invest time exploring, shaping, and agreeing on a purpose, which motivates members to put extra effort into their collective performance.[369] General Stanley McChrystal writes that a team must know its purpose so members can work toward the same goal, especially when the goal may change in complex and unpredictable environments.[370] When a caregiving team knows the boundaries of how to provide care, members are more invested in meeting with those who are struggling, and they will have a better idea of how to handle unpredictable situations that come up in ministry. Also, according to one study by William Kahn and another by researchers working with the Department of Clinical Research Informatics at the National Institute of Health Clinical Center, having a purpose helps team members to have a more all-around positive experience with higher levels of productivity and collaboration.[371]

The pastors I spoke with saw this play out in their Stephen Ministry teams. They expressed confidence in how the team was functioning because they had a clear purpose and structure. One pastor said, "I leave it all just as Stephen Ministry is designed and I trust the process." Another pastor said, "You have a shared experience…a shared vision of ministry. You have a shared understanding of confidentiality, of listening, of walking with someone."

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[369] Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 49–50.

[370] McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 99.

[371] Kahn, "Engagement and Disengagement at Work," 703–4; McKeeby et al., "Reviving Purpose," 6–9.

There also needs to be accountability in the team to follow through with carrying out its purpose. Katzenbach and Smith write, "No group ever becomes a team until it can hold itself accountable as a team."[372] Mutual accountability within a team may be the most effective way to improve and maintain the team's success. One study concluded that organizations benefit from individuals holding each other accountable for their work and communicating feedback to improve performance.[373] Melissa Raffoni suggests that all members of a team should have regular check-ins for feedback and team meetings to stay aligned with the team's purpose to evaluate what is working and not working well.[374] Patrick Lencioni says that without accountability, members will put their individual needs above the team, resulting in team divisions and inattention to collective results.[375]

One reason the pastors were able to trust the Stephen Ministry team to expand their ministry capacity was because of its built-in accountability through peer supervision meetings. These twice-monthly small groups allowed Stephen Ministers to check in, confidentially talk about the relational dynamics with their care receiver, and accept guidance and input from others. These meetings were more than making sure everyone was providing appropriate care, though. One pastor said that the supervision meetings were also time for prayer and offering support and, "It has blossomed into more than just working together. It blossomed into doing life together." Another pastor said the regular meetings deepened the faith of all the team members.

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[372] Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 60.

[373] Arnold, Hannan, and Tafkov, "Mutual Monitoring and Team Member Communication," 17.

[374] Raffoni, "Does Your Team Have an Accountability Problem?," 6.

[375] Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions*, 189.

This accountability is crucial for members to continue providing quality care and avoid ministry burnout. I have been a part of and encountered ministry opportunities where the team rarely meets and no one follows up with how its members are doing. Inevitably, the team loses focus, people feel isolated, and over time, they become less committed to the ministry.

Trust and Healthy Relationships

Another key characteristic of an effective team is that its members can develop trust and healthy relationships with each other. Amy Edmondson notes that members of a team "learn how to team" when they acquire skills to ask questions clearly and foster trust.[376] McChrystal agrees that trust is essential for teams to meet their responsibilities because then teammates know each other intimately and function with high-level adaptability and efficacy. He writes, "Great teams are less like 'awesome machines,' than awesome organisms."[377] Lencioni writes that teams that do not develop trust and healthy relationships "waste inordinate amounts of time and energy managing their behaviors and interactions…[members] dread team meetings and are reluctant to take risks in asking for or offering assistance to others."[378]

Pastors told me how members of the Stephen Ministry team strongly trusted each other. This trust grew as individuals went through training together, which included class discussions, role plays, retreats, prayer, and personal sharing. One pastor said that this

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[376] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 14.

[377] McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams*, 120.

[378] Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions*, 196.

process created a strong community: “The team ends up loving each other, supporting each other, praying for each other.” Another pastor said in addition to the training and preparation, the continual peer supervision meetings helped them to be a “close-knit group…battle buddies, trusted friends.” Other pastors noted how the experience brought together people who did not know each other before, and the relationships formed in the team may not have happened otherwise. These close connections made a safe and supportive environment for lay people to gather up the resolve to enter into difficult situations and continue to provide care for as long as needed.

Training and Coaching

Proper training is another key characteristic of effective teams. Stephen Ministry teams use a fully scripted curriculum that includes lectures, devotions, activities, discussions, and videos to equip members on how to provide one-to-one emotional and spiritual support. The training encompasses the three main learning initiatives for a team: knowledge, which provides the foundational understanding and context of the team’s purpose; skills that are specific means by which the team will carry out its purpose; and attitudes, which include how individuals will relate as a team.[379] Research has shown that solid training enhances the team’s performance with the tools to work together for a common purpose. When that training establishes psychological safety, members are more willing to speak up and contribute more freely.[380]

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[379] Linhardt, Bisbey, and Eduardo, “Science and Practice of Team Training,” 71.

[380] Lacerenza et al., “Team Development Interventions,” 519–24.

Pastors noted how important training was for the individuals on the team, and some made the point that they would have been limited by time and expertise to develop a complete curriculum for the team on their own. They noted how certain aspects of the training were fundamental to the quality of care offered, such as listening skills and helping the person to process their emotions and the situation rather than offering solutions to fix the circumstances. Pastors also appreciated how the training included ways to identify and maintain healthy boundaries since caregivers must keep from becoming emotionally enmeshed in the other person's problems. One pastor quoted a key principle of the training: "You're the caregiver, but God is the cure-giver." In other words, members of the team were trained on how to provide care and support, but they knew they had to rely on God for the results of healing. The training also gave members the confidence to contribute to the ministry. Another pastor said that people in her congregation had the gift and calling to care, but until the training, they did not feel equipped. She said, "Once they're equipped, oh my goodness! They are so empowered and they feel so comfortable."

A piece of the training is ongoing coaching. While some scholars emphasize that coaching should be primarily on maintaining safety in the team, J. Richard Hackman and Ruth Wageman suggest that coaches address a team's task performance. This aspect includes how individuals are motivated, provides consultation as conditions change, and sharpens members' skills and knowledge. They contend that if performance skills are sharpened, then interpersonal skills improve since group members relate better after they

have received high-performance feedback.[381] When people feel competent in what they are doing, there will be fewer frustrations, blame, and tensions on the team.

Several pastors told me that one way they contributed to their church's Stephen Ministry was by offering relational guidance and formal continuing education. Typically, the Stephen Leaders approached them with an issue or question, and the pastor provided insight that the Stephen Leaders would then bring back to the group. One pastor shared how affirmed she was when asked to teach a topic to the team, and then she witnessed how those presentations helped team members personally grow and deepen the relationships with their care receivers. Another pastor said he appreciated the team asking for his input because, "It was helpful just to give people a glimpse of what you know what pastoral care can look like." By periodically giving the team coaching and guidance, pastors can help members improve their skills and ensure that they are caring in ways that reflect their own approaches to pastoral care. It also gives the team more confidence in providing care when their spiritual leaders show ongoing support and share insight from their experiences.

I have often seen training as a missing piece in mobilizing people for ministry. It is common that church leaders and other congregants who express interest in caring for others are asked to do so with little to no equipping. This can result in well-intentioned caregivers responding to people's pain with platitudes, jumping to solutions, shifting the conversation's focus to their own stories, and other actions that cause more harm.

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[381] Hackman and Wageman, "Theory of Team Coaching," 273–74.

Communication

Communication is another key to establishing and maintaining effective teams. Katzenbach and Smith stress that teams should "invest just as much time and effort crafting their working approach as shaping their purpose."[382] Edmondson states that healthy communication involves candidness as team members engage each other directly and openly, while also listening, seeking feedback, asking for help, and offering suggestions.[383] One study showed that team members who communicated by using affirmation, active listening, and positive regard for others directly correlated to how well they performed their tasks.[384] This aspect closely ties in the trust, training, and team building described above, because, as Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries suggests, when teammates trust each other, they can handle complicated issues with openness, honesty, consistency, competency, and fairness. These are all necessary traits as caregivers support each other while coming alongside those dealing with painful and complicated situations.

Because the Stephen Ministry training includes discussions and role-playing activities that build on communication skills, the team uses those skills not only to relate to their care receivers but also to relate to one another. Pastors remarked on how their teams had "deep connections" with one another and a "camaraderie" and developed a "community." One pastor credited the communication within their ongoing supervision groups as the way they learned from one another about how to provide care. The format

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[382] Katzenbach and Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 56.

[383] Edmondson, *Teaming*, 53.

[384] Carmeli, Dutton, and Hardin, "Respect as an Engine," 1021–39.

and content of training laid the foundation of healthy communication, and consistent meetings built on it.

Several studies support the idea that the most successful teams effectively communicate outside the team members as well.[385] Since Stephen Ministry is designed to be an extension of the pastoral ministry, teams function best when they dialogue with the pastor and others to coordinate efforts to carry out the church's mission.

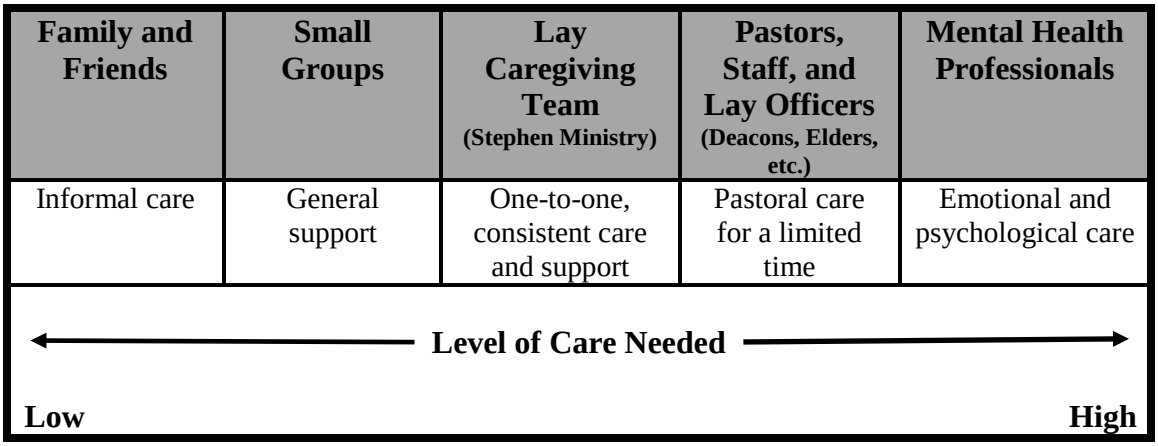

Figure 1: How a Lay Caregiving Team Fits with the Church's Existing Structures

Some pastors talked about how Stephen Ministry worked alongside elders and deacons to provide a different type of care. For example, the Presbyterian pastor described his deacons as "junior firemen" who would deal with immediate, emergency needs but then hand off the longer-term needs to the Stephen Ministry team. The Congregational pastor said the Stephen Ministry team communicated with other church leaders to identify needs for care in the church and community. Beyond these instances, I

[385] Ancona and Caldwell, "Bridging the Boundary," 649.

see more potential for Stephen Ministry teams to coordinate with other ministry teams, such as small groups, men's and women's fellowship groups, prayer teams, or mercy and outreach teams. These ministries could be sources of referrals for care, and the Stephen Ministry team could help those receiving care get connected with groups offering other types of service.

The pastors I spoke with greatly appreciated how the team consistently communicated with them. Some pastors chose to be more involved with matching Stephen Ministers with care receivers, while others trusted the Stephen Leaders to make those calls. Regardless of how involved the pastors were, they stayed informed of the caregiving needs and how they were being met when the Stephen Leaders approached them for regular conversations. This communication kept the team and pastor working well together, and as one pastor said, "You have an awareness that those people are there, and their understanding of ministry is the same as your understanding of ministry."

Equipping people and organizing them in a caregiving team can substantially expand pastoral care, thus helping the pastor in long-term ministry sustainability. For that team to be effective, though, my research shows that the team needs to have a clear purpose and accountability, build trust thorough training and ongoing coaching, and maintain healthy communication. If these elements are weak or lacking, the team may not function well and could be difficult to sustain over time.

Effective Equipping Involves Empathy and Client-Centered Care

The third principle I have pulled from my research is that the lay caregiving team can provide high-quality care when they are equipped to offer empathy and client-centered care, which, along with biblical teaching, is what Stephen Ministry training is

based on. Numerous studies show that the client-centered approach to therapeutic care is effective in the health care field, social work, and religious institutions. The advantage of equipping lay people with the skills used in client-centered care is that they do not need special psychological, psychiatric, medical, or even deep religious knowledge to offer active listening, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. Individuals can offer quality care if they can relate to someone by letting them talk freely, express attitudes, and allow them to safely discover inconsistencies in their thinking and beliefs.[386]

There are several compelling reasons why a client-centered approach to care is consistent with pastoral care. First, it helps avoid viewing other people as objects to be evaluated, diagnosed, and fixed.[387] This is just one aspect of Stephen Ministry training that pastors told me they appreciated. They knew Stephen Ministers were not pressured to give their care receivers advice or were expected to have all the answers. One pastor said he was glad they were focused on the person's struggles instead of being "solution-oriented," since no one can work out the problems for another, but they can help the person find solutions on their own and trust God to bring healing.

Another reason client-centered care is consistent with pastoral care is that it creates room for struggling individuals to process emotional pain and issues they may try to avoid otherwise. If the questions are strictly spiritual, or the caregiver comes in with a specific agenda, the care receiver may not have the freedom to explore difficult emotions and thoughts. Giving freedom in the relationship helps the struggling person open up to see God's grace working in their lives. One pastor noted that because of the dynamics in

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[386] Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, 72–74.

[387] Rogers, "Therapeutic Personality Change," 99.

the caring relationship, Stephen Ministers "can make [the hurting person] more open to…be a follower of Christ." Another pastor related how a care receiver lost both of her parents in a short period and seemed stuck in her grief. After being matched with a Stephen Minister, the pastor said, her demeanor changed, and she was more hopeful in talking about eternity and her faith.

A third reason effective pastoral care can be offered by using client-centered care skills is that the skills promote a non-judgmental, confidential, and safe environment for care receivers to explore their situation and feelings through unconditional positive regard and active listening—both of which are taught in Stephen Ministry training. A couple of pastors mentioned how unconditional positive regard may have contributed to keeping people from spiraling into self-harm. Other pastors brought up how care receivers felt loved and valued by having someone check in with them weekly.

Pastors also mentioned how active listening was a skill that needed to be learned, and it was a key component in avoiding advice-giving, pat answers, or other dismissive responses. The skill was used outside of the group as well. Pastors noted that team members told them that learning how to listen better improved their work and family relationships.

Through unconditional positive regard and active listening, Stephen Ministers help their care receivers process their emotions. One pastor shared how a care receiver felt like they were "unburdened" and did not need to unload on their family as much. Another pastor described the care receiver as being able to process their situation this way: "You see the light return to their eyes and light return to their life…to move beyond

the darkness that [was] associated with that episode. You see them begin to thrive again just in life in general."

Being empathetic is a key skill for these relationships. Carl Rogers describes empathy as the ability to sense the other person's perspective as if it were the therapist's own, without losing the "as if" quality.[388] Others have described empathy as being "with" clients in their thinking, being on the same track and joining them in experiencing their world, momentarily identifying with clients through imagining what it's like to be them, and the ability to see through the eyes of someone different.[389] Studies have shown that empathy allows for relational connections that do not already exist. One study showed that those who are dying in the hospital are more likely to reach out to empathetic chaplains, and empathy gives chaplains the ability to grasp experiences difficult for the patients to articulate.[390]

The pastors I spoke with credited the development of empathy skills with making a difference in how team members related to others. Some pastors talked about how those who had gone through difficult life circumstances were drawn to care for those struggling with similar challenges. Several noted that the Stephen Ministry team was more sensitive to the needs around them and would take the initiative to get people connected with care. One pastor shared how going through the training helped her to be more intentional about catching up with people and getting to know them on a deeper, more personal level.

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[388] Rogers, 99.

[389] Bohart, "Productive Client Thinking," 67; Clark, "Empathy," 349; Riess and Neporent, *The Empathy Effect*, 23.

[390] van Dijke et al., "'Talk About Empathy,'" 23.

Overall, a client-centered approach to care allowed lay caregivers to come alongside those who were hurting and offer them a safe, non-judgmental, empathetic presence without attempting to rush in to solve their problems, offer platitudes or other dismissive responses, or become entangled in others' emotional pain. Lay people did not need a professional background to use these skills. Plus, their caring efforts reflected Christian values. These benefits can make it easier for pastors to trust the type of care offered by the team.

Benefits to Long-Term Ministry Sustainability

The final principle builds off the first three. Pastors experience benefits to long-term ministry sustainability when they share ministry responsibilities with a team. Rather than equipping individuals one-by-one, or hiring more clergy, which is unfeasible for the majority of churches, pastors can establish a caregiving team that is structured and well-trained to expand pastoral care.

Many challenges to long-term ministry sustainability were addressed when pastors and their church leadership started Stephen Ministry. Once the team was set up, pastors remarked how it did not require extra involvement from them, allowing them to meet other responsibilities they may not have been able to do otherwise. Some were able to concentrate more on leading and casting a vision for the entire congregation, while others had more time to handle pastoral care crises as the team handled ongoing needs. Pastors also related how a team made them feel less alone in the ministry, and that the Stephen Ministry structure helped them feel confident that the team would last. Stephen Ministry also provided a resource for the appropriate people needed, which relieved concerns that people were receiving inadequate care or none at all.

The most notable direct effect that having Stephen Ministry made on the pastor was their overall outlook on their ministry. One said it "heartens me…gives me a reason to get up and do it again tomorrow." Another said it gave him "peace of mind" knowing a person he has not gotten to visit was being taken care of by a Stephen Minister. They did not feel as overwhelmed, stressed, or even resentful of the growing needs of care around them. A pastor told me that he no longer felt "a simmering sense of anger" when people require care, while before he used to "feel a sense of desperation of 'I can't hear one more [crisis].'" He added that it also affected his marriage, "Honestly, our marriage is better because I don't feel as drained all the time. I don't have that sense of having the life sucked out of me….Because of Stephen Ministry, my marriage is better. I have something to offer her."

These benefits to long-term ministry sustainability come from applying the message of Ephesians 4:12—to use the gifts given by Christ and to equip members of the church for the works of the ministry. The verse also implies that pastors cannot assume members of the church will automatically use their gifts to do ministry or use them well. They must be equipped by the teachers, pastors, and other leaders mentioned in Verse 11 who have the skills to do the equipping. All ten of the pastors I interviewed referred to the necessity of training and team structure for successful ministry mobilization.

In the process, pastors benefit because they are no longer attempting to take on ministry responsibility that is supposed to be shared. In addition, they are also better able to work towards the goal of Verse 13: to build up the body of Christ "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Pastors talked about how having a Stephen Ministry team brought "unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God." There was unity in the ministry as Stephen Leaders worked with pastors to find care receivers and match them with Stephen Ministers. It also gave pastors opportunities to share their experiences and theological insights to shape the care that the team provided. Pastors felt reassured that the team would continue expanding pastoral care should they retire or as they began new ministry opportunities.

There is unity in how the team functioned as allies to the pastor. This is especially important for solo pastors, as one said, "It's helpful long-term to have a team of people, that you're not going about this alone. Doing anything alone for a long time is difficult, and so if you can do it with people, that's going to make [ministry] more sustainable." Another pastor said he was thankful the team shared his understanding of the ministry, which gave him confidence in his position, and a third pastor felt less stressed because "I've got a group of people around me that can take up the care baton and run with it. I don't feel that I've got to push myself beyond my capacity and wear myself out."

Stephen Ministry also helped team members "to mature" in their faith. It gave lay people a ministry in which they could use their gifts alongside those who were in an ordained office. Pastors saw how those who were weaker in their faith grew deeper through the experience of being in the ministry. A couple of pastors thought there were members of the team who may not have stayed connected to the church had they not gotten involved with Stephen Ministry. One pastor said he saw the team members' training and service make them depend more on God to guide their words and to be used in ministry work.

Through increased participation in the ministry, the church was able to continue growing "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." When there is healing, the body of Christ grows stronger. There were caregiving opportunities that happened because of Stephen Ministry that may not have happened otherwise. Pastors mentioned that some people would not come to them for certain needs but felt more comfortable sharing them with a lay person. There was sometimes a barrier for someone of the opposite gender to share deeply personal issues with the pastor, so a Stephen Minister of the same gender could be a caring presence instead. A Stephen Minister may also step in when there are barriers because of the relationship between the pastor and a congregant. One pastor shared that his mother had met with a Stephen Minister, and she could share the emotions and struggles she would not feel comfortable sharing with him.

Pastors want their churches to continue to grow more like Christ and to make a difference in the community around them, and they saw the Stephen Ministry team contribute to making that happen. Those who received care remained connected with their Stephen Minister after the caring relationship formally ended, and one even returned care when his Stephen Minister started having health issues. Others who received care saw changes in the relationships with their family and friends.

The congregation as a whole was influenced by the presence of the Stephen Ministry team. It raised people's awareness of those who may need support. It made churches more welcoming and contributed to churches experiencing numerical growth. The body of Christ continued to grow.

The love of Christ through the team reached the surrounding community as well. Congregants were more confident reaching out to offer care to people who had no church home, and some came to faith through receiving care from the Stephen Ministry team.

Thus, pastoral care, discipleship, and outreach are expanded by having a trained Stephen Ministry team, which helps pastors stay in ministry long term. It has also benefited both them and lay people to work together to build up the body of Christ.

Recommendations for Practice

In light of the findings described above, I have recommendations for practice for denominational leaders, congregation members, and pastors.

Denominational Leaders

An article in the *Washington Post* in the summer of 2023 described the clergy job market as a "train wreck" because an expected wave of pastors would be retiring in the coming decades and fewer seminary students were graduating to replace them.[391] The Hartford Institute on Religion Research reported that over half of religious leaders in their research considered leaving the ministry, nearly a 20 percent increase from a study they did in 2021.[392] The potential shortfall has been predicted for both Catholic and Protestant churches, and the issue is becoming more urgent. Solo pastors in particular are more likely to consider leaving the ministry than those in larger churches with several

[391] "Churches Shrink and Pastors Retire," *Washington Post.*

[392] Hartford Institute, "Exhausted All the Time," 2.

staff members.[393] Regardless of their context, though, pastors are facing many issues that threaten their long-term ministry sustainability.

Many of the reasons why pastors consider leaving the profession, and why people may avoid becoming clergy in the first place, have to do with the growing demands of the ministry. If pastors are not able to find healthy ways to cope with the challenges or find practical solutions to address the underlying causes, they may leave, or, if they stay, may experience burnout or depression.

There are several practical actions that denominational leaders can take to help pastors stay in the ministry for the long term. They can work to check in with them more regularly, they can encourage sabbaticals, or they can offer training and exercises for self-coping and spiritual renewal. As valuable as these are, however, none of these address the vast number of pastoral care needs that pastors shoulder.

Many of the pastors I spoke with described their pastoral situation as overwhelming, stressful, being stretched too thin, and exhausting. After establishing Stephen Ministry, they described their situation as heartening, relieved, more at peace, and having more positive feelings about long-term ministry.

It will not work to simply encourage pastors to develop a caregiving team in their congregations to help take on some of the ministry burdens. That approach only adds more to their plate. In addition to creating the structure and training for such a team, pastors must then train leaders for the team, which may create an unsustainable situation where the team becomes dependent upon pastors for day-to-day leadership. Or, because of limitations in resources and time, the pastor may opt to give little to no training to a

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[393] Peter Smith, "US Pastors Struggle," *AP News*.

loose group of individuals to provide care. Again, this is an unsustainable model, because, without adequate training and accountability, the care offered may be insufficient, or worse, it may cause more harm. Plus, regardless of the level of training, individuals attempting to do ministry without a supportive team will most likely face similar issues that solo pastors have in the ministry, such as exhaustion and burnout, creating a high turnover rate of caregivers.

Instead, I encourage denominational leaders to promote a ministry system that includes structure, training, and built-in support so it can operate alongside the pastor without requiring much more involvement. As this research shows, Stephen Ministry is a viable option. Even if they choose something other than Stephen Ministry, denominational leaders should consider how to provide churches the means to equip lay people for high-quality ministry work and have them function in a supportive and structured team.

Pastors may not initiate the request for such a team, believing that by doing so they show weakness or create concern in those who oversee them. In addition, small churches operate with tight budgets, so asking them to fund something like Stephen Ministry may not be possible. This is where denominational leaders can allocate resources to support these pastors and the churches they oversee. By doing so, they can make long-term ministry sustainability more likely for pastors and slow down the losses in the number of clergy.

There is another possible benefit for denominational leaders to consider. If lay people are properly trained for the work of the ministry, and they experience meaningful ministry through offering pastoral care to hurting people, some of them may be moved to

use their gifts in vocational ministry. Church members becoming a part of something like Stephen Ministry could inspire them to enroll in seminary and pursue a ministry career.

Therefore, I think it would be beneficial for denominational leaders to look at setting aside funds for congregations to start a lay caregiving ministry such as Stephen Ministry and then discuss the benefits of long-term ministry sustainability a caregiving team can provide with the church's pastors, lay church leaders, and members. By helping a church catch the vision for a caregiving team and providing the support to get it started, denominational leaders can make a huge impact on keeping pastors in the vocation and possibly add more for the future.

Congregation Members

When the pastor struggles, the congregation is affected. Some overwhelmed clergy may emotionally distance themselves from the congregation as a protective strategy. Others who are beginning to burn out and become depressed because of unrealistic expectations are less able to support those under their care. If the pastor leaves the church or the ministry, the transition to a new pastor can be lengthy, difficult, and frustrating, especially when there is already a shortage of pastors. The process is even more challenging for small churches with one pastor, where a pastoral change can bring instability and uncertainty for the church's future. Therefore, congregations should do whatever they can to ensure the health and well-being of their pastors.

Congregations also have an obligation to care for their pastors. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13, "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work." In 1 Timothy 5:17, he writes, "Let the elders who rule well be

considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." Galatians 6:6 says, "Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches." The common message is that those receiving teaching and guidance should honor their leaders and share what is necessary to support their ministry.

For these reasons, congregations need to look for ways to promote long-term ministry sustainability for their pastors. This may include measures such as holding the pastor accountable for taking regular days off or providing resources for spiritual renewal and managing stress. Yet these measures alone do not address structural issues that may cause exhaustion and burnout. Dr. Tracey Dawson recommends training and resources for other staff and lay leaders so they can work more effectively with the pastor.[394]

Studies have shown what this can look like. One study said that clergy repeatedly expressed a need for others to walk beside them in solving problems, to "be available," "carry some of the load," and provide "active support not in words but in deeds."[395] Another study showed that clergy experiencing support from their congregations reported greater personal accomplishment in the ministry and overall positive mental health, while those who perceived their congregations as making too many demands reported higher levels of negative mental health traits.[396] In a 2021 survey of 345 pastors in 27 countries, the greatest need pastors reported is sharing responsibilities with others in the church.[397]

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[394] Dawson, "Whose Problem Is Clergy Burnout?," 23.

[395] Meek et al., "Maintaining Personal Resiliency," 343.

[396] Proeschold-Bell et al., "The Glory of God," 717.

[397] Faithlife Corporation, "2021 Pastoral Mental Health Report," 11.

When congregation members volunteer to take on some of the ministry responsibilities, they alleviate the stress of pastors and create more active support for the overall ministry of the church. This can help pastors feel less responsible for carrying the entire weight of congregational needs.

For some, this may mean a shift in the expectations of their role as church members to look more at how they can participate in the work of the ministry. For others, this may mean evaluating their current involvement to assess if they are fully using their gifts and resources in a way that supports the pastor and the mission of the church.

Establishing and serving in a caregiving team like Stephen Ministry requires time and commitment, but the pastors I spoke with told me several stories of how transformative it was for team members. Stories spoke of greater spiritual maturity, joyful partnering where God is at work, and taking more ownership in helping others to grow in their faith. People saw changes in their work habits and relationships with family and others. Team members became more confident sharing their faith and entering into the messy situations of the people they encountered. Serving on a team also gave everyone involved a loving and supportive community as they served together.

Pastors and those on the team are not the only ones who benefit. The respondents revealed the impact that Stephen Ministry made on their entire congregations. It fostered an environment where people were more sensitive to the needs for care around them, and this drew in people from the community. Notably, many of the pastors contributed part of their churches' numerical growth to having a Stephen Ministry team.

Initially, it was surprising to me that most of the pastors were not the ones who led the charge in getting Stephen Ministry started. However, I soon realized that this

detail did actually fit the context. If pastors are already feeling overwhelmed, they are not going to have the capacity to initiate the creation of a caregiving team and work to get it operating. Rather, congregation members can approach the pastor with a plan in place, including volunteers to lead it and the resources to fund it. This can be a significant step. One pastor shared how the person who drove the process to get the church's Stephen Ministry started felt a sense of fulfillment, thankfulness, and pride, and the pastor said it is now "one of the best things we've got going at our church."

While all the pastors I interviewed were trained as Stephen Leaders, it is not a requirement for clergy to go through leadership training to start a Stephen Ministry team. Even if pastors are not trained as Stephen Leaders, they are always a part of the team because it is an extension of their ministry. It is up to pastors how involved they want to be. This means that a group of lay volunteers can offer to be trained and begin ministry without requiring a significant investment of time from the pastor.

To begin this process, I would suggest that a few individuals in the church meet to define the purpose of the caregiving team and name the ways it can help carry out the mission of the church. This might include talking about the message of Ephesians 4 and other biblical texts like 1 Corinthians 12 that promote the concept of ministry as the responsibility of all God's people. In addition, they can talk about how a caregiving team allows the church to meet more caring needs, reach out to the community, and deepen people's faith through active service. Communicating this message will help recruit others to join the team. Then the lay leaders can approach the pastor with the idea, discuss how involved the pastor wants to be, and, with the pastor's approval, move forward in starting the caregiving team. If they move forward with Stephen Ministry, lay

people would be trained and resourced by the Stephen Ministries organization on how to structure the team and would be provided the entire curriculum to train members to do one-to-one care.

As the research shows, creating an effective, sustainable team requires a clear purpose, accountability, training and coaching, and healthy communication. All the pastors I spoke with appreciated how Stephen Ministry provided all these elements, so if the congregation decides to create its own type of caregiving team, it will need to ensure that these elements are included.

Pastors

Pastors already know the challenges they face in the ministry. As these pastors told me, not being able to meet caring needs can bring up guilt, anxiety, exhaustion, and frustration. One pastor summed up what many others felt about not reaching everyone: "I don't like that because I know that I'm responsible for them. I want to give them time because I care about them and I care about the call that God has put on my life."

Even though they face this tension, some pastors insist that they still should do all the pastoral care themselves. As discussed above, this approach results in negative consequences, and it is not fulfilling all that God calls them to do in their role. When members are not being equipped for ministry, they lose opportunities to mature in their faith and participate in building up the body of Christ. One pastor said that he is sensitive to ways those in an ordained office, including elders or deacons, may inadvertently take away the occasions for lay people to use their gifts for ministry. For example, a person may not be willing or comfortable to offer care because they assume that responsibility is reserved for those in church offices. In some denominations, these offices are restricted to

men and that may leave women uncertain on how they can actively participate by using their gifts in caregiving. By not spreading ministry responsibility to others, congregations and surrounding communities are not reached as well as they could be.

Other pastors may not want to admit that they cannot do it all. They may think asking for additional help is an admission of failure. The reality is that the pastors I spoke with were all positive about getting the caregiving team started and felt more confident in their ministry moving forward. As one pastor told me, "I guess the bottom line is Stephen Ministry keeps me from feeling like a total loser as a pastor because I don't get around as often as I'd like….You know a pastor can't do it all by himself." Pastors need to know that feeling inadequate is normal, and I encourage them to see it as a strength to be open to doing something about finding the help they need, which is often close at hand.

They can begin the process of getting a caregiving team by first casting a vision to the congregation through informal conversations, discussions with church leaders, and mentioning the idea in sermons and other teaching. They may designate one or two lay people who believe in the idea and with whom they have a good relationship to recruit others to join the movement.

If they desire to create a caregiving team from scratch, they will want to ensure there is adequate training involved. Several pastors told me that even though people are gifted, there still needs to be training for them to skillfully use those gifts. This should include reading and role-playing for practicing caregiving skills. In addition, as my research shows, the team will need to have built-in accountability and support for members to continue functioning on a high level. Since these are significant investments of time, energy, and expertise, pastors need to identify others to take the lead in finding

resources that they can use and determine whether these materials align with their ministry approach.

If pastors decide to begin a Stephen Ministry caregiving team, accountability is built in with peer supervision groups, the entire training is provided, and there are resources included in recruiting team members and identifying those who need care. The Stephen Ministry materials have fit well in the ten churches and seven denominations represented in my study, and all the pastors said they appreciated the results of the care offered. Starting a Stephen Ministry team rather than creating a caregiving team from scratch can save a substantial amount of time and investment in equipping people for ministry and expanding care.

Whatever approach they take, I recommend clergy equip and mobilize lay people in a team to expand pastoral care. It will be an integral part of promoting long-term ministry sustainability while benefiting the congregation and the wider community.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on how solo pastors describe the benefits to their ministry sustainability of having lay caregiving teams in their congregation. As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the research can be. Therefore, the pursuit of the following areas of study could be highly valuable.

One recommendation for further research is to interview pastors who are not in a solo position but are actively involved with Stephen Ministry. Since they are working with other pastors in the church, it would be good to compare the challenges they faced before starting a caregiving team and the differences such a team has made. These pastors would also come from larger churches with more resources and possibly more ministry

opportunities. It would be worth investigating how Stephen Ministry functions in that setting and cooperates with other ministry teams.

Another recommendation is to interview more solo pastors from the church backgrounds represented in the study. It would be interesting to hear if other pastors from Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, non-denominational, and congregational churches share similar experiences as the ones in this study.

A third recommendation is to interview solo pastors from churches representing different denominations and church polities. My study did include the three main church governments: episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational. It would be worth more research into how Stephen Ministry works in variations of these structures.

A fourth recommendation is to interview pastors at congregations predominately of a racial or ethnic minority to learn if they experience unique challenges in the ministry or experience other benefits from Stephen Ministry. I was not able to connect with or interview pastors in this setting, although several respondents in my study pastored congregations with some amount of diversity.

A fifth recommendation is to interview spiritual leaders in entities outside of the church. Stephen Ministry has been used to expand chaplains' care in settings like retirement communities, prisons, military bases, colleges, and hospitals. These would be unique ministry contexts to compare with the research I conducted.

A final recommendation is to interview pastors who have developed similar caregiving teams apart from Stephen Ministry. It would be interesting to learn how the benefits compare to those in this study, and how similarly and differently they operate.

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