1-1-2018

Pastoral Leadership for the Small, Rural Church: the Second Career Pastor

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PASTORAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE SMALL, RURAL CHURCH: THE SECOND CAREER PASTOR

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2018

Portland Seminary
George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 15, 2018
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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DEDICATION

To all Small, Rural Churches and their Pastors:

"God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance,

so that by always having enough of everything,

you may share abundantly in every good work."

2 Corinthians 9:8 (NRSV)

To my wife, Denise,

who has always been the voice of encouragement for me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all those who have walked with me in this journey of education and faith.

First, a huge thank you to my wife, who has endured this four-year journey of classes, researching, and writing, supporting me each step of the way. I also thank my children, Jared, Hannah, and Emma, and their families. They all have had to bear with me not always being as readily available through these days. I love you all.

Thank you to my parents, Charles and Ann Lee Nichols, who introduced me to the joy of being part of a small, rural church. Thank you to my in-laws, Delvin and Erma Edwards Coppinger, whose example of service and faithfulness continues to inspire me.

To MaryKate Morse, my lead mentor, and Loren Kerns, Clifford Berger, Heather Rainey, Adam McGuffie, and the rest of the Portland Seminary faculty and staff, a big thank you for guiding me throughout this wonderful adventure.

A very special thank you to my advisor, Carole Spencer. Your counsel and advice, your encouragement and guidance, and especially your good cheer and laughter have been instrumental in helping me persevere through this journey.

To my readers and editors: Tom Palmer, Marlene Reece, Art Sathoff, and Tom Showalter. Your commitment has helped more than you can possibly know. Thank you.

Thank you to the marvelous people of Middle River Friends Church who provided me released time from my pastoral duties during this undertaking. Your support and care have been sustaining values throughout.

And most importantly, thank you to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May this paper and all that I do bring honor to the One and Only God.

EPIGRAPH

"Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Ephesians 4:1b-3 (NRSV)

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Unless otherwise noted, all quotations cited from the Holy Scriptures in this dissertation are from *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).

ABSTRACT

Due to financial and demographic factors plus a shortage of qualified candidates, small, rural churches often struggle to secure and retain pastoral leadership. An examination of these problems from the perspective of the church and that of pastoral candidates reveals the remoteness of location among small, rural churches creates an inability to attract candidates. Faced with college loan indebtedness, young growing families, and the need for full employment for spouses, candidates feel unable to accept a call from a small, rural church.

The dissertation reviews the origins of the church, the historical prevalence of the small, rural church, and the experience of the American church. The characteristics of small, rural churches are outlined and contrasted with those of large, urban churches. Then, the expectations small, rural churches have for pastoral leadership are considered.

To illustrate the components of the problem, the pastoral leadership challenges of the fictitious Augusta Freedom Church are described throughout the paper. This church is a composite of several churches the author has known and observed.

The contention expressed in the dissertation is that second career candidates, retired early from previous work, inspired and able to serve, can provide stable full-time pastoral leadership for small, rural churches. The paper examines other options used by small, rural churches, especially the bi-vocational pastor. What becomes clear is that small, rural churches can choose some form of part-time pastoral leadership or call a young Bible college or seminary graduate and pay these recent graduates what is actually a part-time wage. Both approaches tend to exacerbate the short tenure many small, rural churches currently face.

How can small, rural churches recruit and retain strong pastoral leadership? The intention of the paper addresses this question and offers a solution to reduce the number of unfilled pastoral leadership vacancies among small, rural churches.

INTRODUCTION

Pastoral leadership is always challenging. For the small, rural church, finding and keeping a pastor has become increasingly difficult. The following story, based upon a composite drawn from the stories of several small churches, illustrates this dilemma.

A Common Story: The Augusta Freedom Church

The Augusta Freedom Church is located in an unincorporated village "in the middle of nowhere." Without a pastor for eighteen months, attendance averages about fifty. Mail comes from a town of five hundred located seven miles away, where the elementary school is located. The secondary school is twenty miles away in a community of 1,500 people. The closest "city" of 20,000 is forty-five miles away, the regional center for medical services and shopping. The area's population is declining. After graduation, most young people end up in the state's capitol to work and raise their families.

The church has had five pastors in the last ten years, the longest tenure being three years. All left for larger churches in larger communities or left pastoral ministry altogether, citing the need for employment opportunities for their spouses and adequate salary to pay college indebtedness while supporting their families. The church struggles with the maintenance costs of the church and parsonage.

Small Church Realities

Small churches, especially in rural areas of North America, are struggling.[1] This quandary is revealed in the demographic, economic, and leadership realities faced by small, rural churches. Due to financial and demographic factors plus a shortage of qualified candidates, small, rural churches often grapple with securing and retaining pastoral leadership.[2] How can small, rural churches recruit and hold onto strong pastoral leadership?

Small churches have sought a variety of options to address the problem of securing and retaining pastoral leadership.[3] For many small churches, such options often result in a part-time pastoral arrangement. While affected primarily by size, the financial realities of small congregations also force them into choosing a part-time format for pastoral leadership.[4] Regardless of the type of option implemented by small churches, the fact remains that part-time models overwhelmingly prevail.

However, the dilemma faced by small churches is two-fold. Not only do small churches generally employ pastors on a part-time basis, but the tenure of pastors in small, rural churches is also most frequently short.[5] Even if a small church can secure a full-time

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[1] Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different!* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982), 57.

[2] James P. Wind and Gil Rendle, "The Leadership Situation Facing American Congregations: An Alban Institute Special Report," in *Leadership in Congregations*, ed. Richard Bass (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2007), 6, Kindle.

[3] Adair T. Lummis, "What Do Lay People Want in Pastors?" in *Pulpit & Pew: Research on Pastoral Leadership (Research Reports)* (Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School, 2003), 3.

[4] Rosario Picardo, Ministry Makeover: Recovering a Theology for Bi-Vocational Service in the Church (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), Loc 53, Kindle.

[5] Dennis W. Bickers, *The Bivocational Pastor: Two Jobs, One Ministry* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2004), Loc 353, Kindle.

pastor, all too often these pastors leave for other employment after only a couple of years. This frequent change in pastoral leadership is debilitating to the mission of the church and inhibits both numerical and spiritual growth.[6]

An Option: The Second Career Pastor

What can small, rural churches do to address this dilemma? What options exist to secure and retain full-time, longer-tenured pastoral leadership among small churches? The second career pastor is a viable option for pastoral leadership among small, rural churches. Second career pastors, having other sources of income such as pensions and possessing a strong sense of call, are able to accept a smaller level of compensation from the church while providing full-time service. In addition, because the second career pastor is more financially secure personally,[7] he or she is able to commit to a longer term of service – perhaps five, ten, or more years. If churches believe that longer terms of service and full-time pastoral employment are beneficial to the spiritual health of the congregation, then the second career pastor becomes a more attractive option than the part-time pastoral arrangements or recent Bible college or seminary graduates otherwise generally employed full-time.

Second career candidates, retired early from previous work and still able to minister, can provide stable full-time pastoral leadership for small, rural churches. The intention of this proposal is to reduce the number of pastoral leadership vacancies among

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[6] Lyle E. Schaller, *Hey, That's Our Church!* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1975), 96.

[7] Bruce Pfadenhauer, Regional Executive Director, Central Region, Open Bible Churches, Des Moines, IA, interview by author, Des Moines, Iowa, December 9, 2015.

small, rural churches in America by retaining mature pastoral candidates with practical life experience.

A significant area not addressed in this paper is any distinction regarding gender or ethnicity among those in pastoral leadership. Such investigation is certainly warranted, especially considering recent social attention fomenting throughout numerous sectors of American society. Women and ethnic minorities have a role in American churches, including that of serving as pastors. The purpose of this paper, however, is designed to engage in a more general view of pastoral leadership. The expectation is that the findings and recommendations will be applicable to all in these leadership positions, regardless of gender or ethnicity.

A Preview of Chapters

Chapter One will be an examination of the problem faced by small, rural churches in obtaining and retaining pastoral leadership plus reasons and factors behind this problem. Chapter Two will be a review of the history of the church, focusing on biblical foundations of the church and the establishment of the American church. Chapter Three will provide definitions and features of the small, rural church plus outline expectations held for pastors among small, rural churches.

Chapter Four will examine alternative options for securing and retaining pastoral leadership among small, rural churches with special attention given to the bivocational pastor, an increasingly popular option. Chapter Five will focus on the advantages and the training needs of the second career pastor. This chapter will include comparisons and lessons found for small, rural churches in the fields of education and economics. Chapter Six will provide conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Pastoral Vacancies in Small, Rural Churches

One of the significant problems faced by the contemporary American church exists primarily among smaller congregations: a lack of pastoral candidates to fill empty pulpits. "[T]he majority of vacant pulpits in most denominations are in small congregations that pay a very minimal full-time salary, if that. Consequently, . . . such small congregations are having a great deal of trouble finding any candidates for their pulpits."[1] A variety of statistics suggest that the high vacancy rate for pastoral leadership among small, rural churches is increasing.[2]

Through an extrapolation of statistics regarding church size, between 51 and 52 percent of all churches in America are under seventy-five in attendance in their worship services. A National Congregations Study confirms "that the American religious experience still is heavily skewed toward small congregations in which the median worship attendance is 75 persons."[3]

All denominations have more small churches than large churches. All denominations struggle to keep each of their pulpits filled. "Nationally, a study conducted Pulpit and Pew Research Reports found that around 10 percent of pulpits are without a pastor at any given time."[4]

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[1] Lummis, 25.

[2] Wind and Rendle, 4-14. Kindle.

[3] Ibid., 6, Kindle.

[4] Shea Zirlott, "The Church's Search: After 14 Months and 300 Resumes, Oxford Church Is Still Looking for a Pastor," *Anniston Star,* Anniston, Alabama, August 7, 2010, accessed October 13, 2017, EBSCOhost.

While many churches face a trend of declining membership, rural churches face even greater difficulty in securing pastoral leadership than larger urban and suburban congregations. "As memberships begin to decline, so do the numbers of pastors willing to serve rural congregations – a trend that furthers the decline in rural churches. The Fund for Theological Education reports that less than half of rural churches in the United States have a fulltime pastor."[5] This trend is likely to continue.

In addition, smaller churches have much greater difficulty retaining pastoral leadership. Bickers notes, "Ministerial salaries are kept low, often resulting in a fairly rapid turnover of pastors."[6] The high turnover rate as well as the increasing frequency of unfilled pulpits among small churches has a deleterious effect upon the spiritual life in these churches.

These hard to fill pulpits tend to be in churches that are located a substantial distance from urban centers in distinctly rural settings. Lummis has observed that "finding any trained pastoral leadership for small rural congregations is a growing problem across denominations."[7] Being distant from an urban center has an impact on both pastoral and lay leadership among rural congregations. Increasingly, younger families are relocating to urban centers, creating a leadership vacuum for rural churches. As Montgomery summarized, "Social mobility in which the local population moves or

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[5] Molly Rossiter, "Big in Spirit: Closing is a Last Resort," *Cedar Rapids Gazette* (Iowa), November 14, 2009, accessed October 11, 2017, EBSCO*host*.

[6] Dennis W. Bickers, *Intentional Ministry in a Not-So-Mega Church: Becoming a Missional Community* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2009), 87, accessed October 13, 2017, EBSCOhost.

[7] Lummis, 5.

dies out without replacement … can sap the resources and eventual life of even the most vibrant congregation."[8]

The impact of the shortage of pastoral candidates is no respecter of denomination. Wind and Rendle found "that most of the major Christian and Jewish denominations are experiencing or soon will face a shortage of clergy to meet current congregational demands."[9]

Facing the difficulty of finding pastoral leadership for smaller rural congregations, out of necessity church leaders are increasingly turning to non-traditionally trained pastors. Jack Marcum, denominational researcher for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has concluded, "Making more use of commissioned lay pastors . . . seems like the best option of those currently available."[10] Bruce Pfadenhauer, an Open Bible Church denominational leader, concurs with this assessment of the need for a different path into the pastorate than what has previously been the norm. "Smaller churches are being forced to consider other options for pastoral leadership. Non-traditional pastors are one option for these churches."[11]

The solution proposed here for this shortage of pastors among smaller, rural churches is the recruitment and development of "second career pastors." As the twentieth century ended and the twenty-first century began, an increasing number of individuals have transitioned into pastoral ministry after careers in other professions. In the author's

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[8] Michael H. Montgomery, "Best Practices for Small Churches," *Prism* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 24.

[9] Wind and Rendle, 4, Kindle.

[10] Patricia Mei Yin Chang, "Pulpit Supply," *Christian Century* 120, no. 24 (November 29, 2003): 32.

[11] Pfadenhauer, interview.

denominational regional organization, sixteen of thirty-three pastorates are currently filled by second career pastors.[12]

The growth of the trend of non-traditionally trained clergy in American churches, while a direct result of the shortage of pastoral candidates in small, rural congregations already noted, is also influenced by financial factors affecting these churches. In addition, such financial influences affect the younger Bible college and seminary graduates small, rural churches have generally relied upon to fill their pulpits. The salary package that small, rural churches can afford to provide is too often simply insufficient.

> The issue ... is not a clergy shortage, but a salary shortage. Even with efforts to recruit more 'good pastors' into seminary, fewer congregations are able to pay a full-time salary sufficient to support a pastor and his or her family. At the same time, many seminary graduates find that their educational costs have made it financially impossible to consider such positions and are instead considering other forms of ministry or non-church careers.[13]

Retaining pastoral leadership influences church growth, spiritually as well as numerically. As Schaller has identified, "Congregations that have experienced a long series of two or three-year pastorates tend to be either numerically declining churches or on a plateau in size."[14] Therefore, addressing pastoral leadership vacancies is a critical issue that small, rural churches must face.

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[12] Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends, *154th Annual Sessions, 2016 – Reports & Directory*. Author's analysis of the data.

[13] Lummis, 3.

[14] Schaller, *Small Church*, 71.

Statistical Factors behind the Problem

Ironically, seminaries are producing more graduates and denominations are recognizing more individuals trained as pastors among their churches than previously experienced in recent history.

> The data supplied by denominations to the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches confirm that there is a clergy glut. Whereas data in the 1950s showed slightly less than one pastor for every church, in 2000 there were almost two pastors for every church. This trend appears across liberal, moderate, and conservative denominations, across large and small denominations, and across fast-growing and slow-growing denominations.[15]

In the doctoral cohort of the author, this trend of seminaries serving a wider cadre of students, including those not intending to seek pastoral positions, was evident. With eighteen members in the cohort, only four held the position of pastor, with all of these being the only full-time pastor in a small church. There was one megachurch associate pastor, one part-time, bivocational associate pastor, and two denominational leaders. The other ten cohort members were employed in a variety of positions in parachurch organizations, colleges, and secular organizations. A direct result of this trend is that denominational leaders frequently report more and more pastoral vacancies among their churches.

> In the denominations often designated as liberal, … roughly 20 percent of churches lack clergy. The 'moderate' mainline denominations ... show a 10 percent vacancy rate. ... The data from [the conservative denominations] suggest there are 1.4 working clergy per church. (Anecdotally, however, officials in these

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[15] Chang, "Pulpit Supply," 28.

> denominations believe that there are still empty pulpits out there, and they estimate the percentage to be between 4 and 6 percent.)[16]

Thus, a dichotomy exists. There are many more trained pastors than there are congregations in America, but a significant number of congregations cannot secure pastoral leadership. It is a trend that continues to grow. For example, the "research found that in 1950 there were 0.8 clergy for each Southern Baptist church. The number of clergy for each church has continued to rise. By 2000 there were 2.4 clergy members for each church within the denomination."[17]

Consequently, the dichotomy between the number of empty pulpits and the number of trained candidates exists, in large part, due to the differing perspectives of church leaders and pastoral candidates.

> Leaders look at the vacancy rate in the small churches and see a clergy shortage that needs to be addressed ... Clergy see a surplus of clergy who are competing for the same jobs, forcing many to work part time outside the church, or move into non-parish positions and ultimately begin new careers because they cannot find an adequate position within a church setting.[18]

These different perspectives are influenced by a juxtaposition of a statistical anomaly in the American church today. Only ten percent of the congregations in America have 350 or more active members[19] yet the majority of church attendees go to these

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[16] Chang, "Pulpit Supply," 28. Examples of liberal denominations cited: Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ, and Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). Examples of moderate denominations cited: United Methodist Church, Lutheran denominations, Disciples of Christ, American Baptist Churches, and Reformed Church. Examples of conservative denominations cited: Southern Baptist Convention, Church of the Nazarene, and Assemblies of God.

[17] Zirlott, "Church's Search."

[18] Patricia Mei Yin Chang, "The Clergy Job Market: What Are the Opportunities for Ministry in the 21st Century?" *Hartford Institute for Religion Research* (May 2003): 3, accessed September 21, 2015, http://hirr.hartsem.edu/leadership/clergyresources_clergyjobs.html.

[19] Chang, "Pulpit Supply," 31.

churches.[20] However, over half of the available opportunities for pastoral ministry reside in churches of under seventy-five active members.[21]

The small church is the norm, despite all the attention megachurches receive. For example, "seven out of ten Nazarene pastors serve congregations with fewer than 100 in worship on an average Sunday morning."[22] Less than seven percent of Nazarene pastors serve in churches with more than 250 worshippers.[23] The prevalence of the small church is found throughout denominations. In the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ, "congregations that average fewer than 50 in worship now constitute 47% of the churches."[24]

Reasons Contributing to Small Church Pastoral Shortages

Many seminary graduates are reluctant to accept a call to a smaller church. Crow observes that "[t]here may be a shortage of pastors who can afford and are willing to serve in some of our smallest … churches."[25]

The small church environment is foreign to many pastoral candidates, something outside of their experience. As Chang has concluded, "Seminary students, most of whom were raised and formed in large churches (as are the majority of the American

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[20] Chang, "Clergy Job Market," 1.

[21] Chang, "Pulpit Supply," 28.

[22] Kenneth E. Crow, *The Corps of Pastors of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, MO: Research Center, Church of the Nazarene, 2006), 1.

[23] Ibid., 6.

[24] Montgomery, 23.

[25] Crow, The Corps of Pastors of the Church of the Nazarene, 18.

population) feel called to serve in the kind of churches in which they were raised."[26] Although there are openings available in small congregations, many seminary graduates don't have the experiential or mental framework to envision small churches as viable opportunities.

This prevents many pastors from experiencing the richness of the relational depth smaller churches provide. Chang further notes, "Small churches may be more likely to create strong interpersonal bonds, forge vibrant communities and create a stronger witness to the community. It may be that church life occupies a more significant place in the lives of people in small churches."[27] Regrettably, the statistics are clear that small churches have the greatest number of pastoral vacancies and the greatest need for pastoral leadership.

Compounding the problem of differing perceptions regarding church size is the cultural desire for professional advancement. Just like those in other professions, an emotional desire to "climb the ladder of success" infuses many pastors. "[F]or many pastors the position of senior pastor in a large multistaff church remains a symbol of professional accomplishment."[28] However, with only ten percent of the churches having more than 350 members, the opportunity for the professional advancement that pastors may desire becomes an extremely competitive and crowded field, when vacancies in these larger churches occur. Those desiring to advance come from the ninety percent of churches that are smaller, providing for a glut of candidates.

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[26] Chang, "Clergy Job Market," 1.

[27] Chang, "Pulpit Supply," 32.

[28] Ibid., 29.

The track of professional advancement appears natural and desirable to many pastors and their families. As one pastor's spouse wrote, "My husband was also succeeding in his world, assuming ministry positions in successively larger churches and then moving into a denominational role with wide influence."[29] The small, rural church does not appear to offer this sense of professional advancement.

A ramification is an overly crowded field of pastoral candidates for the larger – and culturally, more desirable – churches, which in turn often results in discouragement and disillusionment among unsuccessful candidates. This causes some to "move into non-parish positions and ultimately begin new careers because they cannot find an adequate position within a church setting."[30]

The drive for professional advancement exists, even though it is counter to the Christian ideals many pastors and congregations purport to hold. Nouwen has stated, "The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross."[31] The key is finding satisfaction in the work of the local parish, which many pastors struggle to do as they struggle with financial pressures. Cohall and Cooper assert, "Job satisfaction was determined by supportive working conditions, supportive colleagues, self-actualization, equitable rewards, and mentally challenging work. It was assumed that a real sense of

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[29] Carole Eldridge, "Reconciling Two Worlds," *Mutuality* 17, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 5.

[30] Chang, "Clergy Job Market," 3.

[31] Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), Loc. 481, Kindle.

enjoyment in the roles that pastors play and motivation to remain in the profession are not determined by money."[32] However, even for the pastor, money talks.

There are other factors causing departures from pastoral ministry. Pfadenhauer observed, "Reports reveal that 1,700 pastors are leaving their positions every month in America. The reasons vary: burnout from stress, blow-out due to moral failure, discouragement, and financial difficulties."[33] This departure dramatically contributes to the shortage of pastors among smaller churches without respect to denomination.

> In the [Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)] . . . the vacancy rate in congregations with fewer than 100 members has grown from 39 percent in 1990 to 44 percent in 2000. Among churches with fewer than 50 members, the vacancy rate has grown from 71 percent to 77 percent. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reports a similar trend, with half of its pastoral vacancies occurring in churches with fewer than 175 members.[34]

Economic Factors

Financial pressures are increasing upon the American church today, especially among small churches. There is a dramatic "increase in the number of smaller congregations with very limited financial resources."[35] The economic pressures faced by small, rural churches affect decisions concerning pastoral leadership.

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[32] Kirkpatrick G. Cohall and Bruce S. Cooper, "Educating American Baptist Pastors: A National Survey of Church Leaders," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 19, no 1 (January 2010): 46.

[33] Pfadenhauer, interview.

[34] Chang, "Pulpit Supply," 28.

[35] Wind and Rendle, 5, Kindle.

Congregational Challenges

As Black has concluded, "If you are like any number of churches around the country right now, you are struggling financially."[36] Size alone strains the finances of small churches. There is a limited number who can support the ministry in the small, rural church. Rural churches must deal with the trend of declining demographics, which negatively affects not just membership but finances as well. These "shrinking congregations are unable to provide the salary and benefits required to support a full-time minister."[37] Then inflation, although currently modest, exerts a detrimental influence upon these churches. Highland contends, "The largest challenge in the smaller church groups is the negative power of the economy. The financial resources of these churches are growing smaller even as the cost of operating the church is growing larger."[38]

The combination of increasingly limited resources while dealing with increasing costs and declining membership creates despair in many small, rural churches. As House notes, "Indeed, there is anxiety about the survival of the congregation altogether."[39]

Of the many problems facing U.S. churches, a primary one is the "clearly economic pressure of the cost of the infrastructure, which is increasing at a rate that is

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[36] Doug Black, Jr., *Marathon: A Manual for Bivocational Ministry* (Philadelphia, PA: Destiny Church, 2014), 124, Kindle.

[37] Renee S. House, "Bi-vocational Clergy (and Congregations)," in *Learning to Lead: Lessons in Leadership for People of Faith*, ed. Willard W. C. Ashley, Sr. (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2012), 74, Kindle.

[38] James W. Highland, *Serving as a Bivocational Pastor: Positive Help for a Growing Ministry* (Newburgh, IN: Newburgh Press, 2012), Loc. 167, Kindle.

[39] House, 74, Kindle.

greater than the giving," according to an United Methodist official.[40] This financial pressure has an impact on the pastoral leadership decisions among small, rural churches. Picardo has observed that in many churches "the money is running out. It is not sustainable for churches to be able to afford ordained [clergy]."[41]

While finances are the primary influence upon a church's ability to recruit and retain pastoral leadership, it is not the only factor. "Many small churches struggle financially, but finances are not the only limited resources in the small church. Time, energy (for churches made up mostly of elderly, retired people), gifts, and abilities are all resources that may be lacking or in short supply."[42] The age of the congregation and the ability of members to join actively in ministry contribute to the expectations that are placed upon the pastor. The lack of a pastoral team can overwhelm pastors in small churches which rely on the single paid pastor for leadership. Thus, leadership is a key issue for small, rural churches, and lay leadership in these churches is another critical factor.

Pastoral Challenges

A variety of financial factors, and not just the basic pastoral compensation package, contribute to the problem of recruiting and retaining pastoral leadership for small, rural churches. One increasingly important contemporary dynamic is the two-income family. Both spouses in pastoral families are often employed. As Chang reports,

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[40] Alfredo Garcia, "Methodist Study Finds Four Marks of Church Vitality," *Christian Century* 127, no. 17 (August 24, 2010): 15.

[41] Picardo, Loc. 1637, Kindle.

[42] Bickers, *Bivocational Pastor*, Loc. 520, Kindle.

pastors are increasingly finding themselves restricted about where they can serve due to the career of their spouse. A smaller, rural church may not provide employment opportunities for the pastor's spouse in a chosen field.[43]

For younger pastors just graduating from Bible college or seminary, the burden of college debt becomes a financial issue that prevents many from considering positions in smaller churches.

> One of the significant challenges for young pastors is the amount of college debt they are accumulating. To go and accept a call to serve a small church that has limited resources to provide for a pastoral salary is becoming prohibitive for these young pastors. Small churches are finding that younger pastoral candidates are unwilling to even consider them.[44]

Traditionally, ministerial careers have not been lucrative. However, the level of financial stress in today's economy upon pastoral families is making vocational ministry even less attractive, particularly in rural areas. As Lummis ascertained, "Few ordained persons are eager to go to rural congregations, even if the church pays a modest full-time salary. Even fewer clergy are willing to take a part-time position in small town or rural areas while having to supplement their salary with another job."[45] Pastoral pay in small congregations has not kept pace with the rate of inflation over the years, a trend since the 1960s. While slowing in recent years, the gap continues to grow and "simply has priced many churches out of the ministerial marketplace."[46]

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[43] Chang, "Pulpit Supply," 29-30.

[44] Pfadenhauer, interview.

[45] Lummis, 3.

[46] Schaller, *Small Church*, 84.

The limited finances of the small church are not a new problem. However, "[t]his limitation also has wide ramifications. The pastor's salary is usually below the level that would enable him [or her] to serve at his [or her] best."[47] The financial strain felt by the small church is also conveyed upon the pastor, further aggravating the pastoral recruitment and retention problem.

Another reality for small, rural churches is that ingrained within the American culture is the prestige of professional advancement. This is no less true for pastors than for other professions. Pastors seek professional recognition and growth, much in the same manner as those in other careers.

> In so many small town rural churches, guys will show up there, sometimes their first church out of Bible college or out of seminary. They'll stay three, five years until they get a little bit of experience, something to put on their resume. And then they look for that opportunity to move up to a bigger church. You know that mentality? A bigger church, usually a little bit bigger paycheck that comes along with it. … Unfortunately, over the years, … some of our smaller more rural churches have a hard time keeping really good pastors. … I don't think the church should look like the corporate world in America. It shouldn't be about upward mobility.[48]

All of this creates an unending cycle that leads to short pastoral tenure and ultimately to the unfilled pastoral vacancy for the small church. Traditionally, younger men and women fresh out of Bible college or seminary have formed the pool of pastoral candidates for small churches. However, under the present societal conditions, these young people have become unable to accept calls from small churches due to two

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[47] W. Curry Mavis, *Advancing the Smaller Local Church* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1957), 11.

[48] Jason McConnell, "Rural Ministry in Historical Perspective" (seminar, Rural Home Missionary Association Small-Town Pastors' Conference, Morton, IL, April 28, 2015).

primary financial factors: 1) the large debt from college loans and 2) the need for adequate resources to care for their growing families.

Those pastors that do accept calls funded under a minimum level of financial support find their family's interdependence crucial to being able to serve the small church. "Many report being subsidized by a spouse – which often means that they are the ones able to accept jobs in small churches that cannot otherwise offer a living wage. Yet those being subsidized in this way are also most constrained by a partner's job and lifestyle."[49]

Unable to support a full-time pastor, "the move to call a part-time, bi-vocational minister is experienced as a significant, unavoidable loss. There is a sense of having settled for less."[50] Balancing financial realities with organizational aspirations has become exceptionally tenuous for many small, rural churches.

Of course, some small, rural churches do continue to attempt to maintain a full-time pastor while providing a minimum level of salary. Sometimes then, moving to bi-vocational situations is prompted by the financial need of pastors who "may need a secular job to sufficiently care for themselves as well as their families."[51]

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[49] Chang, "Pulpit Supply," 31.

[50] House, 74, Kindle.

[51] Tanya Pagan Raggio-Ashley, "Healthy Clergy, Healthy Congregations, and Healthy Communities," in *Learning to Lead: Lessons in Leadership for People of Faith*, ed. Willard W. C. Ashley, Sr. (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2012), 42, Kindle.

Pastoral Family Challenges

A survey of 1,000 U.S. pastors conducted by the Fuller Institute of Church Growth revealed that "80 percent of pastors believe their pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families."[52] The impact of being the single staff member in a small, rural church while receiving a minimal pay and benefit package all too often drains the emotional well-being of not just the pastor but the pastor's family as well.

A consequence of the financial factors that promote a minimalist approach to pastoral compensation is that the spouse's career often becomes more important than the pastoral call itself. The pastoral candidate is only able to serve where his or her spouse can obtain employment. Frequently, this means restricting the pastor's choice about which church to serve only to churches in or near urban centers. The impact on small, rural churches is significant, further contributing to a repetition of the short tenured pastorates. Not only is this detrimental to the church, it has a negative effect on the growth of the pastor. As Willamon has surmised, "Long pastorates generally make wonderfully grounded and centered pastors, while a series of short pastorates are often an indication of a pastor who has not had to develop the resources for maturation of ministry."[53]

The pastor's family is a critical component of ministry. Among the changes occurring is the increasing presence of women in ministry with husbands as the pastoral spouse. Regardless of which spouse has the pastoral role, the impact of the two-income

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[52] Wind and Rendle, 13, Kindle.

[53] William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 315.

family changes the role of both pastor and spouse. Many churches that have traditionally relied upon the pastor's spouse to assume certain positions and duties within the church are having to rethink how to manage these responsibilities when work makes the pastor's spouse unavailable.

Without question, the sense of call can be pervasive and even impinge upon family time. As one pastoral couple observed, "We have three young children, so time is one of our most precious commodities. There have been moments and weeks where the responsibilities of being in leadership with this missional community have felt like a sacrifice just because we are time-pinched."[54] The financial stress that pastoral families face in small, rural churches with a minimalist approach to pastoral compensation has tremendous negative impact upon the pastoral family that already is struggling with the stress of the time commitment of the pastorate.

Pastors can find themselves seemingly faced with a choice between being responsible to the expectations of the church and the obligations of family. Such conflicts are real and often frequent. As one pastor's spouse concluded, "If things were going to have to be sacrificed, it wasn't going to be our marriage relationship. No matter what, [my spouse, the pastor,] was committed to Jesus first, then to our marriage, and then to the church/job. We knew that if the latter came before us, it would tear us up and that was a non-negotiable."[55]

Contributing to the family stress is the financial stress of being minimally paid. Younger pastors with families in small, rural churches all too often find it necessary to

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[54] Picardo, Loc. 1612, Kindle.

[55] Black, 117, Kindle.

leave the small, rural church to provide for their family. The provision needed is not just financial. It also includes locating an environment in which family time is elevated.

For younger pastors, college debt often becomes the significant factor that precludes their service in smaller churches paying minimal salary. Those "who are feeling a compelling call to vocational ministry are not going to want to be weighed down under $100,000 worth of theological education debt. This is not fair to them or their families."[56]

Demographic Challenges

America is changing, and so is the community around the small, rural church. "The context, especially in rural America, is rapidly changing. The image of the small church as an unchanging community in an unchanging world has never been less true than today."[57]

With mechanization, fewer people are directly involved in farming. In addition, there are new people moving into rural America, often people of color, immigrants who have different cultural experiences and expectations. Bickers observes, "New cultures are moving into the neighborhood. New languages are heard on the street, new foods are available in the local Wal-Mart, and signs in languages other than English are seen in the stores."[58]

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[56] Picardo, Loc. 270, Kindle.

[57] Montgomery, 30.

[58] Bickers, *Intentional Ministry*, 7, EBSCOhost.

A significant example of such change in rural areas is the increasing Hispanic population, which "is now the largest minority in the United States, and the numbers keep growing. The United States Census Bureau estimates that the Hispanic population in the United States will be over 102 million persons by 2050, which will represent slightly over 24 percent of the total population."[59]

Yet, the overall trend in rural America is that of decline with population moving to the cities and urban areas, away from the farm. This puts stress on rural communities and makes the prospect of being in ministry there much less feasible for many, and less attractive for others.

Unfortunately, many small, rural churches have not adapted well to the farm-to-city population shift. They attempt to continue to operate as previously, creating additional stress and conflict. Anthony and Boersma have determined, "Our culture has changed radically, so it stands to reason that our ministry must change to keep pace. We no longer live in an agrarian culture but rather one that is technological in scope and emphasis. … All around us are vestiges of change, yet many churches still operate as though they were living in the Middle Ages."[60] One result of the refusal to adapt to the changing realities of the rural environment is an increasing pressure upon the pastor to be the solution, which is an unreasonable and unrealistic expectation for any one person.

Among the community changes small, rural churches face is the willingness of rural residents to drive into the city for many resources and services, including to attend church. "Rural churches across the country are struggling to remain open as a mobile

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[59] Bickers, *Intentional Ministry*, 29, EBSCOhost.

[60] Michael J. Anthony and Mick Boersma, *Moving On, Moving Forward: A Guide for Pastors in Transition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), Loc. 1450, Kindle.

society leads churchgoers to larger cities for services. Some [rural] churches … host a half-dozen congregants or less."[61] Improvement in transportation infrastructure plus the loss of local businesses in rural communities result in an inherent inclination to drive into the larger community and away from the rural area for church as well as for shopping and medical services.

As rural churches seek pastoral leadership, they are increasingly discovering that the available candidates are not interested in serving them. They struggle to keep a pastor, and when searching are unable to induce candidates to seek them. Bickers contends, "Studies show that there is not a clergy shortage in America, but there are fewer ministers willing to serve in the smaller, declining churches."[62] Changing demographics and changing culture are increasing the pressure on small, rural churches.

The family structure of rural America poses another demographic challenge. Family structure is changing across the country, and rural areas are not immune. Like their urban neighbors, the impact of divorce and an increasing number of single adults creates still another challenge for the small, rural church.

Another reality is an aging of pastors in small, rural churches.[63] Pulpits are no longer frequently filled with younger, freshly ordained pastors as in the past. Because younger pastors are not available, many rural churches retain pastors well into retirement age. The aging of pastors mirrors the aging of congregations.

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[61] Rossiter, "Big in Spirit," EBSCOhost.

[62] Bickers, *Intentional Ministry*, 143, EBSCOhost.

[63] Emily McFarlan Miller, "Survey Reveals Public's Skepticism about Pastors," *Christian Century*, 134, no. 5 (March 1, 2017): 13-14.

The stress of the rural pastorate, fueled by financial restrictions, demographic challenges, and cultural changes, has influenced the vocational decisions of many pastors. An increasing number of pastors are leaving ministry for other vocations. Some churches compound the problem of pastors choosing to leave for other professions. When churches are unable to directly face the many societal changes, the solution they too often choose is to remove the pastor. According to statistics provided by Norval and Barna, about "fifty thousand pastors each year [hang] up their collars and [walk] away from what they once felt was God's call on their lives, … [and] 26 percent [of all pastors have] been forced out of their churches."[64]

An Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) report notes that "the number of clergy leaving ordained ministry through on-leave-from call, resignation, removal and retirement" was putting additional pressure on small churches and the denomination.[65] Pastoral vacancies are the result in all denominations.

Summary of the Problem

Several factors have been noted that contribute to the difficulty small, rural churches have in securing and retaining pastoral leadership. Many small, rural churches "are in a crisis situation. There is a leadership crisis, both professional and lay; there is a growth crisis as the median age of the membership increases …; and there is a financial crisis that is directly related to the aging and diminishing membership."[66]

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[64] Anthony and Boersma, Loc. 2544, Kindle.

[65] Wind and Rendle, 5-6, Kindle.

[66] Allen T. Hansell, "Life in the Small Membership Church," *Brethren Life and Thought* 27, no. 4 (Autumn 1982): 232.

As a result, small, rural churches frequently have an identity crisis. They struggle between attempting to mimic the megachurch versus expressing their uniqueness as small churches. As one pastor realized, "Sometime in my third year as pastor I began to realize that I really didn't understand how to serve this smaller congregation effectively. … I began to understand; the problem was that I was trying to pastor a smaller church as if it were a much bigger one."[67]

In addition, being rural simply is no longer the singularly distinguishing characteristic that it once was. The distinctiveness of rural America has been blurred by media and the economic transition of residents away from the agrarian lifestyle.

> In many ways, however, the rural-urban distinction has long since become obsolete. Fewer than 5% of those gainfully employed in the United States and Canada are engaged directly in agricultural production. Little of the rural life, which traditionally offset urban life, is left. There is a larger rural non-farm population … but these, being economically non-agricultural, can be regarded as urbanites living in the country.[68]

A significant consequence among American churches is a growing number of small rural, churches that are unsuccessful in the recruitment and retention of pastoral leadership. As one denominational report laments:

> [T]he number of professionals available for church positions in [the] denomination is decreasing fairly rapidly. The decline has several dimensions: a smaller number of people entering congregational ministry; …retirement of clergy; … shorter clergy-career tenure terms, … [and] that a large number of seminarians are not interested in seeking congregational leadership positions.[69]

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[67] Andrew D. Hagen, "Learning to Pastor a Small Congregation," in *Leadership in Congregations*, ed. Richard Bass (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2007), 78.

[68] Paul Peachey, "Free Cities, Free Churches, and Urbanized Societies," *Brethren Life and Thought* 27, no. 4 (Autumn 1982): 199.

[69] Wind and Rendle, 6, 9, Kindle.

The pastoral leadership situation among small, rural churches continues to grow more desperate. Addressing the problem will require innovative action to break the bonds of tradition and assume a riskier, more missional approach for being the church in the rural community. Small, rural churches have "an incredible opportunity, but neither the resources nor people to accomplish it."[70] The survival and growth of the small, rural church means that either change is inevitable or the slow decline to non-existence will continue.

An Illustration: A Meeting of the Augusta Freedom Church Elders

The board of elders of the Augusta Freedom Church met once again to consider the pastoral leadership of their church. Their discussion focused upon the church's experience with its recent pastors. The elders noted that in the past ten years the tenure of the five pastors who had served them had been one year, three years, one-and-a half years, one year, and two years. Now, for eighteen months the church had been without a regular pastor, relying on a series of individuals to fill the pulpit on Sundays. The elders recognized the discouragement felt by the entire congregation, but they had not been able to recruit a pastoral candidate during these eighteen months.

The elders listed several factors that had been influential in the decision of the church's last five candidates to leave. When each of the five had first come to August Freedom, all had recently graduated from either a Bible college affiliated with the denomination or from a seminary in one of the neighboring states. Three had been married; two were single. All had financial difficulties, primarily the result of the student

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[70] Black, 4, Kindle.

loans they had accumulated. The elders concurred with the stewardship committee that August Freedom Church had provided as much salary and benefits as the church could afford each time a pastor had been called. Still, in each case the pastoral package did not seem to be enough.

Two of the pastors left after accepting calls to larger churches in the regional organization of the denomination, one as an associate pastor at the regional organization's largest church. Another had left ministry altogether. Both of the most recent pastors had accepted calls in neighboring states. One went to a church in another denomination that was in the largest metropolitan area of a neighboring state. The most recent pastor to serve Augusta Freedom Church had become the senior pastor of the denomination's largest church in the capitol city of still another state.

All five of these pastors cited financial factors as motivating their decisions to leave Augusta Freedom. The three who were married all noted that their spouses had difficulty obtaining employment in their fields in the area surrounding Augusta Freedom Church. There was a sense among the four who stayed in ministry that their moves also involved professional advancement.

The elders expressed bewilderment at what Augusta Freedom could do differently to address these issues. While they recognized the impact of student loan debt, they had not been the ones who had entered into such debt. They also knew that their rural location did not provide great opportunities for families seeking employment for the pastor's spouse. There seemed to be very little that Augusta Freedom could do. The only candidates that even considered the church's call as pastor had been these recent

graduates. Even with a parsonage, the ability to pay the pastor had been a challenge for the church for decades.

What could Augusta Freedom Church do? It appeared to the elders that the only answer to obtain a full-time pastor for the church was to pray for a miracle.

To provide a broader framework for the dilemma faced today by small, rural churches, the next chapter will review the biblical and historical foundations of the church.

CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL & HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHURCH

Biblical Foundations

The church is the primary agent used by God to promote his kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven."[1] The Greek word most often translated as "church," *ekklēsia*, appears one hundred eighteen times in the New Testament.[2] History reveals that the term became associated with the followers of Christ quite early following Christ's ascension as a reference to their communal gathering. "The earliest Christian use of *ekklēsia* often forms part of an established term, 'church of God.' … [E]arly Christians probably used the term (often abbreviated as 'church') to express their self-understanding as those at the center of God's eschatological activity."[3]

Beginnings

The movement of the Holy Spirit upon the approximately one hundred twenty gathered followers of Christ at Pentecost marks the beginning of the church. "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. … All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit …"[4] Peter spoke, "and that day about three thousand persons were

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[1] Matthew 6:10.

[2] "Ekklēsia," *Strong's Concordance* in *The Blue Letter Bible*, accessed March 2, 2017, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongs=G1577&t=KJV.

[3] Graham H. Twelftree, "Church," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed., eds. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 138-139.

[4] Acts 2:1, 4a.

added"[5] to the fellowship of believers, becoming the *ekklēsia*, initially called The Way, later referenced as the church of God.

While generally found in Acts and the Epistles, *ekklēsia* first appears in the Gospel of Matthew. "Matthew is, in fact, the only Gospel to use the term *ekklēsia*,"[6] where it appears three times in two verses. The first use of *ekklēsia* is when Jesus responds to Peter's declaration that he is the Messiah. "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church (*ekklēsia*), and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."[7] The second Matthean verse to use *ekklēsia* deals with conflict within the church. "If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church (*ekklēsia*); and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church (*ekklēsia*), let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."[8]

The church is initiated by Jesus as the means to advance and expand his mission. Brown contends, "The mission of the church is a continuation and a derivative of Jesus' own mission. … The church is to enact justice and mercy in Jesus' name. They are to live as a community defined by God's forgiveness and so marked and known by their forgiveness of others."[9] The church becomes the embodiment of Christ in the world. To follow Christ means to live individually and collectively in the same manner that he

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[5] Acts 2:41b.

[6] David de Silva, An Introduction to the New Testament: Context, Methods, & Ministry Formation (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 267.

[7] Matthew 16:18.

[8] Matthew 18:17.

[9] Jeannine K. Brown, "Matthew, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed., eds. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 582.

demonstrated through his acts of love and compassion. The church is to be the visible and continuing representation of Christ, made possible through the advocacy of the Holy Spirit.

Old Testament Underpinnings

While "church" is a New Testament term, the concept of the gathering of the people of God has roots in the Old Testament. Stephen, during his trial in Acts 7, reminded those listening that Moses had brought the people together at Mount Sinai as a collected assembly. "[Moses] is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living oracles to give to us."[10]

This sense of the united assembly of people is affirmed throughout the Old Testament. For example, the Psalmist declares, "Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation."[11]

While it is in the New Testament that the *ekklēsia* is featured, there is a visible connection to the collective experience of the Children of Israel expressed throughout the Old Testament. According to de Silva, this connection is especially featured in the Gospel of Matthew: "Matthew's extensive interest in anchoring Jesus and his teaching in the Jewish Scriptures cautions us against devaluing our connection with the Old

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[10] Acts 7:38.

[11] Psalm 111:1.

Testament heritage. … Matthew reminds us that the New Testament has value as the revelation that stands in continuity with the Old Testament, not as its replacement."[12]

The influence of Judaism upon early Christianity is evident in the conflict expressed in the Gospels and Acts, especially notably in Matthew. In its infancy, "the early church was not a formal or formalized institution. The earliest church consisted of small, informal gatherings."[13]

Among the items about which Matthew expounds is concern for how this new assembly should follow Christ as a unified group, emphasizing that the Law remains instructive even while the composition of the new movement grows and changes.

> Matthew also helps address the relationship of Jewish and Gentile Christianity, both with regard to the plan of God and the ongoing importance of Torah in an increasingly Gentile movement. Far from suggesting discontinuity with historic Israel, Matthew rather assures the audience that the growing Gentile majority in the *ekklēsia* proves that God's purposes from of old are being fulfilled in the church.[14]

History confirms the visibility of the *ekklēsia* in the Roman-occupied Jerusalem. Barrett notes, "The existence in Jerusalem in the months after the crucifixion of a company of believers in the resurrection of Jesus is hardly open to question."[15] Achieving unity becomes a primary challenge for this new group, the church. Consequently, providing this new venture a strong connection to the existing tradition and structure found in the Old Testament was essential for Matthew. "A prominent interest of

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[12] de Silva, 290.

[13] Wendy J. Porter, "Music," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, eds. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Loc 25433, Kindle.

[14] de Silva, 237-238.

[15] Charles Kingsley Barrett, "The Historicity of Acts," *Journal of Theological Studies* 50, no. 2 (October 1999): 527.

Matthew's Gospel is to demonstrate the connectedness of the new body, the 'church,' with the historic people of God through whom God spoke, which received and kept God's oracles, and which was to be the vehicle of promise."[16] According to Matthew, the *ekklēsia* has become the place through which God will fulfill his promises.

While the beginning of the church is attributed as following the events of Pentecost, the writers of the Gospels, especially Matthew, reveal its origins in the messages of Jesus and establish connections to the experiences of the Children of Israel. Twelftree contends, "The classic view is that although the church was born at Pentecost, it was inaugurated by Jesus in his teaching and the involvement of his followers in his mission."[17]

The Community of the New Covenant

Identifying the church as having replaced Israel as the chosen people of God is wrapped up in Jesus's message and its rejection by the Jewish religious leaders. This question appears prophetic for Christians and their belief in the establishment of a new covenant through Jesus. Novakovic asks, "Has God, in response to Jewish obstinacy, passed on the promises originally given to Israel to another people? This problem is closely related to the transformation of the early church from a Jewish sect into a predominantly Gentile movement and to the concept of the 'new Israel.'"[18] Such interpretation correlates with the perception that the parable of the tenants in which the

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[16] de Silva, 246.

[17] Twelftree, 139.

[18] Lidija Novakovic, "Israel," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed., eds. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 403.

owner of the vineyard will "give the vineyard to others"[19] represents this change from the old covenant to the new covenant.

The church was commissioned by Jesus to be his conduit for blessing the world, in a life that built upon being an edifying community. "For this 'assembly,' this 'congregation' of the faithful, Matthew gathers, shapes and organizes a wealth of Jesus traditions to provide guidance for living in the manner that pleases God in the context of a strong and supportive community of disciples."[20]

Near the end of the final meal Jesus had with his closest disciples, he spoke of the new covenant that had now come. With this declaration, Jesus portrays "the inauguration of the new covenant that [will take] place by virtue of Christ's resurrection and on the basis of which both Jew and Gentile receive salvation."[21] This new covenant found expression within a new community of faith, the church.

The new community was to exemplify a pattern of living that was radically different from that of the world in which they lived. "The aspect of the ethos of the new community that Matthew most underscores, placing it as the conclusion to all Jesus' teaching, is doing works of mercy toward those who are in dire circumstances (Mt 25:31-46)."[22]

This lifestyle of extending mercy and care through the church comes into focus in the accounts of the Apostles found in Acts. As Reid explains, The Acts of the Apostles

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[19] Mark 12:1-11.

[20] de Silva, 267.

[21] Christopher Zoccali, "'And So All Israel Will Be Saved': Competing Interpretations of Romans 11.26 in Pauline Scholarship," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30, no. 3 (March 2008): 294.

[22] de Silva, 276.

provides a narrative of the early church.[23] Acts records the coming of the Holy Spirit which resulted in the initial rapid growth of the church and its collective lifestyle emphasizing sharing and extending mercy. "All who believed were together and had all things in common; … And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."[24]

Being saved catapults the believer into action. The collective efforts of the church bring attention from others. Thus, "the church is the faithful remnant of those who have now entered the sphere of God's heavenly rule through living conversionary lives and then carry on Jesus' mission of disclosing in word and deed the character of the kingdom."[25]

Maintaining Unity: The Importance of Servanthood

The challenge of maintaining unity as more joined the faith quickly became increasingly difficult, in part due to the numerical growth but perhaps more so because the movement soon extended beyond its initial Jewish roots.

> From the parent religion, they inherited the Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament), which were foundational to the forging of the new group's identity, but not in nearly the same way that they were for the synagogue. Gentile Christians were connected to these texts only on account of their connection with Jesus. Jewish Christians were wholly reoriented to their Scriptures by the same. Both were called together into one new community by the preaching of the apostolic witnesses to what God was doing in Jesus.[26]

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[23] Barbara E. Reid, "Acts Introduction," in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1953.

[24] Acts 2:44, 47b.

[25] Joel B. Green, "Kingdom of God/Heaven," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed., eds. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 475.

[26] de Silva, 29.

As the "Christian church came into being in Jerusalem, and that in tentative, diverse, uncoordinated ways it spread out into the Mediterranean world,"[27] the ethnic and cultural differences between Jew and Gentile became a point of contention within the new community of faith. Jesus' example and teaching of being a servant at the Last Supper became crucial for the development of the church. The Gospel of John calls on Christians "most dramatically to be servants one to another, specifically following Jesus' example"[28] in washing the feet of his disciples. Jesus' challenge to follow his servant example also provides encouragement regarding unity. The one who voluntarily serves does not demand priority, thus removing conflict between individuals and within groups. "The same unity enjoyed by the Son and the Father – one that is not maintained without humility and submission – is also to characterize the community of believers, who will find unity when each member is submitted to God."[29]

After all, the church was not initiated for position and influence among humanity. "The purpose of the church is said to represent God."[30] Being representatives of God with a holy mission was to take precedence, but regrettably often has been overcome by human maneuvering. "Only when the followers of Jesus experience true and abiding love among the fellowship of the believers will they be able to persist in their commitment."[31]

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[27] Barrett, 534.

[28] de Silva, 433.

[29] Ibid., 435.

[30] Twelftree, 140.

[31] de Silva, 434.

Remaining steadfast upon representing God rather than human desires was challenging from the very beginning of the church, as evidenced by the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), whose deception resulted in their death. As Oden explains, "For the support, sustenance, and completion of its mission, the church depends upon the continuing real presence of the living Lord."[32] The church is not an entity possessed by people but is an overture of the Lord's holy and redemptive initiative. "The gospel does not belong to the church, for the gospel brought the church into being."[33]

Quickly within this new religious organization, leadership became important. A pastoral style of leadership was favored, exemplified by the Apostle Paul.

> Paul appears as an absolutely convinced believer, devoted to Christ, for whom he is willing to abandon all his privileges, to face any peril, and to endure any suffering. He is a tireless and effective preacher who shows full responsibility in gathering his converts into societies and watching over them as a pastor, rejoicing in their Christian achievement and shedding tears over their failures.[34]

A Family Image

The sense of family pervaded the early church, advocated in Paul's preaching and his epistles. The close-knit, caring community found expression in this metaphor that could be broadly understood and communicated. "Rich familial images pervaded early Christianity. God as Father paternally sends his Son for redemption; the church as mother maternally nurtures this growth. One cannot understand this paternity without this

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[32] Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology Volume Two: The Word of Life* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 433.

[33] Oden, 16.

[34] Barrett, 532.

maternity."[35] This family image was further emphasized since churches met in homes (Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, Philemon 1:2).

Unity was the hallmark of the call to be the church. Paul wrote frequently about being one in the Lord, even as he recognized individual differences and gifts. "Paul wants to preserve unity and mutual consideration in the one community. God acted to bring together a diverse body of Jews and Gentiles, with a diversity of ways to honor God's claim on their lives and actions on the behalf, to worship the one God together in unity."[36] For Paul, unity within the church was the indication that believers were one with God.

By living in unity, being an extended family, and providing mercy and care not seen frequently in the Roman-dominated society, the church made a lasting imprint upon this very society, sparking a cultural revolution. Such innovation knit "them into a community of proclamation that 'turned the world upside down' (Acts 17:6)."[37]

The Bride of Christ

Another image that enabled the church to connect more directly with Jesus, to be one with him, was being identified as the Bride of Christ. This cultural image provided place, honor, and value for Christians within the fledgling church. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the

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[35] Oden, 64.

[36] de Silva, 628.

[37] Oden, 214.

word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish."[38]

The image of being united in marriage to Christ provided a position in the society that often did not recognize many of those being gathered in the church: women, slaves, and those who weren't Roman citizens. The spiritual union provided standing in a society that choose to demean and deny such individuals.

The Body of Christ

One more image used to portray the church was being seen as the Body of Christ. "The body of Christ, from another viewpoint, is the church, those whose lives are hid in Christ. He is the church's glory."[39] Again, for those on the outside, this image provided security that was often missing in their lives within society. Christ, the Suffering Servant, brings clarity to the journey of life and provides the means through which all may find security. "And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."[40]

Throughout the New Testament, the growth of the church is reported. "Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers."[41] In such reports, there is recognition of being one with Jesus, being united

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[38] Ephesians 5:25-27.

[39] Oden, 308.

[40] Ephesians 1:22-23.

[41] Acts 9:31.

with the other believers, and living obediently in accordance to the teachings of Jesus Christ. The images of being family, being the Bride, and being the Body contributed to this sense of purpose, the commission to take the kingdom of God into the world.

Growth and Expansion

Distinguishing the church was the understanding of undeserved reconciliation with God through Christ. Union with God and unity within the church were only achievable through this understanding. "As a reconciled people the church is to maintain unity above all else (Eph 2:13-16; 4:3-6). In particular the [Apostle Paul] seeks ways to bring the lofty theological principle that Christ has unified a people for God (Eph 2:11-21; 3:3-6) to bear on the day-to-day relationships and interactions between Christians."[42] Through living a life that extended mercy to others within and without the church, the testimony of the church came alive. "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily."[43]

The church not only grew; it spread throughout the world. "[Paul] went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."[44] Yet Paul frequently admonished the church regarding the supreme need for unity. The underlying foundation of the church stems from the brilliance of its unity. According to Paul, such unity is the work of God:

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[42] de Silva, 726.

[43] Acts 16:5.

[44] Acts 15:41.

"In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord."[45]

Jesus commissioned the church to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."[46] This calling has been the focus of the church and its mission ever since. However, the church is not left alone to attend to this task. "[Jesus] awakens, calls, empowers, and preserves the church."[47] The church operates under the assurance of God, the Son. "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."[48]

As is seen in Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of his arrest, "Christ intercedes especially for the church, … those in union with the community of faith … and in union with Christ himself …, that they might be made holy."[49] The church is the beloved Bride of Christ. In union with him, the church is made holy. The church achieves its agency through unity with Christ and exemplifies it through unity with one another. This becomes an indomitable presence, the church that is Christ's witness to the world. The Apostle Peter encouraged the church in its witness to "be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."[50]

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[45] Ephesians 2:21.

[46] Matthew 28:19.

[47] Oden, 522.

[48] Matthew 28:20.

[49] Oden, 310.

[50] 1 Peter 2:5.

The Early Church

The first years of the church's existence revealed confusion about whether the followers of The Way were something entirely new or just a sect of Judaism. "In the early years of the Christian church, Jewish Christians saw themselves as part of Judaism (Acts 2:46-3:1; 20:16, 21:17-26), though the relationship between Christians and Jews became increasingly tense as time went on … and contributes to the ultimate separation of Judaism and Christianity."[51]

Becoming Politically Suspect

The church quickly became a recognizable feature of the culture of the first century. As Marinello explains, "[T]he believers were committed to the fellowship (koinonia). This means that they were committed to this distinctly identifiable group which began on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2."[52] This fellowship rooted its practice in living out faith through acts of love. Consequently, Bass contends, "Early Christians insisted that love – no rationality or politics or even virtue – was the primary bond between God and human beings."[53] Therefore, the early church was not politically inclined. Thus, the members of this neophyte religious organization were distrusted by those in power, who could not fathom that any group could grow so quickly without having political motivation. However, Luke, the author of Acts, places the events of the

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[51] Colin G. Kruse, "Persecution," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, eds. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Loc. 27460, Kindle.

[52] T. J. Marinello, "Small, Struggling Churches in Europe: Do They Have a Future?" *European Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (October 2014): 152.

[53] Diana Butler Bass, A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 32.

early church squarely in the midst of Roman rule and Jewish religious experience within the Greco-Roman world. As Reid summarized, "Luke gives his work a historical framework that relates the development of the early church to Roman and Palestinian history."[54] This framework portrays the early church being surrounded by a suspicious and antagonistic society.

Jesus was seen by the ruling authorities as a political threat.[55] So were his followers. The church, therefore, endured hardship and persecution from its earliest days. As Early reports, "During the era of the twelve Caesars (49 BC–ca. AD 138), Roman literature, architecture, and science flourished. … Because Christianity was also growing, it caught the eye of the Roman authorities, who looked at it with disdain and suspicion."[56]

Yet, despite the condemnation of both religious and governmental authorities, the movement grew. Believers spread the message of the gospel wherever they went. "[T]he earliest Christian missionaries from Jerusalem went out as refugees and victims of persecution … These first Christians had expansionist tendencies without worldly power."[57]

As new believers joined, the young church grew. Across the Greco-Roman empire, these new believers were attracted to what initially was viewed by the others around them as a sect of Judaism. The Jewish authorities viewed this new group as being heretical, since its members set the foundation for their spirituality upon the death of their

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[54] Reid, 1953.

[55] Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, History of the World Christian Movement, Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 1.

[56] Joseph E. Early, *A History of Christianity: An Introductory Survey* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2015), 13, EBSCOhost.

[57] Irvin and Sunquist, 26.

leader, who they also claimed had been resurrected. When the Jewish religious leaders began punishing the members of this new sect, the adherents took this persecution as a pathway to strengthen themselves in the practice of their faith.[58] As this group solidified their identity, known first as The Way and later as Christians, they began moving away from Jerusalem, the center of the initial persecution, dispersing to other areas of the Greco-Roman world and spreading their newfound faith throughout Asia and Europe. The impact of these small groups of Christians was noticeable and significant within the society of the day. Fowler has summarized that "it is sufficient to demonstrate that small churches did exist in New Testament times, and that they were regarded as authentic."[59]

Meeting in Houses

In the early days of Christianity, churches were small primarily because of the limitations of the places in which Christians could safely meet. Mavis notes, "The Christian church itself took root in small groups of believers thoroughly dedicated to Christ. The earliest Christians met, for most part, in the home of believers."[60] Available meeting places were limited, especially as the rift between traditional Judaism and the new sect of Christianity emerged. "After their separation from the temple and synagogues, Christians usually met and worshipped in homes. In order not to attract the

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[58] Joanna Collicutt McGrath, "Post-Traumatic Growth and the Origins of Early Christianity," *Mental Health* 9, no. 3 (June 2006): 292.

[59] Bill G. Fowler, "The New Testament Basis for the Small Church," *American Baptist Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (June 1990): 94.

[60] Mavis, 13.

attention of Romans and hostile Jews, these house churches were almost always small and had limited contact with one another."[61]

Connections, however, were maintained, through a variety of communication efforts such as letters that were shared among the small gatherings. Other vehicles of communication were used as well. "Churches in various locations were connected with others by sharing their resources, by traveling itinerant ministers, and by common memories they held of Jesus."[62] Remarkably, the young church maintained cohesiveness throughout the small groups that met across many communities.

The size of the meeting location limited the size of the congregation. "A big church in the first and second century was maybe fifty people. That was huge."[63] In the very beginning of the church's history, being a small group was the standard practice. With rare exception, there was little change for centuries.

It is likely that the owner of the house in which the church met was a wealthier member of both the church and the community, able to provide the security and the resources vital for the continued existence of the young organization. "Into [the Greco-Roman] world the early church both spread and had its initial existence. The first churches probably met in people's homes and … the homeowner would often be the patron of the [church]."[64] Patronage would become more pervasive in later centuries, leading in part to the Protestant Reformation.

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[61] Early, 17, EBSCOhost.

[62] Irvin and Sunquist, 41.

[63] Michael Svigel, "Moving Furniture: A Return to Pulpit/Altar-Centered Worship," (seminar, Rural Home Missionary Association, Small-Town Pastors' Conference, Morton, IL, April 29, 2015).

[64] Brook W. R. Pearson, "Associations" in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, eds. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Loc 5507, Kindle.

Becoming Formally Organized

The church as a more formal organization blossomed as a response to the chaos and confusion that developed after the death of John, the last living apostle. Without the authority of the firsthand witness of an apostle, the different regions inhabited by Christianity needed a way to respond to those fostering discord. The overseers of the different regions began gathering records with which to provide certainty within the belief of the young church. According to Olson, "The bishops … responded to critics and cultists by remembering what the apostles had taught, gathering, preserving and interpreting their written legacies and writing letters and booklets to be circulated among churches. In that process Christian theology was born."[65]

A major development within the history of the church occurred in the early fourth century when the emperor Constantine proclaimed his conversion to Christianity and gave legal sanction to the church. "As churches become more visible and accepted in the civil arena, they absorbed more influences from the world around them."[66] Primary among these influences was the movement from meeting in homes into church buildings, some of which over time would become architectural centers of communities. The influence of the church facility on pastoral leadership was and continues to be significant.

The scope of this dissertation does not allow for further perusal with any detail of the great history of the church over the centuries. Unquestionably, the fledgling church grew fully and broadly into Christendom. Western history was molded by the impact of

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[65] Roger E. Olson, The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 27.

[66] Irvin and Sundquist, 163.

what became the Imperial Church, marked by the assumption of divine rights by kings. Power, both religious and political, became intertwined in this developing history of the church. Then this symbiotic relationship, which developed and was promoted over the centuries, came up against the American experiment with freedom of religion, the next period within the examination of the historical foundations affecting the small, rural church.[67]

The Development of the Church in America

As the church came to America with the European settlers, the religious traditions of Europe were initially duplicated in the colonies. However, the distant geographical setting from the seats of ecclesiastical authority soon provided opportunity for uniquely American experiences.

Religious Freedom and Westward Movement

Chief among the distinguishing features of the American church was religious freedom as established in the First Amendment to the *Constitution* of the United States, added in 1791. National religious liberty meant "there would be no national church in the United States, and no citizen would be compelled to attend any church. Religion was voluntary. Each denomination stood on equal footing and would have to proselytize to

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[67] The connections between the church and government warrant further exploration beyond what is tenable within the scope of this paper. Three sources of church history and theology cited within this paper that offer different insights include Diana Butler Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story* (New York: HarperOne, 2009); Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement, Volume I: Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); and Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999). There are numerous other sources as well. Bass's book, in particular, presents alternative perspectives regarding the historical development of the church.

survive and grow."[68] This independent spirit contributed to the great number and variety of churches in America, most of which were and continue to be small. The church reinforced, through the variety of Christian expression, how the new country would express its newfound freedom. "[T]he churches in the United States helped define what it meant to be 'American,' while at the same time what it meant to be 'American' had much to do with the development of churches."[69]

Westward movement greatly affected the development of the American church. The shifting center of population continue to emphasize the rural roots of American Christianity. "After the Revolutionary War so many Americans poured into the territory that the whole continent seemed to tilt toward the Pacific. Between 1792 and 1821, nine new states were added to the original thirteen. By mid-century half of the American people were west of the Appalachians."[70] The great growth of the church in America came outside of population centers, another factor contributing to the large number of small, rural churches.

The Impact of Revivals

Among the most notable of American religious experiences are revivals, which have had great impact upon the development of the American church. "The revival became the dominant religious force in American Protestantism (and an underappreciated

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[68] Early, 335, EBSCOhost.

[69] Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), Loc. 1449, Kindle. It should be noted that the designation "American" here would perhaps be better designated as "White Protestantism," which became the de facto civil religion in the United States.

[70] Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 384.

influence among American Catholics), in part because it was so effective in winning the lost but also because it so effectively expressed the country's democratic spirit."[71] Principle among the impacts of revivals has been periods of increased church attendance, even while focusing upon individual religious experience rather than that of the church as a whole. Early concluded, "The [revival] affected many aspects of American religion and life. The idea of individual transformation fit well with the developing concept of American individualism. Morality, public decency, and church attendance improved."[72] Consequently, the American Christian tradition developed more rooted in individual experience than as a collective expression.

However, a sense of community was captured as well. The common meal that was an integral part of the early church as a sign of faith[73] became a staple of the pioneer church across America. This gathering for meals was likely more social than religious, but the element of the meal as a shared faith experience was honored.

In part, the collectivism demonstrated by the common meal was captured in the churches of the immigrants who came to the United States. As the United States became a pluralistic society, "'many groups of immigrants streaming westward were taught that they, as true believers' had the particular truth, and should therefore 'segregate

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[71] Noll, Loc 2465, Kindle.

[72] Early, 331, EBSCOhost.

[73] Wendell L. Willis, "Banquets," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, eds. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Loc 5783, Kindle.

themselves from the godless throngs.'"[74] Immigration was one more factor in the development of the small, rural church in America.

The rapid increase in the geography and population of the United States presented challenges for the church. As the center of population shifted westward into new areas, denominational religious leaders sought information about the spiritual condition of the settlers, the frontiersmen, and the natives. These leaders sent observers who reported that conditions were deplorable, with the people "entirely ignorant of divine things."[75] Noting the lack of pastors and other religious leaders, plus a scarcity of Bibles, missionaries were sent to evangelize the Wild West. While there were notable spiritual achievements, possibly "the most lasting contribution Christians made to western settlement was the building of infrastructure needed for their society."[76] In the spiritual realm, however, revivals were the instrument that enabled the growing influence of the American church in the West.

Revivals also increased the expectations congregations have for the preaching of their pastors. "The Great Awakening disrupted the traditional role of the minister in many communities. … The success of the Great Awakening revivalists undercut the traditional role of the minister. To many it appeared that the local pastor could not attract crowds

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[74] Jon Gjerde, The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 10, quoted in Nancy Koester, Introduction to the History of Christianity in the United States, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), Loc 3367, Kindle.

[75] Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today*, rev. ed. (San Franscico: CA, HarperOne, 2002), Loc. 2913, Kindle.

[76] Nancy Koester, *Introduction to the History of Christianity in the United States*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), Loc 3315, Kindle.

and usher in a powerful revival."[77] These experiences and expectations have greatly affected all churches in America, the legacy of which has contributed to the leadership challenges in small, rural churches.

Pastoral leadership in the American church included many dedicated individuals, often serving without significant pay. As Halter has observed, "The gospel came to us through a church of barely paid and non-paid saints."[78] In spite of this, and perhaps because of it, the American church exerted great influence as the country grew.

The History of the Small, Rural Church

Throughout at least the first two hundred fifty years of the church in America, attending a small church has been the common practice among American Christians. "Historically, small membership churches were the norm until after the Civil War."[79]

Rural Lifestyle and the American Church

Up through the last half of the twentieth century, rural life was the dominant lifestyle among Americans. Peachey noted, "By the end of the 18th century, when after independence the first United States decennial census was taken, nearly 95% of the population was listed as rural."[80] This predominance of rural life meant that the rural

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[77] Early, 331-332.

[78] Hugh Halter, BIVO: A Modern-Day Guide for Bi-Vocational Saints, Leveraging all of Life into One Calling (Littleton, CO: Missio Publishing, 2013), Loc 150, Kindle.

[79] Montgomery, 23.

[80] Peachey, 201.

church was the primary experience for most Americans as well for much of the history of the American church.

Revivals reinforced the rural basis for the experience of the American church, contributing as well to the rise of the small church. "The western phase of the Second Great Awakening was [the] polar opposite [of the First Great Awakening]. It took place in the rural West; the ministers were generally uneducated; the services were rambunctious; and the soteriology [reinforced the] belief that individuals could forge their own destiny."[81] One result of the revivals was the emergence of new churches and new denominations,[82] many having Arminian-Wesleyan theology.

As the westward movement intensified and people settled in a new location, the church came quickly after. The Methodist circuit rider was one answer for bringing the church to the numerous small communities that were settled and grew rapidly. "Whenever frontiersmen created a new settlement, a Methodist minister was not far behind. … By 1844, the Methodist Episcopal Church reported 4,400 circuit riders."[83]

After the Civil War, the Holiness Movement, in which Methodists played a major part along with other denominations, was another instrument of the American church that found expression in rural areas more than in urban settings. While the Holiness Movement began in urban Victorian parlors prior to the Civil War, its greatest outpouring

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[81] Early, 353, EBSCOhost.

[82] Gaustad and Schmidt, Loc 2772, Kindle.

[83] Early, 381-382, EBSCOhost.

occurred after the Civil War when the Movement crystallized in the rural, less sophisticated Midwest and West.[84]

The religious freedom of the United States, as noted previously, has contributed to the establishment of a wide variety and a great number of churches throughout the country. This differed greatly from the religious experience of the Old World. "This liberty to choose a church – or to form a new one – was a radical departure from the old parish system, in which everyone was expected to attend the church closest to home."[85] This ability to choose has also led to the prevalence of small churches throughout the United States. The resultant religious competition, rather than being detrimental, contributed to the health of the country and reinforced the pervasiveness of the small church. As Koester deduced, "In an informal system of checks and balances, religious competition kept any one church or sect from becoming too powerful. It also generated new churches … that helped the new nation thrive."[86]

Population Shift: From Rural to Urban

The demographic trend of the movement of population from the rural to urban areas increased dramatically after the Civil War as the Industrial Revolution took hold in America. As farming became more mechanized, this shift in population has had and

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[84] Carole Dale Spencer, *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 171.

[85] Koester, Loc. 1220, Kindle.

[86] Ibid., Loc. 1628, Kindle.

continues to have tremendous impact upon rural churches. As Brinton concluded, "The migration from the country to the city has affected rural [churches] adversely."[87]

Perhaps the most significant factor that has had a negative effect on small, rural churches is the increasing expansion of the interstate highway system in the United States. "Take away the interstates and we would lose most of the megachurches overnight. There would be sizable churches only in the center of cities where people can use mass transportation."[88] Until the improvement of the highway transportation system, the neighborhood church and the rural church enjoyed prominence since people's ability to freely travel elsewhere was limited. The vast highway system has enabled people easy access to shopping and entertainment, as well as the ability to choose to travel to attend church. Today most do not give a second thought about traveling twenty-five miles or more to work or to go to church, much to the detriment of the small, rural church.

The Augusta Freedom Illustration: A Historical Review

As the elders of the Augusta Freedom Church pondered how to proceed in recruiting a new pastor, they decided it would be good to review the history of the church and its community. While several had been part of the church for their entire lives, none of the elders had spent any significant time looking over the history of the church.

The elders discovered that the church had been founded just before the Civil War when the community was first being settled. Following the war, the small town grew

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[87] Howard H. Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years* (Lebanon, PA: Sowers Printing Company, 1964), 201.

[88] Gordon MacDonald, Who Stole My Church? What to Do When the Church You Love Tries to Enter the 21st Century (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 49.

rapidly in anticipation of a railroad line being routed through the area. The town was platted to accommodate even more growth, and a railroad station was designed. However, the railroad never came to the town, instead being routed forty miles south. Consequently, the small community was never incorporated. Presently, there are fewer than ten houses in the unincorporated town of Augusta.

Despite this, the church grew, coming to average nearly two hundred in attendance a few years before the turn of the century. Then, as the twentieth century arrived, and the mechanization of farming began, the community's population began to decline. Farms grew larger, but with fewer people needed to do the farming. This trend continues even in the present.

As the elders studied the membership of the church, they noticed that the people currently attending the church lived in a much wider area than had been the case during the church's heyday in the late nineteenth century. The elders recognized that even some of them lived in a larger community that was twenty miles away from the church. These members and others like them continued coming to Augusta Freedom primarily because of past family connections. Following a gradual decline, the church's attendance had been relatively stable over the past forty years. A few years saw attendance pushing seventy, but most years the average was right around fifty.

After a fire, the church had built a new facility around 1925. The parsonage, next door to the church, had been built in the late 1960s. During the early 1980s, a Christian education wing had been added to the church.

The first full-time pastor had been called in the late 1880s. Prior to that, several men in the community served the church as pastor on either a volunteer or part-time basis

while also farming. In the late 1960s, to serve a large youth group, the church had employed a youth pastor for several years. However, when that group of youth matured, most moved away, and the youth pastor position was discontinued. Now the church struggles to maintain a living wage for one full-time pastor.

As the elders considered what their review of the church's history revealed, they reminded themselves that they could not live in the past. The present and future of the church demanded a fresh outlook, perhaps a new way of maintaining full-time pastoral leadership. They could see that Augusta Freedom Church needed a fresh leading from the Holy Spirit and not just for pastoral leadership.

The next chapter will define, review, and consider the characteristics of small, rural churches and the expectations they have for their pastors.

CHAPTER THREE: SMALL, RURAL CHURCHES AND THEIR PASTORS

Rural America is changing. Consequently, ministry in rural America is confronted with new challenges. "There is much diversity today in rural communities, so much so that 'rural' can no longer be equated with 'farming.'"[1] Before delving further into what constitutes the small, rural church, taking time to define what is meant by the terms small and rural in respect to the church may prove helpful.

Definition of Terms

The Small Church

While megachurches garner the attention of those inside and outside of Christianity, the reality is that most churches in America are small. Although no universal definition of what constitutes a small church exists, several analyses confirm their predominance.

From Canada: "One half of the churches in Canada have fewer than seventy-five in worship. In the US, the average church attracts fewer than ninety on a weekend. Many have fewer than fifty in worship. Only 2 percent of churches have more than 1,000 people."[2]

A Hartford Institute for Religion Research study noted: "There are 177,000 churches in America with fewer than 100 weekly worshipers and another 105,000

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[1] Barney Wells, Martin Giese, and Ron Klassen, *Leading through Change: Shepherding the Town and Country Church in a New Era* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2005), 24.

[2] Abe Funk, Hope for the Small Church: Revitalizing the Small Church through Leadership Development (Belleville, ON: Essence Publishing, 2005), 19.

churches that see between 100 and 500 in attendance each week. On the other hand, there are only 19,000 churches – or 6 percent of the total – with more than 500 attenders. . . Mega-churches (regular attendance over 2,000) make up less than one half of one percent of churches in America."[3]

So what size makes a church small? While there are no universally accepted and definitive criteria, general brackets of average attendance size are frequently cited: between 150 to 200/300, between 100 and 150, between 50 and 100, and less than 50. Such brackets may be correlated with the number of ministerial staff. Churches between 150 and 200/300 may have two full-time pastors, perhaps supplemented by a part-time pastor or two. Churches between 100 and 150 may have one full-time pastor and perhaps a part-time pastor. Churches between 50 and 100 may have a full-time pastor or a couple of part-time ministerial staff members. Those churches under 50 rarely have a full-time pastor.

Such size designations have been fairly consistent over several decades.[4] The 150 to 200 level has been frequently used to designate the small church. Some denominations set the break between smaller and larger churches at 250 or 300 in average attendance.[5]

In this paper, the small church will be those with generally only one full-time pastor,[6] perhaps supplemented by a part-time associate. This church averages under 150

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[3] Brandon J. O'Brien, *The Strategically Small Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2010), 25.

[4] Mavis, 10.

[5] Richard Boatman, Pastor, Oakwood United Methodist Church, Pleasant Hill, Iowa, telephone interview by author, November 30, 2017.

[6] Anthony G. Pappas, "Let's Talk Small," *American Baptist Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (June 1990): 87.

in attendance. Within that parameter, the primary focus will be on the lower half of this size grouping of churches, those with less than 75 in average attendance.

The Rural Church

Rural is harder to define than small. It is a more subjective term, finding its meaning through the purpose of its use rather than as a statistical calculation. The federal government has "at least 15 different official definitions of the word 'rural,' including 11 at the Agriculture Department alone."[7] Among these federal definitions are differing calculations of size and location. For example, one federal government definition sets any place with less than 50,000 as being rural. Another defines rural as any place that is not in a town or city of 2,500 or more residents. Some definitions of rural focus on population density, but the variance here is great as well, ranging from having less than 20 persons per square mile to less than 1,000 residents per square mile.[8]

Rural appears to be more of a mindset than a statistical figure. For example, the church served by the author views itself as a rural church, even though it is within the geographical boundaries of a metropolitan area. Therefore, to provide definition, comparing rural and urban mindsets may be more helpful than a precise definition.

"[M]any pastors [and their families] often experience culture shock when they move to a small town or rural community out of an urban or sub-urban background. There are distinct cultural differences between cities and rural areas of the United States.

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[7] "The Federal Definition of 'Rural' – Times 15," *Washington Post*, June 8, 2013, accessed November 28, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-federal-definition-of-rural--times-15/2013/06/08/a39e46a8-cd4a-11e2-ac03-178510c9cc0a_story.html?utm_term=.6471aefb1cfe.

[8] Ibid.

... Some aspects of rural thinking may drive seminary-trained, suburban-raised pastors crazy."[9] What cultural differences exist between the rural communities of small town churches and the urban-suburban areas of larger churches?

A major difference is the mindset assumed by the collective, that basic approach taken toward the influences and events in the surrounding environment. These are cultural differences, as real and distinct as differences in the ethnic cultures of immigrants. These cultural differences affect interactions in communities and churches. "Cultural differences … shape how churches understand and practice their relationships with their neighbors and neighborhoods."[10]

The rural mindset adapts to the pressure of unpredictability (weather, crops, income) by assuming a "cloak of pessimism." If one expects the worst and the worst happens, the worst is expected and bad doesn't seem so bad. But if one expects the best, bad is very bad, and the worst may be unbearable. On the other hand, the urban mindset adapts to the pressure of psychological overload by adopting a "cloak of detachment." If one does not notice, he or she won't have to care. And if one doesn't have to care, he or she can cope. But if one does notice, he or she is compelled to care and may not be able to cope when crushed by the endless responsibilities and need.[11]

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[9] Lee J. Smith, Reflections of a Small Town Pastor: Engaging in God's Mission in Smaller Places (Minneapolis, MN: NextStep Resources, 2013), 19.

[10] Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures, & Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), Loc. 699, Kindle.

[11] Martin Giese, "Understanding Your Ministry Context" (workshop, Rural Home Missionary Association's Small-Town Pastors' Conference, Morton, IL, April 19, 2016).

Table 1 provides a broad comparison generalizing the mindsets of the rural (agrarian) and the urban-suburban (cosmopolitan) regarding the basic cultural approach in each context to interactions and concepts.[12]

Table 1: Perspectives on Life Interactions and Concepts

Category		**Agrarians**	**Cosmopolitans**
Success		Survival	Advancement
Size		Small is beautiful	Big is better
Community		Independent	Interdependent
Planning		Presumptuous	Essential
Perfectionism		Jack-of-all-trades	Specialists
Outlook on life		Pessimistic	Optimistic
Time		Almanac	Day planner
Work		Manual	Mental
People		Relationships	Roles
Decision making		Grassroots	Top-down

Table 2 reveals the generalized approach to financial concepts of agrarian and cosmopolitan mindsets, identifying examples for each.[13]

[12] Wells, Giese, and Klassen, 26-34.

[13] Giese (workshop, RHMA).

Table 2: Approaches to Financial Concepts

Concept		Agrarian	Cosmopolitan	Examples
Assets		Fixed	Liquid	Farm Land vs Mutual Funds
Risk/Investment		High	Low	Farm Equipment vs Car
Income Type		Cyclical/Uncertain	Predictable	Sale of Crops vs Salary/Wage
Income Source		Non-wage	Salary/Wage	Farm Income vs Employment
Spending		Lump Sum	Regular Payments	Annual Farm Payment vs Monthly House Payment
Doing Without		Pride	Shame	Cash vs Credit

While the tables are simple generalizations, they provide insight about how conflict might arise when the two different cultural mindsets encounter one another. For the pastor in a small, rural church, such knowledge is critical.

The bottom line is the focus on what is valued. In the agrarian mindset, money is more valuable than time. The opposite is true for the cosmopolitan mindset; time is more valuable than money. The rural individual is willing to give up time to conserve money, while the urbanite will spend money to save time.[14]

In this paper, rural will be considered the mindset that has been adapted by a church in relationship to its perceptions of its environment.

[14] Ibid.

Characteristics of the Small, Rural Church

Small churches are different. "They are built around family and friendship relationships; ... more concerned about people than about excellence; ... primarily voluntary organizations; and ... intergenerational."[15]

Relational Intensity

Small churches reflect the close-knit nature of their communities. "Smaller churches provide unique opportunities to know and be known. ... As the song from the once-popular TV show *Cheers* reminds us, people like to go 'where everybody knows your name.'"[16]

With fewer people, each individual is known, often in great detail about his or her activities and relationships. According to Klassen, "One of the advantages of small-town intimacy is that you know most everyone who goes to church and who doesn't, who's likely a believer and who isn't."[17]

It is not just that in the small, rural church each person is recognized and known. There is a level of involvement that joins people together. Each person finds purpose in belonging to the small church through active participation in it. "Put simply, everyone is

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[15] Funk, 20.

[16] Shawn McMullen, "The Power of the Smaller Church" in *Releasing the Power of the Smaller Church*, ed. Shawn McMullen (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing, 2007), 20.

[17] Ron Klassen, *Church Growth in the Small Town* (Morton, IL: Rural Home Missionary Association), 1, accessed April 8, 2016, http://www.rhma.org/documents/SmallTalk/Church%20Growth%20in%20the%20 Small% 20Town.pdf.

needed in a small parish."[18] The small church functions best when all are involved, which is not a necessary component in the operation of large churches that tend to be more staff driven.

However, relationships are the driving force in small churches. As Daman has observed, decisions in small churches are frequently made based upon the impact on relationships.

> Within a small church, decisions are not based on corporate objectives, but on the effect the decisions will have on the unity and fellowship of the congregation. No matter how significant or beneficial a decision might be, it will be rejected if it is perceived to undermine or threaten the unity within the community. So, for example, a decision to replace the organ with a keyboard would not be based on the objective of reaching baby boomers, but on how it would affect the family who donated the organ and the person who has been playing the organ for the past twenty years.[19]

As a small town has intimate knowledge among its people about each other, small churches operate in an intimate manner, like a family rather than as an organization. Smith, notes, "Small town and country churches are more relationally oriented than organizationally oriented. It is not the business model but the family model that predominates."[20]

Consequently, the decision-making in a small church flows out of a family-like operational style. Therefore, the small, rural church works as a whole, a single unit rather than as individuals or committees. "The whole congregation makes decisions

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[18] Gael Gensler, "Good Things Come in Small Parishes," *U. S. Catholic* 72, no. 1 (January 2007): 30.

[19] Glenn C. Daman, *Leading the Small Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 213.

[20] Smith, 69.

rather than a representative few. … The ultimate decision-making authority resides within the congregation rather than within the board or pastor."[21]

Identity and Success

The strong connections within the context of rural life drive small, rural churches in developing not just relationships but also a sense of identity. "Rural churches see themselves as expressive of rural life and hope to integrate the church with the community, at least on a surface level."[22] The interrelationship between the rural church and its community fosters a perspective that pervades the very mission of the church. Extending God's kingdom is not just about conversion, it's about establishing roots that sustain all of life. There is a deepness in this connection between church and community in rural areas that extends beyond the spiritual into life's very existence. One cannot survive without the other.

Achievement for a small church is measured in relationships rather than through any competitive model, different from large churches which typically use decision-making practices based upon business models. "Churches that operate under a managerial model measure success by results. They are product oriented rather than process oriented. ... In the family model, success is measured by relationships and inward experiences. The congregation is process oriented rather than product oriented."[23]

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[21] Glenn C. Daman, "15 Characteristics of the Small Church," *Enrichment Journal* (2016), accessed March 2, 2017, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200104/011_characteristics_sidebar.cfm.

[22] Montgomery, 31.

[23] Daman, *Leading*, 216.

Decision-making

As a result, the decision-making process in small, rural churches can be hidden, occurring behind the scenes rather than in formal business meetings. "Many larger congregations have a well-defined leadership team, and most members of these churches understand how and by whom decisions are made. This isn't always true in smaller churches. The unique dynamics of the smaller church often mean that decisions are made by a number of different people in a number of different positions."[24]

The big, important decisions in small, rural churches are made and owned by the entire body. While business is generally conducted less formally, the decisions are made only after everyone has a chance to hear, question, and weigh in on the matter. As Johnson observes, "Business meetings tend to function as committees of the whole. People bring up topics, and the entire group discusses them before a decision is made."[25]

Belonging

The strength of the small, rural church is in the intensity of its relationships. Here is where the mission of the small, rural church thrives, by bringing people into relationship with God through the fellowship of faith. "There is no greater feeling on earth than to belong."[26] This sense of belonging is the central need of all humanity. "To

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[24] McMullen, "Power," 26.

[25] Bob I. Johnson, "The Nature and Characteristics of the Small Membership Church," *Review & Expositor* 93, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 375.

[26] Ken Lloyd, "Ministry on the Street" (presentation, Doctor of Ministry in Leadership & Spiritual Formation Cohort #1, Cannon Beach, OR, October 27, 2016).

belong is a vital need based in the spiritual nature of the human being."[27] Building vital, enduring relationships provides the impetus for the life of small, rural churches.

The informal operational preference of the small, rural church becomes especially evident in how it expresses care for people and builds relationships among its members. "People who are not comfortable with bantering and 'idle talk' will not be at home in a small church. Caring times are rarely by appointment or as part of a specific agenda. They most likely occur at the post office, on the street corner, in the parking lot, over the phone, or during a pastoral call. Caring occurs after the funeral more often than in planned 'sharing' groups."[28]

Planning

The small church's relational orientation has an impact upon the planning done by the small church, which is also generally a less formal process than the practice of larger churches. "Small churches are like families, and families normally live from day to day unless a problem comes up. . . Most small churches prefer to take things as they come."[29]

Fostering relationships is an ingrained process within small, rural churches. Among the most frequently used practices that promotes relationship-building and nurtures community is the fellowship meal. Montgomery notes, "Food is never just food;

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[27] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), Loc. 2933, Kindle.

[28] Johnson, 371.

[29] Ron Crandall, *Turn Around Strategies for the Small Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 116.

it provides an opportunity to work together, share similarities and differences in positive ways, an opportunity for group building and value formation."[30]

Dealing with Change

Another result of the relational orientation of small churches is cautiousness toward change. Being innovative is a process rather than an event, a testing of the waters before proceeding. As Wells suggests, "For the smaller church to release its power, it is going to have to implement deliberate changes and respond to unexpected changes in its context. To safely navigate the waters of change, you can't rock the boat too much."[31]

Consequently, the change process is often more difficult in the small, rural church. Since even one strident voice in a small church can curtail change, it is vital to provide opportunity for all voices to be heard. Seeking unity becomes the operational standard for small, rural churches, even when the organizational structure is quite informal. "Because one or two dissenting voices can make a big difference in a smaller church, it's important that the members of the smaller church understand and value the biblical concept of unity. In an attempt to do what larger churches are doing, some leaders of smaller churches may move too quickly to implement change, alienating and even losing members in the process."[32] The collective life of the small, rural church is built upon the value granted each individual by all the others within the church.

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[30] Montgomery, 33-34.

[31] Barney Wells, "Conflict Management: Maintaining Unity Through Prevention, Intervention, and Resolution," in *Releasing the Power of the Smaller Church*, ed. Shawn McMullen (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing, 2007), 86.

[32] McMullen, "Power," 26.

Historical and Social Memory

There is significant community memory in rural areas that is shared by small, rural churches. For example, in the small unincorporated town with its small church in which the author grew up, people will reference the "Jackson place." The Jacksons haven't lived there for over 120 years, and there hasn't been a house there for at least 75 years. Yet everyone in the area knows where to go if told to head out to the Jackson farm. Navigating the social memory of the small, rural church is crucial in honoring the value of the area's heritage, one of the foundations of the rural church. "People in small-membership churches value the past. In fact, memories are extremely important and strategically placed in the kitchen cabinet of survival food for the small congregation."[33]

To confront the impact of historical memory and address change in the small, rural church requires deliberate action. These churches generally "operate in a casual, unintentional manner. Transition cannot be coped with casually but must be intentionally addressed."[34] Included in the deliberate action leading to change is the need to provide a forum for differing viewpoints to be expressed prior to initiating action. To fail to do so will result in conflict, disunity, and even departure.

The depth of relationships found in the small church affects its contentment and angst as people come and go. Small churches cannot narrowly focus upon attracting a certain demographic but must take a broader, intergenerational approach. Then, when someone leaves the church, pain is experienced, regardless of the reason for departure.

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[33] Johnson, 369.

[34] Earl D. Trent, Jr., "Churches and Communities in Transition," in *Learning to Lead: Lessons in Leadership for People of Faith*, ed. Willard W. C. Ashley, Sr. (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2012), 124, Kindle.

Regarding small, rural churches, Ingalls has concluded, "People here notice when someone leaves, and it often hurts. Targeting a certain profile of people like Saddleback Church does is easier when there are 500,000 of them in your community. Smaller churches have to reach a broader spectrum of people simply because there aren't as many people."[35]

Leadership

Leadership also looks different in the small church. With fewer people, yet the same basic operational tasks, "[s]maller churches are able to bring a larger percent of their people into firsthand contact with Christian reality through active service. To use an educational figure, the little church offers better laboratory opportunities for Christian growth."[36]

Without paid staff, the small church turns to lay leaders and volunteers, which, if recognized and fostered, provides opportunity for leadership development. McMullen notes, "Smaller churches provide unique opportunities for leadership development. Opportunities to lead and to train leaders abound in the smaller churches."[37]

In small churches leadership is widely distributed and informal; relational rather than positional. Being granted leadership is a sign of trust. "Influence and authority to

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[35] Brian Ingalls, "Elders and Other Leaders: Building Positive Relationships for Effective Decision Making," in *Releasing the Power of the Smaller Church*, ed. Shawn McMullen (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing, 2007), 68.

[36] Mavis, 28.

[37] McMullen, "Power," 21.

lead … are earned. Influence is not the product of simply being called to be the pastor. In the small church influence and authority to lead are the products of trust."[38]

One harsh reality confronting new pastors in small churches is that they are not immediately granted authority to lead. "Since pastoral turnover in smaller churches is relatively frequent, the congregation is legitimately concerned about pastors who set the course and then abandon ship."[39]

Often lay leadership asserts authority over pastoral leadership. "Power in the small church is not usually in the hands of the pastor."[40] This can change as the pastor earns the trust of the congregation, but wise pastors understand that they will need to lead gently from a position of little authority, at least initially.

Small churches, like most people, are creatures of habit. This displays itself in the assumption of leadership roles within the small, rural church. Bickers observes, "The same people hold the same offices year after year. We sit in the same pews week after week. Everyone knows his or her role in the small church. It provides us with a sense of security and stability that we cannot experience in any other area of our lives.[41]

Leadership in small churches, like the organizational structure, tends to be informal – even when formal positions exist. Frequently, the most influential leader holds no official position. "In the small town and country church, the real leaders may not be the formally-elected leaders and the pastor needs to discover who the real leaders are." [42]

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[38] Smith, 72.

[39] Hagen, 78.

[40] Smith, 71.

[41] Bickers, *Intentional Ministry*, 102, EBSCOhost.

[42] Smith, 71.

Even though small churches have fewer people and tend to exert leadership informally, and although decisions are relationally based, there often are numerous committees. "Small churches are often over-organized"[43] with a committee for everything. In comparison, larger churches generally streamline governance structures, relying heavily on paid staff to make operational decisions about necessary tasks.

Participation

Sheer numbers limit the staffing in small, rural churches. Most work is accomplished by volunteers rather than paid staff, the result of not only limited staff but also limited finances. Turnover in pastoral leadership often occurs regularly for the small, rural church. As Mavis noted, "[T]here is frequently a lack of workers. Sometime there is only part-time pastoral service and that is on a short-tenure basis. … Much of the church work is done by laymen in the smaller groups and there is often a shortage of these workers."[44] This scarcity of workers and the high turnover rate among pastors too often fosters fatigue and discouragement among the faithful.

Yet, the dearth of workers can provide an unexpected benefit: a greater percentage of participation in the operation of the church. "There are two reasons why smaller churches can enlist a large percentage of their members in active participation. First, the sense of fellowship makes it easy for the people to participate in all areas of church life. Secondly, the need for participants in smaller churches creates a situation of

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[43] Funk, 103.

[44] Mavis, 11.

urgency that challenges the people to engage in the total program of the church."[45] Conversely, larger churches experience less commitment from a larger number of attenders. "Large-church attenders are significantly less likely to attend weekly than are their small-church counterparts. This pattern holds across denominations, which gives credence to the argument that size, independent of other factors, promotes lower levels of involvement."[46] Thus, the size of small churches has a great impact upon participation and attendance. Because the sense of family pervades, the person who is absent is missed, for that person is needed in order for the small, rural church to function well.

The Present Condition of the Small, Rural Church

In part due to mass media and social media, a more urban mindset is entering rural areas. As Anthony and Boersma concluded, "Our culture has changed radically, so it stands to reason that our ministry must change to keep pace. We no longer live in an agrarian culture but rather one that is technological in scope and emphasis."[47]

The changes of the agrarian landscape have had great impact upon the small, rural church. For example, in rural Illinois, the town of "Arcola has existed to serve the needs of the areas farmers, and the community's churches … have been made up of those same farmers. In the last twenty years, however, Arcola has changed. As the size of farms has increased, the number of resident farmers has declined. More of the residents are

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[45] Mavis, 25.

[46] David Eagle, "More People, Looser Ties: Social Life in the Megachurch," *Christian Century* 133, no. 8 (April 13, 2016): 13.

[47] Anthony and Boersma, Loc. 1450, Kindle.

professionals, factory workers, and folk who commute to office jobs a half-hour or more away."[48]

Influx: Changing Demographics

Also, "rurbanization" is occurring at an increasing pace, as urbanites move into rural areas to be part of its more relaxed lifestyle, commuting physically or technologically to work. The attraction is the perceived rural lifestyle, even if the new residents don't fully adapt. "Small towns are thought to be: safe, friendly, relaxed, gossipy, conformist, boring, remote, married, religious, clean, and quiet."[49]

The rural landscape is transforming. New groups are moving into rural areas, especially into those areas within driving distance of metropolitan centers. The arrival of new groups also places stress upon the rural poor, increasing competition for property and even jobs. "Some changes coming to town and country contexts are not happening in other places, such as the emergence of the new rural poor and the arrival of suburban transplants."[50] Another group moving into rural areas is the urban poor, some of whom speak primary languages other than English, seeking inexpensive housing in the abandoned buildings of the depopulated countryside.[51] This influx is unsettling for many longer-term rural residents. "In [this] transition …, the principal dynamic can be

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[48] Barney Wells, "Conflict Management," 85.

[49] Thomas P. Nebel, *Big Dreams in Small Places: Church Planting in Smaller Communities* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2002), 43.

[50] Wells, Giese, and Klassen, 13.

[51] Ibid., 45.

described as an invasion of the body snatchers outlook. They look like us, but they are not like us."[52]

Many rural areas are experiencing changing demographics in race and ethnicity. As Crandall reports, "[S]mall churches … are experiencing noticeable ethnic and cultural shifts in their community."[53] This adds another dimension to the ministry of the small, rural church, reaching out to serve those of different cultures. This is not something that is easily done for most rural churches and communities.

Regardless of the reason for relocating, former urban-suburban dwellers bring their urban cultural expectations with them. Conflicts arise as rural and urban mindsets clash. "Long-term residents and newcomers have different perspectives. They are on different wavelengths. It can be hard for them to understand each other. Lack of understanding often leads to conflict."[54]

Transportation: Outflow

The increased mobility goes both ways. While former city residents find living in rural areas and continuing to work in the city appealing, rural residents have become accustomed to driving into the city for work, goods, and services, including church. As MacDonald concluded, "But when the interstates became operational, people no longer gave a second thought to traveling twenty-five or more miles to shop at malls or go to the

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[52] Trent, 119, Kindle.

[53] Crandall, 133.

[54] Wells, Giese, and Klassen, 26.

movies or even to go to church. . . Now people can drive long distances to a church campus that provides every kind of ministry imaginable for their families."[55]

The impact on small churches is obvious. If one feels slighted by the small, rural church, leaving to attend a bigger church is easy. One lure of the bigger church is to get lost in the crowd, something that is unattainable in the small church. "Anonymity is harder to come by in a smaller town, so knowing others becomes the rule of the day."[56]

The movement from rural to urban has been occurring throughout history. In America, the pace of this trend increased dramatically during the middle of the twentieth century. After the Great Depression and World War II, "the social fabric of the nation moved from stability to mobility. … The movement from farms and rural areas to the cities was explosive."[57] The mobility of the American populace continues to exert unending pressure upon rural society and upon the small, rural church.

Before this massive outflow, the community church was a staple of American culture. Whatever denomination the church was, the members of the community attended because the church was nearby. As Rhodes observed, "Previously the church's organizing principle was geography; personal preference and denominational affiliation came second in a low-mobility world."[58] Having a high-mobility culture magnifies the pressure on the small, rural church as people not only move from the small community to

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[55] Gordon MacDonald, 49.

[56] Nebel, 44.

[57] Paul O. Madsen, "The Rural Church Movement and the Rural Church Center," *American Baptist Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (June 1990): 105.

[58] Brandon D. Rhodes, "Re-Placing the Church: Missional Opportunities in the Emerging Energy Crisis" (DMin diss., Portland Seminary, George Fox University, 2013), 36, accessed January 3, 2018, http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/57.

metropolitan areas but will also just drive by to attend the larger church in other communities.

Being Known: The Family Dynamic

Rural cultural intimacy becomes a stumbling block for some. Having seen the bright lights of the city and the crush of the crowd, they become enticed about losing themselves in it. Media trumpets this as an advantage, escaping the feeling of the rural area in which it seems that "everybody knows more than everybody wants everybody to know about everybody." So, some leave the country church to escape being known too well. "Among rural people, one's entire personal history is known: conduct, values, past sins ..., marriage relationship, family life, financial dealings – it's all an open book ... Life in the small town is lived in a fishbowl. Nothing gets past anyone."[59]

Yet, this abundance of common knowledge does not necessarily produce any collective pride or security within small, rural churches. The dichotomy of the intimacy of relationships is that it can isolate individuals and even the church itself, creating barriers that inhibit spiritual growth and church growth. "Some leaders and volunteers in smaller churches feel insecure about themselves and their congregations … This insecurity leads them to huddle together for support and protection, … They may think of themselves as a friendly church. … But in the end they are friendly only to one another."[60]

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[59] Klassen, 2.

[60] Shawn McMullen, "Encouraging Words for Smaller Churches," in *Releasing the Power of the Smaller Church*, ed. Shawn McMullen (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing, 2007), 153.

Thus, two competing realities often exist in small, rural churches. They are built upon intense, personal relationships but can exist as closed systems to anyone new.

> [T]here are two central signs of spiritual development in small churches: inclusiveness and hospitality. … [A]nyone who has been associated with such congregations will understand that the cohesiveness that allows these churches to survive in often-difficult environments can also shut people out. It is hard for many of these congregations to show hospitality to those who are different from themselves.[61]

Small, rural churches continually live out this internal struggle of developing a family dynamic while being open and welcoming to others. Such struggles cause stress among many small, rural churches and creates a lack of confidence among their members in the church's ability to provide ministry. According to Montgomery, "Small membership church members and leaders report a sense of disempowerment and vulnerability."[62] There are external pressures as well, with one of the more significant ones being the presence, the power, and the reach of the megachurch. With a prevailing sense of inadequacy, coupled with a transportation system that makes movement to other churches easy, the lure of the megachurch creates additional pressure on the small, rural church and magnifies the internal perception of inadequacy.

The Influence of the Megachurch on the Small, Rural Church

> When I hear adults say, "Well I don't like a big church, I like about 200, I want to be able to know everybody," I say, "You are so stinking selfish. You care nothing about the next generation. All you care about is you and your five friends. You don't care about your kids … anybody else's kids." You're like, "What's up?" I'm saying if you don't go to a church large enough where you can have enough Middle Schoolers and High Schoolers to separate them, so they can have small groups and grow up the local church, you are a selfish adult. Get over it. Find

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[61] Gerald A. Butler, "Spiritual Leadership in the Small Membership Church," *Congregations* 32, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 40.

[62] Montgomery, 24.

> yourself a big old church where your kids can connect with a bunch of people and grow up and love the local church.[63]

The backlash reverberated greatly after megachurch preacher Andy Stanley declared his apparent contempt for small churches and the people who attend them. Andy Stanley is not the first, nor will he be the last, to denigrate the small church.

The perception of the inadequacy of the small church is not new. Consider the following statement written in 1957:

> Are smaller local churches the poor relations of larger congregations? … There are leaders in American Protestantism who answer … in the affirmative. … They think that Protestantism would gain if many of the smaller churches were closed. I recently heard a learned professor, cloistered in the security of a great divinity school, plead for a movement that would merge all congregations with fewer than 300 members.[64]

Even those involved in small churches often have negative perceptions about the small church. As one pastor reflected upon his service in a small church, "I entered believing that there must be something wrong with churches that remain small. . . It took several years of floundering around before I realized that the biggest problem this smaller church had was not its size, but its pastor."[65]

The megachurch's impact is increasing throughout Christianity, affecting all churches. Church attendance statistics confirm the increase in the numbers of these very large churches. "According to the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, the number of

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[63] Andy Stanley, "Saved by the Church" (sermon, North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, GA, February 28, 2016).

[64] Mavis, 9.

[65] Hagen, 77, Kindle.

megachurches (churches with more than 2,000 people in attendance at weekly worship) increased from fewer than 100 in 1970 to nearly 1,800 today."[66]

The model of the megachurch has become the predominant template for the American church. Megachurches "have a common style of gathering which is labor-intensive as well as visually and aurally dynamic. Accordingly, the goal is to grow in size so that this model can be implemented. This and other goals related to size are clearly advocated by the proponents of the megachurch and even of the general larger church model."[67]

Addressing the disproportionate influence of the megachurch, Jim Belcher, author of *Deep Church*, muses, "Why have we allowed the ministry experience of one half of one percent of all churches to become the standard by which we judge the remaining 99.5 percent of churches?"[68] However, small, rural churches have not coalesced in any manner that provides a model that specifically addresses their needs.

Small churches comprise the clear majority of churches in America. Yet large churches receive considerably more attention, often instilling an expectation that to be successful every church should adopt the policies, practices, procedures, and features of the megachurch. However, like in other situations, the cookie cutter approach is not always applicable from one setting to another. Smith cautions, "[I]f you intend to pastor effectively in rural or small town places, I would suggest that you will need to be

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[66] David Eagle, "More People, Looser Ties: Social Life in the Megachurch," *Christian Century* 133, no. 8 (April 13, 2016): 12.

[67] Marinello, 151-152.

[68] Jim Belcher, "Forward" to *The Strategically Small Church*, by Brandon J. O'Brien (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2010), 10.

cautious about adopting all the tenets of what I would call the 'mega-church syndrome.'"[69]

The question of the prophet appropriately tempers these perceptions: "Who despises the day of small things?"[70] Yet many question the validity of the small, rural church. Its identity lacks clarity, separate from the megachurch. Small churches look to the megachurch for models of worship and of operation. However, there is virtually no way small, rural churches can emulate the megachurch, despite the effort many put into doing so. As Black has surmised, "[I]n our culture, there is obviously an ever-increasing gap between the little church (those under 300) and the mega church (those greater than 2000)."[71]

In the face of the nearly overwhelming influence of the megachurch, the small, rural church has strengths to use to its advantage in significant ministry. "[W]hen it comes to the vital qualities that define strong churches – such as growing spiritually, participating in the congregation, and having a sense of belonging – small churches have a decided advantage over larger churches."[72]

Still, understanding there is pressure to look and act like the megachurch, the expectations for pastors in small, rural churches are expanding.

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[69] Smith, 25.

[70] Zechariah 4:10a (World English Bible)

[71] Black, 4, Kindle.

[72] David Venzke, "All Churches Great and Small: 60 Ideas for Improving Your Church's Ministry," *Congregations* 32, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 40.

Expectations for Pastors in Small, Rural Churches

Anthony and Boersma contend, "As the church struggles to keep up with an ever-changing world, the role of the pastor is changing too."[73] The pastor in the small, rural church is not immune to these changes. Demographic, financial, personal, and relational factors influence congregations to increase their expectations for pastors, in addition to the spiritual factors that lead individuals to respond to the calling to become pastors.

Visibility

Peterson has observed, "Those of us who enter into this way of life, this vocation, this calling, face formidable difficulties both inside and outside congregations – idolatrous expectations from insiders, a consignment to irrelevancy by outsiders."[74] Rural pastors perhaps face these competing issues more than their urban and suburban counterparts. They generally operate more visibly in the public arena of their communities, a big fish in a small pond.

A pivotal expectation for the pastor of a small, rural church is to be busy. The members expect to see the pastor in the community and in the church office. They expect the pastor to attend committee meetings and to study the Bible and other religious literature. They want good, Biblical sermons, and they want the pastor to visit church members and visitors. Church researcher Thom Rainier conducted an experiment at a church when he was its pastor. He provided the twelve elders a survey with about twenty areas of congregational responsibility on it. He asked the elders to share with him the

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[73] Anthony and Boersma, Loc. 1342, Kindle.

[74] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 6, Kindle.

minimum amount of time he should average in each area each week. To meet the minimum expectations of the twelve elders, Rainer would have had to work more than sixteen hours every day for seven days each week. This was the result of only the twelve surveys of the elders and not the entire church![75]

Historically, the desire among small, rural congregations is that the pastor closely identify with them on a personal level. There is an unwavering desire for unity, a sense of being one people united together under a strong bond of mutual commitment. One example, from the middle of the past century displaying this passion for such a strong connection, describes the successful relationship between a rural church and its pastor. The record reports, "The fact is that church and pastor are suited to each other, speak the same language, serve the same high purposes."[76] Such a relationship can only grow over a period of years, the result of a longer pastoral tenure.

Leadership

Determining one's role and position as the pastor within the small, rural church is not a simple task. Because of the trend of short pastoral tenure, lay persons frequently assume leadership roles that in larger churches are generally the responsibility of the paid pastoral staff. However, it is assumed that the pastor will lead. Morse noted, "If we are to be God's influencers, we need to come to grips with the true role of power in our lives. If we are to incarnate the living presence of Christ, we must understand the combination of

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[75] Thom S. Rainer, "How Many Hours Must a Pastor Work to Satisfy the Congregation?," *Thom S. Rainier: Growing Healthy Churches Together*, July 24, 2013, accessed February 12, 2016, http://thomrainer.com/2013/07/how-many-hours-must-a-pastor-work-to-satisfy-the-congregation/.

[76] "Great Churches of America: 7. Olive Chapel Baptist, Rural Route 3, Apex, N. C." *Christian Century* 67, no. 31 (August 2, 1950): 916.

his power with our own."[77] The small, rural church will respond to humble, servant leadership that demonstrates responsiveness to Christ's leading. While trust is not earned quickly, its importance amplifies the need for longer pastoral tenure.

Most pastors have had some training in the theoretical components of leadership. However, this training tends to focus upon personal qualities and the style of decision-making. The spiritual leadership of a church is much broader based, involving not only ethical actions but also consideration of the church in its location. It is not just about doing the job. It involves living life in the community.

> There are three essential elements of leadership: character, competency, and context. Much has been researched and written about leadership character and competency. Context is the most neglected of the three. It is possible to be righteous and highly capable and *highly ineffective*. For example, Chuck Swindoll did not do well as a pastor in New England but became highly successful in Southern California, experiences about which Swindoll has written and spoken.[78]

All too often small, rural churches, which tend to operate informally, do not set forth specific expectations for pastors. There is almost a sense that to do so would inhibit the leading of the Holy Spirit upon the ministry of the pastor. Therefore, many small, rural church pastors are left to formulate what their ministry will look like all by themselves. As Willimon has observed, "In most congregations we are on our own so far as basic definition of our ministry is concerned. In conscientious persons this encourages a heightened sense of responsibility and can lead to an oppressive situation if the person is not only conscientious but also perfectionistic as well as unrealistic."[79] Lacking clear

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[77] MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 41.

[78] Giese (workshop, RHMA).

[79] Willimon, 317, Kindle.

expectations breeds an environment for dissatisfaction among the congregation and within the pastor. This all too often leads to either dismissal or burnout, contributing to short pastoral tenure.

The lack of specificity in expectations for the pastor of a small, rural church is not due to disinterest among the members. Rather, it is that in these churches, the pastor is expected to do it all. "The smaller church is not looking for a [pastor] who spends 40 hours a week crafting an erudite sermon, or shaping a vision-directed five year ministry plan, but a generalist who does some preaching, some visiting, some planning, some counseling, some youth work, some teaching and maybe even some building maintenance."[80] The small, rural church is not built upon pastoral study, but instead is invested in relationship-building by the pastor as well as the members.

The small, rural church wants its pastor to become immersed "in the life of the community . . . at the football games, the Memorial Day Service, the community picnic, serving as a volunteer fireman or just hanging out with the locals at [the] café."[81] The lifeblood of the small, rural church pulses from such interaction, nourishing the marrow of community, spiritually as well as relationally.

Change Agent

With the many factors modulating within the church and the transitory nature of the context surrounding it, change is inevitable for the small, rural church. However, as previously noted, the small, rural church is often reluctant to embark upon change.

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[80] Smith, 46.

[81] Ibid.

"Change in town and country areas occurs at a slower pace than other contexts. Leading change requires more patience, more time."[82] Many congregations will claim that they want the pastor to lead them through a change process, but the reality is that they have no desire to change. Many a pastor has been caught in the middle of this paradox so frequently present in small, rural churches.

Therefore, change in the small, rural church tends to be a slow process. Highland concludes, "Churches are by nature cautious, conserving organizations, …holders of the faith, believing and fighting to be sure the message is conserved. Often we stop there, get stuck there."[83] While small, rural churches won't often say it, and sometimes aren't even consciously aware of it, they do expect and need the pastor to lead the change process. The community around the church is changing, and the church must adapt to these changes or slowly die.

However, leading change can be a slow and difficult process for the pastor, not only because change is hard but also because the pastor has difficulty finding the time to reflect, plan, organize, lead, and review the change process. "Change is elusive for many town and country pastors because their 'job descriptions' are so sweeping that any desire to be a change agent is held prisoner by the urgent."[84] Change consumes time. When the pastor's job description is so all-encompassing, the pastor ends up responding to the immediate, putting out fires, rather than engaging in a time-consuming change process.

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[82] Wells, Giese, and Klassen, 13.

[83] Highland, Loc. 902, Kindle.

[84] Wells, Giese, and Klassen, 13.

As Daman describes, "In the family model of leadership, . . . [t]he role of the pastor . . . is not to set the direction, but to help the congregation establish its own direction and to make sure that the direction reflects biblical reality."[85] The servant leader, the pastor, must gently move the congregation toward change initially as a humble example.

Not only does the pastor need to lead the change process as the church grows with its community, but the pastor is also expected to guide the members of the congregation on their individual and collective faith journeys. McMullen asserts, "[O]ne of the primary responsibilities of any church is to help its members become more and more like Christ. And it begins with the leadership."[86]

Relationships

These many responsibilities require pastoral leadership. However, in small, rural churches, leadership is not automatically conferred upon the pastor. Often, past experiences have fostered a dependence upon lay leadership, which is not easily surrendered. In fact, there are some small churches that are averse to the pastor assuming leadership. Instead, such churches seek "a chaplain who performs the pastoral duties of shepherding, marrying and burying because there is already a long-established leadership person or structure in place."[87]

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[85] Daman, *Leading*, 214.

[86] McMullen, "Power," 25.

[87] Funk, 50.

It takes time to become trusted. Yet, trust garnered from investing in building relationships is vital to the success of the small-town pastor. "People in a small church evaluate how much time the pastor spends with them. They want to know the pastor personally and individually."[88] Regardless of what the job description states or what the evaluation instrument might contain, the bottom line is that the congregants will expect the pastor to allocate time for visitation. It is viewed as a pastoral investment in the small, rural church.

Accountability

Whether pastoral expectations are formally outlined or simply informally understood, the small, rural church places the welfare of the church, its spiritual health, its financial well-being, and its attendance squarely upon the shoulders of the pastor. Especially if attendance declines, the pastor is held responsible. The result, a snowball effect once such dissatisfaction begins, is a stream of departures with the blame placed upon the ineptitude and incompetence of the pastor. As Bevere has concluded, "Today men and women leave churches so readily if they see something wrong in the leadership. … If they don't like what the pastor preaches, they leave. … This list [of pastoral shortcomings] doesn't end. Rather than face the difficulties and maintain hope, they run to where there appears to be no conflict."[89] Departures are disheartening for the pastor, especially in trying to determine what was the specific cause. The blame all too often is laid at the pastor's feet.

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[88] Daman, *Leading*, 215.

[89] John Bevere, The Bait of Satan: Living Free from the Deadly Trap of Offense (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2014), 54.

There is an expectation of administrative competence for pastors in the small, rural church, even if this is not an area of skill, strength, or giftedness for the pastor. Anthony and Boersma have observed that "more pastors are terminated over mismanagement than false doctrine."[90] This expectation for administrative competence applies not only to church matters but also to the personal finances of the pastor. Churches do not want their reputation within the community soiled by the financial incompetence of a pastor.

With respect to these demands on the pastor, Willimon has noted, "Because of the ill-defined nature of pastoral ministry, the work demands a high level of internal control. Pastors have less peer supervision than any other profession."[91] In the small church, the pastor is too often alone, without anyone else with whom to share, consult, or confer.

Consequently, to deal with the wide-ranging ministry expectations, the pastor of the small, rural church needs to develop a supportive ministry team of volunteers and allow them to assume responsibility for some duties within the church. As Raggio-Ashley admonishes, "Effective delegation is essential, because sometimes the needs and care of the congregation and the community may eclipse those of the clergy as well as family members, which can adversely impact the health of all."[92] To operate as a lone wolf often means the pastor is putting her or his physical and spiritual health, as well as personal relationships, at risk.

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[90] Anthony and Boersma, Loc. 1369, Kindle.

[91] Willimon, 316.

[92] Raggio-Ashley, 42, Kindle.

The Augusta Freedom Church: Analysis and Expectations

To report on their findings regarding the history of the church and its pastors, the elders of the Augusta Freedom Church requested a meeting of the church. Following their presentation, questions arose concerning how to proceed in searching for a new pastor. After a brief discussion, one of the older members of the congregation observed that it didn't make much sense to hire a new pastor if the church didn't know what it wanted in a pastor.

More discussion ensued. Adding to the observation of the senior member was a question from one of the elders about whether the church knew what its purpose and role in the community was. After the lengthy discussion, all agreed that it was important to determine what the church should be about in its ministry, and, once that was determined, what characteristics would be needed in a new pastor to help the church in carrying out this ministry purpose. To move the church forward in this endeavor, the elders were asked to contact the denomination's regional officer for assistance.

The denomination's regional officer agreed to provide the resources for this effort. A series of meetings were arranged to help Augusta Freedom Church members work through the discovery process. Nearly everyone in the church was able to be at every session. By the conclusion of these meetings, the church had developed a clear and purposeful ministry target and a set of expectations for the work of the new pastor, including a written job description, the first one the church had ever had.

The church recognized during the meetings that no one person would be able to fulfill all of the responsibilities they had initially listed. There simply wasn't enough time within the typical week. Consequently, the church began to focus on what was important

and essential for the health and growth of the church to honor their call to be active in serving God's kingdom.

The denominational leader challenged the members of Augusta Freedom Church to first look at themselves and how the church functioned before considering what the responsibilities of the pastor should be. Individuals opened up and shared in what was a difficult but exceptionally valuable time. The church collectively began to understand that their friendliness had become a means to protect themselves. Their fellowship had taken on the appearance of an exclusive club. The church began to see how this prevented them from having an effective outreach throughout the wider community served by the church.

Following this transformative conversation, the church returned to consideration of the critical responsibilities they felt the new pastor should assume. The church identified three primary areas upon which they wanted the new pastor to focus: Biblically-sound sermons, interaction and visibility in the community, and equipping members as active participants in the mission of the church. To have a pastor specifically focused on these responsibilities would mean that others within the church would have to take on some of the other duties that had formerly been expected of the pastor. The congregation recognized that their current experience over the recent eighteen-month interim period between pastors had prepared them to take on some additional roles as lay leaders.

Part of the church's learning involved understanding the value of longer terms of tenure for pastors. By narrowing the pastor's responsibility, they hoped to secure a pastor and retain him or her for much longer than what had been the case in the past.

Following these decisions, the members of Augusta Freedom Church realized that before calling a new pastor, they still needed to address their financial realities. Unless they could align their pastoral leadership needs with the financial situation of the church, they knew it was unlikely anyone would come as a full-time pastor and stay for more than a couple of years.

The next chapter will address alternative approaches that small, rural churches use in calling and employing pastors.

CHAPTER FOUR: OPTIONS FOR PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

Small, rural churches facing declining membership, located in areas of declining population, and experiencing increasing financial obligations find themselves engulfed in a perfect storm. Consequently, recruiting and retaining pastors is often difficult. Therefore, churches and denominations have been seeking alternatives to traditional full-time clergy to fill pastoral vacancies. Several different options have been employed by small, rural churches in this effort. These approaches fall into one of two general categories: 1) some form of part-time arrangement with the pastor or 2) a younger pastor newly graduated from Bible college or seminary employed full-time with a salary package that is below a truly full-time level of compensation.[1]

The Bivocational Pastor

A solution that is increasingly being used to address this dilemma is the bivocational pastor. This option involves calling an individual as pastor who is willing to work another job as well. Regardless of the level of pay, being bivocational means that "a

[1] There are some full-time options available to small, rural churches about which the scope of this dissertation prevents significant discussion. As noted previously, women often serve in pastoral leadership roles, especially among churches with an egalitarian theology. In addition, due to increasing racial and ethnic diversity in America, ethnic minorities are more often being found as pastoral leaders. Both women and ethnic minorities find frequent opportunities to exert pastoral leadership among small, rural churches. The issues of whether such opportunities are lesser or prevent advancement into leadership of larger churches and denominations plus the financial implications these circumstances impose upon women and minorities deserve further discussion. Yet, such examination must be left for others since the focus of this paper is on the general leadership of pastors within small, rural churches, regardless of gender or ethnicity. However, in the current social climate, the concept of white male privilege among pastoral roles warrants extended and intense investigation.

person in ministry works both in ministry and in a marketplace job. One or both can be paid positions. The person's time is split between both jobs."[2]

Among small, rural churches, having a bivocational pastor is a common experience throughout the United States. As House describes, "Mainline Protestant Christian church membership has been in decline …; local churches are shutting their doors, denominational staff and financial resources are shrinking. This has forced many congregations to choose bi-vocational pastors as a default for the sake of survival."[3]

The trend in using this type of pastoral leadership is increasing. For example, "Southern Baptists are predicting that within 10 years bivocational pastors will outnumber 'fully funded' pastors in their denomination."[4] A similar experience is reported in other denominations.[5]

Perspectives concerning the appropriateness of having a bivocational pastor vary significantly. "The increase in the number of bi-vocational ministers and congregations reflects the church's response to what some experience as threat, and others as opportunity for a more faithful witness in the world."[6]

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[2] Black, 123, Kindle.

[3] House, 73, Kindle.

[4] Bickers, *Bivocational Pastor*, Loc. 66, Kindle.

[5] Kenneth Crow, *The Corps of Pastors in the USA/Canada Region, Church of the Nazarene 2017* (Lenexa, KS: Research Services, Church of the Nazarene Global Ministry Center, 2017), 10.

[6] House, 73, Kindle.

Facing Issues in the Small, Rural Church

Just turning the reins of pastoral leadership over to someone who works elsewhere to reduce church costs does not address longer term issues facing small churches. Since improved transportation infrastructure has made it easier for people to go elsewhere, for some, churches have become another consumer choice to be made. As Bickers has generalized, "Expectations are higher today than ever before, and if people can't get their expectations met, they will simply move on to another church."[7]

Another complication smaller churches experience is rapid turnover in pastoral leadership, negatively impacting ministry effectiveness. "One major reason these smaller churches often lack a vision is that they experience a high pastoral turnover. It's not uncommon for small churches in our area to have new pastoral leadership every 12 to 18 months."[8] Some churches experience even greater challenges retaining pastoral leadership. Highland found this in his first pastorate. "In my second year at college, a small suffering church called me as pastor. They had thirty-three pastors in the previous thirty years."[9]

Such churches face a gradual death unless a significant change occurs in their operational culture. Picardo has observed, "The temptation is to settle for a survival-mode mentality instead of a thriving-church mentality."[10] Approaching existence from a survival perspective creates a mindset that focuses on the negative, missing anything

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[7] Dennis Bickers, *The Art and Practice of Bivocational Ministry: A Pastor's Guide* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2013), 22, Kindle.

[8] Bickers, *Bivocational Pastor*, Loc. 353, Kindle.

[9] Highland, Loc. 609, Kindle.

[10] Picardo, Loc. 236, Kindle.

positive in the life of the church. This view looks backward rather than forward, ultimately becoming a self-determined terminal outlook. As Highland deduced, "We cannot avoid that our calling and ministry is not to yesterday but to tomorrow."[11]

Consequently, some churches and denominations have embarked upon "an holy experiment," the bivocational pastor. While for many this new journey has been the result of necessity, the attraction of the bivocational pastor is the attempt to see the financial difficulty with new eyes and find a viable solution for the overwhelming challenge. "The problem was I did not have the type of budget that would allow me to hire staff, so I needed God to give me a new wineskin. That new wineskin came in the form of bi-vocational pastors."[12]

Unpaid Bivocational Pastors

For some, this new outlook has taken on a drastic form, that of the unpaid bivocational pastor. MacDonald has discovered that "[t]he unpaid cleric model is gaining traction among Episcopalians. In the mid-1990s, for example, the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming had few if any unpaid clergy serving its 49 congregations. Now, 20 priests in Wyoming – more than one-third – are unpaid."[13]

While the bivocational model is gaining momentum, most churches still provide some form of compensation for the part-time pastor. However, some have found pastoral leaders who chose to serve churches without pay. "Most mainliners still pay their clergy.

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[11] Highland, Loc. 136, Kindle.

[12] Picardo, Loc. 123, Kindle.

[13] G. Jeffrey MacDonald, "Churches Turn to Part-Time Clergy," *Christian Century* 130, no. 21 (October 15, 2013): 14.

Only 2 percent are unpaid, according to Hartford Seminary's 2010 Faith Communities Today survey. Meanwhile, 30 percent of mainline churches have a part-time paid pastor."[14]

Perceptions and Finances

Reactions can be surprising. Black discovered that there is a segment of seminary trained clergy who question the ministry of those choosing to serve bivocationally. "One of the things that surprised me when I went [bivocational] was how many ministry friends and colleagues of mine said that I was no longer in 'real ministry' because I wasn't getting paid."[15] This view that bivocational ministry is not real ministry demeans not just the pastor but also all lay ministry within churches. Professional snobbery aside, the exacting demands of church ministry continue regardless of the size of the church. Among the most stressful for the bivocational pastor to deal with are those revolving around the finances of the church, all too often magnified by members leaving. Departure is not just more noticeable in the small church; its impact can devastate the finances of the small church.

The cultural factors surrounding churches in America are changing. A primary change is mobility, which often has a negative impact on church finances. "[C]hurches have to operate based on the probability of losing many of their congregational members every few years, just like a college ministry. As people lose their sense of stability, security and sustainability, their tendency is to move from generosity to scarcity – they

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Black, 27, Kindle.

simply won't give like they used to."[16] A question about the move to accepting a bivocational pastor is wrapped up in this reality of church decline, both numerically and financially. Is the bivocational pastor a step in the process of closing a church?

The Priesthood of All Believers

The dynamic of scarcity certainly has an impact on ministry. One answer is found in the priesthood of all believers. In the midst of scarcity, ministry leadership becomes more focused upon inviting all into the ministry of the church and then equipping them to do the work. "During that time, I went from being a pastor who felt burdened to do the work of the church to one who recognized it as my responsibility to equip others to do ministry."[17] In this way, the biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers aligns with the movement toward incorporating bivocational ministry in the small, rural church.

Of course, bivocational ministry is not new. Historically, the part-time bivocational pastor has been the practice in many American churches. "Full-time vocational ministry (American-style) is not normal (less than 200 years old) and there are exciting opportunities for ministry in bi-vocational or volunteer paradigms."[18] Re-envisioning ministry upon historical roots provides hope for many small churches that have been floundering regarding pastoral leadership. However, congregations will need to change how they approach leadership in their churches. "Work, when a Christian does it, no matter if it be as a custodian, chef, doctor, lawyer, or even pastor, is ministry

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[16] Halter, Loc. 76, Kindle.

[17] Bickers, *Art and Practice*, 30, Kindle.

[18] Halter, Loc. 209, Kindle.

because of the doctrine that Reformer Martin Luther emphasized, *The Priesthood of All Believers*. All Christians must participate in ministry, and a theology of work can be connected to vocation."[19]

Making the shift in congregational attitude from passive observation toward being active co-laborers is not always easy. Bumps in this journey are natural for "true change always begins with some struggle before harmony settles in."[20]

Building upon Relational Strengths

Relationships are primary in the church that moves toward calling a bivocational pastor. It is inevitable that the interaction between pastor and congregation becomes more intense. From his own experience as a bivocational pastor, Bickers advises, "Because most bivocational churches are heavily dependent upon relationships, it's important that there be a good match between pastor and church."[21] This intensity of relationship takes advantage of one of the strengths of the small, rural church.

The primacy of relationships may result more from being a small church[22] than being exclusively attributable to the bivocational leadership within the church. "Many pastors do not understand the importance of relationships in the small-church setting. In the small church, everything revolves around relationships. Virtually every decision made

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[19] Picardo, Loc. 1340, Kindle.

[20] Halter, Loc. 138, Kindle.

[21] Bickers, *Bivocational Pastor*, Loc. 213, Kindle.

[22] Bickers, *Art and Practice*, 13, Kindle.

will depend on how that decision might impact the current relationships that exist in the church."[23]

The Missional Church

Through emphasizing the priesthood of all believers, the bivocational church establishes evangelism as the responsibility of all members, not just the pastor. "People consider the reality of God when they see normal people living for God, and there is no greater opportunity to evoke curiosity or find common ground from which to inspire people than how you do marriage, family, and close friends."[24] Consequently, the witness of each life becomes viewed as ministry. Yet this takes intentionality; it is about deliberately becoming a missional church – pastor and congregants. "To be missional is simple. Get out of your office. Go out with people. Walk up to a random stranger and introduce yourself."[25]

Being a missional church with a bivocational structure recognizes "that everyone has their part because no one person can do it all. Rather than one person doing the work of the ministry, you get to EQUIP others to do the work of the ministry. [The bivocational approach] tells people that the Church struggles if everyone is not involved, just like a body where a thumb is not working."[26]

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[23] Bickers, *Art and Practice*, 93, Kindle.

[24] Halter, Loc. 296, Kindle.

[25] Black, 21, Kindle.

[26] Ibid., 72.

Re-engaging the church in the priesthood of all believers not only requires intentionality, but also an enduring commitment by leadership for equipping and encouraging each member.

> Bi-vocational ministers and congregations know better than anyone that the minister cannot fulfill the church's ministry alone and that even shared church ministry does not answer the breadth of God's call to love and serve God and neighbor. The bi-vocational pastor will be *especially* focused on building up the body of Christ for its pastoral vocation and participation in the expansive mission of God.[27]

Blessings in the Bi-Vocational Approach

The primary advantage of being engaged in bivocational ministry is found in the workplace: that of the bivocational pastor's second job and that of the congregants' jobs. "Bi-vocational ministers, by virtue of their own 'worldly' labors, enjoy a special solidarity with every person in the congregation who goes into the wider world on Monday morning carrying God's benediction and returns to the church on Sunday, carrying the people and concerns of the world."[28]

For the bivocational pastor, there is a dramatic shift in his or her relationships. As Highland encountered, "As a full-time pastor, 90% of my regular contacts were within the church. Now a large portion of my contacts are outside of the local congregation."[29]

This change in relationships clarifies the bivocational pastor's role in modeling the church's evangelistic mission. Black found this new reality when he became a bivocational pastor. "I never reached a single person with the Gospel from inside my

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[27] House, 77, Kindle.

[28] Ibid., 76.

[29] Highland, Loc. 1839, Kindle.

church office. Now, I have Jesus-focused conversations every other day. … [bivocational] ministry is the single greatest way to move yourself and your church into mission."[30]

A New Testament Mindset

Bivocational ministers and churches have reconnected with a more Biblical understanding of ministry, modeling their behaviors after the example of the Apostle Paul. As Picardo suggests, "There is a strong likelihood that Paul used his workshop in much the same way, that is to say, for entering into conversations with his coworkers and customers about the gospel, in order to win people for Christ."[31]

There is a growing population that has little interest in the church. Among the reasons these disengaged individuals cite for their disengagement is a perception of hypocrisy among Christians. The bivocational pastor can address such concerns "by showing parishioners and unchurched people that ministry is a labor of love."[32]

To be successful requires a greater sharing of responsibility for ministry within bivocational churches. The benefit is seen once this mindset becomes reality. "One advantage that bivocational ministers have is that their churches often understand that they have responsibilities outside the church and are willing to share the load of ministry with them."[33] Such a reorientation does not always come smoothly. As Bickers notes,

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[30] Black, 4-5, Kindle.

[31] Picardo, Loc. 678, Kindle.

[32] Ibid., Loc. 1437.

[33] Bickers, *Bivocational Pastor*, Loc. 403, Kindle.

"One of the most frustrating things as a pastor or ministry leader is getting people to work."[34] Perseverance is required. If pastors and lay leaders remain united in the transition to bivocational ministry, then the congregation will follow their leadership. "Churches do what they see their pastors and leaders doing."[35]

Addressing Financial Issues

Another beneficial area for bivocational churches is reduction of financial stress. Black confirmed this to be true in his experience. The bivocational approach "also allows for finances to be less of an issue. Most churches, including yours spend the bulk of their tithes and offerings to supply a salary and benefits to a ministry leader."[36] When the financial commitment for the support of the pastor is reduced, a level of freedom is opened in bivocational churches.

Increased Pastoral Tenure?

Another residual benefit may be found in bivocational ministry: a decrease in the pastoral leadership turnover rate. Reducing the financial stress upon the church fosters a change in organizational culture. This reduction in financial stress may provide a setting in which the pastor then stays longer. With the negative tension gone, this might be answered prayer for small, rural churches. Some anecdotal evidence suggests this may occur.[37] However, specific denominational reports note that pastoral tenure is becoming

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[34] Black, 39, Kindle.

[35] Ibid., 65.

[36] Ibid., 123.

[37] Bickers, *Bivocational Pastor*, Loc. 356, Kindle.

shorter among small, rural churches, even among those having adopted the bivocational approach in pastoral ministry.[38]

Struggles in the Bi-Vocational Approach

While financial pressure can be reduced in the bivocational church, it is important to acknowledge there are costs, perhaps even larger than the dollars saved. Tschudy reminds us that "even a nonsalaried pastor costs someone something. It costs the parish and it costs the clergy. … We need to recover the idea that giving witness to the Gospel outside of modern-day Jerusalem is a call given by Christ for the entire church, and we should all be willing to help bear the cost of that witness."[39] What are the costs of being bivocational?

The most notable struggle for the bivocational church is time. "Because of the limitations of time and energy for the bivocational pastor, [pastoral care] often gets the short end of the pastor's time or causes you to neglect other important areas."[40]

The time dilemma increases when expectations for the pastor are not adjusted for being bivocational. All too often, a part-time salary is provided while the expectation of a full-time work commitment continues. As House reports, "Without intentional effort to frame a new paradigm for ministry, both the part-time pastor and the congregation are

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[38] Crow, The Corps of Pastors of the Church of the Nazarene, 4, 8-9.

[39] John Tschudy, "Serving the Small Church," *Christian Century* 130, no. 24 (November 27, 2013): 6.

[40] Highland, Loc. 944, Kindle.

likely to be disappointed in each other as they continue to function with the norms and expectations of the good old days when there was a full-time pastor to 'run the church.'"[41]

Such operational framework hinges on the nostalgic views of the congregation, a passive-aggressive refusal to acknowledge that things have changed and will continue to change. "Most small churches are looking back at yesterday, talking about what happened in the past that was good for them or what inflicted the fatal wound on them. These live in the world of 'yesterday,' are comfortable there and cannot recognize any possibilities of looking forward."[42] Failure to adjust to the changing environment will drag the church toward organizational death.

Adjustments in Pastoral Priorities: Time, Family, and the Congregation

While the congregation must adjust its expectations for the pastor, the pastor should realign priorities as well. "The bivocational pastor will certainly encounter the pressure of giving time to family, friendships, small groups, study, prayer, and personal leisure time. As a bivocational pastor, you will be expected to adjust to many of these challenges. That may require both changes in attitudes and preaching."[43] The pastor has to adopt new approaches for personal care and for interaction with the congregation. Two major changes needed are learning to say no[44] and learning to delegate.[45]

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[41] House, 74-75, Kindle.

[42] Highland, Loc. 516, Kindle.

[43] Ibid., Loc. 150.

[44] Bickers, *Bivocational Pastor*, Loc. 1883, Kindle.

[45] Ibid., Loc. 1647.

As the bivocational pastor struggles to give adequate attention to the needs of the church, encroachment on family time may occur. "Protecting your family time is incredibly difficult, probably one of the hardest things about going [bivocational]."[46] Not only is this difficult for the pastor, the congregation can usurp the pastor's family time. "People assumed that my vacation time [from my bivocational job] was theirs to use, that it had been commandeered for church use."[47] If personal and congregational balance is not established, the church will soon have a pastor who is fatigued, discouraged, and contemplating departure.

Isolation also may become an issue. Having a second job often means the pastor cannot attend area ministerial and denominational meetings. "Many bivocational ministers feel a great deal of stress due to the constant demands on their time and energy, and this sense of isolation and the lack of respect they feel from their denominations just add to that stress."[48] Like individual churches, denominations have been slow to adjust to the increasing number of bivocational pastors in their churches. Scheduling denominational events to accommodate bivocational work schedules is challenging.

The time crunch can lead to prioritizing the pastor's attention upon those who are leaders or exhibit the potential to become leaders. If such prioritization is pursued too rigorously, others in the congregation may perceive they are unimportant and leave. As Halter has observed, "Of course, many people have left because we didn't 'plug them in' immediately or make them feel all snug and comfy, but this process is critical if you are

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[46] Black, 114, Kindle.

[47] Ibid., 115.

[48] Bickers, *Art and Practice*, 20, Kindle.

serious about giving your best time to what produces your best fruit."[49] Somehow, a balance must be attained, most likely in cooperation with the church's lay leadership.

Training Considerations for Bi-Vocational Pastors

Bivocational pastors frequently are called from other careers "with little or no formal theological training."[50] Therefore, it is critical that systematic training be deliberately designed and implemented. The areas in which bivocational pastors need instruction include relationship building, listening, leadership, communication, preaching, conflict resolution, and equipping laity.[51]

While there is certainly training appropriate for both full-time pastors and bivocational pastors, there are also significant areas of difference requiring targeted educational experiences. "[T]he mere fact of being bivocational brings with it some unique challenges and needs, and denominational leaders need to be more intentional in working with these bivocational ministers."[52] Part of the dilemma in providing training for bivocational pastors is finding the time. Because of their other job responsibilities, bivocational pastors do not have the flexibility to attend training opportunities. Churches and denominations will by necessity have to become more creative to provide the training needed by bivocational pastors.

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[49] Halter, Loc. 623, Kindle.

[50] Bickers, *Bivocational Pastor*, Loc. 58, Kindle.

[51] Ibid., Loc. 1407-1649.

[52] Bickers, *Art and Practice*, 11-12, Kindle.

One particular form of training that may have sufficient flexibility to provide training for bivocational pastors is a formal coaching program. "Coaching will not replace education, but it can be a tool judicatory leaders use to help bivocational ministers deal with their ministry weaknesses."[53]

Developing Trust

Sound leadership is crucial for the church to be successful in fulfilling its calling in God's kingdom. Being accepted as the pastoral leader rather than just someone who brings a message each week is challenging for all called to ministry. It is perhaps more challenging for the bivocational minister. "Leadership is based on trust, and it will take time for a church to begin to trust you enough to allow you to lead it."[54]

Developing trust grows by building intimate relationships, which takes a commitment of time and interaction. "Bivocational churches are looking for a pastor who will love and serve them. Relationships are important elements in the bivocational church, and the ability to lead will come through those relationships."[55] This requires being in the small church for longer than the current service average of eighteen months. Building trust involves developing a vision for the church cooperatively between pastor and the congregation and incorporating the priesthood of all believers. In his bivocational experience, Halter found "that people find meaning when they are used by God."[56]

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[53] Ibid., 148.

[54] Bickers, *Bivocational Pastor*, Loc. 563, Kindle.

[55] Ibid., Loc. 578.

[56] Halter, Loc. 664, Kindle.

Dilemmas in Bivocational Ministry

Declining demographics and financial realities will expand the use of bivocational ministry. "The need for bivocational pastors will continue to grow in the next decades. The biggest reason is the economy. More and more churches are struggling to stay afloat financially."[57]

Yet churches are unlikely to easily adopt the bivocational approach to ministry. "Small churches don't like change. People are comfortable with familiar routines. When change is introduced, many people are uncertain as to what their new role will be and become fearful that they won't have a part in the new structure."[58] Making the change from the full-time pastoral model to a bivocational model requires strong leadership, both pastoral and lay. Yet, the leadership needed for bivocational ministry to be successful must be grounded in humility. "Humility is one of the most crucial spiritual disciplines missing from our lives today, and one of the most important in [bivocational ministry]."[59] A dictatorial approach will not work in small churches where relationships are more important than logical analysis.

A primary drawback in the bivocational model is the negative impact of two jobs on the pastor's family. The competition for time often causes the bivocational pastor to attend to church responsibilities at the expense of time with family. "I have met many bivocational ministers who struggled with the feeling that they were neglecting their

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[57] Highland, Loc. 2127, Kindle.

[58] Bickers, *Bivocational Pastor*, Loc. 617, Kindle.

[59] Black, 90, Kindle.

families. … It is never permissible to neglect one's family in order to serve as a minister of any kind."[60]

Success in the shift to the bivocational model is largely contingent upon the congregation understanding the limits of time and consequently adjusting expectations. "[Bivocational] ministry gives the illusion that a pastor or ministry leader is working full-time AND pastoring full-time. … The danger lies in the congregation believing the pastor … will do the same work with less time. There will be much, much less time from this ministry leader to do everything around the church or ministry."[61]

Also, while many small, rural churches are moving to a bivocational pastoral leadership model, the attitude is often one of defeat, and "the move to call a part-time, bi-vocational minister is experienced as a significant, unavoidable loss. There is a sense of having settled for less and anxiety about how the work of the ministry will be fulfilled. Indeed, there is anxiety about the survival of the congregation altogether."[62] This negative perception creates a significant barrier for the leadership of the church to overcome when adopting the bivocational pastoral leadership model.

Other Part-Time Alternatives for Pastoral Leadership

As previously noted, pastoral shortages have been reported widely across denominations. Even though seminaries are educating more students than previously, ordinations are down as the number entering pastoral ministry has declined while the

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[60] Bickers, *Art and Practice*, 31-32, Kindle.

[61] Black, 126, Kindle.

[62] House, 75, Kindle.

number of pastors retiring is increasing. Smaller churches have a much higher prevalence of pastoral vacancies, and the number of small churches is increasing.[63] Therefore, denominations and churches, in addition to bivocational ministry, have used a variety of other options to fill pastoral vacancies.

Retired Pastors

With fewer pastoral candidates available from seminaries and the baby boomer generation of pastors reaching retirement age, many small, rural churches have called a recently retired pastor to return to the ministry, at least on a part-time basis. "For hundreds of small churches, when benefits are measured against costs, the most attractive alternative on this list will be to seek an officially retired minister who is interested in a three to seven-year pastorate in a small church."[64]

Another form of this approach is found in the "semi-retired minister who wants only to preach on Sundays."[65] This is a more dramatic shift for the small, rural church, leaving many pastoral duties for members of the church to assume.

The difficulty of any form of this option of calling a retired pastor is that it will either be a part-time arrangement or for a very short tenure.

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[63] Wind and Rendle, 5-7, Kindle.

[64] Schaller, *Small Church*, 99.

[65] Ibid., 107.

The Multiple-Point Charge

Another option for pastoral leadership in the face of financial difficulty and numerical decline is the multiple-point charge. In the author's county of residence this past summer, one pastor has been assigned responsibility by her denomination for serving five individual congregations, really an impossible task. This pastor spends one day per week at each church. She then preaches at three of the five churches on Sunday and has enlisted the aid of a retired pastor from another denomination to bring the message at the other two churches. The two of them trade back and forth on alternate weekends among four of the five churches, with the assigned pastor preaching every week at the largest of the five churches.

Many view this arrangement as a lesser ministry, serving churches that are merely attempting to survive. As Tschudy proposes, "[W]e need to remove the stigma of serving more than one congregation. … This ministry is as much a specialized ministry as any other type. Yet for many clergy, the challenge of serving more than one church is beneath their dignity."[66] Frequently, the pastors assigned to a multiple-point charge are either those newly graduated from seminaries seeking their first pastoral experience or those who have not had noticeably successful full-time ministries elsewhere.

The advantage is that the pastor is completely focused upon ministerial functions. "In a typical arrangement, the minister serves on a full-time basis, has no outside employment, the economic compensation package is divided among the participating congregations, and the minister preaches at two or three different places every Sunday

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[66] Tschudy, 6.

morning."[67] This arrangement also addresses some of the financial constraints under which many small, rural churches operate.

Often these assignments are in more remote areas and require some travel from church to church. According to one report, "Each Sunday morning, Edmund … travels by golf cart and crab boat, in rain, shine or nor'easter, across Smith Island's 8,ooo acres of marsh and tidal creek … [to lead] worship services at three small churches in the trio of remote hamlets that hang on to the island's meager dry ground."[68] The experience can be rewarding while also physically taxing.

The disadvantages of the multiple-point charge include a very busy Sunday for the pastor without time for exhibiting pastoral care on Sunday morning as the pastor rushes from one worship service to the other. There is also a sense, as noted previously, that the pastoral service that is provided is a maintenance level only, with no real time for new programs or efforts by the pastor. This means that anything more, anything missional, will have to be led and carried out by the laity. Regrettably, the history shows that multiple point churches perpetuate a series of short term pastoral tenures.[69]

The sense that the multiple-point charge is focused on maintenance tasks finds confirmation both from denominational sources and from those in the field. "It's the best way [the denomination] can meet the wishes of members who don't want to lose a particular small church. 'Even if the numbers were there (in the combined congregations)

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[67] Schaller, *Small Church*, 97.

[68] T. Edward Nickens, "Preacher on the Go," *Smithsonian* 32, no. 2 (May 2001): 32, 34.

[69] Schaller, *Small Church*, 98.

that doesn't mean that effective ministry is going on,' [Pastor Jim] Davis said. 'Effective ministry is what the struggle of rural churches is all about.'"[70]

Student Pastors

Another approach for pastoral leadership among small, rural churches "is the widely used idea of licensing the preseminary college student to serve as the minister of a small congregation on a part-time basis while still in college. Tens of thousands of today's pastors began their ministerial careers while serving as lay ministers of small congregations while in college or seminary."[71] This option works only for those churches within driving distance of a seminary.

The major downside to this approach is that it is guaranteed to be a short-term tenure for every student pastor. By its very design, the student pastor will leave after two, maybe three, years. This means the church which uses this approach regularly will repeatedly be seeking a new pastor. The reports of such arrangements reveal that the student pastor usually has very little impact on the missional life of the church.

> I don't want to be overly critical at this point, but I have known too many student pastors who needed a church to fulfill their seminary requirements and to help pay for their education. They knew they would not be at the church after they graduated, so they had little interest in starting new ministries or leading the church to consider a fresh vision from God. Their seminary studies limited the amount of time they could devote to new ministries, so they had little incentive to explore such ministries.[72]

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[70] Molly Rossiter, "Big in Spirit," EBSCOHost.

[71] Schaller, *Small Church*, 106-107.

[72] Bickers, *Intentional Ministry*, 45, EBSCOhost.

The opportunities for real leadership are extremely limited for the student pastor. The members of the church know the student pastor will be leaving and are reluctant to invest in the leadership of such pastors.

> I have also known some seminary students who wanted to serve their churches and lead them into new ministries but were unable to do so because the congregations did not respect their leadership. The lay leaders remembered too many times in the past when new pastors would recommend new ministries and then leave them about the time the ministries were implemented.[73]

Lay Leadership

Increasingly, laity is handling pastoral duties formerly assigned exclusively to an ordained minister, an "emergence of 'lay pastors' in a variety of American denominations. … [T]hese new leaders are laypeople who are trained to exercise some or all pastoral duties in one local setting, often a small congregation unable to support a full-time, seminary-trained minister."[74]

A common option is for the local lay leader to provide much of the pastoral care under the supervision of an ordained member of the clergy within the denomination. This sort of arrangement exists in a variety of formats. For example, the ordained clergy may be expected to preach a minimum number of times each year at the church and attend specific meetings such as the annual budget meeting. The lay leader then provides pastoral leadership for all other functions of the church.

Another form has the ordained clergy and the lay leader serving together in a multiple-point charge. For example, "Davis and a lay leader alternate church duties: On

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[73] Bickers, *Intentional Ministry*, 45, EBSCOhost.

[74] Wind and Rendle, 20.

one Sunday, Davis delivers sermons to three churches while the lay leader serves the other two. The following Sunday, they switch." While this shared arrangement allows several churches to be served, it primarily serves the maintenance functions of ministry without significant missional effort.

One strength of the local lay leader approach is a strong commitment to the specific local church. Regarding this, Lefevere contends, "Lay ecclesial ministers are more fully integrated into the life of their parishes and dioceses and are faithful to the mission of the church precisely because 'we are all coworkers in the vineyard.'"[75]

Pulpit Supply

Another approach used by some extremely small, rural churches is some form of pulpit supply in which a series of different individuals are used to bring the message each week but have no other responsibility to the church. All other duties, such as they exist, are handled by the members of the very small congregation. Regrettably, this type of arrangement is evidence of a church that is in a survival mode.

Congregational Collective Leadership

Another option that a very few churches and denominations choose is to reject the concept of pastor to be held as a single individual. Instead, such churches nourish the practice that all members of the congregation collectively fulfill the pastoral role. This was the practice that permeated the author's denomination, the Friends (Quakers), for much of its early history. It was not until the late nineteenth century that the pastoral

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[75] Patricia Lefevere, "Summit Affirms Lay Stake in Future Church," *National Catholic Reporter* 44, no. 21 (June 13, 2008): 10.

model began to be used by most Friends churches. A smaller number of Friends meetings continue this practice with its emphasis upon "the priesthood of all believers" and without paid clergy. Other denominations that do not use paid clergy include the Plymouth Brethren and some Orthodox churches, especially Russian Orthodox.[76]

Rees explains, "To unpack this shift from the 'professional' view of theology to the vision of all people as theologians, several other elements are crucial. First is a rediscovery of the priesthood of all Christians as central to the character of the church."[77]

There is a simple reason that most denominations choose not to use this model of congregational leadership. It is difficult to sustain. It requires an exceptional faith commitment by the entire congregation for the entire life of the congregation. Too often, the pressures of work, community, and family disrupt the demands of this continual faith commitment. One of the realities of pastoral service is the sense of being released to attend to the duties of the local congregation rather than having to juggle other work commitments as well as that required by the church.

Summary of Pastoral Leadership Options

Churches and denominations seek leadership. Pastoral leadership is crucial for each church. As reported by Rossiter, "Closing a church is considered a final option when no others exist. 'We're committed, if there's a church, to providing leadership,' said the Rev. Jill Sanders, field outreach minister for the Iowa Annual Conference United

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[76] "Which Christian Churches Have an Entirely Unpaid/Lay Clergy?" *Christianity Stack Exchange*, accessed February 26, 2018, https://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/26060/which-christian-churches-have-an-entirely-unpaid-lay-clergy.

[77] Frank Rees, "Enabling Congregations to Become Theological Communities," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 30, no. 1 (January 2006): 8.

Methodist Church. 'We've tried to come up with some models like … using … a lay leader.'"[78]

All churches desire full-time pastoral leadership. Small, rural churches understand that longer tenures of pastoral service provide better spiritual and numerical growth in the ministry of their church. The primary drawback of the options explored in this chapter is that all involve some form of part-time pastoral leadership arrangement. The experience of these approaches tends to result in shorter tenures of pastors in these small, rural churches.

Augusta Freedom Church: Pastoral Leadership Options

As the final meeting with the regional denomination leader was held, the leader challenged Augusta Freedom Church members to explore other options for pastoral leadership in their church. One question began a long discussion, that would be explored more fully over the next several weeks. Does the church need a full-time pastor? A follow-up question ensued. Can the church still afford a full-time pastor?

The members asked the denominational representative about part-time pastoral arrangements. Several formats were then explored: sharing a pastor with another church, employing a recently retired pastor, and contacting the closest seminary, about two hours away, to arrange a continuing cycle of student pastors. All felt that the current pulpit supply arrangement was insufficient to serve the church over the longer term. They also knew that their recent history of hiring young graduates from either seminary or Bible

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[78] Rossiter, "Big in Spirit," EBSCOhost.

college had resulted in a series of very short pastoral tenures, which had limited the church's ministry.

After deliberate consideration, the consensus was that the church should still seek a full-time pastor. Again, this brought the church's financial picture back fully into the discussion. How could the church find and retain a full-time pastor any better than they had over the last ten years with a budget that was not really sufficient for this purpose?

The next chapter will explore another alternative that provides for full-time pastoral leadership while also addressing financial stresses faced by small, rural churches: the second career pastor.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SECOND CAREER PASTOR

As small, rural churches seek pastoral leadership, a better option for these churches might be an individual transitioning into pastoral ministry after having previously worked in another career. Many such second career pastors, having retired from other employment, have other means of financial support such a pension or other retirement income. These individuals are physically able to serve full-time in a church and provide spiritual leadership and guidance for several years before fully retiring. For the small church which has experienced a series of short pastoral tenures, a second career pastor may provide greater stability than a younger individual faced with college debt and the financial obligations of a young family.

The second career pastor is a growing trend in pastoral ministry.[1] The second career pastor is older when first coming into pastoral ministry, in keeping with the rising age of pastors in the country, "a 'graying' and 'second-career' trend among ordained clergy."[2] When faced with a pastoral vacancy, this trend provides encouragement to small, rural churches to consider second career pastoral candidates. Plus, there is evidence which suggests that ministry effectiveness is not determined by whether the pastor is a first or second career pastor, by the pastor's age, or by whether the pastor has a seminary degree or not. According to data from a Methodist study of church vitality, "it

[1] John Dart, "Mainline Worries about Dearth of Young Pastors," *Christian Century* 123, no. 8 (April 18, 2006): 15. See also Lummis, 19.

[2] Carl R. Wells, "The Effects of Work-Related and Boundary-Related Stress on the Emotional and Physical Health Status of Ordained Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 1 (February 2013): 106.

did not matter whether ministers held seminary degrees, whether pastoral ministry was a first or second career, or how long the minister had been engaged in pastoral ministry."[3]

Life experiences are suggested as being at least as valuable as education for the pastor, if not more applicable. According to Anthony and Boersma, "Twenty-first-century pastors will need to have a broader range of education and training going into the pastorate than the generation of ministry leaders before them. Gone are the days when a seminary degree was the cure-all for the congregation's problems."[4] Second career pastors bring their life experiences into ministry as a foundation for pastoral leadership. The characteristics of the small church in which relationships are more valued than the theological knowledge of the pastor reinforces that "seminary education is not necessarily an indicator of effectiveness for serving smaller churches."[5]

Therefore, accepting the validity of these contentions, pastoral leadership may be found in a much broader pool of candidates than some churches have explored over the years. Consequently, the second career pastor becomes a viable choice in the search for pastoral leadership.

Thus, small, rural churches may be well served by pursuing the second career pastor for leadership. These churches have an inherent relational strength that supports developing leadership among pastors and members.[6] By taking advantage of this characteristic of the small, rural church, which by emphasizing its relational core and

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[3] Garcia, 15.

[4] Anthony and Boersma, Loc. 1366, Kindle.

[5] Crandall, 28.

[6] For a review of the primacy of relationships in the small, rural church, refer to Chapter Three, under the sub-heading *Relational Intensity* found on page 64.

building its ministry through the active participation of its members,[7] the process of incorporating a second career pastor within the church's ministry also appears more natural. It sets the framework for a strong bond between the need of the church and the development of the pastor.[8]

Definition of Second Career Pastor

A second career pastor is an individual who transitions into pastoral ministry after having worked in another field for many years, often having retired from the previous field of employment. These persons leave secular employment to enter pastoral ministry. Most second career pastors did not first go to Bible college or seminary and then into a pastorate, what is considered the traditional route into ministry. Instead, they receive their calling into pastoral ministry later in life. Thus, they follow what is considered a non-traditional path into ministry. This non-traditional path presents its own challenges for these persons as they seek to be obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit and enter pastoral ministry.

Characteristics of the Second Career Pastor

Research regarding the advantages that bivocational pastors offer churches also applies in many ways to second career pastors. Having had a secular or marketplace job places the second career pastor in the middle of the American culture, preventing the

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[7] Check the sub-heading *Participation* in Chapter Three, page 73, about the level of lay involvement in small, rural churches.

[8] Review the description of the relational connection among people in small, rural churches found under the sub-heading *Belonging* in Chapter Three, page 67.

pastor from becoming missionally stale due to having been isolated in a life of insular contact within a church. Then, the greater financial freedom of the second career pastor allows the pastor to fearlessly address the needs of a church and congregation in response to God's leading, knowing he or she has a "fallback position" for income, either in retirement or by returning to a previous field of employment. The second career pastor has developed many applicable skills in previous employment and will not need to learn everything "on the job" as a younger pastor often does.[9]

The Advantages of Maturity

Consequently, among the different avenues for entering pastoral leadership, second career pastors have certain advantages, especially with respect to approaching ministerial tasks with a mindset focused on the practical and upon meeting immediate needs. Brown contends, "Second career pastors, like non-traditional students, bring a more practical approach into their ministry. There is a different level of inquiry. They seek to put what they have experienced and learned immediately into practice. There is a seriousness and purposefulness to their approach."[10]

The second career pastor brings a maturity attained through years of living and working that is valued by congregations. "Life experience has no substitute. That's why second-career pastorates are so valuable to the church today. Those who come into the church after already experiencing a career are well received as being more realistic and

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[9] Thom S. Rainer, "Bivocational Pastors and Church Staff," *Rainer on Leadership 96*, February 6, 2015, accessed September 21, 2015, http://thomrainer.com/2015/02/bivocational-pastors-church-staff-rainer-leadership-096.

[10] Derek Brown, Director of M.A. Pastoral Ministries & Transformational Leadership, Barclay College, Haviland, KS, interview by author, Haviland, KS, November 12, 2015.

down to earth."[11] Such individuals are at a point where they don't have to prove anything, nor are they on a career advancement track any longer. Therefore, they often can provide the gentle servant leadership needed in the relational culture and context of small, rural congregations.

One advantage most second career pastors have is an extensive record of lay leadership involvement in the church. They know how the church works.

> Second career pastors have a proven track record in leadership roles as lay persons. The pastor fresh out of college or seminary has an academic record but often no practical experience in leadership. The trained lay leader often has a good background for becoming a pastor. They don't just bring book knowledge with them. They have life skills, people skills, and a spiritual wisdom based upon actual experience.[12]

Such experience sets a foundation for success and satisfaction in ministry. As Cohall and Cooper found in older seminary students, second career pastors bring their lay experiences with them in serving the church. "The data show that church involvement prior to seminary contributes significantly to pastoral preparation, which leads to an increase in job satisfaction and effectiveness."[13] For the second career pastor, the increased sense of purposefulness, the call into pastoral ministry, has not been made due to youthful exuberance. It has grown out of the longer spiritual journey experienced by the second career pastor. This purposefulness drives the second career pastor toward practical applications of spiritual leading.

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[11] Anthony and Boersma, Loc. 1360, Kindle.

[12] Pfadenhauer, interview.

[13] Cohall and Cooper, 44.

Second career pastors bring into ministry a similar viewpoint to what Stone observed in older seminary students. "Second-career students are less interested in the pursuit of the intellectual and theological quest and more oriented to the practicalities of a ministerial career after graduation. They tend to be less disillusioned or troubled by the inherent problems of parish ministry; second-career students . . . appear more oriented to the parish ministry than their younger counterparts."[14]

Denominational leaders recognize this orientation toward finding fulfillment in the pastorate among second career pastors and find it an advantage when filling empty pulpits. "I'd pick non-traditional folks any day. They have more well-rounded experiences that lead to greater success as pastors."[15]

An experienced pastor with over forty years in the ministry, when asked about what had been the most crucial training or learning that had prepared him for being a pastor, cited an internship he had experienced with a second career pastor who only had an eighth-grade education. He noted that from this pastor he learned that ministry was rooted in the heart, presenting the gospel in every situation while serving and caring for those in the community, and especially toward those not in the congregation.[16]

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[14] Howard W. Stone, "The New Breed of Minister," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 47, no. 3 (September 1993): 290.

[15] Pfadenhauer, interview.

[16] Thomas Palmer, Retired Pastor, Iowa Yearly Meeting of Friends, interview by author, Knoxville, IA, August 4, 2015.

Accountability and Pastoral Authority

Second career pastors bring other attributes that provide foundation for greater success in first pastorates over more traditional, first career pastors. One area where previous work experience plays out involves the formal interaction of the pastor with lay leaders and denominational leaders of the church, regarding accountability within the church. As Pfadenhauer observed, "Their past work experience, especially those from the corporate world, makes them better prepared to accept accountability in the evaluation process. Younger pastors often find the evaluation process as threatening their pastoral role, their authority, rather than as an aid to leadership and spiritual growth."[17]

Second career pastors tend to hold more realistic expectations regarding how a congregation will respond to their leadership than younger pastors. One denominational leader summarized this tendency, noting that younger pastors entering ministry directly from their educational experience trended toward being idealistic, holding unrealistic – even unreasonable – expectations for their interaction with their congregation. When these idealistic expectations go unfulfilled, the younger pastor becomes discouraged and threatened as pastoral leader. This leader observed that "second career pastors generally have much more realistic views about what life as a pastor will be like. Their previous experience in secular careers in the business world or in the military has matured and refined their pastoral expectations."[18]

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[17] Pfadenhauer, interview.

[18] Ibid.

Pastors are called by churches to have an impact on the church. However, these same pastors are often surprised by the resistance they encounter once they take some initiative to move the congregation in a direction, even if there was a sense of this need when the call was extended. "When I was called to serve this church as pastor, they asked me to bring change. Now they seem to oppose the very change they wanted."[19] Second career pastors seem less surprised by this tendency among small, rural congregations and are able to lead the slow process of change without as much discouragement. "While I have not observed any noticeable disparity between the pastoral effectiveness between traditional and second career pastors, many second career pastors bring an ability to work in the face of adversity and with combative coworkers that many traditional pastors don't. Second career pastors know how to take criticism less personally."[20]

Like it or not, churches are political entities. In addition to each church's spiritual purpose, each has its own social and political environment that the pastor must navigate. "Any pastor, to be successful, must quickly understand the various cultural/sociological/spiritual nuances present within a church. Because it is their first assignment, [new pastors] will often be unprepared to parse the nuances present, and will thus have to learn through trial and error how best to integrate into, and then lead, this community of faith."[21] Second career pastors have been through change in their previous secular work places, and they have witnessed the difficulty of change in the church previously as lay persons.

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[19] Wells, Giese, and Klassen, 12.

[20] D. Brown, interview.

[21] Ibid.

Pastoral Care

As Nouwen has observed, "Ministry is not only a communal experience; it is also a mutual experience."[22] Personal relationships are vital within the small, rural church and must be considered when leading a congregation. "Congregations want warm, empathetic, sustaining friends whose presence reminds them of God in the joys and traumas of life. ... [T]he warm, outgoing, extroverted ones ... will be judged to be good ministers."[23] Unfortunately, too many young pastors find their comfort in academic pursuits and make this their operational focus as spiritual leaders rather than relationship building. Stone concludes, "Quality of ministerial leadership, however, does not mean only academic competence. Quality is associated with academic excellence, to be sure, but is broader, including among other things the ability to relate well to others. Increasingly, research studies are showing that personal characteristics and interpersonal skills are key components of effective ministry."[24]

The second career pastor has worked in other environments, which often required intense social interaction. Such experiences provide a foundation for the relational engagement between pastor and congregation. As a pastor from a small town in Kansas noted, "My twenty-eight years as a teacher and coach have developed my people skills. I always try to meet people where they are in their spiritual walk. I try to let them know that I do love and care for them."[25]

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[22] Nouwen, Loc. 351, Kindle.

[23] Janet F. Fishburn and Neill Q. Hamilton, "Seminary Education Tested by Praxis," *Christian Century* 101, no. 4 (February 1, 1984): 112.

[24] Stone, 295.

[25] Crandall, 138.

As Lummis has surmised, "Regional leaders interviewed across denominations cited the pastor's ability to show members of the congregation that he or she loves and will care for them, as an almost essential clergy quality that search committees try to find when choosing a new pastor."[26] The more seasoned life experiences of second career pastors had them applying such interpersonal skills in the workplace and in other life activities. These same skills then become useful for leadership within the church. Second career pastors have not only lived outside the cloistered academic environment, they know the value of relationships in achieving goals, which is especially important in small, rural churches where relationships reign supreme. In the small, rural church, the pastor is not able to simply stay in the church office studying and preparing the weekly sermon like some teaching pastors may be able to do in larger churches while delegating other duties to other pastoral staff. The small, rural church pastor must serve as a generalist in the pastoral role, taking on a much wider scope of duties, many of which involve time spent in fostering relationships both inside and outside of the congregation.

Challenges Faced by Second Career Pastors

Second career pastors do face challenges. Some of these challenges are common to all pastors, regardless of education, gender, ethnicity, or age. However, some are unique to being older and transitioning from a different type of employment.

Included in challenges that are common to all pastors is realizing that pastors must be ever cognizant that they are involved in a corporate, communal endeavor and are

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[26] Lummis, 13.

not able to operate solely from their own desires. The interpersonal skills gained from previous work experience often help second career pastors here.

A Public Life

Still, pastors must adapt to and be sensitive about the perspectives of both the lay leadership and the lay "followership" of the congregation regarding their lives as pastors, which may be much different than expectations faced in previous employment settings. It is a spiritual community and not a business enterprise. Such realization has 24/7 implications. The pastor is always the pastor, not just on Sunday or while at church.

Klassen contends that it is nearly impossible for the pastor in a small-town environment to lead a double life. He cites the example of a megachurch planter whose marriage was troubled and whose wife rarely attended church. This pastor's church was unaware of her absence, something that would be immediately noticed in a small, rural congregation.[27] Being a pastor does mean living out one's life in front of others and their expectations. Recognizing the public context of the pastoral life is one area of transition faced by the second career pastor. Modeling righteous living is a visibly important aspect of small-town ministry.

The Context of Pastoral Work

Failure to recognize the status of their own spiritual formation and that of the congregation can cause significant emotional turmoil for new pastors. "Pastors in their first assignment don't necessarily all face the same challenge. However, the success for

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[27] Klassen, 2.

each new pastor is generally determined by their own maturity and the spiritual health of the congregation. They may survive and grow if only one of these two factors is strong. Hopefully, both are not low."[28]

Among the challenges of those entering pastoral ministry after being in other careers is recognizing where they fit within the structure of the church they serve. Too many pastors, regardless of when they enter ministry, fail to account for the cultural, social, and political realities of the particular environment of the church they serve. Each individual church is unique. To affect change and encourage growth, one needs to be trusted. Trust does not come solely because of position or appointment. It is earned. Therefore, building strong relationships with parishioners becomes a primary task of the new pastor.

While previous work experience can be a tremendous asset for second career pastors, it also can be a trap into which the second career pastor can fall. The danger is trying to apply what worked in the business world or in the military too rigidly in the faith environment of the church, attempting to operate the church strictly like a business.

> If new pastors attempt to force a different organizational ethos onto a church from previous employment environments, they will often find their efforts ineffective or counterproductive, and thus they will face frustration. The greatest challenge is to transition the second career pastor away from the expectations of the previous career field, however useful they may be, and into the expectations of leading a church.[29]

Also, even though many have other sources of income besides the church, second career pastors are not immune to financial stresses. "Some second-career clergy are also

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[28] Pfadenhauer, interview.

[29] D. Brown, interview.

likely to have particular financial problems that make it difficult to serve as pastors of those small, rural congregations that can neither pay them much nor offer other amenities they may want. These older clergy are more likely to have families that they must support, and they typically have spouses who also have careers."[30] However, there are those who have a degree of financial independence due to early retirement pensions or other income sources that provide freedom to serve full-time in congregations which only have the financial resources for a minimal salary and benefit package. (This has been the experience of the author.) Such individuals have a freedom to humbly respond to the calling of God to serve.

Transition Challenges

One disadvantage for some church leaders regarding second career pastors is "that clergy changing careers will experience shortened durations in the entry-level and subsequent stages, partly the result of age, previous experience, opportunities, and other factors."[31] Consequently, second career pastors often seek an expedited process into pastoral ministry, which may or may not be available, depending upon the denomination. For the small, rural church, physical distance from pastoral training opportunities, including seminaries, can add to the difficulty of the second career pastor's transition fully into ministry. Improvements in the availability of distance learning lessens this difficulty but does not always completely eradicate it.

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[30] Lummis, 28.

[31] Paula D. Nesbitt, "First and Second-Career Clergy: Influences of Age and Gender on the Career-Stage Paradigm," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 34, no. 2 (June 1995): 154.

Then, some traditionally trained church leaders treat second career pastors as second-class citizens, denying them access to leadership positions. While second career pastors often find themselves at a point where professional advancement is not of great concern, recognition of leadership skills provides fulfillment, even motivation, for ministry, perhaps being even more meaningful for pastors serving in more remote areas.

> [W]hile second-career male clergy can expect moderate occupational attainment, prospects for denominational leadership positions that hold the greatest potential for influencing organizational attitudes and ideology remain dominated by an aristocracy of men who were socialized into the occupation during their youth and who are more likely to hold less positive attitudes toward nontraditional entrants, namely women and second-career clergy.[32]

While perhaps not a primary motivator, the lack of opportunity for professional recognition and advancement becomes a negative influence upon second career pastors, especially women and ethnic minorities.

Insights for the Small, Rural Church & Second Career Pastors from Other Fields

Two other components of the rural cultural landscape have experienced similar pressures as small, rural churches: small, rural schools and rural businesses. Awareness of these educational and economic experiences provides additional framework for small, rural churches and their pastors regarding the approaches they might use to address the challenges of the demographic and financial trends they face.

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[32] Nesbitt, 169.

Education

For many small, rural communities, the church is the last remaining institution that connects people to each other. The impact of school consolidation has left the church all alone in many rural communities, with such communities experiencing "the unraveling of community fabric. When school doors shut in small towns, … there's a loss of community life."[33]

School consolidation has been a reality in rural America for several decades. The impact on communities which have been through the consolidation and closure of schools is instructive for small, rural churches. The sense of loss in these communities is accompanied by despair, regret, and conflict. Blame is assigned.

The causes of school consolidation echo the struggle of small, rural churches: declining population, sudden dramatic shifts in the fragile agricultural economy, and the ease of transportation coupled with an increasing willingness of people to travel to the city to obtain goods and services. These factors contribute to the financial stress of the community and upon families. School consolidation is reluctantly undertaken.

Small, rural churches see ill-fated shadows in the experience of small, rural schools, which portend their own demise. The belief that there is almost nothing that can be done to stem the tide of demographic decline and subsequent struggles often prevails. As churches grow smaller and finances grow more difficult, at times closure of the local church appears inevitable.

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[33] Marjorie Coeyman, "Small-Town Schools," *Christian Science Monitor* 90, no. 252 (November 24, 1998): 15.

Sharing resources has become part of the landscape in rural schools. Sharing a superintendent is a common option among rural school districts, a practice that mirrors small, rural churches who share a pastor. As Meyer notes, "The trend of sharing superintendents is growing, particularly among small districts in the Midwest."[34] The move to part-time service of a superintendent shared with other school districts echoes the part-time or shared pastoral leadership environment of small, rural churches.

Financial stress is the primary motivation behind schools sharing superintendents. "Superintendents doing double duty is nothing new, particularly among the hundreds of small districts scattered across the Midwest. But shared administrator arrangements appear to be gaining favor, at least in some regions, as districts wrestle with some of the most severe revenue shortfalls in decades."[35] This practice among small, rural school districts mimics how some small, rural churches share a pastor to deal with their financial struggles.

The primary reason behind sharing a superintendent revolves around spending less money for both school districts, rather than for educational benefit in either district. However, for the shared superintendent, generally the work load is increased. "The dual superintendency has cut some expenses for both small systems, but as [shared superintendent Tom] Micek puts it, 'It's doubled about everything. … I'm pretty weary by the weekend,' he says. 'It's not like running one (larger) district. You have two different worlds.'"[36] The strain on the shared superintendent can lead to shorter tenure, similar to

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[34] Leila Meyer, "Save Money, Share Superintendents," *District Administration* 53, no. 8 (August 2017): 16.

[35] Bill Graves, "Stretched Superintendents," *School Administrator* 68, no. 4 (April 2011): 12.

[36] Ibid.

the experience among churches and pastors in shared situations. Keeping up with the demands of two schools or two churches is often physically draining.

The second career pastor who accepts a call to pastor a small, rural church must understand the impact of declining rural population upon communities as well as within the church. Ministering with fewer people and fewer resources is a reality that can cause stress for church leaders. While schools consolidate to address such issues, churches usually seek other means of handling the impact of these factors upon the church. It is a circumstance that many second career pastors will confront while serving small, rural churches.

The impact of the declining demographic trend may be precisely why the church has called the second career pastor. Considering what steps have been taken by another of the last vestiges of cultural institutions in communities – the school – could be a resource that provides direction for the small, rural church and their pastors.

Economics

Small, rural communities face an uphill battle. Businesses in these areas "must punch above [their] weight class" to compete against the easily accessible malls and shopping centers of metropolitan areas, which offer so many more choices. As Fallor has summarized, "[T]he threat of the big-box stores looming in the backyard has long been a concern. … [Many] small businesses close their doors due to outside competition … [fostered by] a shift in buying from chain stores and residents not supporting locally

owned businesses."[37] Small town merchants face the challenge of rural residents seeking greater variety and services available through traveling to shop in metropolitan areas. The outflow from local businesses to larger communities is a similar issue to that faced by small, rural churches as people will often drive some distance to larger communities to attend larger churches offering more ministry options and services.

Small town businesses face these challenges by attempting to build on the same strength that frequently typifies small, rural churches – strong personal relationships. Serving the community is key to the success of both small-town businesses and the ministry of small, rural churches.

Rural areas cannot compete with the magnitude of options that metropolitan areas offer. Instead, to compete small town businesses must promote their connections to the people they serve. As Dunn and Hogg have proposed, "Small towns can strengthen their local economy by identifying the town's 'uniqueness' and then capitalizing on it."[38] The primary strength small communities have that makes them unique, like small churches, is the intimacy and strength of the personal relationships among the people that populate them.

Like small-town businesses, small, rural churches can feel the strain of operating in an area where people drive to larger communities for spiritual care and connection. Businesses in rural communities focus upon fostering strong connections through personal service. Failure to do so often results in the eventual closure of businesses. The

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[37] Evan Fallor, "Sherman Embraces Its Small-town Appeal: Nearby Shopping Meccas Pose a Challenge," *Fairfield County Business Journal* 51, no. 16 (April 20, 2015): 4.

[38] Douglas Dunn and David H. Hogg, *Marketing the Uniqueness of Small Towns* (Corvallis, OR: Western Rural Development Center, January 1995), 2.

lesson for the rural church mirrors that of businesses. While younger, traditional pastors may view the small, rural church as a stepping stone for career advancement, the second career pastor, to be successful, can learn from this business model. Building upon relationships over time, one day at a time, becomes a strategy for the second career pastor for the spiritual maintenance and spiritual growth of the small, rural church, and perhaps numerical growth as well. In addition, serving follows the model of Christ which he demonstrated in washing the feet of his disciples. (John 13:1-17).

Helping Second Career Pastors Transition: Training

Consequently, it becomes essential that pastors new to the ministry of small, rural churches, including second career pastors, receive appropriate training. As noted in the previous section, understanding the cultural dynamics of small communities is critical and should be included in the orientation and training of pastors of small, rural churches. Small town schools and businesses provide some insight into the cultural underpinnings of the community. However, the one new to the pastorate will need training in a variety of other areas as well: sermon preparation, theological foundations, visitation expectations, denominational practices and procedures, the conduct of special services such as funerals and weddings, and more. Some of these training needs are procedural and even technical, which may be more quickly learned. Those areas involving relational intensity likely will require more extensive training.

Orientation and Training

In addition, there is a definite transition that second career pastors face upon entering ministry. The culture of the previous employment experience often provides

some positive foundation for pastoral service, but there are aspects that can negatively influence how the second career pastor interprets the role of the pastor and the associated operational style adopted. In considering the transition of second career pastors, Brown has reflected, "I think the biggest challenge faced by second career pastors is the tendency to force the organizational culture of the previous career onto the church. One has to realize that the church is a unique organizational entity and must be contended with on its own terms."[39] Therefore, an immediate need for many second career pastors is some form of orientation that begins the process of shifting from secular employment into the work of the pastor.

To provide pastoral leadership for their small, rural, hard-to-fill congregations, some denominations are establishing streamlined processes for incorporating second career pastors into active ministry. Pfadenhauer describes one denomination's approach. "The support and educational track for second career pastors actually grew out of the missions arm of the denomination, where many were coming from other careers. So, the process has been adapted to provide an institute-type of approach rather than requiring seminary degrees for pastoral ministry candidates coming from other careers."[40] Short, intense training modules involving a few days delivered periodically may better fit the circumstance of the older, second career pastor transitioning from other employment. A one-day seminar on denominational expectations for pastoral reports and participation in denominational functions would be an example of this form of training. Another example might be a three-day workshop on the theological foundations of the denomination's

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[39] D. Brown interview.

[40] Pfadenhauer, interview.

soteriology and its impact on the practices of baptism, communion, marriage, and other life events in the life of faith within a church.

Mentorship

To assist the second career pastor in making a successful transition from previous employment into pastoral ministry likely requires the use of a variety of such mechanisms. However, there appears to be a consensus that mentorship is vital in this process. "A mentor, assigned or individually sought out, to guide the new pastor would appear to be one of the more effective tools leading to successful pastoring experiences."[41] Mentorship is an area in which the denomination leadership can provide great support to the small, rural church by developing a cadre of mentors. For the independent church, since there is not a natural link for mentorship, both the new pastor and the lay leadership would need to seek mentorship from other respected churches nearby that have experienced pastors.[42]

Regardless of whether provided by a denomination or by the local church individually, mentorship would involve matching the new pastor with an experienced pastor, preferably one who has served in a similarly sized church. While technology offers the opportunity for communication regardless of geographic distance, the ability for the mentee and the mentor to meet face-to-face with some regularity, monthly or quarterly, would be advantageous.

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[41] D. Brown, interview.

[42] Ed Stetzer, "The Growth of Non-Denominationalism Is Making It Harder to Find Mentoring," *Christianity Today The Exchange*, October 26, 2017, accessed January 1, 2018, http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/june/non-denominational-pastors-networks-and-mentoring-relations.html.

Mentorship is critical for new pastors in small, rural churches due to the isolated condition in which most in the profession will operate, often without a specific definition of their role. "Because of the ill-defined nature of pastoral ministry, the work demands a high level of internal control. Pastors have less peer supervision than any other profession."[43] Most pastors, and especially those in small, rural churches, serve without significant and regular connections to others in ministry. Mentorship is one method of overcoming such isolation.

Most seminaries have incorporated the concept of mentorship within their preparation programs using internships, providing practical experience in church settings. These internships reveal that the heart of church is found within the individual and corporate spiritual journeys and not in delivering specific programs. Interns learn that pastoral service involves moving beyond theological preparation into practical experiences such as hospital and nursing home visitation, expressing care for the weak and the ill. It is a discovery "that people who slip into the pews on Sunday morning aren't looking for structured programming or even a perfectly timed church service. They're simply looking for God."[44] Realization that church is more than study and sermons, that its essence is in the daily life of its members is a primary function of both internships and mentorships.

Although internship is a useful approach, it is likely somewhat incomplete for the second career pastor since internships are usually limited in duration to a few weeks.

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[43] Willimon, 316, Kindle.

[44] Amy Adair, "You Can't Learn That in a Classroom: A Pastoral Internship Provides Ministry Tools and Direction," *Christianity Today* 57, no. 8 (October 2013): 86.

Mentorship, on the other hand, is generally designed to be in place over an extended period of time.

Repeatedly, mentoring is noted as being exceptionally beneficial for all new pastors, but especially for second career pastors. One denomination places "significant emphasis on mentoring as a criterion for effective preparation. Local and regional organizations within the denomination need to take up the issue of mentoring as a required part of their preparation for ministry, especially for those who are entering the pastorate as a second career."[45] The long-term relationship of mentorship provides an on-going relationship for support and consultation. While second career pastors may transition quickly into pastoral ministry, the need for training continues as they encounter new situations within the scope of their ministry.

Mentoring is not new. For pastors, the "relationship between Paul and Timothy in the New Testament offers a model for mentoring and ministry."[46] Paul wrote to Timothy and said, "Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress."[47] The relationship between Paul and Timothy developed over many years. It provides a model of mentorship that would serve second career pastors well as they undertake the transition from secular employment into pastoral ministry.

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[45] Cohall and Cooper, 48.

[46] Keri Wyatt Kent, "A Model for Mentoring," *Leadership Journal [CT Pastors]* 31, no. 1 (February 2010): Web Exclusive, accessed January 1, 2018, http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2010/february-online-only/model-for-mentoring.html.

[47] 1 Timothy 4:14-15.

Therefore, effective mentorship is generally a long-term experience, possibly extending over several years. "The majority of pastors surveyed felt that mentoring enhanced their pastoral leadership skills. ... Ongoing mentoring programs … are critical for pastors because they often practice ministry by themselves in the church context."[48] Since distance makes face-to-face meetings more difficult, this isolation may be even more prevalent for pastors in small, rural churches. In the face of distance, devising a long-term mentorship program may require innovation, including the use of technology rather than physical presence for all meetings of the mentorship pair.

The key to effective mentorship is the relationship between the mentor and the mentee while engaged in regular contact to deal with the real issues of the pastoral experience. The value of such a relationship is revealed in the following example cited during a seminary internship. Here, the mentor noted that among the most important revelations he provided was that he still encounters questions, struggles, and concerns in ministry. He believed it was vital that the mentee should see that the mentor experiences frailty and the need for daily dependence upon the Lord, even after years of ministry.[49] The experience of deeply sharing together in this intimate process is crucial to the success of a mentorship.

One second career pastor reflected that having a pastor from the local area to walk beside him would have been immensely helpful, especially in his first few months of serving as a new pastor. This pastor noted that he had had difficulty gauging his productivity as he transitioned into being a pastor and that success was hard to measure in

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[48] Cohall and Cooper, 51.

[49] Adair, 86.

ministry. He believed that, had he worked with a mentor, some of this trepidation and confusion might have been alleviated.[50]

While informal contacts such as local and denominational ministerial associations might address a degree of this type of angst, the informality of such contacts does not offer the concerted attention required to provide training. Mentorship incorporates the long-term relationship that is focused specifically upon the development of the pastor. Therefore, before entering into the mentorship relationship, there should be a long-term commitment from both parties.

The Constraints of Time

Being able to draw on years of real life experiences sets the second career pastor apart from the younger, more traditional pastoral candidate. The actual events of the pastor's life often inform the pastor's response to the experiences of ministry beyond what any academic training might. As Byassee has reflected, "I may have learned more of what I needed to be a pastor in my college fraternity than in seminary; more from coming from a family of divorce than from my church internships— learned more, that is, about how to build consensus, get people who don't necessarily like you to work with you, and keep meeting several times a week without killing one another."[51]

Because the second career pastor comes to the ministry later in life, there will be those who choose not to invest the time in a seminary degree, preferring to focus upon

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[50] John "Mac" McDonald, Pastor, Pleasant Plain Friends Church, interview with author, Oskaloosa, IA, July 29, 2015.

[51] Jason Byassee, "Family Feud: Politics in a Small Church," *Christian Century*, 127, no. 8 (April 20, 2010): 26.

engaging in the service of ministry more immediately. Therefore, the program for the second career pastor will often need to be designed differently. "Seminary programs have to be designed which tie into the work and life experiences of second-career students.[52] ... Second-career students should be helped to correlate the activities of their previous professions to their new one, so that learnings from their first careers are not lost to their ministry."[53]

Adapting to a New Perspective

The training for second career pastors will need to be targeted and designed to address very specific problems that the second career pastor encounters in ministry, primarily the result of the change in careers. Now, the second career pastor must shift from focusing on production and profit into learning to serve in ministry. "Second career pastors often respond to a call into ministry and discover that there are some gaps in their training and experience, which they then deal with by pursuing educational experiences or additional training that provide very specific knowledge which they can quickly apply."[54] This additional training will vary from situation to situation. An active mentorship provides an avenue in which to identify such gaps and determine how to access appropriate training. There will be times when the mentor can provide the specific training.

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[52] Certainly, like the author, there have been second career pastors who have accessed seminary training. However, during the research for this dissertation, the author has not encountered any seminary programs that have a separate track specifically designed to support second career pastors.

[53] Stone, 297.

[54] D. Brown interview.

Training is crucial for all pastors. In the twenty-first century, there will be a need for a broader range of education and training than that available in previous generations. The impact of the decline in the influence of the church upon society and the withdrawal of people from active participation in the church demand more than just an academic degree from a seminary. The second career pastor brings into ministry a life full of experience that grounds him or her in a practical reality. Being perceived as realistic meshes well with the contemporary desire for relevancy and authenticity within the church by current American society, particularly among millennials.[55]

Finding and Developing Pastors Locally

Accepting the second career pastor as a viable option for pastoral leadership, the question then becomes focused upon where second career pastors may be found. One proposed avenue is to look among the people already known by the small, rural church. This includes considering those part of the immediate congregation. It also means looking at neighboring churches, especially those of the same denomination. Is there someone among the laity who has already displayed ministerial leadership gifts? "Who are you raising up to be a leader in your church? … An internal candidate understands your church culture. [Internal candidates] understand your locale. They know the people, the programs, the successes and challenges. If you have someone who has the gifts and the character, this is a good option and makes the sell a little easier."[56]

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[55] Adelle M. Bank, "Hip-Hop Embraced as an Evangelistic Tool," *Christian Century* 128, no. 25 (December 13, 2011): 16.

[56] Black, 135, Kindle.

One approach in this type of recruitment for pastoral leadership is to "grow your own," which involves encouraging individuals who display ministerial gifts as lay persons to become open to responding to God's call upon their lives and to enter pastoral ministry full-time. An example of this grow-your-own approach was experienced by a life-long friend of the author. The circumstance of this friend moving from secular work into full-time ministry involved the only church in a small community of about two hundred people, which was located more than thirty miles away from any town of more than 5,000 people. The church was looking for a new pastor. The elders discussed asking this man, a member of their congregation, to serve as the interim pastor for one year. This man had grown up in this church. He and friends had sung in gospel groups in high school and college. He and his wife, shortly after completing college, had taught in a mission school in Palestine Ramallah. He had been a teacher for a few years. At the time the elders spoke with him, he was working with his stepfather in a painting business. The elders approached him, and he agreed to take the position as interim pastor for the one year. He ended up serving the church as its pastor for twelve years. Prior to being approached by the elders of the church, this individual had not considered entering pastoral ministry. The church saw his spiritual gifts and encouraged him to use them in pastoral ministry. Since leaving this church as its pastor, he has developed a ministry as an interim pastor. He has served three other churches in the surrounding area as an interim pastor.[57]

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[57] The author is aware of these events through personal observation and conversations with this friend and other members of the congregation. The author also attended this church for six years, part of which were during the pastoral tenure of this friend.

Part of the attraction of the recruitment of lay people into ministry in a community known to them revolves around the family connections of the prospective second career pastor.[58] That was certainly the case of the previous example. This was the church where the man and his sisters grew up. His mother and stepfather attended this church. His father-in-law had previously served many years in this church as its pastor. In retirement his in-laws had returned and were attending this church when this man assumed the ministerial role as pastor.

For churches looking to use this model, it becomes crucial that the lay leaders of the church be sensitive regarding the spiritual gifts of people in their midst and of those in nearby churches. Paying attention to the careers of those who have grown up in the community, knowing the natural tendency among most people to stay close to home, helps in this assessment process. Then, the process must be focused by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Who is being prepared to serve as pastor? Those approaching retirement age, especially those in public service professions such as teachers, school administrators, social service workers, and the military, who have exhibited leadership in lay positions they have held within the church, may increase the candidate pool from which the small, rural church recruits its pastoral leadership.

Responding to Call

Hearing the call of God and responding to the Holy Spirit's leading into pastoral ministry varies from individual to individual. Samuel responded to the voice of God as a

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[58] Tony Gutierrez, "Pastors Prep for New Starts," *Clovis (NM) News Journal*, August 3, 2007.

young boy.[59] Many are similarly called today and prepare for pastoral ministry throughout their youth and early adult life, attending Bible college and seminary.

However, there are others who come into ministry following a path more similar to that of Amos. The prophet Amos had been a shepherd and farmer. He responded to God's calling later in his life and went to deliver God's message to the nation of Israel.[60] This is the path of the second career pastor, whom God has been preparing for pastoral ministry within the confines of the labor of another career, melding the second career pastor through the experiences of this previous occupation. As the Holy Spirit prepares and directs this preparation, this individual learns and matures spiritually until that time when God calls her or him forth into pastoral ministry. Like Amos, the call to the second career pastor is clear. The experiences of the previous work career become a foundation for ministry.

Augusta Freedom Church: Seeking a Pastor

As the members of the Augusta Freedom Church continued to seek a pastor, they became aware that a man who had grown up in their church was preparing to retire as a teacher in a school system about sixty miles away. Over the years, the members of Augusta Freedom had encountered this individual through a variety of denominational events and activities. They had watched his faith mature and had witnessed him fulfilling a variety of lay leadership positions within the denomination. The elders began

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[59] 1 Samuel 3:1-10.

[60] Amos 7:14-15.

wondering among themselves whether this man might return to their community and accept a call to become the pastor at Augusta Freedom Church.

The elders decided to take the initiative and have two of their number go to visit with this individual. As these two elders met with the man at a restaurant in his community, they expressed the thought that had been hovering over the members of the church about whether he would be interested in accepting a call into pastoral ministry at the church. The man paused before responding. He told the two elders that he and his wife had been talking and praying over the past two or three years for God's leading regarding where they could be used after he retired from teaching. The conclusion they had drawn from their prayers was that God was leading them into pastoral ministry. They just didn't know where.

Now, he was being presented with an opportunity to return to his home church and become the pastor there. He was excited about that possibility. The elders and the candidate agreed to hold the matter in prayer. He would consult his wife, while they would visit more within the body of elders and with others in the church. Both would continue to pray for God's leading. They arranged to visit again the next week.

The two elders reported back to the other elders of the Augusta Freedom Church about their conversation with the candidate. The elders decided they should take some intermediate steps to prepare to issue a call to the second career pastoral candidate. Once again, they contacted the denomination's regional officer for assistance. The church's elders asked what assistance could be provided by the denomination in helping with the transition of the candidate from his secular career into the pastorate. What training would be available?

Together, the church and the denomination designed an orientation program into pastoral ministry with an expectation that training would continue over a period of months and perhaps years. The denomination would take the lead in providing technical and procedural training regarding denominational expectations for pastors. However, the centerpiece of the training program involved finding a mentor for the new pastor of the church, a relationship that was designed to last a minimum of two years with regular meetings. The denomination's regional officer indicated that the denomination would find a suitable mentor and would provide a small stipend for the mentor. The plan was that the mentor would be an experienced pastor within the denomination from a nearby church, someone already known by the church and the new pastor. The church would then provide released time for the new pastor to participate in the training program, including supporting the meetings with the mentor through travel reimbursement.

The next chapter concludes the study of the second career pastor as an option for pastoral leadership for small, rural churches by reviewing the proposal and considering what other areas merit further exploration.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the demographic shift occurring in America that has progressively witnessed a greater percentage of people living in metropolitan areas, the small, rural church will always be an important part of American Christendom. According to Pappas, "The average Protestant church in our country has 75 at worship on Sunday morning. Broadly speaking, small churches comprise two-thirds of all the Protestant churches in North America. … Thus it has been and thus it undoubtedly will be!"[1]

The small church is the norm, not the exception. Combine this with the overwhelming geographic preponderance of rural areas in America, the extrapolation then suggests that the small, rural church is a predominant feature in American Christendom. As Byassee has concluded, "Church denominations … are only as good as [their] small parishes."[2]

Bickers highlights the continuing and overwhelming presence of the small church. He contends that, due to the strong sense of community within small churches, many prefer them over megachurches and are willing to sacrifice programming for that sense of community.[3] Yet, there will always be churches in rural areas and small towns needing pastoral leadership. These congregations will still find it more difficult to fill their pastoral vacancies.[4]

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[1] Anthony G. Pappas, "Small Churches," *American Baptist Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (June 1990): 54.

[2] Byassee: 29.

[3] Bickers, *Intentional Ministry*, 32, EBSCOhost.

[4] Chang, "Pulpit Supply," 28.

Unfortunately, rural areas will likely never be the places that that draw great numbers of people from metropolitan areas to become part of the rural church community. Coupled with the unabated increases in the costs of college and seminary education plus the two-income status of most contemporary families, financial factors will continue to cause young pastoral candidates to lean toward seeking pastorates in larger churches in metropolitan areas. There will be exceptions, but the current trend toward living in metropolitan areas appears to be more likely to grow rather than decline. Demographic factors exacerbate this trend. Younger clergy are often inclined to join the exodus. As Madsen has surmised, "The rural church had too often been used as a stepping stone by clergy. Low salaries, poorly trained leadership and declining membership had created an identity crisis."[5]

Consequently, this trend continues to put pressure on small, rural churches as they recruit and seek to retain pastoral leadership. As this struggle persists and even increases, small, rural churches will need to develop new solutions regarding pastoral leadership. The second career pastor is one such option for pastoral leadership that small, rural churches should consider adopting.

Assumptions

Certainly, there are some assumptions that have been used in making the argument of this dissertation. Among these, two stand out. First, this paper's basic contention is that full-time pastoral service is preferred by churches over any form of

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[5] Madsen, 106.

part-time service. Second, longer tenures of pastoral service support more effective ministry for churches and are consequently desired by churches.

Due to having a pension or another form of retirement income already in place, the more mature second career pastor has less need for financial compensation. If this is so, then the second career pastor will not be as significantly driven by financial need as a younger pastor. In addition, being retired from another profession, the second career pastor will not be as motivated by the desire for professional advancement as a younger pastor might be. This creates the possibility of a longer term of pastoral service in the small, rural church by the second career pastor. Thus, both assumptions interact – the preferability of a full-time pastor and the desirability of a longer tenure of pastoral service.

The Critical Nature of the Small, Rural Church

Pappas has summarized that the major difference between small and large churches is that "the small church operates in the realm of face to face relations; it is socially structured. The large church operates bureaucratically as an institution; it is administratively structured."[6] It is this relational focus that energizes and sustains the small, rural church. People are what is valued in the small, rural church rather than programs or productivity.

Knowing that the small, rural church builds its ministry upon the relationships of its members and with its community becomes a critical consideration when selecting a pastor. While the small, rural church needs a pastor who preaches a sound Biblical

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[6] Pappas, 89.

message on Sunday morning, perhaps the more important need is for a pastor who cares deeply about the people of the church. However, the model that many see in the contemporary American church is that of the teaching pastor rather than that of the visitation pastor.

This is the model of the megachurch, which, while the smallest numerically of all American churches, exhibits the greatest influence upon the American Christian community. It is the pastors of megachurches who are sought as the keynote speakers for church conferences, not the pastors of small, rural churches. Regrettably, the small, rural church has been swayed by the image of the megachurch and too often attempts to incorporate this model in its operations. The illusion of the applicability of the large church model with all its programming is alluring. As small, rural churches come under its spell, they encounter "the glorification of Goliath: bigger is thought to be better."[7]

However, the popularity of the megachurch model does not align with the realities of the community surrounding the small, rural church. As Brooks deduced, "A model that works in a megachurch in California usually will not work in a small church in rural Georgia. Some of the principles may cross over, but there are no cookie-cutter models that will work church-wide."[8]

The small, rural church does well when it emphasizes its calling as a family, much like the New Testament church which was comprised of small gatherings that met in houses. Consequently, when confronted by a pastoral vacancy, the small, rural church

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[7] Owen Owens, "American Baptist Small Churches: Where We Are in 1990," *American Baptist Quarterly*, 9 no. 2 (June 1990): 74.

[8] George Hambric Brooks, "Revitalization of Moderate Baptist Churches" (DMin diss., Portland Seminary, George Fox University, 2016), 22, accessed January 3, 2018, http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/124.

may find its best pastoral candidate by looking at those who have grown up in the church or among its immediate neighbors. In the words of Meredith Wilson in the opening to his musical *Music Man*, "You gotta know the territory."[9] The second career pastor who has lived as part of the community of the small, rural church has this knowledge, through which his or her service can be more natural and enduring.

Strengths of the Second Career Pastor in the Pastoral Call

Herein lies the strength of the second career pastor in the service of the small, rural church – an intimate knowledge of the territory. The older and spiritually mature second career pastor is not driven by career, but instead responds to the sense of calling. This pastoral call in the small, rural church bears witness in caring for the local congregation and its community in a myriad of ways: from helping with the harvest to being the announcer at sporting events of the local high school, from chewing the fat with the old boys at the grain elevator to serving the snack to the children at Vacation Bible School, from conducting worship services at the local nursing home to washing dishes after the women's book club meeting.

For the second career pastor, these acts are not inconveniences nor are they stepping stones to something beyond. Instead, these acts are part and parcel of what it means to pastor in the small, rural church. They typify the acts of ministry that build the foundation of relationships from which the church grows. In his study of small churches, Carl Dudley observed, "In small churches, more people know more people, and know more about more people, than in most larger congregations. ... When church size is

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[9] Meredith Wilson, "Rock Island," in *Music Man* (New York: Music Theatre International, 1957).

measured by human relationships, the small church is the largest expression of the Christian faith!"[10] The successful second career pastor ministers through the development of such relationships.

Implications for the Pastoral Leadership of the Small, Rural Church

Relational care then is the bedrock of the ministry in the small, rural church. From this foundation, all other aspects of ministry in the small, rural church flow. "Regardless of the educational level of a pastor, small churches expect pastors to have a love for people, a sense of God's calling of them to this ministry, and enough education and training to preach effectively, lead in worship and provide pastoral care for the congregation."[11] Everything in the small, rural church begins and ends in the intensity of its relationships.

While the small, rural church is relationally driven, trust is not conferred simply by position. The pastor does not automatically have a voice of leadership in these churches. Trust must be earned before a leadership role is granted, and this takes time. Again, this reinforces the need for longer pastoral tenure. The practice of finding a pastor from within the known associations of the small, rural church may reduce the time required to earn trust. The second career pastor who has lived and exhibited ministerial gifts as a lay person, and who has been observed by the congregation, may more quickly be granted authority in the pastoral role.

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[10] Carl S. Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1978), quoted in David R. Ray, "A Theological, Biblical Foundation for Small Churches," *American Baptist Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (June 1990): 101.

[11] Linda C. Spoolstra, "Training Pastors for Small Churches," *American Baptist Quarterly*, 9, no. 2 (June 1990): 79.

Therefore, within this process the small, rural church congregation assumes direct oversight for its own pastoral leadership. Spoolstra declares that "the local church has a responsibility to identify, recruit and support persons who will prepare for pastoral ministry. … It is assumed that the local church works with God to call people out to consider a pastoral vocation and prepare for that form of ministry."[12] Such responsibility includes the training of the person moving from a secular career into the pastorate. Thus, the entire church becomes more involved and more vested in its own spiritual welfare through the support it provides the new second career pastor. Such investment also provides a footing which may enable a longer tenure of the pastor.

Topics Needing Further Research

No paper can sufficiently examine all the complexities of a single issue. Therefore, there are other areas regarding pastoral leadership in the small, rural church that remain to be explored which are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

As noted previously, ministry opportunities for women in small, rural churches warrant further study. While some denominations and churches are theologically opposed to women having leadership in the church, many at least espouse an egalitarian theology. In the long history of the church, women being in pastoral ministry is a relatively recent experience. Is this experience more frequently available to women in metropolitan areas or in rural areas? Are women accepted more readily as pastors in rural areas? Do the financial restrictions of small, rural churches cause them to more readily call female pastors? Does the more limited salary package of small churches contribute to the

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[12] Spoolstra, 80.

inequity of monetary compensation experienced by women pastors, similar to the experience of women throughout the wider scope of American businesses?

Also, the experience of ethnic minority pastors in the small, rural church deserves additional exploration. The racial and ethnic segregation among churches has been starkly noted. According to Smietana, "Sunday morning remains one of the most segregated hours in American life, with more than 8 in 10 congregations made up of one predominant racial group."[13] What practices have denominations and churches incorporated, if any, to recruit ethnic minorities into pastoral ministry in small, rural churches? What has been the reception of small, rural churches regarding pastors with ethnicity different than that of their members? Developing churches that incorporate different ethnicities is not easy, nor has it occurred with any frequency.

Such an undertaking can be stressful for the church and for the pastor. Branson and Martinez note, "Overall the organization's capacity for stress is increased when relationships are deepened and trust is increased. Leaders shape the process when they focus attention and deepen conversations. The attention of a church is shaped by stories, information and experiences."[14] The solution for the incorporation of minority pastors in small, rural churches appears to be found in the development of strong, supportive relationships within the church. Crandall contends, "Because more and more of America is becoming multiethnic, pluralistic, and heterocultural, training and experience in cross-cultural communication and ministry is critical for … church leaders of today and

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[13] Bob Smietana, "Sunday Morning Segregation: Most Worshipers Feel Their Church Has Enough Diversity," *Christianity Today* (January 15, 2015), accessed December 21, 2016, http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2015/january/sunday-morning-segregation-most-worshipers-church-diversity.html?paging=off.

[14] Branson and Martinez, Loc. 2389, Kindle.

tomorrow."[15] Further study regarding the impact of the incorporation of other ethnicities within those rural areas that have been predominantly white could benefit small, rural churches and might enable ethnic minority pastors more opportunities to serve in these churches.

Another area that has not been considered is the quality of ministry of the second career pastor. Studies comparing the success of second career pastor with pastors who enter ministry at an earlier age warrant further investigation. One of the difficulties for this type of study is identifying what constitutes success in ministry. Certainly, it cannot simply be a numerical analysis, especially as the population of rural areas continues to shrink. Brooks has observed that too often churches "get caught up in numbers as the only way to gauge church health. It is imperative we understand that growth statistics are just one indicator of a healthy church."[16]

In the same vein, comparisons of the effectiveness of different part-time pastoral arrangements with that of second career pastors remain to be investigated. Again, to be undertaken, such comparisons would require identifying key components that define ministerial success.

One option for pastoral leadership that has received a great deal of attention currently has been the bivocational pastor. While historically commonly present, in the contemporary American church, the bivocational pastor is viewed as being a relatively recent development by many congregations. Longitudinal studies analyzing not only the growth of this form of pastor-church relationship but also interpreting its long-term

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[15] Crandall, 139.

[16] Brooks, 24.

effectiveness, especially regarding the numerical growth of the churches employing this option, would be helpful as churches consider how to proceed in securing pastoral leadership.

Another interesting study would be a determination about what the prevalence of the second career pastor is in different sizes of churches. When determined by the percent of congregations, is the second career pastor found more frequently in smaller churches? Do rural churches have a second career pastor more often than urban and suburban churches?

While an abbreviated exploration of the training of second career pastors was undertaken in the previous chapter of this paper, a more thorough investigation of the results of specific training approaches would be helpful for churches. What are the specific subjects of training that have the most impact upon the ministry of the second career pastor and that result in more effective ministry? What must churches be sure to do to promote the success of the ministry of their pastors? How does this contribute to the success of the ministry of the church as a unit?

A correlated investigation would be the approach seminaries have taken in addressing the educational needs of the second career pastor. There has been an adjustment made to address older students who begin seminary studies after several years in another vocation, which technology has made more accessible. According to Lincoln's analysis of seminary programs, "Theological educators recognize that the life experience of a single 22-year-old fresh out of college is different from the life experience of a

married 35-year-old (who may also be a parent) who enrolls at the same seminary."[17] What about the 55-year-old who has retired from teaching, the military, or social services work? Such a pastoral candidate may not be as willing to undertake three to four years of a traditional seminary experience.[18]

Still another area deserving study would be the tenure of second career pastors compared to the more traditional pastor. Do second career pastors have longer tenure in small, rural churches than do younger pastors fresh from college or seminary? The assumption of this paper suggests this is possible, but further study would certainly provide a more definitive perspective.

Recommendations

The small, rural church provides great opportunity for Christian service. The very nature of the intense relationships among its members enlivens the small, rural church and drives it forward in ministry. As Chang discovered, "Many pastors would say that it is deeply satisfying to work in smaller churches. As one pastor who moved from a large church to a small church commented, 'I would never go back to a large church . . . Administrative tasks kept getting in the way of doing what I wanted to be doing, . . . [which is] serving a congregation and making a difference in people's lives.'"[19] The small, rural church cannot do everything. Therefore, it must focus upon the essential

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[17] Timothy Dwight Lincoln, "The Seminary Experience: Conceptual Worlds of First-Career and Second-Career Seminarians" (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2009), 5, accessed December 1, 2015, https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/6690.

[18] There may be seminaries which have developed a specialized track for second career pastors. However, during the research for this dissertation, the author did not discover any such programs.

[19] Chang, "Pulpit Supply," 28-29.

things. For the pastor, this helps align his or her ministry toward directly serving the people of the church and community. In summarizing this perspective of ministry, Hagen states, "The joy of a smaller church is that pastoral care can be shown to everyone all the time in ways not possible in larger congregations."[20]

One major challenge for any pastor in the small, rural church is to make sure the entire church, including the pastor and the laity, is focused upon reaching out into the community; i.e., being missional. Unfortunately, many small churches have become focused upon the maintenance functions of the church, caring for those already in the church. As Bickers has surmised, "The only targeted group most smaller churches seek to serve is their existing members, and they wonder why they can't reach new people. If a church is serious about wanting to be missional, it must identify a target different from its existing members."[21] The previous employment experience of a second career pastor may be helpful in the effort to reorient this focus. Having been involved in attracting customers or meeting performance level expectations provides the second career pastor insight applicable to the missional work of the church.

The primary recommendation begins with the small, rural church acknowledging its own present status. Pressure from demographic loss in those areas more distant from metropolitan areas is the reality of many small, rural churches. However, there are rural areas and churches that border urban and suburban areas and that may be transitioning through an influx of population. The circumstances faced by each small, rural church are

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[20] Hagen, 79.

[21] Bickers, *Intentional Ministry*, 16, EBSCOhost.

unique to each particular church. Therefore, generalizations must be understood to have a limited applicability.

For those small, rural churches that are more geographically isolated, pastoral vacancies are more frequently experienced. The challenge to recruit and retain pastoral leadership can be met by considering the older second career pastor rather than the younger pastor. The key is retention, having a longer tenure of pastoral service.

Financial pressure for the small, rural church adds to the demographic trends experienced due to a more remote location. There are churches "all across America that have difficulty paying their electric bills and keeping up with building repairs due to lack of funding because of declining attendance."[22] As noted earlier, the impact of financial struggles has led many small, rural churches to move to some form of part-time pastoral arrangement. Nearly all believe, however, that a full-time pastor would be preferable. The mature second career pastor may provide relief from such financial constraints, assuming the second career pastor has another source of income, likely one associated with retirement. Here, the second career pastor responds to the sense of God's calling rather than making a career move.

Training for the new second career pastor is vital. While several avenues exist, the key feature identified by pastors and churches is mentorship with an experienced pastor, especially during the first months of the transition from secular work into the pastorate. The great value found in mentorship is being able to converse about the spiritual implications of the pastoral call, the winds of the faith journey of not only the new pastor but also what he or she encounters in others during pastoral experiences. As Russell has

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[22] Brooks, 2.

advocated, "Developing leaders for the church must incorporate the mystery of the faith because that is where people meet God. … Leadership development must empower people to discover the mystery of Christ themselves and lead others to the mystery of God's unconditional love and redeeming grace in our lives and word."[23] It is essential that matters of faith be examined through the mentorship, for faith is the heart of the church and Christian life.

Unfilled pulpits among small, rural churches severely inhibit the spiritual growth and outreach of today's church. In the face of demographic trends and financial limitations, the second career pastor can provide stable pastoral leadership for the small, rural church.

The Augusta Freedom Church: A Longer Tenure of Pastoral Leadership

The man who was retiring as a teacher accepted the call to be pastor of the Augusta Freedom Church. The training program for his transition from his career as teacher into the new vocation of pastor worked well. The mentor obtained for him by the denomination already had a relationship with the new pastor. Their conversations continued well beyond the term of the mentorship, becoming a spiritual friendship, enriching both.

After having five pastors in ten years, including eighteen months without a pastor, with their new pastor Augusta Freedom Church experienced ten years of service from one pastor. The church only grew slightly during these ten years. However, after a couple

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[23] Danny Wayne Russell, "Congregational Leadership Development through Mentorships: Preparing Each Generation for the Church's Future through Family Systems Theory," (DMin diss., Portland Seminary, George Fox University, 2014), 11, accessed January 3, 2018, http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/82.

of years the leadership of the church noticed that interactions within the congregation were less stressful. Most notably, the church's financial situation had improved significantly, which enabled the church to respond to needs within the community more easily. In addition, they improved the compensation for the pastor as well.

After ten years, the pastor informed the elders that he felt he was coming to the end of his time as pastor. Consequently, he and the elders began to have a succession conversation regarding pastoral leadership for the church. In looking forward, the elders and the pastor agreed there were a couple of people that had exhibited ministerial gifts in nearby denominational churches. They were looking forward to exploring pastoral possibilities with each of these individuals and to encourage them in their spiritual aspirations. The church felt confident that their experience with one second career pastor set the groundwork for another person to transition into the pastoral leadership role, a much different attitude than ten years earlier.

Final Reflections: A Personal Journey

The journey of the second career pastor has been the experience of the author. After thirty-five years in education, including twenty-two years as a public school administrator, I accepted a call to pastor a small, rural church, which is part of a denomination of Evangelical Friends. I am now in my sixth year as pastor of this same church. In the training I sought, I pursued becoming a "recorded minister" in the denomination, an experience similar to ordination in other denominations. Once I started that process, I felt a need for more training. Engaging in this doctoral program in Leadership and Spiritual Formation was the result.

As I have reflected upon the transition, there are certain items that were particularly helpful. Primary among these was the mentorship built into the recording process. I greatly appreciated the conversations I had with my "sponsor" over the two years of the program. Regrettably, because our denomination advocates the calling of laity into ministry, there are some who never engage in this mentoring experience. In addition, to qualify for the recording process, one must have been observed in active pastoral ministry for one year. It would have been helpful in my transition to have had the mentorship in place immediately.

As I began my sixth year of pastoral ministry, I accepted a call as interim pastor of another small, rural church that is located eight miles from the original church I continue to serve. After serving there for five months, they asked my first church and me if we could work out a more permanent situation so that I could continue to serve both churches. So, as a new year begins, I am now serving two churches and getting to experience the multiple-point charge.

One of the things I told the church six years ago during the candidating process was that I was at stage in my life where I didn't have to prove anything. Looking back, what I was telling the church was that I was no longer on a career advancement track. My wife and I had been talking about the call into ministry for several years before my retirement as a school administrator. We were ready to respond to God's call. I believe there are many others who are ready to respond in much the same way. The older, more mature second career pastor has a role in serving God in the small, rural church.

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