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From the Editor
By Laurie D. Bailey

Some years ago I made a brief foray into church consulting. The experience was both enlightening and frightening. The churches I encountered saw themselves as strong and healthy, wanting to grow. They were seeking help in identifying their strengths and assessing the needs of their communities. They wanted to know: What are we good at? Where are we weak? What do we like and dislike? What is our target audience? How can we attract them to our church? Do we need to add programs, staff, or facilities? They were willing to survey their congregations, study their neighborhoods, write histories, cast visions and craft mission statements. Sounds like an ideal situation: Strong churches, open to change, willing to work.

What was so frightening about this? At no time did any of these churches raise the theological question. None thought to ask, "What is the nature and purpose of the church, and what does that mean for our community in this time and this place."

They wanted historical, sociological, cultural and economic data to inform their decisions, but it did not occur to these bodies (or their leaders) to begin with ecclesiology. They did not understand that the new practices and programs they were considering were at odds with their Reformed, Anabaptist or Wesleyan theology of the church. They were willing to move beyond "What we have always been?" to "What we want to be now?" But it did not occur to them to ask "What *must* we be?"

This issue of CGJ asks just that question. Each article examines a different aspects of the nature of the church and lays out implications for communities of faith today. Linda Cannell discusses the nature and purpose of the church within the context of the children in our midst. She makes the case that the presence of children is required in the community of faith, and offers a framework for making them full participants in the life of the congregation. Terri Birkett tells the story of a dying church and the spiritual journey that small body took to transformation and new life. She provides principles for revitalizing the small church without recourse to the fads and gimmicks of the day. Michael T. Cooper offers a historical perspective on ecclesiology. He shows how cultural factors influenced the development of the structure and organization of the early church, and draws implications for the continuing development of our understanding of the church across cultural contexts today. Daryl Busby's article will be of particular interest to pastors and those involved in pastoral development. Busby identifies reasons for confusion over the role of the pastor today and defines a number of changes in culture and society that have led to shifting expectations of the pastor. He offers guidance and hope for meeting these challenges.

About the Editor

Laurie D. Bailey, Ph.D. is editor of *Common Ground Journal.* She has over 20 years experience as a Christian educator in two Illinois churches, and enjoys acting as a bridge between the academic community and the church through consulting and freelance editing. She lives in Park Ridge, Illinois and has three grown children.

The Upside Down Church
By Linda M. Cannell

Wendy[1] faced serious surgery for removal of a brain tumor. The children's director, wanting the children involved in the expressions of concern and prayer, invited Wendy to tell the children what she was to face in the next few days. She readily agreed. Two children dragged a rocking chair into the center of the room for Wendy and they all sat around her on the floor. She had told the story so often that it wasn't

difficult to explain what was about to happen and why. Then she asked the children if they had any questions. The predictable question, "Are you afraid?" was answered seriously and honestly. The less predictable question from a nine-year boy, "Are you angry?" caused Wendy to pause and think. "Yes," she said finally, "Sometimes I am angry that I have this terrible thing in my head that could take me away from my family and all that I love. I get angry when I ask God to take it away and nothing happens." As she talked about her fears, the children ministered to her through their concern and honest questions.

After Wendy returned to the worship service, the children got busy and made encouragement cards for her. Many volunteered that they would pray for her. Wendy had her surgery. The children's director had known from the first that if Wendy had died they would process that with the children as well. But, she lived, and after some months Wendy came back to the children's area. She sat on the same rocking chair, while the children gathered around her eager to hear what had happened. Wendy explained what she could of the experience and praised God with the children for his gracious kindness to her and her family. She told the children that, when the hospital staff and visitors asked who made the cards taped all over the walls in her room, she would say, "They were made by the children at my church. They have been praying for me." And she thanked them for their gracious ministry to her.

Wendy experienced grace as the children in her church were given opportunity to minister. The convictions that drive this paper come directly from this story: (1) The church accepts the presence of children and ministers effectively with them to the degree that it sustains a healthy tension between its *character* as the people gathered by God, and its *institutional* expression. (2) The church *requires* the presence of children. We learn the meaning of responsible and selfless care as we minister to children; we see faith freshly as we invite them to process their experiences with us; and we experience grace as God ministers to us through children. (3) Christ is made known to the world through the worship, discipleship, service, learning, and witness of the people of God. Children *must* be involved authentically in these activities, and helped to become responsible participants in the life of the church, or the church will fail to incarnate Christ or to see truly the kingdom of God.[2]

Our response to children, our embrace of children, shows most clearly who we are and what we most value as congregations and as nations. Efficient organization, skilled leadership, clever campaigns, fervent door-to-door canvassing, or apparently successful programming are insufficient to build what Don Posterski and Gary Nelson identify as "future faith churches." Future faith churches know their identity, are involved in authentic ministry in their own contexts, and understand the times (Posterski and Nelson 1997). If children are not learning the meaning of these characteristics it could be argued that there will be no future faith churches!

The Old Testament community was frequently admonished to share the story of God's mighty acts with their children. Societies that have a strong sense of continuing identity into the future have a strong commitment to the nurture of the next generation. Postman writes that "Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see" (Postman 1994, xi). It is not surprising that the book of Deuteronomy, Moses' last words to the Israelites, emphasizes repeatedly the need to communicate that which they held as most important to the next generation. The persisting importance of Moses' admonition is reflected in Barclay's observation that

"No nation has ever set the child in the midst more deliberately than the Jews did. It would not be wrong to say that for the Jew the child was the most important person in the community . . ." (Barclay 1959, 11). Old Testament history, the history of congregations, and nations should remind us that a community neglects its responsibility to communicate faith, values, practices, and wisdom to the next generation to its peril.

The Nature and Purpose of the Church

George Barna is adamant that the future of the organized church in North America is in question. "Let's cut to the chase. After nearly two decades of studying Christian churches in America, I'm convinced that the typical church as we know it today has a rapidly expiring shelf life" (Barna 1998, 1). After a series of indictments he observes that

> the stumbling block for the Church is not its theology but its failure to apply what it believes in compelling ways. The downfall of the Church has not been the content of its message but its failure to practice those truths. Christians have been their own worst enemies when it comes to showing the world what authentic, biblical Christianity looks like . . . Those who have turned to Christianity seeking truth and meaning have left empty-handed, confused by the apparent inability of Christians themselves to implement the principles they profess. (Barna 1998, 5)

While Barna's critique cannot be applied to all churches, he expresses what many in North American culture feel: the church as an institution is no longer relevant. Unfortunately, Barna's emphasis on "authentic, biblical Christianity" is lost as pastors, pressured by such criticism, flock to church conferences where they are assured that the antidote to the perceived problems of today's church is more effective leadership. Seminaries, in turn, are pressured by denominational leaders and congregations to train better leaders. However, the nature and role of leadership are often distorted as churches seek to be successful over being the people of God.

Eugene Peterson is among many who assert that the solutions we propose are grounded in flawed assumptions about what constitutes church leadership. His indictment is that

> the pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeeper's concerns – how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money.
> Some of them are very good shopkeepers. . . . Yet it is still shop keeping; religious shop keeping to be sure, but shop keeping all the same (Peterson 1994, 1).

The letters to the churches in the New Testament were addressed to entire congregations, not simply to leaders. The burden of the Scripture is always directed to the health and spiritual development of the *entire* faith community.[3] Though the focus of the letters to the churches is significant, it is often difficult for many to

accept that the church could be a healthy and viable community in today's world because the *institutional* church gets in the way. The institutional expression of the church is clearly flawed; it seems impotent in a world paralyzed with the madness of violence, hate, poverty, and injustice; there seems no hope to redeem its purpose in the world. Annie Dillard once wrote that ". . . nothing could more surely convince me of God's unending mercy than the continued existence on earth of the church" (Dillard 1977, 59). Barna writes that he is praying for revival. Perhaps that is the best response possible. However, the intention of Christians to be the people of God, demonstrating the character God expects, is also needed.

Dallas Willard once said, "If you want to see the greatness of Christ, look at the church." This paper is being written at a resort center in Nova Scotia. As we looked out at the Atlantic Ocean the owner said, "You want to see church on Sunday around here, go to the local Walmart!" How do we answer the owner's implicit criticism? If we are unable to disentangle the institutional forms of the church that *we have created* from the church as God sees it, we have no answer. In a culture searching for community, the *institutionalized* expression of the church alone is not an option. Is the answer to simply to create more satisfying Walmart–style communities with better programs, user-friendly services, and efficient organization?

The fundamental description of the church as a faith community is that of a people *gathered by God* seeking to embody and practice *together* the identity and character *expected by God*. This commitment to be the people of God is the answer to the implicit criticism and to the questions of where is the church and why isn't it making a difference. Willard argues that if *we* attempt to create the faith community, we are standing in a place where God cannot bless. The most important realization for 21st century Christians is that the church is a diverse, multi-generational people *gathered by God* to accomplish God's purposes.

A thoughtful pastor once wrote,

> I realize now that for all my ideas and skills eagerly put in practice, the truth is, I had no theology of the congregation. I had various notions of what to preach. These I advocated fervently. I was sure of the biblical mandate to help the helpless. These I pushed into action. But I had no sure ground for understanding the congregation itself as *ecclesia*, that is, people of God called together and gifted for ministry in a particular place. (Frank 2000, 12)

If the Scripture is to be taken seriously, the church is God's greatest concern. The *church* is God's chosen means for making known the mystery and the wisdom of God (Ephesians 3: 9-10); and the agency for reconciling the world to God (2 Corinthians 5:18). One could argue that the church is the *primary* community; that is, principles of life and faith learned in the church are transferred to all other human communities. To the extent that this community is dysfunctional,[4] other human relationships and communities in society are impoverished – including the families who are embraced by the church.[5]

The church has long struggled with the tension between its identity as the people of God and its institutional character. Acts 6 and 15, for example, are accounts of the early church creating institutional processes and policies while at the same time upholding its fundamental character as the people of God. In the search for a

theological expression relevant for the church today, Giles argues that the "best solution to the quest for the fundamental church concept, under which all other titles and descriptions of the church can be subsumed, is 'the Christian community'" (Giles 1995, 15). He notes that our customary understanding and use of "fellowship" is inadequate for what the word community means in the Scripture. It is not just people who get along – it is people who participate together in suffering, in giving, who experience love in the gospel, and in the body and blood of Christ. In the Bible, the word fellowship (or *koinonia*) is never used of a specific program or structure. It always describes relationships; but relationships that are shaped by the recognition that we are not *just* in relationship with each other. As communities, we are also in relationship with God, and called to live, serve, and suffer with God. In our quest to design churches that are places of relationship and "good fellowship," and where worship is user-friendly, we may miss the essential reality that *God* gathers a people to accomplish God's purposes, that Christ is the head of the church, and that the Holy Spirit empowers the people God has gathered. This community must be defined by faithful, obedient discipleship, responsible service, and the desire to glorify God. As we do these things we are in fellowship with God and with one another. Based on this kind of fellowship, we can effectively communicate Christian faith to this and to the next generation.

Significantly, there are few biblical descriptions of the church that relate to structure or organization; there is a great deal of emphasis, however, on the *character* that God expects of the congregation as a whole. Most of the letters to the churches in the New Testament were just that – letters to the churches. They were addressed to the gathered church – the community of God's people. I decided one day to read all the letters to the churches in the New Testament. As I read, I jotted down every word or phrase used to describe the churches; I made note of every instruction or admonition addressed to the churches. Try the exercise yourself and note how few of the terms are descriptive of structure or organization and how many are clearly related to the spiritual and interpersonal character expected by God.

The Upside Down Church

> Why do we people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute?
> . . . On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. . . . we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return. (Dillard 1982, 52-53)

We know that children will be influenced by their experiences in several different forms of community: schools, neighborhoods, families, clubs -- and churches. Therefore, the nature and health of the communities that influence our children must be of concern. The popular phrase, it takes a village to teach a child, is significant for all communities, but most significant for congregations. In my judgment, the organizational pattern we have established for congregational communities is upside-

down. If we begin with programs, including the many we tend to organize for children, it is too easy to use the "success" of these programs as the marks of a successful church, or ministry. We tend to equate programs with purpose rather than see them as temporary, tangible expressions of what the church is to accomplish out of obedience to God, the One who has gathered the church. Successful programs will never be the sort of "villages" that are needed for the nurture and development of children. The ongoing challenge for the church in the world, renewed in each new generation, is to learn its identity as a people gathered by God and to live out that identity in the world.

If we were able to look at a picture of the early church we would see all ages, men and women, different cultures, and a variety of social conditions. Many churches today are indistinguishable from any other organization in society. Their organization is that of an older corporate model. If your church is defined primarily in this way, think about those who are not able to be part of that structure. For example, what role does a person play in a corporation who is disadvantaged in whatever way society characterizes "disadvantaged?" What space in the community is created for persons who have some degree of difficulty in certain areas of life? Do they have any chance to speak or participate in significant decision-making? What happens to people who retire from a corporation? In some cases, corporations are hiring them back because they realize they need their wisdom, but in many cases, it's the gold watch and good-bye. What role do children play in a corporation? They have no role. We wait for them to grow up so that they can assume a role. We might create educational experiences for them designed to teach them or prepare them for responsibility, but they are not part of the corporation. In reality, institutions do not require children in order to exist. Churches that see themselves primarily as corporate institutions can survive simply by ensuring that there is a perpetual supply of adults. Much of the programming of today's church is designed especially for this purpose.

Turn the typical conception of church upside down. Think first of the church as the people of God, rather than as an organization defined by programs. Then think of those experiences that are necessary for the maturing and spiritual development of the entire congregation: worship, learning, authentic service, relationship, and so on. Consider the following diagram (Figure 1):
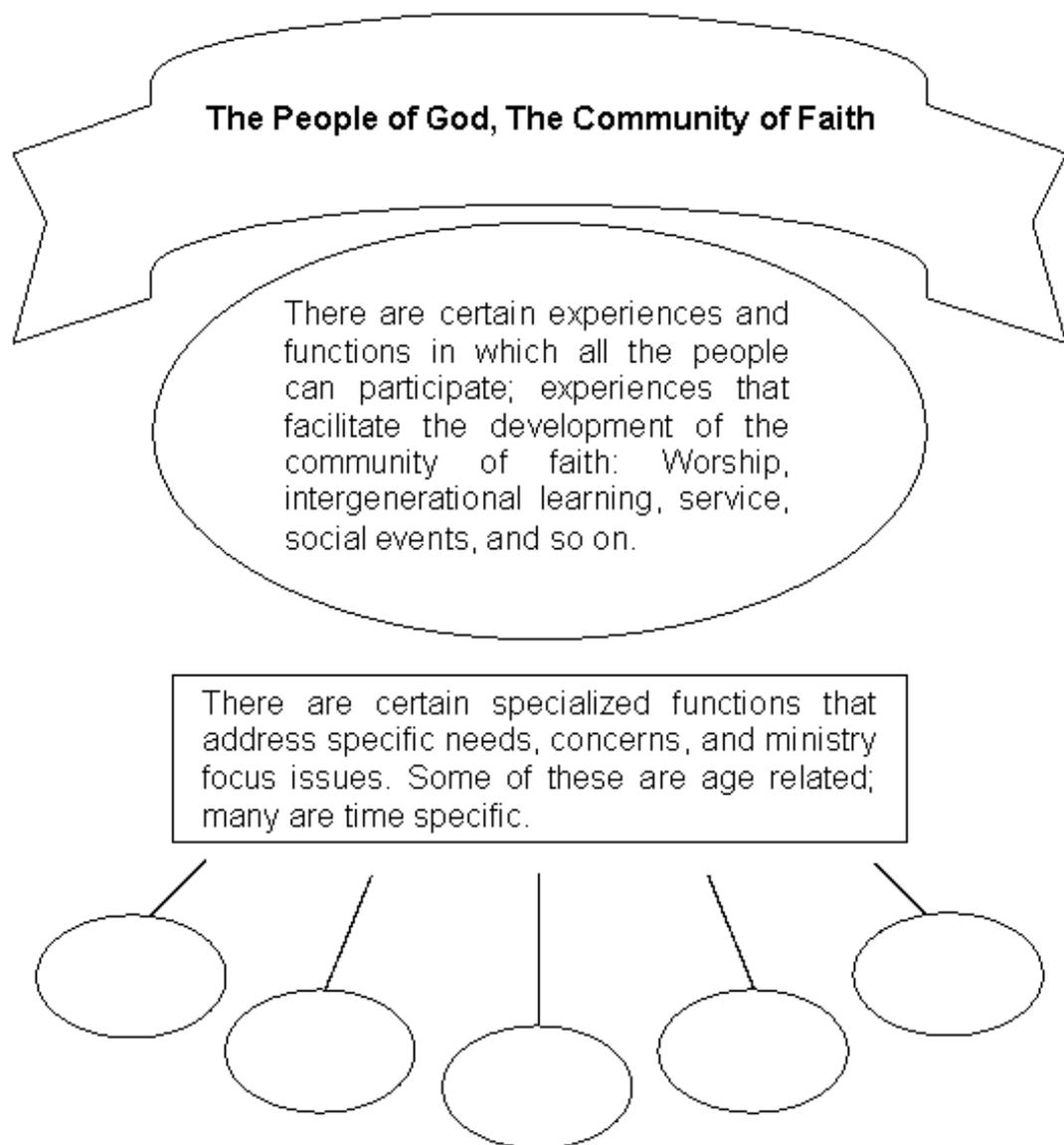
Figure 1. The Upside Down Church

As members of the community of faith come to know one another, specific needs, concerns, ministry options, and ways to communicate the gospel within society will become apparent. *Only then should programs and other specialized activities be developed.* The ministries and programs, the short-term and long-term experiences that become part of the responsibility of the church to the world and to one another are at the bottom of the diagram. Some of the programs and ministries that emerge will be age-related, many will be time-specific. In other words, once the situation changes, the program or institutional structure may change.

The structures and administration of the church are essentially a human creation – no matter how hard we try to justify them theologically. As Peter Drucker once wrote: "Organizations are legal fictions. By themselves they can do nothing, decide nothing, plan nothing. Individuals alone decide and plan" (Drucker 1969, 100). Yet, the existing institutional structures of the church have become so deeply entrenched that they have taken on a pseudo-theological verity. The problem, of course, is that we often don't know what different structures would look like. Even though we feel

the limitations of current institutional structures, the familiar is comfortable; and because it is comfortable, we are shaped by it. When we have an investment in the *institution* and a stake in its continuance, it is hard to let it go or to allow it to change. We may become loyal to the institution to the degree that our service is to preserve the institution; and we are soon unable to critique the nature and function of the institution on the basis of biblical and theological principle.[6]

Children in the Faith Community

If the faith *community* is the fundamental expression of the people of God, then the presence of children is required. Communities *require* the next generation to carry on their faith and values. The essence of a community is not to be found in institutional structures and programs, but in the life and faithfulness of its people. Without children, life and faithfulness have no meaning beyond one generation. Without the need to model and explain the faith to children, adult faith is impoverished. If children are simply attached to the church through programs, the church itself is weakened. Programs will emerge as ministry emerges; but the following emphases must be part of the life of congregations seeking to be the people of God.

Foster authentic relationships among children and adults. Intergenerational activity and relationships are assumed in Scripture (see Psalms 78:2-6, Psalms 102: 18, Esther 9:28, Acts 2:39). Scripture also affirms that the relationship of adults and children includes the activities of teaching through behavior, word, and ritual so that they will remember God's acts and learn obedience leading to wisdom (see Deuteronomy 6: 4-6; Deuteronomy 31:12-13; Proverbs 3-4); as well as the obligation to encourage and respond to children's questions when they observe that certain things are important to the adults around them (Joshua 4:4-7). Jesus admonished adults to see in children the attitudes and behaviors appropriate for the kingdom (Matthew 18: 1-4; Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48). Meaningful intergenerational experiences can be developed by replicating biblical feasts and rituals.[7] Increasingly, churches are developing experiences to help families learn what it means to be family. Many churches realize that parents or caregivers often don't know how to be those who provide spiritual direction for their children. For these churches it makes more sense to view the church as a community where whole families can learn together.

Be the people of God in a particular place and time. Children learn the meaning of the Christian community as they participate in worship, learn the stories of the Christian church and its people, celebrate the heritage of the church, and assume responsibility. Develop a heritage celebration designed to communicate to children the values and commitments that shape the life and ministry of your church. Invite adults from the congregation to share with children stories of their own life and faith. Take children to those areas where your church has a vital ministry. Model what it means to respect diversity and to be reconcilers and ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). Children who see faithful Christians engaged in acts of witness and justice, learn more than the mechanics of the gospel, or simplified stories of Jesus' life. They learn how to be reconcilers themselves as they respond to conflict on playgrounds; they learn how to relate to their siblings and to interact with children of different backgrounds and ethnicity. Children who are part of a faith community

seeking to understand and practice the purpose of God for the church in the world, learn that the gospel is the most pervasive, life-changing force on earth. This is the proper motivation for their lifelong service.

Provide opportunities for children to assume roles and responsibilities in their church. Billy, eight years old, responded to the invitation to learn how to be an usher. The head usher took a couple of weeks to train him in the responsibilities of an usher and impressed on him that the first contact people have with a church is often with an usher. One day, Billy's mother called the children's minister and asked what they had done to make such a difference in the life of her son. "Billy made us take him to a clothing store and actually buy him a suit! He has never worn anything but a T-shirt, jeans and running shoes." Though the suit wasn't required, Billy felt a new sense of responsibility and he wanted to be like, and look like, Mr. Brown, the head usher.

In another church, a children's minister, faced with the needs of a developmentally delayed child in the Sunday School, developed a Friends of Sam ministry and invited children to take turns being with Sam on Sunday. The children helped to make a Friends of Sam box filled with suitable activities. Each Sunday, children would take turns helping Sam with the activities, sitting with him, playing with him, talking with him. Many adults greatly underestimate children's capacities for service. Leadership development begins in childhood. To equip those who are then able to equip others also (2 Timothy 2:2), begin by giving children significant, authentic opportunities for service.

Involve children in meaningful experiences of worship. Listen to the questions or comments of children as they participate in worship: "When can we go home?" "Why do we have to go?" or "What does this mean?" "Why do you do that?" Services of worship that are too often meaningless activities for adults, will not contribute to children's learning. It is not necessary for children to be in every service of worship. However, to exclude children from worship because they distract others, make noise or, worse, disrupt the performance, is devastating for the future of the congregation. Neither is it necessary to "dumb down" the service when children are present. Children have a remarkable capacity for experiencing awe and wonder.

Establish meaningful teaching and learning environments and experiences. The force of the Great Commission is to make disciples, teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded. To view teaching as simple transmission of information, biblical or otherwise, is, in effect, a violation of our Lord's command. Ted Ward, on numerous occasions, has observed that this text calls for *teaching to obedience*. He notes that the word obedience has two families of meanings: one authoritarian and control-oriented; the other a *response* to knowledge communicated through word and relationship. He suggests that what is implied in teaching to obedience is actually what would be known today as *life-long learning*. Through the teaching and learning experiences in congregations, children are introduced to a life of learning. Dallas Willard expresses concern that "It is not essential anymore that you be a disciple of Jesus Christ in order to be a Christian. What is essential is that you believe the right things about him. If you believe the right things, then you're a Christian."[8] The presumption that we can be followers of Jesus simply by knowing things about Christ without the expectation of response leaves nothing substantial to

pass on to the next generation. Willard describes disciples as learners on a journey. He stresses the link between character and belief and discipleship: "Where there is little attention to character and matters of the nature of belief, then discipleship is nice but not necessary. . . . The natural bridge from faith to obedience or abundance is precisely discipleship to Jesus Christ." Imagine the effect on children who are part of a community of faithful disciples intentionally seeking to learn of Christ, and to obey all that he commands!

The most important consideration in encouraging experiences of learning is to help children understand and develop a life of discipleship. In this regard, William Hendricks, a professor of theology, notes that the typical patterns of teaching children in the church can hinder children's spiritual development. The pattern begins with teaching typically expressed as content we deliver *to* children through programs; then we put children in the worship service; and, finally, we hope that through involvement in these activities they will somehow learn how to live the life of faith. Hendricks suggests that ministry with children must *begin* by including children intentionally in the life of the congregation, enabling them to be responsible participants and contributors to its worship and ministry, and exposing them to the joys and struggles of the community of God's people. As children confront the values of the community, and participate in its life, they come to understand the significance of *worship.* In other words, they are impressed that these people, who behave in these ways, do so because they love and respect and fear this God. *Then*, and only then, does learning the story of the Bible make sense as it provides the background and context for what children are experiencing in the faith community.

In Conclusion

Children's ministry is reaching heights of popularity not experienced since the early 20th century. Unfortunately, many children's ministry leaders in contemporary churches are preoccupied with keeping children happy and entertained, and not enough on exploring vital questions in the church's ministry with children. For example, how do we encourage the attitude in congregations that children are not just the church of tomorrow, but *are part of* the church of today? How do we *engage* children in ways that demonstrate their capacity for significant learning, authentic worship, and responsible service in and through the church's community.

Unless what we know as church is consistent with biblical images and expectations, the faith development of children will be impoverished. Therefore, before we lose ourselves in children's ministry programming, curriculum development, or even in a particular approach to shaping Christian families, we must give attention to the nature and purpose of the church. Through their experiences with the people of God, children will learn what it means to be Christian and how to make a difference in their world.

End Notes

[1] Names are changed throughout the paper.

[2] In stories mentioned often in this book, Jesus rebuked his disciples, laid his

hands on the children and said, "it is to such as these that kingdom of heaven belongs (Matthew 19:14). He asserted that the humility of the child is the mark of greatness in the kingdom; that anyone who welcomes children welcomes him; and that a millstone around the neck and drowning in the sea would be preferable to his wrath at anyone who hinders the child who believes in him (Matthew 18: 1-6).

[3] The growing effort to understand the church as both a theological and institutional entity is spawning a new growth industry in books and periodicals. Titles include: Douglas Webster. 1992. *Selling Jesus: What's Wrong with Marketing the Church.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; Thomas Bandy. 1998. *Moving off the Map: A Field Guide to Changing the Congregation.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press; Thomas Edward Frank*. 2000. The Soul of the Congregation: An Invitation to Congregational Reflection.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press; Manuel Ortiz. 1996*. One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press*;* Philip Kenneson and James Street. 1997. *Selling Out the Church: The Dangers of Church Marketing.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press; Jim Cymbala. 1997. *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House; Eugene Peterson. 1994. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Henri Nouwen. 1989. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership.* New York, NY: Crossroad; Os Guiness. 1993. *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House; Don Posterski and Gary Nelson. 1997. *Future Faith Churches.* Winfield, British Columbia: Wood Lake Books; Johannes A. Van Der Ven. 1996. *Ecclesiology in Context.* Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Donald Posterski and Irwin Barker. 1993. *Where's a Good Church.* Winfield, British Columbia: Wood Lake Books; Edmund Clowney. 1995. *The Church.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; George Barna. 1998. *The Second Coming of the Church.* Nashville, TN: Word Publishing; Kevin Giles. 1995. *What on Earth is the Church? An Exploration in New Testament Theology.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Thomas Hawkins. 1997. *The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership.* Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press; Hans Küng. 1967. *The Church.* New York: Sheed and Ward. They are indicative of a range of responses: from a charismatic, emotive response, to a deeply felt organizational-leadership response, to a theological-historical response. We may not have found the way forward in this matter, but the concern for the church and its true nature and function is growing.

[4] The reality is that institutionalized anything will always be flawed, simply because it consists of human beings. Ted Ward's description of organizations as "leaky boats" is apt. If we are involved in any organization, we will have to spend a significant amount of time bailing. So while we accept the reality of the institutionalized church, we must look deeper to its fundamentally spiritual character and purpose. Missing this, we will always struggle with pessimism about the role of the church in the world and its influence on the lives of our children.

[5] Arguing for the role of the family as a central context for the nurture of the child, Thompson avers that, theologically speaking, "the church usually is viewed as the primary teacher of faith and the mediator of spiritual values" She suggests that "The problem arises when the church is identified primarily with its structure or with its professional leadership rather than with its full membership. Specialized training is so esteemed in our culture that we have come trust only 'professionals' to teach, heal, or advise us. It is small wonder that parents often feel inadequately equipped for the demanding and challenging task of teaching children . . ." (Marjorie

Thompson, 1996, *Family the Forming Center*, Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 26).

[6] A group of Christians in the southern United States has come together to seek what it means to be the church. One of the leaders in this church noted that if they were concerned about their continuance into the future *as an institution*, they would be more concerned about structure. Because they have left their continuance in the hands of God – who ultimately is responsible for bringing together those who learn, worship, and meet the needs of people – they are less concerned the "effective" and "efficient" organization that consume many churches. If the church disbanded tomorrow that would not be their concern. Their concern is to obey as well as they can, what it means to be the people of God, and to create a climate where children and youth can see and experience authentic faith with the believers in this place.

[7] Martha Zimmerman's, *Celebrate the Feasts* is representative of resources available to help celebrate Old Testament feasts and rituals. Resources describing activity for families are readily available and can be mined for ideas for intergenerational activity.

[8] The references in this section are taken from his address to the "The Unnecessary Leader" Conference, Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia. Dallas Willard and Linda Cannell, May 19-20, 2000.

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Revitalizing the Small Church: A Spiritual Model
By Terri Birkett

Our retiring minister removed himself from the Fellowship Hall, leaving us alone to contemplate the fate of our small church. Numbers had been dwindling and now our pastor was leaving. It was time to decide if this was the end, or if we could make it a new beginning. We stared at each other across the aluminum tables. Finally someone spoke.

"Well, what are our options?"

Before anyone could answer, Tom (not his real name), an elder, rose to his feet. "What are our options? I'll tell you what our options are. The only option we have is to close the doors! This church is dead--belly up. Why would anyone want to come here?"

For most of us, this was the defining moment. Why *would* anyone want to come to a small church that was quickly spiraling downward? They certainly would not come to meet the living God. After all, our usual sermons sounded like they came from a politically correct subscription service. And what kind of support could they expect from the few overworked, spiritually underfed Christians left keeping this place afloat? We sat in stunned silence, barely able to believe that an elder of our church had just pronounced us dead. We felt defeated. All our hard work had come to nothing.

Tense minutes passed. Some sat looking at the floor while their spirits whimpered at this tragic end. Some of us contemplated picking up our sword and shield and fighting. We all felt a cry for God to save his people welling up in our innermost beings. It was in this moment of despair that we saw another road.

A second elder stood and listed the options that our little church had: 1) we could disband (It burned our hearts a second time to hear this option stated.); 2) we could work with a supply pastor only (We had seen many small churches take this option that resulted in a minimal existence. It was hardly better than being dead.); 3) we could co-op with other churches and drop back to being in a 'parish' (It was a safe option, but one where physical and spiritual growth was likely to be stifled.); 4) we could call another pastor. (This, of course, was the hardest option because we all knew we did not have the money for it.)

We sat in brokenness, looking to God for answers. Little did we know that He had already begun His work in the hearts of a family 500 miles away in Chicago. They also cried out in their brokenness asking God to reveal His plan for them. This is the story of our journey together--down God's road.

Our Starting Place

We experienced firsthand how, as in many small churches today, the Living Word has been cast aside for goodwill philosophies and intellectual theories. The result was a pitiful, malnourished church body whose corporate 'spirit' was hollow-eyed, dull, and tired of life. Our ministries lacked power, and our lives were not being changed. Over time, our congregation had withered away and the church doors were almost closed. We sensed that this was not what God wanted for us. During the journey of our small church from nearly 'dead' to being alive again and willing to be used by God, it hit us that in many ways our journey mirrored the steps of an unbeliever's transformation to faith in Christ.

The (Church) Body

In his letter to the Romans, Paul exhorts the church to act as a body, each member or body part with its own function, but working together for the common good. Our small church had body 'parts' (members) who were working at various levels of commitment, from fully committed to not doing anything. Using Paul's comparison to a physical body, it often seemed like only the 'brain', a 'mouth', and maybe one 'foot' appeared alive at all. Imagine such a physical body. What could it accomplish? Or, when all the parts were working, differing agendas and goals kept the parts from agreeing and working together. A physical body in such a disagreeable state would come to a standstill, unable to take nourishment, get exercise, protect itself, or move along its chosen path. While it seems comical to view these problems in terms of a physical body, they are surprisingly real in many of today's church bodies, and certainly described ours about eight years ago.

The Journey

Step 1: Recognition of who we are. Our new journey as a church body began as a

spark of desire in the hearts of individuals in the congregation. This same desire had facilitated our coming together as a congregation in the first place. The spark was fanned into flames by the haunting words of our elder when he told us our church was dead. Just as an individual unbeliever must become cognizant of his personal need and debt before beginning the turn to Christ, our congregation was forced to recognize our corporate need for a stronger connection to Christ. The hollowness of our church body became apparent. We could feel our weakness and, humbled by it, quickly realized that in our own strength, we could accomplish nothing. We acknowledged that only in God's strength could our small congregation survive this devastating blow. This realization immediately resulted in our stepping out in faith to pray whole-heartedly for God to call a pastor of His choosing to our small congregation. Recognizing our need for both an awakening and a complete dependence on God, we began of our journey to renewal and life.

Step 2: Opening ourselves up. In both the individual and the church body, it is necessary to confess our frailty and failure to God. Seeking God's forgiveness, as well as His instruction for any remedy required for these failures, is also important. For our church, this step required asking God (through corporate prayer and the guidance of our new pastor who felt specifically called to us) to reveal the sins of our church body, and a willingness to confess that those sins were real. Often, our corporate sins were revealed (convicting us to change) as we wholeheartedly sought God through our pastor-led study of the Word. This step transformed us from a people trying to work our way back to health, to a body that stood ready and waiting for God's response.

Just as a person might pause for a moment at the beginning of a journey, this step allowed our church body to stop and get its bearings before heading down the path God had laid out for us. Many churches cannot get beyond this point of pause. It is not yet a turning point, but a point where everyone stops to hear what God will tell them. Some church bodies insist on going on without hearing, and in doing so, they miss the turn to life and power; others stop and never get going again. We did not want to do either. This point of reflection was not without pain because some of our own church members fell by the wayside as the church body began to move further down God's path. God remained steadfast and faithful however to His promise to restore what was lost when we remained faithful to Him

Fortunately, God has an open door policy. When we knock, He is faithful to open the door. Our seeking of direction drew the Holy Spirit near. Even at this beginning point of our journey, the Holy Spirit began His work within us, making it easier for our pastor to lead us into the heart of our journey. Always, we were assured that the Holy Spirit would walk with us as long as we sought God's direction and remained obedient to His Word.

Step one required a whole-hearted desire to have something better and a dependence on God to show us the way. Step two prepared our hearts to hear what God had for us. The power found in the Word, God's response to our seeking, and sensitive pastoral leadership helped our church body develop the desire for something better and then stand ready to receive it. Church bodies without this desire and the willingness to receive God's instruction are sure to miss the adventure in the steps ahead.

Step 3: Looking for a Savior. Once an unbeliever realizes his desperate situation,

it will dawn on him that unless Someone saves him from his plight, he will be lost. It is easy to recognize that Whoever will save him from this debt must be One whose grace and mercy far outweighs the unbeliever's own contemptuous nature. At this point, God usually steps in and, through various means, makes us aware of Jesus, the Savior. Similarly, our church body recognized and re-affirmed Jesus as the head of the church. Without this step, the journey to renewal and power would have stopped short.

This truth escapes some rebellious church bodies and pastors. Not recognizing the Truth does not make it untrue. It does, however, hurt the ones who refuse to believe it. Getting past this step depends on acceptance of truth by the church body. If the body cannot be led to accept it, then just as the rebellious soul remains an unbeliever, the church will veer off the path and into the treacherous waters of being lukewarm or worse.

Step 4: Repentance. A truly contrite heart, when introduced to Jesus, is unlikely to refuse the gift He gives. Before taking the gift however, a new believer is usually moved to repentance, the hating of and turning away from sin. (If a new believer is not immediately moved to repentance from a conviction in the heart, then the instruction of the Word will soon make him aware of its necessity for a long term life in Christ.) In our church body, it took perceptive pastoral leadership and clear preaching of the Word to bring a desire of repentance to the congregation. At all points on the path, the Word was used to remind the body of our continual need for confession and repentance.

Step 5: Recognizing our place in the body. It seems silly to think of our hand having to recognize that it is a hand. However, when our life began in the womb, we were undifferentiated cells which contained an intricate plan placed by God into the genetic code. At the appropriate point, cells were genetically triggered to become an ear, or a finger. Amazingly, there was a point of 'recognition' in the cell of just what it would grow into.

Likewise, our own church members had to discover what part of the body they were. To do this, we took an inventory of the natural and spiritual gifts and talents God had bestowed on us. Interestingly, this was a time of surprise and joy; a time to find that one was a hand of the church body and not a foot or vice versa. God had the most wonderful way of answering our innermost desires. He often allowed us to become the part of the church body that was most suited for us, and therefore most desirable and comfortable for us. While the pastor of the church played an important role in this process, the members themselves became larger players, seizing opportunities to test their newly found places in the body. Unity became more than just an idea because people began to get engaged in the work of ministry and enjoy it! Like a team of horses that all of a sudden start pulling together, the whole church experience became more comfortable and effective. Members began to feel more like family.

Step 6: Taking on our share of the responsibility. During a Christian's journey to maturity in Christ, he becomes hungry for spiritual food and anxious to explore God's kingdom. Similarly, our church body, whose members had begun to understand their place within the body, began to see it working together like a well-oiled machine. Seeking hearts, and the oil of the Holy Spirit, facilitated unity in the congregation. This new found unity allowed the church body to begin to respond to

God's grace and mercy in a more appropriate way.

Still seeking God's will, the church body moved closer to being in one accord than ever before. Using our gifts and talents in unity opened up many opportunities to learn about and further the work of God's kingdom. As more church body parts became functional, we began to enjoy the variety of paths God offered us, exploring the unique calling of our particular church body. This was another joyful time in the life of our church.

Step 7: The Great Commission. As Jesus prepared to go to His father, He left us with His last words which instructed us to go out into the world and make Him known. Most committed Christians carry a burden for those who do not know the good news of salvation. However, a church body with a leg and a mouth, but no eyes, no hands, and no heart, will not get far on the road to tell others about Jesus. It is only with the entire body healthy and full of energy, powered by the Holy Spirit, that it can be a truly effective witness.

When our church body had made it this far in the journey, God began to call us to be a witness for Him in unique ways. For us, this included opening a used clothing store in our community, a community youth center, an outreach to at risk children, and writing our own vacation Bible schools. It included support for both foreign missionaries and missions at our own backdoor. Just as God uses individuals in unique ways, He called us, as a church body, to unique ministries. Always, God gave the call, determined the venue, and made our ministries successful; however, we had to be willing to answer the call, to step out in faith, and to continue the adventure.

Our Mission

As our church began to grow and our new ministries began to tax our resources, we came to the realization that while all of our ministries were good, we still lacked focus. This realization forced us as a church to come up with a clearly defined mission statement. We wanted one short, simple statement that everyone could remember and articulate easily. After a year of prayer, we embraced the mission statement "To Know Jesus Christ and To Make Him Known".

Our Vision

Once we had a clearly articulated our mission, we needed to corporately develop a "how to" plan for achieving it. We did this by defining a vision statement that kept everyone on the same path. After prayerful consideration, our vision became: Using the Great Commission as a guide, it is our vision to work and pray toward the goal of our mission, saving the lost and equipping the saved, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ in the sanctuary of our church, our homes, our work places, and in our daily lives.

Our Destination

No one wants to spend time on a journey to nowhere. Likewise, our church body

needed to know that there was a destination, and that the destination to which we had embarked was a worthy one. Jesus said that He went to prepare a place for us. This goal was held up and not hidden; the rewards discussed and praised. Fears were addressed by the Word, so that all could long for the joy that awaits us. We learned that we are on a journey to a beginning and not an end.

God's Timing and Teaching

Remembering that God has a plan for each of us has helped keep our church body seeking His will and trusting that He would take care of details, even those of which we were unaware. He brought some Christians into our path and moved others out. He sent some of our members to become part of other church bodies. He allowed some of our members to leave the journey before we had traveled very far. He slowed the body down when some members were lagging behind and He threw up roadblocks when some members ran ahead. The path was hardly ever smooth. He also asked us to leave some of our beloved 'things' behind, but it has always been worthwhile.

Make no mistake; God's timing is perfect. However, for those of us who would do things our own way, His timing is often a source of frustration. Steps in the journey that by our estimation should have taken a few months took a few years. He allowed obstacles on our journey, but required us to keep our eye on the goal and seek His direction. The obstacles that threatened to knock us off course also challenged our faith and brought us closer as a family.

Keeping our eye on the goal was not always easy. However, looking back on how far our church body has come has been a great source of comfort for our members. God has been and continues to be the perfect Shepherd, and as we move down His path in humility and faith, we will continue to enjoy the adventure because not only is Jesus the author of it, He is with us every step of the way through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Blessed is the Small Church

During our journey from death to life, God has impressed upon us the importance of our place in His kingdom. Just as he gives different gifts and talents to individuals within the local church body, He gives different ministries to local church bodies within the whole church. Many of these special roles cannot be filled by the mega churches. They are best filled by small ones. Our journey has taught us that God will even use a 'nearly dead' church to further His kingdom. Blessed is the small church, if they seek and find the adventure God has planned just for them.

About the Author

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Cultural Influences on the Development of Early Church Structures: Implications for Contextual Ecclesiology

By Michael T. Cooper

Ecclesiology is the least studied branch of systematic theology. Millard Erickson states that, "No point in history of Christian thought has the doctrine of the church received the direct and complete attention which other doctrines have received" (1984, 1026). However, the implications of the study of the church are significant. Erickson suggests at least five:

1. The church is not to be conceived of primarily as a sociological phenomenon, but as a divinely established institution. Accordingly, its essence is to be determined not from an analysis of its activity, but from Scripture.
2. The church exists because of its relationship to the Triune God. It exists to carry out its Lord's will by the power of the Holy Spirit.
3. The church is the continuation of the Lord's presence and ministry in the world.
4. The church is to be a fellowship of regenerate believers who display the spiritual qualities of their Lord. Purity and devotion are to be emphasized.
5. While the church is a divine creation, it is made up of imperfect human beings. It will not reach perfect sanctification or glorification until its Lord's return. (1984, 1049)

Missiologically, ecclesiology, together with other aspects of theology, has a significant role in engaging contemporary culture, wherever that might be. Missiologists and missionaries often ask questions about the forms that a church should adopt in order to be culturally indigenous. They correctly assume that culture can dictate the form while Scripture must dictate the function. However, there is often confusion that results in the form being equated with function. Form, then, is transplanted rather than contextualized. Thus, the observation of many missiologists: the church has not been contextualized (Cooper, forthcoming).

This paper examines the development of ecclesiology during the first seven centuries of the Christian era. As will be apparent, this development was heavily

influenced by the culture of the period. There is a stark difference between the image of the church that we see in the New Testament and that of the patristic period. On the one hand, it is true that the New Testament does not provide us with a clear image for the form of the church. On the other hand, it is equally true that the New Testament does provide a clear image for the function of the church. The paper will conclude with four axioms that might be gained from this study and applied to contemporary contextual ecclesiology.

Cultural Influences on the Development of Ecclesiology

David Hesselgrave states that, "A careful study of representative church polities will reveal that historically they have tended to reflect the social structures of the times and places of their inception" (1980, 367). A look at the cultural influences that helped shape ecclesiology in the first seven centuries of Christianity will bear out Hesselgrave's observation. The three periods under consideration are the New Testament, Apostolic Fathers and Church Fathers. There is obviously overlap between these periods, but they can be roughly defined as follows:

1. The New Testament period roughly falls between the years of 33 and 100 A.D. This was the time period that saw the inception of the church (Acts 2) after Christ's ascension to heaven through the time of His apostles spreading the gospel.
2. The period of the Apostolic Fathers falls between 100 and 300 A.D. This period was characterized by the defense of Christianity against the Jews, Gnostics, Classical Pagans and the Roman Empire.
3. The period of the Church Fathers falls between 300 and 800 A.D. The early church developed four criteria in determining who can be considered a Father: (1) orthodoxy of doctrine, (2) holiness of life, (3) ecclesiastical approval, and (4) antiquity (Tsirpanlis 1991, 21). Generally it is held by both East and West that there are nine Fathers who deserve the title of *Doctors of the church:* from the East -- SS. Athanasius the Great (c. 295-373), Basil the Great (329-379), Gregory the Theologian (329-390), John Chrysostom (344-407), John of Damascus (c. 675-c. 749) and from the West -- SS. Ambrose (c. 333-397), Jerome (347-420), Augustine (354-430), Gregory the Great (540-604).

Influences in the New Testament Period (33-100 A.D.)

The Jewish culture of the day was instrumental in the development of the early church. Most scholars would agree that the New Testament church was formed according to the structures of the synagogue and not in some religious vacuum. The development of the synagogue has a long history. While there is no reference to a synagogue in the Old Testament some would argue that "meeting place" in Psalm 74:8 refers to a synagogue. Jewish tradition suggests that "little sanctuary" in Ezekiel 11:16 is a reference to synagogues of the exiled Jews. The synagogue emphasized what Jews could do anywhere: prayer, reading of the Torah, keeping the Sabbath day, circumcision, and observance of Old Testament food laws.

In the synagogue the leaders of the congregation selected a ruler. He had the task

of conducting the services and managing the properties. Often he used others to conduct worship, prayers, readings of the Law and the Prophets, and to give exhortations. Other members of the congregation were used to carry out menial duties, inflict corporal punishment and discipline members, as well as distribute alms. Elders were elected based on the desire of the congregation and they formed the local Sanhedrin. The chief elder was first among equals and probably selected by the elders.

Services in the synagogue began with prayers, *shema*, eulogies, and benedictions and continued with readings from the Law and Prophets and a sermon from the Prophets. They were held on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The synagogue was the center for educating children in the Jewish faith and typically housed a library. It was also a center for judicial proceedings. The local Sanhedrin met and decided upon legal cases that were brought before it.

Jesus regularly attended and participated in the synagogue services and especially ministered throughout Galilee in the synagogues (Matt 4:23-24). The synagogue was at the height of its importance by His time. Hesselgrave sums up the implications of the synagogue for the church,

> New Testament believers, therefore, had a model for church leadership and organization. It is not to be inferred that they followed this synagogue pattern rigidly, however. The point is that the early believers were aware of basic ways and means for conducting corporate spiritual life and business. (1980, 351)

It seems apparent that, in God's providential wisdom, the New Testament church did not have to struggle through the development of a system that would facilitate the believers in worship of God. The Jewish culture of the day provided an applicable model for the church and ultimately this model was implemented wherever the community of Christ went. The similarities of the synagogue with the church are striking. It is evident from Acts 2:42, 6:1, and 14:23 that the church appointed elders and deacons, held services of prayer and provided for the daily needs of widows as did the synagogue.

The missionary activity of the New Testament was primarily centered on the formation of local bodies of believers that had recently converted to Christianity. Of the Apostle Paul's thirteen epistles, nine were directed to local churches and four were directed to church leaders. Luke's Acts of the Apostles records information regarding at least eight churches (Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia) that Paul and his colleagues planted and suggests that they might have planted more (Cyprus, Berea, Troas, Tyre). It is also clear that his disciples played a significant role in church planting (Colossae, Laodecia, Ptolemais, Crete, Rome). One might even assume based on Acts 19:10 that Paul's disciples planted six of the seven churches of Asia Minor recorded in Revelation 2-3. Furthermore, the same assumption could be made about the churches of Macedonia based on 1 Thess 1:8.

Paul's epistles suggest that there was a standard to which all churches were expected to conform (1 Cor 4:17, 11:16, 16:1; 1 Thess 2:14). Those standards seemed to be theological rather than ecclesiastical. Paul rarely, if ever, discusses the form of the church. Rather, his concentration is on the function of the church.

Nevertheless, at times in his ministry the church appears in the form of a philosophical school rather than a Jewish synagogue. This would not be surprising given the Greek understanding of *ekklesia* as a body assembled in order to discuss civic matters. Paul's use of the home was very similar to traveling sophists, as was his engagement of those in the marketplace with philosophers.

Influences in the Period of the Apostolic Fathers (100-300 A.D.)

The theology of the early church was formulated in an environment influenced not only by Plato and the Gnostics, but Buddha and Zoroaster (Frend 1984, 316). Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-202) had a great knowledge of Indian religions, a point often overlooked. Frend states, "The early third century saw strong links being made between the Roman Empire and India and these links affected thought as well as trade" (1984, 372). Mani, the author of Manicheism, suggested that Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Platonism and Gnosticism could be fused together into a single system of universal validity (Frend 1984, 317).

Some have suggested that the theological reflections of the early church were platonically based. However, further study of the second and third century Apostolic Fathers reveals their belief that Moses influenced Plato. Clement of Alexandria postulated, "What is Plato but Moses in Attic Greek?" Following the Jewish theologian Philo, he never doubted that Plato's religious ideas found their basis in Moses. Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) considered Plato and Aristotle pre-Christian Christians. Origen (A.D. 185-254) was most definitely a Christian Platonist. Plato profoundly influenced his ideas of eternal matter and the pre-existent soul. However, the Fifth Ecumenical Council ultimately anathematized Origen for Hellenism.

There were also those that rejected any association with Greek philosophy. Irenaeus (A.D. 115-200) totally rejected Plato as a philosophical base for Christianity. For him the basis of Christianity formed solely upon Scripture, tradition and the power of the Holy Spirit. Frend notes that his theological formulations were sought from the Bible rather than Greek philosophy (1984, 244). Along with Irenaeus was Tertullian (c. A.D. 116-230) who stated, "What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem? What between the Academy and the church? What between heretics and Christians?"

All in all, the Apostolic Fathers fought for theological orthodoxy and maintained the faith passed down to them. These theological arguments, however, had little impact on the formation of the church. That is not to say that the church did not continue to develop. On the contrary, the church's structure and organization made profound strides that would impact the future of ecclesiology.

The primary influence during this period was not so much cultural as it was circumstantial. One such circumstance occurred at the end of the New Testament period. Around A.D. 95 Clement of Rome wrote to the church at Corinth in regards to a division that had taken place. The church ousted their elders and Clement responds to this "shameful in the extreme" (1 Clement 47:6) act with the first suggestion of "apostolic succession." We will discuss this further below. Needless to say, the influential letter from the bishop of Rome written to confront a particular circumstance profoundly influenced the formation of the second century church.

By the second century the circumstances surrounding the issue of authority in the church gave rise to further development of ecclesiastical hierarchy. Ignatius of Antioch (ca. A.D. 117) used the argument of apostolic succession to appeal to authority against the Docetists and Judaizers (Chadwick 1993 [1967], 46). Similarly, Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 180) used this argument against the Gnostics (*Against Heresies*) as did Tertullian (ca. A.D. 200) against heretics (*Prescriptions of the Heretics*).

Another circumstance that influenced the church was a series of persecutions that challenged the faith of many. While Nero's persecution in A.D. 64 marked a significant point in Christian history, it was primarily locally centered. However, Trajan's persecution (A.D. 117) was regional (Bythania) while Decius' (A.D. 250) as well as Diocletian's (A.D. 303-305) were empire wide. Cyprian of Carthage (ca. A.D. 248), wanting to ensure his authority over the church while in hiding, stated that to forsake the bishop was to forsake the church (Chadwick 1993 [1967], 119). This series of persecutions gave rise to many Christians denying their faith and the ensuing Donatist controversy. The Donatist controversy led to further development of sacramental theology and raised the issue of their validity if administered by a priest who denied his faith.

The circumstances of the period of the Apostolic Fathers set the stage for ecclesiastical development over the next several centuries. The church of this time became more hierarchical with the bishop exercising great influence and authority over the church. While the church continued to grow in the midst of difficult circumstances, the stage was set for a greater gulf between clergy and laity. However, it must be remembered that the circumstances of this period necessitated the form of the church.

Influences in the Period of the Church Fathers (300-700 A.D.)

The Fathers were the witnesses of the Apostolic Tradition that was passed on from generation to generation. They transmitted, rather than delivered, what they had learned from the Apostolic Tradition. It was their authentic preservation of the message of the Apostles that warranted belief. George Florovsky states, "Fathers were those who transmitted and propagated the right doctrine, the teaching of the apostles; they were guides and masters in Christian instruction and catechesis" (1995, 122).

The Fathers are an extension of the Apostles and so, when Maximus the Confessor writes, ". . . conforming to what has been reverently determined by the divinely inspired fathers of the catholic [read universal] church and the five ecumenical councils" we see the full force of their authority (Clendenin 1994, 115). Yet, they were not original or polemical thinkers. They did not devise new doctrines. In the words of Gregory of Nazianzus, "They theologized in the manner of the Apostles, not Aristotle" (Hom. 23:13). They were the "spiritual guides or masters, the teachers, those holding a high office in the community of those 'born again'" (Chryssavigis 1988, 276).

By far the most profound influence on the period of the Church Fathers was the Christianization of the Roman Empire in A.D. 323. After Constantine's dramatic conversion in A.D. 312, the future of Christianity was secure. Less than a year later the Edict of Milan was issued and assured Christians and Pagans freedom of

worship. It was at this time that Christianity flourished unabated while, in spite of the edict, the table turned against the Pagans. As Frend states, "Conforming Christianity was replacing conforming paganism as the mark of an educated provincial" (1984, 563). Constantine's actions of legalizing the church bolstered the authority of the clergy. The clergy would now be exempted from certain taxes and civic duties in order to concentrate fully on the responsibilities of their office. Bishops sat as judges in civil suits and were given authority equal to law (Walker, et al. 1985, 184).

By A.D. 323 the entire Roman Empire was united under Constantine's reign with his defeat of Licinius (emperor of the East). The center of the Roman Empire then moved to Byzantium, what Constantine called the New Rome (Constantinople, modern day Istanbul). Less than two years later Constantine would preside over the first ecumenical council at Nicaea in order to combat the disunity in the Eastern Church that threatened the united empire. He would proclaim himself "bishop, ordained by God to oversee those outside the church" and paved the way for what is today called the "state-church" (Shelley 1998, 40). Later, he would proclaim himself as the thirteenth apostle and be entombed surrounded by twelve sepulchers symbolically representing the twelve apostles.

Constantine , following previous emperors who dedicated buildings to pagan gods, embarked upon a massive and spectacular building campaign to honor the God who gave him victory at the Milvian Bridge. These basilicas were immense and costly. The church of St. John Lateran in Rome is but one example of the great expense of building a church according to imperial standards,

> Around 500 pounds weight of it [gold] were needed at a cost of some 36,000 solidi. This sum, which might be translated into approximately £60 million today, could have fed about 12,000 poor for a year (according to calculations from Dominic Janes' God and Gold in Late Antiquity). Another 22,200 solidi worth of silver (3,700 lbs.) was required for light fittings and another 400 pounds of gold for fifty gold vessels. (Freeman 2001, 16)

These basilicas looked more like the great audience halls of emperors than the house churches of the previous centuries. Horrified by the change of Christianity, Jerome would write, "Parchments are dyed purple, gold is melted into lettering, manuscripts are dressed up in jewels, while Christ lies at the door naked and dying" (*Ep.* 22, 32). By the end of the fourth century the church would accept its newfound wealth.

Naturally, priestly vestments came in line with the ornate churches. In fact, frescos of the time depicted priestly garb as elaborate as the emperor's. The priestly office became an important position not only in the church, but also in the community. Constantine's conversion impacted the forms of the church for centuries. In fact, many of these forms still exist in the churches of the East.

It seems apparent that what the Church Fathers propagated in relation to ecclesiastical forms was tied to culture. Understandably, it is easy to see that since the culture of the Roman Empire continued through the first millennium the church did not have to adapt or adjust its forms. In fact, the church became the creator of new forms and it is said that once the form was practiced in the great church of Hagia Sophia it meant "a final sanction and ultimately, a quasi-guarantee of

universal acceptance" (Meyendorff 1979, 116). The influence this church had upon Christendom has been traced to Italy, Syria, Macedonia, Armenia, and Ukraine (Meyendorff 1979, 115-117).

Growing Structure and Organization

Cyprian of Carthage wrote to a group of bishops in 251 regarding unity in the church after the persecutions of Decius,

> And the church forms a unity, however far she spreads and multiples by the progeny of her fecundity; just as the sun's rays are many, yet the light is one, and a tree's branches are many, yet the strength deriving from its sturdy root is one. So too, though many streams flow from a single spring, though its multiplicity seems scattered abroad by the copiousness of its welling waters, yet their oneness abides by reason of their starting point. Cut off one of the sun's rays - the unity of that body permits no [such] division of its light; break off a branch from the tree, it can bud no more; dam off a stream from its source, it dries up below the cut. So too our Lord's church is radiant with light and pours her rays over the whole world; but it is one and the same light which is spread everywhere, and the unity of her body suffers no division. She spreads her branches in generous growth over all the earth, she extends her abundant streams ever further; yet one is the head-spring, one the source, one the mother who is prolific in her offspring, generation after generation: of her womb are we born, of her milk are we fed, of her Spirit our souls draw their life breath. (*The Unity of the Church*)

Unity in the struggling church was of prime importance to the early Christian leaders. This unity would ultimately be preserved in the clergy. As the church dealt with potentially divisive theological issues as well as persecutions the role of the clergy became increasingly prominent and important. According to J.N.D. Kelley, Tertullian argued that "there can be no difference between clergy and laity, since authority belongs to those who possess the Spirit, and not to bishops as such" (1978 [1960], 200). However, in spite of his argument, the authority of the clergy grew to the point where Cyprian would write that to forsake the bishop is to forsake the church.

As previously mentioned, Clement of Rome wrote to the Corinthian church in A.D. 95 to bridle what became a divisive issue. In fact, Clement named the issue a schism (1 Clement 46:9). The Corinthian church "unlawfully" deposed its leaders and appointed others in their place. It is apparent that some of these leaders were appointed directly by an apostle (presumably Paul). His letter, as mentioned, gives the first indication of "apostolic succession" that would later be defined clearer. Clement distinguished two offices in the church: bishop and deacon. These offices were by appointment and for life (1 Clement 44:2). When one of the leaders died another was appointed by those with "proper standing" and with the whole consent of the church. Presumably those with "proper standing" meant the current leaders who had been appointed by the apostles or by other leaders who had similarly been appointed. This was not done at Corinth. The church usurped the authority of the leaders and disregarded their apostolic appointment.

Clement clearly shows a sharp boundary between clergy and laity. The clergy were

clearly authenticated by their apostolic heritage. He shows us the accreditation of the offices of bishop and deacon by God due to their relationship to the apostles. Those who opposed the offices were in rebellion against God. Deacons would ultimately evolve to simply be an office that served the bishop rather than the church. Hippolytus of Rome (A.D. 160-235) wrote,

> When the deacon is ordained, this is the reason why the bishop alone shall lay his hands upon him: he is not ordained to the priesthood but to serve the bishop and to carry out the bishop's commands. (*The Apostolic Tradition*)

It was not long before the bishop would be singled out as the single most important office in the church. Ignatius of Antioch followed Clement in asserting the authority of the bishop. Writing to churches in Asia Minor, he was concerned with heresy and division and saw the bishop as the solution. Almost echoing Clement, Ignatius asserted that each church must adhere to the authority of the bishop. For the bishop was God's representative and exercised God's authority. He writes,

> Let the bishop preside in God's place, and the presbyters take the place of the apostolic council, and let the deacons (my special favorites) be entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ who was with the Father from eternity and appeared at the end [of the world]. (*To the Magnesians*)

Ignatius propagated the sole authority of the bishop that later became known as the "monarchial episcopate." The bishop was to be followed as Christ followed the Father. He gave approval to every aspect of ministry in the church and Ignatius stated that "whatever he [the bishop] approves pleases God as well" (*To the Smyrneas*). The sacrament of the Eucharist was raised to prominence in the duties of the bishop. Only he, or someone he appointed could administer the Eucharist.

The monarchial episcopate evolved over time to a diocesan episcopate by A.D. 185. The bishop of a diocese was administrator of all city bishops. By the fourth century we have the metropolitan episcopate, who was located in a large city, presiding over the diocese and cities. In the fifth century we see the initiation of the patriarchal episcopate. The patriarchal bishop had authority over the churches in his particular precinct. By the time of the council of Chalcedon there were only five patriarchal bishops who represented the five major centers of Christian activity: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. All presumably had equal authority with Rome given prominence as the seat of the Apostle Peter.

Christians of the first two centuries generally met in the homes of its wealthier members (Lydia, Philemon for instance). By the third century buildings were either constructed or converted for meeting places of worship. The first documented building in literature dates to A.D. 201, but the first actually discovered by archaeologists was constructed some fifty years later (Ehrman 1999, 317). Christians gathered in these places of worship much like the Jews gathered in the synagogues or disciples gathered in the rented homes of philosophers. They stressed the reading and teaching of Scripture, prayer, confession, and exhortation, singing psalms and hymns and collecting alms. However, they were distinct from the Jews in that they met on a different day (Sunday), had a different locus of worship (Christ) and authority (New Testament). They were also distinct in the rituals they

practiced (baptism, Eucharist, agape feast).

Over time, these rituals were added to and developed. Regarding baptism, Kelley states that, "It was always held to convey the remission of sins, but the earlier Pauline conception of it as the application of Christ's atoning death to the believer seems to have faded" (1978 [1960], 194). It ultimately came to mean the conveyance of the Holy Spirit to the believer. It was looked upon as the seal of the Son of God and came to be understood as replacing circumcision. The *Didache* gave specific instructions that baptism was to be performed in cold running water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Eucharist was considered a sacrifice in fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy (1:10) that the Lord would reject Old Testament sacrifices for a "pure offering" made to Him (Kelley 1978 [1960], 196). The *Didache* considered the elements of bread and wine as holy. Ignatius, Irenaeus and Justin considered the elements to be the actual body and blood of Christ. Ignatius and Irenaeus used the argument for the actual body and blood to engage Docetism and Gnosticism, which denied the humanity of Christ. Justin stated that, "The food Eucharistized through the word of prayer that is from him . . . is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who became incarnate" (*First Apology*).

Implications for Contextual Ecclesiology

The church continued to grow in its structure and organization. As we have seen, much of the maturation of the church was due to circumstances that it confronted, whether social or theological. Nonetheless, the church provided a framework where Christians could gather in celebration of the Lord's work in their lives. Unity was preserved by the clergy and the church grew from roughly 7,500 at the start of the second century to over six million by the beginning of the fourth (Wright 1998). At least four axioms can be drawn from this study and related to contextualized ecclesiology.

Axiom One

Cultural and circumstantial influences played a profound role in defining the ecclesiology of the first few centuries of the church . We traced the cultural influence of the synagogue as well as that of the Christianization of the empire. We looked at circumstance that influenced the second and third century church. It is apparent that cultural forms were implemented and were to one degree or another successful. Ralph Winter relates the implications of Jewish synagogue cultural issues for church planters today. What he writes can apply to the succeeding centuries.

> In fact, the profound missiological implication of all this is that the New Testament is trying to show us how to borrow effective patterns; it is trying to free all future missionaries from the need to follow the precise forms of the Jewish synagogue and Jewish missionary band, and yet to allow them to choose comparable indigenous structures in the countless new situations across history and around the world - structures which will correspond faithfully to the function of patterns Paul employed, if not their form! (1981, 180)

Axiom Two

The preservation of unity in the church is one of the more significant issues in the development of ecclesiology . Unity must be theologically and biblically based. The study showed that the biblical notion of the priesthood of all believers was ultimately sacrificed for the sake of unity. The office of bishop developed to the point where they were no longer answerable to the congregation, but rather to the metropolitan bishop. The deaconate developed from an office that served the church to one that served the bishop. While the Apostle Paul gives us the idea to spare no expense to preserve unity (Eph 4:3), he did not intend to include the compromising the responsibilities shared by all believers.

Axiom Three

The church must guard against clerical hegemony . The office of bishop ultimately became the most powerful office in a city. Their influence was felt not only in religious matters, but also in social and political matters. The very fact that they were reprimanded for accepting gifts for penance or from those desiring to be ordained for personal profit demonstrated their power over a congregation and in a city. Scripture indicates that leaders are responsible to the congregation (1 Tim 5:19-20). They are to be tested to see if they are worthy of the office they hold (1 Tim 3:10).

Axiom Four

The form of the church acted as a bridge between culture and Christianity. While there were distinct functional differences, the forms, be it synagogue form, household or philosophical school, helped prevent unnecessary barriers and welcomed people as they were attending something familiar and acceptable. However, as is seen in the form of the church after the Christianization of the empire, acceptable cultural forms can be taken too far. The elaborate structures and ritual artifacts tended to separate people from the church. The individual was not accustomed to attending functions in a structure that resembled and emperor's audience hall. So, naturally barriers were being erected as opposed to bridges being built.

Conclusion

It is apparent that the New Testament churches took on cultural forms that were familiar to the people at that time in order to implement its functions. We can speculate about the reasons why they took on cultural forms. The reasons that might include convenience rather than creativity in order to build a bridge from one culture to another and therefore easily assimilate new believers into the life of the church without major cultural barriers. However, one thing seems clear: there was freedom and diversity in the early church that allowed for the employment of acceptable cultural forms. During the patristic period the forms of the church became inseparable from the functions. In fact, one might argue that the forms were equated with the functions resulting in an ecclesiology that was defined as much, if not more, by culture rather than by Scripture.

This study has examined some of the cultural influences in the development of ecclesiology. It is evident from the paper that culture played a significant role in the church's developing structure. This indicates that the church was concerned not simply with the form that church took, but the preservation of the function of the church as it encountered various cultural challenges. The implication for contemporary ecclesiology is that cultural challenges may continue to influence the form of the church, but not at the expense of its function.

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Renovating the Pastoral Office
By Daryl Busby

While serving as pastor of my first church in a logging town of northern Canada, I also supervised children during lunch hour at the local public school so that the teachers could take a much-deserved break. A curious grade three boy walked up to me one day on the playground and asked, "Hey Mister, where do you work? I only see you at lunch." As a new seminary graduate, I proudly answered, "I serve as pastor in one of the local churches". "Oh," said the boy, with a quizzical look. Somewhat irritated, he repeated the question, "But, mister, where do you *work*?"

The boy knew his father labored in the nearby mine, his teacher graded papers in the school, and the salesclerk sold groceries in the store. But this little guy wondered, "What do pastors do?" He innocently stumbled upon a question that nags clergy and the churches they serve: What do ministers do? What is their "work"?

What do Pastors do?

There is no end to what ministers *can do* , but immense uncertainty about what they *should do* . It remains a complex calling to serve *among* the people of God as a mentor and prayerful shepherd, while also giving leadership *over* the church with an inspiring, innovative vision that keeps them coming back for more. The perpetual dilemma pits the gentle, reflective pastor (whom the congregation often wants) against the visionary, organized, strategic planner (whom the congregation often needs). As a result, some pastors have abandoned the ministry in their frustrated attempts to juggle the demands of the minister's job description.

Search committees struggle to identify the pastor they need for the next stage of their church life journey. Some committees debate between the reflective pastor who demonstrates gentle spirituality or the aggressive visionary pastor who leads with passion and charisma. Although it seems few pastors view themselves as strong leaders, current trends push pastors to function as "CEO" types in the congregation, leading with vision and confidence. Among other church Board meetings, people wonder if the pastor should preach or counsel, or worse both? Others look for the evangelist, while others hunger for the "Bible teacher" who teaches the deep doctrines of God.

A landmark study conducted by the Alban Institute concluded, "A key finding in our interviews was that most of the major Christian and Jewish denominations are experiencing or will experience a shortage of clergy to meet current congregational demands" (Wind, Rendle et al. 2001). Catholic, United Methodist and Evangelical Lutheran all report declines in seminary enrolment. The work has become simply unmanageable and unreasonable for many students considering this as a life calling. In one study cited by the Alban report, 20 percent of Presbyterian pastors were in advanced stages of burnout. The Fuller Institute also reported that 50 per cent of pastors felt incapable of meeting the demands of the office, and 90 percent felt inadequately trained to fulfill the role (Wind, Rendle et al. 2001).

Be somewhat consoled: Even at the early junctures of the Twentieth Century, observers warned of the growing complexity of pastoral ministry. Mark May, writing in 1934, concluded, "What is the function of the minister in the modern community? The answer is that it is undefined. There is no agreement among denominational authorities…and seminaries as to what it should be" (May 1934). At the midpoint of the century, H.R. Niebuhr described the work as "the perplexed profession", due to the inherent role confusion; and, at the end of the era George Barna researched intensively into pastor's lives and reflected, "I became keenly aware of the anguish, confusion and frustration that characterize much of the daily experience of pastors" (Barna 1993, 12). The entire century was spent looking for a center of pastoral identity.

Why are Pastors Confused about their Role?

But, why the role confusion among pastors? This essay proposes several reasons that converged to create conflict within the pastoral office; but also offers broad stroke paradigm shifts that will guide the pastor and church through this "Perfect Pastoral Storm".

The Complexity of Pastoral Ministry

The first reason for role confusion comes from the very essence of pastoral work. No other current profession bears more titles than the minister in the 21 st Century and we expect all these proficiencies at Internet speed. Clergy sometimes feel like "Pastor 3.0" serving in a "Leader 6.0" world. Some make the upgrade, while others find themselves obsolete.

Pastor…Priest…Minister…Clergy…Bishop…Reverend…
Preacher…Chaplain…Evangelist…Friend

The plethora of job titles already hints at some of the confusion surrounding the role; each title stresses one aspect of the work. Frequently, the endless array of job descriptions and role confusion lead to overwork, job dissatisfaction, heightened stress and shortened ministry. However, we can gain some comfort that even the apostle Paul described church leaders as those living with the tension of both *over* us and *among* us (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). Pastors and lay leaders have always walked the tightrope of both leading the congregation while at the same time continuing to be among the people. In another passage that alludes to ministry tension, Paul reminds his young minister friend, Timothy of the immensity when he urges the young man, "Do the work of an evangelist and *fulfill all your ministry*." (2 Timothy 4:5). The list seemed endless, even to young Timothy.

In reality, we demand ministers to do it all: counsel, teach, evangelize, cast vision, lead in worship and administrate the daily affairs of the church. In the community, ministers still sometimes bless football games, houses, babies, fire trucks and the occasional water treatment plant. Within the church, they serve as hospital chaplains, building committee chairpersons and ecclesiastical cheerleaders for those who have lost their direction. They do it all from A to Z, from "Administration to Zeal Builder". Pastors resemble the chameleon that prided himself in the ability to change colors for any situation, but died trying to walk across a plaid shirt. Few pastors have the innate ability to serve as "chameleon clergy", able to change color and style with the ever-changing need of the moment. But, in their zeal for the ministry, many will try!

The Complexity of the Local Church

The second mitigating factor for pastoral role confusion relates to the nature of the local church. Each stage in the life-cycle of the congregation beckons for a unique style. Whereas the fresh excitement of the new church plant calls for an outward focused, risk-taking evangelist who can draw people and increase the attendance, the older, maturing church prefers the internally focused, nurturing pastor who build the church by teaching and administrating. Later, as the church moves through stages of renewal and revisioning, people long for a leader, who like the kings of the Old Testament, can cast a new vision and empower people to move forward with administrative acumen, and thus energize the church with renewed excitement and growth.

A rudimentary analysis of local churches would conclude that many have either plateaued or slipped into decline. My Canadian scene reflects trends across the North American continent. Although Canadian attendance figures remain relatively constant (about15% of the total population, or 58% among self professed Conservative Protestants), a clarion warning bell comes from the fact that the category "No Religious affiliation" has increased from less than 1% in 1961 to 20% in 2000. Furthermore, those who claim a religious affiliation do not regularly translate into regular Sunday morning attendees. For those who look to the phenomenal increase in large churches, actual growth or merely transfer growth remains a point of debate. Reginald Bibby, a long time observer in Canadian churches, noted, by the year 2015, most mainline churches will have experienced considerable decline; and even the most creative conservative Protestant groups will see only modest increases (Bibby 2002, 25f). However, he noted in more recent research added that people continue to express deep spiritual needs. Here is the key: They are willing to return, if the leaders update the "menu". If ministers can change the church, they claim a willingness to "come back" or perhaps enter for the first time. In fact, there is some hope for the church since even mainline denominations have experienced a plateau of attendance and even a modest increase. In 1990, 9% of Canadians claimed they attended church weekly and that figure increased to 13% by 2000 (Bibby 2002, 27).

On another positive note, Lyle Schaller, the highly respected observer of churches in North America, optimistically wrote of a new Reformation taking place in churches. Factors such as New Music forms, the rapid spread across all denominations of programs like Alpha, the emergence of mega churches, the increase in laity involvement, the redefining of denominationalism and the rise of small group meetings all give reason to hope (Schaller 1995, 13-15).

However, all of this potential for success rests primarily upon the innate ability of the pastor to "produce" in this market driven world. Such effects demand change; and although change is inevitable, few church-goers warmly embrace the notion of "doing things differently", especially in our personal religious practices. All may change, but church must never! Ministers serving smaller congregations seem especially prone to job complexity and resistance to change, while perhaps clergy serving middle to larger size churches can specialize to some extent, thus bringing some clarity to their image. But all ministers struggle to define the limits of their calling and assist the local church through these reformations in ministry.

The Complexity of Culture

A third reason adds to the pastoral dilemma: both pastor and congregation now relate to an emerging culture that has become post-everything: post modern, post-Enlightenment, post-secular; and, definitely Post-Christian. The church finds itself relegated to the outskirts of society, removed from its downtown position of respect and honor.

Not long ago, the Church and her pastors had a cultural chaplain role, center stage in Western thinking. I remember the heady, early days of my pastoral ministry. While serving a small Baptist church in Northwest Ontario, Canada, I received a phone call from the town Reeve, who proudly informed me that our little community of 2000 people had received government approval to build our own water treatment and

sewage plant. We could have clean water. However, he added that, when the buildings (there were two of them-one for sewage and one for water purification) were completed, the government would only send the financial grant when the new structures had been "dedicated." Government policy clearly stipulated that the municipality had to pray over our sewage treatment plant in order to get the funding. My role as the resident clergy in our town was to visit the two little buildings; and, in the presence of the government officials, pray over the brick and machinery. Only then would we get our money. I currently have no such requests outstanding!

The towering stadiums and vast shopping malls of a completely secularized culture have replaced the towering cathedrals and vast church auditoriums of the early decades. Denominationalism, the child of the previous era, reached maturity in these decades, and subsequently, shuffled into senior years at the beginning of the 21 st Century**.**

However, lest we long for the "old days" of respect and honor, remember that the recent marginalizing of the local church merely places us where the First Century people of God stood in the Roman Empire that towered around them. The emerging First Century church offered an alternative polis, a counter-cultural social structure that welcomed all in need. George Hunsberger called this "the community of the cross" that spoke into the Roman world from the fringes, and from even the prison cells (Hunsberger 1991, 232). The Postmodern world, for the first time since the Conversion of Constantine, frees the church to speak from the fringes rather than the center of society. Both Scripture and the broad strokes of church history reinforce the principal that the church speaks with the most effectiveness from the outskirts of society rather than its cathedrals. God shapes his people in the slavery of Egypt, the exile of Babylon, the persecutions of Nero and the contemporary sufferings of the house church movements in Asian countries. We have today a pristine opportunity to re-envision the church and the role of those called to serve as her leaders.

These three ecclesiastical and cultural changes create new landscapes for pastoral work like few other periods in history. Alan Roxburgh, a Canadian pastor reflecting on his own world and the broader context and concluded, "…these are extremely anxious, confusing and tenuous days for pastors and congregations…major congregational decline continues and will only get worse in the decades ahead"(Roxburgh 1996, 320).

What Shapes the Pastoral Office in Twenty-First Century North America?

The church board chairman visited the pastor; and, while looking around the dated and worn out appearance of the study informed the pastor, "I am here to tell you we are planning to renovate the pastoral office." The minister wondered if this meant the role or the room.

Any prudent redecoration of the contemporary pastoral office shall consider the following shifts in expectations and responsibilities among church ministers. These propose to offer guidance and hope to the minister in the twenty-first century.

From Positional Authority of Modernism to Relational Integrity of Postmodernism

The office of overseer remained open to those, in the words of Paul, "who were above reproach." This stellar demand for integrity echoes throughout congregations today. Any ministry renovations begin with guarding the foundational integrity of the pastoral office. *People demand truthfulness in relationships before they consider the truthfulness of our message.*

The ongoing "Ministry in America" study reinforces this demand for integrity among spiritual leaders. Now representing the largest and most complex study of pastoral roles conducted during the Twentieth Century, the research probed thousands of denominational leaders, pastors, lay-leaders and seminary students from across North America. First launched in 1970 and replicated in 1983 and 2004, the study continues to give focus to characteristics and competencies deemed essential for those entering pastoral ministry in this new world. The research identified numerous factors that people called for in pastors including: caring for people, leading the church with flexible leadership styles, engaging with the surrounding culture, resolving conflict, teaching with relevance, broad theological knowledge, deep personal commitment, and sensitive counseling skill.

More than any other competencies deemed essential for ministry, people across denominations in North America issued a clarion call, first in the 1970, then later in the 1983 and the 2003 studies, for pastors of integrity. They must, according to the items on the survey (scored on a scale of 1 to 7), "Honor their commitments by carrying out promises despite pressure to compromise." (6.49 total mean score out of seven); "Present a profound sense of God's redemption and demonstrate a sense of calling to Christ with both freedom and courage." (mean score of 6.46); "Evidence a clear vision of what spirituality involves and show through their own life witness to a personal, living relationship with God." ; and furthermore, "Know their own limits and mistakes as well as recognizing their need to continually grow personally." (mean score of 6.44). Even across widely differing denominational families, personal integrity and character rose to the surface as the most desired qualities (Lonsway 1997).
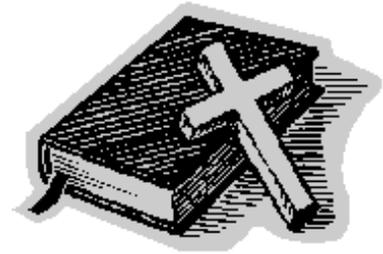
In summary, postmodern people want pastors of spiritual depth, genuineness, courage and commitment. When given a choice between competence and character, they prefer consistency in character over competence. Such pastoral women and men honor their personal word, match their words with actions; and, earn respect among the congregation. They know their own limitations and mistakes. Not surprisingly, this echoes much of the character expectations of elders in 1 Timothy 3 where they remained "above reproach". Enemies cannot argue against integrity and character.

Other smaller studies resonated with this finding. A 1994 Murdock Charitable Trust study compared laity, clergy and seminary professor expectations regarding the priorities of the pastor. Whereas the lay-person wanted foremost a person of spirituality, the pastor thinks that relational skill and management expertise matter

most. Amazingly, competence skills do not surface among the laity until the number four ranking of preaching ability (Bender 2001, 70).

Contemporary leadership earns respect through honesty and transparency. Gone are the days (if ever they existed!) when pastors could rouse the troops with stirring messages, then retreat into the study to prepare more inspiration. We no longer stand behind a large imposing wooden pulpit to issue doctrine and duty; rather we stand among others as a fellow traveler on this spiritual journey. People want models, not managers, warm authenticity, not wary authority. Such 21 st Century pastors have developed the fine art of sharing life's deepest experiences; but, not as those with all the answers, but as fellow travelers on the journey, although perhaps a little ways further along than others.

One delightful pastor I know spends considerable time in the coffee shops of the town where he serves. Whereas some might view this as a waste of time (what, you spent today with farmers drinking coffee!) he views the restaurant booths as his mission field, building relationship and trust with people who have long developed a cynicism of the church. When he goes away on business or vacation, the townspeople miss him and long for his return. Few attend his church, but all have developed a new trust for the "man of the coffee cup".

These leaders of integrity also reflect the resolute ability to endure the crucibles of life. In their remarkable study of former and current business leaders, Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas expressed some surprise when their findings noted that leaders, regardless of their era, demonstrated a resilient "adaptive capacity" under trials (Bennis and Thomas 2002). Some crucibles are self-chosen, but many just happened in life; but all trials forced the leader to see the world in a new light, to think creatively, to depend upon others and develop the ability to inspire others. Pastors, like these business people, shall always be those who have endured the shipwrecks, beatings and hurts of life…yet without bitterness (2 Cor. 6:3-10).

These pastors have a disciplined appreciation for prayer. Throughout history and Biblical texts, pastors prayed. Samuel the priest covenanted to pray for the people, Jeremiah the prophet prayed; Nehemiah, called to build a wall, prayed; and Paul the apostle prayed. E.M Bounds' words still remain etched over the entrance to the art exhibit of pastoral images, "What we need are not more men or machinery and not better or new methods. What we need are people of prayer, people mighty in prayer." God can use pastors passionate about prayer, regardless of their skill and talent. Henri Nouwen pleaded, "The spiritual life of the minister, formed and trained in school of prayer is the core of spiritual leadership." Ministry is the living out in public of our private time in the presence of Christ. Without that soul-revealing, heart-refreshing presence with Christ, our ministry deteriorates into professionalism.

Howard Rice described this pastor: *"Ministers can have no authority in the church of tomorrow if we try to hold on to an authority of role or office. The only authority pastors can claim is that of personal integrity. Faith communities expect this kind of authentic authority in their pastors, and they deserve to find it"* (Rice 1998, 189).

From Stability of Church Tradition to Change of Spiritual Relevance

We dispose of everything. Clothes, cars, computer and relationships all become discards in the pragmatics of culture. "It no longer works", or "I no longer need it". The world, along with our wardrobe, is constantly changing. *Change will continue to be a constant element in the world and thus the local church and the broader work of the Kingdom.* However, the seven last words of the church are no longer those of Christ on the cross, but rather, "We have always done it that way." Gerald Arbuckle described the sense of pastoral chaos the churches feel when confronted by a world in rapid cultural change. He asserted that we, "cannot merely renew the church, but refound the church. This will take pastoral women and men of spiritual depth and imagination" (Arbuckle 1990, 2).
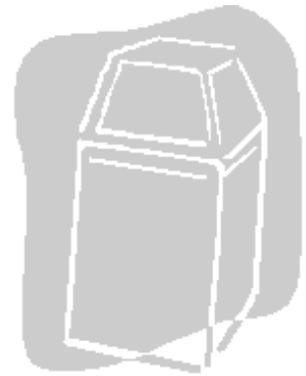
Some of these churches are dramatizing a truth that missionaries have known for decades. George Hunter writes in his new book, *Church for the Unchurched.* "To reach non-Christian populations, it is necessary for a church to become culturally indigenous to its `mission field'"--whether that is Asia, Africa, Latin America, or Suburbia. "When the church's communication forms are alien to the host population, they may never perceive that Christianity's God is for people like them" (Hunter 1996, 23). Hunter and others like him have begun describing North America as an emerging mission field.

The church must change and move, in order to reach culture. A rural church on the Canadian prairies found itself at the end of a muddy; or sometimes, icy road which few people dared to travel. After much deliberation, the congregation decided to literally tow their church building down the road to the nearby highway in order to stay accessible to people. Even though the movers had to lean the entire structure a few degrees on the support beams in order to bypass one stand of old oak trees, the church leaders did all that was needed to remain accessible to the town. When the massive building slowly lumbered down the highway, a young boy stood in awe and gasped, "I never knew how big the church was until it started to move". Today, that church serves over 200 people, even though it is situated in the middle of the Canadian prairies. A culturally relevant church and its pastor will do all possible to reach the world it claims to serve…even if it means "leaning a few degrees" to reach the goal.

Pastoral apostles in this era have a discerning eye on the swirling clouds of culture around them. They express courage and sensitivity while working with the leaders of the congregation to nudge the church down the back roads of tradition toward the highway of culture. And yet, such ministers know the difference between faddish ideas and principled change. They distill the unchanging truths of God's Word from the ever-shifting trends of culture. Such pastors have an entrepreneurial bent, a willingness to take risks. They understand the change process and the complexities of bringing people into a fresh vision.

From Stable Family to Networks of Community Relationships

We live in a relationally fragmented world. The 21st Century offers a cheap replacement for the family in a multitude of often surface relationships: work, kid's soccer team parents, school PTA, a few family members, several "ex-relationships" and the occasional neighbor. In fact, even the local church does not escape this shallow existence; for, attendees often bring their children every second Sunday because their "ex" takes care of them the alternate weekends.

The effective pastor in this environment gives attention to creating Biblical community, an alternate "family" centered in Christ. Here, people should be able to find forgiveness and healing, the presence of Christ lived out in relationships, a holy nation and a people set apart. Small groups, transparent ministry and a relational style of preaching reach deep into fragmented lives.

Again the "Ministry in America" study noted that next to personal character, the minister most sought after would "employ actions that would likely build a strong sense of community with a congregation" (Lonsway 1997, 69). Such clergy take time to know the parishioners well; they promote activities that build a sense of parish family. In this manner, even the most evangelical, non-hierarchical minister offers the role of "priest" in the community. As we seek to create a forgiven, healing people of God, the pastor serves as a descendent of those faithful priests who heard the confession (the counseling moments) and brought people to the presence of a God worthy of our worship.

However, this sense of unique community shall remain an open rather than a cliquish gathering. The people of God, deeply committed to each other, always keep the door open to others who need a sense of belonging. The pastor-shepherd, recalls the word of Jesus, "I have other sheep that are not yet of this fold."

Such 21 st Century pastors also know the vitality of mentoring within this community. Beyond building a church community that embraces all who come through her doors, such pastor-leaders affirm that success without successors is ultimately failure. The Apostle Paul urged Timothy to mentor others as the young man had experienced through his relationship with Paul. Investing one's life in the souls of selected others guarantees a legacy of ministry, and this needs to remain a priority among effective pastors.

From Clergy Centered to Catalytic Equipper

The new post-modern era gives a fresh opportunity to finish the Reformation. The empowered pastor can serve as a catalytic agent who shares the joy of God's work among the people, rather than hoarding the ministry for the paid professional. The first Reformation gave the Word of God back to the people, while the second emerging Reformation can give the Work of God back to the people. The first Reformation inspired "church" as a place to which people gather apart from the world, while the second Reformation has re-created "church" as a power with which people scatter into the world.

However, in order to achieve this goal, it may be that a radical rethinking of the local church will be necessary in some quarters to shake us from the persistent image of pastor as "doer of it all". When Luther and others stood against the existing church structures, they called for an empowering of the laity to share in ministry; however, the movement toward the complete empowering of God's people bogged down in the ensuing centuries. Toward the latter half of the Twentieth century we witnessed a refocusing of the church toward lay ministry; so that today, in place of the clergy who must do it all, the contemporary church calls for those with gifting to share in the work. The day of the omni-competent pastor who can do it all has thankfully, come to an end.

In the ongoing "Ministry in America" study noted earlier, a primary competency to "empower others for ministry" appeared across all denominations at fifth place in both the 1973 and 1988 findings. Considering the first four criteria related to character, this placement is significant in that the number one activity/competency longed for in a pastor is the ability to equip others for ministry. Under the factor of "Congregational leadership", the study noted a strong emphasis upon, " an active employment of lay leadership-regardless of gender-in establishing and executing an overall strategy for parish ministry" (Lonsway 1997, 72). This characteristic ranked fifth overall, and similar to the traditional roles of preaching and teaching. These clergy take time to know the parishioners well and invite people to feel they are needed in the work of the church. They empower lay people to set goals consistent with their mission and potential. They work diligently to broaden the base of participation in the decisions of the church.

Even in the broader field of leadership research, we find a passion for equipping others. Kouzes and Posner have studied outstanding leadership qualities for over twenty-five years. Of the five major leadership qualities they noted, "Empowering others to act" continues to receive among the highest scores among followers who admire their leaders (Kouzes and Posner 1992). Jim Collins almost classic work, *Good to Great*, explored almost thirty moderate sized, producing companies that had moved from average to stellar investment returns. All companies had what Collins and his associates called "Level Five" Leaders. Such people have a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. They look out the window to apportion credit to others, while at the same time, they look in the mirror to apportion responsibility when things do not go well. Whether in church or business, such pastor/leaders set up others for success and succession, while other lesser pastors hoard the attention and floodlights for as long as they can (Collins 2001, 17f).

I currently teach pastors in seminary. We had been talking one day about equipping the saints for ministry and I urged them, "Give the ministry away. Give it all away!" After class, a student came to me with a quizzical look. He formerly captained a massive sea-freighter, commanding a large crew and valuable cargo. He steered this three-football-field-length ship through narrow channels and stormy seas. He asked, "But if I give it all away, what is there that only I can do? Is there any part of the ministry that remains my sole domain?"

I thought for a minute and answered, "About all that legally remains for you are the

words 'I now pronounced you man and wife. You may kiss the bride'. All the rest of ministry can be shared." Perhaps a few tasks remain for the pastor: The communion table is a traditional place for the pastor, but even here there appears no Biblical ground for guarding the position for the pastor alone. In a church I served, some of our best communion services were led by lay people. The baptismal tank perhaps is a place for the pastor, but even here a shift is occurring in which family and mentors baptize their "spiritual children". The teaching of God's Word continues to be, and should be a pivotal role for the pastor, but even that domain calls to be shared.

Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* has a powerful scene in which the priest challenges his people with the words, "What is there about me that you've been respecting and what have you all been expecting to see?" Then ripping off his vestments, he adds invitingly, "Put it on, and you'll see: any one of you can be any part of me." There remains the vital role of pastoring God's people, but an intrinsic aspect of that included inviting people to be "part of me."

The New Testament calls for pastors to "equip the saints for the work of ministry". Outside of Scripture the word was used to join a broken bone, and in Matthew 4:21, the same word described the work of mending nets for the purpose of catching fish. In 1 Corinthians 1:10 the word noted the unity of a local church - "perfectly knit together". Galatians 6:1 translated the word as "restoring" the fallen. Leadership training means more than giving workshops and practice in doing ministry. "Equipping" demands a restoring, healing work among God's people that invites them to serve the church, deploying their gifts, despite personal limitations and struggles. Equipping deals with the humanness of people in the context of ministry.

The action of the 1996 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) giving commissioned lay pastors the right to perform many pastoral functions reversed a centuries old principle of limiting certain activities to paid clergy. The decision was, in part, a pragmatic response to the continued decline in seminary graduates for that denomination. Although this decision met with mixed responses, (some advocating it as empowering the laity, while others questioning its viability and the very existing of seminaries) the shift does reinforce the movement among many denominations to open the door of pastoral ministry to lay-people in the church; and this offers new hope for the sometimes beleaguered pastor

From Pulpit-Centered Authority to Diverse Spirituality

The teaching ministry of the pastor continues to have a central role, and well it should; however, with the changing attendance patterns of people (on average 50%-75% attendance rate per month); the church needs to offer alternate delivery points for spiritual truth. Therefore the pastor of this generation embraces and empowers small group ministries, discipleship groups and other modes for exploring the Truths of God's Word that stretch far beyond the pulpit. Each venue has a role in the spiritual formation of believers.

However, whatever renovations we undertake, preaching has always owned a primary place in the foreground of the pastoral office. Throughout all ages and in all cultures, teaching defines what the clergy do. Even the earliest list of elder qualifications for an early church elder distinguishes these leaders as, "able to teach." Therefore, a priority in the schedule is the place for study, understanding

people and preparing for the sacred moment of preaching to the people of God. Again, the Ministry in America study called for those who can guide people by relating the Scriptures to their human need. Such pastors use biblical insights to guide members in making wise decisions. When this pastor is finished speaking, the congregant is conscious of Jesus Christ and less so of the pastor (Lonsway 1997, 38).

Although it remains a primary role of the pastor, preaching/ teaching has changed. Those who preach will ensure that the message is both Biblically rooted, but culturally relevant. The delivery will ensure genuineness from the messenger and clarity in the choice of words. We are speaking to a generation that hungers for relevance, creative delivery and simplicity. This article affords little time for engaging this vital aspect of pastoral work, therefore we refer the reader to many of the current works on teaching and preaching, with reference to two in particular, Dr. Kent Anderson's insightful *Preaching with Integrity* and *Preaching with Conviction*, both by Kregel Publishers.

From Focused, Formal Education to Life-Long Learning

The term "Master of Divinity" betrays the office. No one ever "masters" divinity or the office of those who serve Him. Granted, seminary graduates, upon entering their first church, work hard on preaching and public ministry. Later, they forge new people skills in the furnace of ministry; and, even later see their leadership skills blossom into full fruit. Over time, all clergy develop some competence, but seldom mastery of the entire orchestra of ministry. Although success may come quickly for a select few, maturity in pastoral work takes a lifetime.

Therefore, regardless of their age, effective pastors know where they are in the seasons of ministry development and embrace the opportunity to grow. Anathema to growing pastors are the words, "I've learned all that before". When asked in his annual evaluation, "In what areas of your ministry do you feel most inadequate", one pastor reflected, "All of them! There are none in which I feel adequate." He understood that even to sense competency in several areas does not mean mastery.

Tom Rainer's study of pastors asked them what factors more influenced their confidence and style of ministry. First place went to experience and/or "participation in a conference or seminar" (44% and 49% rated as "very important"), second place went to mentors who invested in them (34% "very important"); third place went to seminary or college (25% "very important"). All this reinforces lifelong learning at every level. Formal education provides the foundation for a season in life, but ongoing disciplined reflection, intentional mentoring and pursuit of truth (Rainer 2001, 173f).

Jay Conger and Beth Benjamin researched current leadership development models in successful companies (Conger and Benjamin 1999). These businesses stressed: group learning (leaders learn best in groups), 360 Feedback (like it or not, we need feedback from peers and subordinates and superiors!), lifelong mentoring relationships; and, regular, non-formal seminars that included significant interaction

and reflection.

The church can learn from these paradigm shifts in business. All effective church leaders, lay and professional, spend their lives pursuing four learning experiences: Concept awareness (learning and relearning truths of doctrine and ministry application), feedback (an ongoing passion for self awareness), skill building (an insatiable thirst to excel); and, personal growth (a deep hunger to know God and His Word).

A corollary to this shift is: Pastors will develop the refined art of adaptable leadership styles. Since it would appear that most pastors do not view themselves as leaders, then the impetus remains upon the minister to learn about concepts of leadership. Shepherds lead sheep, and the flock needs discernment as never before. While the concept of "Pastoral CEO" has a smudged reputation; nevertheless, the challenge remains for ministers who are visionary and risk-takers. Furthermore, every three to five years, the needs of the congregation will change, and the leadership expectations with them. Be prepared to adapt, or else move your family lots! Long ministries will demand a flexible approach to leadership: at some points, decisive; while at others, more collaborative and team oriented. Know the elements of implementing successful change in the church. Understand the dynamics of conflict and power bases within a group of people. At one occasion, the church needs decisive and confident vision-casting. At another moment, the congregation needs a more consultative approach in which many have a voice. Learn to mature and flex.

In essence, ministers do the work of God, in all its awesomeness and majesty; And it is this inherent splendor that makes defining the work of the minister impossible. Regardless of the congregation's address, the pastor will always live with the tension between Christ's mission and the local church's mandate. Live with it, yet avoid being defined by it! Such servant-leaders fit their pastoral style and strengths with the needs of the church and yet constantly refer back to the historic, biblical roots of the pastor. Feed them, lead them, pray for them and above all…love the flock of God! And, lest we forget, accept the fact that not every pastor has the specific pastoral skill set for every church. If the pastoral office could be neatly defined, then the character of God could also be neatly explained; for, to delineate the role of pastor is to describe the work of God. Those would limit the pastoral image to a few of the historic vignettes or cherished priorities rob the role of its kaleidoscopic beauty and inherent majesty. In fact, the very intensity of the current debate merely emphasizes the greatness of the work of pastoring.

Embrace the tension of "among them" and "over them", "within them" and "beyond them." Some pastors lead their congregations from a high and lofty tower of professionalism and competence that rests *over* them. In their ministry, everything is orchestrated, and done oh so well! Their charisma and large church setting calls for clergy to lead with power and charisma. However, such a profile leads some ruthless preachers to make lofty demands upon the congregation who sit *under* their ministry. Their office door is closed to all but the daring few who "get past the secretary"; and their lives are closed to all but the select ones who see a small glimpse of their humanity.

Other pastors lead "from *among* them". These clergy are human, transparent, yet prone to serve as people pleasers who pretend to love the people while in fact fearing the flock. Wanting to keep their job and reputation, such ministers do all that

is expected of them…except lead and direct the people. They seldom say, "Thus says the Lord" and prefer the safer, "My personal opinion is…"

And yet, for those with optimistic eyes, it is this multi-faceted aspect of pastoral ministry that makes it so exciting. In one day, a minister can: mourn with a family, visit a new born baby, develop strategic plans for the church, work on a passionate sermon for Sunday and share the Gospel with a needy person (Figure 1).
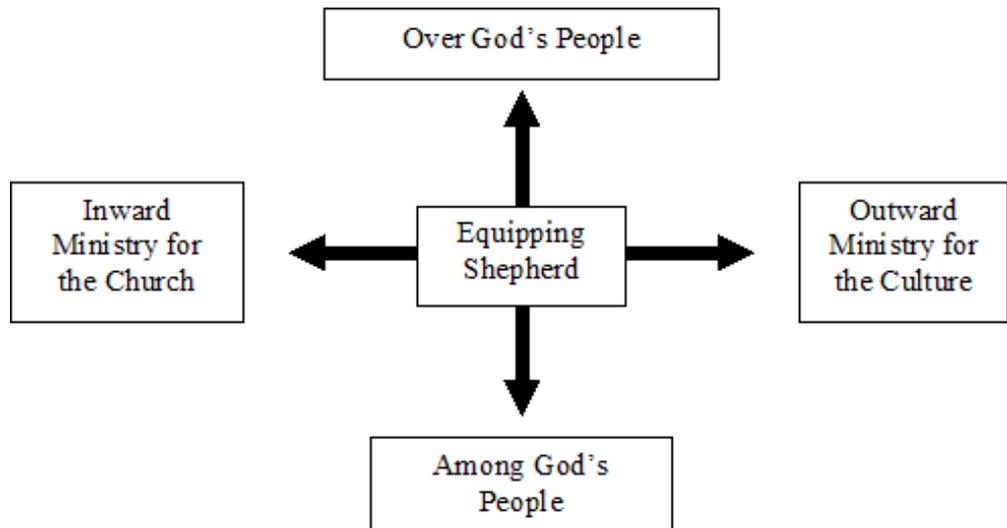

Figure 1: Renovating the Pastoral Office

Although pastoral work calls for those clergy tuned to their own ministry preferences, at the hub of ministry, we find the enduring image of the equipping shepherd. Granted, the term "Shepherd" does have limitations. The image projects a passive, naive flock of sheep grazing to their heart's content in some vast field of grass, oblivious to the wolves around them. On the contrary, the church remains an army storming the walls of Hell to salvage anyone with their grasp. Furthermore, the image of the "minister as shepherd" does seem incongruous in the computer driven world of the twenty-first century. After all, how many urbanites have ever met a shepherd or seen a sheep, outside of the Zoo?

Nonetheless, although the images of coach, CEO, manager and counselor seem more fitting, in all of history and in all of language there seems no word that more astutely describes the pastoral role as "shepherd." When all is completed, pastors, like shepherds, serve many functions. They guard and lead the flock. They help to give new life to the lamb and healing to the ailing ewe. They feed the hungering and search for the wandering. Shepherds cast vision, and they care and they guard. Shepherds spend time in active caring for the flock and many hours in reflection about the flock. They serve as mystic and manager, leading and feeding, CEO and servant. They heed the call of the Chief Shepherd, "Feed my sheep." Occasionally they tackle wolves, giving little regard to their own well-being. If pressed to use another phrase, we could consider Elton Trueblood's insightful "player coach".

But, even Jesus employed a paradoxical image when he described spiritual leaders as shepherds. Our minds think fondly of a shepherd and his flock and we hear Bach's 'Pastoral Symphony" playing in our ears when we envision the tranquil scene of a shepherd and his flock. However, in the days of Jesus, the image "Good

shepherd" carried an oxymoronic tone, for shepherds were classed along with gamblers, usurers and publicans. Their social status remained near the bottom as they wandered about letting their sheep graze wherever they might. One ancient writer noted, "No position is so despised as that of the shepherd" (Jeremias 1971, 116). Nonetheless, despised by culture, they willingly risked their life to protect the sheep from enemies.

Through all the ages of history, the image of a shepherd tending the flock has endured. Neither the hierarchical system of the Medieval era, nor the cold German theology of the nineteenth century nor even the CEO, purpose driven church of the twentieth century can erase this image from the canvas of ministry. Shepherding still works! They lead, care, guide, direct, look for lost sheep; and above all, they love the flock of God. Although no one image captures all the variety of pastoral work, that image helps to capture key elements of the vast responsibility. However, there are paradigm shifts in our culture and church that need attention as we continue to answer the question first posed to me by a grade school boy: "What should pastors do?"

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