RECLAIMING THE EARLY CHURCH AS A LEADERSHIP MODEL OF MENTORSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY

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Dissertation Abstract

The church has rapidly changed since the beginning of the global pandemic in 2020. In this liminal time, congregations have faced a growing challenge to find pastoral leadership, with fewer pastoral candidates under care and many current pastors nearing retirement. For years the church has looked to the secular world for answers, but its pattern of "one congregation, one pastor" is becoming much harder to maintain. Many congregations no longer have the budget to support a full-time pastor.

The Bible provides effective leadership models which can be reclaimed. The early church flourished using a mentorship/discipleship model, though the modern church has relied on seminaries to provide leadership. Seminaries no longer have enough students to provide sufficient pastoral leaders. Yet Biblical mentorship is a time-proven method that could fill the void of leadership in today's church.

Along with mentorship, the early church worked together across boundaries, viewing the entire Christian church as one. God is calling congregations of today to work together across congregational, community, and denominational boundaries to be a blessing to each other and the world. Two or more congregations sharing pastoral leadership and ministry offers a sustainable leadership model in the current context, even as it did in the early church.

Thesis

The predominant leadership models in congregations today are drawn from the business world. It is common, for example, for one pastor to be the "CEO" of the congregation – whether one pastor serves one congregation or one senior pastor serves with other support staff. These models no longer serve the church amid plummeting membership and finances. The early church moved leaders from place to place, however, and leadership was shared collaboratively through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It constantly developed new leaders through one-on-one mentorship and then trusted the new leaders to lead. By combining mentorship and collaborative ministry, today's church can effectively reclaim its Biblical roots.

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Introduction

The modern church in America has predominantly relied on leadership models found in the secular world – including the church as a business or corporation, the pastor as CEO, council as a corporate board, and council as personnel committee. By relying on these secular models, the church has largely forgotten about effective leadership models found in the Bible. Amid changes in culture and changing demographics in rural America, the church is struggling to find a "perfect" corporate model that will magically fix all of its problems. Many small congregations find themselves with fewer people attending worship, shrinking budgets, and the inability to compensate a full-time pastor to serve one church. This has caused anxiety about the future of the church. Yet secular models have brought little growth in membership or a sense of mission.

Many communities have more congregations than the remaining, declining population can support, leading to several congregations closing their doors.[1] Typically, when a congregation closes, its members scatter to various congregations and denominations; others are so hurt by the grief of their home congregation closing, they never join another church. This unfortunate phenomenon is a result of very little collaboration or connection between congregations or denominations. Divisions – and competition between congregations or denominations – have created distance and even animosity among churches.

I have been involved in shared ministries in rural areas of the upper Midwest throughout my pastoral career, serving nine different congregations in four calls, including two or three congregations during each. I have helped congregations envision a new way to provide pastoral leadership by sharing leadership with another congregation(s). Unfortunately, I have also

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[1] In 2016 the PC (U.S.A.) was composed of 9,451 congregations, and in 2021 the number of congregations was 8,813 congregations. This is a drop of 638 congregations within five years meaning almost 7% of congregations had closed or merged within these five years. See Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) - PC(USA) 2021 statistics continue to show declining membership (pcusa.org) (accessed on April 12, 2023).

witnessed several congregations that refused to change during this liminal time; as a result they closed their doors because their leadership models were no longer sustainable. Congregations will either adapt to these rapidly changing times or, most likely, end up closing their doors.

This is not to say there is no hope, because congregations which have learned to work collaboratively and develop new leaders are thriving. I presently serve two congregations in small communities that work together well, and their ministries are thriving. In recent years, a lot of change has been forced upon all congregations,[2] and those that adapt will have a brighter future ahead of them. The Spirit continues to lead small congregations to embrace working collaboratively. Far from a new innovation, collaborative ministries reclaim a pattern of pastoral leadership that was present at the birth of the Christian movement.

Reclaiming Biblical Leadership Models

As opposed to drawing from secular leadership models, this thesis will explore reclaiming Biblical models of leadership for today's church. While there are many leadership models throughout scripture, I will focus specifically on the approaches incorporated by Paul and the early church as described in Acts and the epistles attributed to Paul. Pauline models of leadership enabled the Gentile church to grow very rapidly in a short period of time. This growth happened while intricately weaving together models of mentorship and congregational collaboration.

Other authors have urged the church to reclaim these leadership models, including Roland Allen, who offered one of the earliest critiques of modern colonial missionary methods. Allen wrote a monumental book in 1912 called, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours? A*

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[2] "One in five Americans say they attended religious services in person less often than before the pandemic." According to Pew Research. How COVID-19 Affected Religious Service Attendance in U.S., 2020-2022 | Pew Research Center (accessed on April 12, 2023).

Study of the Church in the Four Provinces, with an eye-opening chapter on the unity of the early church. Allen writes, "St. Paul began with unity. In his view the unity of the Church was not something to be created, but something which already existed and was to be maintained. Churches were not independent unities: they were extensions of an already existing unity."[3]

That Paul began with unity may seem radical to the church of today, when congregations typically think of themselves as independent, individual communities of faith, instead of part of the one body of Christ. Paul's model of leadership began with the premise that unity is not church-generated but is a gift from God. God makes the church one, and the church is encouraged to find ways to live into that unity and reclaim Biblical leadership models.

Mentorship

The early church had a shortage of leaders as the Christian church was new and rapidly growing. Today, many denominations are experiencing a shortage of qualified pastoral leaders as the church is increasingly marginalized. The early church addressed its leadership shortage by developing leaders from within the communities of faith. With no outside institutions to supply leaders, they internally developed their own. Roland Forman, Jeff Jones, and Bruce Miller write, "Nearly two-thousand years ago Jesus handed the baton to his disciples. He gave them the mission of the church and they ran a good race. Just as important as running a good race was passing the baton to others."[4]

The early church did this, cultivating leadership from within the communities they served and continually passing the baton to new leaders. They accomplished this primarily through mentorship, a hands-on approach by which leaders constantly evaluated the spiritual gifts present

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[3] Roland Allen, M.A., *Missionary Methods St. Paul's or Ours: A Study of the Church in the Four Provinces*, (London: Robert Scott, 1912), 170.

[4] Rowland Forman, Jeff Jones, and Bruce Miller, *The Leadership Baton: An Intentional Strategy for Developing Leaders in Your Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 21.

within the communities they served. Each prospect was taught to lead but also expected to find new potential leaders.

Today's church has relied on academic institutions to provide leaders from outside the community, as opposed to identifying leaders from within it. The current leadership development model is influenced by secular educational patterns more than scriptural models. While seminaries effectively educate the inquirers and candidates they receive, more work needs to be done on the local level to encourage potential leaders to pursue vocational ministry. Leadership recruitment begins at the ground level of congregations. "The local church is by design the most effective incubator of spiritual leaders on the planet."[5] Leadership models of the secular world are failing, and recovering effective leadership models of the early church can revitalize a church that has been secularized and institutionalized. It is time to return to scripture for guidance as God leads the church through this liminal season.[6]

Cultivating leaders from within is the most basic of approaches, but it has proven to be the most effective model of leadership development in church history. Today's church can successfully "transition from *acquiring* great leaders to *developing* great leaders"[7] by reclaiming this model. Many smaller congregations have been solely focused on survival instead of developing leaders for the future. Yet as congregations look within for potential leaders, a declining church can experience hope. New leaders are needed to navigate in a time of uncertainty. If every congregation provided just one potential pastoral leader to the wider church, there would not be a shortage of pastors.

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[5] Ibid., 25.

[6] The church was famously slow-changing before 2020, but the global pandemic which began that year accelerated change.

[7] Ibid., 31.

Collaborative Ministry

Today, the predominant model of pastoral leadership is "one church, one pastor." It emerged after churches experienced unprecedented growth following World War II and individual congregations became large enough to support a full-time pastor. Decades later, the decline of the mainline church has resulted in the closure of many rural congregations, while remaining congregations struggle to maintain a model which is no longer sustainable. The modern church seems to have forgotten that the early church lived out unity in the way it did ministry. Allen writes, "In like manner the Churches of which they were members were not separate and independent bodies. They were not independent of the Apostle who was their common founder, they were not independent of one another."[8] Each church was still connected to the founder and to every Christian congregation because they embraced unity as a gift from God.

Many local congregations have forgotten their own history as they were once new worshiping communities, founded by and sharing a pastor with another congregation(s). Growth happened at phenomenal rates as they shared pastoral leadership among multiple congregations. The present church can recover faithful leadership models of the past as they adapt to a changing environment.

Unity in the early church was not self-created; it was a gift from God. Allen adds, "They were all members of a body which existed before they were brought into it. They could not act as if they were responsible to themselves alone."[9] Each congregation was connected to and responsible for neighboring communities of faith. Jesus' command to love neighbors also applies

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[8] Allen, *Missionary Method*, 166.
[9] Ibid., 167.

to congregations. Each congregation should love other congregations and love the community in which they are planted.

Unity does not mean that all churches need to have identical worship services or traditions. Allen writes, "In a word, unity did not consist of outward conformity to the practices of the earliest member, but in incorporation into the body."[10] This enables congregations with different customs, traditions, or denominations to work together because they are one in Jesus Christ. Today's church has been divided in multiple ways, and this has created a stumbling block to realizing the unity God has given the church in Jesus Christ.

Mentorship and Collaborative Ministry Together

The early church did not separate mentorship from collaborative ministry but combined these models into one. Though each model by itself can greatly bless any congregation, the incredible growth and vitality of the early church came from using both models in tandem. Jim Mynors says, "St. Paul's strategy was unashamedly focused on leaders for the future…His multi-church ministry resulted in dramatic and lasting growth."[11] Paul's strategy included both mentorship and collaborative ministry.

Amiel Osmaston describes Paul's ministry writing, "He literally worked himself out of a job by empowering leaders to minister in their own community, then moving on to do so again."[12] Many of these pastoral leaders continued to move between communities at Paul's instruction. Each "part" was connected to the whole, and each part was called to build up every other part in love, as Paul describes in Ephesians 4:15-16.

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[10] Ibid., 174.

[11] Amiel Osmaston, "Leadership models and skills," in *Reshaping Rural Ministry: A Theological and Practical Handbook*, ed. James Bell, Jill Hopkinson and Trevor Willmott (London: Canterbury Press Norwich, 2009), 64.

[12] Shannon Jung, Pegge Boehm, Deborah Cronin, Gary Farley, C. Dean Freudenberger, Judith Bortner Hefferman, Sandra LaBlanc, Edward L Queen II, and David C. Ruesink, *Rural Ministry: The Shape of the Renewal to Come*, (Nashville: Abington Press, 1998), 169.

The modern church has defaulted to leadership acquisition: securing leaders from outside the community rather than developing them from within. This must change. In addition, collaborative ministry challenges the predominant "one church, one pastor" model. Embracing mentorship and collaboration might require considerable time and energy to develop – since it can be challenging to invoke change in any organization – but a change to reclaim Biblical models of leadership can bring blessings to the church today.

Thesis

The predominant leadership models in congregations today are drawn from the business world. It is common, for example, for one pastor to be the "CEO" of the congregation – whether one pastor serves one congregation or one senior pastor serves with other support staff. These models no longer serve the church amid plummeting membership and finances. The early church moved leaders from place to place, however, and leadership was shared collaboratively through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It constantly developed new leaders through one-on-one mentorship and then trusted the new leaders to lead. By combining mentorship and collaborative ministry, today's church can effectively reclaim its Biblical roots.

Scope

While many leadership models may be gleaned from the entire Bible, I will focus exclusively on Paul's model of leadership. The Pauline portions of the "Acts of the Apostles" along with the epistles attributed to Paul provide the Biblical basis of this thesis. This is not an exhaustive list of approaches used in the early Christian church, let alone the entire Bible, but Paul's leadership model caused tremendous growth during a liminal time. As a result, this is the focus of this paper. I will show the important role that both mentorship and collaborative

ministry played as the early church rapidly grew numerically and geographically. This research will demonstrate how the two models were interwoven in the early church.

Aim

The aim of this project is to give congregations an alternative to predominant secular, business models of leadership which view the church as an institution. Joseph Small writes, "In ordinary usage, *church* has become simply synonymous with 'religious institution.'"[13] This is a modern phenomenon, as the early church did not establish an institution but lived into the imagery of the church as the body of Christ. Every part of the early church was connected and worked together in unity, with teams of mobile pastoral leaders constantly developing more leaders from within the church.

This project will look at Pauline related texts to show mentorship as vital in helping to rapidly develop leaders in the early church. Next, methods for reclaiming this leadership model in the current context will be explored. Care is used to allow for differing contexts and not to provide a cookie-cutter model for mentorship, since mentorship is both relational and organic. The Holy Spirit will lead each community to a path for mentorship and that path will look different in varying contexts.

This project will also explore Pauline texts that support the constant collaboration that occurred in the early church. Each community thought of itself as part of a bigger body, the body of Christ, and this had implications for the way communities shared leadership. After surveying Pauline related passages, several possible modern models of collaborative ministry will be offered, recognizing that one size does not fit all. Many of these models have worked well in differing situations. Shared ministries need to address the specific needs of their congregations.

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[13] Joseph D. Small, *Flawed Church, Faithful God: A Reformed Ecclesiology for the Real World,* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 2.

This project also explores the power of intertwining these two models of leadership. Though this will undoubtedly require time to incorporate, the payoff promises to be immense. The major aim of this project is to get congregational leaders to embrace Biblical models of leadership instead of secular models.

Hermeneutic

The texts here were historic to the early church, written in a specific place and time. The Pauline epistles addressed specific needs in the communities to which they were written. At the same time, God's Holy Word remains God's Word to the church in the present context. Based on personal experience, I am convinced the leadership models that were effective in the early church are still effective today. Looking at the variety of Pauline epistles, readers discover that each faith community was unique and had its own issues; likewise each pastoral leader was unique and had his/her own issues. Today, too, each faith community will be different and so will each leader, but the church can still be united in the name of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit fell upon the early church and generated growth. This growth was personal as Paul and other leaders invested one-on-one time to mentor new leaders. This growth was also communal as Paul addressed communities of faith as the body of Christ. As the contemporary church embodies Paul's personal and communal focuses, it may experience similar divine growth.

Chapter Plan

Chapter One "The Church is a Church Divided by Many Human Boundaries" examines congregational boundaries, denominational boundaries, and community boundaries. These mindsets have prevented many faith communities from working together as the body of Christ. The prevalence of business models over Biblical models of leadership, the stark demographic

changes in many rural areas, and the continuing decline of the mainline church have caused many congregations to go into survival mode. The early church had boundaries to overcome as well, but they overcame those boundaries by believing they could agree to disagree about traditions and practices and still maintain the unity that comes as a gift from God.

Chapter Two "The Early Church as a Model for Mentorship/Discipleship" explores Pauline texts concerning mentorship and considers how Paul consistently developed new leaders. Paul himself had a mentor and was accepted by the disciples because of his mentor Barnabas. Paul never worked by himself but always had co-workers with him. He was always looking for potential leaders, mentoring them, and then trusting them to lead as he moved to another community. This chapter looks at examples from the book of Acts, Paul's letters to faith communities, and Paul's letters to co-workers in the church. Paul mentored many co-leaders, and he expected them to do the same. This approach led the early church to grow rapidly in a short period of time.

Chapter Three "The Early Church as a Model for Collaborative Ministry" explores this leadership model in Pauline related texts. Paul was sent as a missionary by the Holy Spirit and a confirming faith community. He and his co-workers moved from community to community with no boundaries, as they considered themselves to truly be one church. They shared resources within communities and among communities as well. Paul stayed connected to faith communities even after he left, sometimes writing letters to offer correction when issues developed in them. Each worshiping community was called to build up all other communities in love. With unity viewed as a gift from God, they did not consider each faith community to be a separate, independent institution.

Chapter Four "Mentorship – Starting at Ground Level in Congregations" reclaims the congregation as the primary place where leadership is developed, with mentorship a desired core value in each congregation. Following the example of Paul, each congregational leader is expected to have a mentor, colleagues in ministry, and at least one mentee to eventually pass the baton of leadership. The idea: Biblical leadership is not intended to be "possessed" but passed on to another leader. This simple method of leadership development can be incorporated into a faith community of any size. While all mentorship begins at the congregational level, this chapter also explores how presbyteries and judicatories can encourage mentorship from within, placing emphasis on leadership development rather than leadership acquisition. Mentorship will look different in various communities of faith and will not conform to a one size fits all model.

Chapter Five "Models of Collaborative Ministry for Today" explores potential ways to practically work collaboratively between communities. This chapter debunks the myth that the "one church, one pastor" model has been in place since the beginning of the church. This is a modern phenomenon, and the early church worked collaboratively between communities. There are many models offered as examples because each context and pairing of churches is unique. The list of models is not exhaustive, but these models have effectively been used in a variety of settings. It is important to let members of all the affected faith communities have voice and input as they explore how they might work together and bless each other. Care must be taken to address all concerns, ensuring that shared leadership is a blessing to each community and that these communities actually work together in ministry in some way.

Chapter Six "Putting It All Together" summarizes the ideas from previous chapters and ties everything together in the hope that this project will be useful for today's church. This project has been bathed in prayer and reflection on God's Word. This is not a comprehensive list

of possibilities of mentorship and collaborative ministry, yet hopefully, some ideas from scripture will trigger conversations about how to recover models from the early church for today. The Spirit led the early church in magnificent ways, and I pray the Holy Spirit will lead the church of today into a future with hope. I also pray the church will develop future leaders from within our congregations and that congregations will live into the unity which God gives the church as a gift. The church is already connected through Jesus Christ, and it is time the church works together in ministry and develops new leaders across all boundaries for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 1

The Church is a Church Divided by Many Human Boundaries

The Bible calls the church to be one body,[14] yet U.S. congregations continually delineate themselves by distinctive attributes. Paul writes in Galatians, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."[15] Paul calls for unity, but churches today still encounter many boundaries which are described in this text: boundaries of race, language, economic status, and gender. Congregations are often marked by homogeneity to avoid crossing these divides. This is usually inadvertent, but it remains true that people often assimilate in groups resulting in forming a group identity.

Divisions persist in the broader church as well. We are called to be one body, yet the church divides into congregations and denominations, emphasizing what makes communities different instead of emphasizing this unity in Christ. The church often forgets that diversity is a blessing rather than a curse. Paul describes this blessing in 1 Corinthians, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."[16] God makes people different and gives every person different spiritual gifts.

Congregational Boundaries

Members of congregations often identify so strongly with a specific congregation, they forget they are also part of the one body of Christ. Congregations often end up competing against

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[14] See also Romans 12:4-5 (NRSV), 1 Corinthians 12:12-12(NRSV), Ephesians 4:4-6(NRSV), and John 17:21(NRSV).
[15] Galatians 3:27-28 (NRSV).
[16] 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (NSRV).

one another for members or prestige instead of working together to build up the kingdom of God. Part of the reason for this is to preserve the identity of each individual church. David Rohrer, an experienced Presbyterian pastor, in his book *The Sacred Wilderness of Pastoral Ministry* writes, "The church as institution was never meant to be an end in itself."[17] Rohrer goes on to say, "Rather a congregation is a wide spot in the road where we come together for rest, encouragement and challenge."[18] Each congregation is part of a much bigger context than itself and each congregation is connected to all other congregations through Jesus Christ who is the head of the church. When congregations focus on sustaining their individual institution, they lose sight of their call to work together with all Christians to fulfill God's mission in the world. Often as congregations experience decline, they look inward instead of outwardly bearing witness to the community and the world.

Rohrer writes, "We might commence our work with a declining congregation using terms like *spiritual renewal* and *revival* to describe our objectives, but this very quickly devolves into discussion of financial solutions and market share."[19] Often the business of the church overshadows the mission God has for that congregation.

This challenge is further complicated by the traditional pattern of one pastor serving one congregation. Mark Mogilka and Kate Wiskus both have vast experience in helping create new multiple-parish ministries in the Roman Catholic Church. They write in *Pastoring Multiple Parishes*, "most people see the 'one pastor, one parish' model as the norm."[20] This congregational boundary results in congregations completely draining their financial resources

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[17] David Rohrer, *The Sacred Wilderness of Pastoral Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 96.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 33.
[20] Mark Mogilka and Kate Wiskus, *Pastoring Multiple Parishes: An Emerging Model of Pastoral Leadership* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2009), 13.

maintaining a model which is no longer sustainable. This pattern of leadership remains engrained

resulting in congregations that cannot imagine a different model could work effectively. When

attendance declines, the resulting lack of resources may eliminate the possibility of calling a full-

time pastor, which can feel disheartening. Congregations then focus solely on the individual

institution's survival because there is not a sense of identity with the larger church.

Pastor as CEO Is Predominant Leadership Model

The notion that the pastor is "CEO" of an individual congregation, instead of viewing

each congregation as part of the larger church divides rather than unifies the church.

Congregational leadership models have assimilated to the culture, rather than drawing from the

Bible. The most common model is the business model. Joseph Hellerman, author of *Embracing*

Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church and Why It Matters Today, is both a

professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Talbot School of Theology and a pastor

of Oceanside Christian Fellowship. He writes, "The business model typically assigns to the

pastor sole authority, as the CEO of an institution with a board of directors (generally called

elders or deacons) whose ecclesiology is often marked more by the values of the *Wall Street*

Journal than by the letters of Paul."[21] In addition, among PC (U.S.A.) circles, session members

often see themselves as the business leaders of the congregation rather than the spiritual leaders

of the church. This makes it difficult to break out of the business model.

The pastor as CEO is not Biblical. The Bible doesn't describe the church as a business or

an institution, but instead describes the church as the body of Christ.[22] Nor is pastor as CEO a

Presbyterian model. The Presbyterian Church is comprised of elders (*presbuteros*) and the elders

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[21] Joseph H. Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church and Why It Matters Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2013), 17.
[22] 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NRSV).

are to be the spiritual leaders of the church, not the business leaders.[23] Yet the business model

persists. Hellerman goes on to warn, "Further contributing to the potential for power abuse are

the businesslike relationships that too often exist between a pastor and his [or her][24]

congregation's board of elders or deacons."[25]

Hellerman sees further problems with the business model because it is unbiblical and not

the model of the early church.[26] He writes, "It has been my experience that deacons and elders

are generally quite satisfied to see their church (a) growing numerically and (b) solvent

financially."[27] The problem with these goals is they are neither Biblical nor mission minded,

drawing the church from the mission to carry the gospel to all people and thus cementing

allegiance to the business model.

In the Presbyterian Church, leadership is shared between elders, an approach supported

by scripture.[28] Hellerman agrees that leadership should be shared. He writes, "a leadership model

that is highly relational will most naturally encourage the proper use of authority in local church

ministry."[29] In a Biblical approach leaders form meaningful relationships with each other and

with members of the congregation, proving effective as leaders work collaboratively together to

build up the body of Christ.[30]

Relationships especially matter in rural churches because many smaller congregations are

"family" congregations in which many members are related in some way. In these cases,

relationships become more important than any business model. *Practicing Care in Rural*

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[23] "Form of Government" in *The Book of Order 2019-2021*, G-2.0102 (Louisville: Office of General Assembly, 2019), 25.

[24] Hellerman uses non-inclusive language, recognizing this, inclusive language was added within the quote.

[25] Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry, 236.*

[26] Ibid., 243.

[27] Ibid.

[28] 1 Timothy 5:17

[29] Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry*, 18.

[30] Ephesians 4:15-16 (NRSV)

Congregations and Communities reiterates the need for relationships stating, "Being adopted as a leader is the way one begins to exercise leadership. The pastor might do better if he were to 'join the church' and exercise leadership from within. He will find that being adopted as a trusted pastor is the necessary path to leadership."[31] Leadership in a congregation is much different than in the business world. Leadership in the church is based on relationships, and an effective leadership model involves the pastor and elders working together through the inspiration of the Spirit. Relationships with God and with one another are both important in the body of Christ.

Increasing Cost of Pastoral Staff and Shortage of Candidates

The business model for church becomes a real issue when congregations start balancing their budgets and realize leadership costs continue to rise while congregational membership and giving continue to decline, especially in rural areas. In an article from *Christianity Today* columnist Karl Vaters states, "While 45 to 55 percent of budget going to staff is healthy for mid-size to larger churches, the range is much wider for small churches. As in zero to one hundred percent."[32] With the rising costs of salary and benefits, many small congregations which are stuck in the "one pastor, one church" model end up paying a much larger percentage of the annual budget to the pastor's salary. This leaves very few financial resources for ministry. This puts small congregations in a challenging place, especially in a changing environment with fewer candidates graduating from seminary and with the costs of seminary rising as well. Other congregations look at their resources and decide not to call a pastor and opt instead to have long-

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[31] Jeanne Hoeft, L. Shannon Jung, and Joretta Marshall, *Practicing Care in Rural Congregations and Communities* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 70.

[32] Karl Vaters, "9 Principles for Creating an Annual Budget in a Small Church," *Christianity* Today, September 17, 2018, https://www.christianitytoday.com/karl-vaters/2018/september/annual-budget-small-church.html (accessed on December 28, 2020).

term pulpit supply. This creates a lack of leadership, if the elders do not step up as spiritual leaders in the congregation.

Lee Hinson-Hasty, the Senior Director of the Theological Education Funds Development for the Committee on Theological Education, writes in an article for the Presbyterian Foundation, "But there is a storm brewing in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and other protestant denominations, and that looks like a shortage of pastors. Like many tornadoes, this 'storm' is exacerbated in the rural Midwest."[33] This shortage of candidates is hitting the rural farming areas of the Midwest especially hard because these areas are experiencing decline in both population and young people. The result of this decline makes calling a pastor much more difficult, especially if a congregation's budget restricts them to calling a part-time position. With this shortage of pastors, it becomes increasingly hard to fill half-or even three-quarter time calls which are what many of the small rural congregations can afford to provide using the "one pastor, one congregation" model.[34]

As a result pastoral searches require more time, and many smaller churches end up looking for several years before finding pastoral leadership.[35] Other small churches are now opting to use long-term pulpit supply, because a pastor's salary would take more than one hundred percent of their budget. The rising costs of leadership in the church have created a scenario in which the traditional business leadership model is no longer sustainable. This creates a lot of anxiety about the future for many congregations.

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[33] Lee Hinson-Hasty, "O'Neill Nebraska needs a pastor too," Presbyterian Foundation, https://www.presbyterianfoundation.org/oneill-nebraska-needs-a-pastor-too/ (accessed January 28, 2020).

[34] For example the number of active teaching elders in the Synod of Lakes and Prairies dropped from 784 in 2017 to 631 in 2021 according to Church Trends found at https://church-trends.pcusa.org/minister/elders/combined/synod/080/5/ (accessed February 24, 2023).

[35] The chair of a rural Nebraska church compares the current pastoral search to one fifteen years ago stating, "There are fewer candidates… and the number who are willing to move to a town of 3,700 is even fewer." This is from an article found at https://www.presbyterianfoundation.org/oneill-nebraska-needs-a-pastor-too/ (accessed on February 24, 2023).

Declining Rural Population and Decreased Church Attendance

Rural farming areas face a double-edged problem as they have experienced a dramatic decline in population even as fewer residents belong to a faith community. With expansion of large agricultural corporate farms, fewer families are involved in the operation of farming resulting in a decline of population in many farming communities.[36] Pew Research states, "As a group, the nation's 391 rural farming counties – heavily concentrated in the Great Plains – have lost total population since 2000, while rural counties with other types of economies gained population."[37] Many of the young people from rural farming areas have moved to cities to find work. With these trends, rural communities often have a larger percentage of retired people with fewer young families or children. According to Pew Research, "Rural areas have a higher share of adults who are ages 65 and older than urban or suburban counties."[38] This trend leads to anxiety about the sustainability of current church leadership models in rural farming communities.

Coupling this decline in population with the secularization of culture has been devastating to small rural congregations across the country. Secularization remains not just an urban or suburban problem, but a rural problem as well. As early as 1990, at least forty percent of rural Americans were identified as unchurched.[39] When rural areas were settled, congregations were typically formed early as settlers of an earlier era avowed faith as a crucial part of life. In

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[36] Corwin Heatwole the CEO of Farmer Focus states, "Consolidation of the farming industry is accelerating the decline of rural populations and making farming less attractive to younger generations." found at https://foodinstitute.com/focus/how-rural-population-decline-impacts-u-s-agriculture/ (accessed on February 24, 2023).

[37] Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at a Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center, https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/05/22/demographic-and-economic-trends-in-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/ (accessed December 28, 2020).

[38] Ibid.

[39] Martin B. Bradley et. al., *Churches and Church Membership in the U.S. 1990* (Atlanta: Glenmary Research Center, 1992).

addition transportation was limited prior to the invention of the automobile by how far a horse could travel. That resulted in the presence of many open country congregations: churches located in the country "in the middle of nowhere." Farmers were not able to travel to the nearest town to worship, so they established congregations closer to home. When today's open country congregations were established, most community members belonged to a congregation, but that has changed in recent years.

Pew Research notes that the religious landscape in the United States is rapidly changing. In 2018 and 2019 sixty-five percent of Americans described themselves as Christian, down twelve percent from the previous decade.[40] In that same period of time the religiously unaffiliated or "nones" increased from seventeen percent to twenty-six percent of Americans.[41] The fastest growing religious group has become the "nones," who indicate no religious affiliation, regardless of whether the community is urban, suburban, or rural.

Even among those who self-identify as Christian, many do not regularly attend worship. Pew Research finds that in 2018 and 2019 fifty-four percent of Americans who identify with a religion attend religious services a few times a year or less, while forty-five percent attend at least monthly. [42] This has impacted the ability of small congregations to survive. Each year many presbyteries within the PC (U.S.A.) close one or two congregations.[43] Not only has church membership declined, but church attendance has also declined. This has a major impact on the resources available to provide leadership and mission in small churches.

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[40] Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at a Rapid Pace."
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys closed at least one church in each year 2011-2021.

The problem goes even deeper for rural congregations because they have a smaller number of Millennials[44] living in their communities than urban or suburban congregations because of the lack of jobs. In addition Pew Research data shows, "Roughly two-thirds of Millennials (64%) attend worship services a few times a year or less often, including about four-in-ten who say they seldom or never go."[45] The study also shows that while twenty-two percent of Millennials attend religious services once a week, there are also twenty-two percent of Millennials who never attend religious services.[46] Again, rural communities experience an even greater ripple effect because there are fewer young people and a bigger percentage of those young people who do not actively participate. This is because the majority of young people move to bigger cities following graduation to find better career opportunities.

"One Church, One Pastor" Model

Many congregations have always been independent and were very successful in the past, having many young people in Sunday School and youth programs. Many now feel isolated and alone as they try to move forward with the "one pastor, one congregation" model, which is the only model of leadership most people in the pew ever remember. This model is no longer realistic in the changing congregational landscape. These congregations often look inward as to how they can fix the problem, and as decline happens there seems to be no business solution to the problems except to close. Many of these congregations can no longer afford a pastor, and therefore decline continues because of the vacuum of leadership.

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[44] Millennials are generally classified as anyone born between 1981 and 1996.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

Looking Inward, Instead of Outward

The Bible calls us to look outward and not inward.[47] Before Jesus ascended to heaven he gave the disciples these instructions, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[48] Business models of the world, on the other hand, look *within* to fix problems for example reducing staff or doing more fundraising to help the budget. Although the Holy Spirit calls the church to bear witness in the world and not just to maintain institutions, this focus on being witnesses gets lost when congregations continue struggling to survive. When congregations only look inward, they fail to see the vision that God gives them outside the walls of the church. There is a mission field in each community, no matter how big or how small, and the church must reclaim the mission of being witnesses to those outside its walls.

Denominational Boundaries

Denominational boundaries also impede the church from being the true body of Christ. While denominations help people in the same system work easily together, in rural communities the closest congregations geographically are not always of the same denomination.[49] Many mainline denominations have seen a need to work together. In small communities, congregations effectively share pastors when unity in Jesus Christ is emphasized more than the things which make them different. Several denominations work even more effectively together because they have established a formal agreement and are in full communion with each other.[50] The *Book of Order* is the second part of the constitution of the PC (U.S.A.) and it defines this agreement. This

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[47] Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV).

[48] Acts 1:8 (NRSV).

[49] Many times the closest PC (U.S.A.) congregation may be several miles away, while there is an Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), Reformed Church of America (RCA), United Church of Christ (UCC), or Methodist Church in the same community or the neighboring community. It is often more practical to work with another local church.

[50] In G-5.0202 in *The Book of Order* states, "Full communion shall include the mutual recognition of baptism and the orderly exchange of ministers, as defined by ecumenical agreements." The PC (U.S.A.) recognizes full communion with the ELCA, the UCC, and the RCA.

makes it possible to work across denominational boundaries in an ecumenical way, and the minister of one of these denominations can serve as installed pastor in another without seeking ordination within its structure. Through this agreement, the PC (U.S.A.) has made it easier for congregations to work together across denominational boundaries.[51]

Partnerships between congregations are not limited to those denominations which are in full communion, however. Congregations can also successfully share pastors across other denominational boundaries as the Holy Spirit guides these congregations.[52] Often the ministry in that particular community becomes more important than the denominational boundaries which separate the congregations.[53] Again, when congregations look outward, they often find that God's mission in the community holds them together as the body of Christ. This outward focus is key to making a real partnership in ministry effective.

Community Boundaries

Another common boundary that prevents congregations from working together is a community boundary. Sometimes competition between communities or school districts proves hard to overcome. Often a school's most heated rivalry lies in the nearest town. Congregations in these neighboring communities have yet one more boundary to overcome. This can be a real issue concerning children and youth programming. An extra effort needs to be made with young

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[51] For example, I serve in a PC (U.S.A.) and an ELCA congregation as installed pastor to both congregations; I have full status and may vote in both judicatories and denominations.

[52] The United Methodist Church is not part of the full communion agreement, but the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys includes a congregation that is yoked with a United Methodist Church.

[53] Both congregations I serve have shared a pastor with other congregations in the same denomination since they were founded. People of both churches have commented how the partnership of these two particular churches across denominational boundaries is much more effective because the people of both congregations get along better than any congregation in the history of both congregations.

people to build community despite this boundary. This can be challenging, but it certainly can be done when the focus shifts to what we have in common, rather than what separates us. [54]

Another challenge is simply geographical. Two communities may only be a few miles apart, but residents primarily "do business" in different larger communities, often in the opposite direction. This affects where people typically go to hospitals, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and other businesses, creating a larger circle for the pastor to travel. It also means more community building needs to happen between the two congregations because members won't find a natural connection in the secular world. [55]

Boundaries in the Early Church from Acts

The early church struggled with boundaries and division as well. Paul called the church to turn away from those divisions, and instead to focus on what unifies, which is Jesus Christ. The most profound division in the early church was the religious background of believers. Many Jews became Christians , and while they believed that Jesus Christ was the Messiah foretold by the prophets, they continued to follow the Jewish law.[56] As the disciples fulfilled Jesus' commission to spread the good news to the ends of the earth, many Gentiles also believed, resulting in two very different groups of the people, the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers.[57] This did not go without controversy. In Acts 15 the disciples gathered in Jerusalem,[58] and they searched scripture for help in making a decision about whether Gentiles could become

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[54] I have confirmation students from three different schools from three separate communities, and they don't know each other apart from church. In an effort to form community, we share a meal before class to form friendship and deeper connections.

[55] Congregations need to purposely hold joint activities and events that form relationships and friendships between people of differing communities, congregations and/or denominations. One of the most effective ways to build these relationships is sharing meals and conversation and looking for ways that the congregations can be a blessing to each other.

[56] Acts 13:42-43 (NRSV).

[57] Acts 13:48-49 (NRSV).

[58] Acts 15:2 (NRSV).

part of the church without adherence to Jewish Law. In coming to an agreement James quotes the prophet Amos saying, "so that all other peoples may seek the Lord–even the Gentiles over whom my name has been called."[59] The early church used scripture to guide decisions and settle disagreements. In Acts 13 there was a dispute whether the Gentile believers should be allowed into the church without becoming Jews first, and Paul was asked to speak the word of the Lord. Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah saying, "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."[60] Instead of looking to business models, today's church can reclaim this model found in the early church.[61] Unity was stressed, and though these two diverse groups of people were divided in the ways they practiced faith, they concluded that what they held in common was far greater than what separated them.[62]

James goes on to say, " Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood."[63] The church decided to agree that some Christians would follow all the Jewish law and others would simply refrain from certain things. The unity was found in the grace of the Lord Jesus.[64] Although two separate churches could have emerged following this council, the early church emphasized unity, even when practices of faith varied from community to community.

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[59] Acts 15:17 which refers to Amos 9:11-15 (NRSV).

[60] Acts 13:47 (NRSV)

[61] The disciples used scripture to help them decide to include the Gentiles in the church, and to not require them to follow all the Jewish law. There was one church, and some people followed the Jewish law and some did not, but they were unified in the name of Jesus Christ, agreeing that was all that mattered.

[62] Acts 15:10-11 (NRSV).

[63] Acts 15:19-20 (NRSV).

[64] Act 15:11 (NRSV).

Unity Across Boundaries Emphasized in the Pauline Epistles[65]

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is written to a church that was experiencing division and boundary issues. Paul advises them to quit dividing because of loyalty to human leaders such as Paul, Apollos or Cephas, but instead find unity in Jesus Christ. [66] These divisions were becoming boundaries that could have unraveled the church into separate communities of faith. Here Paul urges the church to focus on what unites them, namely that they belong to Christ. That identity can overcome congregational differences, denominational boundaries, community differences, and any other type of boundary.[67] Paul calls the whole community of believers to work together.

Bo Reicke is a renowned New Testament scholar who had an interest in the Pauline epistles. He observes that one of the reasons Paul wrote the letter was because "He was shocked by the news of a schism in the congregation that caused people to cling to individual authorities like Paul, Apollos, and Peter, and thus Christ was divided (1:10-13a)."[68] In First Corinthians and numerous letters Paul writes about unity.[69] In Ephesians Paul urges Christians to make "every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."[70] Paul encourages them to maintain unity because we are called to be one.[71] When congregations collaboratively work together in any way, they take seriously this call to unity in the body of Christ. Despite congregational and denominational differences, if the congregations turn away from those things

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[65] While there is controversy about the authorship of some epistles which bear Paul's name, for the purposes of this paper the Pauline epistles will include all letters which claim authorship by Paul.

[66] 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 (NRSV).

[67] The Corinthian Church could have split according to human leaders, creating division in the church. Paul encouraged them to remain one church. Today we have separated because of human leaders, but God is still calling us to find ways to come together across these boundaries and be one church.

[68] Bo Reike, *Re-examining Paul's Letters: The History of the Pauline Correspondence*, ed. David P. Moessner and Ingalisa Riecke (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International), 50.

[69] Romans 12; Galatians 3; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4 (NRSV).

[70] Ephesians 4:3 (NRSV).

[71] Ephesians 4:4-6 (NRSV).

which could separate and face Christ, they should find unity in the one Lord. For there is only one body, and only Jesus Christ can take the many and make them one.[72] Congregations need to emphasize what they have in common rather than the boundaries which separate; Jesus brings together the diversity of ideas and people and makes them one people.[73]

Unity Emphasized in the PC (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions

The Second Helvetic Confession of 1562 links this unity of the one body of Christ to our baptisms saying, "we are baptized into one body of the Church, that with all members of the Church we might beautifully concur in the one religion and in mutual services." [74] Baptism unites the church in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. This one baptism unites the one church. The church fulfills the vows of baptism when the church works together in the one body of Christ, "in the one religion," and serve together as sisters and brothers in Christ. This unity overcomes all the boundaries which the culture and world place upon congregations, denominations, and communities. Baptism makes the church one in spite of differences.

The Confession of 1967[75] acknowledges that the institution of the church continually changes, and that unity remains possible when it states, "The unity of the church is compatible with a wide variety of forms, but it is hidden and distorted when variant forms are allowed to harden into sectarian divisions, exclusive denominations, and rival factions." [76] The church breaks unity when people refuse to work together and ignore their shared identity in Jesus Christ.

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[72] Congregations which focus on shared mission, shared prayer concerns, shared education, and shared worship opportunities find unity through faith relationships. Even when doctrinal perspectives are different, emphasizing the many issues where there is agreement and respecting different ideas when there are doctrinal differences enhances unity.

[73] Romans 12:4-8; Galatians 3:27-29 (NRSV).

[74] Heinrich Bullinger, "The Second Helvetic Confession" 5.189 in *The Book of Confessions* (Louisville: Office of General Assembly, 2016), 127.

[75] The Confession of 1967 was written in an era of conflict. This conflict led to the acknowledgment that change was needed in all areas of life including the church.

[76] "The Confession of 1967" 9.34 in *The Book of Confessions*, 292.

The Confession of 1967 envisions an institution which would change and adapt to the varying needs of each context.[77]

The context of small rural congregations invites reclaiming a collaborative ministry model found in the early church. Collaborative ministry can take a variety of forms as the Spirit leads congregations to work together. Congregations often get stuck doing things the same way year after year, but recalling that God calls the church to adapt to the changing landscape of congregational life in each place and time opens them to the Spirit.[78]

Ephesians Captures Paul's Teaching on Unity which Needs to be Reclaimed

Each particular congregation must follow wherever the Spirit may lead and yet remain connected to the one Church of Jesus Christ. Ephesians describes the church stating, "the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."[79] This model envisions a church which is connected and working together to build each part of the body up in love.

The church must not be tossed about by worldly or cultural models for leadership which divide and emphasize what makes us different. God calls the church to something bigger than individual congregations, denominations, or communities. God calls Christians to be part of the larger one body of Christ which transcends culture, race, or theological thought. This universal body of Christ is joined and knit together by every ligament. Each congregation, each denomination and each community are part of this one body which is called to build itself up in

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[77] Ibid.

[78] This need to adapt to the changing landscape became evident as the COVID-19 global pandemic forced every congregation to adapt in some way. Hopefully amidst all of this change, the church will find ways to adapt and effectively thrive in this new environment.

[79] Ephesians 4:14-16 (NRSV).

love. The church is changing, and God is calling all parts of the church to embrace each other across boundaries, to work collaboratively together, and to truly be the one church of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2

The Early Church as a Model for Mentorship/Discipleship

The Apostle Paul never acted as a "lone ranger" in ministry, instead he constantly served alongside co-workers while mentoring others for different duties in the church. In his book, *Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church and Why It Matters Today*, Joseph Hellerman writes, "When we turn to Paul's letters, we discover that 'coworker' (Greek *synergos*) was, in fact, Paul's favorite word to describe those whom he served."[80]

Jim Mynors is the priest in charge at a parish of rural Anglican churches and his research includes the interface of theology and social anthropology applied to village life in England. Mynors states, "St. Paul's strategy was unashamedly focused on training key leaders for the future."[81] Paul developed pastoral leaders but also local elders in each community where he witnessed to the Gospel. Mark Sanders, a Diocesan Director of Ordinands and New Ministers in the Dioceses of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and he works with many rural parishes and ministers,[82] writes, "all Christians have a vocation and ministry."[83] The early church continuously developed new leaders, and truly used a team approach to ministry across many churches and communities.

The Need for Leadership Begins with Jesus' Ascension

This emphasis on the need for leadership began with Jesus' ascension into heaven. Jesus says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[84] The spread of

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[80] Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry,* 195.
[81] Amiel Osmaston, "Leadership models and skills," in *Reshaping Rural Ministry*, 64.
[82] Bell, Hopkinson, Willmott, *Reshaping Rural Ministry*, xi.
[83] Mark Sanders, "Encouraging vocational pathways," in *Reshaping Rural Ministry*, 99.
[84] Acts 1:8 (NRSV).

the church in Acts shows how the disciples responded to this charge. *The Leadership Baton: An Intentional Strategy for Developing Leaders in Your Church* describes the early church saying, "Local churches were the leadership incubators that propelled the explosive expansion of the church from a single church in Jerusalem to thousands of churches, penetrating the known world in just a couple hundred years."[85]

Leadership development is a long and enduring task given to the church. Despite centuries of co-workers, the need remains to develop leaders for future generations. William Willimon, a retired theologian and bishop in the United Methodist Church, writes, "There is work to be done; let the church be about that work in the meantime, secure in the promise that Jesus who was so dramatically taken from the disciples shall return to them in the same way."[86] Even today, Jesus' followers wait for his return, and Jesus still calls the church to develop leaders to bear witness to the ends of the earth.

The Spirit Equips the Disciples

Jesus does not allow the church to struggle alone with this gigantic task. He sends the Spirit to give spiritual gifts and to accomplish God's mission. On the day of Pentecost in Acts, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and given the gift to speak in other languages. The crowd from many nations was bewildered because they could suddenly hear the disciples speaking in their native languages.[87] Hearing these native tongues might have made the church remember the differences of their past, but God is pointing the church to the unity of their future. Willie Jennings is a theologian and professor at Yale Divinity School. Jennings writes, "Their miraculous tongues are not about the past but about the future, a future shaped by divine desire.

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[85] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 23.

[86] William H, Willimon, *Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching,* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1988), 20.

[87] Acts 2:4-6 (NRSV).

This is why we must see more than a miracle of hearing. Such limited seeing reveals our failure as readers to grasp God's unfolding of the divine fantasy to these early believers."[88] The Spirit gave the disciples the gifts to fulfill Jesus' commission. The miracle is in the speaking because this is the gift that enabled the apostles to go and be witnesses to the ends of the earth, causing rapid growth in a diversity of communities. The hearing points to the divisions of the past, but the miracle of speaking propels the church to the future of unity led by the Spirit.

Paul Was Mentored

While Paul mentored many future leaders, Barnabas first mentored him, standing before the apostles and affirming that Saul truly was called by God. This introduction of Saul to the apostles was vital to giving Saul credibility because Barnabas testified that Saul not only saw the Lord on the road but also spoke boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus.[89] Even as God accomplished the completely unexpected by giving the mostly uneducated disciples the ability to speak in other languages, the Holy Spirit called Saul, an avowed enemy of the Christian church. Barnabas affirmed Saul's call because it seemed unbelievable. Jennings states, "Barnabas became his advocate, proclaiming the mighty acts of God in and through Saul. Saul is freed to be trusted, freed to do his work among the disciples because two testimonies have been joined in unison to declare his new truth – he has been changed."[90] This act of joining Barnabas and Saul's testimony together enabled Saul to be accepted by a church he once persecuted.

Saul and Barnabas part ways, but later Barnabas goes to Tarsus to look for Saul and brings him back to Antioch enabling mentoring to continue. Saul and Barnabas spend a year in

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[88] Willie James Jennings, *Acts: Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 29.
[89] Acts 9:27 (NRSV).
[90] Jennings, *Acts*, 98.

Antioch teaching and preaching among the church.[91] Jennings describes this saying, "Barnabas invites Saul to Antioch. We must never forget the order here. Barnabas invites Paul into the newness of this moment. Together Barnabas and Saul spent a year teaching what they did not fully understand."[92] Mentorship is learning from each other and strengthening each other in faith. Barnabas was Saul's mentor in the faith and in ministry.

Church Sends Missionaries

After Saul and Barnabas spent a year among the people in Antioch, the Holy Spirit inspired a new plan in Acts 13:2-3. "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."[93] Willimon writes, "As usual, they are not 'free agents' moving at their own initiative. This new step in outreach has been declared by the Spirit and confirmed by the church through fasting, praying, and laying-on-of-hands. The Spirit and community work together to set apart some Christians for leadership."[94] Paul and Barnabas matured as leaders in Antioch, and in time the church sent Paul and Barnabas on a mission trip to widen the church's reach proclaiming the Gospel and developing more leaders. Paul and Barnabas mentored leaders in the Antioch church, and also as they traveled to witness to new communities.

Appointing Elders in Each Church

Paul and Barnabas went from community to community developing leaders. Acts 14:23 describes their work of ministry in this way, "And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to

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[91] Acts 11:25-26 (NRSV).
[92] Jennings, *Acts*, 124.
[93] Acts 13:2-3 (NRSV).
[94] Willimon, *Acts*, 123.

believe."[95] They developed leadership in each community and trusted those leaders to lead. I. Howard Marshal, a Scottish New Testament scholar, writes, "The missionaries appointed leaders in each church, here described as *elders*. This is the first reference to elders outside of Jerusalem."[96] Leadership development almost certainly ensured the success of these new communities of faith in Gentile territory. The communities thrived as Paul identified new leaders from within each community and then trusted them to lead it.

Disagreement, Separation, but No Division

Mentorship proved so vital to the early church that one of the first sharp arguments concerned a disagreement about whom to mentor. In Acts 15:37-41, Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them on the next mission trip, but Paul disagreed because John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia. The disagreement became so great that Barnabas took John Mark and went to Cyprus, while Paul chose a new mentee, Silas, to accompany him to Syria and Cilicia.[97]

This could have led to an irredeemable division in the Christian church, but it did not. Though Paul and Barnabas parted ways, both took along a partner to mentor and the ministry of each continued. Although Barnabas disappears from the book of Acts, no evidence suggests Barnabas separated from the rest of the church; instead, the ministry expanded because they went in two separate directions. Willimon writes, "Now there are *two* mission thrusts to the gentiles rather than one. Even dissension among the church's leaders only serves to double the church's mission work."[98] He adds, "Nothing, including human limitations and the need for new young

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[95] Acts 14:23 (NRSV).

[96] I. Howard Marshall, The *Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 241.

[97] Acts 15:37-41 (NRSV).

[98] Willimon, *Acts*, 135.

leaders can stop the movement of the Spirit."[99] This passage is often considered to be the first division of the church, but it did not become a lasting division. The church did not divide with one church following Paul and the other following Barnabas. They agreed to disagree, and mentorship and ministry continued for both leaders. The modern church has much to learn about agreeing to disagree and continuing with the mission of the church.

The Spirit Calls the Marginalized in Society to be Leaders

Acts 16:1-3 describes Timothy as a person of mixed race, being both Jew and Gentile. Timothy's mother was Jewish, but his father was Greek. Timothy had natural connections to both Jewish and Gentile communities but didn't fit into either community fully. In today's culture, people of mixed races have issues of being accepted and included as well. Paul takes the drastic step of having Timothy circumcised so he would be accepted by both the Gentiles and the Jews.[100] Jennings observes, "Timothy is the truth that no people are closed off and completely sealed unto themselves. No people group is beyond the embrace of God, which is not a hypothetical or ephemeral embrace, but an enfleshed embrace. Timothy is a Jew-Gentile-Christian."[101] Timothy is an incarnational model of how a Jew and a Gentile can both be faithful Christians, and that Christian identity is much more important than being a Jew or a Gentile.

Paul continued to develop unexpected leaders in Acts 18:1-3 in that Priscilla was a woman and both Aquila and Priscilla had been forced to leave Rome for political safety. "Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with

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[99] Ibid.
[100] Acts 16:1-3 (NRSV).
[101] Jennings, *Acts*, 153.

them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers."[102] Aquila and Priscilla are

refugees from Rome, fleeing for their lives. Willimon points out, "When Luke later puts

Priscilla's name before Aquila's, it suggests that she had become a leader of the Corinthian

Christians – consistent with Luke's emphasis upon the role of women in the early community."

[103] He developed leadership among all people inclusive of people of mixed race, refugees, and

women, and the church grew at a remarkable rate.

Each Leader in Turn Mentored New Leaders

Paul didn't only develop leadership; the leaders he mentored in turn developed additional

leaders. In Acts 18:24-26 Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos speak and took him aside to explain

to him the way of God.[104] Paul taught leaders who would then teach others in the way of God.

This emphasis on mentorship helped the church grow exponentially during the first few

centuries. Forman, Jones, and Miller write, "The apostolic strategy of reaching the world through

multiplication was an ingenious one. It was a strategy of multiplying not just converts but local

churches as well. In local churches, new believers were established in the faith and equipped to

serve and lead."[105] This was not simply a strategy but a movement of the Holy Spirit. The Holy

Spirit used mentorship to quickly develop new leaders for a rapidly growing church.

Trusting Leaders to Lead

Importantly, Paul trusted mentored leaders to lead. In Acts 20:28-32 Paul meets with the

elders at Ephesus for the last time. He encourages them, and entrusts them to lead as the Spirit

has equipped them. Paul knows this is probably the last time he will see the elders of Ephesus.

He instructs them, "Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit

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[102] Acts 18:1-3 (NRSV).
[103] Willimon, *Acts*, 145.
[104] Acts 18:24-26 (NRSV).
[105] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 23.

has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God."[106] Paul trusts them with the care of the church at Ephesus. He goes on to encourage them, "And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified."[107] Paul commends the elders to build up the community in Christ's love.

Paul warns them that many challenges lie ahead of them. Jennings explains that the Spirit provides the means to meet these challenges in this challenging time in the church's history. He writes, "This space requires disciples willing to live floating in baptismal water, their feet no longer held in place by the soft soil of kinship, empire, family, or even religion. These followers of the savior are held afloat by the Spirit working through love for one another."[108] This community or team of leaders must support each other in love while meeting the challenges of the day.

And most importantly, Paul left the Ephesian elders, empowering them to lead and instructing them to build up the church in love. Ben Witherington III, a New Testament scholar and retired professor, writes, "V. 32 indicates that though the flock has been entrusted to the shepherds, they in turn have been commended to God. The message of God's grace is said to build up these leaders and give them an inheritance among all those who have been sanctified."[109] The early church grew in part because leaders equipped other leaders. The Biblical text suggests that every place Paul and his co-workers went, they mentored others and then left, entrusting these new leaders to lead.

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[106] Acts 20:28 (NRSV).
[107] Acts 20:32 (NRSV).
[108] Jennings, *Acts*, 194.
[109] Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 625.

Paul Wrote Letters with Co-workers

In the epistles attributed to Paul, readers find further evidence of this

mentorship/discipleship model. The first sign of teamwork frequently appears in the salutations.

In seven of Paul's letters, he writes with at least one other person, highlighting that Paul not only

worked alongside but even wrote letters and offered instruction with co-workers.[110] Herschel

Hobbs, a Southern Baptist pastor and New Testament commentator, writes that the inclusion of

Silvanus and Timothy in the greeting of 1 Thessalonians "reflects their relation to the church in

Thessalonica, and the fact that they shared in Paul's concern and agreed with his statements."[111]

His salutations demonstrate Paul's pattern of working and providing guidance alongside a team

of leaders.

Paul Greets Many Co-Workers in the Closing of Letters

The end of each Pauline epistle showcases the wide array of leaders he groomed. While

these verses are often ignored as irrelevant for today's context, they reveal a wide network of

leaders and their connection as the family of God. The most stunning example of this is Romans

16:1-16. In closing Paul names twenty-seven leaders in the church along with some of their

family members. Paul mentions several churches, including a house church and two families.[112]

The connections are immense.[113]

James Edwards, New Testament Scholar and retired professor of theology, writes

concerning this long list of names, "Despite the uncertainty about many of them, the names

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[110] 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1;1, 2 Thessalonians 1;1, Philemon 1:1 (NRSV).

[111] Herschel H. Hobbs, "1-2 Thessalonians" in *The Broadman Bible Commentary Volume 11: 2 Corinthians-Philemon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 263.

[112] Romans 16:1-16 (NRSV).

[113] There has been a lot of debate among scholars about this chapter as to whether Paul originally wrote this as part of the letter, if it was added after he went to Rome, or whether this letter was addressed to other churches as well. Regardless of how this chapter came about, it gives us a glimpse into the vast mentorship going on within the church.

reveal remarkable diversity in early Christianity. Paul mentions 29 persons, 27 of them by name, a full third of whom are women. There are Jewish, Greek and Latin names."[114] This diverse group includes many leaders who would have been marginalized in the context of that day but still were chosen for mentorship and leadership in the church. This is a large group of names, but Edwards notes, "The list testifies to the uniqueness of each member of the community. There is no roster of faceless names (much less numbers), but a naming of persons who were known and valued."[115] These people had been mentored by Paul or others over time, and the mentors formed loving relationships with them by spending time together in ministry. Edwards adds, "This list is a reminder that Romans was not conceived as a bloodless theological tract. It was written to *persons*, and judging from the names, to a very average cross section of persons in first-century Rome."[116] Paul mentored people from various classes, languages, races, genders and he wrote to them. Though Romans warrants deep study because of its rich theological content, Paul wrote this letter to an actual community of faith. Romans affirms that a large and diverse group of people composed Paul's leadership team.

Mentorship in the Letters Written to Churches

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to a church divided by loyalty to different human leaders. Paul heard reports that some were following Paul, some were following Apollos, some were following Cephas, and some were following Christ.[117] These quarrels were threatening to divide the church. As Lyle Vander Broek writes, "This community problem has its immediate origin in illegitimate loyalty to Christian leaders."[118] Paul insists that no human leader, including himself,

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[114] James R. Edwards., *Romans: New International Biblical Commentary,* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 357.

[115] Ibid., 358.

[116] Ibid.

[117] 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 (NRSV).

[118] Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Breaking Barriers: 1 Corinthians and Christian Community* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 33.

is more important than any other. The church must follow Christ alone. All leaders are simply co-workers united in the same mind and purpose of Christ.

Later in the letter, Paul points out that different leaders have performed various tasks, but only God causes growth in God's field. Paul observes that all human leaders are merely servants and are assigned a task by God. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but only God gave the growth. God's servants are called to work together, but God gives the common purpose.[119]

Richard Hays, a New Testament scholar and retired New Testament professor, equates Paul and Apollos to field hands writing, "Thus neither one of them amounts to anything in his own right (v. 7a), because their efforts would be of no avail apart from the direction and empowerment of God. The field hands can only do what they are told to do, but they are utterly powerless to make the seed come to life."[120] All the field hands are servants. Though some have mentored others, leadership in the early church is marked by equality among leaders.

Just as Paul planted and Apollos watered and used different gifts, 1 Corinthians 12 instructs the church about the variety of spiritual gifts. Paul outlines the variety of spiritual gifts of the church and then asks, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?"[121] God gives a variety of gifts and when the church functions as one, all these gifts together bless the community. Hays states, "Every gift of the Spirit is given 'for the common good' (12:7) and must be exercised in the church for the sake of ministry to the whole-community."[122] Each person receives a different spiritual gift or set of gifts, so leadership is best done collaboratively.

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[119] 1 Corinthians 3:3-9 (NRSV).
[120] Richard B. Hays, *1 Corinthians: Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching,* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 52.
[121] 1 Corinthians 12: 28-30 (NRSV).
[122] Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 219.

Mentorship is vital to finding and developing the spiritual gifts which God has given to a community. As leaders "water" and cultivate the gifts of others for use in the church, it becomes obvious that no one can do everything and no one possesses all spiritual gifts. The church must work together to allow the rich variety of gifts to become evident.

The early church developed many co-workers. Paul uses this word in five of his letters[123] to churches as he does in 2 Corinthians 8:23, "As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service; as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ."[124] Witherington observes, "Titus is called Paul's partner, but for the Corinthians he is a coworker (v. 23). This again suggests that Paul saw the Corinthians as his coworkers."[125] Paul considered the entire Corinthian church his "co-workers" which speaks volumes about the importance of mentorship, not just among the leaders, but among an entire congregation.

Leaders in the church have many gifts, yet each gift is important, and we are all connected and called to work together as a team. Ephesians 4:11-16 describes this unity and collaboration. It states the gifts are "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith."[126] The variety of gifts are to be used together to build up the body of Christ. This can only happen with a team of people working together so there is a diversity of gifts. The passage continues, "we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."[127] All members of the church are joined and knit

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[123] Romans, 1 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon (NRSV).
[124] 2 Corinthians 8:22-23 (NRSV).
[125] Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 422.
[126] Ephesians 4:12-13 (NRSV).
[127] Ephesians 4:15-16 (NRSV).

together and bless each other when the diversity of gifts work in unison to build up the body in love.

These gifts are given to the whole church, not just the leaders. Ralph Martin, a New Testament scholar and long-time professor, writes, "There is then an interplay of a regular ministry, ordained and appointed by the head of the church, and the rank and file members, which leads to the desired goal. That is, the end in view is the building up of the body."[128] Each person in the church possesses gifts that need to be developed through encouragement to use the gifts God has given. Mentorship is meant to be done throughout the entire membership of the church because all members have spiritual gifts to be developed.

Mentorship involves more than just sharing wisdom; it sprouts from a close personal relationship. Paul's letter to the Philippians showcases one example of a healthy mentoring relationship. Paul had invested so much time and energy in Timothy that he thought of Timothy as a son. Mentoring can have a huge impact on another person's life and ministry.[129] Quite likely, Paul invested the most time in mentoring Timothy, developing a special place in his heart for Timothy. At the same time, Paul doesn't think of Timothy as somebody "beneath" him, but as a fellow servant. Frank Stagg, a New Testament scholar and author, writes, "Paul likens Timothy to his son in ministry, but he associates himself with Timothy in their servanthood: *he has served with me*."[130] Paul mentors without elevating himself above his mentees; they are truly co-workers.

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[128] Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon: Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching,* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 52.

[129] Philippians 2:19-22 (NRSV).

[130] Frank Stagg, "Philippians" in *The Broadman Bible Commentary Volume 11*, 201.

Mentorship in Letters Written to Individuals

Paul was a teacher of teachers and a mentor of mentors. The letters to Timothy give us insight into his individual mentorship of Timothy. In 1 Timothy 1:5 Paul tells Timothy the purpose of teaching the law. Paul writes, "But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith."[131] Paul showed this love to Timothy in the form of mentorship and he urges Timothy to pass on the love to others. John Calvin writes about this passage, "The law can be summed up as saying that we should worship God with a **pure heart and a good conscience,** and that we should love each other."[132] Paul guides Timothy to look beyond the words of the law and embrace Jesus' re-interpretation of the law using the powerful word "love." Love is at the heart of Christian mentorship: a love for God and a love for one another.

Paul addresses more than doctrine, and he encourages spiritual practices. Paul writes, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity."[133] He lifts up the importance of prayer in mentorship. Calvin writes, "**prayers** should be offered not just for believers, but for everyone."[134] Leaders and the church should pray for the entire community, both those inside and outside the church. Paul encourages prayer for rulers and people in all positions – not to blindly support the state, but in recognition that state decisions affect the life and well-being of the entire community.

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[131] 1 Timothy 1:5 (NRSV).

[132] John Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus: The Crossway Classic Commentaries,* eds. Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 22.

[133] 1 Timothy 2:1-2 (NRSV).

[134] Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 35.

In 1 Timothy 3:8-13 Paul outlines the qualifications to be a deacon. His description invokes character and patterns of conduct. These are key elements in building relationships and mentoring others.[135] Interestingly this list includes character traits and conduct, but it does not include any specific duties of a deacon. H. A. Ironside, a Bible teacher and pastor, writes, "Here we have the qualifications of a deacon. The word *deacon* really means 'servant,' or 'minister,' and a deacon is to take care of the temporal affairs of the church of God."[136] Deacons often oversee a wide array of duties because "temporal affairs" can be interpreted broadly. Yet, the character of a person proves foundational. In addition to having knowledge and being prayerful, deacons must live godly lives. Mentorship moves beyond imparting knowledge to shaping practice for godly living inside and outside the church.

Likewise, 1 Timothy 5:17-22 gives a description of elders or presbyters. Paul describes two kinds of elders, ruling elders and teaching elders, those called to rule and those called to preach and teach. There is also a warning not to ordain anyone hastily and to keep oneself pure.[137] Mentoring new elders requires investing time in a person before ordination to ensure the church is not ordaining hastily. There is an emphasis on character and moral development that is important in this description. John Calvin, the founder of reformed theology, writes, "There are two kinds of presbyters, as not all presbyters were ordained to teach. The straightforward meaning of these words is that some ruled well and honorably but did not hold a teaching office."[138] PC (U.S.A.) polity draws from this passage as teaching elders and ruling elders make

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[135] 1 Timothy 3:8-13 (NRSV).

[136] H.A. Ironside, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon: An Ironside Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1947), 51.

[137] 1 Timothy 5:17-22 (NRSV).

[138] Ibid.

decisions together. A team of co-workers creates order in the church through mutual support, mentoring and learning from each other as they share leadership.

Paul forged relationships with his co-workers, not just through teaching and learning, but by getting to know them on a personal level. This becomes evident as he describes details about their families. For example, in 2 Timothy 1:5-7, Paul tells of how Timothy's faith first lived in his grandmother and mother and now lives in Timothy.[139] Calvin writes, "Paul commends Timothy's faith and that of his mother and grandmother, more to encourage him than to praise him. For when anyone has started well, his progress should be a spur for him to continue further, and these examples from his own family are strong incentives for him to press on."[140] Paul formed and mentored co-workers and, by spending time together, he was well acquainted with many aspects of their lives.

Paul continues to encourage Timothy throughout this letter. In 2 Timothy 3:14-17 Paul encourages Timothy to continue what he has learned and believed. He reminds Timothy that he has known the sacred writings since childhood and that all scripture is inspired by God and is useful in teaching, training, and equipping.[141] These aspects remain important in mentoring because scripture is vital to mentoring within the church. Gordon Fee, a theologian and New Testament professor, comments about these verses, "Thus Paul urges Timothy's loyalty, not only to himself and his own past, but also to the **Scriptures**, because they, too, lead to **salvation**."[142] Paul urges Timothy to be authentic to himself and to what he learned from childhood. Calvin suggested the authority of Scripture distinguishes the Christian church from all other religions

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[139] 2 Timothy 1:5-7 (NRSV).
[140] Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 118.
[141] 2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NRSV).
[142] Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus: New International Biblical Commentary,* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 279.

because Scripture is God-breathed. He writes, "Paul teaches that it is **God-breathed**, for if that is so, it is beyond all question that people should receive it with reverence." [143] Timothy learned this from his grandmother, his mother and from Paul because each one was a mentor to Timothy.

Paul mentored co-workers by shaping them through the words of scripture, and scripture is still formative to leaders of today's church. Each generation has passed on this teaching to the next, and the Holy Spirit continues to work through the God-breathed Word of God. Thus allowing scripture to mold and shape mentees needs to continue to future generations of leaders in the church.

Titus 1:5-6 implicitly highlights this pattern of mentoring and appointing elders in every town in which the co-workers went. "I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious."[144] Paul not only appoints elders in each community, he instructs mentees to do the same thing. Ironside writes, "From verses 5–9 we have instruction given to Titus in regard to ordination of elders. He was to set in order the things that were wanting, organizing the churches in a godly way and ordaining elders in every city by apostolic direction."[145] Like passages from 1 Timothy, this is not a list of duties but qualifications about how elders should live their lives. Mentors identify people who truly embody these traits in their lives, forming lasting relationships with them as the mentees develop as leaders.

Paul writes Philemon to a slave owner urging him to accept one of his slaves as a brother in Christ. This is an example of the diversity of people Paul mentored. Paul calls the slave owner

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[143] Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 155.
[144] Titus 1:5-6 (NRSV).
[145] Ironside, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 166.

Philemon a dear friend and co-worker, but Paul refers to the slave Onesimus as "my child" showing a close connection to Onesimus as well. Paul makes his request in Philemon 8-12; he doesn't command Philemon to do his duty but instead appeals to him on the basis of love. Paul refers to Onesimus as his "own child" and explains how he became "like a father" to Onesimus while they were imprisoned. Paul claims that Onesimus is now useful to both Philemon and Paul.[146]

Martin writes, "This paragraph lies at the center of the letter in every way. It brings Paul to the point. Although he might stand on his dignity and use his authority as Christ's agent (lit., 'ambassador') to urge Philemon to do the right thing in the light of his Christian faith – namely, to take the slave back with clemency – he chooses, rather, to ground his appeal in love."[147] In honoring Paul's recognition of leaders as co-workers, he appeals to Philemon in the equalizing love of Christ rather than issuing demands.

Paul continues this request in Philemon 17-21, urging that if Philemon considers Paul as a partner to please welcome Onesimus in the same way. Paul offers to fix any wrong that Onesimus has caused to Philemon, saying he will repay it. Paul expresses confidence that Philemon will do this and even more than Paul requests.[148] Paul refers to Philemon as a partner. Ray Robbins explains the Greek, "**Partner** translates a Greek word from the same root that is translated 'sharing' in v. 6 – also often translated 'fellowship.' The word partner as used here indicates some peculiar bond of fellowship between Paul and Philemon."[149] He reiterates, "If Philemon would receive Paul as a partner in the spiritual fellowship, he should receive Onesimus

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[146] Philemon 8-12 (NRSV).
[147] Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 143.
[148] Philemon 17-21 (NRSV).
[149] Robbins, "Philemon" in *The Broadman Bible Commentary Volume 11*, 385.

in the same way."[150] Fellowship and partnership suggest a close relationship, one likely developed through a period of mentorship.

The early church's primary model of leadership development was mentorship/discipleship. Through the examples of Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Onesimus, one sees how Paul taught doctrine, encouraged spiritual practices, developed relationships, and trusted leaders to lead. Forman, Jones, and Miller write, "Both Jesus and Paul invested their lives in a few key leaders. Both drew people around them to whom they could pass the baton of leadership." [151] The authors add, "Yet for both, *building character* came first. In Paul's advice on choosing church leaders (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1), the central issue is character."[152] Leadership is to be passed on to other leaders, and mentorship is an effective method of leadership development.

Biblical mentors impart knowledge, cultivate relationships by spending time with people, and trust others to lead. Importantly, mentors then teach others to mentor new leaders. One leader can only mentor a certain number of people, but by encouraging each one to mentor others, exponential growth can occur. The Bible gives the church an effective method for developing future leaders for God's church.

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[150] Ibid., 385-386.
[151] Forman, Jones and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 44-45.
[152] Ibid.

Chapter 3

The Early Church as a Model for Collaborative Ministry

In the current context collaborative ministry seems to be a new concept to many churches. Collaborative ministry is two or more congregations working together in ministry, and in partnering together, each congregation is a blessing to the other congregation(s). Many times, congregations consider this option only because of financial struggles and the inability to find a part-time pastor. Yet this model was the common pattern of leadership in the early church. Today's church can reclaim this model as an effective and faithful pattern. Collaborative ministry "follows the example of St. Paul who often brought the needs of one faith community to another in an effort to build up the body of Christ."[153] These churches can be a blessing to each other as they work together, pray for one another, and share resources and ideas.

This partnership can lead to building up each other's community of faith and to a greater connection to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Yet as Joseph Small writes, "Today, detached churches have become strangers to one another."[154] He adds, "In an age of toleration and doctrinal latitude, each church is now reduced to bearing witness to itself, reinforcing the impression that it is all a matter of personal preference."[155] Collaborative ministry broadens the awareness of congregation members of the joys and struggles of other congregations. It helps to build up each community in love and strengthens the connection to that one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church throughout the world.

Several of the Biblical passages which focus on mentorship/discipleship also inform the concept of collaborative partnership. The concepts of mentorship and collaborative ministry were

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[153] Mogilka and Wiskus, *Pastoring Multiple Parishes*, 31.
[154] Small, *Flawed Church*, 9.
[155] Ibid.

woven together in the early church. Leaders not only raised up new leaders, they then sent them to other communities. The combination of mentorship and collaborative ministry fueled the growth of the early church. "Local churches were the leadership incubators that propelled the explosive expansion of the church from one single church in Jerusalem to thousands of churches, penetrating the known world in just a couple hundred years"[156] write Forman, Jones, and Miller. According to common practice leaders routinely moved from community to community.

The Need for Witnesses Sent Out to the Ends of the Earth

At his ascension, Jesus sent his disciples to be witnesses throughout the world. The book of Acts records their movement from community to community, forming leaders in each place as they went.[157] Leaders moved between communities[158] as the early church viewed each community as part of the one church of Jesus Christ. Mark Mogilka and Kate Wiskus observe, "It is through collaboration, guided by the Spirit, that the early church flourished."[159] Later they write, "The Gospel accounts of Jesus' instructions to the disciples, as well as the accounts of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles and in the epistles, clearly establishes collaboration as the model of ministry."[160]

Leaders Move From Church to Church

The early church used a collaborative model of leadership which originated in Jesus' words before he ascended to heaven. He said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."[161] This sending continues as first the church in Jerusalem sent witnesses to

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[156] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 23.
[157] Acts 6:5-6, 14:23 (NRSV).
[158] Acts 17:14, 19:22, 20:1-6 (NRSV).
[159] Mogilka and Wiskus, *Pastoring Multiple Parishes*, 31.
[160] Ibid., 42.
[161] Acts 1:8 (NRSV).

form new churches, and subsequently each of these communities continued to send witnesses to new communities. There was a sense that all communities were connected because of shared leadership and this constant sending out of leaders. The disciples see themselves as sent-out people, called to be witnesses to the ends of the earth and united in Jesus Christ. Ben Witherington III says, Acts 1:8 "also announces one of, if not the major, theme(s) of Acts. Witnesses, empowered by the Holy Spirit, are sent out from Jerusalem in various directions."[162] This model of sending out leaders to be witnesses created a sense of collaboration and connection between churches as these witnesses went from place to place. It started with the disciples, and later Paul coordinated sending leaders to different communities because they viewed all the communities as the one church of Christ.

The theme of being sent occurs in the conversion story of Paul. After Saul's dramatic encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, God sent Ananias to pray for Saul and announce his conversion: "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name *before the Gentiles and kings and before the people Israel;[163]* I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."[164] The wide geographic span echoes Jesus' direction to the disciples before he ascended, as well as the proclamation on the day of Pentecost. God specifically sends Saul to be a witness to the Gentiles. Witherington writes, "He is to be God's instrument of election 'to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel.' The order of this list is odd but no doubt intentional, and it anticipates what is said to Saul directly in Acts 22:15 and 26:16-18. By this remark, Luke indicates the comprehensive

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[162] Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 111.
[163] Italics mine.
[164] Acts 9:15-16 (NRSV).

scope of Saul's commission."[165] Saul, soon to be Paul, quickly started proclaiming the good news in many different communities.

Paul Sent by the Holy Spirit and a Faith Community

Acts 13 opens with prophets and teachers worshiping as the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them."[166] The church then conducts a commissioning service including the laying of hands to send them off, an example of the collaborative leadership model. William Willimon writes, "The Spirit and the community work together to set apart some Christians for leadership."[167] The community of faith in Antioch sends missionaries to develop congregations in other communities. Both the Spirit and community are vital to the collaborative model.

Barnabas and Paul begin a whirlwind tour of numerous towns and locations sent to proclaim the word of God in synagogues. Even while they meet resistance at many places, they develop believers and, eventually, leaders at each location. Their ministry becomes an extension of the church at Antioch since they were sent by the Spirit through that community of faith. The early church embraced the idea of sending people to bear witness to the good news of the Gospel.

While following this call to a new region in Cyprus, even Saul's name changes to convey his wider missionary scope and here he is first called by his Roman name of Paul. Paul Walaskay, former professor and dean of faculty at Union Presbyterian Seminary, notes, "It is not incidental that at the start of Paul's first missionary journey, on a Roman island in the middle of

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[165] Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 319.
[166] Acts 13:2 (NRSV).
[167] Willimon, *Acts of the Apostles*, 123.

the Mediterranean Sea, Saul the Jewish Christian is now known as Paul the Roman citizen."[168]

Paul and Barnabas report back from this mission trip to the church which commissioned them.[169]

Walaskay states, "There they gave a progress report to church," adding this "was the beginning

of a one-way journey into a totally new understanding of what God had willed for the human

race."[170] God was up to something new not just in one community but in many communities, and

shared leadership was part of this new thing to which the Spirit had led them. They commission

and send leaders to create new communities; these new leaders are connected because they had

the same mentor in Paul.

Planting New Churches and Developing New Leaders

As Joseph Hellerman writes, "After establishing congregations in Lystra, Iconium, and

Pisidian Antioch, for example, Paul and Barnabas 'appointed elders in every church' (Acts

14:23)."[171] In his initial missionary trips, Paul planted congregations in many communities,

fulfilling the Spirit's call through the commissioning community of faith to bring Jesus' name

before the Gentiles.

As time went on, Paul's stays became much longer, and he spent time not just witnessing,

but building up leaders in each community of faith. While Paul was in Corinth "he found a Jew

named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla."[172]

Paul sought them out and spent time with them because they practiced the same trade of

tentmaking. He shared life with them, and both became effective leaders through this

relationship.[173]

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[168] Paul W. Walaskay, *Acts: Westminster Bible Companion*, (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 127.

[169] Acts 14:26-28 (NRSV).

[170] Walaskay, *Acts*, 140.

[171] Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry*, 193.

[172] Acts 18:2 (NRSV).

[173] 1 Corinthian 16:9 (NRSV).

Later Silas and Timothy came to Corinth, and the church again shared leadership and sent leaders from place to place.[174] When Paul initially left Corinth Aquila and Priscilla went with him to Syria; later Paul left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, providing another example of shared collaborative leadership.[175] While Aquila and Priscilla were in Ephesus, a Jew named Apollos, who had been trained in the way of the Lord, came and spoke, but Pricilla and Aquila corrected Apollos and explained the "Way of God" more accurately.[176] Here leaders whom Paul developed, now develop and mentor new leaders for the shared ministry of the church. Paul frequently orchestrates the moves as leaders relocate from one community to another.[177] This strengthened the web of connection as Paul choreographed their movement.

Apollos left Ephesus to become a leader in Corinth while Paul went to Ephesus.[178] Churches worked together by continually and willingly sending leaders and willingly receiving new leaders. Communities did not compete but helped build each other up by staying connected. The steady movement of leaders ensured churches were not following one specific human leader but were following the Spirit, united in the name of Jesus Christ.

This model of leadership development was meant to allow churches to thrive even after Paul moved on to the next community. Jim Mynor says Paul's "multi-church ministry resulted in dramatic and lasting growth" and later he adds, "Paul's strategy was about growth after he left, not just about survival. Why should we expect less today?"[179] Scripture reveals Paul cared about the future of each community of faith he helped to lead. He prayed for and continued to support each community so that they could thrive in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Paul continued to help

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[174] Acts 18:5 (NRSV).
[175] Acts 18:19 (NRSV).
[176] Acts 18:26 (NRSV).
[177] 1 Corinthians 16:5-12; Ephesians 6:21-22; Colossians 4:1-9 (NRSV).
[178] Acts 19:1 (NRSV).
[179] Jim Mynor quoted by Amiel Osmaston "Leadership models and skills" in *Reshaping Rural Ministry*, 64.

each community after he left including moving leaders from place to place, further knitting together the larger church.[180] God gave the church the gift of unity, and the various communities of faith received that gift and flourished by working together to provide leadership.

Writing Letters to Churches

In the early church a network of leaders worked to communicate with one another and stay connected.[181] The only way to communicate was in person. One could write a letter, but without a mail system, it had to be sent with somebody. Information traveled by word of mouth, and Paul and other leaders heard of situations developing in communities to which they had ministered. After hearing news, Paul often wrote a letter to build up the church in love, not to question the current leadership.

In the closing of the letter to the Colossians Paul writes, "Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts."[182] Paul sends the letters with co-workers to read out loud to the churches, with a plan that they will stay, build relationships, and develop new leaders while they are there. The connection was both in the letter and in the messenger whom Paul sent to deliver the letter.

Colossians notes that yet another co-worker, Tychicus, will accompany Onesimus, "the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here."[183] Sending letters is also an opportunity to send co-workers to different churches. Martin writes, "More important, no doubt, Tychicus (a Pauline travel companion, according to Acts 20:4, and a

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[180] Acts 18:5-19:1; 1 Corinthians 16:5-12; Ephesians 6:21-22; Colossians 4:1-9 (NRSV).
[181] Romans 16:1-16 (NRSV).
[182] Colossians 4:7-8 (NRSV).
[183] Colossians 4:9 (NRSV).

visitor to Ephesus, according to II Tim. 4:12) is the partner in this task with Onesimus, who with

Paul and his master Philemon is one the chief characters in the letter addressed to Philemon."[184]

Paul Cared for Each of the Connected Congregations

Paul writes, "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ

Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord

Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace to you from God our Father and

the Lord Jesus Christ."[185] There are several things to note in this greeting. First, the joy and

thanksgiving expressed as Paul calls them "saints together with all those who in every place."[186]

This emphasizes the unity of the church in every community. Richard Hays writes, "Paul places

the church at Corinth and its particular concerns within a much wider story, encouraging them to

see themselves as part of a network of communities of faith stretching around the Mediterranean

world."[187] Connection was emphasized, and leaders moved from place to place showing the "real

life" connection between churches. Hays observes "Everything that follows [the salutation] is

founded upon these identity ascriptions: God is the one who *calls*, and the church, not just at

Corinth but everywhere, is the community of people who respond by *calling* on the name of

Jesus Christ."[188] Although this letter was written to the Christian community of that time, this

letter is also God's word to the modern church.

Philippians recalls a similar pattern, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi,

with the bishops and deacons. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus

Christ."[189] Again Paul uses the joyful and affirming word *saints*. Notice this letter is addressed to

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[184] Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 130.
[185] 1 Corinthians 1:2-3 (NRSV).
[186] 1 Corinthians 1:2 (NRSV).
[187] Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 16-17.
[188] Ibid., 17.
[189] Philippians 1:1b-2 (NRSV).

the plural of bishops or overseers and deacons supporting that this letter was written to several house churches in the city and surrounding area. Hellerman prefers the translation of *overseers* rather than *bishops*. He writes, "What we have in Philippians 1:1 is a reference to two groups of leaders – overseers and deacons – who provided oversight to local Christian congregations during the formative years of early church history."[190] In verse two the same greeting appears, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." [191] This greeting commonly recurs in Paul's epistles, emphasizing that Jesus Christ unites the church in collaborative ministry. Paul uses this same greeting in multiple letters to emphasize that all communities share the same identity in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians has a remarkably similar greeting, "To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father."[192] The greeting showed a close familial connection between members, among leaders, and between congregations. These letters were sent by messengers and meant to be read to the congregations. Paul would hand-choose the messengers as well.[193] These messengers were typically leaders in the church of Jesus Christ, so sending messengers was another way that leaders moved from community to community. This mobile model of leadership was the original model, handed down by Jesus.[194]

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[190] Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry*, 127.
[191] Philippians 1:2 (NRSV).
[192] Colossians 1:2 (NRSV).
[193] Ephesians 6:21-22; Colossians 4:1-9 (NRSV).
[194] Jesus traveled from place to place proclaiming the good news of the gospel. Jesus sent people out to be witnesses as well just as he sent out his disciples two by two in Mark 6:6-13.

The Church Was More Than Just a Local Congregation

Galatians is addressed "To the churches of Galatia,"[195] many churches gathered in the area. Romans is addressed "To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints."[196] All God's beloved included all believers in the large city of Rome and surrounding areas. At the end of Paul's letter to the Colossians he instructs, "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans."[197] Each of these letters was addressed to multiple churches, all connected in the name of Jesus Christ. They shared letters and leaders, as the churches worked together as one larger collaborative ministry team.

Joseph Small discusses how the contemporary church in North America lives in competition between congregations, while the early church operated very differently. He writes, "New Testament letters are replete with references that both assume and encourage inter-relationships among Christian communities scattered throughout the Roman empire."[198] These letters were for the entire church, hence they became part of the canon. They served as unifying letters showcasing connections between communities.

Small emphasizes how the early church did not view itself as separate congregations. "The gathered congregation *is* one, holy, catholic, apostolic church but not of itself alone – as if it were a solitary, self-sufficient ecclesia" he writes. "The gathered congregation *is* the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church *only* in its essential communion with the Lord and therefore its communion with other gathered congregations."[199] The early church fully understood this concept of being connected to the entire Christian church. The twenty-first century church has

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195 Galatians 1:2b (NRSV).
196 Romans 1:7a (NRSV).
197 Colossians 4:16. (NRSV).
198 Small, *Flawed Church, Faithful God*, 63.
199 Ibid., 44.

divided so many times it may fail to comprehend the unity to which God still calls the church to even today.

Christ as Head of the Church

Paul's repeated imagery of the church as one body with Christ as the head allowed congregations to share leaders who moved from place to place. Jesus holds the church together, not any human leader. Still, the churches struggled with this concept at times.

Directly following the greeting in Galatians Paul writes, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing and want to pervert the gospel of Christ."[200] Charles Cousar, a New Testament professor and Presbyterian pastor, writes, "It may be well at the outset to note that from the time of the New Testament onward the problem of authority has been a serious one in the life of the church."[201] Authority does not rest with human leadership, but authority rests in Jesus Christ. Yet human leaders are continuously tempted to be the authority figures in place of Jesus. Paul suggests the only real authority in the church is Jesus Christ; everyone else is a co-worker serving the Lord.

Paul reiterates, "For I want you to know, brothers and sisters that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."[202] Paul corrects the Galatians on the source of true authority in the church, namely Jesus Christ. Frank Matera, former New Testament professor and scholar, writes, "the gospel is not of human origin (*kata anthropon*). This theme, the divine origin of the gospel, is foundational for everything Paul will say in this

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[200] Galatians 1:6-7 (NRSV).
[201] Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians: Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching,* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 19.
[202] Galatians 1:11-12 (NRSV).

letter."[203] The gospel is a gift from God and not of human origin. Paul instructed the church to follow Jesus Christ rather than humans. This concept allows for shared leadership in the church because no matter who the human leader is, Jesus Christ is the head of the church.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to a church that was experiencing division based on human leadership. Directly following the greeting Paul writes, "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose."[204] "Everything that follows, especially 1 Corinthians 1:11 – 4:21, must be understood as an elaboration of this appeal. Paul, writing to a community torn by divisions (*schismata*), calls for unity"[205] writes Richard Hays. Paul makes this appeal to them not using his own name or authority but in Jesus' name and under Jesus' authority.

Paul had heard that some of the Corinthians followed Paul, others Apollos, others Cephas, and others Christ.[206] Paul heard the Corinthians were dividing by loyalty to human leaders. Lyle Vander Broek writes, "The Corinthians have divided themselves into groups," and he adds, "This community has its immediate origin in an illegitimate loyalty to Christian leaders. People 'belong' to their leaders (1:12, 3:4) and boast in them (3:21) in a way that makes them critical of other leaders, including Paul, and hence causes splits in the church.[207]

In response, Paul pushes them toward the authority of Jesus Christ writing, "Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"[208] Hays writes, "The first of these questions ('Has Christ been divided?') would be precisely translated,

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[203] Frank J. Matera, *Galatians: Sacra Pagina Series Vol. 9,* Daniel J. Harrington, ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 55.
[204] 1 Corinthians 1:10 (NRSV).
[205] Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 21.
[206] 1 Corinthians 1:11-11-12 (NRSV).
[207] Vander Broek, *Breaking Barriers*, 33.
[208] 1 Corinthians 1:13 (NRSV).

'Has Christ been divided up and parceled out?' The community's dissension has created an absurd situation, Paul suggests, in which Christ is treated as a commodity or a possession to be haggled over.'[209] Paul claims the church belongs to Jesus Christ and nobody else. Paul includes himself in these loyalties, emphasizing that Jesus Christ is the one they were called to follow.

God Calls Churches to be Connected to One Another

Leaders were shared between communities, and churches prayed and supported one another. Many of the communities Paul wrote had a network of several house churches within a community. Even more house churches existed in the outlying communities. These churches worked together in ministry and not in competition.

This concept of "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" articulated in the Nicene Creed[210] relates to the Greek word *koinonia*. Small observes that *koinonia* is frequently used in the New Testament and can be translated as *communion, fellowship, participation, partnership, sharing, contribution,* or *taking part*.[211] He writes, "*Koinonia* is a theological reality before it is an ecclesiological possibility; communion is a statement about God and God's way in the world before it is a statement about the church and its way in the world."[212] The early church lived out the intimacy conveyed by *koinonia* in a much more real way than today's divided Christian church.

In 2 Corinthians 8:16-22 Paul sends Titus along with two co-workers to accept an offering within the Gentile churches.[213] This offering was collected by the Gentile churches to support the poor in Jerusalem. There was one church and the Gentile churches supported and

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[209] Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 23.
[210] "The Nicene Creed" was written in 325.
[211] Ibid., 67.
[212] Ibid., 69.
[213] 2 Corinthians 8:16-19 (NRSV).

were connected to the Jerusalem churches. Witherington comments, "Paul is sending with Titus two companions (vv. 18 and 22) – one who is praised 'in the gospel' (v. 18)."[214] These two are sent to many churches, presumably authorized by the Jerusalem church, highlighting the connection and collaboration among all the churches. Of the one who has been "given the gift of proclaiming the gospel" Witherington observes, "He is said to be praised 'in all the *ekklesiai*,' which may mean all of Paul's 'congregations,' but the context suggests a wider reference."[215] The *ekklesiai* here most likely refers to the one Body of Christ including both Gentiles and Jews.[216]

Paul solicited this offering to support the broader church, not the local congregation. He encouraged generosity writing, "Each of you must give as you made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."[217] This offering supported the connectional nature of the early church. Ralph Martin asserts, "But such help is clearly set in the framework of thanksgiving to God (vv 11, 12, 15), and a demonstration of concern that promotes the oneness of believers in Judea and Paul's missionary sphere, his 'field' of evangelistic and pastoral opportunities."[218] This offering emphasized profound connection, collaboration, and compassion among people who were very different from each other.

Building Up the Body of Christ

Paul powerfully illustrates an ecclesiology that transcends gender, ethnicity, and social status. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into

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[214] Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth*, 422.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Acts 8:24 (NRSV).
[217] 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NRSV).
[218] Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians: Word Biblical Commentary Volume 40* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 295-296.

one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."[219] He

addresses a church fractured by misplaced loyalty to human leaders. The image suggests the

benefits of diverse leaders and gifts. The one Spirit will make the many, one.

Other divisions plagued the Corinthian church. For example, some people were

welcomed to the Lord's Supper while there was nothing left for others.[220] Some spiritual gifts

were being lifted above others, yet the passage notes that each part of the body is important and

necessary for the functioning of the whole body.[221] In this model of church leadership each part

of the body is important, and all parts work collaboratively together with no one left out. Then

Paul points them to the "still more excellent way" of love. [222] Vander Broek states, "Love is more

basic in the Christian life than spiritual gifts; it governs the use of those gifts and indeed all

relations in Christian community."[223]

Love marks the more excellent godly way, and love is to be the way in the church. Paul

promotes connection and collaboration while urging churches and followers to build each other

up in love. This extended within churches and among churches. He asserts the many are now

one, so there is one body of Christ, not several bodies of Christ, working together in love.

While 1 Corinthians issues the call to unity within a community of faith, Ephesians seems

to emphasize the unity of the church universal. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you

were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and

Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."[224] This passage affirms that each

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[219] 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (NRSV).
[220] 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 (NRSV).
[221] 1 Corinthians 12:14-30 (NRSV).
[222] 1 Corinthians 12:31b (NRSV).
[223] Vander Broek, *Breaking Barriers*, 134-135.
[224] Ephesians 4:4-6 (NRSV).

church or community of faith is part of the one body. Ralph Martin writes, "In a series of

creedlike formulations the meaning of [*unity of the Spirit]* is unpacked."[225]

Martin observes that this may be an allusion to baptism with the chief elements of a

confession of faith made in a baptismal rite of initiation.[226] The repeated use of "one"

emphasizes the concept that the confession affirms one church to which every community and

person of faith belongs. Martin adds, "When Christians come together across the divided fences

of their denominational allegiances they find they have more in common than they suspected.

They meet not to create unity but to confess it."[227]

This passage almost certainly informed the Nicene Creed, the earliest Christian creed

drafted in 325 A.D. Like Ephesians, the Nicene Creed repeats the word "one," referring to one

God, one Lord, one Being with the Father, one holy catholic and apostolic Church, and one

baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Even now this is the creed that most unifies the global church

as churches in both the Eastern and Western theological streams claim it.

This passage in Ephesians closes with these words, "But speaking the truth in love, we

must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body,

joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working

properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."[228] This passage stresses that

the whole church was truly connected together in the early church.[229] This model of ministry

maintained and emphasized unity across all boundaries. As Small notices, "The astonishing

inclusivity of the early church was itself a proclamation of the gospel," and he adds, "It was as

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[225] Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 48.
[226] Ibid., 48-49.
[227] Ibid., 49.
[228] Ephesians 4:15-16 (NRSV).
[229] Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27; Ephesians 4:12; Colossians 2:17 (NRSV).

the body birthed *by* Christ, the body *in* Christ, and the body *of* Christ, that the church proclaimed Christ by displaying the birth of a new community in and for the world."[230] This newly birthed community was an inclusive network of communities of faith which were connected through Jesus Christ as the head of the church.

They lived into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church in a real way. Communities were encouraged to pray for each other following "the example of St. Paul who often brought the needs of one faith community to another in an effort to build up the body of Christ."[231] Collaborative ministry was the heartbeat of the early church. Jesus developed leaders and sent them to other communities. Paul developed leaders and sent them; in turn, the people Paul mentored also mentored others and sent them out.

Mentorship and collaboration functioned in tandem. In 2 Timothy 2:1-2 Paul instructs "my child" Timothy to follow his lead: "and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others."[232] Mentorship leads to collaboration. As John Calvin writes, "Paul realized that the Gospel could easily die out if it was not spread widely by many ministers."[233] The development of more leaders allowed the Gospel to be spread collaboratively in the early church as they viewed the whole church as *one united body*.

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[230] Small, *Flawed Church, Faithful God*, 184.
[231] Mogilka and Wiskus, *Pastoring Multiple Parishes*, 106.
[232] 2 Timothy 2:1-2 (NRSV).
[233] Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 130.

Chapter 4

Mentorship – Starting at Ground Level in Congregations

Mentorship is understood as the intentional one-on-one development of future church leaders. Mentorship needs to begin at the ground level in congregations, but it also needs to happen at higher levels of government in the church. Today fewer potential pastoral candidates are looking for new calls, especially candidates willing to serve in small, rural communities. In 2012 there were 21,064 ministers in the PC (U.S.A.)[234] compared to only 18,458 ministers in 2021.[235] Identifying new candidates for ministry must become a priority. While presbyteries can talk about leadership development, unless it happens at the congregational level, the church will still face a shortage of possible candidates because identifying gifts needs to happen locally. Though mentorship at the congregational level seems inherently Presbyterian, most congregations have forgotten its importance.

Moreover, a vacuum of leadership exists within many communities of faith. Elders and deacons stay in the same leadership positions for years, even asking for exceptions from the presbytery to serve beyond the term limits set by the *Book of Order* or congregational by-laws. Instead of equipping potential successors, many leaders remain in a position because they don't believe there is anybody to replace them – which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy![236] Mentorship would help them equip somebody to take their place. Biblically, leadership is not designed to be held forever but to be passed on to the next generation of leaders. Local churches

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[234] Office of the General Assembly Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "2012 Comparative Summaries," https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/2012_comparative_summaries_.pdf (accessed on 03/14/23).

[235] Ibid.

[236] I served a congregation where being on session was expected to be a life-time election. People were hesitant to become an elder because it was for life. The church asked for exceptions from the presbytery every year. There were other members to replace them, but this was the accepted practice of this congregation.

need to reclaim the training of new leaders as a core value of congregational life and mission. This has been at the heart of the church from its inception.

Reclaiming a Biblical Leadership Model

Leadership models in the current church, however, are seldom based on Biblical or theological models as business models have taken precedence. Hellerman observes, "The business model typically assigns the pastor as sole authority, as the CEO of an institution with a board of directors (generally called elders or deacons) whose ecclesiology is often marked more by the values of the *Wall Street Journal* than by the letters of Paul."[237] This focus on business has caused the church to focus on attendance, buildings, and budgets as opposed to actual ministry and the proclaiming of the Good News to the world. The modern church has forgotten about Jesus' Great Commission which should remain our mission, along with the leadership model of mentorship that propelled the early church forward.

The church of today will be wise to reclaim the effective leadership model that led to exponential growth in the early church. This leadership model remains simple; it consists of individual discipleship and mentorship. Jesus taught his disciples, and they in turn, went out and developed new leaders through apprenticeship or learning on the job. Paul developed leaders in each community he served and encouraged his co-workers to do the same. "Local churches were the leadership incubators that propelled the explosive expansion of the church from a single church in Jerusalem to thousands of churches, penetrating the known world in just a couple of hundred years."[238] This did not happen at a denominational level, because there were no denominations in the early church. Although there are hints in 1 Corinthians 1:11-17 of the factionalism that would presage later denominationalism – and other texts reveal tensions in the

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[237] Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry*, 17.
[238] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 23.

early church (Gal 2:11-14; Acts 15, etc.) – in its earliest expressions, the Church was formally

one. Unfortunately, the business model has permeated denominations and judicatories, and the

mentorship model has largely been forgotten or used on a very short-term basis.

Joseph Small claims that the nature of the English language leads to confusion about the

word *church*. "Unlike many others, English does not distinguish among the realities as diverse as

buildings, congregations, denominations, and global institutions."[239] Small concludes that

"*church* has become simply synonymous with 'religious institution.'"[240] This emphasis on

institution is neither Biblically nor theologically based. Yet the church is further institutionalized

as congregations rely on universities, seminaries, and denominations to train new leaders rather

than cultivating them from within.

Mentorship: The Leadership Model of the Early Church

Mentorship is, first and foremost, rooted in relationships. This goes directly to our reason

for being, as God created humans to be relational creatures, that is, to live in relationship with

God and one another. Rowland Forman, coauthor of *The Leadership Baton,* defines mentoring as

an "*intentional spiritual friendship*."[241] He identifies this intentional spiritual friendship as the

kind of relationship Jesus maintained with his disciples and Paul enjoyed with his co-workers.

The word *co-worker* was "Paul's favorite word to describe those with whom he served."[242] Paul

seems to have never acted as a "lone ranger" in ministry. He consistently led with a team

approach. Though he was a mentor, Paul was also a co-worker with many people.

Mentoring must be carefully and intentionally incorporated into every aspect of a

church's life so that leadership will be implicitly expected to pass from one person to another.

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[239] Small, *Flawed Church, Faithful God*, 1.

[240] Ibid., 2.

[241] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 101.

[242] Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry*, 195.

Just as Paul was a mentor who equipped others to lead, so the leaders of today's congregations need to embrace mentoring and make it a priority. Spiritual friendships help effectively develop new leaders. Incorporating mentorship into a pastor's job description will help prioritize its value. "For mentoring to be ingrained in the culture of the church, it must begin with the senior pastor."[243] Since the pastor cannot mentor everybody in the congregation, mentorship needs to be introduced as a core congregational value – one that likely entails a change in the culture of the congregation and priorities of the pastor. Otherwise "it never becomes a core value in the church's culture."[244]

Mentoring Starts with the Key Leaders of the Church

Ideally a pastor begins the mentoring process with the session or governing board because leaders of the congregation gain ownership in the process. Spiritual friendship is not "getting the session or council to buy into a vision," but a group of leaders working together as the Spirit leads them to mentor others. "What emerges from the process is not just one person's vision but a vision that taps into the collective wisdom of the group."[245] While each mentoring relationship must be organic to its context, the basis of the process will be "spiritual friendship." The process might look different in smaller or larger churches, but it must be based on relationships as well as on the context of that particular community of faith.

Too often, congregations find leaders in the church by finding "the next warm body" or the first person who says "yes." A preferred option would be a Biblically based process in which the council developed mentorship in their particular context and circumstance. Many leaders in the church suggest the hardest thing they do is asking somebody to take their place. That happens

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[243] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 167.

[244] Ibid.

[245] Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry*, 136.

because churches don't cultivate a process for developing new leadership. People are asked to serve with no leadership development and then assume a position for which they have no training.[246] Yet the mentorship process doesn't have to be complicated.

Identifying Each Leader's Mentor

Paul's system of leadership was not complicated; it was simply based on relationships and friendships. Mentorship often comes down to the rudiments of officer training faithfully offered plus the loyalty and conscientiousness that friendship inspires: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."[247] All leaders should be challenged to recognize their leadership is temporary and to identify potential successors whom they might mentor. For the mentorship process to work best, each leader needs at least one "Paul" (a spiritual mentor), at least one "Barnabas" (a spiritual co-worker), and at least one "Timothy" (a future leader). The process may vary from place to place, but each person would be expected not only to identify a potential new leader but to mentor that future leader into the position – basically teaching leaders to pass the baton to the next leader.

This supports the concept that the church is a community of leaders: the body of Christ with Jesus Christ as the head. Relationships are at the heart of this leadership development process. Paul was a spiritual mentor to many leaders throughout the church; each contemporary leader has also been mentored by somebody. Encourage each leader to name at least one person

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[246] I know a church in which a clerk of session had served in that role as long as anyone could remember. Nobody else in the congregation knew anything about what she did as clerk. She suddenly was diagnosed with cancer and passed away. This led to a vacuum of leadership within the congregation. Someone new assumed the position but with no training and nobody to mentor them. Mentorship allows congregations to spread leadership around the congregation so there is always more than one person who knows each leadership position.

[247] 2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV).

who has mentored them personally in the faith and in leadership, whether a pastor, elder,

relative, or other individual who has helped them in their spiritual journey.

It often proves vital for church leaders to know somebody whom they trust enough to

seek advice in times of struggle. Mentorship should not be forced, rather a relationship forms

naturally over time. Ultimately, the goal should be a culture in which mentorship is intentionally

practiced in a network of spiritual friendships. But the first step in this process is for each leader

to have a mentor.

Building a Team of Leaders

The second part of this model is building a team of leaders. Barnabas took Saul under his

wing after his conversion and Barnabas spoke up for Saul in front of the disciples.[248] They then

became co-workers and supported each other in ministry.[249] Such intentional relationships

among leaders are vital to a Biblically based mentorship model; Paul always worked as part of a

team of leaders. While this can take many forms, leaders need to spend time hearing each other's

concerns and prayer requests, praying together, and sharing a meal together. Fellowship is

important in developing deep spiritual friendships. It should not be merely part of a business

meeting, but leaders should designate intentional time to be true colleagues in ministry. This is

time well spent to build each other up in love.[250]

Congregational leaders must remember they are called to be spiritual leaders within the

church, not just those who make the business decisions. To reclaim this important role of being a

spiritual leader, spending time in God's Word, prayer, and building relationships needs to be a

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[248] Acts 9:26-27 (NRSV).

[249] Acts 11:25-26 (NRSV).

[250] I once moderated a session in which each elder had an individual agenda, which would be topics of contention at every session meeting. This was persistent until the session was forced to work as a team to serve a community Thanksgiving meal. This hands-on experience helped them realize their need to work together as co-workers instead of pushing personal agendas to get their own way. The culture of the session meetings changed after this.

primary focus, not an afterthought. Being a team entails more than a devotional and a prayer at the beginning of a business meeting; it means getting to know one another and supporting one another through the joys and concerns of life. It requires commitment, faithful attendance, and participation in the important work of team building. The teamwork of the early church leaders should be the example. Though the process of team building will be different in every context, it is vitally important to find regular team building activities that work for the council.

Each Leader Is Asked to Find Somebody to Whom They May Pass the Leadership Baton

The third part of this process is crucial but often seems to be the most difficult: Each leader should be expected to find a person to mentor. As described in 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul's key strategy was to mentor people who would mentor more new leaders. This was a reason the early church grew so rapidly, since Paul could not have trained enough leaders by himself. Paul did not grasp the reigns of control too tightly, sharing leadership with others. Forman, Jones and Miller write, "Nearly two thousand years ago Jesus handed the baton to his disciples."[251] They add, "Just as important as running a good race was passing the baton to others. As Timothy, for example, received the baton from Paul, he understood that his job was to look for others to whom he would pass the baton."[252] This ideal should be incorporated into every position in the church. This will change the way leadership is handed on in the church, so it will take some time. Yet starting with key leaders in the church sets the leadership process in motion.

When leaders hold on to positions for many years, other members do not engage in church leadership and may feel they are not needed. There are people in every congregation who would be willing to serve as a leader with an invitation and the right training to equip them for

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[251] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 21.
[252] Ibid.

the job – but who are not willing just to be "the next warm body." How much more willing they might be if they knew they were called and intentionally being prepared for eventual leadership!

Reasons People Hold on to Leadership

There are several reasons why people hold on to leadership positions, including the desire to have power and control. They take pride and ownership in the church, but scripture warns that only Christ is to be the head of the church rather than any human leader. All leaders are temporary in the church, no matter how long they stay. Many churches are over one hundred years old, and leaders have come and gone, but Christ remains the head of the church.[253] To ensure leadership is passed on to others, the *Book of Order* prescribes term limits for elders and deacons. A change in leadership fosters healthy congregations as does a sabbatical rest for officers after six consecutive years in any office.

Presuming that nobody else will step up to take the position makes space for egotism and overlooks the gifts in the body of Christ that only await nurturing. Carl George claims, "The typical church involves about 10 percent of its people in public leadership."[254] This means that ninety percent of people in a typical church are potential leadership candidates. It is a myth that nobody will replace leaders in the church. The basic phases of mentoring are "identification of future leaders, imitation, instruction, involvement, and release."[255] Each one of these phases is vital to the development of future leaders.[256]

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[253] Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 2:18-19 (NRSV).

[254] Carl George, *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership* (Mansfield, PA: Kingdom, 1997), 54-55.

[255] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 102.

[256] In mentoring numerous elders and others over the course of my ministry, I've found this 5-phase mentorship model to be particularly helpful. I draw from it here.

Identification[257]

Paul states that human leaders are not to be the head of the church in 1 Corinthians 3:7-8, "So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building."[258] We need to remember that we are all God's servants, and it is God's field and God's building. God uses all members to build up the body in love. Part of building up the body in love is passing leadership along to the next person, ensuring that no group grows overly dependent on a human leader. Claiming Jesus as head of the church, leaders should faithfully pass the baton of leadership to other co-workers, trusting that Jesus Christ will continue to lead.

This first phase is one of the most challenging and critical, namely, that the mentor act as talent scout.[259] Every leader must be looking for potential new leaders within the congregation. This may take some time and encouragement, knowing that new leaders need to be mentored and brought alongside for hands-on experience. Leaders are not necessarily seeking somebody who has every gift and skill necessary to immediately fill the leadership role, but instead somebody who might be willing to be mentored. Often these people just need to be asked. The other factor for mentorship to be successful is a good fit between the mentor and mentee, since true mentorship only takes place if it springs from a good and healthy relationship.

As leaders scan the congregation for future leaders, they should first consider those who are dedicated, yet are not presently involved with leadership in the church, including those who

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[257] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 102.
[258] 1 Corinthians 3:7-9 (NRSV).
[259] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 102.

attend worship regularly but have not found a place to serve. They should also stay open-minded, since God often chooses unexpected people to lead. Saul of Tarsus, for example, was known by many to be an enemy of the church, yet God chose him to be a key leader in the early church. Once potential leaders are identified, it is often necessary to advocate for the mentee as Barnabas did for Saul after Saul's conversion. Sometimes those who have endured hard experiences in life have the mindset of a servant leader. The Spirit often raises up unexpected people who need support and mentorship to become leaders, and this may even foster an expectation of the unexpected in the process of building up the body of Christ. At times, simple observations like, "I see potential in you," can be encouraging and life-giving words to others.

People who are very busy should not be overlooked but given the chance to say "yes" or "no." Often times busy people have many gifts they are already using. Jeff Jones states, "Sometimes we shrink back from inviting those with the greatest potential because they are already busy. Recently, a leader I invited to take on greater responsibility inspired me to keep on inviting good people without hesitation."[260] Being busy is an indication that a person does indeed have potential leadership qualities. But if the person is never asked, the person will never have the opportunity to say "yes." Ordinarily, people like to be asked to do a specific task. While invitations in the newsletter or bulletin are good, the best way to find a new leader is by personal invitation. This is because relationships are key and a personal invitation is a great start to a mentoring relationship.

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[260] Ibid., 149.

Imitation[261]

The second phase of being a mentor is being an example.[262] Paul often used the words "imitate" and "example" to describe what he did in ministry. "Imitative living was the centerpiece of Paul's training method."[263] To be a mentor by example means spending time and sharing life together. This can be as simple as sharing a weekly or monthly meal together, since relationships are formed around the table. Mentoring involves sharing personal stories. A relationship can only be authentic if mentors and mentees get to know each other on a personal level and share the joys and concerns of life. Jesus did this with his disciples as did Paul with his co-workers.

Paul traveled with those he was mentoring as they went from community to community. Being an example is not just about demonstrating character in a leadership position but also about demonstrating character in one's life. Character is an important part of leadership, and character development is an important aspect of mentoring. This may involve spending time in one another's home or participating in activities in the community. Engaging life beyond the church and in the community is a vital part of leadership, since God's work occurs not only within the walls of the church but out in the world. Jesus sent his disciples out to the world, and Paul was sent as a missionary to the Gentiles. Spending meaningful time together – doing activities that interest both parties – enables the mentor to offer a good example to the apprentice and for both to offer a good example to the world.

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[261] Ibid., 104.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid., 105.

Instruction[264]

In the third phase, the mentor functions as teacher[265] – recognizing that "mentor as an example" comes first. Relationship is teaching by doing rather than conveying academic knowledge. Though knowledge is necessary for some tasks in the church, the most effective way to teach a leadership position is to use Paul's example of taking along the apprentice in ministry. For example, a new elder should shadow the mentor to a session meeting or to carry out other tasks. "It includes the passing on of wisdom, instruction, skills, or a preferred lifestyle for the purpose of the protégé's growth and transformation."[266] The new leader functions as an apprentice to the mentor, observing and absorbing what is needed to be faithful in this leadership position.

Paul invited his protégés to participate in ministry with him,[267] sharing every aspect of ministry with those he mentored. Other professions implement this practice. Medical professionals often have learners shadowing them; frequently patients visit a doctor or nurse and find a student or intern present for the consultation. On-the-job training is a time-tested way to teach somebody a leadership position.

Involvement[268]

In the fourth phase of mentoring, the mentor serves as coach.[269] In this phase the future leader is given more responsibility, perhaps co-teaching a class or co-leading a meeting. "Barnabas not only spotted leadership in Saul, he also involved him in mission and ministry."[270]

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[264] Ibid., 107.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Ibid.
[267] Paul both led by example and taught, or offered instruction, alongside mentees as he co-authored many letters with them. See 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 1:1 (NRSV).
[268] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 108.
[269] Ibid.
[270] Ibid., 109.

Coaching involves coming alongside, working together, and eventually letting the protégé do most of the work. Carl George describes the process of leadership training in this way, "I do, you watch, we talk. I do, you help, we talk. You do, I help, we talk. You do, I watch, we talk. We each begin to train someone else."[271] Importantly, each leader continually mentors new leaders and equips others to mentor new leaders, an effective model of leadership that permeated the early church.

Crucially, a mentor provides a new leader with constructive feedback, while remembering Paul's admonition, "Let all things be done for building up."[272] The point of feedback is not to criticize, but to improve somebody's skills, as well as to be the strongest advocate for and spiritual friend to the new leader. Sometimes this means reflecting together about a better way to handle a situation, always for the purpose of improving leadership skills. It is also important to strongly affirm gifts during this feedback. A coach encourages, celebrates the wins, and helps reflect on how things may have gone better. A good coach gives feedback, but eventually trusts the new leader to do the work.

Release[273]

In the final phase, the mentor acts as team player.[274] The new leader is trusted to lead, and the mentor becomes a trusted colleague or a team player, as well as the strongest advocate for and spiritual friend to the one now vested with leadership. At this point, the mentor goes back to phase one, searching for the next potential leader to mentor – constantly developing new leaders.

This process can be adapted to any community of faith, with details varying according to each context. Mentorship needs to be organic and authentic to each context. One size does not fit

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[271] George, *Nine Keys*, 61.
[272] 1 Corinthians 14:26 (NRSV).
[273] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 110.
[274] Ibid.

all. For larger churches there might be more formal structures like classes and training programs; smaller congregations will likely be much more informal and rely almost exclusively on one-on-one mentoring. Either way, it is crucial for the ministry team to hold the mentoring process as a priority. "It's easy to get so busy doing ministry that we fail to devote attention to developing others. Yet, the development of people is our real job – even more than accomplishing the tasks."[275]

Churches today can become incubators of leadership as they reclaim the model of the early church as affirmed in Ephesians 4:11-16: "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ."[276] Paul adds, "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.[277]

Building up the body of Christ should not only include passing on the faith to the next generation, but also ensuring the leadership baton is passed to every subsequent generation. Such a priority should be understood as an expression of the Great Commission, as the church looks to Christ as its head, with a team of servant leaders living into the vision to go and make disciples in every community and in every nation. Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."[278] Where the

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[275] Ibid., 155.
[276] Ephesians 4:11-13 (NRSV).
[277] Ephesians 4:15-16 (NRSV).
[278] Matthew 9:37-38 (NRSV).

church intentionally develops more workers for God's kingdom, it will continue to grow, incorporating the leadership model of scripture as inspired by God.

The Vocation of Ministry

Mentorship starts at the congregational level, but the vocation of ministry has not been sufficiently emphasized among congregation members; this can be surprisingly true in small rural settings. Mark Sanders writes, "The first assumption to be challenged is that vocation is only God's call to those who wish to be ordained."[279] He goes on to explain that "all Christians have a vocation and ministry."[280] This idea of vocation has largely been forgotten in rural areas.

Most of the presbyteries in the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, composed of six upper midwestern states, have very few inquirers or candidates for ministry under care.[281] There are many reasons for this, including the perception that many smaller congregations are no longer able to pay full-time pastors. Small churches may assume they are in the minority and that larger churches' needs are more important, yet in the PC (U.S.A.) most congregations list fewer than one hundred members.[282] Many candidates come from larger suburban communities. Leadership development in smaller churches has often been ignored because there seem to be more pressing needs in these declining congregations; yet the lack of leadership may cause many of these congregations to close. Emphasizing the vocation of all Christians is vital to claiming leadership development as a core value, regardless of what form church leadership eventually takes.

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[279] Sanders, "Encouraging vocational pathways," in *Reshaping Rural Ministry*, 97.

[280] Ibid., 99.

[281] For example, the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys currently only has on inquirer under care and this is the first inquirer or candidate we have had under care for five years.

[282] Sixty-five percent of PC (U.S.A.) congregations are one hundred members or fewer according to the Office of the General Assembly Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "2021 Comparative Summaries," https://pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/2021_stats_comparativesummary_update06_2022.pdf (accessed on March 17, 2023).

Need for Candidates from Small Churches and Small Communities

Leadership development must be initiated locally because presbyteries and judicatories cannot produce leaders if they are not identified within their congregations. Mark Sanders analyzes statistics of rural churches in England. "Finally, looking at statistics it is clear that long-term residents from rural multi-parish benefices are not well represented even in ordained local ministry (OLM), where they might be expected to feature prominently."[283] Something similar is happening among the current candidates for ministry in the PC (U.S.A.).

One complicating factor: Distance education plays a much more prominent role than ever in theological education across the United States. The prominence of distance education has made it possible for many people to attend seminary who were once tied to a specific location. Because distance students don't have to move to a new location to attend seminary, these same students are more likely to stay closer to where they currently live than to be open to a national search or to a call to serve a rural church. This change in the way seminary education is offered has unintentionally helped create a vacuum of pastoral leadership in many rural communities. As a result, reclaiming mentorship and vocation in small rural areas takes on greater importance. No congregation is too small to mentor a new leader to send out to the wider church.

Reclaiming Mentorship on a Presbytery Level

Presbyteries and judicatories also benefit by reclaiming mentorship as a core value. The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys has initiated the "Small Church Residency Program" which is modeled after the program, "For Such a Time as This," once sponsored by the PC (U.S.A.). This program is designed for first call or newly ordained pastors to serve in small congregations with the support of an individual mentor, a colleague support group, and professional coaching.

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[283] Sanders, "Encouraging vocational pathways," in *Reshaping Rural Ministry*, 110.

Programs like this help to mentor newly ordained pastors, ideally developing and retaining

pastors in ministry for years to come.[284]

Presbyteries, especially when they struggle to identify new leaders to serve as ruling

elders to serve within the presbytery, should encourage every leader who serves on a

commission, committee, or task force to use 2 Timothy 2:2 as a model of ministry. Such an

approach would align with the connectional nature that the denomination espouses, resulting in

congregations in closer relation with each other and likely more leaders willing to serve in the

presbytery or to help other congregations in need. With strong leadership raised up from within

congregations, the core value of mentorship would permeate the culture of the presbytery.

Pastor Support Groups

According to Barna research, the top reasons that pastors leave ministry early are stress,

loneliness, and isolation.[285] In a culture of mentoring, pastors would not only mentor leaders

within their congregations but have a team to support them as well. Presbyteries should foster

ministry support groups for each pastor, but allowing this to happen organically helps local

pastors have ownership of the process.[286] Such support networks can take many forms: pastors

may be asked to join text studies, meet for a meal, or form prayer groups to support each other,

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[284] The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys has successfully attracted potential candidates who were exclusively looking for associate positions. This program allows a candidate to gain experience as a solo pastor with a support system much like the candidate may receive in an associate position.

[285] Barna Research, "Pastors Share Top Reasons They've Considered Quitting Ministry in the Past Year," https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-quitting-ministry/#:~:text=Stress%2C%20loneliness%20and%20political%20division,into%20their%20thoughts%20on%20leaving (accessed on March, 17, 2023).

[286] Some presbyteries already have clusters or regions that might be utilized to form support groups. Other times there are already text study groups that already function as support groups.

etc.[287] Every leader benefits from mentorship and every leader benefits when part of a team that enjoys mutual encouragement (Romans 1:12) in the joys and struggles of ministry.

From an administrative standpoint, a presbytery could designate regional clusters or form groups by age and experience, with groups consisting of those new to ministry, those approaching retirement, and those in mid-career. Topical interests could also serve as the basis for group formation around themes like prophetic preaching, hybrid worship, or faith formation. Format is less important than fellowship, support, and collegial mentorship.

Growing One's Own Candidates for Ministry

The final challenge for judicatories is to grow leadership from within, rather than relying solely on outside leadership. Pastor nominating committees in small churches often place top priority on finding a new pastor with small church experience, small town experience, and familiarity with the area of the country where they are located.[288]

Internship programs provide an excellent way to develop interest in pastoral leadership within a presbytery. This was once largely limited to presbyteries which had a seminary within or near them, but distance education has opened new possibilities. "Most seminaries also provide distance learning options so that any church can have access to theological education, regardless of location."[289] All presbyteries should consider supporting internship programs, financially and otherwise, since geography is no longer a limiting factor. They do well to recognize and mentor intern candidates who are already living among them. "Fewer churches these days seem to be

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[287] I have been involved in a text study in every call I have served. This has been a vital and life-giving part of my ministry. I have sought out groups and even formed new text study groups. It is important to have co-workers to support in ministry.

[288] The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys has started hosting a bi-annual "Exploring a Call" event via Zoom. This event is open to anybody who is interested in serving in leadership in the church. It could be a call to be a teaching elder or CRE, but it could also be to serve as pulpit supply or worship leader in local congregations or being a leader in any capacity within the church. God calls everyone to use their gifts as the Spirit calls.

[289] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 180.

looking to seminary placement offices to fill positions. They either hire from within their own ranks or they network with churches they know and respect to identify candidates."[290] Formerly, candidates relocated to attend seminary, and then were much more open to move any place in the country as the Spirit led them. In today's context, candidates tend to be more geographically bound because they have remained in the same community while attending seminary. Distance education inadvertently enables candidates to remain connected to an area, making ministry less about journey and more about growth in one place.

Theological education is still important. "How wonderful it can be for local churches and seminaries to bring their respective strengths to the table and work together to develop leaders for Christ's church!"[291] Mentorship does not replace theological education, but mentorship coupled with theological education is powerful. Often the best way to learn to lead worship is simply by leading worship; the best way to learn to lead a session meeting is by leading a session meeting. Ideally, a mentor observes the leader-in-training and then offers feedback. Mentorship strengthens theological education because one learns to put one's knowledge into practice in a real ministry setting.

Other Ways to Fill Pulpits through Mentorship

Presbyteries might also consider using less traditional ways to provide leadership for those small faith communities which can no longer afford a full-time, seminary-trained pastor. Equipping commissioned pastors or commissioned ruling elders also helps presbyteries to fill leadership gaps. Many presbyteries have created training programs to develop new leadership from within the presbytery, and some seminaries also offer commissioned pastor courses.

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[290] Ibid., 181.
[291] Ibid., 187.

Internships and student pastorates are excellent ways to mentor those who can fill these positions effectively.

Another way to develop leadership is encouraging ruling elders to fill the pulpit when the pastor is on vacation or when there is a pastoral vacancy. [292] Presbyteries often develop training events to equip ruling elders to lead worship, and offering these opportunities more frequently will enrich congregations. In some presbyteries ruling elders leading worship is vital to providing worship for some small congregations.

Reclaiming Mentorship Can Produce More Effective Leaders

Many books about church leadership models are based on business or secular leadership.[293] The Bible describes a different leadership plan: teach by mentorship and encourage the one mentored to go and mentor others. This simple but brilliant plan is led by the Spirit. The church desperately needs more leadership now, and this plan is proven and true; conveniently, it starts at home. "Local churches helping other local churches in dynamic win-win partnerships reflects the New Testament pattern (Jerusalem and Antioch, for instance) and moves Christ's kingdom work forward."[294] As congregational leaders embrace this Biblical plan and make it their own, it promises the good fruit that God desires.

Paul was intimately involved in the churches he founded, making mentorship a priority in every aspect of ministry, and leadership grew at amazing rates as a result. The church today needs more leaders yet mentorship offers a solution. If the church prioritizes mentorship over other tasks of ministry, mentorship might infuse the culture of every congregation and

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[292] The Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys has effectively used a ruling elder and a retired pastor to provide effective worship leadership for small congregations. The ruling elder is given a mentor and is encouraged to eventually consider becoming a commissioned pastor. This has enabled a very small congregation to have regular pulpit supply and continue to minister to its community.

[293] For example, viewing "pastor as CEO," viewing session as the "board of trustees," or viewing all decisions as "business decisions."

[294] Ibid., 186.

presbytery. Given time and intentionality, making mentorship a core value will help churches fulfill God's call. Today's church leaders have been divinely entrusted to pass on the baton to the next new group of leaders.

Chapter 5

Models of Collaborative Ministry for Today

Many existing congregations were planted by other congregations – possibly sharing a pastor for many years until the new congregation had enough resources to support a pastor independently. With the advent of the "one church, one pastor" model, however, many churches lost sight of the practice. The book of Acts describes leadership shared among communities which experienced phenomenal growth and mutual connection. This model can be life-giving. "Collaboration can energize everyone involved through the infusion of the Holy Spirit, who is at work within them and through them."

Though some congregations fear that collaboration means "the beginning of the end" for them, shared leadership can infuse new life and hope for years to come. This is especially true for congregations struggling to sustain the "one pastor, one church" model in a changing context. Theologian Walter Brueggemann suggests the tradition of "one church, one pastor" or the "way it has always been done" is nostalgia – described as "over-remembering" or "better-remembering" the past.[295] Nostalgia especially happens at a season of loss. For example, Brueggemann says, the Israelites over-remembered how much food they had when they were in Egypt, while at the same time forgetting that they were slaves.[296]

When independent churches first share a pastor, it can be perceived as a season of loss. The congregation over-remembers having a pastor to itself and worries about losing some control. Adherents may over-remember the "good, old days" of the church and dwell on that over-remembered perception instead of their current reality. This proves especially tempting for

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[295] Walter Brueggemann, "Memory as Temptation to Nostalgia," April 20, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wuxsbxt6Ks (accessed May 27, 2021).

[296] Ibid.

elderly members who enjoy remembering the past glory days of the congregation. Over-remembering can paralyze a congregation into doing the same thing over and over, even though it is not effective anymore. Congregations over-remember the glory days when they think the "one pastor, one congregation" model is the only effective standard of pastoral leadership – forgetting that many congregations shared a pastor when they were planted.

Joseph Small explains the fragmentation of congregations began following the Reformation. "The ecclesial problem was that local churches had become separated churches, and separated churches had become antagonistic churches. Today, detached churches have become strangers to one another."[297] Fragmentation has reinforced "one church, one pastor" as a persistent norm, as churches imagine themselves to be wholly independent organizations instead of a part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

Many small churches simply cannot afford to pay a full-time pastor, and with the shortage of available candidates, they struggle to find a part-time pastor. Many rural congregations reflect their community's shrinking population with declining membership. Sue Washburn writes, "Congregations are getting smaller, and ministry is getting more personal. According to the Office of the General Assembly, in 2020, more than half (63%) of the churches in the denomination had fewer than 100 members and 40% of PC (U.S.A.) members attended a church with fewer than 50 members."[298] Small churches now comprise the majority of congregations in the PC (U.S.A.).

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[297] Small, *Flawed Church, Faithful God*, 9.
[298] Sue Washburn, "The small church: a gift to its community," *Presbyterians Today*, October 20, 2021, Presbyterian Mission Agency The small church: a gift to its community | Presbyterian Mission Agency (accessed on October 20, 2021).

The problem transcends denomination.[299] These smaller congregations face a changing landscape for ministry in their communities. Many play vital roles in their communities, sometimes even as the only church in a town. Mark Mogilka and Kate Wiskus note the drop in membership within the Roman Catholic Church writing, "The phenomenon is nationwide. It is occurring in varying degrees in every region and state."[300] Fewer members will force denominations to consider alternatives to keep congregations open and to sustain communities of faith in some rural towns. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Roman Catholic Church determined "within this first decade of our new millennium, the number of faith communities sharing a pastor will surpass fifty percent."[301] The phenomenon will likely become more prevalent in many presbyteries as well as throughout the entire Christian church.

True Cost Saving of Sharing a Pastor

One advantage of shared ministry: A pastor can do many tasks one time and all congregations involved benefit. Many of these shared activities maximize the pastor's available time. For example, if two independent congregations call a half-time pastor, each congregation will pay the full Board of Pensions benefit premiums based on a pro-rated full-time salary. Assuming each pastor will spend at least fifteen hours a week preparing for the Sunday service, sermon, confirmation class, and other meetings, five hours a week remain for visitation and other duties.

If two congregations share a full-time pastor, however, each church will fund a portion of one full-time Board of Pensions benefits package halving the cost for each congregation. The

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[299] Aaron Earls, "Small Churches Continue Growing–but in Number, not Size," Lifeway Research, https://research.lifeway.com/2021/10/20/small-churches-continue-growing-but-in-number-not-size/#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20religious%20landscape%20is,number%20has%20climbed%20to%2065%25 (accessed on March 24, 2023).

[300] Mogilka and Wiskus, *Pastoring Multiple Parishes*, 3.

[301] Ibid., 5.

pastor still spends fifteen hours a week preparing for the Sunday service, sermon, confirmation class, and other meetings, yet preaches the same sermon and uses the same worship service at both sites. The pastor teaches one confirmation class for the two churches. Though the sessions meet separately, the similar format of meetings greatly reduces preparation. As a result, the full-time pastor has twenty-five hours a week – as opposed to five! – to fulfill ministerial tasks. Rather than causing the pastor to function as a half-time leader to two congregations, reducing duplicated tasks maximizes effort and enriches each congregation.

If congregations are part of the same denomination, even more responsibility can be shared. The pastor goes to presbytery meetings and fulfills other presbytery responsibilities for both congregations. Because many congregations do not have another Presbyterian Church near them, however, several churches share a pastor with a church of another denomination. This works best if the church is part of a denomination participating in the Formula of Agreement, which establishes full communion. For the PC (U.S.A.) this includes the Reformed Church of America (RCA), the United Church of Christ (UCC), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). Pastors in these denominations agree to an orderly exchange of ministers, making it easy for a pastor to be fully installed in both congregations and recognized in both judicatories and denominations. Congregations can also share pastors with churches from denominations outside of the Formula of Agreement, though that proves more complicated. Yet sharing pastors across denominational lines affirms the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Good things happen when churches work together as God intended, as one body of Christ.

Some observers describe this era as the "ecumenical age" of the church, though some misunderstand the goal of ecumenism. Small writes, "Ecumenism does not dream of 'super

church,' but rather hopes for deep communion among churches."[302] The many are made one. This oneness comes from God, and not from the church. Small writes, "ecclesial communion is less a product of ecclesial effort than it is a gift of the church's Lord that can either be embraced or neglected."[303] God gives other congregations as a gift. If the church accepts this gift, congregations can work together and bless one another, regardless of denominations or other boundaries.

Models of Collaborative Ministry

Happily, congregations have learned to thrive in collaborative ministry, and many small congregations have big impact in their communities. They are healthy and vital congregations, even if they are not big numerically. "Resilient small churches are open to change and alternative forms of ministry," Washburn notes, "including a part-time or shared pastor with other churches or even other denominations."[304] Sometimes vague terminology for these congregations adds confusion: terms like shared ministry, yoked churches, two-point parishes, or three-point parishes. For example, a yoked church could refer to two churches being merged into one congregation or two congregations simply sharing a pastor.

Given the changing landscape of the global church, returning to a Biblical, collaborative ministry offers a way forward. Mark Sanders writes, "Collaborative ministry, ministry teams and ecumenical partnerships should be modelling shared ministry, encouraging and equipping congregations to see that mission and ministry is not the task of an individual."[305] Nor is mission or ministry the task of a single, individual congregation. The early church modeled mission

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[302] Small, *Flawed Church, Faithful God*, 79.
[303] Ibid., 84.
[304] Washburn, "The Small Church," *Presbyterians Today*, October 20.
[305] Sanders, "Encouraging vocational pathways," in *Reshaping Rural Ministry*, 100.

rooted in unity and shared connection between churches; even though some churches were mostly Jewish and others were mostly Gentile, they worked together in unity.

Many forms of shared ministry are possible. Since each agreement is unique to its context, confusion may arise. Mark Mogilka writes, "Some of the most frequently asked questions in multiple-parish ministry don't have one right answer."[306] He goes on to say, "Based on our experience, we have found that there is no single way to organize multiple-parish ministry." [307]Much like forming a mentoring process for congregations, leadership teams from all congregations involved should meet together and figure out what will work best in their particular context. Different models exist, but there is no single "right" or "best" model. Leaders for each group of congregations must explore possibilities together, designing an agreement that will suit their particular congregations. In truth, no two congregations are exactly the same and no two pairings of congregations will be exactly the same either.

Separate Congregations, Separate Office Staff, <u>Shared</u> Pastor

Although approaches to shared ministry vary, below are examples of models which have worked well. This may be the most common model, as churches begin to live into collaborative ministry. In some ways, it is the simplest of models. Both congregations remain completely autonomous, but joint activities strengthen the relationship between leaders and congregations. Although each session remains separate, they meet together at least twice a year to consider actions which affect both congregations. Each church maintains a separate office with separate office staff. The pastor keeps office hours at both buildings. The pastor leads worship at both congregations, allowing travel time between services and preaching the same sermon with similar worship components; only the announcements vary. The two congregations may or may

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[306] Mogilka and Wiskus, *Pastoring Multiple Parishes*, 79.
[307] Ibid.

not use the same hymnal. Confirmation class and other faith formation events can be shared, while Sunday Schools typically remain separate. A joint newsletter helps each congregation know about events in the other and can enhance special events like fundraisers or special services.

While other expenses would be separate, the two congregations would share the cost of the pastor. Approaches too can vary. In some cases, congregations split the cost evenly with each church paying one half of the total salary and benefits package. Frequently, though, one congregation is significantly larger than the other so evenly splitting the cost is not practical. Sometimes churches agree on a percentage, such as one third/two thirds, or one quarter/three quarters. In other situations, the churches prorate the pastor's salary and benefits based on the membership of each congregation.[308]

One technicality: In the PC (U.S.A.), a pastor needs to be "under the call" of one congregation for the Board of Pensions. Typically, the larger church pays the pastor, and the smaller church reimburses the church for its portion of the expense. This is considered a full-time call and not two part-time calls. Continuing education, mileage, and all other expenses are usually included in these shared expenses.[309]

Advantages

- Each church maintains a physical presence in their building by having staff in each building.
- There is somebody at the church during office hours to handle the day-to-day needs of the congregation and taking some of the administrative pressure off the pastor.
- Communication is easier for congregation members because they can stop in the office or call the church as they have always done.

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[308] This is done by adding the two congregation memberships together and figuring out what percentage belongs to each congregation, then splitting the pastor's salary and benefit package along that same percentage.

[309] Dividing mileage by congregation grows complicated. Often the pastor will travel to a hospital or care facility and visit people from multiple congregations. It simplifies expenses to split the cost rather than belaboring how to split the cost when the pastor visited two people from one congregation and three people from the other during the same trip.

- There is a financial and time savings because of sharing a pastor.

Disadvantages

- While there is staff in the office, the pastor is not in the office as much as in the "one church, one pastor" model.
- Congregation members may have less opportunity to interact with the pastor because sometimes the pastor will be at the other office.
- Often, there is a perception that one congregation is favored over the other because the pastor typically lives in one of the towns and, therefore, spends more time in the community where he/she lives.
- Sometimes the pastor gets put in the middle of disagreements between sessions, especially if they only meet jointly every six months.

Separate Congregations, <u>Shared</u> Office Staff, <u>Shared</u> Pastor

In this model, churches share one office in one church building with shared office staff. Often churches reach this arrangement gradually, because not having staff in "its" office marks yet another loss for a congregation. Yet this approach nets significant cost-saving. Having one office means there is one copy machine, one computer for the office staff, and maybe even one place where internet or phone service is required.

Having one person prepare both bulletins can also save costs and time. The bulletins will basically be the same with slightly different announcements and possibly different hymns if the congregations have different hymnals. Communication between parishes is streamlined as everybody who contacts the office talks to staff working in the same building. The pastor could still maintain office hours on both campuses if the sessions found that to be important. In some instances that might not feel important, however; for instance, an open country church may not find value in having the pastor in the office because visitors may seldom stop, and they could always make an appointment.

Advantages

- There is time and cost savings for the office and the office staff.
- Communication becomes easier for staff because there is a central office.

- Communication is streamlined for congregation members because they always talk to the same staff, and the staff works from the same office.
- Most pastors prefer having one office because the pastor only has one staff with which to communicate. The pastor can still maintain office hours at both churches if necessary.

Disadvantages

- Loss of the physical presence of office staff on one campus.
- Often, a perception arises that one congregation is favored over the other(s) because the office is in one building rather than the other(s).
- Most photocopying would take place at one church, requiring more organization and communication with staff before the pastor travels to the other church(es).
- Each session would lose some of its individual power because more decisions would be made by the joint sessions.

Separate Congregations, <u>Shared</u> Office Staff, <u>Shared</u> Pastor, <u>Shared</u> Ministry Council

In this model, a separate entity is formed to smooth the sharing of staff and resources. Often this means forming a separate tax entity which pays the pastor and staff while all the congregations in the "parish" pay into this joint entity. Churches form a shared ministry council, representative of all congregations, with authority to recommend staff salaries and joint budgets to be approved by the individual sessions and congregations. Meeting at least quarterly, this council would also authorize office expenses and any joint services or activities.

Advantages

- People from all congregations would be in the room at the same time making decisions, with less chance of putting the pastor in the middle.
- Stronger relationships form between leaders of the various congregations because they meet together more often.
- Communication is streamlined because a joint council comprised of people from all congregations meets regularly.
- The shared staff report to this one entity instead of reporting to each individual session and congregation.

Disadvantages

- There may be a sense of a loss of control by each session because more decisions are being determined by a different, joint group.

- The pastor has one more meeting to attend, since each congregation maintains a separate leadership council. There may be confusion about what group makes a particular decision.
- Because there is a separate tax entity, this process requires more steps, and it is more complicated to dissolve this agreement if the congregations vote to separate.

Merged Congregations and Sessions, Shared Office Staff, Shared Pastor, Two Buildings

Though this model is seldom used, it proves quite effective in certain situations. This model typically emerges only after congregations have worked together successfully for several years. In it, congregations merge so there is only one session and one congregation. While leadership and governance is shared, the parties still maintain two buildings and separate worship services. In this arrangement, the office would be located on one campus with the staff primarily working from that building, although the pastor may keep office hours at each campus. Most likely the session would frame a guideline so some percentage of its members would regularly worship at each site, ensuring representation is fair to both congregations. This approach saves time for the pastor and staff with only one leadership meeting each month.

In other circumstances, the session may decide to maintain two buildings but worship together as one congregation, rotating between the sites. This is especially practiced in situations where few people attend either worship service. This nets a larger group for worship and other important activities such as Sunday School. This may be a step in the process to discern whether and when to sell one of the properties.

Advantages

- All decisions are streamlined into one session or leadership team. Pastors have only one meeting, with all players in the room for decisions.
- Stronger relationships form because one shared council meets on a regular basis with people who worship at both sites.
- The merged congregation maintains two buildings, often in two communities–thereby keeping a physical presence in each community.
- Reduced administrative duties for pastor and staff.

Disadvantages

- Some may perceive a congregation has lost the ability to control its own decisions because all decisions are made jointly. This may lead to a loss of identity.
- Two campuses require maintenance and expense.
- This takes time to establish as the presbytery would have to approve any merger and is much harder to dissolve if a disagreement arises between the congregations.
- There may be a perception that the leadership is moving towards worshiping in one building.

<u>Merged</u> Congregations, <u>One</u> Building

Typically, congregations hesitate to share a pastor, fearing an eventual merger and fusion of identity. Most of the time, this is not the intention of working together. A shared ministry agreement is intended to build each congregation up in love and allow both to worship in their building for many additional years rather than forcing an immediate merger. Optimally, the congregations will be a blessing to each other. It is rare for two congregations to merge using one building, but in some circumstances, this is the best option.

This occurs most frequently when one or both congregations draw so few people that worshiping separately and paying for the utilities and maintenance of two buildings proves impractical. Though it is a very sad day for any congregation to close a building, this may be the only way to truly cut costs. This is especially true when both churches are in the same town or are in close proximity.

The new congregation should prayerfully consider its name. One option would be to combine the two names in some way; or the congregation could choose an entirely different name. Regarding property, the most practical solution often involves selling the building that needs more repair or is in a less desirable location, then moving both congregations into the other building. In that case, parishioners may find comfort in incorporating some furnishings or

worship elements[310] from the closed building into the new location. Another option would be to

sell both buildings and build or buy a different building. This solution sometimes softens the

transition for both congregations because they don't have to choose one building over the other.

Advantages

- There is a huge cost savings in reducing payment for maintenance, utilities, and insurance to only one building.
- Worship and singing are energized with more people attending services.
- It is easier to provide Sunday School, confirmation, youth group, and adult education with more people.
- If the churches are in the same community, it keeps a church open in that community because the two congregations might have both closed without this merger.

Disadvantages

- Anytime a building is closed, people experience loss and grief.
- Old identities can lead to an "us" versus "them" mentality, especially when congregations first merge. That melts with time, as congregants less frequently identify with one church or the other.
- This takes time to establish as the presbytery would have to approve any merger and sale of property.
- Some congregation members may choose not to join the merged church and transfer to another community of faith.

Emerging Models Using Technology

Even prior to the global COVID-19 pandemic[311] Shannon O'Dell observes that "When it

comes to spiritual things, for some reason we cling to a withering contentment to sit in

uncomfortable chairs listening to dry monologues and out-of-tune pianos. In all honesty, I'm not

quite sure why that is. But as we continued to see life after life changed, [by incorporating media

and new technologies in congregational worship] I firmly believe that modern technology could

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[310] This could be paraments, communion table, baptismal font, banners, crosses or any object that would be an important reminder of the former building.

[311] The COVID-19 pandemic forced congregations to discontinue in person gatherings and find ways to worship and meet virtually. This pandemic affected every organization, business, and all of society.

and should, be the friend of the timeless gospel."[312] Prior to the pandemic the church was slow to embrace technology. While almost every profession and organization had embraced technology, the church largely resisted it—perhaps especially in small, rural congregations.

Since the pandemic everything has changed across the entire culture and even in the church.[313] While all the preceding models have been successful over many years and contexts, the church has only widely increased its use and knowledge of technology since the 2020 pandemic forced isolation and social distancing. Providentially, that opened new possibilities even for small congregations. Often, geography creates one of the most challenging obstacles to shared ministry: A congregation knows it would benefit from sharing a pastor but cannot find a congregation that is both close enough to be practical and reasonably like-minded. Technology enables congregations to try shared ministry with congregations regardless of distance.

One common debate that occurs when sharing a pastor: What time will each congregation worship? Using the "one church, one pastor" model most congregations prefer a worship time in the middle of the morning, often between nine thirty and eleven. When churches share a pastor at two locations, they must stagger worship times. There is no middle ground because the pastor must have time to drive between congregations. Technology, however, opens an entirely new possibility. Both congregations actually could worship at the same time with the pastor physically present in one building and projected on a screen in the other building(s). Technology opens new possibilities with advantages and disadvantages that congregations will need to discern.

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[312] Shannon O'Dell, *Transforming Church in Rural America: Breaking All the Rurals*, (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2015), 172.

[313] During this time only essential travel was allowed, education was done virtually, entertainment could no longer be in person, all nonessential medical procedures were postponed, and the government posted guidance concerning how many people could gather in person.

Separate Congregations, Separate Office Staff, <u>Shared</u> Virtual Pastor

The possibility of the pastor only having to lead worship one time a Sunday creates a totally different scenario. While it brings significant benefits, using technology in this way also generates some significant disadvantages. Some congregations might feel deeply uncomfortable without a pastor physically present for a service, and others may be very comfortable with this arrangement. As with every shared ministry agreement, the agreement must match the context, and leaders must discern the approach with input from all congregations.

In this model, congregations and sessions remain separate but share the worship experience. The congregations could be geographically farther apart, but still close enough for the pastor to be able to comfortably drive to either on Sunday morning or to provide pastoral care. Because distance might be greater, both churches would most likely have separate offices and office staff, though in some cases the office and office staff could be shared as well. Yet the pastor would be physically present in one congregation, and the other church could livestream the entire worship service. The next Sunday the pastor could physically lead from the other church or rotate in a way to which the congregations agree.

Advantages

- This geographically expands options for shared ministry because the pastor wouldn't have to be physically at both churches each Sunday.
- Both congregations could worship at the same time, making a midmorning worship service possible.
- The congregations may also be able to share organists or musicians.
- The pastor only needs to lead one service on Sunday, but two or more churches are blessed by the same service.

Disadvantages

- Some people may resist having the pastor physically absent and may choose to attend only when the pastor is physically there.
- Loss of personal connection with the pastor because the pastor wouldn't get the opportunity to personally greet people at each location each Sunday.

- There needs to be a backup plan in case the live stream gets disrupted, the church loses internet connection, or the power fails.
- Communication about joys and concerns requires greater effort when the pastor is not physically present every Sunday.

Separate Campuses, <u>Shared</u> Virtual Preacher, In Person Worship Leader

This model has been used by many churches, especially in other denominations, with some success. In this case, typically a larger church partners with smaller congregations in the area, helping provide worship in each church. Here, the preacher ordinarily preaches in person at the larger church and the message is recorded and saved to a link. The smaller congregations have their own worship leader for liturgy, music, and prayers with the sermon shown on a screen. Each congregation would remain separate with a distinctive session, its own office and office staff, but it would share the worship experience with other congregations.

This approach could be modified for a variety of situations. For example, pastoral care could be handled by the main preacher or by the site leader or some combination of the two. The preaching pastor might moderate each site's session meetings, or presbytery might assign other pastors to moderate. Administration might be centrally located, with shared office and staff. There are many variations of this plan, but the idea is that one preacher could provide the sermon to several congregations. This could especially be useful in churches that experience lengthy pastor searches or are using permanent pulpit supply–implemented every Sunday, on certain Sundays of the month, or when pulpit supply is unavailable. The options are vast.

Advantages

- One preacher could preach one sermon that is heard in many congregations on the same Sunday.
- Worship times would be flexible with each congregation deciding independently the time of worship.
- There would still be a person physically present to lead most of the service.
- This would be a good opportunity to mentor elders to start leading part of the worship service, which might lead to a future candidate for ministry.

- This could help congregations in transition which were not able to acquire interim pastoral leadership.

Disadvantages

- Relationships would not be formed with the main preacher in the smaller congregations.
- Pastoral care might be provided by a different person than the main preacher. This might be a disadvantage if the person providing pastoral care has no previous relationship with the parishioner.
- There needs to be a backup plan in case of technology problems.
- The smaller churches may feel inferior to the larger church.
- This might be temporary while looking for a pastor or it might be for one or two Sundays a month. There needs to be a clear plan, communicated with the congregations.

Separate Congregations/Parishes, Separate Pastors and Staff, <u>Shared</u> Ministry

Collaborative ministry can take many shapes and forms. The first step in exploring working together with multiple churches is to do ministry activities together. Many activities are easier and better with more participants. Shared ministry typically begins with one shared ministry or activity and grows from there. Pastors and staff share in the planning and fulfillment of shared ministry activities. Vacation Bible school, [314] youth group, [315] and mid-week educational opportunities[316] tend to be opportune activities to work together because there is greater energy when more children or youth participate.

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[314] My current two congregations worked with four other congregations within our community. We had 105 students in our VBS and teachers from all six congregations. We had to have the VBS program outside in a park because none of our sanctuaries would have been big enough to hold everybody. We also had supper to allow for fellowship between congregations. This was possible because all six congregations pooled their resources together to provide a great experience for our children.

[315] My two congregations have partnered with two other congregations who share a pastor. Both pastors enjoy working together and getting to know the youth from all four congregations. We have had twenty to thirty youth at every event. Parents have come to me and said, "I used to have to force my child to attend youth group when we were by ourselves, but now that same child begs to go to youth group because all of the child's friends are there, too." Youth love to be with their friends, so youth group is another opportunity to collaborate with other congregations.

[316] My congregations have experimented for the first time with moving our children's education program to Wednesday evening. This has led to doubling our church school attendance on Wednesday evenings and we were able to double the volunteers who teach as well. We have been averaging thirty-five to forty students every week. The teachers who were once burned out, are now full of energy because of the increased attendance. Next year we will explore sharing mid-week education opportunities with other congregations.

Mid-week worship services during Lent or Advent, Thanksgiving service, or community services are additional opportunities to share in ministry together with other congregations.[317] Worshiping and singing become more rewarding with additional people in the sanctuary; there is an irreproducible energy and spirit that occurs when sanctuaries are full. This model can lead to additional conversation about future shared ministry opportunities. Exploring shared ministry is not pursued for business purposes, but for mission and energized ministry while not sharing staff.

Mission projects open another opportunity to bring congregations together. Some feeding programs require more volunteers than one congregation can provide, but several congregations working together can easily provide enough volunteers.[318] Habitat for Humanity and mission trips can also provide a way for congregation members to form deep relationships with one another.

Advantages

- Children and youth ministry is more effective and energizing with additional children and youth participating.
- Singing and worship become easier and more enjoyable when the sanctuary is full.
- Pastors and staff enjoy collegial relationships working together in ministry.
- The budgets and independence of congregations are unaffected by sharing ministry.
- This may be the first step in bringing congregations together to explore one of the other models.

Disadvantages

- There is not a cost savings to this model, it is done for mission purposes.
- It would be important that the pastors, staff, and volunteers work together to plan joint activities.

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[317] This past Lenten season four congregations shared midweek services together. Their two pastors led these services together. This year the two pastors partnered in a new way in doing dialogue sermons together. The unintended result was that the congregations saw the pastors working together so closely, and now there is great energy toward doing more things together as congregations. We had record attendance, and we are looking for more opportunities to worship together because there is great energy when our sanctuaries are full.

[318] In my former congregations, we worked with the Roman Catholic Church to serve at "The Banquet," which was a feeding program that required forty volunteers. While our theological differences prevented our churches from sharing certain activities, this mission project brought our congregations together to serve the greater community. Bigger mission projects are practical when congregations work together.

- There may be resistance because every event does not happen in one's own church building.
- There is a loss of control because decisions need to be made with all congregations having input and vote.
- Each governing board would have to approve and oversee shared activities and ministry.

<u>Multiple</u> Congregation Parish, <u>Shared</u> Pastors and Staff, <u>Shared</u> Ministry Council

Mentorship and collaborative ministry are powerful leadership models. While both are Biblical, growth in the early church stemmed from putting these two leadership models together. Combining mentorship and collaborative ministry enabled the early church to have leaders to send to new worshiping communities. Forman, Jones, and Miller write, "Local churches helping other local churches in dynamic win-win partnerships reflects the New Testament pattern (Jerusalem and Antioch, for instance) and moves Christ's kingdom work forward."[319]

This model is more outside-the-box compared to the "one church, one pastor" model, but it has been used successfully to bless multiple congregations.[320] Presbyteries and judicatories are experimenting with this creative approach to find pastoral leadership for congregations. Forming pastoral teams to serve multiple congregations allows for mutual mentorship among pastors. In the current environment, many candidates are searching for associate calls to gain experience and receive mentorship, but many senior pastors don't have mentorship responsibilities in their job descriptions. Associate pastors are often given a narrow list of responsibilities and typically preach once a month or less. Associate pastors often struggle when they become solo pastors because they have not developed the broad range of skills required of a solo pastor. This model

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[319] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 186.

[320] One example of this is Tri-County Ministry in North Dakota. This multi-point parish has been in existence since 1992 and presently has six churches working together, five ELCA congregations and one PC (U.S.A.) congregation. They share a staff and this allows leaders to work together as a team to serve multiple congregations in three neighboring counties. For more information see https://www.tricountyministry.org/ (accessed April 12, 2023).

would broaden the typical duties of an associate pastor, allowing them to preach every Sunday while receiving mentorship from an experienced pastor or pastoral team.

In this model, combining several congregations allows small churches to share a senior pastor and one or more associate pastors. All pastors would preach every Sunday in rotating congregations, gaining experience in the pulpit, while jointly bringing a variety of gifts which would not be possible with a single pastor. For example, one pastor might focus on youth and education, another on visitation, and the senior pastor on administrative and leadership responsibilities. This model does not impact finances as much as mission and leadership development. Calling pastors with complementary skill sets can be beneficial to each congregation.

This allows the pastors to model mentorship within the pastoral staff for the congregations. Mark Sanders writes, "Collaborative ministry, ministry teams, and ecumenical partnerships should be modeling shared ministry, encouraging and equipping congregations to see that mission and ministry is not the task of an individual."[321] The early church did not send pastors to work by themselves in isolation, yet current church leadership models often do. As pastors embrace mentorship and collaboration within the staff, they model the practices among all leadership teams of their congregations.

A multi-church pastoral team would give leaders the opportunity to work as co-workers and colleagues in ministry. Andrew Clark, pastor and author, writes, "The term most frequently used by Paul to describe specific individuals is "co-worker" (*oiwepyo*), which occurs twelve times and is widely distributed across the corpus."[322] Paul led a group of co-workers, but he regarded them as equals working together.

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[321] Mark Sanders, "Encouraging vocational pathways," in *Reshaping Rural Ministry*, 100.
[322] Andrew D. Clark, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 47.

This leadership model offers a prime opportunity for mentorship. Two or three teaching elders with varying degrees of experience could form a pastoral team with a senior pastor mentoring them. The pastoral team could even include a commissioned pastor, an intern, or a congregation member being mentored to help with worship and ministry leadership within the congregation. A pastoral team made up of people with differing educational backgrounds brings diversity, as a teaching elder, a commissioned ruling elder (CRE), an intern, and a ruling elder likely bring slightly different perspectives to a ministry issue.[323] The church needs to be open to varying forms of pastoral leadership in this liminal time.

In this model, a separate entity is formed to smooth the sharing of staff and resources. Often this means forming a separate nonprofit organization which pays the pastors and staff while all congregations in the "parish" pay into this joint entity. Churches form a shared ministry council, representative of all congregations, with authority to recommend staff salaries and joint budgets to be approved by the individual sessions and congregations. More authority is given to the shared ministry council because it "employs" all staff. Meeting monthly, this council would also authorize office expenses and any joint services or activities. Associate pastors who are gifted in children and youth ministry would help with children and youth for the entire parish while associates gifted in visitation would do the bulk of the visitation for the parish. The senior pastor would focus on administration and mentoring the staff. Each congregation's council would still be responsible for the maintenance of their building and all matters pertaining to their individual congregation, but many decisions would shift to the shared ministry council which supervises the staff and joint ministry.

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[323] An example of this would be Wild Rice Lutheran Parish which is a four-point ELCA parish in the Northwestern Minnesota Synod with one pastor and two synodically authorized ministers (SAM's) serving the four congregations. The ordained pastor serves as a mentor to the two SAM's.

Advantages

- Mentorship is modeled within the pastoral leaders of a multi-parish.
- Pastors and staff would work as a team, helping to prevent isolation and loneliness.
- Congregation members would experience a variety of preaching and ministry styles.
- Congregations could call pastors with complementary gifts.
- This model would enable small congregations to call pastoral leaders who could not afford to call a full-time pastor using the "one church, one pastor" model.
- Ministry activities could be shared between congregations with the benefit of more people participating as all congregations work together.
- This model embodies the "oneness" of the ecumenical church working across boundaries.

Disadvantages

- With multiple pastors and staff at various sites, communication would require greater intentionality.
- Distance can be a limitation, depending on the location of the congregations.
- There may be a perceived loss of ownership and control for the individual congregations.
- Children and youth ministry may face challenges if students attend schools in different districts with varying schedules.
- Congregations would need to compromise concerning worship schedules and location of shared ministry activities.
- Pastors and staff will probably live in different communities of the parish, and it may be perceived that the congregation closest to a pastor or staff member's home has an advantage over the other congregations.
- If there is a centralized office, that congregation might be perceived to have an unfair advantage.

A Limitless Number of Models

These are merely some of the models which have been used or are being considered. Each context is different, and congregations could incorporate a combination of any of these models. Leaders must listen to each other when discussing shared ministry and let the Spirit guide. Congregations can approach this in a variety of ways–from drawing up a permanent agreement, approved by participating congregations; experimenting with a model for two to six months before introducing a binding congregational vote; exploring one model and refining it for their context, etc. The possibilities are endless.

Ideally, congregations negotiate a written agreement that details how they will work together. If the agreement is more permanent, each congregation and the presbytery should approve it. Each shared ministry agreement should include at least a six-month notice should one of the congregations decide to exit. While there are many challenges to sharing staff and resources, there are also many blessings. Typically, the blessings far outweigh the challenges so congregations do well to enter exploratory conversations about collaborative ministry.

Shared Ministry Is Important

Sharing hands-on ministry proves vital. When congregations share a pastor, other staff, and resources, they are strengthened by connections that extend beyond personnel. The congregations need to do ministry together. For example, they may conduct midweek Lenten or Advent services, a Thanksgiving service, or other special services together. A multi-parish may offer a joint vacation Bible school or Wednesday Church School or join forces for a mission project, all of which benefit from more participants and more resources. Engaging ministry together nourishes relationships within the congregations who share a pastor; without this, at some point parishioners will likely question why these congregations share a pastor when they do nothing else together. The healthiest shared ministry partners work together at every opportunity and seek ways to bless each other.

If a congregation discerns the Spirit is leading it toward a shared ministry agreement, it does well to remember the historical, biblical roots of the approach. This is a model of leadership used successfully from the very beginning of the Christian Church. Unlike the "one church, one pastor" corporate model, Jesus calls the church to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Small makes this bold statement, "What the church is called to know better than all of that is the certainty that Christ breaks down walls, God gathers the scattered, and the Spirit is

poured upon all flesh. The church is called to live out its hope in the fullness of time when all walls will fall, all who are scattered will be gathered, and the multitude will live together."[324] This is just one way congregations can live into the calling to be the one unified church in this present age and to be a faint image of what Christ calls the church to be in the age to come.

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[324] Small, *Flawed Church, Faithful God*, 211.

Chapter 6

Putting It All Together

The early church used mentorship and collaborative ministry to rapidly grow the church with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The modern church should explore these ancient models which can be reclaimed successfully today. Business leadership models have become more common in the modern church, yet it is time to reclaim models which are Biblically based and can be adapted to the contemporary context.

One Body

The early church viewed itself as the one body of Christ, not as separate congregations or denominations. Paul refers to the church as the "body of Christ" in several places in his letters[325]. In a time when denominations and congregations continue to split and divide, God may be issuing a fresh call to work together as the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. This can only be done if congregations concentrate on what they have in common instead of what divides them. The "world's way" is division and separation, but God's way is unity in Jesus Christ.

Congregational, denominational, and community boundaries threaten to divide the church, but Christ calls the church to be one: to concentrate on the things that bind together rather than sources of disagreement. Unity can be achieved through an intentional choice to emphasize agreement and "agree to disagree" on things which threaten to divide. Sharing and connection helps churches live into the unified body imagery Paul describes as a model for the church.

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[325] Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27; Ephesians 4:12; Colossians 2:17 (NRSV).

Mentorship

Mentorship supplied the early church with leaders to grow the church and also send leaders to new communities. The emphasis was on leadership development instead of leadership acquisition. One-on-one mentorship led the early church to work in teams or pairs of leaders rather than in isolation. Each mentor, in turn, taught one's mentee(s) to find and teach new leaders. Because of this emphasis on mentorship, there were increasing numbers of leaders available to send to new communities.

Local Churches Become Leadership Development Centers

In this rapidly changing time in culture – plagued by the rise of the "nones," the exodus of young adults from rural communities, diminished church attendance, and the lingering effects of global pandemic – the vision of the church must change. The local church is reemerging at the center of the leadership training enterprise. God seems to be catalyzing a movement that returns leadership training to an in-ministry, apprenticeship, church-based model."[326] The early church grew because leadership development occurred on a local level.

Small rural communities often value leadership that has come from within the community more than leaders acquired from far away. This is, in part, because these communities lose so many young people to bigger cities – and they celebrate any time they can keep younger people in the community. During this liminal time, the church will benefit from an openness to new/ancient ways to develop leaders; in certain circumstances, the best pastoral leader may arise from within the congregation. Jones suggests that "the church itself become the soil in which leaders are intentionally and yet naturally grown."[327] The local church can be a catalyst to develop leaders instead of entirely relying on leadership acquisition.

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[326] Forman, Jones, and Miller, *The Leadership Baton*, 53.
[327] Ibid., 56.

Mentorship must become part of the culture of congregations. "There is a huge difference between leadership acquisition and leadership development."[328] It's not that leadership acquisition is bad; leaders from outside can help a congregation see issues from a more objective position. Likely there will always be a need for some leadership acquisition, but it must not be the exclusive method to supply new leaders. Small, rural congregations have almost completely relied on leadership acquisition as opposed to development. Yet the church needs leaders who come from small congregations or small communities, and who are familiar with the culture of each region.

With a need for more leaders, the church does well to develop them on the local level. Jeff Jones claims that "the more you can hire from within, the more you'll reinforce a culture that values leadership development. You will also raise up new leaders for the kingdom rather than merely transferring leaders from somewhere else."[329] In recent years the rural church has experienced a shortage of pastoral candidates because leadership has taken a back burner to survival in most small congregations. Developing leaders is a key factor in filling this void in leadership. If there is a shortage of leaders, leadership development is essential,

Collaboration

The early church worked together, developing and moving leaders from congregation to congregation and sharing mission and ministry. Each congregation is still called to be a blessing to other congregations. Congregations working together live into the connectionalism that is vital to Presbyterian polity. Moreover, collaboration between congregations is critical for the survival of the church because the "one church, one pastor" model is no longer sustainable in many small congregations.

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[328] Ibid., 38.
[329] Ibid.

Variety of Models

There are a variety of models for shared ministry, and one model is not superior to the others. The blessing arises from working together and learning to bless each other in shared ministry. Though working together brings financial and ministry benefits, more importantly it follows the call of the Spirit to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of Jesus Christ. Some models share one pastor among two or more churches while others share a team of pastors among several congregations. Regardless of which model is utilized, God blesses congregations when they work together and live into the "oneness" of the body of Christ.

Developing relationships between members of the congregations dramatically improves the likelihood of successful shared ministry. Sharing activities and ministry between congregations helps form authentic relationships; these relationships become the glue that holds shared ministry together for decades. Relationships are at the heart of any ministry, and it is critical that relationships are formed between congregation members.

Combining Mentorship and Collaboration

The combination of mentorship and collaboration was key to the success of the early church. These two concepts working in tandem led the church to dramatic growth in just a few hundred years. Mynor writes, "Paul's strategy was about growth after he left, not just about survival. Why should we expect any less today?"[330] Survival mode causes churches to look within and isolate themselves, and it can lead to burnout in both congregations and pastors. When pastors work in community, however, they are nourished as part of a team. Working together, pastors offer a variety of gifts to the church. In addition, a community of congregations working together can cause each congregation to stop looking only inward and to look to one

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[330] Amiel Osmaston, "Leadership models and skills," in *Reshaping Rural Ministry*, 64.

another for support. Survival mode leads to closure, while collaboration and leadership development lead to hope with a future. Focusing on collaboration and leadership development nudges the congregation outside of its walls to the mission God has given it.

Mark Mogilka and Kate Wiskus write, "We wonder if these multiple-parish situations can serve as indicators of where the Spirit is leading the U.S. Church. Clearly, one indication is that we are being led into greater collaboration – clergy and lay, pastors and communities, parishes and dioceses. A second indication is that we are being led into a more mission-focused ministry that discourages parochialism and encourages the building of the kingdom one community at a time."[331] The Spirit seems to be leading the church to collaborate in many ways to join with God in God's mission in the world. Cultivating new leaders from within is crucial to the mission. Even as the church looks inward to develop new leaders, it looks outward to collaborate and join in God's mission.

God is calling the church to join this mission in our own communities and the world, and reclaiming Biblical models of leadership offers promise. The church has looked outside the church for answers to survival issues for decades. Business and secular organizational models have permeated the church, and in that same period of time, the church has declined. Looking within the Bible for faithful leadership models shifts attention from sheer institutional survival to building the kingdom of God. Reclaiming models from the early church, which led to remarkable growth, can lead the modern church from mere survival to leadership development, collaboration, and growth with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As John Calvin writes, "Paul realized that the Gospel could easily die out if it was not spread widely by many ministers."[332] Today the church has a shortage of leaders, increasingly

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[331] Mogilka and Wiskus, *Pastoring Multiple Parishes*, 137.
[332] Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 130.

facing the marginalization that confronted the early church. Calvin's words still ring true in today's context. Congregations and their leaders would benefit from reclaiming mentorship and collaboration so the church will continue to grow new leaders and learn to collaborate as the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Thanks be the God!

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