

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP IN A RURAL CONGREGATION

A PROJECT REPORT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JOSEPH F. CARNEY

WINEBRENNER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

FINDLAY, OHIO

AUGUST 2010

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WINEBRENNER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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ABSTRACT

Many rural congregations are struggling for viability due to inadequate resources. Pastoral leadership that can move the congregation toward health is necessary in order for these rural congregations to continue. Thus, this project sought to identify the characteristics of pastoral leadership that equip a rural congregation to fulfill its kingdom purpose.

The research focused on two aspects of a rural congregation. First, the research identified the unique context of a rural community. Second, the research identified characteristics of pastoral leadership that are necessary in a rural context. The researcher utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods of research.

Quantitative data were gathered through the use of a questionnaire and an online survey. Pastors serving congregations in the Great Lakes Conference of the Churches of God, General Conference were asked to complete a four-page questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions from four categories: pastor's demographic information, congregational demographic information, pastoral profile, and general information questions.

Qualitative data were gathered through the use of interviews, case studies, and current literature relevant to the discussion. Interviews were conducted with pastors serving rural congregations, pastors who have served in both rural and non-rural contexts, as well as pastors who have served as denominational leaders in both rural and non-rural contexts. Case studies of pastoral leaders in rural congregations were also utilized. These

case studies identified ministry programs that are being successful in rural contexts. There is also a plethora of current literature regarding both pastoral leadership and ministry in a rural context. This research connected these data to offer cogent recommendations for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation.

The research led to five recommendations that will make pastoral leadership competent in a rural context. The first two recommendations involve ministry paradigms for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. These recommendations are: make passionate spiritual care a priority; and demonstrate a commitment to a long-tenured pastorate. The final three recommendations involve ministry initiatives for a rural congregation. These recommendations are: to consider a facilities renovation program; to make children's ministries a priority; and finally, to be intentional about the rediscovery of the kingdom purpose of the congregation.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

In small towns and rural communities throughout the midwestern United States it is commonplace to see abandoned and crumbling buildings that, in earlier times, served as places of business, community centers, and houses of worship for local communities of faith. These buildings, at one time, served as active components in the life of their communities. Each of these buildings has a unique story. Each building contains a story of a contribution made to the history and legacy of the communities they served.

These buildings tell a story that reveals the hopes and dreams of people with a passion to build prosperous lives for themselves and for their families for generations to come. They demonstrate the social, civic, commercial, economic and spiritual development of our nation.

The early settlers that entered Richland Township of Wyandot County in northwest Ohio arrived with these ambitious dreams. They arrived with the dreams of building a nation they would be proud to call home.

An early history of Wyandot County observed, “[Richland] township is studded with prosperous farms, well drained . . . encumbered with but little timber, and inhabited by a wide awake, thriving and contented people” (Potts 1998, 932). In the late 19th century this area was a bustling center of activity with railroad stations, schools, businesses, and churches.

Today, many of the buildings that housed these enterprises have been destroyed, but a number of these buildings remain standing. These buildings are vacant and unused reminders of the former glory of days gone by.

Many of these buildings are church buildings. They are reminders of communitywide spiritual revivals. They stand as landmarks exhibiting the locations where communities of faith sprang up in response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They reveal the faith of a community of people determined to anchor the lives of their families for generations to come in their shared and mutual faith in God.

At one time, these structures served as central meeting places for the spiritual, civic, and social activities of their communities. Now, they stand abandoned, vacant, and unused. Many have crumbled and fallen into disrepair.

Many of these former church buildings stand alongside other abandoned and unused historic landmarks. They exist in small towns and rural communities that formerly hosted thriving communities. Today, however, they are rarely utilized or are altogether and completely abandoned.

Population shifts and changing cultural trends are the primary culprits of this phenomenon. In some cases, however, this dreary fate has been denied. In some small towns and rural communities, standing amidst the other dilapidated and crumbling historic buildings, arises an anomaly. In spite of struggling economies and shifting populations, there stands a well-maintained historic building that continues to house a healthy and vibrant community of faith. The Wharton Church of God is one of these anomalies.

Context of the Problem

The Wharton Church of God traces its roots back to the Star Bethel Church of God. This congregation began holding meetings in the Morrison Schoolhouse until 1876 when the congregation erected its first building. The new Star Bethel Church of God was located three miles northeast of Wharton in Richland Township in Wyandot County, Ohio. As was the practice of many denominations in the latter part of the 19th century, Star Bethel was joined with the Kirby, Grace Chapel, and Salem Bethels to form the “Wyandotte Circuit” of the Churches of God in Ohio (Eatherton 1986, 4). As the community began to flourish, it was decided to abandon the rural Star Bethel building and concentrate a new work within the town limits of Wharton. In 1911, the congregation erected a new brick building located on Cass Street. The original building still exists and is the present worship facility.

The cornerstone of the building was laid on June 11, 1911. The building was completed and ready for use in October of that same year. The new building was dedicated on the last Sunday in October 1911. At the dedication service of the new building, Dr C. I. Brown, then-president of Findlay College, challenged the new congregation to commit their efforts to the pursuit of kingdom work. Dr Brown also challenged the congregation to receive an offering that day in hopes of paying off the debt on the new facility. The ensuing offering raised enough money to pay off the remaining debt with money left over.

Over the years the congregation expanded the building several times. An education wing was added to the south side of the structure. The addition included classrooms, as well as indoor restrooms. This addition was expanded again by adding a

second floor with additional classrooms and another restroom. Another remodeling project enhanced the front entrance of the building. The original bell tower was removed and a new, enclosed foyer was added. These building campaigns are evidence of a clear conviction of this congregation to faithfully serve the Wharton community.

Since the time that this congregation opened its doors for ministry until today, it has held a prominent position in the Wharton community. It has provided a rich source of ministry throughout its history.

At its peak in the mid 20th Century, the Wharton community was a bustling agricultural community with industry, commerce and numerous community and social activities. As the civic and social community thrived, so did the spiritual community.

The Wharton community, however, experienced the fate familiar to so many similar communities. The sources of commerce and industry moved and businesses either failed or relocated to more lucrative communities. There was a community-wide paradigm shift as families relocated to communities that provided better employment opportunities with greater access to the essentials and amenities of life.

The abandoned buildings and dilapidated structures standing on Main Street are ghostly reminders of the former glory of the Wharton community. What was once the home of grocery stores, restaurants, dry goods stores, new car dealerships, lumber yards, service stations, a bank, and other commodities is now the lonely host of a small U.S. Post Office and a local bank branch of a national institution. What was once a thriving community has become a vague memory of its former days.

As the community suffered the decline of commerce and industry, so did the congregation. The empty pews and subtle sense of apprehension among the membership

echo the same reminders of the former glory of this wonderful church. Memories of month-long revivals and overflowing Sunday School classes elicit nostalgic emotions of past generations.

In spite of these declining civic and social conditions this congregation has continued to survive. It continues to be an active congregation with a faithful gathering of believers. In spite of the declining community, the church has experienced an optimistic and steady record in attendance. The financial condition of the church is stable and healthy. There exists, however, a subtle apprehension that the fate of similar churches in small towns and rural settings throughout the midwest is a fate that could befall the Wharton Church of God.

Statement of the Problem

The fear of failure could entrap the congregation in a pursuit of self-preservation. The congregation could fall prey to a ministry paradigm that seeks to preserve itself rather than pursue its kingdom purpose. This self-preservation would rob the congregation of its vision to pursue its kingdom purpose.

In 1974, under the pastoral leadership of Pastor Clarence Thornton, the Wharton Church of God embraced the vision statement: *The village church with a world vision*. This vision ignited a renewed passion and sense of vision in the congregation. This vision statement made a two-fold declaration. First, it declared that the Wharton Church of God was a *village church*. In the mid-1970's Wharton was an active community. The ministry of the church was focused on the inhabitants of the Wharton village and its immediately surrounding community. This congregation had a vision to serve the community by

fulfilling its kingdom purpose in the community. It was a village church with a vision to serve the village community.

The congregation, however, was not intending to be myopic. They had a vision to serve a kingdom purpose beyond their small village. The second declaration of this vision statement announced that this village church embraced a *world vision*. This vision sought to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the entire world. Although the primary focus of ministry was within the local community, the congregation was making an intentional effort to participate in global evangelism. Their specific role in global evangelism was achieved primarily through the support of missionaries. As a result of this vision, the congregation significantly increased its financial support to local missions as well as cross-cultural missions in foreign lands.

Times have changed, however. *The village church with a world vision* no longer ignites the passion it once did. The evangelistic fervor that once accompanied this vision has since ceased to exist. Gone are both the village and the vision. In the 35 years since this vision statement was embraced, the dynamics of the Wharton community have changed dramatically. The social and financial demographics of the community have shifted significantly downward. The spiritual climate of this once cozy, bedroom community is now afflicted with a level of crime and poverty that was incomprehensible 35 years ago. These significant cultural changes in the Wharton community mandate a renewed vision for ministry. The Wharton Church of God needs to rediscover its kingdom purpose in the Wharton community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of pastoral leadership that equip a rural lifestyle congregation to fulfill its kingdom purpose. Competent pastoral leadership is a key element in discovering and pursuing the kingdom purpose of a congregation. In order for a congregation to thrive and grow, it must have competent pastoral leadership. “The only congregations that will thrive in the coming decades will be those whose leaders have learned to *respond* to change, not *resist* or *ignore* it” (Shawchuck and Heuser 1993, 167).

The process of revisioning must be a constant process in rural lifestyle congregations. The biblical mandate of the Great Commission has never changed since the time Jesus walked on this earth. But, the specific mission of a local congregation does change as the community around it changes. Shifting cultural paradigms and the redistribution of the surrounding population forces a local congregation to rediscover its kingdom purpose. This study addresses specific issues that relate to the demand for and the process of revisioning for a local congregation.

Rural lifestyle congregations must be responsive to the cultural shifts and trends in order to maintain a culturally relevant model of ministry that effectively fulfills its kingdom purpose. The prevailing cultural dynamics of the community must be examined and understood in order to develop a culturally relevant method of ministry.

A multi-generational ministry paradigm is essential for rural lifestyle congregations to effectively minister in their communities in the 21st century. The specific demands and unique worldview of each generation must be understood. This

multi-generational perspective must inform and direct the ministry of a rural lifestyle congregation.

Rural lifestyle congregations are essential to the mission of the global church in the 21st century. In order for these congregations to effectively serve their local communities, however, pastoral leadership is the key! Pastoral leaders must recognize the unique characteristics and specific demands of rural lifestyle congregations. “Rural areas have many strengths, including a sense of community and mutual caring”, but they also face numerous challenges (Green 2006, 1). “Population shifts, economic changes and thinning of community life are three of them, but . . . the number one challenge to rural churches and their communities is inappropriate leadership” (Green 2006, 1).

Research Methodology

The research for this project includes interviews with pastors serving similar rural lifestyle congregations. These interviews provide a source of information from pastoral leadership that will inform the discussion of this project.

The research also includes case studies of rural lifestyle congregations in the Great Lakes Conference of the Churches of God, General Conference. These congregations are located in similar small towns or rural locations in southern Michigan and northwest Ohio.

The research also includes an examination of contemporary literature regarding pastoral leadership in rural lifestyle church ministry. A number of groups have conducted significant research in this area of discussion. The Alban Institute, Leadership Network, Hartford Seminary, The Pew Foundation, and others have conducted research that appropriately informs the present discussion.

Finally, the research includes an examination of biblical texts as well as contemporary literature that inform the current discussion.

Research Questions

This study addresses four research questions. The first question is, “***What are the characteristics of pastoral leadership that are unique to rural lifestyle congregations***”?

This research endeavors to identify the characteristics of pastoral leadership that are unique to the ministry of rural lifestyle congregations as compared to urban or suburban congregations. Pastoral leadership is a popular subject of dialogue within theological circles. These contemporary discussions are offering insightful observations regarding the essential characteristics necessary for pastoral leadership. This research pursues the characteristics that are unique and specific to rural lifestyle congregations.

The second question is, “***How does pastoral leadership guide a congregation in the revisioning process***”? This research seeks to guide pastoral leadership in rural lifestyle congregations in the revisioning process. This research identifies the unique mission assigned to specific rural lifestyle congregations. The key components of the kingdom purpose specifically assigned to a rural lifestyle congregation must be regularly evaluated in order to maintain a current and relevant model of ministry. This research provides a working model that will guide pastoral leadership in rural lifestyle congregations through their specific revisioning process in their local communities.

The third question is, “***How does pastoral leadership develop a ministry model that is relevant to the specific context of the rural lifestyle congregation***”? This research includes a discussion of the prevailing cultural dynamics that are unique to rural lifestyle

congregations. It seeks to identify a methodology of pastoral leadership that is culturally relevant to the specific community of the congregation.

The final question addressed is, “*How does pastoral leadership achieve a ministry model that is multi-generational*”? This research includes a discussion of the unique demands of four different generations within a rural lifestyle congregation. This research includes a discussion of the four generational divisions that exist simultaneously in a rural lifestyle congregation. This research identifies the need for rural lifestyle congregations to effectively minister to the four generational divisions in a congregation.

Significance of the Study

Self-preservation has become the model of ministry for many congregations in small towns and rural communities. These congregations find themselves in survival mode as they face the very real danger of succumbing to a ministry mode that places a greater value on self-preservation than in fulfilling its kingdom purpose. It is the goal of this project to provide insights into the characteristics of pastoral leadership necessary for rural lifestyle congregations to thrive.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

This project has four assumptions. The first assumption is that rural lifestyle congregations require competent pastoral leadership in order to fulfill its kingdom purpose in its communities. The declining community and shifting population of the surrounding area surfaces many obstacles to hinder a congregation in some small towns and rural communities. The current social, spiritual, or economic conditions do not diminish the need for a local congregation to achieve its kingdom purpose. It is the

assumption of this project that competent pastoral leadership is essential in order for small towns and rural communities to accomplish their kingdom purpose in their community.

The second assumption of this project is that pastoral leadership is the necessary catalyst for rural lifestyle congregations to accurately develop their specific vision. It assumes that every rural lifestyle congregation has a specific kingdom purpose assigned. It is the task of pastoral leadership to lead the congregation in the process of revising and pursuing their kingdom purposes.

The third assumption is that rural lifestyle congregations must pursue a culturally relevant ministry in order to effectively minister in their community. Each local community has specific social, spiritual, political and economic dynamics. In order for a rural lifestyle congregation to effectively minister in their community these cultural issues must be recognized and addressed by the congregation.

The fourth assumption is that a multi-generational ministry paradigm is both necessary and possible. In order for a local congregation to effectively minister to its community, generational distinctives must be understood. Ministry initiatives must effectively recognize the unique worldview and cultural paradigms of different generations. The unique generational distinctives must be understood in order to effectively achieve the kingdom purpose of a congregation.

In this project, the research is limited to qualitative research methods. The research consists of interviews and case studies, as well as the examination of relevant biblical and contemporary texts.

Definition of Terms

The term *rural lifestyle congregation* refers to a congregation that is located in a rural area or within a small town. This diverse community of persons shares a common worldview with a distinct system of values that are uniquely different from those in suburban or urban communities. The term is understood to be qualitatively value-neutral, yet identifies a shared system of values unique to a rural or small town community. According to this definition, congregations located within a small town could also be considered a rural lifestyle congregation.

The term *small town* refers to a community that is populated with 2500 people or less within or immediately surrounding the corporation limits of that community.

The term *rural community* refers to a community of persons that is located outside the boundaries of an urban, suburban or small town corporation limits.

The term *kingdom purpose* refers to the biblical mandate of the local congregation. This idea is variously defined in other texts with terms such as mission, vision, purpose, or focus. It is further understood that the *kingdom purpose* of the local congregation varies and is unique and specific to each local congregation. While there are overlaps of biblical mandates that apply to every congregation, this phrase is being used as it applies to the specific ministry parameters unique to every congregation, including those mandates that apply universally.

The term *vision* is used to describe the ordained kingdom purpose of a specific congregation as it is articulated and understood by the congregation.

The term *visioning* is used to describe the process by which a congregation develops its understanding of its divinely ordained kingdom purpose.

The term *mission* is used to describe the act or sets of actions taken in order to fulfill the ordained kingdom purpose of the congregation.

The term *self-preservation* refers to a ministry mode that seeks primarily to preserve the status of its own congregation. It refers to the paradigm of ministry that is focused on the needs and demands of the congregation within the church while overlooking the needs of the community outside of the church.

The term *pastoral leadership* refers specifically to that leadership which is specifically pastoral. Pastoral leadership is unique to the church. There are principles and practices of leadership that apply equally to both sacred and secular settings. However, pastoral leadership is understood to apply specifically to pastoral ministry that is distinct to the church. Further, while pastoral leadership may be informed by secular sources, its primary source is rooted in the Word of God

The term *culturally relevant* is used to express a paradigm that seeks to understand the worldview of the contemporary culture. It is a term that expresses the need to understand the prevailing cultural climate in order to present the gospel in a manner that is relevant and applicable to the Wharton community.

The term *multi-generational* is used to identify the four generations that exist together in a particular time and place. There are young, adult, mature and senior persons living together in communities across the world. Each of these distinct generations has unique values, worldviews, ambitions and perspectives that are influenced and informed by issues specific to each generation. A multi-generational approach seeks to hold each of the four generations together without forbidding or denying the generational distinctives.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One: Introduction to the Project

Chapter Two: Biblical and Theological Foundations

Chapter Three: Review of Literature and Other Sources

Chapter Four: Research Methodology and Procedures

Chapter Five: Results and Analysis of Data

Chapter Six: Summary, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter One introduces the parameters and establishes an outline for the remainder of this project. It addresses the context of the problem and seeks to familiarize the reader with the problem addressed in this project. The statement of the problem is reduced to a single sentence that has guided the research and defined the purpose of this project. It also introduces the research methodology and procedures employed to address the stated problem. The primary research methodology is qualitative in nature and includes interviews, case studies, and the research of biblical, historic, and contemporary texts.

Chapter Two pursues a biblical and theological foundation that addresses the problem statement of this project. The two primary sources that will inform this discussion are the leadership examples of Joshua and the Apostle Paul. The life and leadership of Joshua will be examined from Old Testament sources, specifically the books of Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. The life and leadership of the Apostle Paul will be examined from New Testament sources, specifically the Book of Acts and Paul's letters to Timothy, Titus, and the Philippians. Finally, the experiences of the author and other colleagues will be examined.

Chapter Three offers a review of literature and other sources. This chapter includes research of relevant and contemporary authors that contribute insight and information pertinent to this discussion.

Chapter Four describes the research methodology and procedures used to inform this project. It includes interviews of pastors currently serving rural congregations. It also includes observations, surveys, and other documents that inform the present discussion.

Chapter Five presents the results and analyzes data collected. It is coded in terms of categories, classes, patterns, and themes.

Finally, Chapter Six offers the summary, findings, conclusions, and recommendations resulting from the research of this project.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of pastoral leadership that equip a rural congregation to fulfill its kingdom purpose. This project assumes that rural congregations require competent pastoral leadership in order to fulfill their kingdom purpose in their communities. The goal of this chapter is to provide a biblical and theological foundation that identifies those characteristics that are essential for pastoral leadership to lead a congregation to thrive in fulfilling its kingdom purpose. Competent pastoral leadership is leadership that provides visionary leadership, provides culturally relevant outreach, and provides multi-generational discipleship.

Characteristics of Competent Pastoral Leadership

Many congregations in America are in crisis. They once held prominent positions in their communities but have now become the struggling residents of decaying edifices. But, these congregations still have a mandate from God. They still have a kingdom purpose in their communities. The word *congregation* comes from the Hebrew word *aydaw* and is defined as a “fixture, a stated assemblage . . . a family, crowd, or people” (Strong 2004). The biblical concept of congregations is similar to the current concept of family. God told Abraham, “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3 [NKJV]). The word *family* in this context is a reference to a tribe of people. It is not referring to just genetic or biological connections. It refers to the bonds shared between

people with physical, spiritual, and social connections. This definition describes a rural congregation. The first assumption of this project is that rural congregations require competent pastoral leadership in order to fulfill their kingdom purpose in their community. The Apostle Peter exhorts pastoral leaders to have the proper perspective concerning their ministry. “The elders who are among you I exhort . . . shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly” (1 Peter 5:1-2 [NKJV]). In this passage, Peter exhorts pastoral leaders to tend to the needs of their congregations.

There are three Greek words in this passage that identify pastoral leadership. The first word is the Greek word *presbyteros*. It is translated *elder* in this passage. The word means “one who is old; but it is frequently used in the New Testament as applicable to the officers of the church” (Barnes 2004). The second word is the Greek word *episkopos*. It is usually translated *bishop*. But, in this passage, it is translated *overseer*. The word gives “the sense . . . of overseeing; taking the oversight of; looking after, as of a flock” (Barnes 2004). The final Greek word in this passage that identifies pastoral leadership is the word *poimane*. It is translated *shepherd* in this passage and *pastor* in Ephesians 4:11. The word means “to take such an oversight of the church as a shepherd is accustomed to take of his flock” (Barnes 2004). These terms identify pastoral leadership in the church. The following discussion will identify essential characteristics necessary for pastoral leadership.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Loves People

One essential characteristic of competent pastoral leadership is a passionate love for the congregation he serves. The Scriptures offer insight into the expectations and demands of competent pastoral leadership. God told Jeremiah, “I will give you shepherds according to My heart” (Jeremiah 3:15 [NKJV]). The word *heart* is the Hebrew word *leb* and it refers “very widely [to] the feelings, the will and even the intellect” (Strong 2004). The one’s God calls for the care of his flock are expected to be shepherds “according to God’s own heart” (Clarke 2004). Jesus demonstrated the heart of the Father when he said, “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30 [NKJV]). When Samuel confronted King Saul about his incompetent and sinful leadership, he told him, “But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14 [NKJV]). King Saul had become so incompetent that God needed to remove him from his position. In his place, God wanted a man who would be passionate about the things of God rather than the things of this world. The one who would become that man was David – the shepherd boy. Simply stated, God appoints shepherds who have the same heart for people as his heart!

The best example of a loving shepherd is seen in Jesus. The Apostle John said, ‘By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us’ (1 John 3:16 [NKJV]). Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13 [NKJV]). Jesus said, “I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep” (John 10:15 [NKJV]).

The heart of God is passionately in love with people. Paul states that God’s abundant mercy is demonstrated by “His great love with which He loved us” (Ephesians

2:4 [NKJV]). In his theological discourse to the Romans Paul said, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8 [NKJV]). Paul told the Thessalonians to be encouraged in their work because God “has loved us and given us everlasting consolation” (2 Thessalonians 2:16 [NKJV]). Clearly, God loves people. The Apostle John was amazed by the love God has for people. John wrote, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us” (1 John 4:10 [NKJV]).

Isaiah declared God will “feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young” (Isaiah 40:11 [NKJV]). This passage offers a powerful image of competent pastoral leadership.

First, Isaiah said that God will *feed the flock*. The word *feed* is the Hebrew word *rawaw* and it means *to tend a flock, to pasture it, [by extension] to associate with as a friend* (Strong 2004). The task of feeding the flock is not limited to preparing and preaching edifying sermons. Feeding the flock is an activity of friendship. The expression, “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” aptly applies to pastoral leadership. Competent pastoral leadership feeds the flock.

Isaiah continues, explaining that God will *gather the lambs with his arms*. This is a beautiful picture of pastoral leadership. A shepherd is the protector of the flock. He roams among the flock gathering the lambs into his arms protecting them from danger. The shepherd is so attuned to the flock that potential danger is recognized and averted. Pastoral leadership attends to the congregation in the same way that God cares for his flock by *carrying them in the bosom*. This phrase offers a powerful image of the young,

timid, and needy sheep being carried closely to the bosom of the shepherd. The word *bosom* is a nurturing word. “*To have in one’s bosom* indicates kindness, secrecy, or intimacy” (Easton’s 2004). Isaiah continues, explaining that God will *gently lead those who are with youth*. The task of providing gentle leadership for the most vulnerable of society is an activity of competent pastoral leadership. Gentleness is often overlooked as a virtue in a leader. Leadership expert Jim Collins states that the leader who achieves the highest level of excellence is “an individual who blends extreme personal humility with intense professional will” (Collins 2001, 21). The expression, “leather skin, tender heart” is an appropriate attitude for pastoral leadership.

The final comment about the expectations of loving pastoral leadership comes from the words of Jesus. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11 [NKJV]). In this passage, Jesus demonstrates a paradigm of servant leadership that is essential for competent pastoral leadership. Competent pastoral leadership is sacrificial leadership. The leader exists for the benefit of others. The Old Testament example of King Saul exemplifies a leader who got confused on that issue. God ordained Saul to serve Israel. Instead of serving Israel, Saul compelled Israel to serve him. Jesus called this kind of demanding, overbearing, and self-seeking leader a hireling. Jesus said, “a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees . . . The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep” (John 10:12-13 [NKJV]). Competent pastoral leadership loves people.

Competent Pastoral Leadership is Appointed by God

Pastoral leadership that strives for excellence gives evidence of a divine appointment. Joshua was commissioned by God to handle one of the most difficult assignments recorded in Scripture. Joshua was called to assume the mantle of leadership after Moses' death. Moses had an incredible ministry. He was the one appointed to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt after more than four hundred years of slavery and bondage. Moses' ministry was a dizzying array of spectacular miracles, monumental events, and history making occasions. Moses was a tough act to follow. But, God did not casually appoint Joshua to a potentially impossible situation. God selected a man that had been "formed in the womb" and "ordained a prophet" (Jeremiah 1:5 [NKJV]). Joshua was appointed for the purpose of providing leadership to the nation of Israel after Moses' death.

Joshua's promise as a leader was evident early after the Exodus. When a conflict arose with the Amalekites, Joshua was selected to lead the army into battle. "And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek . . . so Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek . . . so Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword" (Exodus 17:9-13[NKJV]). Joshua gave evidence of his divine calling throughout his apprenticeship under Moses' leadership.

As Moses was nearing the end of his life, God told him to climb to the top of Mount Nebo on the west side of the Jordan so that he could see the Promised Land. On the top on the mountain, God reminded Moses that he would not be the one to lead Israel into the Promised Land. As he gazed upon the land of promise, Moses realized the people would not succeed in occupying the land unless they had a competent leader. Thus,

Moses cried out to God, “Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd” (Numbers 27:16-17 [NKJV]).

This passage offers a beautiful depiction of divinely appointed pastoral leadership. Moses asked God to give the people a leader who would be out in front of the people whether they were in battle or in repose. Moses asked God for a leader who would be among the people. He asked for a leader who would be coming in and going out whenever the people moved. Moses recognized this leader was necessary because, without a leader, the people would be like sheep without a shepherd. In response, God directed Moses to appoint Joshua to be the new leader of Israel.

God also gave Moses specific instructions regarding the process by which Joshua would be commissioned. The Lord told Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight.” (Numbers 27:18-19 [NKJV]). Joshua was not selected for leadership because he had superior intellectual capacities or because he had royal lineage. He was selected because the Spirit of the Lord with him gave evidence of God’s call upon him.

Evidence of his divine appointment was immediately manifested. When Joshua received the instruction to cross over the Jordan and begin the conquest of the Promised Land, his special leadership quality was apparent to all Israel. After the people had completely crossed the Jordan, Joshua instructed one man from each of the twelve tribes to take one stone and place it in the Jordan as a memorial of that day’s events. When the

memorial was set in the river, “On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they had feared Moses, all the days of his life” (Joshua 4:14 [NKJV]).

Joshua demonstrates an example of divinely appointed pastoral leadership. The task of pastoral leadership is not to be entered into at the will of man. The call that leads to pastoral leadership begins first in the counsel of God. Competent pastoral leadership is appointed by God.

Competent Pastoral Leadership is Spiritual Leadership

The life of Peter demonstrates leadership that is spiritual. Jesus had just finished eating His last meal with His disciples. He led them to the Garden of Gethsemane for their final hours together. In the Garden, Jesus said, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (Matthew 26:31 [NKJV]). But Peter refused to believe that he lacked the strength to stand against any opposition. He boldly declared, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble” (Matthew 26:33 [NKJV]). In spite of Peter’s bold declaration, Jesus said to Peter, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times” (Matthew 26:34 [NKJV]).

In spite of Jesus’ words, Peter was characteristically over confident. He was convinced that he possessed superior strength to withstand any opposition that could be thrown against him. Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You” (Matthew 26:35 [NKJV]). Peter’s arrogance is evident. On the night of the betrayal, Peter began to waver. When Jesus was arrested and taken to the High Priest, Peter followed

from a distance. Before the evening was over, however, Peter would be fearfully standing around a charcoal fire denying that he was one of Jesus' disciples. When Peter heard the rooster crow, he remembered Jesus' words of warning. When he realized his failure, Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75 [NKJV]). Peter's failure, however, did not mark his lack of potential. Jesus was not finished with Peter.

After Jesus' death and resurrection the disciples were fishing on the Sea of Tiberias. They had fished all night but caught nothing. When the morning came, they headed to the shore. Jesus, standing on the shore, yelled out to the disciples, "Children, have you any food?" (John 21:5 [NKJV]). The disciples, not recognizing to whom they were speaking, simply said, "No" (John 21:5 [NKJV]).

Jesus persisted, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some" (John 21:6 [NKJV]). When the disciples obeyed Jesus' instructions, the catch was so large they were not able to draw all of it in. When they realized they had just experienced a miracle, Peter jumped out of the boat and swam to the shore to meet Jesus. The other disciples landed the boats and drew in the nets. As soon as the disciples landed, they brought some fish to the fire Jesus had prepared and they ate breakfast together.

When Jesus and the disciples finished eating breakfast, Jesus turned to Peter to resolve some unfinished business. At their last conversation, Peter stood proudly declaring his unwavering confidence that he would stand with Jesus regardless of the circumstances. Yet, when the soldiers came, and the hostility of the crowd intensified, Peter lost his bravado and ran away in fear. But Jesus was not content to allow Peter to remain in a state of melancholy due to his failure. Instead, Jesus had come to bring reconciliation.

“So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me’ (John 21:15 [NKJV]). Jesus did not scold Peter for his failure. Rather, Jesus was calling him to remembrance of his holy calling. Three times Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love Me”? With each inquiry, Peter responded in the affirmative. When Peter confessed his commitment to Jesus, Jesus commanded Peter, “Follow Me” (John 21:19 [NKJV]). The word *follow* is the Greek word *akoloutheo* meaning *to be in the same way with* (Strong 2004). It suggests an invitation to be a travelling companion. This is spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership is leadership that is walking with Jesus. Peter is an example of a man who learned to walk with Jesus. Competent pastoral leadership is spiritual leadership.

Competent Pastoral Leadership is Visionary Leadership

The second assumption of this project is that visionary pastoral leadership is necessary for rural congregations to fulfill their kingdom purpose. Competent pastoral leadership requires vision. Visionary leadership is an essential characteristic that makes pastoral leadership excellent. Visionary leadership looks beyond the present circumstances and sees the future plan of God. Wayne Gretzky, the great hockey player once said, “A good hockey player plays where the puck is. A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be”. That is visionary leadership. Competent pastoral leadership must be visionary leadership.

Visionary Leadership is Courageous

Competent pastoral leadership is courageous enough to pursue the will of God. A hireling will run at the first sign of opposition, but a courageous leader will refuse to be

swayed by any opposition. Moses is an excellent example of courageous visionary leadership.

When Moses entered Pharaoh's court, he entered hostile territory. Moses probably had some childhood experiences in the presence of Pharaoh. But, when he went to Pharaoh to intercede for the people of Israel, he did not exercise any privilege as a former member of the royal family. Rather, he went to Pharaoh as the messenger of God. When God called Moses, he said, "Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10 [NKJV]).

But Moses was timid about this plan. He had some knowledge about the Pharaoh. He knew Pharaoh would not be pleased with God's request. Thus, "Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11 [NKJV]). This is a legitimate question. Moses knew how to behave in the presence of the Pharaoh. He had been raised by the Pharaoh's daughter. But, Moses had left Egypt in disgrace. He knew that he would not be warmly received. Moses considered this to be a hindrance, but God had a plan. "So He said, "I will certainly be with you" (Exodus 3:12 [NKJV]).

So Moses left Midian and headed back to Egypt. In spite of his reservations, in spite of his perceived incompetencies, Moses had determined to become the courageous leader God had called him to be. When Moses and the children of Israel arrived in Egypt, Moses and Aaron went in to have a counsel with Pharaoh. Moses, boldly and confidently declared to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness'" (Exodus 5:1 [NKJV]). That is an example of courageous visionary leadership.

Pharaoh was not impressed with Moses' message. He was not impressed with Moses' visionary leadership. Instead, Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2 [NKJV]). As difficult as the initial undertaking must have been, it certainly became more difficult with each rejection from Pharaoh. Yet Moses is undeterred. Ten different times Moses went before Pharaoh and made the same request, "Let my people go"!

In spite of the rejection, in spite of the failure, in spite of Pharaoh's complete refusal, Moses did not become discouraged. He continued to persevere. He courageously went before Pharaoh with boldness and courage. This is courageous visionary leadership. Moses had received the vision of God's plan. He knew that God was going to deliver Israel from the hand of Pharaoh. He knew that the will of God would prevail over the will of Pharaoh. So, Moses refused to quit.

This is an essential characteristic of pastoral leadership. Competent pastoral leadership that is courageous abandons fear. It refuses to yield when worldly forces are arrayed against the plan of God. Courageous visionary leadership is confident that God will be with the leader just as he was with Moses. Visionary leadership is courageous.

Visionary Leadership Guides the Congregation Through Change

Visionary leadership that is competent effectively guides the congregation through seasons of change. Immediately after Joshua was commissioned as the new leader in Israel, he began to prepare the people to occupy the Promised Land. Joshua called his officers together to prepare the people for the journey. He told the officers, "Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the

land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess” (Joshua 1:10-11 [NKJV]). For forty years the people of Israel had wandered in the wilderness. But now, they were about to change direction.

The blessings of the Promised Land could not be realized if the people were not able to make the necessary transitions. Joshua’s command to get the people ready was given to prepare the people for some very significant cultural changes. In just a short time, the manna from heaven was going to cease. The Hebrew people would be sustained by eating the food of the land of Canaan.

Visionary pastoral leadership sees beyond the immediate moment. Methods that were relevant at one time may no longer be fulfilling a relevant purpose. Visionary pastoral leadership guides the congregation through the changes of releasing ineffective methods. The message of the gospel never changes but the methods used to conduct ministry do change. Visionary leadership provides guidance through those changes.

There is a tension that exists in Scripture regarding change. One passage instructs, “Ask for the old ways and walk in them” (Jeremiah 6:16 [NKJV]). Yet, another instructs, “forget those things which are behind and reach forward to those things which are ahead” (Philippians 3:13 [NKJV]). In rural congregations, there are not many things with greater power to ignite controversy than change. Human nature tends to resist change. When people become accustomed to a particular behavior or process, resistance naturally arises. But, resistance to change may be a good thing! God said, “I am the LORD, I do not change” (Malachi 3:6 [NKJV]). Scripture also says there is “no variation or shadow of turning in God” (James 1:17 [NKJV]). Changelessness is an attribute of a holy God. Thus, there are times when the correct thing to do is to remain unchanging.

The Scripture also embraces positive aspects of change. David – speaking of his enemies – said “because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God” (Psalm 55:19 [NKJV]). Speaking of the work of God’s hands, David again said yes, “they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed” (Psalm 102:26 [NKJV]). The writer of Hebrews expounds upon the changes facing believers after the resurrection of Jesus. The new covenant brought expansive changes in the worship practices of God’s people. To an audience that was resistant to change the time-honored practices of Temple worship, the writer of Hebrews said “for the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law” (Hebrews 7:12 [NKJV]).

This tension regarding change manifests in rural congregations. There are struggles concerning worship styles, musical preferences, outreach programs, budgetary changes, and a plethora of other issues. There are those who have become rigidly fixed and unwilling to make any change in any form regarding any church practice. On the other hand, there are those who adopt a wholesale philosophy of “out with the old, in with the new” regarding nearly every church practice. Visionary pastoral leadership is necessary for rural congregations to navigate the complex issues of rural congregational life. Visionary pastoral leadership must lead the congregation biblically and lovingly. Visionary pastoral leadership guides the congregation through change.

Visionary Leadership Maintains A Tension Between The Old and The New

Visionary leadership that is competent maintains a proper tension between issues that are perceived as old and traditional, and new and contemporary. The prophet Isaiah argued for a perspective that could release former things in order to receive new things from God. “Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I

will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth” (Isaiah 43:18 [NKJV]). “God is doing a new thing” is a familiar mantra among the people of God. But this mantra should never be a battering ram used to dishonor the accomplishments of previous generations. It is necessary for God to do a new thing with the passing of one generation and the birth of a new generation. God has always done new things. In every generation God is going to do a new thing.

Although the people of God are instructed to release the former things, they are instructed to not forget the past. Visionary pastoral leadership strives to keep alive the memory of what God has done in the past, while inspiring a new generation of believers to strive for the blessing of God. “Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest--when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them . . . and all that you have is multiplied . . . then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:11-18 [NKJV]).

The story of ancient Israel is a powerful reminder of what happens when the people of God forget what the Lord has done in the past. In the above passage, God instructs his people to remember their spiritual journey. He warns the people to remember that the power to accumulate material and spiritual treasure comes from God. It is God who supplies the power for his people to get the wealth he desires for them. If human ability receives the credit for divine accomplishment, then pride and arrogance result.

This kind of arrogance has been evidenced in some attitudes toward music in the church. Worship music is an example. Isaiah said, “Sing to the Lord a new song” (Isaiah 42:9 [NKJV]). The book of Revelation records the song of those who are victorious over the beast. “They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!” (Revelation (15:3 [NKJV])). John also said that the saints of God, throughout all eternity, will be singing “a new song . . . out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9 [NKJV]). The call to sing a new song has been issued to every generation. Every generation has expressed its love for God through its music. Ezekiel prophesied that the Lord will “give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you” (Ezekiel 36:26 [NKJV]). Every heart that has been made new in every generation has been empowered to sing a new song. Every heart that has sung a new song has been made new by the power of God.

Unfortunately, one of the primary conflicts in the recent history of the church has been in regards to music. Every generation expresses itself musically. The music of each generation helps to define that generation. The music that is popular in a generation is a reflection of that generation’s passions, ambitions, interests, like, and dislikes. Music identifies a generation. The phrase, “the music of the 60’s” elicits images of the hippy movement, the concert at Woodstock, drug use, free-love, and demonstrations against the war in Vietnam. It is not just the sounds of the music that are remembered. It is the social and cultural issues that defined the generation that come to mind.

It is not surprising that different tastes in music often cause conflict in a congregation. The Psalmist records, “Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord,

all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day” (Psalms 96:1-2 [NKJV]). Three times the Psalmist instructs *sing to the Lord*. This new song is to be sung in order to *proclaim the good news . . . from day to day*. Each generation of God’s people should experience a new song. They should sing a new song that proclaims the good news from day to day in their generation.

The new song that is sung by a succeeding generation, however, is often unappreciated by the previous generation. There are all kinds of music that reflect all kinds of cultures. There are a myriad of music styles that reflect a myriad of generational influences. This is a demonstration of the marvelous diversity and variety God has created. However, when music becomes the source of tension between different cultures or generations, the new song is stifled. The music of a generation should produce the beauty of the new song God intended. Competent pastoral leadership strives to prevent tension over something as fluid and changing as generationally specific musical preferences. Competent pastoral leadership strives to unite people to sing a new song in every generation.

Jeremiah said, “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not, they are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:23 [NKJV]). The mercies of God that brought the blessings of God to the people of God yesterday are the same mercies that bring the same blessings today. The mercies of the Lord are not discovered by reaching backwards anymore than they are discovered by reaching forward. The mercies and compassions of God are found new and fresh every day. Visionary pastoral leadership strives to maintain a healthy balance between the old and the new – the contemporary and the traditional.

Competent Pastoral Leadership is Culturally Relevant

This project assumes that rural congregations must pursue culturally relevant outreach in order to effectively minister in their community. Pastoral leadership that is culturally relevant strives to understand the cultural forces that are at work in the world. One might ask, “Should these cultural and generational changes concern our discussion of pastoral leadership in rural congregations?” Or, “Should pastoral leadership give serious consideration to these changes in reaction or response to these issues?” Some pastoral leaders choose to disregard the issues of cultural relevance. Those who would ignore issues of cultural relevance are reminiscent of the proverbial ostrich with its head buried in the sand. Pastor Wayne Boyer, former Executive Director of the Churches of God, General Conference (CGGC) refers to this practice as “death by neglect” (Boyer 2001). Pastoral leadership that strives for excellence demands an understanding of the host culture.

Culturally Relevant Outreach is Biblical

Throughout the Bible, it seems that God spoke to each generation in a manner that could be understood. The writer of Hebrews wrote, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets” (Hebrews 1:1 [NKJV]). God spoke *in various times and in various ways* because the shifting cultural dynamics demanded it. The word *ways* is defined “variously, as to method or form” (Strong 2004). God changed the *method or the form* of the delivery of his Word, but he never changed his message. The Psalmist wrote, “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven” (Psalms 119:89 [NKJV]). Although his word is forever settled in heaven, *the various ways* – the methods or forms – have changed throughout various times.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus indicated that, in spite of the unchanging message of the gospel, the delivery methods should be modified as necessary. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16 [NKJV]). The imperative in this passage is *let your light so shine*. This is not a passive posture for the light-bearer. Rather, the light-bearer is instructed to shine the light before others in such a way that they may see the good works of God. There is a responsibility on the part of the light-bearer to be effective. It is not enough just to allow the light of Christ to shine. It is demanded of the light-bearer to let that light shine in such a manner that others may be able to comprehend that light. Pastoral leadership is required to shine the light in such a manner that the world can respond back to the Father in heaven.

Paul admonishes the church at Philippi to shine the light “without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, whom you shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15 [NKJV]). This is not just a call to faultless living. It is a call to faultless light-bearing. Paul suggests that faultless light-bearing is necessary in order for a crooked and perverse generation to see the glorious light of the gospel. Paul said, “In mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God . . . I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:19 [NKJV]). Paul fully preached the gospel. It is as if Paul said, “I have successfully preached—I have not only proclaimed the word, but made converts and founded Churches” (Clarke 2004). For Paul it was not enough just to preach the word. He wanted to make disciples and plant churches. Thus, he preached the word in such a way that the people could hear and understand it.

Peter also advised pastoral leadership to deliver the gospel message in a culturally relevant manner. Peter begged his fellow sojourners to have their “conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God” (1 Peter 2:12 [NKJV]). The honorable conduct Peter advocates is conduct that is considered honorable by the Gentiles. This is the conduct that allows the Gentiles to *observe and glorify God*. Any conduct that would prevent the Gentiles from finding God is unacceptable to Peter. The desired end of Peter’s honorable conduct is the conversion of the Gentiles.

God is eternally unchanging and the truth is unchangeable. But, competent pastoral leadership strives to respond to the shifting cultural paradigms of each generation. Competent pastoral leadership ministers in such a way that the message is understood by the specific culture and generation being addressed. Culturally relevant outreach is biblical.

Culturally Relevant Outreach is in the Old Testament

The state of affairs in Israel during the time of Jeremiah offers insight into the discussion of culturally relevant outreach. Jeremiah was living in a world with similarities to the current culture in America. He was surrounded with pagan and heathen practices that had corrupted the moral and religious fabric of society. He was dwelling among a people with a godly heritage, but they had forsaken the ways of righteousness and were following pagan customs.

Jeremiah prophesied during the final four decades before Judah went into Babylonian captivity in 586 BC. As Judah digressed spiritually, the nation became more

vulnerable to undesirable consequences. The spiritual condition of Judah was destroying the nation.

Jeremiah opened his book of prophecy by reminding Judah of her rich spiritual heritage. Jeremiah reminded Judah of her glorious youth. “Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying . . . I remember . . . the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal . . . when Israel was holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of His increase” (Jeremiah 2:1-3 [NKJV]).

The message of Jeremiah, even in the midst of a decadent and hedonistic culture, is a message that called the people back to their spiritual and religious heritage. Judah, however, would not heed the call. The Lord pointed out two problems among the people of Judah. “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns--broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13 [NKJV]).

These two evils grant the reader an insight into the spiritual condition of Judah. The first evil was that Judah had forsaken God. The word *forsaken* is the Hebrew word *azab* which means to *loosen or relinquish* (Strong 2004). The Lord’s wrath was kindled against Judah because they had *relinquished* themselves from him. This is not to say that the Temple worship had ceased. It had not! This is not to say that religious activity had ceased. It had not! Nor is this to say that the Mosaic laws and practices for Temple worship had been significantly altered. They had not!

The real problem had nothing to do with the form or the outward expression of Temple worship. The evil being committed was the ambivalence and lack of holiness

among the people. The problem was not their outward expression. It was their inward condition. It was the condition of the heart gone awry.

There is a recurring theme among the major and minor prophets in the Old Testament. It was the same problem that Jesus identified in the Scribes and Pharisees of his day. It was a condemnation of religious practices that were in accord with Mosaic Law, but devoid of any lasting spiritual value. The Apostle Paul labeled this practice as “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5 [NKJV]).

The second evil mentioned, however, really got to the heart of the prevailing spiritual condition. The Lord said, “My people . . . [have] hewn themselves cisterns that can hold no water”. What is the problem with cisterns? Cisterns provide a means of storing water. The stored water makes a constant source of water available for the people. This seems like a brilliant idea in a dry land like Judah. It is a land with few bodies of fresh water. The use of cisterns is a metaphor. Jeremiah said the people had forsaken God who is *the fountain of living waters*. *Living waters* is a metaphor that identifies moving waters such as in streams and rivers. Cisterns are reservoirs of waters. Cisterns metaphorically represent non-moving or dead waters.

The real issue Jeremiah condemned was the cold, dead, lifeless worship of the people. Their worship was like the waters of the cistern. It was dead! Jesus said, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38 [NKJV]). The spiritual condition Jeremiah confronted was the same condition Jesus encountered. Jesus rebuked this condition in the church at Ephesus in the Book of the Revelation. Jesus said, “I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (Revelation 2:4 [NKJV]). This cold, dead and lifeless spiritual condition was present in

ancient Judah. It was present in Ephesus in the first century. And, it continues to exist in some congregations today. God is calling his church back to the spiritual condition that ignites a passion to pursue him.

The central theme of Jeremiah's message to Judah is a call to return to the love Israel experienced in her youth. This is the impassioned plea of the prophet to his beloved people. It is the same call pastoral leadership strives to herald in order for rural congregations to fulfill their kingdom purpose.

Jeremiah went on to say, "Thus says the Lord: Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16 [NKJV]). The first part of this passage instructs, *stand in the ways*. One Hebrew scholar translates this phrase as *stand at the crossroads* (LaSor 1996, 328). The word *crossroads* offers an interesting implication. It suggests the possibility of making a course change. This is consistent with the rest of the imperative in the passage, *stand in the ways and see*. The Hebrew word is *rawaw* and it means *to see, observe, perceive, get acquainted with, gain understanding, examine, look after, see to, choose, or discover* (Vine 1996, 219). To stand in the ways and see, then, is not just to make a mere observation. To see is *to perceive and get acquainted with* in such a way that the riches found in the old paths can be rediscovered.

The passage goes on to instruct, *ask for the old paths*. The Hebrew word for the *old paths* is *olawm* and it means *eternal, forever or everlasting* (Strong 2004). The *old paths* Jeremiah is referring to are not the antiquated cultural dynamics of nostalgia. The *old paths* are the *eternal, everlasting* paths of righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 2:24 [NKJV]). They are the same paths that Jesus called the *strait and narrow ways*

(Matthew 7:13 [KJV]). The old paths that are the eternal and everlasting paths are the ways of righteousness and holiness in Jesus Christ. It is the path God has created for every congregation to walk upon.

Jeremiah went on, “But they said, ‘We will not walk in it’” (Jeremiah 6:16 [NKJV]). The people of Judah during Jeremiah’s day did not heed the message. Culturally relevant pastoral leadership strives to lead the congregation to walk in the good way. Culturally relevant outreach that is exemplified in the Old Testament, leads the congregation to embrace the eternal ways of righteousness and holiness.

Culturally Relevant Outreach is in the New Testament

While there is a consistent call in Scripture to return to the tried and true spiritual paths of righteousness and holiness, there is also a clarion call to abandon former things and follow the new! Solomon issues a warning in regards to inquiring about former days. “Do not say, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For you do not inquire wisely concerning this” (Ecclesiastes 7:10 [NKJV]).

In Solomon’s pursuit for meaning in life, he systematically dispels all of the trappings of this material world as a means to ultimate fulfillment in life. Every conceivable form of treasure, pleasure and profit is denounced as a source of lasting joy. The only source of true contentment, Solomon concludes, is to “Fear God, and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13 [NKJV]).

One pursuit that Solomon denounces is the longing for the former days. This is an unwise pursuit. The phrase *former days* implies a reference to the ancestral past. Solomon is not denouncing a studious examination of history. He is denouncing the practice of nostalgic glorification of previous accomplishments. The attempt to recover the luster of

yesterday's glory is fruitless. Competent pastoral leadership strives to pursue ministry that is culturally relevant for today.

A congregation cannot be effective in current ministry if it is tethered to nostalgic attempts to recover memories of the past. The Apostle Paul said, "Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14 [NKJV]).

When Paul says, "forget those things which are behind", he is not advocating an abandonment of his familial and spiritual heritage. The previous verses contain Paul's rather impressive resume. He was circumcised on the eighth day of his life. He was born of the tribe of Benjamin. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews and, most impressively, he was himself a Pharisee. Paul could boast of his former life. He had come from a good family. He had received a great education. He was zealous concerning his priestly duties. Yet, when compared to the incomparable riches of knowing Christ, Paul said "I count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8 [NKJV]).

Pastoral leadership strives to make more and better disciples of Jesus Christ. The pursuit is to press forward towards those things which are ahead. The prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus is not behind us. It is ahead of us. The verbs in these two verses are in the present tense. Culturally relevant pastoral leadership presses forward and reaches toward the upward call that is found in Jesus Christ. There are lessons to be learned from past experiences. The accomplishments of past generations should be treasured. The achievements of previous times should be valued. But, competent pastoral leadership does not get stuck in reverse.

In another passage Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus to “receive the spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Ephesians 1:17 [NKJV]). Maintaining the proper balance that links the wisdom gained from yesterday’s experiences to the circumstances of today’s cultural demands requires spiritual revelation. Culturally relevant pastoral leadership strives to reach this generation by connecting the lessons from the past to the present pursuits of contemporary ministry.

Competent Pastoral Leadership is Multi-Generational

This project assumes that a multi-generational discipleship paradigm is necessary in order for rural congregations to thrive in their kingdom purpose. The discussion of multi-generational discipleship begins with an understanding of the term. A generation is defined as “a group of people who are connected by their place in time with common boundaries and by a common character” (McIntosh 2002, 11). Age is one element in determining a generation. It is not the only determinant, but age sets the parameters that define a generational group. Members of a generation are identified by physical, spiritual, and societal events that are shared with others of the same age group. It is these shared events that form the nuclei of a generational group. Another identifying characteristic of a generational group are shared beliefs. A generational group is identified by common beliefs that have developed within the group. Members within a generational group have experienced the same social trends and fads. They have shared experiences of prominent people. They have shared experiences of significant events and experiences. These experiences have created an experiential thread that unites and defines a generational group.

Multi-Generational Discipleship Reaches All Ages in the Congregation

At any point in time, there are typically four generations co-existing within a culture. Today, these four generations are generally identified as Builders, Boomers, Busters, and Bridgers. Builders are those who were born before 1946. The World Wars I and II, the Roaring Twenties, and the Great Depression were powerful influences on their psychological, physical and spiritual development. They were born into a world that was predominantly rural and agrarian. They experienced the advent of the automobile and the radio. This generation shares common characteristics such as a strong sense of patriotism, loyalty, and a deep sense of civic duty. The Boomers were born roughly between 1946 and 1964. They experienced the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights Movement. They witnessed the advent of television, the economic growth that powered American affluence worldwide, educational and technological growth. They witnessed the Kennedys' and Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinations. The Busters were born roughly between 1964 and 1984. The issues that shaped their development were issues such as legalized abortion on demand, the collapse of the nuclear American family, the spread of divorce, the explosion of technological advances, video games, and the massive expansion of television. The Bridgers were born roughly between 1985 and the present. The rise of postmodernism, the global availability of high speed technology, the massive expansion of the worldwide internet, school shootings at Columbine High School, Virginia Technical Institute and other institutions, and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were formative experiences of the Bridger generation.

A multi-generational ministry paradigm offers discipleship that is relevant to each generation. Multi-generational discipleship seeks to recognize and understand

generational paradigms in order to offer ministry that is relevant to each generation. Competent pastoral leadership provides multi-generational discipleship in order for a rural congregation to achieve its kingdom purpose. Multi-generational discipleship reaches all ages reaches all ages in order for rural congregations to achieve their kingdom purpose.

Multi-Generational Discipleship is Biblical

Rural congregations tend to be family churches. Grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters and every other family member, on any given Sunday, are found worshipping together in rural congregations throughout America. One aspect of rural lifestyle families tends to be their desire to worship together as a family. They worship in congregations that offer ministry to the young as well as to the old. Every year, the average age of many rural congregations increases by one. This occurs because there are no young people being added to the congregation. The result of this upward aging of the congregation will ultimately result in the death of the congregation. An infusion of congregants from the younger generation is required if these rural congregations are going to survive. Most congregants, as well as leaders, in rural congregations crave the addition of younger people. Most people in dying rural congregations realize that if younger people are not added to their church, the death of the congregation is inevitable. If rural congregations are going to thrive in fulfilling their kingdom purpose, pastoral leadership must pursue a multi-generational paradigm of discipleship.

The command upon parents and grandparents to teach their children and grandchildren dates all the way back to Moses and the giving of the Law. Moses said,

“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren” (Deuteronomy 4:9 [NKJV]). The instruction to *take heed to yourself* is satisfied, in part, by fulfilling the instruction to *teach your children and grandchildren*. The word *heed* and *keep* in this passage are the same Hebrew word. It is the word *shawmar* and it means “to hedge about, guard; generally to protect, attend to” (Strong 2004). It requires an intentional effort to guard oneself from the “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things” (Mark 4:19 [NKJV]). The allurements that are a continual bombardment are powerfully destructive forces against the family. It is incumbent upon parents and grandparents to attend to the spiritual care and instruction of their children. The following passage establishes a biblical paradigm for rural congregations to strive for multi-generational discipleship.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up” (Deuteronomy 6:4-7 [NKJV]). This passage is referred to as the Shema. It is the great commandment – the commandment to love the Lord God with the entire being. This commandment establishes the paradigm for parents to teach their children to walk in the ways of the Lord. Parents are commanded to order the household conversation to speak about the Lord when they are sitting in the house, when they are walking by the way, when they lie down and when they arise from

bed. The instructions of the Lord are to be constantly confronting the thinking of the children. Competent pastoral leadership strives to achieve a ministry paradigm that disciples children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents and every generation as the Bible teaches. Multi-generational discipleship is biblical.

Multi-Generational Discipleship is Required in Rural Congregations

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6 [NKJV]). Discipleship that is multi-generational is an achievable pursuit. The above passage expands the instructions to train children to include the discipleship ministry in the congregation. To *train* a child is to discipline the child (Strong 2004). The word *child* refers to children “from the age of infancy to adolescence” (Strong 2004). It encompasses every age group of children. The implication is that the training of children is also a responsibility of the leadership of a congregation. The Hebrew phrase *train up a child in the way he should go* means to “initiate the child at the opening (the mouth) of his path” (Clarke 2004). The implication is that the child should be receiving transformational discipleship as they arrive at the beginning of every new path in life. Multi-generational pastoral leadership strives to achieve discipleship ministry that effectively developing every age group of believers.

The training a child receives is intended to empower the child to *not depart from it* as he gets older. The track record of rural congregations in this regard is not positive. Young people that are being raised in Christian homes are leaving the church when they reach adulthood with staggering consistency. The young people who are regularly participating in many rural congregations’ discipleship programs are reaching adulthood and leaving the church, never to return again. This is a failure rural congregations cannot

easily afford. Multi-generational discipleship is required in order for rural congregations to train up children in the way they should go.

Multi-generational discipleship does not exclude ministry from any age group. The older generations are expected to pass the faith from one generation to the next. Peter gave instructions for congregational life when he said, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5 [NKJV]). Paul taught Titus that the older generation should be teaching the younger generation. He wrote, “the older women [should] be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things – that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed” (Titus 2:3-5 [NKJV]). This is a multi-generational discipleship model for rural congregations.

Competent pastoral leadership in rural congregations strives to achieve multi-generational discipleship that effectively empowers disciples in every generational group.

In many rural communities, there are healthy and dynamic congregations accomplishing the work of the kingdom in exciting and innovative ways. Thriving rural congregations are achieving effective multi-generational ministries. Multi-generational discipleship reaches all age groups. Multi-generational discipleship is biblical. Multi-generational discipleship is achievable. Competent pastoral leadership strives to achieve multi-generational ministry in the congregation.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND OTHER SOURCES

The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of pastoral leadership that equip a rural congregation to fulfill its kingdom purpose. The goal of this chapter is to provide a literary review from contemporary literature that is relevant to the role of pastoral leadership. One assumption of this project states that competent pastoral leadership is a foundational necessity in order for rural lifestyle congregations to thrive.

The landscape of rural America has been undergoing massive changes in the first years of the 21st century. “Many rural communities have been on a demographic and economic roller coaster” (Johnson 2001, 21). Some rural communities are experiencing economic booms. The migration of many urban and suburban dwellers to the quieter and slower pace of a rural community has created a booming economy in many rural communities. The local economies of these communities are flourishing as the waves of new residents are contributing to their financial activities.

The flourishing rural community, however, does not seem to be the norm throughout the midwest. Due to the diminishing financial conditions, “many parts of rural America face a make or break period in the coming years” (Drabenstott 2001, 3). The result of population shifts has created a decline in the financial base of many rural communities. The declining circumstances in the communities have had a significant impact on rural lifestyle congregations.

Many rural lifestyle congregations have either failed or they are in fear of failure due to declining attendance and falling revenues. This phenomenon is being experienced in rural lifestyle congregations all across America. One of the reasons these congregations fail is because “we have either forgotten or have not known that the key to every ministry is the quality of the shepherd who leads it” (Stowell 1997, 11). The uncertainty of the social, economic, and religious landscape of rural communities provides rural lifestyle congregations an opportunity to advance the work of the kingdom of God in these communities. This chapter seeks to identify essential characteristics that make pastoral leadership competent to equip the rural lifestyle congregation to fulfill its ordained kingdom purpose.

Definitions of Competent Pastoral Leadership

The pursuit of competent pastoral leadership begins with understanding the kingdom purpose of the church. In his book, *The Essence of the Church*, Craig Van Gelder describes the church as “spiritual territory that occupies earthly terrain” (Van Gelder 2000, 14). The church is not just another human organization designed for the well-being of society. The church is the representation of Jesus Christ on the earth. The church does not exist in order to send missionaries into the world for the purpose of spreading the gospel. The mission of spreading the gospel is the “inherent . . . nature of the church” (Van Gelder 2000, 33). A fundamental necessity of competent pastoral leadership is to lead the congregation in its ordained kingdom purpose of presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to its community.

The church in 21st century America, however, is experiencing a crisis in pastoral leadership. “In virtually every segment of American society the people cry that leadership

has fallen on hard times” (Shawchuck and Heuser 1993, 15). “Like every other segment of society, the religious community has not escaped the leadership drought” in the early years of the 21st century (Blackaby 2001, 8). This phenomenon, however, does not exist due to a lack of published literature on the subject. Blackaby reports that there are more than 850 definitions of leadership in Christian literature (Blackaby 2001, 16). Books regarding pastoral leadership are being written and read by the thousands. Yet, in the midst of this deluge of dialogue, the drought of competent pastoral leadership seems to continue. This discussion begins by offering four acceptable definitions of competent pastoral leadership.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Is Influential

The first definition of competent pastoral leadership is from John Maxwell. Maxwell defines leadership simply as *influence*. “If you don’t have influence, you will never be able to lead others” (Maxwell 1998, 11). Influence is understood as the ability to “move people in a new direction” (Maxwell 1998, 14). The power of influence is illustrated in the life of Mother Theresa.

Mother Theresa was a saintly Roman Catholic nun who devoted herself to her life’s mission. She was a small woman, short in stature and petite. She was soft spoken and gentle of nature. She lived a life of sacrifice and hardship. Mother Teresa began her work in India in 1931. She devoted herself to working among the poorest of the poor in the slums of Calcutta, India. Her work in Calcutta earned her the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. She founded *The Society of Missionaries*, which has motivated people all over the world to help the world’s poorest in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The Society helps

to provide relief work in the wake of natural catastrophes such as floods, epidemics, and famine. They also work with alcoholics, the homeless, and AIDs sufferers.

Mother Theresa was an otherwise unremarkable woman. Her life, however, served as an inspiration to thousands of people who continue her cause of ministering to the poor. Mother Theresa is an example of leadership by influence. In the same way that her life influenced others to serve, competent pastoral leadership must influence a congregation of people to accomplish its ordained kingdom purpose.

Competent Pastoral Leadership is Spiritual

The second definition emphasizes that competent pastoral leadership is spiritual leadership. “Spiritual leadership is moving people on to God’s agenda” (Blackaby 2001, 20). This definition distinguishes leadership as a spiritual activity. “This is not to distinguish between leaders of religious organizations and business leaders guiding secular companies” (Blackaby 2001, 17). Rather, the intention is to distinguish the leadership that seeks to follow Godly principles. The abundance of dialogue regarding leadership makes this distinction necessary. Pastoral leadership that is competent must be spiritual leadership.

The best example of spiritual leadership is Jesus. “Jesus has established the model for Christian leaders. It is not found in his ‘methodology’. Rather, it is seen in his absolute obedience to the Father’s will” (Blackaby 2001, 28). Nowhere is this absolute obedience better seen than in Jesus’ struggle of will in the Garden of Gethsemane. “Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples . . . ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me’” (Matthew 26:36-38 [NKJV]). The anguish upon Jesus was so great that He even experienced

physical symptoms. Luke records, “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44 [NKJV]). The distress of the impending circumstances was causing Jesus great sorrow. He was sorrowful, even to the point of death because of the magnitude of the sacrifice being required of Him. Yet, in spite of His personal anguish, Jesus steadfastly held to His prayer, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39 [NKJV]).

The name of the garden where Jesus prayed is called *Gethsemane*. *Gethsemane* is a compound Hebrew word that means *oil press* and it probably identifies the Garden of Gethsemane as the place where the oil press operated. Thus, Gethsemane, the place of the oil press, is a metaphor for the process Jesus would be required to endure in order to fulfill the will of the Father. Jesus subordinated His will to the will of the Father in spite of the stress and anxiety He was experiencing in order to elevate the will of the Father over His own will. Competent pastoral leadership is spiritual leadership that serves in submission to the Father.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Moves People Toward God's Purposes

The third definition of competent pastoral leadership is “influencing God’s people toward God’s purposes” (Clinton 1988, 203). This definition is similar to Blackaby’s definition but it views leadership more specifically as a task. The goal of competent pastoral leadership is to challenge God’s people in such a way that God’s purposes are accomplished. This focus of pastoral leadership seeks tasks that are specific to a particular point in time, specific to a particular people, and specific to a particular location for God’s people to carry out God’s purposes. While this definition is task-

oriented it still provides a valuable insight into a desirable characteristic of competent pastoral leadership. Big dreams, aggressive ambitions, and lofty goals are useless until they are put to the task in order to accomplish those dreams, ambitions and goals.

The life of Nehemiah is an example of competent leadership that moved people toward accomplishing God's purposes. Nehemiah was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes during the period of the Babylonian captivity of Judah. While serving in the king's palace, Nehemiah inquired of some friends concerning the state of affairs in Jerusalem. Nehemiah's informants told him, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire" (Nehemiah 1:3 [[NKJV])). Nehemiah was terribly disturbed by this report and he determined to do something about it. After a period of prayer and fasting, Nehemiah approached the king and asked permission to return to Jerusalem to repair the city. Nehemiah was granted permission. Nehemiah had such favor that the king even agreed to fund the operation.

When Nehemiah entered Jerusalem, he made a tour of the city and realized that rebuilding the city was a monumental task. The king's support was not enough for Nehemiah to complete the task. He needed the help of the men of the city. After his assessment of the damage in the city, Nehemiah gathered the leading citizens. He said to them, "You see the distress [of the city] . . . come and let us build the wall . . . and I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, 'Let us rise up and build.' Then they set their hands to this good work" (Nehemiah 2:17-18 [NKJV])). Nehemiah is an example of competent pastoral leadership that moves people towards God's purposes.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Maintains Ministry Methods That Are Current

The final definition of competent pastoral leadership focuses on the need for leadership to respond to the ever-changing circumstances of the community. Joe Stowell declares, “An effective shepherd keeps his finger to the wind, adjusts his technique, but never takes his eyes off the center of the target by which his life and divinely prescribed ministry will be measured” (Stowell 1997, 12).

The General Motors Corporation is an example of an organization that failed to effectively respond to the ever-changing demands of the worldwide business community. GM opened its doors for business in 1908. The company gradually grew and ultimately became the largest private employer in America in 1979. The ride of worldwide success, however, was a short ride. By 1986 GM was closing plants, trimming models, and renegotiating contracts in pursuit of profitability. By the end of the 20th century, GM was billions of dollars in debt and struggling for survival. What caused the fall of the mighty automaker? What brought this American icon of worldwide industry to its knees in apparent failure? One cause was the rise of competition from foreign automakers.

While GM was embroiled in bitter contract negotiations with executives and its labor force, the Toyota Motor Company quietly challenged and ultimately surpassed GM as the world’s largest automaker. The Japanese automaker surpassed GM in overall sales in 2008 without much fanfare. Industry analysts attribute Toyota’s rise to the industry leader to a very simple principle. While GM and other American automakers were scrambling to avoid bankruptcy and navigate complex contracts with labor unions, the Toyota Motor Company thrived by focusing on its own performance without becoming concerned about its competition. CNBC News Broadcaster Phil LeBeau reported, “The

Japanese auto maker has thrived by focusing on its own performance and not whether it can thump its chest and say, ‘We’re # 1!’ (Aired 21 January 2009). Toyota provided a desirable product at an affordable price while maintaining a lean labor force and operating at a profit. The Toyota Motor Company was able to respond to the changing demands of the worldwide automobile industry while continuing to operate at a profit. In the same manner, competent pastoral leadership must be responsive to the ever-changing circumstances of its rural lifestyle community.

An acceptable definition of competent pastoral leadership must include each of these four elements. Competent pastoral leadership influences God’s people. Competent pastoral leadership is spiritual leadership that is in submission to God. Competent pastoral leadership moves people towards accomplishing God’s tasks. Competent pastoral leadership continually reviews its methods in order to remain current with the cultural demands of the community.

Competent Pastoral Leadership is Visionary Leadership

The power of vision can hardly be overestimated. The writer of Proverbs wrote, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18 [KJV]). The absence of a clearly articulated, God-ordained vision is a leadership failure that is fatal to a congregation. The word *people* is the Hebrew word *am*, which is literally defined, *people as a congregated unit* (Strong 2004). The word *vision* is the Hebrew word *hawzone* and is defined as *a sight (mentally) i.e. a dream, revelation, or oracle* (Strong 2004). This passage demonstrates the need for the congregation to have a unique insight – such as a prophetic revelation – of God’s vision for their congregation. An understanding of the

prophetic revelation is not a casual luxury for a rural lifestyle congregation. Rather, grasping God's vision is a matter of life and death for the congregation.

The word *vision* is a common word in the public discourse among pastoral leadership. There are a number of words that are used somewhat synonymously with the word *vision*. Vision, goal, dream, objective, and purpose are words that share the same basic idea. For the purposes of this project, these terms are understood to be synonymous. For the purposes of this project, vision is defined as, "a clear and challenging picture of the future of a ministry as its leadership believes it can and must be" (Malphurs 1994, 31).

This vision is not to be understood as a figment of the leader's imagination. Rather, the vision is understood to originate in the eternal purpose of God and is unique and specific to each individual congregation. Jesus addressed the church of Ephesus in the book of Revelation saying, "Remember . . . from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent" (Revelation 2:5 [NKJV]). This church was instructed to repent and return to its previous passion for ministry. Failure to do so would result in Jesus "removing its lampstand from its place". While the context of this passage is a rebuke demanding corrective action, it identifies a fundamental reality concerning Christ's relationship to His Church. This church was granted a place of ministry in Ephesus for which it was being held accountable. The word *place* is the Greek word *topos* and it is used figuratively to refer to *a condition or opportunity* (Strong 2004). Thus, Jesus expects His Church to be faithful to do effective ministry in that window of opportunity granted

to it. Jesus expects His Church to embrace its assigned opportunity – its place of ministry – in order to accomplish its ordained kingdom purpose.

God told the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, “Son of man, receive . . . all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. And go . . . to your people and . . . tell them, 'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse” (Ezekiel 3:10-11 [NKJV]). The Lord told the prophet to understand and communicate the vision in such a way that its recipients could understand. This message applies to pastoral leadership. Competent pastoral leadership must lead the congregation to understand its ordained kingdom purpose by articulating a clear and challenging picture of its vision for ministry.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Discovers the Vision

“Then He said, ‘Hear now My words: ‘If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream’” (Numbers 12:6 [NKJV]). Every congregation has an ordained *topos* that is unique and specific. This *topos* of a congregation is located in a specific geographic location, but the *topos* is far more than a location. The *topos* is a window of opportunity. It is the place where the congregation is granted the privilege, as well as held accountable for the responsibility, of bearing the glorious light of the gospel. The *topos* is the “city that is set on a hill” for which the congregation is empowered to “let the light shine” for all the people “to see so that they may glorify God” (Matthew 5:15-16 [[NKJV]]). This *topos* is the kingdom purpose, the specific vision assigned to every congregation in the Body of Christ. It is the task of competent pastoral leadership to discover this vision for the congregation being served.

There is a common thread that is found in Scripture concerning the vision for every congregation. Jesus' final instructions to His church before He ascended to heaven were, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20 [NKJV]). This Great Commission is the ultimate purpose for every congregation regardless of location. The Church – the Body of Christ in the earth – is charged with making disciples throughout the world. Every congregation has a part in that assignment. Pastoral leadership, however, is charged with the task of discovering the specific activities and functions that are assigned to their local congregation.

Most Christians in conservative evangelical congregations are probably aware of the Great Commission. Most Christians would probably acknowledge that their congregation shares in the responsibility of fulfilling the Great Commission. Most Christians would probably recognize a personal responsibility in fulfilling the Great Commission. Probably not every Christian would agree, however, that the Great Commission is the main purpose of their congregation.

A survey was conducted that sought to discover what most Christians view as the primary purpose of the church. While 35% of the respondents thought the primary purpose of the church is *to make disciples*, a majority - 57% - thought the primary purpose of the church is *to provide a place of fellowship and share God's love with one another* (Hunter 2002, 25). It is not surprising, therefore, that there is confusion among congregations. The primary purpose of the church is to make disciples. It is the task of competent pastoral leadership to discover the specific *topos* of the congregation. In order

for a congregation to understand and pursue its *topos*, pastoral leadership must discover and articulate the vision.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Articulates the Vision

“Then the Lord answered me and said: ‘Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it’ (Habakkuk 2:2 [NKJV]). The 21st century is an age of electronic communication. Personal computers, individual cell phones, email, instant messaging, text messaging, blogging, twittering, MySpace, and Facebook are terms exclusive to the present generation. Many of these words were not even present in the public discourse twenty years ago. Failure to understand the meanings of those words now indicates a cultural disconnect. If an individual does not have access to instant communication, the ability to communicate with others is greatly hindered.

The words of the prophet, however, elicit an entirely different picture than the image of instant communication so readily experienced in the 21st century. God instructed Habakkuk to “write the vision and make it plain”. The word *plain* is the Hebrew word *bawar* and the word *tablet* is the Hebrew word *luach*. Together, the phrase means *to engrave the message as if on a polished stone* (Strong 2004). The message given to Habakkuk was of such importance that the Lord instructed the prophet to write the vision in such a way that it would be as permanent as if it had been engraved on a stone. The image here is in stark contrast to the cavalier and shallow statements that are sometimes promoted as vision statements by congregations.

The *topos* of a congregation does not change with the whim of new leadership. The *topos* of a congregation is not reinvented every time there is a change in leadership. New leadership certainly brings new gifts and a fresh insight into the *topos*. Yet, there

remains a divinely appointed *topos* that transcends human leadership. The *topos* of the congregation, like the vision given to Habakkuk for Judah, has a sense of permanence. It endures from one generation to the next. It has a sense of longevity that transcends the temporariness of immediate circumstances.

The task of competent pastoral leadership is to discover and articulate the timeless purpose of God as it specifically applies to the congregation. Discovering the vision is not enough. The vision must be articulated. It must be articulated in such a way that the congregation is inspired, empowered, and enabled to pursue the vision.

Vision is a powerful force. It is the power of vision that enables an organization to experience a change in course. “*Vision* refers to a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future” (Kotter 1996, 68). A clearly articulated vision has the power to stave off potential destruction and redirect a congregation toward a future of hope and health.

This discussion of vision may create a grandiose and distorted perspective. Vision is not a mystical entity that is comprehended only by the spiritually elite. In order for vision to be effective, it must be understandable. Vision is powerful because it paints a picture of a desirable future. If the desirable future is not comprehensible to the people of a congregation, then the visionary has failed to clearly articulate the vision. According to Kotter, there are six characteristics of an effective vision. These six characteristics should guide pastoral leadership in articulating the vision:

- 1) First, an effective vision is imaginable. It conveys a picture of what the future will look like.
- 2) Second, an effective vision communicates a desirable future. It appeals to the long-term interests of the congregation.

- 3) Third, an effective vision is feasible. It articulates realistic and attainable goals.
- 4) Fourth, an effective vision is focused. It provides clear guidance that impacts and directs the decision-making process.
- 5) Fifth, an effective vision is flexible. It is general enough and broad enough to allow for individual initiative and personal innovation in response to changing circumstances.
- 6) Sixth, an effective vision is communicable. It is easy to articulate and understand. It can be broadly understood with just a few minutes of explanation (Excerpted from Kotter 1996, 72).

Developing a clearly articulated vision is a necessity for competent pastoral leadership in rural lifestyle congregations. The vision must be easily understandable. The congregation must embrace it. In order for these things to occur, the vision must be clearly articulated. Competent pastoral leadership clearly articulates the vision.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Pursues the Vision

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16:9-10 [NKJV]).

In spite of the presence of a divinely inspired, clearly articulated vision, many congregations hesitate to pursue a course of ministry that requires change to long-held practices and traditions. In many congregations this hesitance is understandable. People are “forced out of their comfort zones, made to work with fewer resources, asked to learn new skills and behaviors, and threatened with the possibility of the loss” of a long-held position in the church (Kotter 1996, 70). It is little wonder that some members of the congregation respond to new ideas with little enthusiasm.

In his book, *From Good to Great*, Stanford University Professor Jim Collins acknowledges that “few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life” (Collins 2001, 1). This seems to be a dynamic of the human condition in spite of the clear biblical evidence to “press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14 [NKJV]). Paul also admonishes, “In a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win” (1 Corinthians 9:24 [NLT]). And Paul’s instructions to the young pastor, “But you, O man of God . . . fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called” (1 Timothy 6:11-12 [NKJV]) . In spite of these words to the contrary, it seems that the common paradigm in some congregations is not to pursue greatness, but rather to be content with mediocrity.

Collins, and a team of researchers, conducted a survey of Fortune 500 companies that had experienced remarkable, sustainable growth in their industry. The research was done over a five-year period of time. In order to qualify for the research, the companies had to demonstrate a record of growth that had been sustained for at least fifteen years. One of the principles discovered was particularly significant to competent pastoral leadership. Collins discovered that, “the good-to-great companies paid scant attention to managing change, motivating people, or creating alignment. Under the right conditions, the problems of commitment, alignment, motivation, and change largely melt away” (Collins 2001, 11).

While the business model of leadership is markedly different from pastoral leadership, Collins’ research still teaches a valuable lesson. A rural lifestyle congregation is more productive when it spends its energy and resources on pursuing its *topos* rather

than the internal conflicts within. The energy and resources spent on discovering and articulating God's vision can be too easily squandered when inordinate energy is spent dealing with internal conflicts. Secular organizations that achieved sustained growth did not spend valuable energy confronting internal conflicts. Rather, the leadership of the organization focused its energy on pursuing the vision and the internal conflicts melted away.

This is a model for rural lifestyle congregations to follow. When energy and resources are being spent on achieving the vision, passion for the vision multiplies. When passion is evident, pursuit of the vision is a natural occurrence. Competent pastoral leadership is passionate about pursuing the God-given *topos* of the congregation. Competent pastoral leadership strives to discover, articulate, and pursue the *topos* – the God-given vision assigned to every congregation.

Competent Pastoral Leadership is Culturally Relevant

The term *culture* “refers to norms of behavior and shared values among a group of people” (Kotter 1996, 148). The issues of culture exert enormous pressures to shape attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. In his book *Ancient-Future Faith* Robert Webber argues that human persons “cannot be fully understood apart from a relationship to others and to his or her cultural surroundings” (Webber 1999, 23). In order to seek competence, pastoral leadership must effectively understand the cultural dynamics of the community. The phrase *cultural relevance* may appear to be ambiguous but it describes the mindset that seeks to do ministry in a manner that attracts persons that are otherwise separated by cultural and generational divides. This is an issue of extreme significance to

competent pastoral leadership. In order for pastoral leadership to be competent it must have an understanding of the cultural context in which it seeks to do ministry.

A striking example of the cultural issues of the day shaping the efforts of ministry can be seen in the early church. In his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark examines the issues that caused Christianity to become the dominant religious force in the ancient world. Stark examines “how Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world” (Stark 1997, 161). He goes on to recognize that Christianity revitalized life in the early world by providing “new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems” (Stark 1997, 161).

The pursuit of cultural relevance, however, needs to be understood from a biblical perspective. There is a vast cultural chasm that separates the church from the world. The values, worldview, and moral perspectives of the world are vastly different from those in the church. In response to the unholy behaviors of the world, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean” (2 Corinthians 6:17 [NKJV]). The clarion call of scripture demands a cultural separation from the world. The world, with its unholy attitudes and behaviors, is understood to be unclean. The Scripture demands a separation from that worldly uncleanness. While there is a biblical call to separate from the uncleanness of the world, the church is not called to be separated elitists. Jesus calls for the church to be “in the world, but not of the world” (John 17:14-16 [NKJV]). The call to cultural relevance is not a call to unholy behavior. Rather, it is a call to live out and present the gospel message in such a manner that people can understand it and receive it.

Jeremiah spoke of the unwillingness of some people to heed the Word of God. He wrote, “Behold, the word of the Lord is a reproach to them; they have no delight in it” Jeremiah 6:10 ([NKJV]). In response to this rebellion, Jeremiah said that God will, “certainly bring calamity on this people . . . because they have not heeded My words, nor My law, but rejected it” (Jeremiah 6:19 [NKJV]). If a house or city will not heed the Word of the Lord, Jesus said, “When you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet” (Matthew 10:14 [NKJV]).

Thus, the pursuit of cultural relevance is not an abdication of the call to a high moral standard or to righteous and holy living. Rather, the call to cultural relevance, in this context, is a call to pastoral leadership to understand the context of its culture, to speak the language of its culture, and to be responsive to the needs of its cultures.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Understands the Context of Culture

“In the second half of this century, significant changes have taken place that have relegated many [church practices] of the past to ineffectiveness at the least” (Martin and McIntosh 1993, 105). To recognize that significant changes have taken place in our world needs no further proof than a casual observation. But, to recognize that the church practices of the past may be ineffective in the world today is often overlooked by rural lifestyle congregations.

In the earlier half of this century, institutions and organizations tended to have a respect for the position and influence of the local churches in the community. Athletic programs and extra-curricular events were scheduled so that they did not conflict with activities in the churches. Mid-week services at the church, week-long revival meetings,

and other special events were recognized by the schools and other organizations. These organizations honored the church's calendar in order to avoid scheduling conflicts.

Those days are gone! Basketball games, wrestling tournaments, track meets, and other sporting events are scheduled with no thought of honoring the wishes of players and families to attend church services. Games, tournaments, and meets are even scheduled on Sunday mornings.

During the 19th century and early part of the 20th century the church in America enjoyed a privileged position in society. America was a "Christian nation". Our societal values, laws, and morals were based on God's Word and the Ten Commandments. Certainly, not every citizen was a Christian. Nor did every organization honor Christian principles. Yet, the general mood of the nation was favorable toward Christianity. Alex de Tocqueville, the French philosopher visited the United States in the early 19th century. He noted the overwhelming presence of Christianity in every fiber of life in America. He wrote, "On my arrival in the United States the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention, and the longer I stayed there, the more I perceived the great political consequences resulting from this" (Reeve 1899). If de Tocqueville were to visit the United States today, he would observe a very different America.

The changing social, political, and spiritual landscape in America demands a different kind of pastoral leadership than that which succeeded and prospered in earlier times. In order for pastoral leadership to be competent it must understand the context of the culture. When ancient Israel faced similar circumstances to those of today, God rose up a special brand of leader. They were the sons of Issachar. "The sons of Issachar had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chronicles 12:32

[NKJV]). The sons of Issachar were those who were able to understand the issues of the day in order to discern appropriate battle plans.

When King David was forced into hiding by the madness of King Saul, God did not forsake him. God sent thousands of men to join David's army in order to force Saul "to turn over the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the Lord" (1 Chronicles 12:23 [NKJV]). These men of David were mighty men of valor and fit for all manner of warfare. Some were expert at bearing the shield and spear. Others were expert with the bow and arrow. But the men of Issachar were special. These men were expert at strategy. They knew how to look beyond the obvious in order to discern an effective plan to achieve victory in battle.

Pastoral leadership needs to understand the context of culture in order to be competent. Competent pastoral leadership understands the context of the culture in which it serves. Competent pastoral leadership must be responsive to the cultural forces of society. As these forces ebb and flow, so must pastoral leadership.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Speaks the Language of Culture

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14 [NKJV]). This passage sparks passion in the heart of competent pastoral leadership. Most Competent pastoral leaders love to preach. Competent pastoral leaders love to speak the language of the Bible. Competent pastoral leaders become ignited when a congregation gets engaged in a sermon. One primary pastoral function is to preach the gospel. In the above passage, the question draws attention to the need for competent pastoral leadership to speak the language of culture.

In order for the unsaved and unchurched to hear the gospel, the gospel must be preached. The word *preacher* is the Greek word *kerusso* and it means *to herald (as a public crier), especially divine truth* (Strong 2004). The image is that of a town crier on the streets of the city proclaiming in a loud and conspicuous voice. The crier is effective only if his message is understood. The story of the Day of Pentecost, from the second chapter of Acts, is an excellent example of the message being presented in a language understood by the people. When the church, gathered in the upper room, experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in a new and different way, their enthusiasm drove them out to the city where the people were. When they arrived on the street, they began to “speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4 [NKJV]).

Since it was the Feast of Pentecost, the city was crowded with pilgrims coming to celebrate. These pilgrims had come from all over the Roman Empire. The disciples on the street speaking in other tongues captured their attention. They said, “How is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born . . . we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:8-11 [NKJV]). There were gathered there Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Cretans, Arabs and others from all over the Middle East. They spoke different languages, they had different cultural distinctions, but on that morning in the city of Jerusalem they all communicated in a language they could understand.

The Bible is often difficult to understand for those unaccustomed to the language. The language of the Bible – especially the archaic language of some translations – is very difficult for people to understand. When the unchurched hear Christians speaking the language of religion it must be like hearing a foreign language. Ecclesiastical terms and

the language that results from people acculturated in biblical language must be confusing and non-sensical to the uninitiated.

In order for people to hear the gospel message, they must hear in an understandable language. The foreigners gathered together in Jerusalem during that Feast of Pentecost were able to hear the wonderful works of God in their own language. It was the language of their birth. It was the language of their culture. It was the language that was most able to communicate with the inner person of their heart. The fact that the New Testament is written in Koine Greek – the language of the common people – rather than in classical Greek further identifies the assertion for understandable language.

Even though the same language is being spoken, there are other dynamics that significantly impact communication. Even within the same language there are geographic, racial, social, and other factors that significantly impact the ability to communicate.

Not only are there linguistic differences even within the same language, but the language of culture is also distinct and specific to different groups within a community. These distinctions may be determined by gender, race, education, social status, economic factors, vocation, age, and other circumstances. But, the language of culture must be understood in order to effectively communicate. Competent pastoral leadership must speak the language of culture in order for the community to hear the message.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Responds To The Needs of Culture

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the Lord. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the

Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies-- I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. (Isaiah 1:11-15 [NKJV])

This was a powerful rebuke against Israel. God communicated His displeasure towards those who were practicing their worship in a way that was not pleasing to God. What was the great indictment against Israel? What was their great sin? Their sin was identified as *futile sacrifices*. God was not displeased because they were making no sacrifices – they were making sacrifices. God was displeased because their sacrifices were empty religious observances devoid of any significant consequence.

The Apostle Paul wrote of the spiritual condition that would exist in the latter times. “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:1-5 [NKJV]). What is this great offense that warrants the ire of God? These futile religious observances are external experiences that have no internal significance. They are outward manifestations devoid of any significant spiritual consequence.

Rick Rusaw speaks of a fresh move by the Holy Spirit he sees happening in America. He recognizes that there are congregations that have not fallen prey to these outward manifestations of spirituality that are nothing more than empty forms of godliness. They are congregations that are focusing their attention and resources on making an impact in the communities they serve. He calls them *externally focused churches*. These churches are “increasingly convinced that effectiveness is not measured

by what happens inside the church but rather by the impact the people of the church have on their communities” (Rusaw and Swanson 2004, 16).

Externally focused churches are those that build bridges between the church and the community. Rather than building walls that define the boundaries, externally focused churches are building bridges that allow them to be “useful to their communities” (Rusaw and Swanson 2004, 17). These are congregations that see themselves as vital to the life of their communities. Rather than bemoaning the social and moral woes of contemporary culture, the externally focused church seeks to manifest Christ in their community.

Rick Rusaw is the Senior Minister at LifeBridge Christian Church in Longmont, CO. The LifeBridge congregation became involved in the local elementary school by volunteering to do janitorial work in the building over a Christmas holiday break. Rick tells the story:

For two years, LifeBridge members helped clean toilets and paint hallways . . . during Christmas break. Recently we were invited into kindergarten classrooms to help the kids make crafts. At the same school in which we had cleaned toilets for two years, we are now able to have a direct impact on the students and the teachers. Last year when a local high school student took his life, the school principal called LifeBridge. He asked if we could send over some staff and volunteer youth coaches for three days to be with the students on campus. How did LifeBridge gain such access to a public high school? We simply sent the same people who had been setting up chairs at assemblies, chaperoning the dances, and raking the long-jump pit all year. (Rusaw and Swanson 2004, 50-1)

Competent pastoral leadership must be responsive to the needs of the culture it serves. In order for pastoral leadership to be competent it must understand the context of its culture, it must speak the language of its culture, and it must be responsive to the needs of its culture.

Competent Pastoral Leadership is Multi-Generational

The majority of Americans have had some positive encounter with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Research indicates that 82% of non-Christians between the ages of sixteen and twenty-nine “have gone to a Christian church at some time in their life” (Kinnaman 2007, 74). They have heard the gospel message in church, by various medial outlets, or by personal contact with family and friends. The problem in America is not a lack of gospel opportunities. The problem seems to be the inability to perpetuate discipleship from one generation to the next. “Most teenagers in America enter adulthood considering themselves to be Christians and saying they have made a personal commitment to Christ” (Kinnaman 2007, 74). Yet, by the time these young adults reach their 30’s, most “will have left the church and will have placed emotional connection to Christianity on the shelf” (Kinnaman 2007, 74).

It seems that as young believers transition from one age group to the next, they are abandoning their faith. One of the goals of discipleship is to produce believers that are increasingly empowered to live a victorious Christian life. It seems that the discipleship efforts of many churches are failing many young believers in this regard. Why? Why is there such an exodus by young people from the faith?

One of the sources of this failure is a generational issue. The religious activities and local practices of previous generations are no longer effectively accomplishing the goals of discipleship. In many cases these activities and practices are costly and ineffective. Yet, the events of yesterday’s calendar continue to show up on today’s agenda. In his book, *Shaped by God’s Heart*, Mifred Minatrea says, “Many struggling congregations seek to go back to the future, instead of valuing yesterday’s experience as

they faithfully walk toward tomorrow” (Minatrea 2004, 106). This kind of rigid adherence to outdated and obsolete practices may cause the church to appear out of touch and irrelevant.

Robert Webber adds a harsh but sobering perspective when he says, “Some churches are cold, fixed, and rigid in their views and judgmental of those who disagree with them. Some churches pride themselves on being the only church in town that has the truth. This negative spirit usually spills over into the personality of the whole church and stifles a spirit of joy” (Webber 1999, 68). An inordinate insistence on ineffective practices causes many to relegate their faith to the back shelves of their life. A proper perspective concerning buildings and practices is to realize that “church buildings come and go. Customs are merely vehicles that allow spiritual experience” (Hunter 2002, 88).

Competent pastoral leadership seeks methods and practices that bridge generational gaps. Competent pastoral leadership recognizes that the location of the church building is of far less significance than the purpose of the church. It is not about location, it is about effectiveness. Competent pastoral leadership seeks ministry that is multi-generational.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Understands Multi-Generational Ministry

The church is facing a difficult task in America in the 21st century. The church no longer enjoys the same privileged position it once held in the moral and social fabric of our communities. More and more people are “mentally and emotionally disengaging from Christianity” (Kinnaman 2007, 39). The exodus of people away from institutional churches is alarming. This is especially true among young people. In order to alter this

condition, competent pastoral leadership must take seriously the need to understand contemporary ministry from a multi-generational perspective.

Competent pastoral leadership must recognize that there is a significant disconnect in the perceptions of the unchurched. David Kinnaman notes, “To outsiders the word *Christian* has more in common with a brand than a faith. This shift of meaning in recent decades has been magnified by an increasing use of the term *Christian* to label music, clothes, schools, political action groups, and more. And sadly, it is a bad brand in the minds of tens of millions of people. In the middle of a culture where Christianity has come to represent hypocrisy, judgmentalism, anti-intellectualism, insensitivity, and bigotry, it’s easy to see why the next generation wants nothing to do with it” (Kinnaman 2007, 223).

Christian Smith identifies what he believes to be the predominant religious perspective among young people. “The de facto dominant religion among contemporary U.S. teenagers is what we might call “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (Smith 2005, 162). The first virtue of this three-fold religious perspective focuses on human morality. The moralistic religion believes that “God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions” (Smith 2005, 162). While this perspective of morality has merit, it fails to capture the biblical call to holiness and purity. “For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7 [NKJV]).

A comparison of moral attitudes identifies a significant generational divide. Behaviors that were staunchly rejected fifty years ago are easily embraced in the mainstream of public life today. Attitudes toward sexuality are a great example. Pre-

marital sexual relations and cohabitation appear to be accepted societal norms. The resulting moral decay has resulted in a deluge of societal ills. For example, “in 2001 the US Census Bureau indicated that 33% of American babies were born to unmarried mothers” (Dobson 2004, 34). “The growth and normalization of cohabitation – which our parents and past generations of parents referred to as ‘living in sin’ – has also had a devastating impact. It has increased 850 percent since 1960” (Dobson 2004, 38).

Sexual abstinence appears to be considered an impractical, obsolete, and outdated virtue. Some believers even postulate that, “in these changed times God no longer expects them to live by His old standards of purity” (Arterburn 2002, 26). Sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, and bi-sexuality, are widely viewed as normative behaviors.

The moralistic religion in the world today is powerless because it fails to understand the basic truth that God makes the rules. The writer of Hebrews said, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6 [NKJV]).

The second virtue of this three-fold religious perspective focuses on divine assistance to heal the hurts of the human condition. This perspective maintains that “the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself” (Smith 2005, 163). This perspective abdicates all responsibility for service in the kingdom or sacrifice for the greater good. The central pursuit of religion is to make one feel good. Thus, anything that is inconvenient or uncomfortable may be discarded.

The third virtue of this three-fold religious perspective focuses on a divine being that is primarily absent from human affairs. This perspective holds that, “God does not

need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem" (Smith 2005, 163). This is a perspective that limits divine involvement in the affairs of the world. A deistic perspective eliminates the biblical call to obedience.

The needs of contemporary culture demand ministry pursuits that understand generational distinctions. Competent pastoral leadership must understand multi-generational ministry. Pastoral leadership that fails to recognize generational distinctions will be ineffective. Competent pastoral leadership must understand multi-generational ministry.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Pursues Multi-Generational Ministry

There are powerful forces at work in America that are creating havoc on family life. Jesus spoke of these evil forces when He said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10a [NKJV]). This destructive activity is clearly evidenced in the spiritual lives of young people. In his book *Soul Searching* Christian Smith reports the findings of a nation-wide survey that he conducted of *The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. His research discovered that, from a teenager's perspective, "religious faith and spiritual practice are not simply matters of individual experience and institutional involvements. They are embedded in and sometimes draw much of their life from personal relationships in families, with friends, at school, and with other adults" (Smith 2005, 54). His research indicated that "about one-third of families (34%) talk together about God, the Scriptures, prayer, or other religious or spiritual matters a few times a week or more; 28 percent talk about these matters a few times a month or weekly; and 38 percent a few times a year or never" (Smith 2005, 54). Thus, the research demonstrates that America's teenagers recognize the dynamic

connection between the spiritual life of teenagers and the spiritual life of their parents and their home. The research indicates that, for a majority of America's teenagers, issues of faith and religion are not compartmentalized and exclusively experienced in religious venues. Rather, issues of faith and religion are given significant expression in the home with the family.

This research supports a biblical principle concerning family. God has always intended for the home to be the primary source of the religious and spiritual development of children. The Lord told Moses, "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house" (Deuteronomy 6:5-7 [NKJV]). The fact that so many of America's teenagers are leaving the church as they reach adulthood highlights a multi-generational failure. Teenagers are being evangelized. They are receiving the gospel message. But, when they grow into the next generational phase of their life, they are disconnecting.

This generational disconnect was anticipated when Moses instructed the people about family life. He said, "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren" (Deuteronomy 4:9 [NKJV]). This passage offers a clear warning concerning the potential spiritual failure. Moses instructed the people to be diligent in spiritual pursuits "all the days of your life". To start well is not sufficient. The goal is life-long discipleship. This passage also instructs the people to "teach your children and grandchildren". This is

multi-generational ministry. It is not sufficient to teach only the children. This discipleship extends to the grandchildren as well.

Pastoral leadership that is competent must be responsive to the multi-generational demands of society. There are “massive and expansive societal changes in America [that] demand a response from the church” (Kinnaman 2007, 24). Competent pastoral leadership pursues multi-generational ministry.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Unites Multi-Generational Ministry

The problem is perceptual. “Christianity has an image problem” (Kinnaman 2007, 11). It has already been pointed out that the unchurched perceive the church as hypocritical, judgmental, and full of empty moral striving. Nowhere is this perception more evident than in the area of moral perspectives. In earlier days, there were societal norms that embraced a moral perspective that was basically biblical. The Ten Commandments were recognized as good and necessary commandments by which to live. The Golden Rule was understood to be a reliable principle – do unto others as you would have them do unto you. There was basic agreement about right and wrong. There was basic acknowledgement of what was moral and what was not.

A universal acceptance of moral norms, however, no longer exists. The 21st century is an age of moral relativity. Society no longer acknowledges absolute truth. Truth is perceived as subjective and moral absolutes do not exist. Truth has not changed, nor has morality. But, the perspective of younger generations tends to be vastly different than those of previous generations. This divergent perspective of moral norms is not evidenced exclusively among the unchurched. Many young believers embrace a moral perspective that is more worldly than biblical. “For example, a majority of born-again

adults in their twenties and thirties currently believe that gambling, cohabitation, and sexual fantasies are morally acceptable” (Kinnaman 2007, 53). This viewpoint was unheard of among today’s senior citizens. Pastoral leadership that is competent must seek to unite people multi-generationally.

In order to achieve competent ministry, pastoral leadership must unite people multi-generationally. Robert Webber states that “the road to the future runs through the past” (Webber 1999, 7). In a pursuit to effectively reach a younger generation, there seems to be a tendency to abandon ministry paradigms of the past. Webber suggests that, “unity is based on what is passed down in the ecclesio-social culture of the universal church” (Webber 1999, 16). Rather than reacting to the changing social landscape by pursuing new methods, Webber argues for reclaiming the historic faith. He argues that, “Christians must recover the primacy of being a Christian community” (Webber 1999, 71).

It is within the Christian community that the traditions and practices of the historic faith are passed on to successive generations. It is within the Christian community that young believers are taught the essential tenets of the faith. Paul told Timothy, “The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:1-2 [NKJV]). In this passage, the word *commit* is the Greek word *paratithemi* and it means, by implication *to deposit as a trust or for protection* (Strong 2004). Paul instructed Timothy to be intentional about depositing the issues of faith and life into the next generation of believers.

Pastoral leadership that is competent must unite believers in multi-generational ministry. Multi-generational ministry provides the opportunity for a senior generation to deposit issues of faith into a junior generation. Competent pastoral leadership strives to unite multi-generational ministry.

Conclusion

The preceding pages have provided a literary review from contemporary and biblical sources that are relevant to the role of pastoral leadership in rural lifestyle congregations. This chapter has provided a definition of pastoral leadership. It has discussed the role of pastoral leadership in the visioning process. It has addressed the issue of pastoral leadership in achieving culturally relevant ministry. Finally, it has pursued the dynamics of developing a multi-generational ministry in the congregation.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of pastoral leadership that equip a rural congregation to fulfill its kingdom purpose. The goal of this chapter is to describe the methods and procedures used to conduct the research for this project. The research for this Project was collected from several sources. The sources include data collected in a questionnaire, an online survey, interviews, case studies, notes, observations, and finally, data from other scholarly sources that includes journal articles and online resources.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed to gather information from pastors serving congregations in the Great Lakes Conference (hereafter referred to as GLC) of the Churches of God, General Conference (hereafter referred to as CGGC). This questionnaire was used to gather information exclusively from GLC pastors. The purpose for this was three-fold. First, this author is a colleague of the GLC pastors. Friendships have been developed with these pastors. Conference events, leadership events, Pastor/Spouse events, and other fellowship events have provided an opportunity for the author to have some knowledge of the pastors and the congregations they serve. Secondly, this author desired to conduct research that would be applicable to GLC pastors. A great deal of current literature for pastoral leadership addresses congregations

in communities much larger than the average community of many GLC congregations. Much of this literature inadequately addresses the issues that cause the greatest concern for GLC pastors serving in these rural congregations. Finally, contact information was accessed which provided a current e-mail listing for every pastor in the Conference. Delivering the questionnaire via e-mail was a quick, cost efficient method of distribution. The questionnaire was sent as an attachment so that answers could be recorded and responses returned via e-mail. The majority of responses were received via e-mail, which eliminated postage expenses. As an additional advantage, the majority of the returned responses were received within a week.

The questionnaire provided an opportunity for the pastors to make comments and offer suggestions. This opportunity was provided on the questionnaire to GLC pastors but not the online survey. This was done because it was feared that the responses would be both overwhelming and non-productive if included in the online survey. But, the responses received from the GLC pastors were manageable and insightful.

The questionnaire solicited some objective data such as age, education, and years of pastoral experience. The majority of the questionnaire, however, solicited subjective data. The pastors' opinions were solicited concerning issues that relate specifically to pastoral leadership in rural congregations.

The method of data collection allowed the responses to be collated and divided in two categories. One category was rural pastors and the second category was non-rural pastors. This allowed the data to be analyzed and the responses compared between rural pastors and non-rural pastors. At the time of this project, there were thirty-six active congregations in the GLC. Questionnaires were received from twenty GLC pastors.

Online Survey

The online survey was conducted through the website called Survey Monkey. SurveyMonkey.com is a survey engine that collects and tabulates participant responses to survey questions developed by the sponsor. There were ten questions on the survey. At the conclusion of the survey, the survey engine provided an excel spreadsheet that included each response to every question. There were seventy-five responses collected. The survey was open and available for thirty days.

This survey solicited responses from pastors serving CGGC congregations throughout the denomination in each of the six regions within the United States. Responses from regions outside the U.S. were not solicited. The regional directors of the Eastern, Allegheny, Midwest, Mid-South, Western, and California Regions were contacted and asked to participate in the survey. A link was provided to the survey website and the directors were asked to forward it, via e-mail, to pastors in their regions. Responses were received from pastoral leaders serving congregations throughout the CGGC.

Participants in the survey were solicited exclusively from pastors serving CGGC congregations. The survey was not advertised in any other medium. Nor were responses solicited from any other website except from the regional directors of the CGGC. This was done in order to compile responses that reflect the opinions of CGGC pastors. No attempt was made to solicit responses from pastors serving rural congregations in other denominations or faith groups. Thus, the survey is limited to responses only from CGGC pastors.

Another limitation of this survey was the limited response from CGGC pastors. Every pastor had opportunity to participate, but the solicitation was limited to the placement of a link on the region's website. There were no other solicitations made by e-mail or USPS mail. Thus, the responses reflect the opinions of only those who visit their region's website and who voluntarily followed the link to the survey site. Although this survey was limited in its scope, the data collected represents a random sampling of pastors serving CGGC congregations.

The survey was open for only thirty days. The survey engine allowed only ten questions. The questions had to allow for objective, quantifiable responses. The questions asked on the survey were similar to those on the questionnaire with a few exceptions including any question that could identify the pastor, the congregation, or the region of the respondent. The respondents were granted absolute anonymity. When the survey was closed, there were seventy-five responses received. The results were tabulated and a bar graph was produced for each question. A graph reflecting the tabulated results from each question was printed and is included in this project.

Interviews

The research includes interviews with a select group of pastors serving GLC congregations. The pastors interviewed were selected after prayerful consideration. The selections were made based on knowledge gained through GLC records, CGGC statistical reports, and personal conversations. The selection of the pool of interviewees was clearly a subjective process. Although the bias of the author is present, the final decisions were made in consultation with the Project Mentor of this project. The interviewees selected

were those who best fit the list of criteria and demonstrated a willingness to participate in the present discussion.

A list of criteria was developed to determine the best candidates for interview. These criteria were established in order to provide the most helpful insights into the present study. The candidates selected met each of the following criteria.

- 1) At least twelve years of pastoral experience
- 2) At least seven years pastoral experience in a rural congregation
- 3) At least one rural congregation that has experienced growth
- 4) At least a graduate degree
- 5) A commitment to their current assignment
- 6) At least one unique ministry dynamic that forms a case study

This criterion would provide an interviewee with insights and experiences that would adequately inform this research. Adequate pastoral experience was paramount. The insights of an inexperienced pastor could easily skew the data. Pastoral experience of at least twelve years was determined to be sufficient experience. A pastoral experience in a rural congregation was also a significant factor. A pastor with limited experience in a rural congregation would not adequately inform the research. A pastor with evidence of congregational growth was also a significant consideration in the selection process. This criterion was determined by the statistical report provided by the General Conference.

The next criterion, a graduate degree, was believed to indicate a personal commitment to ministry. An educated clergy is an expectation of the laity as well as denominational leaders. Thus, the selection process was limited to pastors with at least a graduate degree. The next criterion – a commitment to their current assignment – was

viewed as a ministry paradigm essential to rural congregations. In many denominations, the rural congregation is viewed as a stepping stone. Rural congregations are the assignments given to pastors fresh out of seminary or to an inexperienced pastor. The rural congregation is viewed as the first assignment on the way to something better. A commitment to the current congregation was one part of the selection process. The final criterion – a unique ministry dynamic – was a subjective criterion. This criterion was satisfied by the author's personal knowledge of the interviewees and the congregations they serve. The unique ministry was an essential part of the growth and health of the congregation.

The interviews were conducted on site in the interviewed pastor's office. The interviews are identified by number based on the sequence in which they were conducted. The interviews were conducted at the convenience of the interviewed pastor. At the end of the interview, the pastor provided a tour of the facility. The guided tour proved to be a very insightful part of the interview. The classrooms, fellowship halls, common areas, worship areas, and even the parking lots provided numerous stories and anecdotes that contributed greatly to the interview. With each opened door, the passion of the pastor was evident as stories of spiritual breakthroughs and lives touched were shared. It was truly a blessing to share an afternoon or a morning with these precious men of God. It was personally humbling as each pastor shared stories from their heart of the marvelous things already accomplished, as well as the incredible expectations of what God was yet to do.

During the process of the interview, information was obtained about the unique ministry dynamic that had already been identified. The interviewee provided information

and insight that resulted in the writing of a case study. The case studies were written from notes taken during the interviews.

Case Studies

There were four case studies developed out of the discussions in the interviews. Each of the case studies presents a relevant dynamic of pastoral leadership that informs the present discussion. The first case is “A Comparison of Ministry in Rural and Urban Congregations”. This case study comes from a rural congregation in a farming community that demonstrates an experience that is unique to a rural congregation. This case study identifies the need for differing pastoral leadership paradigms in rural and urban congregations.

The second case study is “Relocating and Property Development as a Means of Accomplishing Mission”. This case study is based on the experience of a pastor of a two-congregation charge in central Michigan. His experience provides a case study of a physical relocation of a rural congregation in response to visionary pastoral leadership.

The third case study is “Developing a Culturally Relevant Outreach Ministry”. This case study comes from a pastor in a rural congregation in northwest Ohio. The experiences of this pastor and the congregation offer an example of culturally relevant ministry in a rural congregation.

The final case study is “Starting a Second Worship Service”. This case study comes from a pastoral leader who developed and launched a second worship service. This experience identifies pastoral leadership that developed a multi-generational ministry in a rural congregation.

Notes and Observations

The research includes notes taken from interviews and conversations with respected leaders in the field of pastoral leadership. The research includes notes from a seminar entitled, “The Gathering” held at the Churches of God, General Conference Ministry Center in Findlay, Ohio. The presenters were church consultants Jared and Ann Roth. Jared and Ann served as denominational leaders in the Foursquare Gospel Church prior to their current pastoral assignment in the Pacific Northwest. Their ministry in the Foursquare denomination focused on developing leaders who were empowered to energize a church multiplication movement. The Roth’s acknowledge, “Once a congregation peaks and declines, it rarely recovers to health” (Roth 2009). This is the condition of many rural congregations. But there are also many congregations that are returning to health. This research includes information that can help redirect the congregation to a healthy new life.

The research includes notes from an interview with church consultant Pastor James W. Moss, Sr. In the interview Jim was asked to address the question, “Is a building program or a capital campaign essential or necessary for the growth of a congregation”? The question betrayed the innocent prejudice of the author, and the interview provided an insight into a pastoral leadership paradigm that informs the research of this project. Competent pastoral leadership is absolutely essential for a congregation to be healthy. A church cannot be healthy without competent pastoral leadership. It may be able to continue in a healthy mode for a time – such as with an interim pastor while a pastoral search is occurring. But, a church cannot continue to be a healthy congregation in the absence of competent pastoral leadership. There could exist a situation where a

competent pastor is serving an unhealthy congregation – that congregation could be unhealthy for a variety of reasons. But, a healthy congregation cannot continue to be healthy in the absence of a competent pastor.

The research includes notes from an interview with Dr Stephen Dupree, a missiologist serving as a missionary to Japan with One Mission Society. Dr Dupree discusses the conflict between the universal nature of the gospel and the shifting paradigms of culture. Regardless of the cultural context, the transcendent gospel cannot transform people unless the gospel is presented in a culturally relevant manner. This research informs the discussion of outreach that is culturally relevant.

Other Sources

The research includes information contained in the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000. The Census 2000 report includes demographic characteristics that inform the present discussion. The Census 2000 report presents information relating to the specific geographic location of a rural congregation. This report was accessed online.

The research also includes data reported in the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2008) Summary Report. This report represents the survey that tracked changes in the religious landscape of the adult population in America from 1990 to 2008. This survey categorizes respondents into specific faith groups and denominations. This report was accessed online (Kosmin and Keysar 2008).

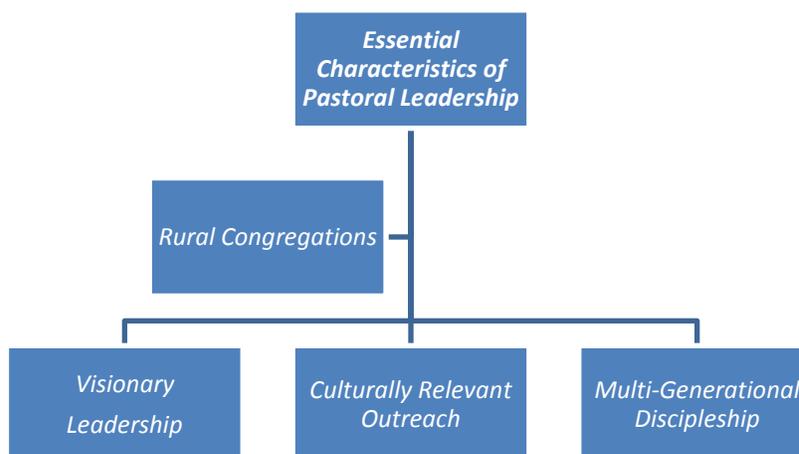
The research also includes data reported in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey: A National and International Study of Congregations. The U.S. Congregational Life Survey is an excellent source of information regarding the profile of worshipers and

congregations in the U.S. It provides insight into growing congregations, issues of cultural relevance, and specific challenges currently facing congregations.

Coding

Finally, the responses from the questionnaire and the online survey were reviewed. The notes from the interviews, case studies, and personal observations were reviewed. The notes from interviews and conversations with informed leaders in the area of pastoral leadership were reviewed. The research was organized into five categories and coded according to the categories used throughout this project. The categories are 1) rural congregations 2) essential characteristics, 3) visionary leadership, 4) culturally relevant outreach, and 5) multi-generational discipleship. The chart below depicts the relationship between the five categories considered for this research project.

Figure 4.1 Components of Excellent Pastoral Leadership In A Rural Congregation



Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to identify the methods and procedures used to conduct the research for this project. The research included data collected in a

questionnaire, an online survey, interviews, case studies, notes, observations, and data from other scholarly sources that includes journal articles and online resources. In the following chapter, the data will be analyzed according to five categories. The first section will include data that examines pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. The second section will examine characteristics of competent pastoral leadership. The third section will include data that examines characteristics of visionary leadership. The fourth section will include data that examines characteristics of culturally relevant outreach programs in rural congregations. The fifth section will include data that examines characteristics of multi-generational discipleship in rural congregations.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of pastoral leadership that equip a rural congregation to fulfill its kingdom purpose. The goal of this chapter is to present and analyze the research conducted for this project. The data was analyzed according to the five categories identified in chapter four. The research was accumulated and analyzed according to the appropriate category. The research includes data that was gathered from a questionnaire, an online survey, interviews with pastors and leaders, case studies, observations, and other scholarly sources.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section includes data that examines pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. The second section examines characteristics of competent pastoral leadership. The third section includes data that examines characteristics of visionary leadership. The fourth section includes data that examines characteristics of culturally relevant outreach programs in rural congregations. The fifth section includes data that examines characteristics of multi-generational discipleship in rural congregations.

Pastoral Leadership in a Rural Context

This section addresses the question, “What are the characteristics of pastoral leadership that are unique to rural lifestyle congregations”? The interviews with rural pastors sought to identify characteristics of pastoral leadership that are unique to the

ministry of rural lifestyle congregations as compared to non-rural congregations. These interviews indicated that many of the characteristics that are essential in a rural context are also essential in a non-rural context. However, they did indicate the necessity for pastoral leadership to understand the unique context of a rural congregation.

“Historically, churches have been central to rural society. As the understanding of the delicate ecosystem of agricultural America becomes more sophisticated, the role of religion in comprehending the fragile balances becomes even more important. How the leaders and members of churches in rural areas respond to challenging economic shifts . . . ultimately will decide how effective or ineffective the rural church will be in the 21st century” (Schier 1993). Thus, this discussion begins with an examination of a rural context.

A Rural Context

In spite of the appeal of America’s largest cities, rural places still “make up more than ninety percent of our nation’s space” (Drabenstott 2001). Shifting community paradigms have resulted in “a significant number of people . . . choosing to migrate to rural areas – choosing a rural lifestyle” (Johnson 2001). The rural lifestyle appears to be an appealing option for many families. “Increasingly, people are interested in fleeing the congestion and high cost of suburban life for the quieter, safer, and more affordable surrounding of the metropolitan fringe” (Johnson 2001). The rural lifestyle is attractive to many because it offers some distinct advantages over urban life. A rural lifestyle offers “its own amenities – natural areas, outdoor recreation, broad vistas, peaceful sunsets. It also offers what might be AMENities – freedom from congestion, crime, commuting, pollution, change, diversity, and the conflicts of urban life” (Isserman 2001).

Surveys of pastoral leaders indicated that the overwhelming majority (92%) of CGGC congregations are located in communities with a population of 50,000 or less. More than half (54%) are located in communities with a population of 2,500 or less. Pastors were asked to identify the size of their communities. The figure below illustrates the results.

Figure 5.1 Community Populations

Population of 2,500 or less	54%
Population of 2,500 – 50,000	38%
Population 50,000 or more	8%

A review of current literary sources, as well as interviews with rural pastors indicates that the rural lifestyle is an attractive option for many families. One attraction of rural life can be seen in a comparison of the traffic on country roads versus urban highways. Agricultural equipment and other slow-moving vehicles are a frequent presence on country roads. The sudden appearance of animal wildlife is another concern that creates the need for abrupt slow-downs. Poor visibility and the lack of streetlights on country roads also demand slower traffic in certain conditions. Similar conditions may occur on urban highways, but wider roads, better lighting, and improved visibility allow for faster traffic. The volume of traffic on urban highways far exceeds that of most country roads. Yet the increased volume does not slow traffic in the same way one Amish buggy slows traffic on a country road (Interview 5, 2009).

Not only is the pace of traffic different on urban highways, but also motorist fatigue is currently a huge concern. The term “road rage” was not a part of contemporary vernacular twenty years ago, but it identifies a recent phenomenon. Traffic on the outer belt around a major city may creep to a crawl during rush hour, yet the drivers on the

road are hurried, impatient, and filled with anxiety. Incidents of frustrated motorists committing acts of violent road rage on other drivers are a recent societal phenomenon. Traffic on country roads, even if it is moving at a faster speed, still seems to move at a slower pace than urban highways. The harried and frantic pace of the urban dweller is in stark contrast to the calmer, more serene pace as the roads become less congested. Frustrated motorists exist on country roads, but violent acts of road rage are a rare phenomenon in a rural community (Interview 5, 2009).

Another attraction of the rural lifestyle concerns the land. “In any rural community, the land takes on a character and value that is hard for an urban soul to comprehend” (Dyer 2009). The rural lifestyle has a different view of the land. Rural properties include yards that must be mowed, driveways that must be cleared in bad weather, leaves that must be raked, and various other domestic duties. Certainly, many of these tasks are required of those living in non-rural areas, but there seems to be a difference. Lawn care services, snow removal assistance, landscaping services, and other services are frequent in metropolitan areas, but these tasks are viewed as a condition of home ownership in rural communities. These kinds of homeowner responsibilities are a part of the rural lifestyle ethos.

Another appeal to a rural community concerns neighbors. Rural communities value their neighbors. Rural people respect boundaries such as fences and closed doors. Unlocked doors are common in many homes in rural communities. They know their neighbors. They trust them. They know their homes are safe. Their neighbors would not break into their home. They also know that if a neighbor notices an unknown individual

entering someone's home, they get suspicious. They know their neighbors and they watch out for one another's property (Interview 2, 2009).

Rural people value personal space. One pastor notes, "We value our personal space. If you see a line at the McDonald's in the city, people will gather together closely – they want to be next in line to place their order. Yet, on any given Sunday, when a congregation gathers for worship, there might be seventy-five people in a sanctuary that could seat two hundred people. Rather than sitting close together, the seventy-five people will be spread out" (Interview 2, 2009).

There appears to be a difference in the way rural people respond during times of local crisis. "Country people rally at a crisis – people come out of the woodwork to help when someone's home burns down, a child is seriously injured in an accident, a mother becomes ill. It is part of the country spirit to do whatever you can to be there and help when professional assistance may be out of reach or hours away" (Dyer 2009).

In a rural community, "I am my brother's keeper" is a genuine concern. It is a virtue that is a part of the rural ethos. This rural ethos is especially evident during a time of family crisis. Rural communities value the family. In a rural community, if a family is impacted by a tragedy or illness, neighbors do their best to help the affected family (Interview 2, 2009).

There are many stories of rural communities that pull together during a time of tragedy. Many rural communities have a story of a farmer experiencing an accident or tragedy at the time of the fall harvest. The accident occurs and the news of the tragedy spreads. The neighboring farmers rally around the stricken family with love, comfort, and support. Their love is demonstrated in a tangible way when the neighboring farmers

arrive with their equipment, complete the harvest and deliver the stricken family's harvest to market. This is a part of the rural lifestyle ethos. Rural people value their neighbors (Interview 2, 2009).

The attraction for a rural lifestyle provides an excellent opportunity for rural congregations to thrive. Rather than being obsolete and irrelevant artifacts of a former time, rural congregations exist in communities that offer tremendous opportunities for kingdom ministry. Rather than being a small and inconsequential part of the universal church, "who knows whether [the rural congregation] has come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14 [NKJV]).

The health of a rural community often depends on a rural congregation. "The rural church . . . belongs to a complex ecology, a social setting that includes governmental, educational, and other agencies, local and national" (Marty 2000). Thus, the rural congregation has a responsibility "beyond the self and self-interest" (Marty 2000). In one very important sense, as the church prospers, so prospers the community.

Rural congregations require pastoral leadership that understands the rural lifestyle. "Rural ministry has much in common with ministry anywhere but it takes place in unique culture" (Dyer 2009). Pastoral leadership in rural and non-rural congregations is similar but there are differences. Interviews were conducted with pastoral leaders who have served in both rural and non-rural communities. These interviews identified unique distinctions in a rural context that require understanding from pastoral leadership.

One distinction deals with the family. There is a great deal of brokenness and emotional hurt in American society, but rural families seem to cope with it differently than non-rural families (Interview 3, 2009). In rural areas, people try to hide their family

issues of baggage and brokenness. They try to keep it within the family. Non-rural folks are different. They do not try to hide these issues. This ethos demands discernment from pastoral leadership. Issues of concern that might be readily visible in non-rural congregations may be less visible in rural congregations.

Another distinction relates to the concept of the traditional family. One non-rural pastor notes that his may be the only traditional family in the congregation – meaning one husband, one wife, no ex-spouses, all the children in the home are the biological children of both parents, no step-children shared with other parents through previous marriages or relationships. Broken and blended families are a dynamic of American society, but the rural ethos values the traditional family. This ethos is reflected in many rural congregations (Interview 3, 2009).

Interviews with rural pastors suggested that people in non-rural communities seem to uproot and relocate more frequently than those in rural communities. Rural communities value longevity in the community. A new family moving into a rural community may be welcomed to the community, but also experience a social barrier as their new neighbors hesitate to welcome them into their circle of friendship. The new family may be unable to penetrate that barrier until sufficient time and experiences have passed to allow them acceptance into the circle of friends.

Interviews with rural pastors suggested that rural communities value institutions and traditions that have perpetuated from previous generations. In a metropolitan area, a memorable landmark is likely to be “the new mall near the new overpass”, but, in a rural area, a memorable landmark is more likely to be “the large oak tree out by the old Walter’s farm”. The research has shown that there are recognizable differences between

rural and non-rural communities. These differences manifest the need for pastoral leadership to recognize and understand the unique context of a rural congregation in a rural community.

Competent Pastoral Leadership Is Necessary For a Thriving Congregation

Insight into the relationship between competent pastoral leadership and a healthy congregation was pursued in an interview with Church Consultant Jim Moss. Jim was asked to respond to the question, “How important is pastoral leadership to the health of a congregation?” His response was, “Pastoral leadership is absolutely essential to a healthy congregation – not just pastoral leadership, but competent pastoral leadership” (Moss 2009, 1). Jim states, “A church cannot be healthy without competent pastoral leadership. It may be able to continue in a healthy mode for a time – such as with an interim pastor while a pastoral search is occurring. A healthy congregation, however, cannot continue to be healthy in the absence of competent pastoral leadership” (Moss 2009, 1). It is possible for a competent pastor to serve an unhealthy congregation – that congregation could be unhealthy for a variety of reasons. A healthy congregation, however, cannot continue to be healthy in the absence of competent pastoral leadership.

Surveyed pastors were asked to respond to the question, “How important is competent pastoral leadership to the vitality of a congregation?” The following chart demonstrates the results.

Figure 5.2 The Importance of Competent Pastoral Leadership

	Rural	Non-Rural
Most important	8%	19%
Extremely important	84%	56%
Somewhat important	8%	25%

The chart demonstrates a slight difference between rural and non-rural pastors. Seventy-five percent of non-rural pastors believe competent pastoral leadership is the most important or an extremely important concern, while twenty-five percent believe competent pastoral leadership is only somewhat important. Ninety-two percent of rural pastors believe competent pastoral leadership is either the most important or an extremely important concern, while only eight percent believe it to be only somewhat important. Thus, the survey's support the conclusion that rural pastors believe competent pastoral leadership is an essential characteristic in order for a rural congregation to thrive.

Essential Tasks Necessary for a Thriving Congregation

The survey and questionnaire asked pastors to identify the essential tasks for pastoral leadership. They were presented with a list of ten activities and asked to choose the three most important tasks. The responses from the online survey and the questionnaire were combined and the results were divided into rural and non-rural categories. The responses from the rural pastors are on the left and the responses from non-rural pastors are on the right. The following chart shows the results.

Figure 5.3 Most Important Tasks for Pastoral Leadership

Rural		Non-Rural	
Dynamic Preaching	67%	Visionary Leadership	63%
Visionary Leadership	57%	Multi-Generational Discipleship	58%
Biblical Knowledge	55%	Dynamic Preaching	56%
Multi-Generational Discipleship	47%	Biblical Knowledge	49%
Culturally Relevant Outreach	37%	Culturally Relevant Outreach	42%
Pastoral Counseling	14%	Pastoral Counseling	9%
Community Leadership	12%	Community Leadership	7%
Ceremonial Efficiency	6%	Denominational Involvement	2%
Denominational Involvement	2%	Ceremonial Efficiency	2%
Organizational Skills	2%	Organizational Skills	0%

Both groups of pastors identified the five most important tasks for pastoral leadership as visionary leadership, dynamic preaching, multi-generational discipleship, biblical knowledge, and culturally relevant outreach. There are, however, some differences in the order of importance between rural and non-rural pastors. Sixty-seven percent of rural pastors identified dynamic preaching as one of the three most important tasks for pastoral leadership. Fifty-six percent of non-rural pastors identified the same task as one of the three most important tasks, making it third on their list in order of importance.

A similar difference was identified with the task of visionary leadership. Sixty-three percent of non-rural pastors identified visionary leadership as one of the top three most important tasks, making it first on the list in order of importance. Fifty-seven percent of rural pastors identified the same task as one of the three most important tasks, making it second on the list in order of importance.

The survey also identified a difference in the importance of multi-generational discipleship between rural and non-rural pastors. Forty-seven percent of rural pastors identified multi-generational discipleship as one of the three most important tasks for pastoral leadership, making it fourth on the list in order of importance. Fifty-eight percent of non-rural pastors identified multi-generational discipleship as one of the top three most important tasks for pastoral leadership. Thus, multi-generational discipleship is second on the list in order of importance according to rural pastors.

The survey also identified a difference in the importance of culturally relevant outreach between rural and non-rural pastors. Only thirty-seven percent of rural pastors identified culturally relevant outreach as one of the top three most important tasks for

pastoral leadership, making it fifth on the list in order of importance. Forty-two percent of non-rural pastors identified the same task as one of the top three most important tasks for pastoral leadership, also making it fifth on the list in order of importance.

The most significant discovery of this survey, however, was the importance rural pastors place on dynamic preaching and biblical knowledge. This survey discovered that rural pastors believe dynamic preaching and biblical knowledge are more important tasks than multi-generational discipleship and culturally relevant outreach. Thus, this survey concludes that rural pastors believe the most important tasks for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation, in order of importance are dynamic preaching, visionary leadership, biblical knowledge, multi-generational discipleship, and culturally relevant outreach.

Unique Characteristics Necessary for Pastoral Leadership in a Rural Congregation

One assumption of this project is that competent pastoral leadership is essential in order for rural congregations to accomplish their kingdom purpose in their community. Interviews with rural pastors identified two characteristics of pastoral leadership that are essential in order for a rural congregation to thrive. These characteristics are to be understood differently than the five tasks identified above. The five essential tasks, previously identified, involve regular activities of pastoral leaders. These two characteristics are understood to represent inner qualities of the pastoral leaders. The interviews with pastoral leaders in rural congregations identified two characteristics that are essential for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. They are passionate spiritual care and a commitment to long-tenured pastoral ministry.

Passionate Spiritual Care

Interviews with rural pastors indicate that rural congregations require pastoral leadership that understands and effectively ministers in a rural context. One characteristic of pastoral leadership that is essential in a rural context differently than in a non-rural context deals with personal relationships. One pastor notes, “Personal relationships are deeper and more intimate in a rural context” (Interview 3, 2009). Pastoral ministry is a public vocation that requires relational skills in any context. In a rural context, however, it is essential for a pastoral leader to be able to relate with people in various capacities. One rural pastor conducts approximately ten weddings and twenty or more funerals annually (Interview 1, 2009). This pastor relates to people when they are celebrating a marriage, as well as mourning a death. Pastoral leaders in a rural context can expect to be called to the emergency room to console a grieving family after a tragic accident, as well as celebrate with a family as they honor fifty years of marriage. The ability to conduct appropriately intimate personal relationships is an essential characteristic for pastoral leadership in a rural context.

“Shepherding in a rural context is about showing the flock that you care, that you love them, that you are in it for the long haul. The people need to know that I’m not there just to bring change – I’m there because I love you” (Interview 3, 2009). This pastor, who has experienced pastoral leadership in both rural and non-rural contexts, notes:

The [urban congregation] did not have the need for the spiritual care of the shepherd in the same way the rural [congregation] did. The urban congregation had growth in its DNA – they weren’t focused on spiritual care – they were focused on spiritual growth. Hospital visitation is an example. The members at the [urban congregation] don’t expect to be visited in the event of a hospitalization, and in most cases don’t even desire to be visited. But hospital visitation was an

important part of my ministry in the rural congregation. Pastoral visitations seem to be one difference between rural and urban ministry. (Interview 3, 2009)

This pastoral interview identified the importance of a spiritual care ministry.

Pastoral visitation is one means of providing spiritual care and it appears that a visitation ministry is essential to demonstrate passionate spiritual care. There are other means of demonstrating passionate spiritual care in a rural community. Involvement in school activities, community events, participation in family celebrations, and other activities are also ways of providing spiritual care in a rural community.

This project addressed the question, “What are the characteristics of pastoral leadership that are unique to rural lifestyle congregations?” Passionate spiritual care was identified as a characteristic of pastoral leadership that is essential to a rural congregation. It is essential, in a rural congregation, for pastoral leadership to provide appropriately intimate passionate spiritual care to members of the congregation.

Commitment to Long-Tenured Pastoral Ministry

One pastoral interview identified long-tenured pastoral leadership as an essential characteristic for pastoral leadership in a rural context. Pastoral leadership in a rural congregation “is about showing the flock that you care . . . that you are in it for the long haul” (Interview 3, 2009). Pastors were asked if long-tenure was vital to the health of a rural congregation. The chart below demonstrates the results.

Figure 5.4 Is Long-Tenure Vital to Congregational Health?

	Rural	Non-Rural
Yes	78%	53%
No	16%	32%
No Opinion	6%	15%

Seventy-eight percent of rural pastors believe that long-tenure is vital to congregational health while only fifty-three percent of non-rural pastors believe long-tenure is vital. This marks a significant difference in the perspective between rural and non-rural pastors.

In an attempt to discover the importance of long-tenure, pastors were asked if they considered years seven through twenty-one to be the prime years for effective ministry. The surveys asked pastors if the first seven years of pastoral ministry in a congregation was a necessary period of pastoral and congregational identity at the onset of a pastoral ministry. The majority of rural pastors consider years seven through twenty-one to be the most effective years for ministry. The chart below demonstrates the responses.

Figure 5.5 Prime Years of Ministry Begin At Year Seven

	Rural	Non-Rural
Yes	72%	34%
No	14%	43%
No Opinion	14%	23%

This chart demonstrates a significant difference in perspective, however, between rural and non-rural pastors regarding long-tenured pastoral leadership. Seventy-two percent of rural pastors believe the prime years of pastoral ministry begin with year seven while only thirty-four percent of non-rural pastors hold this belief. It is also interesting to note that twenty-three percent of non-rural pastors offered no opinion to the question. This question concerning tenure is obviously not the issue of significance among non-rural pastors that it is among rural pastors.

It appears that the value of a long-tenured pastorate is appreciated among GLC pastors. The current average tenure of pastors surveyed is 7.8 years – and growing. GLC

pastors were asked if they would accept a better offer of another congregation if one were presented. One-hundred percent of rural pastors answered, “No”. It appears that pastors serving in the GLC value long tenure. These data support the conclusion that long-tenured pastoral ministry is an essential characteristic for a rural congregation to thrive.

Visionary Leadership

The second research question of this project is, “How does pastoral leadership guide a congregation in the revisioning process”? Figure 5.3 above shows that fifty-seven percent of rural pastors believe that visionary leadership is one of the top three most important tasks for pastoral leaders. A pastoral interview provided an example of a pastoral leader guiding a rural congregation through a revisioning process. This pastor serves a rural congregation in a rural community in central Michigan that demonstrates an example of visionary leadership. The following case study demonstrates this example.

A Case Study – Rebuilding and Relocation

This case study identifies an excellent example of a pastor that is providing visionary leadership in a rural congregation (Case Study 1, 2009). This pastor accepted the call to serve a two-congregation circuit in a rural community in central Michigan. Immediately, there was a major paradigm shift in one of those congregations. The congregation had been averaging approximately fifty congregants in weekly worship attendance. The congregation was a typical rural congregation. There were no significant conflicts. The financial condition was solid. The members were genuine and sincere in their spiritual lives, yet there was a subtle perception that the congregation could do more for the kingdom.

Shortly after the new pastor arrived, a conversation began finding ways to better fulfill the kingdom purpose God had assigned their congregation. As enthusiasm for kingdom pursuits rose, the limitations of an older facility began to magnify. The facility had been well maintained throughout its history, but it lacked in its functional capacity. It offered limited parking options. The building was not handicap-accessible. There were limited classrooms and fellowship spaces. The restrooms were small and not handicap-accessible. The facility was located on a gravel road that was in poor condition. It was no longer located on a major thoroughfare of traffic. It was landlocked on three sides by a cemetery and secondary roads. The condition of the access road was poor and especially bad during winter weather. It became apparent that the antiquated facility and its poor location were hindering the congregation from fulfilling its stated kingdom purpose of bringing Christ to the community. As a result of these discussions, the congregation decided to purchase land and build a new facility located in a more desirable location.

Once the decision was made for relocation, the blessing of the Lord became apparent. A deal was made for the sale of the original facility with the local township authority. A piece of property was found and a deal was made for its purchase. The new property was located on a state highway that was a major thoroughfare in the community. It offered excellent accessibility and visibility.

Within six years of the arrival of the new pastor, a new facility was designed, built, and dedicated to the service of the Kingdom of God. The new facility offered the desired amenities for a congregation to fulfill its kingdom purpose. The building is handicap-accessible. It has large, accessible restrooms. It has sufficient classroom space. There is a multi-use common area at the entrance of the facility. It provides space for

fellowship, interaction, and a central point for the dissemination of information. It can also be set up for fellowship dinners, funeral dinners, and other activities. It has a large and accessible paved parking lot. An extended awning at the main entrance allows for a covered space to enter and depart vehicles without being exposed to the weather.

The new facility is functional, visible, accessible, and attractive. The relocation has sparked a renewed enthusiasm in the congregation. There has been a paradigm shift in the leadership of the congregation. The new leadership paradigm involves younger persons in several key areas. There has been a significant increase in the outreach to young people. Young leaders are serving in discipleship programs for the youth and children's ministry programs. The new ministries have resulted in a significant increase in children and youth attendance. The average weekly attendance has more than doubled.

The story continues as the second congregation of the two-congregation circuit joined the conversation of relocation and property development. A denominational leader visited the congregation and delivered a stirring sermon that challenged the congregation to consider the example of their sister congregation. They were challenged to consider relocation and building in a more desirable and effective location. The second congregation received that challenge and began their own process of procuring land and raising the funds necessary for the project.

Once again, the blessing of the Lord became immediately apparent. The former property was donated to their local township authority. Then, a long-time member of the congregation donated seven acres of land at a desirable location. A new building was designed, built, and dedicated to the service of the Kingdom of God two years later. The relocation has brought an increase in the average weekly attendance. The congregation

has experienced a new paradigm of leadership. The children's ministries and other outreach programs are growing. The congregation has been ignited to pursue further possibilities of ministry.

This is a story of visionary pastoral leadership that took a radical approach to finding new ways to accomplish their kingdom purpose. The leadership of these congregations began the discussion of relocation when they confronted the reality that their current location and facility was hindering the work of their kingdom purpose. The discussion of relocation was an understandably difficult issue for the congregation. There was abundant apprehension when these discussions began. Yet, the discussions were not divisive, they were empowering. A consensus was built within the congregations before any actions were taken. A forceful leader did not force the congregations into unwanted actions. Rather, the discussions were led in a manner that the people were able to understand the vision and embrace it. This is an example of competent pastoral leadership.

The congregations pursued the construction of a new building for the right reasons. The poor locations and inadequate facilities were hindering the congregation in fulfilling their kingdom purposes. The vision of relocation grew out of a passion for kingdom ministry. Both of these congregations experienced a renewed sense of purpose. The relocations certainly contributed to their growth.

The experiences of these two congregations are wonderful testimonies of the power of God. They are a testament to the congregation's willingness to step out in faith to follow a God-given vision. It is a testimony of visionary pastoral leadership that empowers rural congregations to fulfill their kingdom purpose. It is an example of

competent pastoral leadership that served as a catalyst for a rural congregation to pursue its kingdom purpose in their community.

Re-Building Requires Competent Pastoral Leadership

Church consultant Jim Moss was asked to address the question, “Is a building program essential or necessary for the growth of a congregation”? The better question to ask, according to Jim, is “Does the congregation want to grow”? (Moss 2009). This is a far-reaching question that needs to be answered truthfully. Most congregations would say, “Yes, we want to grow”. Growth is a part of the fabric of evangelicalism. Most evangelical congregations would agree that fulfilling the Great Commission means that local congregations should be growing. Yet, in spite of this acknowledgment, in spite of what the congregation would say in response to the question, the reality is that most congregations are hesitant to grow. There are several reasons for this.

Some people think that the benefits of a small congregation would be lost if the church grew. Some of those benefits being: knowing everyone by name; being able to visit with each person every Sunday; being able to participate in the leadership and decision making of the church; plenty of hassle free parking; and a plethora of other issues.

Another reason some congregations hesitate to grow is finances. The benefits of having a mortgage-free facility are many. Especially in rural congregations, being debt-free is a virtue of the rural ethos. The costs of maintaining expensive programs, maybe the need for additional paid staff, and the costs of building programs for additional space are seen as too expensive. The view is that the costs of growth do not outweigh the benefits of being small.

Another issue concerns the process of building. Many small congregations have facilities that are debt-free and reasonably serviceable. The facilities have probably been well maintained and there are few, if any, serious issues with the structure that require costly repairs. In other words, the building is fine as it is. To make additions to the facility would detract from the appearance of the facility and this is perceived as a violation of the church's history and tradition. Thus, many congregations may express a desire to grow when realistically they are not. Jim Moss suggests the question be asked differently. He suggests that the question is better asked like this:

Does the congregation want to grow? If yes, is the congregation willing to build? If they are not willing to build, they are not willing to grow – growth means more people and more people need additional space. If you're willing to grow, you must be willing to build. The next question is, is the congregation willing to spend money? If the congregation is willing to build, it must be willing to spend money – it costs money to build. If you are not willing to spend, you're not willing to build. (Moss 2009)

Thus, the question is not, "Are you willing to grow?" The question is, "Are you willing to build?" and, "Are you willing to spend money?" These are the questions that challenge rural congregations. Changes to the physical property are expensive and often viewed skeptically in rural congregations.

This hesitance may stem from a positive and healthy virtue concerning debt. The rural ethos believes "debt is to be retired, not avoided" (Interview 2, 2009). Thus, rural congregations are hesitant to engage a capital campaign due to an aversion to debt. One rural pastor relates a story from a rural congregation. This rural congregation had saved money that was placed in certificates of deposit and other savings instruments, but, that money became an albatross around the neck of the congregation. They became paralyzed with the fear that they would lose their nest egg. The unwillingness to release the money

hindered their ability to grow as a congregation and left them with a building that was desperately in need of renovation (Interview 2, 2009).

A review of the records of GLC congregations suggests that a rebuilding program can be a catalyst for the growth of a congregation. For the decade of 1999 – 2009, there were ten congregations in the GLC that had a sustained period of growth (Appendix G). During that ten-year period, six of those ten churches experienced a significant building or rebuilding project. This supports the conclusion that a building project can be one component for a rural congregation to fulfill its kingdom purpose. Rebuilding or relocating is not feasible in every rural congregation. The hot-button issues of finances and change, however, appear to be central issues with the potential to hinder or empower a rural congregation to thrive. Competent pastoral leadership is necessary if a building program is determined to be the right course in a rural congregation.

Course Changes Require Visionary Leadership

The pursuit of visionary leadership may be painful for pastoral leadership. There have been many young pastors that have felt the sting of rejection after articulating a “new vision” for the congregation. The young pastor has studied and prayed and is prepared to lead the congregation into his newly envisioned Promised Land. The young pastor becomes dejected after discovering that the congregation is resistant to a new direction because, “We’ve never done it that way before”. Wayne Boyer, former Executive Director of the CGGC, offers an account of a fateful first parish of a pastor fresh out of seminary:

The new pastor, fresh out of seminary, unsure of himself yet armed with high expectations of his potential in ministry finishes unpacking the U-Haul on Saturday and ascends to the pulpit on Sunday. Assuming the people are counting

on him for direction for the church he lays out the vision he has for this church. Instead of receiving a standing ovation at the close of the message, the people warmly welcome him there, ask about his getting settled in and graciously offer, “If there’s anything I can do, just let me know”.

Normally, the pastor goes home, delighted in the warm reception, yet a bit uneasy at the complete lack of enthusiasm for the vision he has so carefully crafted for the church. This unease carries forward into the administrative council meetings where they discuss the need of paint for the hallway, the mowing of the grass, but say nothing about “the vision”. In fact, when the pastor personally brings it to the table for discussion, regularly it is slid back into his lap in the classic rural/small town church method of death by neglect.

Too often, the pastor becomes frustrated with the church process and begins to let them know about it from the pulpit on Sundays. The response is noticeably cooler as some of the leadership does not even pass by him at the door after the service. He concludes that their problem is spiritual insensitivity and turns the affection for them down several degrees while he cranks up the intensity of proclaiming his vision. Finally, to accommodate him, the church gives a bit and he is delighted but usually not enough to hold him there when another call comes along. After he leaves the first thing the congregation does is snap back to what they had always been doing. It is not that they are against vision, it is that they always do things together as a family. (Boyer 2007, 60-1)

“Death by neglect” has become the condition of many failing rural congregations.

Changing course and redirecting a congregation away from the “death by neglect” paradigm, requires visionary leadership. Interviews and other sources have demonstrated that visionary pastoral leadership is a necessary catalyst for rural congregations to rediscover their kingdom purpose. A building or rebuilding program may be one component of a thriving congregation, but the willingness to rediscover and pursue its kingdom purpose is essential for a rural congregation to thrive. Visionary pastoral leadership is a catalyst for a rural congregation to rediscover its kingdom purpose. Case studies, interviews, and other sources support the conclusion that visionary pastoral leadership is an essential characteristic for pastoral leadership in order for rural congregations to thrive.

Culturally Relevant Outreach

The third question of this research project is, “How does pastoral leadership develop a ministry model that is relevant to the specific context of the rural lifestyle congregation”? Figure 5.3 above demonstrates that rural pastors believe culturally relevant outreach is among the top five most important tasks of pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. Thirty-seven percent of rural pastors identified culturally relevant outreach as an important task of pastoral leadership. It has already been noted that the rural pastors surveyed did not identify culturally relevant outreach as one of the top three most important tasks for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. The rural pastors surveyed did, however, place culturally relevant outreach as the fifth most important task for pastoral leadership.

The survey asked pastors if a rural congregation can be vital even if the community is declining. Ninety-eight percent of rural pastors believe that a rural congregation can thrive in spite of declining social and economic conditions in the community. The biblical and literature review in chapters two and three demonstrated that culturally relevant outreach is an essential task of pastoral leadership in order for a rural congregation to thrive.

One pastoral interview identified an example of a pastoral leader that is providing culturally relevant outreach in his community. The following case study demonstrates his culturally relevant outreach.

A Case Study – Youth Ministry

A pastor serving a congregation in northwest Ohio has experienced steady growth by developing outreach ministries that are relevant in the context of his congregation. The congregation reaches out to the area high school and junior high youth through a program they call “Overtime”. The ministry occurs after high school football games and basketball games. The young people are invited to come to the church for pizza and soda pop. The youth are invited to eat pizza, drink sodas, and hang out at the church. That is it! There are no conditions attached or other expectations of the students. They are simply invited to the church for food, fun, and fellowship.

This ministry operates under the philosophy that you have to give something in order to show love. The pastor believes, “If the church is not doing something that costs us, then we are missing the point” (Case Study 3, 2009). The purpose is not to increase attendance at the church – the purpose is to love the community! When the ministry first began, some people in the congregation struggled with that concept. It did not make sense to just give away food and sodas without some expectations in return. There was no charge for the food. There was no literature distribution or contact information gathered or any other contact that attempted to solicit the youth in any way. The guiding principle for this ministry is the passion to give something of value to a young person that demonstrates unconditional love.

After a home football game, there is an average of three hundred young people in attendance. It requires a lot of soda and a lot of pizza to satisfy the appetites of three hundred hungry teenagers. This outreach ministry is costly and labor intensive, yet the ministry has never suffered lack of support from the congregation. The people in the

congregation support this program because this is a congregation that loves young people. The passion for young people is a part of the DNA of this congregation. This ministry provides a dynamic outreach of the congregation that is culturally relevant.

The ministry also receives support from an unlikely source. Every year, at the beginning of the football season, the pastor prepares a schedule for “Overtime” events for the entire school year. The pastor delivers the schedule to the school. The school posts the schedule on a bulletin board and the principal announces the schedule with the morning announcements. This exemplifies why this ministry is effective. The congregation is a respected part of the community. Most importantly, the pastor is a respected leader in the community. He is seen attending ball games and other school functions. He is a visible member in the community. He recently received an award from the mayor for his service to the community. This pastor has gained a favored position in the community. He works together with school officials, civic leaders, and other community members for the benefit of the community. This pastor provides an example of competent pastoral leadership that provides culturally relevant outreach to his community (Case Study 3, 2009).

A Case Study – Starting a Second Service

A pastoral interview also identified a second example of competent pastoral leadership that provided a culturally relevant outreach (Case Study 4, 2009). This pastor served a rural congregation in a rural community in northwest Ohio. When the new pastor arrived, the congregation was traditional in worship, but the leadership of the congregation was open to change. The pastor described the congregation as content with present circumstances but no real passion to grow, expand, or redefine its ministry. In the

sixth year of ministry in the congregation, the pastor recognized a subtle paradigm shift in the congregation. A sense of unity and an atmosphere of trust had developed. There was a tangible shift in the spiritual care of the congregation. The congregation had shifted from the primary need for spiritual care to a posture that was ready for spiritual growth. This transition inspired a renewed sense of kingdom purpose in the congregation.

In light of the renewed sense of purpose, the pastor decided to introduce the idea of starting a new worship service. The new worship service would be a contemporary format designed specifically to reach out to younger families. Immediately, a conflict arose among the leadership of the congregation. One of the elders was so opposed to the idea that he ultimately resigned his position, left the church, and transferred his family's membership to another congregation in the area. As the congregation became aware of the conflict, a number of people in the congregation spoke out against the plan to start a second service. Convinced that the launch of a second service was an inspired idea, the pastor pressed on in spite of the opposition.

The pastor did not force his plan on the congregation. He did not impose his will over the will of the congregation. Rather, recognizing that the opposition was coming from a vocal minority, he adopted a plan that would allow the congregation to catch the vision. The pastor spent six months preparing for the launch of the new worship service. He lovingly and persistently solicited support for the plan from the congregation. Ultimately, the congregation began to see the potential of a contemporary worship service. By the time the second worship service was launched, the majority of the congregation was in agreement with the plan.

One of the primary reasons the pastor was able to work through this conflict was because of the trust the people had in their pastor. They knew their pastor loved them. They knew their pastor had the best interests of their congregation in mind. They knew that their pastor was sincerely convinced that the launch of a second worship service was a divinely inspired plan. Thus, after six months of moving slowly and cautiously, the second service was launched.

The initial response to the second service was overwhelming. The pastor and the leadership were not ready for such an overwhelming response. They were not ready to handle the influx to children's ministry. They were not ready for follow-up, for parking, and a number of other issues.

Launching a second worship service that is specifically targeted to reach an unreached segment of the community seems to be an excellent plan. Many congregations are strategically pursuing this course of action and meeting with great success. The issue, however, that dynamically demonstrates excellent pastoral leadership is this pastor's ability to successfully work through a situation that could have been devastating for the congregation. Rather than being destructive, the launch of a second service was a blessing. Even more importantly, the congregation realized a renewed passion to reach out to their community. The experience of this pastor demonstrates how starting a second worship service can ignite a passion for culturally relevant outreach that will be a catalyst for a rural congregation to thrive.

A Case Study – An Effective Greeters Ministry is Essential

A former denominational leader relates the story of a family's first-time visit of a congregation in eastern Pennsylvania.

We visited the church one Sunday morning because we were looking for a home church. On the day we visited, it was raining. My husband brought me and my daughter to the door while he went to find a place to park. I managed to get my daughter into the church, but not without getting fairly wet. When we got in the foyer, I noticed that there were steps that led up to the sanctuary. At the top of the stairs were two young men dressed in suits and ties. When we entered, they were both laughing, apparently at some joke that had just been told. When we entered the foyer, both of the young men turned and watched us enter. Their laughing and playful activity, however, was interrupted for only a moment. Before I was completely able to negotiate the heavy entrance doors while getting myself and my daughter in out of the rain, they had returned to their “fun”. The big wooden (beautiful) doors at the entrance prevented the greeters from seeing that we were entering. But, when the doors were opening and my struggles to enter were apparent, neither of these young men made an attempt to help us.

While my daughter and I waited in the foyer for my husband to return from parking the car, the two men at the top of the stairs continued their gaiety. They became very loud in their fun-making. My daughter, who was wet and cold, was noticeably anxious. We were in a strange place with people we did not know, and so far, the experience had not been very friendly. We felt like invaders attempting to occupy hostile territory. During the wait, my daughter became more anxious and she began to cry. The whole experience was overwhelming her. When I attempted to console her, she was non-responsive. I couldn't help but wonder if these young men would make any offers of assistance when they heard my daughter crying. Sadly, they did not. They obviously recognized that my daughter was upset, but they made no attempt to help. They did not attempt to point out the direction of the restrooms. They did not offer a tissue or a towel. They simply continued their fun and laughter. When my husband finally arrived, my daughter and I were both upset. As we climbed the stairs to enter the sanctuary, the greeters/ushers handed us a program, said, “good morning”, and then returned to their previous conversation. (Interview 6, 2009)

This story highlights the importance of an effective greeter's ministry. The old adage states, “You only get one chance to make a first impression”. When guests visit a church, they are coming into a brand new situation. Every congregation has its own protocol. Even if the visitors are visiting a congregation in the same denomination, there are still issues that are unique. Questions abound. “Where do I park? Where do I sit? Am I welcome here? Are they going to embarrass me? Are the people friendly? Where are the restrooms? What do we do with our children?” And there are a thousand other questions.

An effective greeter does far more than just say, “Good morning”. When visitors enter a church for the first time, they probably feel overwhelmed. They may feel “like invaders attempting to occupy hostile territory” (Interview 6, 2009). The greeters need to diffuse these fears. They need to make visitors feel welcome. Greeters need to be a source of information for a first-time visitor. This case study provides an excellent example of the importance of a greeter’s ministry in a rural congregation. An effective greeter’s ministry is one element of the outreach ministry. A visitor attending worship for the first time has taken the first step toward becoming a functioning member of the congregation, but the deal has not yet been closed. The greeter is one step in the process of assimilating a new member into the congregation. Thus, an effective greeter’s ministry is an essential characteristic for a rural congregation to thrive.

Multi-Generational Discipleship

The fourth assumption of this project states that a multi-generational ministry paradigm is both necessary and possible. In order for a local congregation to effectively minister to its community, generational distinctions must be understood. Discipleship programs that effectively recognize generational distinctions are necessary for a rural congregation to thrive. Thus, the final question addressed in the research was, “How does pastoral leadership achieve a ministry model that is multi-generational”?

The survey asked pastors to identify the three most important activities for pastoral leadership. It has already been noted that the rural pastors surveyed did not identify multi-generational discipleship as one of the top three most important tasks. Rural pastors did, however, identify multi-generational discipleship as the fourth most important task for pastoral leadership, as Figure 5.3 indicates. Forty-seven percent of

rural pastors identified multi-generational discipleship as one of the three most important tasks for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. The biblical and literature review in chapters two and three demonstrated that multi-generational discipleship is an essential task for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. A case study was identified that provides an example of a rural congregation that is pursuing multi-generational discipleship ministries.

A Case Study – An After School Kids Program

In many rural communities, the end of the school day signals the beginning of a lonely and possibly dangerous freedom for the average school child. Many school-age children tend to themselves after the school day ends. The following case study provides an example of a rural congregation providing an opportunity for school age children with an after-school program. This multi-generational discipleship program is called “Kids for Christ” (KFC). KFC meets on Wednesday nights during the fall and winter months. The program meets between 5:30 – 7:00 PM. It is a ministry for children age four through high school, but most of the students are junior high age and younger.

KFC originally met on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 PM. It morphed into the current format when a decision was made to provide a meal for the children at the beginning of the service. It was discovered that many families in the community were like millions of other American families with children taking care of themselves after the school day. This congregation recognized that offering a hot meal after school would satisfy a need in the community. Thus, the time of the service was moved to 5:30 PM and a hot meal was offered for the children in the community. After the meal, KFC includes a Bible lesson, songs, and other activities for the children. KFC has become the primary

discipleship ministry for the children of the congregation. KFC averages approximately eighty children in regular attendance.

The ministry of this congregation is not just about children. The adults also receive discipleship ministry on Wednesday evenings. After the conclusion of the KFC service, there is an adult Bible study taught by the pastor. The adults are coming in for their Bible study as the children are leaving at the conclusion of their program. This occurrence is intentional. The adults attending Bible study are able to see the impact their congregation is having in the lives of the young people in their community.

These adults, who are not actively participating in the ministry to children, are witnessing the excitement and enthusiasm of the program. Though they are not actively involved, they see their church filled with children. They hear the sounds of excitement from the children. They feel the enthusiasm of the leaders in this ministry. This is an excellent source of encouragement for the adults. Members of rural congregations with declined attendance envy the sights and sounds of children in their midst. The absence of young people is as powerful a force in closing a rural congregation as any other source. This ministry is an example of a multi-generational discipleship ministry that is making an impact in a rural congregation. This rural congregation is passionate about fulfilling their kingdom purpose in their community (Case Study 4, 2009).

Dynamic Children's Ministry is Essential

Multi-generational discipleship involves a concentration on children's ministry. A church consultant Ann Roth suggests that children's ministry should be a primary pursuit of a congregation. She states, "If you aim for the Boomers – you'll get them and no others. If you aim for the youngsters you'll get them and the Boomers" (Roth 1, 2009).

This does not imply that ministry to the Boomer generation is irrelevant or unnecessary. It simply implies that ministry to children will draw the children as well as the parents. Current research indicates that people sixty-five years of age and older are more likely to regularly attend worship services than younger worshippers. Younger adults, between the age's twenty-five and forty-four years, attend religious services less frequently than worshippers in any other age groups (Bruce 2004). Young adults can be encouraged to become regular worshippers by providing dynamic, relevant, and transformative discipleship ministries for their children.

Rural congregations that are family churches have a unique opportunity to reach multiple generations. Intentional discipleship ministries that are aimed at reaching young people are necessary for rural congregations. "Rural churches need a deep conviction that they are called to prepare and send out healthy, integrated, dynamic Christian young people. Any minister who makes this a priority will be loved and respected in a country church by families and the youth alike" (Dyer 2009).

Since "young people engage in a nearly constant search for fresh experiences and new sources of motivation" (Kinnaman 2007, 23), multi-generational discipleship is an essential characteristic necessary for competent pastoral leadership. Current research supports the conclusion that multi-generational discipleship is an essential characteristic of competent pastoral leadership.

Effective Visitation Ministry is Essential

One interviewed pastor identified visitation ministry as an essential characteristic of an effective multi-generational discipleship ministry (Interview 6, 2010). A visitation ministry provides an opportunity for pastoral leadership to build trust with people. It

provides an opportunity to build healthy alliances that can pay huge dividends when a difficult or controversial issue is being addressed. Most importantly, however, it provides an excellent opportunity for genuine discipleship. Conversely, failure to adequately provide a visitation ministry can also be destructive for a rural pastor. It is built into the DNA of a rural congregation. Rural pastors are expected to get out of their office and be with the people of the congregation.

There are two characteristics that are necessary for an effective pastoral visitation ministry (Interview 6, 2009). First, pastors need to invest in the training of elders to do visitation. Elders need to be properly trained to do effective visitations. Elders need to recognize visitation as one part of their position of elder, and they should be properly trained to provide effective visitations. Visitation ministry should not be viewed as a begrudged activity. Rather, visitation ministry should be viewed as an opportunity to disciple and nurture members of the congregation. Elders should be expected to report back to the pastor concerning their visitation activity. Just as a pastor reports to the church council, so should elders report to the pastor. Elders need to be properly trained to be effective in a visitation ministry.

Pastoral visitation is different in a rural context (Interview 6, 2009). The difference is in the expectation of the congregation. Congregations in a rural context expect their pastor to have an effective visitation ministry. Even when elders are making visits, the pastor still needs to be a major component of the visitation ministry. A significant part of the visitation ministry should be conducted by the elders. Nevertheless, this does not excuse pastors from visitation. In a rural context, an effective visitation

ministry is an essential characteristic of pastoral leadership in a multi-generational discipleship ministry.

Conclusion

This project addressed four research questions. The first question was, “What are the characteristics of pastoral leadership that are unique to rural lifestyle congregations”? This section began with a discussion about the ethos of a rural lifestyle. A rural lifestyle is different than a non-rural lifestyle. In a rural context, driving habits are different, the view of the land is different, the value of neighbors is different, the response to a crisis is different, and there are many other differences. These differences require pastoral leaders that understand the rural lifestyle. Data were collected that identified five tasks that are essential for pastoral leadership in a rural context. Those tasks are dynamic preaching, visionary leadership, biblical knowledge, multi-generational discipleship, and culturally relevant outreach. Interviews with rural pastors also identified two tasks, or inner qualities, that are necessary for pastoral leadership in a rural context. Those tasks are passionate spiritual care and a commitment to long-tenured pastoral ministry.

The second question was, “How does pastoral leadership guide a congregation in the revisioning process”? Data were collected that provided insight into the pastoral leadership tasks of visionary leadership. A case study identified a rural congregation that relocated and built a new, functional, and attractive facility in a better location in its community. This case study analyzed how pastoral leadership can guide a congregation in the revisioning process. Additional interviews were analyzed, providing data that informs the process of visionary pastoral leadership in a rural context.

The third question was, “How does pastoral leadership develop a ministry model that is relevant to the specific context of the rural lifestyle congregation”? The biblical and literature reviews in chapters two and three of this project demonstrated the need for culturally relevant outreach. The data included two case studies that are providing culturally relevant outreach in their communities. An analysis of the first case study proved that a culturally relevant youth ministry program is necessary in a rural lifestyle congregation. An analysis of the second case study demonstrated that a second worship service could provide a culturally relevant outreach in a rural context. This data provides a ministry model that is culturally relevant to in a rural context.

The final question addressed was, “How does pastoral leadership achieve a ministry model that is multi-generational”? The analysis of a case study demonstrated how a rural congregation can achieve a multi-generational discipleship ministry. Other interviews and scholarly sources provided insight into the importance of pastoral leadership that pursues multi-generational discipleship. Another interview identified an effective visitation ministry that contributes to a multi-generational ministry model. Analysis of these data demonstrates how a dynamic children’s ministry program contributes to a ministry model that is multi-generational.

This project began with four basic assumptions. The first assumption was that a rural congregation requires competent pastoral leadership in order to fulfill its kingdom purpose in its community. Rural congregations are often unappealing assignments for pastoral leaders. The rural community often offers less of the personal, professional, social, and educational amenities than non-rural communities. Rural congregations often have smaller attendance and smaller budgets. Yet, in spite of these issues, rural

congregations can have a thriving presence in their communities if competent pastoral leadership exists. Rural pastors overwhelmingly concur that rural congregations require competent pastoral leadership in order to fulfill their kingdom purpose.

The second assumption was that visionary pastoral leadership is a necessary catalyst for rural congregations to rediscover their kingdom purpose. Many rural congregations are declining and approaching closure. The case studies in this project confirmed that the appropriate visionary leadership can provide the necessary catalyst for a declining rural congregation to revive and thrive. Visionary leadership is necessary for a rural congregation to rediscover and thrive in its ordained kingdom purpose.

The third assumption was that rural congregations must pursue culturally relevant outreach in order to effectively minister in their community. Many rural congregations have become irrelevant relics of the past in their communities. Their aging congregations are viewed by their communities as obsolete and out of touch with contemporary society. This project provided interviews with rural pastors in rural congregations that are achieving effective ministries in their communities because they are pursuing culturally relevant outreach.

The fourth assumption was that a multi-generational ministry paradigm is necessary in order for local congregations to thrive in their kingdom purpose. Rural congregations that are declining can readily attest to the need for multi-generational ministry. In many rural congregations, the average age of its worshipers goes up by one year every year. The absence of young worshipers provides a clear prediction that the congregation's failure is rapidly approaching. Multi-generational discipleship programs

are necessary if rural congregations are going to attract younger worshipers. A multi-generational ministry paradigm is essential for a rural congregation.

Data were collected that provided examples of pastoral leadership thriving in rural congregations. This research identified two unique characteristics that are essential for competent pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. Those essential characteristics are passionate spiritual care and a commitment to long-tenured pastoral ministry.

The research also identified two unexpected additional essential tasks necessary for pastoral leadership to thrive in a rural congregation. These two tasks were dynamic preaching and biblical knowledge. These are two tasks that rural pastors indicated as essential to their ministry, which the author did not expect to discover in this project. The findings of this research project will be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of pastoral leadership that equip a rural congregation to fulfill its kingdom purpose. The goal of this chapter is to present a summary of the project, the findings, conclusions, and finally, recommendations for achieving competent pastoral leadership that have resulted from the research in this project.

Project Summary

This project began with a discussion of the declining conditions facing many rural communities in America. The declining populations and failing resources are also causing problems for many rural congregations. These conditions are causing many rural congregations to fail; many others are in danger of the same fate. This fear of failure causes some rural congregations to become entrapped in a pursuit of self-preservation. This posture of survival causes a congregation to fall prey to a ministry paradigm that seeks self-preservation rather than its kingdom purpose. This pursuit of self-preservation leads to impotence causing the congregation to lose sight of its vision and ultimately fail in the pursuit of its kingdom purpose.

The Purpose of the Study

This study sought to identify the essential characteristics of pastoral leadership for a rural lifestyle congregation. Pastoral leadership that is competent was recognized as a key element for a rural congregation. The consensus among contemporary authors and scholars supports the view that thriving congregations require competent pastoral leaders that are responsive to the ever-increasing societal changes in the world of the 21st century.

Biblical and Theological Foundation

Chapter Two of this project offered a biblical and theological foundation of pastoral leadership in a rural context. Characteristics of pastoral leadership in a rural congregation were discussed. A biblical perspective of pastoral leadership was presented. Biblical examples of pastoral leadership were identified and discussed. This project included a discussion of three essential characteristics of pastoral leadership. The first essential characteristic discussed was pastoral leadership that guides the revisioning process. The second essential characteristic discussed was pastoral leadership that is culturally relevant. The third and final essential characteristic discussed was pastoral leadership that is multi-generational.

Literature Review and Other Sources

Chapter Three of this project offered a review of literature and other sources that pertain to pastoral leadership. The literature review included a discussion of definitions of competent pastoral leadership. Current literature on the subject of pastoral leadership is

plentiful. This discussion sought to identify the more relevant definitions of pastoral leadership as they pertain to a rural context. This project also included a discussion of competent pastoral leadership that guides the visioning process, competent pastoral leadership that is culturally relevant, and competent pastoral leadership that is multi-generational.

The Research

This project addressed four research questions. The first question sought insight into the characteristics of pastoral leadership that are unique to a rural lifestyle congregation. This question assumed that rural lifestyle congregations require competent pastoral leadership in order to fulfill its kingdom purpose in its communities. The research confirmed this assumption. Competent pastoral leadership is essential for a healthy rural congregation. The biblical and literature reviews, as well as case studies, and interviews provided valuable insights into the essential elements necessary for pastoral leadership in a thriving rural congregation.

The second research question for this project sought to discover how pastoral leadership guides a congregation in the revisioning process. A case study presented an excellent example of a pastoral leader guiding his congregation in a revisioning process. The second basic assumption of this project stated that pastoral leadership is the necessary catalyst for rural lifestyle congregations to accurately develop their specific vision. The case studies and survey confirmed this assumption and provided valuable insights into the essential task of visionary leadership in a rural congregation.

The third research question for this project sought insight into a ministry model that is relevant to the specific context of the rural lifestyle congregation. The biblical and

literature review offered valuable insight into the necessity for a rural congregation to provide outreach that is relevant to their context. The survey also identified culturally relevant outreach as one of the top five most important tasks for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. The third basic assumption of this project stated that rural lifestyle congregations must pursue a culturally relevant ministry in order to effectively minister in their community. Interviews with rural pastors provided an excellent source of insight into outreach that is contextual. Three case studies were presented that identified pastoral leaders that have provided outreach that is contextually relevant to their communities.

The final research question for this project sought insight into achieving a ministry model that is multi-generational. The biblical and literature review provided insight into a multi-generational ministry paradigm. The survey also identified multi-generational discipleship as one of the top five most important tasks for pastoral leadership in a rural context. The fourth basic assumption of this project stated that a multi-generational ministry paradigm is both necessary and possible. A case study and data collected from the interviews provided examples of rural congregations providing multi-generational discipleship in a rural congregation.

Project Findings

This project sought to identify the essential characteristics necessary for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation to thrive. As the research progressed, it was recognized that the term *essential characteristics* was too broad. The term failed to recognize the complexity of the subject and represented the yet-to-be-informed perspective of the author. Thus, as a result of this project, it was recognized that it is more accurate to understand the term *essential characteristics* in three different categories. The first

category is identified as *essential qualities* of pastoral leadership. The second category is identified as *essential characteristics* of pastoral leadership. And, the third category is identified as *essential tasks* of pastoral leadership.

Essential Qualities of Pastoral Leadership

The biblical and literature review identified essential qualities in general that are necessary for pastoral leadership. There were six biblical qualities identified that make pastoral leadership excellent. There were four biblical qualities identified that make visionary leadership excellent. There were four biblical qualities identified that make culturally relevant leadership excellent. There were four biblical qualities identified that make multi-generational leadership excellent.

Essential Qualities for Pastoral Leadership in General

The biblical and literature reviews conducted for this project sought to identify biblical qualities that are necessary for pastoral leadership to thrive in a rural congregation. The reviews identified six biblical qualities, in general, that are essential to make pastoral leadership excellent.

First, competent pastoral leadership loves people. Competent pastoral leadership has a deep and genuine love for the congregation he or she serves. Pastoral leadership that is excellent must seek to demonstrate the kind of love God has for the congregation.

Second, competent pastoral leadership is appointed by God. The demands and expectations for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation require that those who serve demonstrate a divine call to ministry. Pastoral leadership that strives for excellence must demonstrate a divine call to ministry.

Third, competent pastoral leadership is influential. Leadership can be understood simply as influence. The ability to lead is the ability to influence people to move in a desirable direction. Competent pastoral leadership is influential.

Fourth, competent pastoral leadership is spiritual. Pastoral leadership that is excellent may take advantage of human skills and abilities. Competent pastoral leadership, however, is a spiritual task. Spiritual leadership seeks to follow Godly principles that move people in the direction of God's agenda. Pastoral leadership is a spiritual activity that demands reliance upon the Holy Spirit to thrive. Competent pastoral leadership must be spiritual leadership.

Fifth, competent pastoral leadership moves people towards God's agenda. The goal of competent pastoral leadership is to challenge the congregation in such a way that God's purposes are accomplished in their community. This characteristic seeks tasks that are specific to the time, place, and people of the congregation. This is not a template perspective where "one size fits all". Rather, this is a characteristic that seeks the specific tasks that will lead the congregation to carry out God's purposes. Dreams, ambitions, and aspirations are useless until they are put to the task in order to accomplish the kingdom purpose of the congregation.

Finally, competent pastoral leadership maintains methods of ministry that are relevant to the context. The ever-changing circumstances of the community demand necessary adjustments in the methods of ministry to maintain current relevance. Competent pastoral leadership must maintain culturally relevant methods of ministry.

Qualities of Visionary Leadership

The biblical and literature reviews sought to identify biblical qualities of visionary leadership. The research identified four biblical qualities of visionary leadership. *First*, visionary leadership is courageous leadership. Visionary leadership must be courageous enough to pursue the will of God through seasons of change. Excellent leadership maintains a tension between the old and new methods and paradigms. Visionary leadership respects the issues that are perceived as old and traditional while continuing a pursuit for that which is current and relevant. Visionary leadership must be courageous leadership.

Second, visionary leadership discovers the vision. The absence of a clearly articulated vision is a leadership failure that is fatal to a congregation. Every congregation exists in a community it is called to serve. Visionary leadership discovers the vision that is unique to the congregation.

Third, visionary leadership articulates the vision. The Scriptures say, ‘Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it’ (Habakkuk 2:2 [NKJV]). Visionary leadership articulates the vision specific to its congregation.

Finally, visionary leadership pursues the vision. A divinely inspired, clearly articulated vision is useless unless it results in action. Visionary leadership must lead the congregation in pursuit of fulfilling its kingdom purpose.

Qualities of Culturally Relevant Leadership

The biblical and literature reviews sought to identify biblical qualities of culturally relevant leadership. The research identified four biblical qualities of culturally

relevant leadership. *First*, culturally relevant leadership is biblical. Leadership that is culturally relevant, but devoid of biblical authenticity is impotent. Culturally relevant leadership must be biblical. *Second*, culturally relevant leadership understands the context of culture. The issues of culture exert enormous pressures to shape attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors. Culturally relevant leadership must understand the cultural dynamics of its community. *Third*, culturally relevant leadership speaks the language of culture. In order for the unsaved and unchurched to hear the gospel, the gospel must be preached in a language the people can understand. Culturally relevant leadership must be conversant in the language of its culture. *Finally*, culturally relevant leadership responds to the needs of culture. Rural congregations that thrive are focusing their attention and resources on making an impact in the communities they serve. Culturally relevant leadership measures its effectiveness, not by what happens inside the church, but by the impact it is making in its community. Culturally relevant leadership must be responsive to the needs of its culture.

Qualities of Multi-Generational Leadership

The biblical and literature reviews sought to identify biblical qualities of multi-generational leadership. The research identified four biblical qualities of multi-generational leadership. *First*, multi-generational leadership reaches all generations. Competent pastoral leadership seeks methods and practices that bridge generational gaps. Generational issues that divide congregations are destructive. Excellent pastoral leaders must achieve ministry that reaches all generations in order to effectively fulfill its kingdom purpose. *Second*, multi-generational leadership understands multi-generational

ministry. The needs of contemporary culture demand ministry pursuits that understand generational distinctions. Competent pastoral leadership seeks effective ministry by understanding the unique demands of each generation. Pastoral leadership in a rural congregation must understand generational distinctions. *Third*, multi-generational leadership pursues generationally specific ministry. Pastoral leadership that is excellent must be responsive to the ever-changing society. There are massive and expansive societal changes that impact generations differently. Competent pastoral leadership must be responsive to these demands. *Finally*, multi-generational leadership unites the generations. In order to achieve its kingdom purpose, a rural congregation must unite people multi-generationally. In a rural congregation, the road to future success must run through the past. Wholesale abandonment of former things is not the way to unite generations. Competent pastoral leadership must unite the generations by holding fast to the biblical standards of the historic faith while maintaining cultural relevance.

Essential Tasks of Pastoral Leadership

The surveys conducted for this project sought insight into the essential tasks of pastoral leadership that are unique to rural lifestyle congregations. As the research progressed, a plethora of relevant information was discovered. This led to the realization that this question was best addressed as two questions rather than one. It seemed logical that the issues relating to a rural context be addressed first, before the specific traits of pastoral leadership. The review of current literature provided data concerning pastoral leadership in a rural context. Secondly, the survey conducted for this project provided insight into the essential tasks of pastoral leadership. Rural pastoral leaders identified five tasks that are essential in order for pastoral leadership to be excellent.

Pastoral Leadership in a Rural Context

Current literature revealed that the rural lifestyle is an appealing option for many people. In spite of the fact that the majority of Americans live in non-rural communities, rural communities continue to offer an attractive lifestyle. The serenity of the country and the intimacy of a small community create an environment that many people desire for their families. The slower pace, the friendliness of neighbors, and the security of a small community offer an ideal setting that many families desire. This attraction of a rural lifestyle has created an ideal opportunity for rural congregations to thrive. The research identified attributes that make a rural community distinct from non-rural communities. These distinctions need to be understood by pastoral leaders serving in a rural context. Rural congregations require pastoral leadership that understands the rural lifestyle in order for rural congregation to thrive.

Essential Tasks for Pastoral Leadership in a Rural Congregation

This project sought to provide insights into the essential tasks necessary for pastoral leadership in a rural context. The project began with an assumption that visionary leadership, culturally relevant outreach, and multi-generational discipleship were three essential tasks necessary for pastoral leadership to be excellent in a rural context. The research for this project identified two additional tasks that are similarly necessary. Those tasks are visionary leadership and dynamic preaching. Therefore, as a result of the research for this project, there are five essential tasks necessary for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. Those tasks are: dynamic preaching, biblical

knowledge, visionary leadership, culturally relevant outreach, and multi-generational discipleship.

The task of dynamic preaching was not initially included in this project. However, rural pastoral leaders identified dynamic preaching as an essential task for pastoral leadership. A majority of rural pastoral leaders surveyed also identified preaching as their strongest personal gift. These results are not surprising. The call to pastoral ministry is often described as a call to preach. The tasks associated with teaching and preaching consumes a major portion of a pastor's time. It is only logical that dynamic preaching should be included in the list of essential tasks for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. The instructions of the Apostle Paul resonate in the heart of pastoral leadership. "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2 [NKJV]).

The survey included the word *worship* in the description of dynamic preaching. The survey understood dynamic *worship* to be implicit within dynamic preaching. In his book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster notes, "If God does not raise up inspired leaders who can guide people into worship with authority and compassion, the experience of worship will be nearly impossible" (Foster 1998, 166). Thus, the task of dynamic preaching is understood to involve more than just creatively crafted and dynamically delivered sermons. The task of dynamic preaching results in dynamic worship. The task of dynamic preaching is an essential task for pastoral leadership in rural congregations.

The task of biblical knowledge was not initially included in this project. Since this task was not initially included, this project does not provide a clear definition for the task. However, the response from the pastor's surveyed indicates the high view of Scripture

among CGGC pastors. This high view of Scripture directs every action of the pastoral leader. The Scripture says, “But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him” (1 John 2:5 [NKJV]). In the commencement ceremony that launched Joshua in leadership of Israel, the Lord gave Joshua a key principle that would guarantee success. “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8 [NKJV]). In light of this discussion, the task of biblical knowledge is understood to refer to a high view of Scripture.

The task of biblical knowledge might be better understood as biblical mentoring. The old adage, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” has already been recognized as especially relevant in a rural context. Paul instructed Pastor Timothy, “Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12 [NKJV]). The task of biblical knowledge is not concerned primarily with gaining biblical knowledge as much as it is about empowering the congregation to live biblically. Thus, biblical knowledge is an essential task for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation.

This project sought to discover how pastoral leadership guides a congregation in the revisioning process. The survey confirmed that rural pastors consider pastoral leadership vital to the health of a rural congregation. The survey also confirmed that competent pastoral leadership is a necessary catalyst for rural lifestyle congregations to accurately articulate, understand, and pursue their kingdom purpose. The *Case Study – Rebuilding and Relocation* identified an excellent example of pastoral leadership in a

rural context that provided visionary leadership. The case study examined the experiences of two rural congregations that moved their physical locations and built new worship facilities that were more functional and provided better access to their community.

Data collected from an interview with a church consultant also confirmed the need for competent pastoral leadership. This interview included a discussion about the process of rebuilding and the consequences of that process on a rural congregation. The research also involved a discussion about the need for visionary leadership to guide a rural congregation through the seasons of change that occurs throughout the life cycle of a congregation.

This project sought insight into developing a ministry model that is relevant to the specific context of the rural lifestyle congregation. Two case studies confirmed that rural lifestyle congregations must pursue a culturally relevant ministry in order to effectively minister in their community. Two case studies provided examples of rural congregations achieving culturally relevant outreach in their communities. The first case study was *Case Study – Youth Ministry*. This case study identified one outreach program that is making an impact in the lives of teens in the community. The second case study was *Case Study – Starting A Second Service*. This case study identified a powerful example of how one pastor successfully led his congregation through a difficult transition as it initiated a second worship service to reach out to their community.

Finally, this project sought insight into achieving a ministry model that is multi-generational. Two case studies provided examples of multi-generational ministry in a rural congregation. The first example was: *A Case Study – After School Kids Program*. This case study identified the value of seeking creative and innovative means to provide

discipleship programs that meet the needs of the community. The second case study was *A Case Study – An Effective Greeter’s Ministry is Essential*. This case study identified the need for an effective greeter’s ministry in a rural congregation.

Essential Characteristics of Pastoral Leadership

The case studies and interviews in this project identified two essential characteristics of pastoral leadership that are unique for a rural congregation. The characteristics are to be understood differently than the five tasks identified above. The two characteristics are understood to represent the inner character or personality of the pastoral leaders. These two characteristics are passionate spiritual care, and a commitment to long-tenured pastoral ministry.

Passionate Spiritual Care

The interviews conducted for this project identified passionate spiritual care as an essential characteristic of competent pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. Spiritual care is a part of pastoral leadership in any context. In a rural congregation, though, the passion to provide spiritual through appropriately intimate relationships is essential. Rural congregations require pastoral leadership that is able to manage a wide range of pastoral duties. The ability to provide loving, nurturing, and compassionate spiritual care, however, is an essential characteristic in a rural context. One of the primary means for a pastoral leader to provide spiritual care is pastoral visitation. There are other means such as involvement in the local school’s activities and programs, participation in community events, as well as participating in the family events of congregants. Providing passionate spiritual care is an essential characteristic of pastoral leadership in a rural congregation.

Long-Tenured Pastorate

The interviews conducted for this project identified a commitment to long-tenured pastoral ministry as an essential characteristic of competent pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. Competent pastoral leadership in a rural congregation must demonstrate a long-term commitment to the congregation. The overwhelming majority of pastors participating in this research believe that long-tenured pastoral ministry in one congregation is vital to the health of a congregation. A long-tenured pastoral ministry offers the stability and sustained ministry that is essential for a rural congregation to thrive. A long-tenured pastorate is an essential characteristic of competent pastoral leadership in a rural congregation.

Project Conclusions

The central issue of this project was pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. Every avenue of research for this project has shown that competent pastoral leadership is absolutely vital to the health of a rural congregation. This project has shown that a rural congregation cannot be healthy without competent pastoral leadership.

This project addressed issues that relate to competent pastoral leadership. Issues that relate to incompetent pastoral leadership have not been thoroughly discussed. While a thorough discussion of the causes and conditions relating to incompetent pastoral leadership would be a valuable discussion, such a discussion goes beyond the scope of this project. It should be noted, however, that for the purposes of this project, incompetent pastoral leadership should not be understood as a personal assault against any pastoral leader. Incompetent pastoral leadership may result from a number or

circumstances including a lack of education, lack of experience, lack of proper support, or a host of others. It is the hope of this author that the present discussion has informed those pastoral leaders who seek to excel so that their rural congregations may thrive in fulfilling their kingdom purpose.

This project has identified a number of rural congregations that are thriving. Many of these congregations exist in rural communities that are experiencing hard times. Yet, in spite of the conditions in their communities, these congregations are striving to excel in accomplishing their kingdom purpose. This author has encountered the same optimism throughout the research process. The overwhelming majority of pastors are confident their rural congregations can and should be healthy in spite of the economic and societal declines. Although the current economic and societal conditions in America are uncertain, the one constant in many rural communities is the local congregation. Families move in and others move out. Businesses close and new enterprises begin. Crumbling buildings are razed and a new parking lot takes its place. Yet, in the midst of all this transition, in many communities, one enterprise remains strong and enduring – that is the local congregation that is faithfully pursuing its biblical mandate to be salt and light in their community.

These rural congregations may exist in a community that feels abandoned. They may feel abandoned by the businesses they once hosted. They may feel abandoned by the local school district. They may feel abandoned by the families that are participating in the mass exodus but, this sense of abandonment creates a wonderful opportunity for rural congregations to thrive. These congregations can thrive because God cares about rural communities! God certainly cares about the people in rural communities, but God also

cares about the community. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus specifically addressed seven churches and identified them by their community name. Throughout the Scriptures, God addressed people as they were gathered in communities. God sent Abraham to Canaan. He sent Esther to Persia. He sent Jonah to Nineveh. He sent Philip to Samaria. He sent Paul to Macedonia. He sent Peter to the Diaspora. In the same way that God cared about the Canaanites, the Persians, the Ninevites, the Samaritans, the Macedonians, and the Dispersed, he also cares about the rural communities that exist today.

In many rural communities that are declining, the one remaining source of community vitality is the local congregation. If the congregation in a community fails, many communities will die with it. “Closing churches can contribute to the decline of communities . . . if you lose . . . the school, post office, and the church it’s hard to maintain a community” (Scram 2003). This project has identified the value of a rural congregation. Rather than being an insignificant and inconsequential part of the larger Church, rural congregations provide a vital and essential role. This project has attempted to elevate the awareness of the significant contributions of rural congregations and the pastors who serve them. In many instances, these rural congregations and the pastors who serve them are the difference between community decline and community vitality.

This project has identified a biblical and theological foundation for pastoral leadership. It has confirmed the rural community as a viable and necessary place for kingdom ministry. It has included excellent examples of pastoral leaders who are faithfully loving and serving their rural congregations with excellence. It has allowed pastoral leaders serving rural congregations the opportunity to identify their perspective of the essential elements necessary for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. This

project has identified essential *characteristics of pastoral leadership that equip a rural congregation to fulfill its kingdom purpose.*

Recommendations

The research for this project has provided this author a wonderful opportunity to spend quality time with a number of rural pastors. It has truly been a blessing to sense the passion and commitment shared among these fellow-servants. The CGGC is blessed with dedicated, competent, and passionate servants of God. It is the heartfelt conviction of this author that the CGGC is strategically posited to accomplish great things in the kingdom of God. It is with the deepest respect for the fellow-servants of Christ that the following recommendations are offered.

There are five recommendations to be made for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation as a result of this project. Pastoral leaders serving rural congregations will benefit from the tasks of *passionate spiritual care* and a *commitment to long-tenured pastoral ministry*. While these tasks are an issue of pastoral leadership in any context, it is the recommendation of this project that they are essential in a rural context. There are three additional recommendations as a result of the research for this project. They are: a *facility-renovation program*; an *innovative children's and youth ministry*; and an *intentional rediscovery of kingdom purpose*.

Passionate Spiritual Care

The first recommendation of this project concerns *passionate spiritual care*. This project confirmed that rural congregations require passionate spiritual care. There are different ways to provide spiritual care, but one effective means is pastoral visitation.

Pastoral leaders in a rural congregation may feel overwhelmed by the enormity of their duties. This is especially true of the solo pastorate in a moderate-sized congregation. The enormity of responsibilities may leave the pastor feeling beleaguered. Add to that the time consuming task of the home visit, the visit of a shut-in senior, or the visit to the nursing home of a chronically ill congregant, and the burden may feel unbearable. In spite of the often overcommitted schedule, however, making time for pastoral visits is a necessity.

There are other ways to provide spiritual care in a rural congregation. There are a number of communication options available that were not available just a few years ago. Current literature suggests that rural communities lag beyond non-rural communities in receiving the latest technologies. However, cell phone reception can be received in most places. Internet access, e-mail traffic, blogs, chats, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and an ever-increasing number of other venues are available in most communities. These and other technologies make instant communication readily available. Busy pastors should take advantage of these technologies. A short phone call, a quick e-mail, or blog may be just the thing a hurting member needs at that moment. Sam Shoemaker, one of the founding spiritual leaders of Alcoholics Anonymous, wrote a poem in which he described his passion to provide spiritual care to those who so desperately need help. The poem is entitled, "I Stand by the Door". Shoemaker writes, "The most tremendous thing in the world is for people to find that door – the door to God. The most important thing any person can do is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands, and put it on the latch – the latch that only clicks and opens to the person's own touch . . . nothing else matters

compared to helping them find it, and open it, and walk in, and find Him . . . so I stand by the door” (Shoemaker 1979).

In spite of busy and demanding schedules, it is essential for pastoral leaders to maintain a passion to pursue the spiritual care of their rural congregations. Failure to do so may have eternal consequences for people in their community. Thus, it is the recommendation of this project that pastoral leadership in a rural congregation pursue passionate spiritual care as an essential characteristic.

A Commitment to Long-Tenured Pastoral Ministry

The second recommendation of this project concerns *long-tenured pastoral ministry*. The surveys conducted for this project have confirmed that a long-tenured pastoral ministry is viewed as a necessary quality in a rural congregation. A long-tenured pastorate leads to a healthy congregation.

In spite of this desirable quality, it is recognized that American society is mobile. People move. Families relocate. Marriages end. Remarriages occur. New jobs are found. New homes are purchased. These issues are simply a reality of the world in the 21st century. In spite of the transitory nature of the American lifestyle, however, the surveys conducted for this project have shown that long-tenured pastoral leadership continues to be a part of the rural ethos. The Apostle Paul identified the value of perseverance when he told the Corinthians, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it” (1 Corinthians 9:24 [NKJV]). To “run in such a way that you may obtain” the prize in a rural congregation involves a commitment to a long-tenured ministry. During the initial years of a pastoral tenure the congregation is learning the style of ministry of the new pastor. The unique

personality distinctions, preaching style, pastoral care, and leadership style of the new pastor are being established. The congregation is making comparisons between the new and the previous pastors. They are learning the new pastor's gift and passions, and vision of ministry. They are comparing their expectations with the gifts and abilities of the new pastor. All of these issues can create a natural tension until the congregation is able to trust and accept the new pastor's leadership.

The new pastor is also working out the dynamics of his or her unique ministry in a new congregation. The pastor has expectations of a new congregation just as a congregation has expectations of a new pastor. Current literature suggests that the first seven years of a pastoral tenure tend to be the period for working through those issues in order to arrive at a place of shared expectations that can lead to productive ministry in the congregation and the community.

This project has demonstrated that long-tenured pastoral ministry in one congregation contributes to the health of a congregation. A long-tenured pastorate offers a degree of stability that is essential to a thriving rural congregation. A long-tenured pastorate allows the time necessary for a pastor to be accepted as a member of the community. Acceptance as a community member allows the rural pastor to more effectively minister in a rural context.

This project identified a case study involving relocation and rebuilding in a rural context. That case study demonstrates a model of trust that is necessary between a rural congregation and pastoral leadership. A rebuilding program of that magnitude could not be achieved without significant trust between the congregation and the pastor. A long-tenured pastorate allows the opportunity for that level of trust to develop.

A long-tenured pastorate allows a pastor the opportunity to share long-term experiences with a family. Long tenure allows a pastoral leader the opportunity to share in events such as weddings, funerals, child dedications, graduations, and other family experiences over multiple generations.

This project identified a pastor in a rural congregation that is having an impact in his community because he has become a trusted member of the community. That case study identified the trust and respect that can be developed as a result of a long-tenured pastoral ministry. Thus, it is the recommendation of this project that pastoral leaders in a rural context pursue long-tenured pastoral ministry in their rural congregations.

A Facility-Renovation Program

The third recommendation of this project concerns *a facility-renovation program*. The research for this project identified an excellent example of a rural congregation achieving a rebuilding and relocation program. This rebuilding and relocation program allowed the rural congregation to leave its isolated and antiquated facility to build a new facility in a better location. This is an extreme experience and not one that many rural congregations can achieve. However, the research also identified a connection between congregational growth and a facilities improvement project in six GLC congregations.

Building programs are costly. Entering into such a program casually or without godly counsel could result in spiritual and financial disaster for a rural congregation. Before engaging such a program, pastoral leadership should ensure that the wisdom of God has been received. James wrote, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5

[NKJV]). Solomon advised, “Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established” (Proverbs 15:22 [NKJV]).

It is the opinion of this author that unwisely pursuing a renovation program is potentially as disastrous as failing to pursue a renovation program when the wisdom of God clearly mandates it. This project has demonstrated that a facilities improvement project could contribute to the health of a rural congregation. Many rural congregations, however, may consider the possibility of a renovation program to be beyond the scope of their ability. Yet, the experience of several GLC congregations indicated that renovation is possible even for a small rural congregation. Marianne Williamson wrote a poem entitled, “Our Deepest Fear”.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. (Williamson 1992)

Fearlessness to pursue God’s will is a virtue that will empower pastoral leaders in a rural congregation to thrive. The rural congregation exists “to make manifest the glory of God” in their community. “There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking” or “playing small”. When the rural congregation lets its “own light shine” the community it serves is empowered to experience the manifested presence of the kingdom of God.

A case study in this project identified a pastor in a rural congregation that began a second worship service in order to provide a culturally relevant outreach. This new program was initially met with opposition from the congregation. Some members in the

congregation feared that a worship service with a contemporary flair would cause harm to the congregation. This pastor was convinced, though, that the determined course was ordained by the Lord. By lovingly and patiently persevering, this pastor led the congregation to experience a program that contributed to the growth and health of the congregation.

It is, therefore, the recommendation of this project that pastoral leaders in a rural congregation seek the wisdom of God concerning a facility-renovation program. It is recommended that pastoral leaders in a rural congregation give earnest consideration to the possibility of a facility-renovation program as a tool to assist in fulfilling the rural congregation's kingdom purpose.

An Innovative Children's and Youth Ministry

The fourth recommendation of this project concerns the development of an *innovative children's and youth ministry*. Jesus demonstrated His perspective concerning ministry to children. "Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, 'Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me'" (Mark 9:36-37 [NKJV]).

This project identified two rural congregations that are pursuing creative and innovative methods to reach the youth in their community. There are many other rural congregations that are accomplishing similar ministries in their communities. A rural congregation with a genuine passion for the young in their community will find creative and innovative methods to reach them. The method of ministry seems far less significant than the genuine passion. The wisdom of King Solomon suggests, "A man's heart plans

his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9 [NKJV]). If a rural congregation has a desire to reach the youth of their community and if that congregation is willing to be unconventional and unprecedented as the Lord directs, it seems clear that the Lord will direct the steps necessary to achieve ministry that is relevant and transformative.

Many rural congregations are failing in this area of ministry! It is a mistake to fault the young people for their lack of attendance. It is a mistake to fault the young people for their lack of enthusiasm. Rather than fault the youth, rural congregations need to invest themselves and their resources into developing dynamic, creative, innovative, and relevant ministries that will appeal to young people. There is no area of programming in the congregation more in need of contemporary and relevant methods than the area of youth ministries. Outdated and irrelevant methods and materials will not attract young people. Conversely, two case studies in this project have demonstrated that programs that are dynamic and inviting will draw young people.

Young people will respond to the love of Jesus if they are given a chance. One day, when Jesus was out among the people, “little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them” (Matthew 19:13 [NKJV]). The text does not indicate why the disciples rebuked the children, but it appears that the disciples thought the little children were a nuisance. They must have thought the children were preventing Jesus from accomplishing his purpose. Thus, the disciples rebuked the children in order to allow Jesus to continue his perceived purpose. When Jesus recognized what His disciples were doing, he told them, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14 [NKJV]). The word *forbid* is the Greek word *koluo* meaning “to prevent by word

or act” (Strong 2004). In the example above, the disciples were intentionally preventing the children from approaching Jesus. In many failing rural congregations, the children are not intentionally being prevented from approaching Jesus. Rather, the outdated and irrelevant methods are unintentionally preventing the children from approaching Jesus. The case studies in this project have demonstrated that young people will be attracted to the church if there are dynamic and innovative methods used to reach them.

The importance of effective youth ministries in the rural congregation can hardly be overstated. There is no area of programming more in need of creativity and innovation in the local congregation than children’s programs. There is, however, often resistance to creativity and innovation in rural congregations. Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple said, “Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower” (Jobs 2010). It is therefore essential for rural pastors to provide the leadership necessary for dynamic and effective children’s ministry to occur in the rural congregation. It is the recommendation of this project that pastoral leadership in a rural congregation seek creative and innovative methods to accomplish children’s and youth ministries in their community.

Intentional Rediscovery of Kingdom Purpose

The fifth and final recommendation of this project concerns the *intentional rediscovery of kingdom purpose* for a rural congregation. The goal of this rediscovery is not to fabricate an impressive-sounding motto. The goal is rather to rediscover the kingdom purpose of the congregation that may have gotten lost, trivialized, overlooked, or even intentionally abandoned. Bill Hybels suggests, “Visionary people face the same problems everyone else faces; but rather than get paralyzed by their problems, visionaries immediately commit themselves to finding a solution” (Hybels 2010).

The problem this project sought to address was *the fear of failure could entrap the congregation in a pursuit of self-preservation*. Pursuit of the congregation's kingdom purpose is necessary to prevent the rural congregation from getting caught in this trap. In many rural congregations, however, the decline of the community, the reduction of attendance, and the loss of revenue for the congregation has caused the congregation to lose sight of its kingdom purpose. Intentional rediscovery of the kingdom purpose is necessary if the rural congregation is going to thrive.

Rediscovery of the kingdom purpose allows the current generation to understand its kingdom purpose in the current time and place. The Church in Ephesus in the Book of Revelation demonstrates a congregation that had lost sight of its kingdom purpose. Jesus rebuked this church saying, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent" (Revelation 2:4-5 [NKJV]). The word *remember* is the Greek word *mnemoneuo*. It is the word from which the English word mnemonic derives. It means *to exercise memory, to recollect, to rehearse* (Strong 2004). This church in ancient Ephesus needed to rediscover its kingdom purpose.

The Apostle Paul demonstrates an example of a leader who needed to rediscover the vision for his ministry. The need for rediscovery arose after Paul and Barnabas had a divisive contention. The contention became so strong that it caused Paul and Barnabas to part ways. The Book of Acts records the story. "Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing. Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called

Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not . . . Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 15:36-39 [NKJV]).

After this disagreement, Paul recruited Silas and set off to accomplish his previously planned missionary journey. However, on the journey, Paul experienced opposition from an unlikely source. The Scripture records that Paul and Silas “were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia” (Acts 16:6 [NKJV]). Paul planned to visit the churches he and Barnabas had established in Asia, but the Holy Spirit would not allow it. Apparently, the conflict between Paul and Barnabas was a serious enough issue that the Holy Spirit forbade Paul’s previous plan. The contention mandated a rediscovery of God’s kingdom purpose for Paul. The plan to revisit the established congregations was no longer the direction the Lord desired. Paul had to rediscover God’s plan.

Paul continued to be forbidden by the Holy Spirit until he finally received a vision from the Lord. “So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:6-9 [NKJV]). Paul needed to rediscover God’s plan for his ministry. It was not until he received the vision of the Macedonian man that he was able to rediscover his kingdom purpose for that time and place.

Paul’s experience demonstrates the importance of rediscovering the vision God has for every rural congregation. The vision God has for the congregation is not the invention of the human imagination. The vision God has for the congregation is the ordained kingdom purpose specifically assigned, in the congregation’s community, at this

specific time. It is necessary for pastoral leadership to intentionally discover and understand the specific vision God has for the congregation at that time and place.

Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th president of the United States, was a leader noted for lofty ambitions and daring enterprises. He offered wise counsel that is particularly beneficial for those pastoral leaders who seek to accomplish great things for the kingdom of God in their rural congregations. Roosevelt wrote:

It is not the critic who counts, not the one who points out how the strong man stumbled or how the doer of deeds might have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred with sweat and dust and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, if he wins, knows the triumph of high achievement; and who, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat. (Roosevelt, 1910)

The rural pastor who is intimidated by the criticism of others will surely fail.

There are many rural congregations that are pursuing creative and innovative methods to bridge the cultural gap between the community and the church. With every bold idea, there yet arises an accompanying criticism from some timid souls within the church. An effective leader will overcome this timidity. In many cases, the timid critic may become the most ardent supporter if only the leader would persevere in spite of the criticism. The Apostle Paul wrote, “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7 [TNIV]).

Author and educator J. Oswald Sanders wrote, “A great deal more failure is the result of an excess of caution than of bold experimentation with new ideas. The frontiers of the Kingdom of God were never advanced by men and women of caution” (Sanders 2008).

A properly understood and effectively communicated vision can be the necessary catalyst to ignite a holy passion in the rural congregation. Early 20th century French philosopher Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, “If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea” (Antoine 2009). It is this kind of longing to experience God's will in the church that pastoral leadership should strive to achieve in the rural congregation. Therefore, it is the recommendation of this project that pastoral leadership in a rural congregation intentionally pursue the rediscovery of its kingdom purpose.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are three recommendations for further research. The first recommendation is to conduct further research concerning the most important tasks for pastoral leadership. The research for this project identified five important tasks for pastoral leadership in a rural context. Further research could be conducted, however, that would provide a broader scope of important pastoral tasks. The two tasks that were added as a result of this project need further clarification. The task of biblical knowledge needs further definition for clarification. Further research is needed to more clearly understand the scope of this important task. The task of dynamic preaching also needs further clarification to more clearly understand the dynamics of this important task.

The second recommendation is to broaden the sampling base. In the current project, pastors and congregations in the GLC are well represented, but other regions in the CGGC are not. With the support of the regional directors, a more thorough research could be conducted that would provide a more representative sampling of the entire

CGGC. This research could be very helpful to regional and denominational leaders, as well as pastors serving rural congregations.

The third recommendation is to conduct more extensive interviews with pastoral leaders with experience in rural contexts. There is a wealth of wisdom and insight among those pastors who have faithfully served rural congregations. Many of these pastors are retired or semi-retired and would welcome the opportunity to share their experiences with others. The interviews for this project uncovered numerous stories and anecdotes that are insightful. These are stories that represent what God has accomplished in the ministries and congregations of the CGGC over the last half-century. Many of these stories may seem minor or inconsequential to those who lived them, but they are in fact examples of the miraculous presence of the Lord at work among the pastors and congregations of the CGGC. The interviews of experienced and seasoned pastors could provide a valuable resource for pastoral leaders in a rural context, as well as provide a remarkable history of rural congregations in the CGGC.

Conclusion

As a result of the research for this project, there are five recommendations for pastoral leadership in a rural congregation. These recommendations are not listed in any order of priority. They are presented in the order they were addressed in this project. The first recommendation is for pastoral leadership to pursue passionate spiritual care in the rural congregation. The second recommendation is for pastoral leadership to embrace a commitment to long-tenured pastoral ministry. The third recommendation is for pastoral leadership to seek the will of the Lord concerning a facility-renovation program for the rural congregation. The fourth recommendation is for pastoral leadership to seek

innovative methods to achieve children's and youth ministries in a rural congregation.

Finally, the fifth recommendation is for pastoral leadership to lead the process of an intentional rediscovery of the kingdom purpose of a rural congregation.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE SUBMITTED TO PASTORS OF THE GREAT LAKES
CONFERENCE (GLC) IN THE CHURCHES OF GOD, GENERAL CONFERENCE
(CGGC)

Pastoral Leadership in Rural Lifestyle Congregations

1. Pastor Demographic Information

Age:

Education:

Years at present congregation:

Years in pastoral ministry:

2. Congregation Demographic Information

a. When was your congregation established?

b. Average weekly attendance: (approximate to the best of your ability)

c. In the past 20 years:

Have there been any significant attendance swings (increases or decreases)?

Yes

No

Have there been any societal issues that may have caused congregational growth or loss - such as:

Community population shifts

loss

gains

No

Community employment opportunities

loss

gains

No

Community housing opportunities

loss

gains

No

Community retail opportunities

loss

gains

No

- d. The US Census Bureau identifies three clusters of population. Which description best fits your congregation (choose one)

Urbanized areas (UA) with a population 50,000 or more

Urban clusters (UC) with a population of 2,500 – 50,000

Rural – population of 2,500 or less

3. Your pastoral profile:

- a. Of the areas of ministry listed below, please choose the three (3) that are your strongest personal giftings. Please rate (1) – being the strongest; (3) – being the least strong)

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
Preaching			
Teaching			
Evangelizing			
Outreaching			
Nurturing			
Guiding			
Organizing			
Leading			
Visioning			

- b. In your past ministry experience, have you served a congregation that fits a different population profile than your current congregation? If yes, which one?

No Urban Areas Urban clusters Rural

- c. Is this your first pastorate?

Yes No

- d. Will this be your last pastorate?

Yes No Don't know

- e. If a “better offer” or another congregation was presented to you tomorrow, would you accept it?

Yes No Don't Know

4. General questions

- a. In your opinion, is long-term pastoral ministry in one congregation vital to the health of a congregation?

Yes No No Opinion

- b. Current literature suggests that the first 7 years of pastoral ministry in a congregation is more about pastoral and congregational identity. Years 7 through 21 are considered to be the “prime” years for effective ministry.

Do you agree with that conclusion?

Yes No No Opinion

- c. In this question, I am attempting to determine how important pastoral leadership is to the vitality of a congregation. In your opinion, is competent pastoral leadership: (circle one)

Extremely important

Somewhat Important

Not very important

Not important at all

- d. In your opinion, is worship attendance an effective measure of congregational health?

Yes No No Opinion

If no, what is an effective measure?

- e. In your opinion, can a congregation be healthy without competent pastoral leadership? (Please exclude situations that would require an interim).

Yes No No Opinion

- f. In your opinion, is it possible for a rural congregation to be healthy/vital in a community that is declining or already declined?

APPENDIX B
ON-LINE SURVEY OF CGGC PASTORS

Pastoral Leadership in a Rural Congregation

1. Of the areas of ministry listed below, please choose the three (3) that are your strongest personal giftings.

Please rate (1) – being the strongest; (3) being the least strong

Preaching
Teaching
Evangelizing
Outreaching
Nurturing
Guiding
Organizing
Leading
Visioning

2. What is your average weekly attendance

0-20
21-40
41-60
61-80
81-100
101-120
121-150
151-180
181-200
200

3. In your opinion, can a congregation be healthy without competent pastoral leadership?

Yes
No
No Opinion

4. In your opinion, is it possible for a rural congregation to be healthy/vital in a community that is declining or already declined?

Yes
No
No Opinion

5. Current literature suggests that the first 7 years of pastoral ministry in a congregation is more about pastoral and congregational identity. Years 7 through 21 are considered to be the “prime” years for effective ministry.

Do you agree with that conclusion?

Yes

No

No Opinion

6. In this question, I am attempting to determine how important pastoral leadership is to the vitality of a congregation. In your opinion, is competent pastoral leadership:

The most important

Extremely important

Somewhat important

Not very important

Not important at all

7. How satisfied/content are you in your present ministry assignment/ (Answer only one).

This is my best assignment

This is my worst assignment

I am looking for another assignment

I will leave when I receive a better offer

I will be here until I die

I would leave if directed by the Lord, but I'd rather stay

I'd rather leave, but I will stay as the Lord directs

8. In your opinion, is long-tenured pastoral ministry in one congregation vital to the health of a congregation?

Yes

No

No Opinion

9. The US Census Bureau identifies three clusters of population. According to this classification, small towns with populations of less than 2,500 are considered rural. Which description best describes your context:

Urbanized Areas (UA) with a population of 50,000 or more

Urban Clusters (UC) with a population of 2,500 – 50,000

Rural with a population of 2,500 or less

10. In your opinion, from the following list, identify the three (3) most important activities for pastoral leadership

- Visionary leadership
- Dynamic preaching/worship
- Multi-generational discipleship
- Biblical knowledge
- Pastoral counseling
- Community leadership
- Denomination or institutional leadership
- Ceremonial efficiency (weddings, funerals, etc)
- Culturally relevant outreach
- Exceptional organizational skills

APPENDIX C

COMBINED SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE AND ONLINE
SURVEY

* Which description best fits your congregation?

<u>RURAL</u>	<u>NON-RURAL</u>
(49) 53%	(43) 47%

* Is long-tenured pastoral ministry vital to congregational health?

	<u>RURAL</u>	<u>NON-RURAL</u>
Yes	(38) 78%	(27) 63%
No	(8) 16%	(11) 26%
No Opinion	(3) 6%	(5) 17%

* Do the prime years for pastoral ministry begin with the 7th year of tenure?

	<u>RURAL</u>	<u>NON-RURAL</u>
Yes	(35) 72%	(19) 44%
No	(7) 14%	(15) 35%
No Opinion	(7) 14%	(9) 21%

* How important is competent pastoral leadership to the vitality of a congregation?

	<u>RURAL</u>	<u>NON-RURAL</u>
Most	8%	19%
Extremely	84%	56%
Somewhat	8%	25%

* Can a congregation be healthy without competent pastoral leadership?

	<u>RURAL</u>	<u>NON-RURAL</u>
Yes	(7) 14%	(11) 26%
No	(40) 81%	(31) 72%
No Opinion	(2) 4%	(1) 2%

* Can a rural congregation be healthy in a declining community?

	<u>RURAL</u>	<u>NON-RURAL</u>
Yes	(48) 98%	(40) 93%
No	(1) 2%	(2) 5%
No Opinion	0%	(1) 2%

* What are the three most important tasks for pastoral leadership?

	<u>RURAL</u>		<u>NON-RURAL</u>	
Visionary Leadership	(36)	57%	(27)	63%
Dynamic Preaching	(43)	67%	(24)	56%
Multi-generational Discipleship	(28)	47%	(25)	58%
Biblical Knowledge	(33)	55%	(21)	49%
Pastoral Counseling	(9)	14%	(4)	9%
Community Leadership	(8)	12%	(3)	7%
Denominational Involvement	(2)	2%	(1)	2%
Ceremonial Efficiency	(4)	6%	(1)	2%
Cultural Relevant Outreach	(23)	37%	(18)	43%
Exceptional Organization Skills	(1)	2%	(1)	2%

APPENDIX D
TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1 Components of Excellent Pastoral Leadership In A Rural Congregation

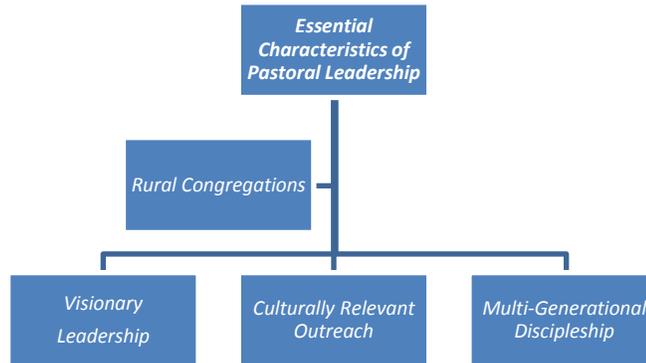


Figure 5.1 Community Populations

Population of 2,500 or less	54%
Population of 2,500 – 50,000	38%
Population 50,000 or more	8%

Figure 5.2 The Importance of Competent Pastoral Leadership

	Rural	Non-Rural
Most important	8%	19%
Extremely important	84%	56%
Somewhat important	8%	25%

Figure 5.3 Most Important Tasks for Pastoral Leadership

<u>RURAL</u>		<u>NON-RURAL</u>	
Dynamic Preaching	67%	Visionary Leadership	63%
Visionary Leadership	57%	Multi-Generational Discipleship	58%
Biblical Knowledge	55%	Dynamic Preaching	56%
Multi-Generational Discipleship	47%	Biblical Knowledge	49%
Culturally Relevant Outreach	37%	Culturally Relevant Outreach	42%
Pastoral Counseling	14%	Pastoral Counseling	9%
Community Leadership	12%	Community Leadership	7%
Ceremonial Efficiency	6%	Denominational Involvement	2%
Denominational Involvement	2%	Ceremonial Efficiency	2%
Organizational Skills	2%	Organizational Skills	0%

Figure 5.4 Is Long-Tenure Vital to Congregational Health?

	Rural	Non-Rural
Yes	78%	53%
No	16%	32%
No Opinion	6%	15%

Figure 5.5 Prime Years of Ministry Begin At Year Seven

	Rural	Non-Rural
Yes	72%	34%
No	14%	43%
No Opinion	14%	23%

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEWS

Pastor George Showers
Seville Community and New Haven Churches of God
Interviewed in Findlay, Ohio

Pastor Jim Keiser
Mt. Tabor Church of God
Interviewed in Celina, Ohio

Pastor Brad Adams
Timberlake Community Church
Interviewed in Holland, Ohio

Pastor Paul Rutledge
Risingsun Church of God
Interviewed in Risingsun, Ohio

Pastor Arnie Kaufman
Wooster Church of God
Interviewed in Wooster, Ohio

Dr. Darrell Prichard
President, Great Lakes Foundation
Interviewed in Findlay, Ohio

Pastor James W. Moss Sr
Church Consultant
Interviewed in Wharton, Ohio

Dr. Stephen DuPree
Missionary and Cultural Anthropologist
Interviewed in Wharton, Ohio

APPENDIX F
PERMISSION GRANTS

Original Message

From: Joe Carney [pastorjoe@udata.com]
To: Pastor George Showers [geoms@cmsinter.net]
Sent: Monday, May17, 2010 10:18 AM

Hi George,

I am in the final phase of writing my doctoral research project. I need to include a written statement from you, granting me permission to identify you as an interviewed source for my research. I did not attach a name to any direct quote in the text of the paper. Instead, I identified the pastors I interviewed in a list that will appear in an attachment in the “back matter” of the project. In the text, I identified my sources only as an *interview*. I have attached the section where most of the material from these interviews occurs. (This attachment is FYI only – it represents a few pages of a pre-published work).

If you would “reply” to this message with the statement below, I will keep it with my files to verify that I had your permission to identify you as an interviewee.

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project.

*Pastor George Showers
Seville Community Church of God
Interviewed in Findlay, Ohio*

Response

From: Pastor George Showers [geoms@cmsinter.net]
Sent: Thursday, May 23, 2010 3:48 PM
To: Joe Carney
Subject: Written Permission

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project.

*Pastor George Showers
Seville Community Church of God
Interviewed in Findlay, Ohio*

Original Message

From: Joe Carney [pastorjoe@udata.com]
To: Pastor Jim Keiser [bigfish316@aol.com]
Sent: Monday, May 17, 2010 10:13 am

Hi Jim,

I am in the final phase of writing my doctoral research project. I need to include a written statement from you, granting me permission to identify you as an interviewed source for my research. I did not attach a name to any direct quote in the text of the paper. Instead, I identified the pastors I interviewed in a list that will appear in an attachment in the “back matter” of the project. In the text, I identified my sources only as an *interview*. I have attached the section where most of the material from these interviews occurs. (This attachment is FYI only – it represents a few pages of a pre-published work).

If you would “reply” to this message with the statement below, I will keep it with my files to verify that I had your permission to identify you as an interviewee.

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project:

*Pastor Jim Keiser
Mt Tabor Church of God
Interviewed in Celina, Ohio*

Response

From: Pastor Jim Keiser [bigfish316@aol.com]
Sent: Monday, May 17, 2010 11:19 AM
To: Joe Carney
Subject: Written Permission

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project:

*Pastor Jim Keiser
Mt Tabor Church of God
Interviewed in Celina, Ohio*

Original Message

From: Joe Carney
To: Pastor Brad Adams [pastorbrad@timberlakechurch.org]
Sent: Monday, May 17, 2010 10:26 AM

Hi Brad,

I am in the final phase of writing my doctoral research project. I need to include a written statement from you, granting me permission to identify you as an interviewed source for my research. I did not attach a name to any direct quote in the text of the paper. Instead, I identified the pastors I interviewed in a list that will appear in an attachment in the “back matter” of the project. In the text, I identified my sources only as an *interview*. I have attached the section where most of the material from these interviews occurs. (This attachment is FYI only – it represents a few pages of a pre-published work).

If you would “reply” to this message with the statement below, I will keep it with my files to verify that I had your permission to identify you as an interviewee.

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project.

*Pastor Brad Adams
Timberlake Community Church
Interviewed in Holland, Ohio*

Response

From: Pastor Brad Adams [pastorbrad@timberlakechurch.org]
Sent: Monday, May 17, 2010 10:56 AM
To: Joe Carney
Subject: Written Permission

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project.

*Pastor Brad Adams
Timberlake Community Church
Interviewed in Holland, Ohio*

Original Message

From: Joe Carney [pastorjoe@udata.com]
To: Pastor Paul Rutledge [prutledge001@woh.rr.com]
Sent: Monday, May17, 2010 10:28 AM

Hi Paul,

I am in the final phase of writing my doctoral research project. I need to include a written statement from you, granting me permission to identify you as an interviewed source for my research. I did not attach a name to any direct quote in the text of the paper. Instead, I identified the pastors I interviewed in a list that will appear in an attachment in the “back matter” of the project. In the text, I identified my sources only as an *interview*. I have attached the section where most of the material from these interviews occurs. (This attachment is FYI only – it represents a few pages of a pre-published work).

If you would “reply” to this message with the statement below, I will keep it with my files to verify that I had your permission to identify you as an interviewee.

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project.

*Pastor Paul Rutledge
Risingsun Church of God
Interviewed in Risingsun, Ohio*

Response

From: Pastor Paul Rutledge [prutledge001@woh.rr.com]
Sent: Monday, May 17, 2010 10:45 AM
To: Joe Carney
Subject: Written Permission

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project.

*Pastor Paul Rutledge
Risingsun Church of God
Interviewed in Risingsun, Ohio*

Original Message

From: Joe Carney [pastorjoe@udata.com]
To: Pastor Arnie Kaufman [pastor@woosterfirst.cgg.corg]
Sent: Monday, May17, 2010 10:14 AM

Hi Arnie,

I am in the final phase of writing my doctoral research project. I need to include a written statement from you, granting me permission to identify you as an interviewed source for my research. I did not attach a name to any direct quote in the text of the paper. Instead, I identified the pastors I interviewed in a list that will appear in an attachment in the “back matter” of the project. In the text, I identified my sources only as an *interview*. I have attached the section where most of the material from these interviews occurs. (This attachment is FYI only – it represents a few pages of a pre-published work).

If you would “reply” to this message with the statement below, I will keep it with my files to verify that I had your permission to identify you as an interviewee.

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project.

*Pastor Arnie Kauffman
Wooster Church of God
Interviewed in Wooster, Ohio*

Response

From: Pastor Arnie Kaufman [pastor@woosterfirst.cgg.corg]
Sent: Monday, May 17, 2010 10:30 AM
To: Joe Carney
Subject: Written Permission

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project.

*Pastor Arnie Kaufman
Wooster Church of God
Interviewed in Wooster, Ohio*

Original Message

From: Joe Carney [pastorjoe@udata.com]
To: Darrell Prichard [dprichard1@att.net]
Sent: Monday, May17, 2010 10:30 AM

Hi Darrell,

I am in the final phase of writing my doctoral research project. I need to include a written statement from you, granting me permission to identify you as an interviewed source for my research. I did not attach a name to any direct quote in the text of the paper. Instead, I identified the pastors I interviewed in a list that will appear in an attachment in the “back matter” of the project. In the text, I identified my sources only as an *interview*. I have attached the section where most of the material from these interviews occurs. (This attachment is FYI only – it represents a few pages of a pre-published work).

If you would “reply” to this message with the statement below, I will keep it with my files to verify that I had your permission to identify you as an interviewee.

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project.

*Dr Darrell Prichard
President, Great Lakes Foundation
Interviewed in Findlay, Ohio*

Response

From: Darrell Prichard [dprichard1@att.net]
Sent: Saturday May 22, 2010 10:16 AM
To: Joe Carney
Subject: Written Permission

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the following information to be included in his final doctoral project.

*Dr Darrell Prichard
President, Great Lakes Foundation
Interviewed in Findlay, Ohio*

Original Message

From: Joe Carney [pastorjoe@udata.com]
To: James Moss [jimmos.org]
Sent: Monday, May17, 2010 10:44 AM

Hi Jim,

I am in the final phase of writing my doctoral research project. You hopefully recall my asking you to allow me to cite you as a source for my research. I need to include a written statement from you, granting me permission to cite you

I have included the two sections where I quoted you as a source (see attachment). If I have not misrepresented you (hopefully) I would appreciate your written permission.

If you would "reply" to this message with the statement below, I will keep it with my files to verify that I had your permission to identify you as an interviewee.

I appreciate it.

I attest that I was interviewed by Pastor Joe Carney for the purposes of his research in the Doctor of Ministry program at Winebrenner Theological Seminary. I agree to allow the information from that interview to be included in his final doctoral project.

*Pastor James W. Moss Sr
Church Consultant
Interviewed in Wharton, Ohio*

Response

From: James Moss [jimmos.org]
Sent: Monday, May 17, 2010 11:30 AM
To: Joe Carney
Subject: Written Permission

Joe: That is an accurate quote. You have my permission to use it. Jim Moss, Sr.

*Pastor James W. Moss Sr
Church Consultant
Interviewed in Wharton, Ohio*

Original Message

From: Joe Carney [pastorjoe@udata.com]
To: Stephen Dupree [omsdupree@aol.com]
Sent: Monday, May19, 2010 11:52 AM

Hi Dr Dupree,

You may recall, you visited us here in Wharton a year or so ago, that I am working on my doctorate and I asked you if I could quote you. I am in the final phase of my dissertation and now I need to close up some loose ends. One of the things I need is a written permission from you because I used your name in my paper.

I did not include any direct quotes or specifically cite anything you said. I did, however, include the phrase, "the gospel is universal, but culture is not". I actually discovered that phrase and similar phrases in several venues so I did not specifically cite a source. Thus, if you agree, you can simply "reply" to this message and I will include your response in my permanent files.

Response

From: Stephen Dupree [omsdupree@aol.com]
Sent: Thursday, May 20, 2010 12:56 PM
To: Joe Carney
Subject: Written Permission

Dear Pastor Joe,

Thank you for your e-mail. I remember you saying at the time that the statement I made was something you would like to use for your dissertation. I give you full permission to use this statement.

I would ask for two minor corrections. I have a PhD in Intercultural Studies. Although my major was cultural anthropology, there may be some who would not necessarily call me a cultural anthropologist, but a missiologist. Please change the term to missiologist. Also, as of January 1, 2010, OMS International changed the meaning of OMS to One Mission Society, so it could state, "serving as a missionary with to Japan with One Mission Society." Thank you for including me!

From: SurveyMonkey Customer Support [surveymonkey1@mailwc.custhelp.com]
Sent: Monday, February 01, 2010 1:24 PM
To: pastorjoe@udata.com
Subject: Permission to Use

Recently you requested personal assistance from our on-line support center. Below is a summary of your request and our response. If you are a SurveyMonkey customer - you can reply via your question located in the "My Questions" tab of the Help Center.

If this issue is not resolved to your satisfaction, you may reopen it within the next 7 days.

Thank you for allowing us to be of service to you.

Subject
Permission to Use

Discussion Thread
Response (Lisa) 02/01/2010 10:23 AM

HI,

To use your own information you do not need permission - but are you using any of our logos and/ or a screenshot of your full results that includes our page(s)?
If so, please complete the form I'm attaching. The first section you fill out your contact information - then in appendix A please attach what images you want to use, and in appendix B please specify what you are using them for (i.e. doctoral dissertation at University X, etc.)

Best,

Lisa

Customer Operations Manager

Question Reference #100201-000285
Category Level 1: Getting Started
Category Level 2: SurveyMonkey General Info
Date Created: 02/01/2010 09:31 AM
Last Updated: 02/01/2010 10:23 AM
Status: Answered/Solved

[---001:001874:58659---]

APPENDIX G

GLC CONGREGATIONS WORSHIP ATTENDANCE 1999 - 2008

Church	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	(+/-)
Arthur Cntr	45	45	40	37	32	30	31	32	30	32	-13
Aukerman	22	22	20	20	20	23	24	24	24	24	2
Big Prairie	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	20	20
Brick Bthl	8	33	37	28	23	22	20	15	15	11	3
Celina	280	273	240	211	216	231	230	208	180	171	-109
College	426	426	475	459	487	502	523	549	531	521	95
CrossPoint	86	117	126	126	133	137	145	145	115	115	29
Eagle	63	64	57	45	48	47	41	41	41	41	-22
Grace	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	0
Hopewell	63	61	62	60	55	58	65	80	70	70	7
Lifehouse	0	208	260	260							
Madison	15	18	17	29	22	29	29	27	26	23	8
Mendon	59	59	51	50	45	49	49	46	43	39	-20
Mt Carmen	84	89	89	94	94	93	93	94	87	86	2
Mt Tabor	142	135	139	141	134	126	119	127	149	159	17
Neptune	41	32	30	25	27	31	29	29	38	36	-5
New Haven	22	24	24	31	32	31	34	39	50	55	33
Ney	176	186	197	161	150	155	155	159	158	147	-29
Ohio City	153	161	166	215	199	235	214	289	103	115	-38
Olive Branch Ottawa River	72	79	84	86	82	81	74	80	71	64	-8
Pathway	25	36	47	50	40	48	44	39	39	39	14
Pine River	66	64	57	46	38	38	37	38	27	19	-47
Ridgeway	71	62	56	50	45	45	48	54	64	65	-6
Risingsun	91	100	101	82	90	88	81	80	74	87	-4
Risingsun	109	104	105	104	112	115	118	121	112	114	5
Salem	44	48	46	48	49	46	49	52	45	36	-8
Seville	64	58	58	80	92	96	98	105	110	111	47
Shawnee Sugar Ridge	49	48	48	47	44	52	45	43	36	40	-9
Tekonsha	58	58	58	60	59	57	51	56	56	56	-2
The Catalyst	16	16	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	15	-1
Timberlake	0	0	45	35	35	38	51	51	51	64	64
Timberlake	78	83	95	139	160	180	189	193	191	186	108
Union Chapel	69	58	55	60	58	59	50	44	32	35	-34
Wharton	121	113	115	108	97	96	101	108	117	120	-1
Wooster	413	395	318	341	333	300	236	237	205	187	-226
Zion	29	31	32	35	34	31	32	28	25	26	-3

APPENDIX H
MEASURING CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH

A Theological Perspective for Measuring Congregational Health

Congregational health is difficult to define and equally difficult to measure. Generally, larger congregations are considered to be healthier because of their size. The experts, the authors, the conference speakers, and pastors of notoriety tend to be those who have gained acclaim because their congregations have grown into large congregations under their leadership. The faithful pastor serving a rural congregation with two hundred worshipers in attendance will not likely be invited to speak at a national convention. From a marketing perspective, bigger is better. Yet, most pastoral leaders in rural congregations recognize that bigger is not always better.

A congregation that is strategically located and possesses a desirable facility may be able to attract large crowds to events such as Christian concerts, educational conferences, or inspirational meetings but are these large crowds an indication of a healthy congregation? A congregation that offers intramural sporting events or organized team sports for children may be able to attract a gathering of Christian families, but are these assemblies an indication of a healthy congregation? A charismatic preacher or an inspirational worship leader may be able to entertain a large crowd but is the size of this group an indication of a healthy congregation?

This project has sought to identify attributes that empower a rural congregation to thrive. The emphasis has been on *thriving* rather than *growing*. The stated purpose of this study was to identify those issues of pastoral leadership that equip a rural congregation to fulfill its kingdom purpose. This is not to say that growth is not desirable or even expected. Rather, it is to say that growth is not the objective. Health is the objective. This project has demonstrated that every congregation has a divinely ordained kingdom

purpose. Thus, for the purposes of this project, a congregation that is thriving in its kingdom purpose shall be considered a healthy congregation.

The research questionnaire for this project sought to gather data that addressed this issue. The question was asked, “Is worship attendance an effective measure of congregational health?” Sixty percent of the respondents said, “No” and only forty percent said, “Yes”. Thus, the majority of the respondents did not consider worship attendance to be the most effective measure of congregational health. Anticipating this response, the questionnaire asked the follow-up question, “If worship attendance is not the most effective measure of congregational health, what is the best measure”?

There were numerous responses given but the majority of the responses focused on the qualities of love for God, love for people, and spiritual growth. While these are the essential qualities necessary in the life of a believer, they are not easily quantified. Of the responses given, only five were realistically quantifiable. Those five quantifiable measures of congregational health were conversions, baptisms, new membership, tithes and offerings, and kingdom service.

Conversions

The first quantifiable measure of congregational health is conversions. When Peter preached the impromptu sermon at the Gate Beautiful, he told the crowd, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19 [NKJV]). A genuine conversion experience that follows sincere repentance is the initial act of faith. Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3 [NKJV]). Conversion is the starting point for the Christian life. Church attendance and financial

support of a local congregation are acts of obedience for the believer, but new life begins at the point of conversion. Paul said, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17 [NKJV]). The conversion experience causes a new creation. The old sinful nature is passed away and a new creation of God is formed. This is conversion.

One sign of a healthy congregation is a regular experience of new converts being added to the church. Upon preparing for His departure from His earthly ministry, Jesus commissioned the Church to, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:15-16 [NKJV]). Clearly, the clarion call to the Church is to preach the gospel so that unbelievers can hear the message of Christ and be saved. A healthy congregation is a congregation that is winning new believers to Christ. Solomon said, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30 [NKJV]). Thus, a regular accounting of new converts is a good measure of congregational health.

Baptisms

The second quantifiable measure of congregational health is baptisms. Baptism is an ordinance recognized by most evangelical denominations. When Jesus came to the Jordan River for His baptism, John the Baptist tried to prevent Him. John said, “I need to be baptized by You” rather than “You coming to me” (Matthew 3:14 [NKJV]). Jesus insisted, however, and said, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15 [NKJV]). The practice of baptism was early received as a necessary ordinance by the early church. After Peter preached his coronation sermon on

the day of Pentecost, “those who gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41 [NKJV]).

A congregation that is healthy will be baptizing new converts. In obedience to Jesus’ example, new converts should be baptized. Jesus commissioned the church to “make disciples of all the nations, *baptizing them* in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19 [NKJV]). Conversions that are followed by baptisms are an indication of congregational health. Thus, a regular accounting of baptisms is an effective measure of congregational health.

New Memberships

The third quantifiable measure of congregational health is new church memberships. New church memberships demonstrate that new believers are being assimilated into the life of the congregation. The rite of the membership is not the significant issue. It is the assimilation of a new believer into the life of faith that is significant. The book of Acts records, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47 [NKJV]). Those early converts who were being saved were also being added to the church. Inarguably, by virtue of their conversion, a new believer becomes a member of the Body of Christ. The conversion of the new believer, however, is not the end of the journey, it is just the beginning. Finding a home in a local congregation is essential for the growth and health of a new believer. Baptism is an act of obedience for the new believer, but the process of Christian maturity has just begun. The new believer must grow and mature in faith and obedience.

Peter wrote that new believers are like infants. He instructed new believers, as newborn babies to “desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter

2:2 [NKJV]). Paul instructed that new believers “should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Ephesians 4:14 [NKJV]). The primary agency for the development of believers is the local church. It is in the local congregation that “the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16 [NKJV]). Assimilation of a new believer into a local congregation is essential both for the health of the believer, as well as for the health of a congregation. Thus, a regular accounting of new memberships is a good measure of a healthy congregation.

Tithes and Offerings

The fourth quantifiable measure of a healthy congregation is tithes and offerings. Solomon instructed believers to, “Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase” (Proverbs 3:9 [NKJV]). Financial support of a local congregation should not be viewed as a compulsory obligation for members. Rather, financial support is a means of honoring the Lord. The prophet Malachi instructed believers, “‘Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it’” (Malachi 3:10 [NKJV]). This passage indicates God’s covenant concerning the tithe. His promise states that He will open the windows of heaven and pour out great blessings upon those who are faithful with the tithe.

One indication that a believer is maturing in faith is their faithfulness with tithes and offerings. A congregation that is winning converts, getting them baptized, and assimilating them into the life of the congregation should also be teaching believers to be faithful in tithes and offerings. Thus, a regular accounting of tithes and offerings is a good measure of a healthy congregation.

Kingdom Service

The fifth quantifiable measure of congregational health is the participation of its members in service to the kingdom of God. A believer demonstrates spiritual growth by the willingness to serve the Lord. Isaiah told the people of Israel, “If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land” (Isaiah 1:19 [NKJV]). The spiritual and temporal blessings of the Lord are directly connected to one’s willingness to obey Him.

When King David was appointing Solomon to assume his kingly role, the need for a servant’s heart was stressed. David told Solomon, “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind” (1 Chronicles 28:9 [NKJV]). Believers demonstrate their love for God by their willingness to serve Him.

Quantifying or measuring the service of believers may be a difficult task, but it is not beyond reach. If a congregation repeatedly falls short of workers willing to serve its ministries, that is an indication of a lack of congregational health. If a congregation is forced to reduce or eliminate kingdom ministries due to a lack of congregational support that is also indicates a lack of congregational health. Conversely, if a congregation is forced to employ a staff person to organize and educate, as well as, recruit volunteers, then that is probably an indication of congregational health. Thus, a regular accounting of

members that are participating in the service to the Lord is a measure of congregational health.

Attendance

Finally, the last quantifiable measure of congregational health is worship attendance. In spite of the hesitation of some of rural pastors, weekly worship attendance is one of the most effective measures of congregational health. Regular worship attendance gives evidence of a vibrant faith in Christ. David said, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’” (Psalms 122:1 [NKJV]). A believer that is growing and maturing in faith will demonstrate a regular pattern of worship attendance. The writer of Hebrews said, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:24-25 [NKJV]). A believer that is regularly forsaking the assembly is a believer that is not experiencing spiritual growth.

All believers are created to be a part of a local congregation. Paul said, “But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased” (1 Corinthians 12:18 [NKJV]). A believer’s participation in a local congregation is neither compulsory nor optional. Participation in a local congregation is simply a part of being a member of the Body of Christ. Paul said, “For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Ephesians 5:30 [NKJV]). He did not say “we should be” members of His body. Nor did he say “we could be” members of His body. He said “we are” members of the Body of Christ! Participation in the life of a local congregation is as normal to a Christian as breathing is to the human body. Thus, one of the most effective measures of congregational health is a regular accounting of worship attendance.

Conclusion

During a visit at the home of Martha and Mary, Jesus was confronted by his friend Martha. She insisted that He rebuke her sister Mary for her perceived failure to be properly concerned about her domestic duties. In response to Martha's request, Jesus said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part" (Luke 10:41-42 [NKJV]). What is that *one thing*? What is that *one thing* that has eternal value rather than just temporal value? What is the "it" that should consume the focus of every congregation? The "it" is certainly not an effective measuring rubric of congregational health.

There must be caution lest there be an over-emphasis on numbers and counting. Numbers are not that one thing. Pastoral leaders in rural congregations must beware that the emphasis not be on "nickels and noses" rather than the precious soul of the child of God. The *one thing* that truly has eternal consequence for the rural congregation is the life-giving, life-affirming pursuit of God's ordained kingdom purpose. It is this kingdom purpose that empowers people to "come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13 [NKJV]).

Measuring congregational health is difficult, but there are some quantifiable measures that are reliable. Those measures are conversions, baptisms, new memberships, tithes and offerings, kingdom service, and worship attendance. Thus, a regular accounting and maintaining of records of those measures will provide significant insight into the health of a congregation.

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