

# Journal of Applied Christian Leadership

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Volume 14  
Number 2 *Fall*

Article 1

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10-2020

## Complete Fall Issue

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### Recommended Citation

(2020) "Complete Fall Issue," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 14: No. 2.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol14/iss2/1>

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VOLUME 14 NO 2 FALL 2020



THE *journal* OF

APPLIED

CHRISTIAN

LEADERSHIP

Volume 14, Number 2  
FALL 2020

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The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership (ISSN 1933-3978, 1933-3986) is a refereed, semi-annual publication from the Christian Leadership Center of Andrews University. It is designed to encourage an ongoing conversation between scholars and practitioners in applied Christian leadership theory. The JAACL is indexed by ProQuest and EBSCO.

This periodical is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database® (ATLA RDB®) and it is also included in the full-text ATLASerials® (ATLAS®) collection. Both are products of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, E-mail: [atla@atla.com](mailto:atla@atla.com), <http://www.atla.com>.

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## EDITORIAL

# FLEXIBLE LEADERSHIP IN A CHANGING WORLD

It's no surprise that the world is continually changing. Since the beginning of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began to rage worldwide, we have been caught up in a whirlwind of adjustments. During this time of crisis, leadership has faced terribly difficult decisions; most of these boil down to one theme: be flexible or fail.

Churches, especially, have had to continually adjust to the changing environment, many quickly making the shift to broadcasting services online, all the while striving to maintain connections with members and encourage community amid masks and social distancing. Church leadership similarly has had to adapt and change.

For many of us, it is easy to become frustrated and bogged down by the “now.” Yet we are reminded again and again in the Bible to “set [our] minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col. 3:2, ESV). Shifting our mindset to adapt to a pandemic may not feel encouraging or productive. However, shifting our mindset to things of Heaven will change everything—for good!

In this issue of the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, we will examine different aspects of flexibility in Christian leadership's changing landscape. We hope and pray that you will find practical information to apply to your church or organization.

In this issue's Biblical Reflection, Steven Ruggerio examines transformational leaders, as described by the Apostle Paul in Romans 12. Speaking from personal experience, Paul identifies ten transformative traits indicative of Christian living. Interestingly, those same behaviors represent the core qualities of present-day transformational leaders. Whether maturing as a Christian in service to Christ or developing as a leader in service to others, the ten traits of Romans 12 are essential to individual, team, and organizational success.

Petr Cincala, PhD, is the director of the Institute of Church Ministry, Andrews University, assistant professor of World Mission, the director of Natural Church Development (NCD) America, and managing editor of the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*.

The Leadership Interview comes from Peter Roennfeldt who has served as a pastor, evangelist, missionary, seminary teacher, and church planter. Roennfeldt not only shares his experiences and lessons learned in the field but also covers insights on cross-cultural church planting, suggestions for how to multiply leaders and propel the church-planting movement forward, and problematic church-planting models. Additionally, Roennfeldt examines the impact of COVID-19 on church planting, providing ideas for how to use this difficult time for good. This is an interview you will not want to miss!

Kevin Hall kicks off the Feature Article section of this issue with a piece entitled, “Leadership Modeling: Christian Leadership Development Through Mentoring as Informed by Social Learning Theory.” In this article, Hall presents a leadership development strategy that is both biblically situated and scientifically informed. He maintains Christian leaders should intentionally influence others to acquire, reinforce, and translate proper leadership character and behaviors into effective Christian leadership. Using Albert Bandura’s social learning theory as a guide, Hall walks us through methods that can be used to effectively develop others.

The next Feature Article is an especially timely piece brought to us by Arndt Büssing, Lorethy Starck, and Klaus VanTreeck of Germany. Considering the coronavirus pandemic, these authors researched and analyzed the emotional, spiritual, and social well-being of 1,036 German Seventh-day Adventists. Additionally, usage of the Church’s digital media resources was analyzed. The findings presented in this article may encourage Christian and non-Christian communities alike to further expand their digital media resources to provide helpful resources during the successive waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

W. Ray Williams closes out the Feature Articles with a discussion on connectivism. Connectivism was first proposed as a learning theory for the digital age. This theory proposes that learning may take place external of the learner and teacher; it exists in the multiple complex networks with which the learner associates. Connectivism is a leadership theory that specifically works in modern churches. This theory emphasizes the connectedness of all knowledge, the mutuality of those connections, and becomes a tool used to build better local church teams. This theory is especially valid in our currently dispersed environment/society.

Our friends Rob Parkman, René Erwich, and Joke vanSanne return in this issue, sharing predictors of sustainability and well-being in ministry. These authors maintain that only a third of leaders finish well, that burnout rates continue to increase, and that clergy are particularly vulnerable to high levels of vocational stress. The purpose of their study was to fill a gap in pastoral

health literature by determining the predictive factors that contribute to the sustainability and well-being of leaders. They then used their research to develop a holistic theoretical framework that empowers Christian leaders and those who support them in organizational, educational, counseling, and mentoring roles.

Finally, Kimon Nicolaides gets us thinking with an article entitled, “Aspects of Leadership and their Effects on the Growth and Vitality of North American Churches.” He examines two aspects of leadership, labeled “paternalistic” and “encouraging.” These qualities were measured in North American pastors using the Paternalistic Leadership Scale and the Encouraging Leadership Index. Significant statistical correlations were observed between them, their churches’ growth rates, and other church vitality indicators.

As always, this issue closes with the latest and greatest in leadership resources, including both book reviews and dissertation notices.

As I close, I want to share one thought that has remained sure and steady through many chaotic moments—and especially during a pandemic. As Paul writes in Romans 8:38–39,

I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (ESV)

I hope and pray that you are well, friends.

# BIBLICAL REFLECTION



## STEVEN RUGGERIO

# ROMANS 12: A LEADER'S GUIDE TO TRANSFORMATION

### Introduction

In the mid-twentieth century, the leadership industry exploded. Barbara Kellerman (2012), a Harvard leadership professor, describes this phenomenon as “countless leadership centers, institutes, courses, seminars, workshops, trainers, books, blogs, articles, websites, webinars, conferences, and coaches claiming to teach people—usually for money—how to lead” (p. xiii). Searching for a competitive edge or, in some cases, a silver bullet, individuals, teams, and organizations devour the tips and tricks, hoping to catch lightning in a bottle.

“Leadership” is a popular word in today’s vernacular. Five years ago, a Google search revealed 148 million links to the term (Pfeffer, 2015, p. 8). The same search today produced over 3 billion results. Though much has changed over the years, several authors produced groundbreaking work that still stands the test of time. Respected as leadership royalty, names like Drucker, Blanchard, and Bennis made room for others such as Covey, Collins, Maxwell, Sandberg, and Sinek. The world of academia gave us names like Bass, Burns, Kellerman, and Kanter. While leadership research is relatively young considering its scientific pedigree, its heritage dates back several millennia.

Around 57 CE, in the bustling city of Corinth, the Apostle Paul—a murderer turned missionary—penned his magnum opus, known as Romans (Sproul, 2019). Covering salvation, grace, sanctification, and redemption, it is the most comprehensive essay of the Christian faith. Three-quarters of the way through his letter, in chapter 12, Paul transitions from describing doctrine to focusing on application. With a staccato style, he highlights 10 transformational behaviors characterizing a Christian’s life. This paper provides a contextual background for Paul and then explains how those 10 traits are critical qualities for present-day transformational leaders. We will also examine the transformational journey of Christians and compare it with the transformational focus needed from today’s leadership development perspective.

Steven M. Ruggerio is a doctoral candidate at Regent University and serves as the Men’s Ministry Director at the City Life Church. He currently lives in Newport News, Virginia.

## From Persecutor to Promoter: Paul's Transformative Moment

The Holy Bible explains the relationship between God and humanity. With nearly four billion copies sold over the past 50 years, the Bible is the “most read book in the world” (Polland, 2012). Along with fantastic stories of battles and miracles, the Bible also shares how a small group of dedicated followers spread a message about a carpenter-turned-Messiah that continues over two thousand years later. While sacred to many, the Bible offers much more than theological encouragement. Filled with thousands of life lessons and insightful teachings, it is an irreplaceable source of leadership wisdom. The New Testament contains twenty-seven letters chronicling the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the birth and expansion of the early church, and other divinely inspired metaphors, warnings, and exhortations. Thirteen—nearly half—of the letters are attributed to the authorship of Paul of Tarsus.

In first-century Jerusalem, following the death of Jesus Christ, an educated Jew skilled in law, politics, and religion traveled the sandy streets, seeking to rid the world of a religious sect known as “Christians.” Under his Hebrew name Saul, his first mention in Scripture is in connection with the stoning of Stephen—a devout follower of Jesus. Following this public execution, a “great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1, NIV), and the members scattered. No longer content with observing, Saul led the pharisaical effort to destroy and persecute the Christian church by “going house to house and dragging out men and women to throw them into prison” (Acts 8:3, NLT). Saul’s reign of terror continued instilling fear in Christians throughout the region (Acts 9:1). However, on his way to Damascus, he had an experience that changed his mission forever.

Professor of theology Dr. Wayne Grudem (1994) defines regeneration as “a secret act of God in which He imparts new spiritual life to individuals” (p. 699). Grudem further explains that regeneration is the beginning of spiritual sanctification, “the progressive work of God and man that makes one more and more free from sin and more like Christ in their actual lives” (1994, p. 746). These life-changing revelations lead to decisions, vows, or commitments that radically influence a person’s life. Sociologist Dr. Morris Massey referred to these moments as “significant emotional events” in which “an experience is so mentally arresting that it becomes a catalyst for one to consider, examine, and possibly change their initial values or value system” (Massey, 1979, p. 8). Whether divine or emotional, all transformation begins with a moment.

On his way to Damascus to continue his siege, Saul came face-to-face with the resurrected Jesus. The transformative event, recorded in Acts 9:3–9, changed Saul from persecutor of Christians to promoter of Christ. The faith he sought to eliminate became the purpose he lived to expand. Empowered with

new passion, “Saul” became “Paul,” and his past loyalties no longer determined his present decisions. Going forward, every action supported his new mission: preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His change amazed onlookers who asked, “Isn’t this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus’s followers . . . didn’t he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?” (Acts 9:21, NLT). From the moment Paul encountered Jesus, his life had a new meaning; he became a follower, student, teacher, missionary, and leader. Part of his ministry entailed writing letters to encourage and instruct dispersed Christians throughout the Mediterranean basin.

## **The Apostle Paul: A First-Century Transformational Leader**

Since antiquity, scholars and theologians have dissected Paul’s writings—its aspects, from contextual influences to spiritual instructions. Paul’s letters communicate an authoritative tone with the love of a parent. Written under divine inspiration, Paul’s letters are considered *theopneustos*, or breathed out by God (Grudem, 1994, p. 74). His writings were intended to be read to congregations, exchanged between churches, and ultimately served as an authoritative substitute for his personal presence (Duvall & Hays, 2012, p. 256). At their core, Paul’s letters were written to “teach, rebuke, correct, and train” Christians in right living so they would be equipped to proclaim the message of Christ (2 Tim. 3:16–17, NIV). His letter to the Christians in Rome encapsulates the full weight of his message and his mission.

The Christian colonies in Rome paled in comparison to the “Romanized” gods populating the local architecture (Barton, Comfort, Osborne, Taylor, & Veerman, 2001, p. 574). As Christians returned to Rome after Passover, they brought the message of Christ back to the local residents. As more Christians were added, the church grew in diversity and social complexity (Barton et al., 2001, p. 575). Paul’s letter was exactly what they needed. Highlighting Jewish history and tradition, he identified Jesus as the prophetic manifestation of their long-awaited Messiah. The first eleven chapters of Romans was Paul’s “argument for the Gospel” and laid a foundation for grace and salvation (Sproul, 2019, p. 375). However, in chapter 12, the flow changes. Opening with the word, “*Therefore*,” Paul signifies both a conclusion and an expectation. He immediately introduces sacrificial transformation and then identifies 10 traits characterizing a mature Christian *and* a transformational leader.

## **Understanding Transformational Leadership**

Sosik and Jung (2018) reported that the “transformational leadership paradigm dominates the leadership field and ranks #1 among all leadership theo-

ries reviewed” (p. 6). The transformational leadership style focuses on emotions, values, and ethics. It involves “an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them” (Northouse, 2018, p. 161). Sitting atop the Total Leadership System is the transformational leadership style, rating individuals above average in active and effective behaviors. These transformed leaders promote positive and meaningful changes in people by practicing five components of transformational leadership, often referred to as the “5 I’s:”

- Idealized Influence (Behaviors): the words and actions performed by leaders
- Idealized Influence (Attributes): the leader’s behaviors perceived by followers
- Inspirational Motivation: articulating an optimistic and enthusiastic vision
- Intellectual Stimulation: leaders encouraging innovative thinking
- Individualized Consideration: leaders investing time and energy in followers

According to Sosik and Jung (2018), one mechanism transmitting these components is a leader’s “traits” or, more specifically, “who they are” (p. 53). In Romans 12, the Apostle Paul outlines mature Christians’ traits and, ultimately, transformational leaders.

## **Romans 12: Ten Transformational Traits**

### *Transformational Leadership (Romans 12:1-2)*

Paul’s call to action opens with personal sacrifice. The Christian growth process is neither easy nor quick. The same holds true for leaders. Retired general Stanley McChrystal (2018) said, “Leadership is not straightforward or glamorous. It is painful and perplexing, even at its best” (p. 399).

Paul also recognized the pull of cultural conformity and insists that Jesus’s followers be “transformed by the renewing of the mind.” The Greek word for “transformed” is *metamorphosis*. This word indicates a radical change of form that alters how individuals think and act (Sproul, 2019, p. 376). In similar ways, transformational leadership is “a process that changes and transforms people” (Northouse, 2016, p. 161). Paul is clear: being a Christian requires the manifestation of certain traits and cognitions. Being a transformational leader requires the same thing. The following 10 traits capture the essence of both Christian and transformational leadership behavior.

**Trait 1: Humility (Romans 12:3 and 12:16).** In chapter 12, Paul highlights humility twice by addressing the issue individually and relationally. In verse 3, he discusses inner humility with the Greek word *sophroneo*, referring to sober-mindedness or putting a moderate estimate upon oneself (Strong’s Concordance, n.d.). Later, in verse 16, he adds that external humility is “not being proud but willing to associate with people of low position.”

Anderson and Adams (2016) refer to this two-sided coin as an “inner game” and “outer game” (p. 30). Their leadership research shows that our consciousness and values’ inner game drives the outer game of our competencies and relationships. Paul knew that deep, inner humility is needed to influence and connect people with the message of salvation. In their book, *Humility Is the New Smart*, Darden Business School professors Hess and Ludwig (2017) write, “Connecting to and relating with other human beings are fundamental to human motivation” (p. 30). Without humility, the Christian witness is questionable and leadership influence is dangerous.

**Trait 2: Team Building (Romans 12:4–8).** Jesus modeled teamwork by investing in twelve disciples, who then invested in others. He commissioned His followers to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19, NIV). Understanding Jesus’s message, Paul referred to the church as “a body with many members” (Rom. 12:4, NIV). He makes it a point to discuss various gifts and abilities; creating a place for each person equips a community to be more versatile and effective.

This is a crucial element for transformational leadership. By practicing individualized consideration, leaders gain an understanding of individual gifts. Countless psychological assessments are available to guide people in discovering their strengths. Many thriving organizations use Tom Rath’s *Strengths Finder*. Rath (2007) writes, “It is essential to discover and develop your strengths as early as possible, but also to help the people around you build on their natural talents as well” (p. 30).

**Trait 3: Integrity (Romans 12:9–10).** Jesus embodied integrity. Paul knew a person committed and submitted to Jesus would love people and cling to what is good. The Greek word for “cling” is *kollao*, which means to glue, cement, or fasten together (Strong’s Concordance, n.d.). A person of integrity fastens themselves to what is good and hates what is evil. Unfortunately, hypocrisy is not new to church culture; as a result, many people avoid religious institutions because of the breaches of trust. By acting with integrity, Christians rebuild trust through authentic relationships.

The lack of integrity is prevalent in secular leadership, as well. From Enron to the Penn State scandal, the lies, coverups, and selfish actions of the few contaminate the whole. Today’s transformational leader models integrity through trustworthy relationships and transparent communication.

**Trait 4: Energy and Enthusiasm (Romans 12:11).** Paul understood the power of motivation and inspirational effect. The origin of his word “zeal” is

*zeo*, which refers to water being boiled with heat (Strong's Concordance, n.d.). The Greek writer Homer used the word metaphorically to describe "boiling" anger or love. Paul requires Christians to "never lack in zeal but keep your spiritual fervor."

In leadership, energy and enthusiasm are contagious and provide fuel for inspiration. Recent research shows a direct correlation between a leader's ability to motivate and improving follower burnout, work engagement, and leadership-related career intentions (Auvinen, Huhtala, Kinnunen, Tsupari, & Feldt, 2020, p. 6).

**Trait 5: Patient Perseverance (Romans 12:12).** The early church faced tremendous obstacles getting started. Between external pressure and internal conflict, the chance of continued growth grew slim. Paul knew Christians needed to hold out hope and be patient through persecution.

Even today, pastors experience difficulty generating momentum. Stetzer and Bird (2007) conducted a qualitative study that found that over thirty percent of church plants close their doors within four years (p. 7). Leaders, both religious and secular, must not abandon hope at the first sign of difficulty. Their perseverance motivates others to continue when facing defeat.

**Trait 6: Care and Generosity (Romans 12:13).** One of the primary functions of the early church was to take care of each other. Luke, the author of Acts, wrote, "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had" (Acts 4:32, NIV). This type of generosity characterized the early church and created an environment where those who had more helped those with less.

Care of others is a key aspect of leadership. Like the early church, leaders today must share knowledge and expertise while also attuning to their personal needs. Caring leaders must remain familiar with available resources to aid followers with financial, marital, or psychological assistance.

**Trait 7: Empathy (Romans 12:14–15).** Interestingly, there is no Greek word for empathy or compassion. Instead, the word *splagchnizomai* is used; this word refers to an agitation in the bowels, as they thought the bowels were the seat of love and pity (Strong's Concordance, n.d.). Nevertheless, Paul understood empathy and demonstrated selfless love by building a close-knit community.

In the past 25 years, the value of empathy has surged among leadership literature, from anchoring Goleman's emotional intelligence to driving transformational leadership's individualized consideration. Cohn and Moran (2011)

write, “When followers sense that their leader is attuned to what they are experiencing at the moment, they feel good; they feel connected” (p. 47). Research shows that connected followers report higher levels of morale, commitment, and productivity (Boyatzis, Smith, Van Oosten, & Woolford, 2013, p. 22).

**Trait 8: Role Modeling (Romans 12:17).** In an earlier letter to the Corinthian church, Paul encouraged his followers to “imitate me as I imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1, NASB). Recognizing his responsibility, he challenged others to mirror his behavior. Jesus established the standard when He said, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15, NIV).

Leaders set the example for strong character and professional commitments. In a recent NeuroLeadership Institute study, researchers found that in times of crisis, followers need their managers to “model behaviors that are productive rather than destructive” (Sip, 2020). Before leaders evaluate their followers, they must first ensure that *they* are living their professed values. Kouzes and Posner (2012) write, “You either lead by example or don’t lead at all” (p. 74). This is a foundational component of idealized influence being attributed to leaders.

**Trait 9: Relationship Building (Romans 12:18–19).** Earlier in his letter to the Romans, Paul highlighted the importance of team building. In these verses, he emphasizes external relationships. The Greek word for “living peacefully” with others is *eireneuo*, which implies cultivating or keeping peace and harmony (Strong’s Concordance, n.d.). To help spread their message, Christians were obligated to interact with people from various backgrounds. These interactions were often contentious. Paul advised his followers to do everything they could to create harmonious relationships.

While leaders carry the weight of strengthening internal relationships, they cannot ignore the myriad of connections with external stakeholders. Marcus, McNulty, Henderson, and Dorn (2019), from the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative, refer to this as leading beyond the “four walls of your organization to reach the people, institutions, and communities that are part of or important to your overall endeavors” (p. 29).

**Trait 10: Action (Romans 12:20–21).** In writing to his protégé, Paul instructed Timothy and everyone else to “preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2, NIV). Christianity is not a spectator sport. The lives of Jesus, the disciples, and Paul demonstrated action-oriented, purposeful activities. Being a follower of Christ requires action—including every-

thing from feeding the poor to opposing injustice. Paul implored Christians to “overcome evil with good.” The Greek origin of the word “overcome” is *nikao*, which means “to come off victorious” (Strong’s Concordance, n.d.).

Transformational leaders use inspirational motivation to inspire victory in followers. Whether facing a product recall or a personal addiction, leaders help followers achieve more than they thought possible.

## Conclusion

The Apostle Paul is one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived. His writings are held sacred by billions of people. What makes his story so meaningful is that he lived his letters. Everything he asked of others, he did personally. As a transformational leader, Paul modeled righteousness and Christ-like behavior. His letters reached beyond his presence and guided a movement that outlasted the temporary glories of Rome. The leadership wisdom of Romans 12 provides rich insight into 21st-century challenges.

Jim Collins, leadership expert and best-selling author, released one of the most popular business books of all time: *Good to Great*. In it, Collins (2001) identifies “Level 5” leaders as those who “build enduring greatness through a blend of personal humility and professional will” (p. 20). Over 2,000 years ago, Paul identified 10 traits of mature Christians: humility, teamwork, integrity, energy, perseverance, care, empathy, role modeling, relationship building, and taking action. These traits are just as necessary today as they were over 2,000 years ago. Whether growing as a Christian or developing as a leader, these traits are essential for transformation and organizational success.

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# LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW

## INTERVIEW WITH PETER ROENNFELDT GOOD PLANTERS MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS: PERSPECTIVES ON CHURCH PLANTING

*Peter Roennfeldt, DMin, has spent his life sharing the Gospel, making disciples, and planting churches. He has served as a pastor, evangelist, missionary, seminary teacher, and pastor-to-pastor. He and his wife, Judy, have lived in four countries, equipping and coaching planters and movement practitioners. As well as initiating Discovery Bible Reading, he has produced conversation guides for disciple-making, church planting teams, and movement leaders, as well as for the prophetic writings of Daniel and Revelation. Peter is the author of eight books: Following Jesus (2017), Following the Spirit (2018), Following the Apostles' Vision (2019), If You Can Eat, You Can Make Disciples (2018), If Your Church is Closed, Be the Church (2020), If You are Thirsty, You Can Be Spirit-filled (2020), Enjoy the Living Word (2021), and with Your Church Has Changed (to be released March 2021).*

*Petr Cincala, PhD, is director of the Institute of Church Ministry, Andrews University, assistant professor of World Mission, director of NCD (Natural Church Development) America, and managing editor of the Journal of Applied Christian Leadership.*

### **Petr Cincala, on behalf of the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*:**

Can you tell me about your experience with training, mentoring, and coaching leaders?

**Peter Roennfeldt:** It was modelled by my first mentor or supervisor in ministry. Four to five days a week, for eight or more hours each day—for a year (1971)—Pastor Bill Otto took me with him to observe every aspect of his ministry. As we drove and ate together, Bill shared ideas, reviewed the visits we were making, and encouraged me. From the first week, I was assigned weekly preaching and visitation opportunities. I learned that my local church leaders and members were my team—volunteers to be encouraged, mentored and inspired; when they agreed to take on an assignment, my role was to affirm, provide the resources for them to complete the task, walk beside them as needed, but also check in at agreed times and expect what they had agreed to would be done.

**JACL:** How did these experiences transition into a passion for raising up leaders and church planters?

**PR:** During the second and third years of ministry, I became responsible for large rural districts with four to six churches—and then I ended up planting another two churches. I was dependent upon my team of elders and members because it was simply impossible to do everything! I was still learning to delegate and trust, but any success I experienced depended upon the team. It was not my job to control but to encourage, resource, and motivate all believers to enjoy participation according to their giftedness and experience.

Early in my fourth year of ministry (1974), my wife, Judy, and I moved to Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea for our first in-depth experience in cross-cultural ministry. My ministry assignment involved daily equipping five to seven intern graduates from our college in public evangelistic ministry and to support the pastors of the three city churches. We quickly realized that the spectator environment of large churches contributed to *backsliding*, giving rise to a statement for which I have been credited: “Large churches are factories that produce backsliders.” So, together with pastors, interns and members, we embarked on multiplying church plants.

During the next four years, we planted 14 new city churches—which have since multiplied to more than 60, most of them far too large today. It was an intense time of equipping leaders to involve all members possible in evangelism and disciple-making. After this, Judy and I transitioned for two years to leading the Sonoma Adventist College ministerial faculty (the senior college at the time). This gave us the opportunity to reflect and assess the effectiveness of what we had been doing—an important task but difficult to do in the midst of intensely active ministry.

**JACL:** Do you have any insights on cross-cultural church planting?

**PR:** Engaging indigenous Australians in planting new faith groups before going to Papua New Guinea, as well as ministry in Pacific countries, not only introduced me to cross-cultural mission but also the pervasive issues of contextualization. I learned that all theology, doctrines, and church systems are contextualized. In my imagination and experience, Jesus was a straight-haired, blue-eyed European, while in the minds of indigenous and Pacifica people, Jesus was one of them: dark, with curly hair—as depicted on their painted evangelistic charts. Because of our different contextualization, what we believe we are saying is not understood as we imagine by those of other cultures, including doctrines and kingdom methods.

I learned to respect other cultures, and through conversations, allow the Spirit to teach His ways. These experiences taught me to constantly check on what was being understood. I have found that reflection on the life, teachings, and methods of Jesus—through reading the Gospels and Acts, in context—provide an environment for the Holy Spirit to crystalize what He envisages. While I underscored principles—making disciples in all *ethne* (relational streams), cultivating *oikos* faith groups (households of faith), and *mission hubs* in districts—I learned to affirm a variety of expressions and insights, while coaching the planting teams to constantly assess what they were doing in the light of the apostles’ applications of Jesus’ teachings in their circumstances.

During my first ten years of ministry, I was taught some basic essentials of church planting. For example, I learned that a new plant is not formed by transferring members from established churches but by gathering new disciples. Also, new plants must plan to multiply within a short time—the time-frame being somewhat culturally determined, but never more than a couple of years. Thirdly, the evangelism methods must be simple, natural, easy to multiply and zero-dollar, so that new disciples can begin sharing faith as soon as they learn of Christ. And also, disciple-making happens most effectively through relational streams—the *ethne* of the great commission or the *wantoks* relationships of Melanesia.

**JACL:** What would you say is the secret to your success?

**PR:** A number of times I have been thrust back into district ministry. The time spent in Papua New Guinea was followed by nine-years as a Division and Inter-Union city evangelist in Australia and New Zealand, again working with teams of pastors (sometimes 25–30 at a time, for eight to nine month-long evangelistic programs), with multiple churches and members. I then transitioned into refocusing and growing an existing church for six years while also engaged as Conference evangelist and Ministerial Association Secretary (or pastor-to-pastor)—resourcing more than 60 pastors and their spouses.

During those years, I also teamed with leading Christian leaders and pastors of other denominations to cultivate a biblical understanding of the missional insights of Donald McGavran and Lesslie Newbiggin. A small team of us organized *The Australian Fellowship for Church Growth*, organizing major Church Growth conferences and producing a regular bulletin with a national readership to coach and foster teams.

In dialogue with other Christian leaders, I discovered few had ever met an Adventist or engaged in meaningful discussions. However, I was never once treated as less than a fellow believer nor expected to surrender my distinctive

convictions. I learned that my years of practical ministry experience in evangelism, disciple-maker, and church-planter—and my commitment to modeling ministry based on the example, teachings, and commission of Jesus—together with my wide reading of the latest research, books, and publications—was highly regarded and respected.

Hands-on ministry among non-believers, working with teams of effective leaders and pastors, treating all members as part of the team, and respecting all regardless of the level of contribution they were able to make—together with wide research and reading—also helped me to appreciate the members and pastors for whom I was directly responsible in ministry.

Three other specific points come to mind. While I had produced countless sermon summaries and seminars on Daniel, Revelation, and Hebrews—which were all translated and available for others to use at no cost—I had consciously decided not to write-up my own methods. When I did write church planting and coaching/mentoring materials, I tried to reflect processes that I had learned from others and put them into practice. In my third year of ministry, I read Fordyce Detamore's *Pastoral and District Suggestions*, in which he urged using ideas that others had proven effective—not rushing too quickly to our own approaches. Maybe I was slow, but it seemed wise to reference others in my first 25 years!

### **Hands-on ministry among non-believers, working with teams of effective leaders and pastors, treating all members as part of the team, and respecting all regardless of the level of contribution they were able to make**

Secondly, in 1980 and the ensuing years, the Adventist church wrestled with huge doctrinal and sociological challenges. Some see it as primarily theological, but it was also a clash of leadership and ecclesiological styles. In Australia, the conflict was messy and very public, but during those years, I was still standing on public platforms sharing the message of the Gospel and Adventism with thousands. It was a painful time, but one that demanded authenticity and honesty—even when the church was, at times, responding (regardless as to what was truth!) in un-Christian ways. I was constantly coaching and mentoring hurting and broken members, pastors, and leaders and responding to a public and media that was increasingly cynical of Christian churches that even destroyed their own.

Then, during the early 1990s, my involvement in leading and coaching expanded. Leading small groups of pastors on study programs in the Bible lands multiplied to leading coachloads of pastors, evangelists, and church planters, as well as invitations to conduct evangelism and church planting

field schools in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. At the same time, while still carrying responsibilities in the Victorian Conference as Ministerial Association Secretary, Conference evangelist, and senior pastor of Burwood Adventist Community Church, I was invited to foster a new initiative for the South Pacific Division, *Mission to Secular Society*, a network of *Adventist Churches for the Unchurched* in the major cities of Australia and New Zealand. While I cast the vision, what was accomplished was not entirely my doing but the result of a large number of creative, dedicated, visionary pastors and members who were inspired with the vision.

**JACL:** How have you managed to multiply leaders and propel the church-planting movement forward?

**PR:** As a local church pastor, I had followed the practice of identifying eight to ten key people to mentor and skill, taking each with me for three hours each week for six months. As we drove between appointments and visits, we could share ideas; I poured my heart and soul into them. In the five or six months we spent together, I worked to skill each one, to enrich them spiritually and as disciple-makers. After that, they each teamed with another, and I invested time in another eight to ten people—with all teams multiplying again after another six months or so.

It is solid work, especially for the first couple of years. Such work also is a huge time commitment and requires you to be vulnerable and consistent. If you are looking to start such a mentorship/discipleship program, trust those elected by the local church, perhaps even starting with them in the initial eight to ten. However, do not limit yourself to elected leaders. Some may be tough to work with, but when you spend time with them—and they experience disciple-making in homes—their hearts and journeys will change. Follow this hands-on process, and by the end of the first year you could have over 30 involved in mission.

In movements, all are disciple-makers—including all leaders. So, I always tried to start at that level. After a year or two—with multiple disciple-makers multiplying in teams—do what Jesus did by selecting those who will cultivate the movement and invest heavily into them.

While working within the denominational systems, I have been committed to thinking movements. The contrasts between the essentials of movement leadership and positional leadership in denominations are stark.

**In movements—movement leadership:**

1. All are disciple-makers;
2. All are involved in church planting—based on natural leaders;

3. Church planting overseers (planters)—multiply church plants;
4. Some will be mission hub–network multipliers; and
5. A few will be mission catalysts, who looking beyond at the national and international needs.

**In denominations—positional leadership:**

1. All are members;
2. Pastors and evangelists are paid;
3. A hierarchy of conferences officers and departments exists;
4. Additionally, a hierarchy of union officers and departments exists;
5. And finally, the denomination is run by division and General Conference officers and departments.

Being conscious of this contrast has enabled me to define my ministry and engage with mentoring and cultivating movements, even while employed within denominational-positional leadership roles and systems. An essential of movements is that all are disciple-makers, including the church planting overseers, network multipliers, and mission catalysts. Jesus was always a disciple-maker. If I follow His example, whatever role or responsibility I might have, I am still to be actively involved in sharing faith and making disciples in my community. I can never protest that I am too busy or travelling too much. I am a disciple, and therefore a disciple-maker!

In cultivating regional, national, or international movements, the principles used at the local level are simply multiplied. Identify the key people to be mentored, and focus upon resourcing, equipping, and encouraging them. It involves having a broad vision of “no place left” where the Gospel is not known (Rom. 15:23, NIV) and intentionally fanning every flame of interest by small teams or families to share faith, for they will plant churches and multiply.

At the local church, district level, or with international movements, gather the key people together at set times to share their experiences, and empower them to equip and inspire others. Train them in how to share their stories so that it is not a rambling, incohesive report, but focused and motivating. Let the best practical stories be told. This will, in turn, sharpen their commitment to disciple-making, church-planting, and movement-building. This means that within a short time your role and movement facilitator will be to affirm and cheer other key players—and you can step out of the way. Jesus left, as did the apostles, and God’s kingdom continued.

**JACL:** What are some “sticky” or problematic models of church planting to avoid?

**PR:** What I have learned is this: don’t try to control what others might envision. While what a planting team might plan seems similar to what I unsus-



cessfully tried, they have different skills and are working in a different territory. So, share the missional principles Jesus lived by (incarnational, apostolic, and messianic) and the missionary methods He followed (*ethne, oikos* and *mission-hubs*), but encourage all teams to adapt these to their context.

Problematic models of church planting include:

- Any that cost more than the team can fund or that the community will support. Under no circumstances should a plant be dependent upon foreign or outside funding. This is a sure recipe for multiple problems.
- The *hiving off* model can struggle. If a large number, even 15–20, hive from an existing established church, they will bring the culture of their church with them. This culture will insulate them and make it difficult for new folk to feel welcome. They will often drive or travel into the target community and thus have little or no connection. Additionally, if they are friends, they already have their social systems and may not need others.
- Unless both *generational* and *migrant* church plants have clear transitional strategies to include and involve others, their long-term viability may be at risk. However, relational streams are fundamental to disciple-making, and if there is clear vision and plan to multiply within one or two years—into other streams—this model can be highly effective.
- It is risky to base church plants purely upon a particular worship style, without regard to the other purposes of church: service, disciple-making, and obedience discipleship growth.

There are frequent tensions between mother churches and the church plants in their districts within the Adventist denomination. There are several reasons for this:

- Denominational systems assess a church's health on the basis of membership (not the number of disciple-makers) and tithe-giving, and church plants are perceived to undermine the size of both membership and finances of parent churches.
- Most Adventist churches live in an environment of competition with their *sisterhood of churches*—for example, some feel their church is committed, while the others in the district are too traditional or too liberal. This often creates an unfair assessment of church plants.
- Many administrative leaders seem too busy to read, and some local church elders and boards are neither familiar with missional literature nor New Testament frames for disciple-making and church-planting and therefore feel threatened by church plants.
- Church planters can also be very enthusiastic, and their enthusiasm—and catch-phrases, such as, “It is easier to give birth than to raise the dead!”—can appear judgmental, resulting in alienation.

Finally, Church systems often listen to the “noisiest” leaders, usually those of the parent-churches. This can result in church-planters being “called in” or “reigned in.”

**JACL:** How has COVID-19 impacted church planting? What are some ways of using this difficult time for good?

**PR:** COVID-19 was a wake-up call to the reality that the systems depend upon church functioning at the local level. There is no church without the local church, and when scattered, we learned it was much smaller than could be imagined. The basic unit of church is the “two or three” who gather in Jesus’s name (see Matt. 18:15–20)—the *household of faith* or *oikos* model.

In places where members, pastors, and leaders had been equipped to think of church as Jesus and the apostles envisaged it when buildings were closed (and where access to internet platforms were unavailable) church plants multiplied in small groups and household.

Like many others (maybe up to 50% of attendees before COVID restrictions), my wife and I decided not to just watch church on Zoom but to read our Bibles and Facetime neighbors to serve and share faith in our community. We are now discovering numerous stories of church plants that have launched in these ways.

Two professional believers invited an atheist university student to share their first lockdown Sabbath (allowed within the health-imposed orders in their city). The student came for food and discussions, and, while they can now return to their church building, they have continued their fresh form of church with 12–15 people, most of whom were unbelievers or those on the fringes of faith.

**JACL:** What are some advantages of the digital age/digital marketing for reaching young people in light of church planting?

**PR:** Another clear lesson of COVID-19 has been that digital media and the internet are great for contact and communication, but it is not church. Churches are planted with the purpose of worship, service, disciple-making, fellowship (not just meetings!), and fostering obedient discipleship (see Matt. 22:37–38 and Matt. 28:18–20). Interestingly, during this pandemic, while the younger generations assisted established churches get up-to-speed with technology, very few looked in on “Zoom church.” They communicate with social media, but that is not church for them. They are fostering a variety of hybrid and digital forms that are more relational and Bible-focused than perhaps

those of older generations. “*We are church*” and “*missional church*”—the *priesthood of all believers*, with justice and without discrimination against any—are themes very important to the hearts of young adults. And that is more like Jesus’s and the apostles’ idea of church!

**JACL:** Does church planting have a future, in general? Within the Adventist Church, specifically? In what form?

**PR:** Adventism began as a planting movement. In the Global North, it is far from that today; and in the Global South, Adventism is at risk of stalling within its systems. But, yes, I believe that church planting has a future.

When I entered ministry and began planting churches, the term church planting was not on the agenda. Few Adventist pastors could share how they had done it, and few other denominations were doing it! However, many Christians, mission agencies, and even denominations are committed to multiplying disciples and planting churches. Some are committed to planting one church for every 1,000 people on the planet, with the vision of “no place left” where the Gospel is not known (see Rom. 15:23).

Today, Adventism is surrounded by many committed to this vision and serious about preparing people for the return of Jesus. While *Church Growth* was derailed with technocratic methods that pitted it against evangelism and church planting (which were encompassed by McGavran’s essential ideals)—and, *missional* has been popularized and misappropriated (as feared by proponents like Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch)—I believe the future effectiveness for a movement of Adventist church planting will depend on returning to Jesus’ methods of disciple-making, with the apostles’ frames for church-planting.

However, I realize, this will call for a major shake-up—for we have become very comfortable with Constantinian models of church and firmly entrenched in applying the messages of the three angels to modern and pre-modern thinking, rather than also addressing our postmodern, post-Christendom, and post-Christian-pagan environments.

The challenges and opportunities are enormous. It would be exciting to be starting the journey of church-planting today, but with the experiences of disciple-making, church-planting, and movement-building that many have blessed me with over the decades.

# FEATURE ARTICLES

KEVIN HALL  
**LEADERSHIP MODELING: CHRISTIAN  
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT  
THROUGH MENTORING AS INFORMED  
BY SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY**

**Abstract:** Leadership development is essential to training up healthy, effective leaders. Christian leaders should be intentionally influencing others to acquire, reinforce, and translate proper leadership character and behaviors into effective Christian leadership. Albert Bandura’s social learning theory serves as a guide for leaders to effectively develop others; this learning occurs by observation through modeling. Modeling leadership in relationship with others is a key approach towards developing leaders. This article presents a leadership development strategy that is both biblically situated and scientifically informed.

**Keywords:** *leadership development, social learning theory, mentoring*

## **Introduction**

Leadership is a social science. It is fundamentally “an observable pattern of actions and behaviors” (Kouzes & Posner, 2016, p. 49). Therefore, one can learn to lead and develop as a leader. For leaders, the development of others is “the highest calling of leadership” (Maxwell, 1995, p. 107). Leaders should be growing and developing themselves, as well as growing and developing others (Fletcher, 2018).

Leadership is distinctly Christian when directed and informed through a biblical worldview, as Christian leaders lead from biblical, Christian convictions (Mohler, 2012). Leadership development was a high priority for Jesus; He was intentional in developing disciples and sending them out. Leadership development was a cornerstone of Paul’s ministry, as well (Plueddemann, 2009). Like Jesus and Paul, the best leaders develop others, serving as “role models for followers to emulate” (Avolio, 1999, p. 43). Role-model leaders pro-

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vide more than an example to imitate as they develop others by modeling in relationship, or mentoring. Mentoring is a non-negotiable responsibility of successful leadership (Finzel, 2007).

Leadership development is an intentional process of influencing established and potential leaders to acquire, reinforce, and translate proper leadership character and behaviors into effective leadership (adapted from Malphurs & Mancini, 2004). To best develop leaders, leaders should focus on influencing one's character and behaviors. Mentoring is a key means to developing other's character and competency (Fletcher, 2018). A strategy towards this end is needed to properly guide leadership development. Utilizing social learning theory to inform a leadership development strategy helps identify principles for leaders to follow, allowing them to effectively develop others. It suggests a strategy focused on developing leaders through modeling through relationships.

This article will examine how leadership development can occur through proper modeling, as informed by social learning theory. First, an understanding of social learning theory explains how most learning occurs by observing a proper model. Then, biblical examples show modeling in relationship as an effective and instrumental way to develop others. Next, the mentor must recognize the need to personally develop into the model. This will ideally influence others to become the type of leader that the mentor desires to develop. Finally, aspects of a leadership development strategy informed by social learning theory provide suggestions for developing leaders through modeling in relationship.

## Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's social learning theory explains that learning can occur through observation. Bandura states that "most human behavior is learned by observation through modeling" (Bandura, 1977, p. 22; 1986, p. 47). Following this understanding of learning, the role model in leadership development is "incredibly important to achieving one's full developmental potential" (Avolio, 2005, p. 37). Learning through imitating is one of the most innate learning styles (McConnell, 2018). Greg Ogden (2019) argues that modeling is "the most significant learning dynamic" and is "where the real instruction occurs" (p. xiii). People seek a demonstration, not just an explanation because one learns first by association before understanding through explanation (Coleman, 2006). As a leader models leadership, leadership development takes place in the observer's life.

Social learning theory involves four subprocesses. These four interrelated steps are attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1971; Manz & Sims, 1981; Wood & Bandura, 1989). *Attention* involves attention to

and recognition of the model's behavior. *Retention* comprises remembering the observation and retaining it meaningfully. *Reproduction* means that one can put together an actionable response and has the capabilities and skill to produce the action. *Motivation* comprises reinforcement that either keeps one from certain actions or incentivizes one toward specific behaviors.

For leadership development, attention occurs when one acquires the behavior through observing the model. Retention and motivation occur by reinforcing the behavior for it to be memorable and desirable for imitation. Reproduction occurs when one translates the desired behavior into effective leadership. Neuroscience helps explain this learning process, which recognizes the validity of other learning theories, such as experiential learning, yet remains distinct.

### *Benefits in Relation to Neuroscience*

The “chameleon effect” is an example that helps explain how one learns from observation. This effect describes how we imitate others’ postures, body movements, and facial expressions through our observation and interactions with them (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). Researchers found that “the act of perceiving another person’s behavior creates a tendency to behave similarly” (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999, p. 893). Imitation from observation occurs unconsciously and unintentionally (Brown & Strawn, 2012). This imitation learning occurs because we understand the implications of others’ behavior as our brains create “an action simulation of the behaviors we are observing (as if we were doing the same thing ourselves)” (Brown & Strawn, 2012, p. 115). Research shows that mirror neurons in the brain code together the acts one observes in a similar manner as the acts one performs (Brown & Strawn, 2012; McConnell, 2018). Therefore, observational learning takes place in the same way as performing the desired behavior. One learns from observing the behaviors that one will imitate.

One benefit of a social learning theory-informed leadership development strategy is that learning is streamlined. One does not need to spend extra time learning and relearning by executing a behavior or task in direct experience. Bandura’s theory explains that

virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experiences can occur on a vicarious basis through observation of other people’s behavior and its consequences for them. Man’s capacity to learn by observation enables him to acquire large, integrated units of behavior by example without having to build up the patterns gradually by tedious trial and error. (Bandura, 1971, p. 2; also see Wood & Bandura, 1989; Davis & Luthans, 1980)

Behavioral learning and change can occur “without the learner actually performing the behavior or directly experiencing the consequences” (Manz & Sims, 1981). While both a place for formal educational learning and a need to imitate and implement effective leadership behavior exist, one can build developmental learning base through observation.

### *Distinctions in Relation to Experiential Learning*

Some, however, argue that a primary way to learn is through experiential learning. Experiential learning expert David Kolb (2015) argues that “direct sense experience and in-context action” is the primary source of learning (p. xviii). Thus, in this view, successful leaders develop primarily through lessons learned through experience, such as learning from on-the-job experience (McCall, Lomardo, & Morris, 1988). John Kotter (1986) suggests that successful managers develop over a long period and through varied experiences. In this way, one learns from personal successful or failed actions (i.e., trial-and-error). Learning thus occurs when change in the individual reflects on a direct experience, developing new abstractions and applications (Atin, 1999).

A social learning theory-informed development strategy does not disregard learning through direct experience. Instead, it recognizes experiential learning as one way to learn, while explaining that it is not the only or most effective learning method (Davis & Luthans, 1980). It also does not deny that God uses successes and failures to shape and grow leaders (Fletcher, 2018), nor deny that one can learn from making mistakes while leading (Maxwell, 2007). While the social learning theory-informed strategy relies on learning from failure and mistakes, this learning is gained by observing the model and the subsequent consequences of the model’s trial and error. Unlike experiential learning, which implies that one has no need for a teacher since learning rests within the student, social learning relies on a model as teacher (Atin, 1999). One learns “a wide variety of behaviors and skills much more efficiently and safely than would be possible through painful trial and error, or even through direct instruction and reinforcement” (Oman & Thoresen, 2003, p. 153). Thus, the observer benefits from the model’s previous and ongoing learning, allowing the observer to learn effective leadership in an expedited fashion.

Another way social learning theory uses experience is through its reinforcement of behavior. It explains that learning can occur through direct experiences, where consequences to one’s actions reinforce and inform correct behaviors (Bandura, 1971). In this way, one learns what one must do to gain beneficial outcomes or avoid punishing ones (Bandura, 1971). Social learning theory differs from experiential learning, though, as behaviors can be regulated not only by “directly experienced consequences from external sources,”



but also by “vicarious reinforcement and self-reinforcement” (Bandura, 1971, p. 10; see also Manz & Sims, 1981). Learning can happen without external consequences as “most behavior is not controlled by immediate external reinforcement” (Bandura, 1971, p. 3; see also Davis and Lutans, 1980). Unlike experiential learning, social learning theory differentiates between learning a behavior and performing/imitating the behavior (Bandura, 1971). Behavior can be learned vicariously through observation without enacting the behavior.

One learns a behavior before performing it (Bandura, 1971; Kouzes & Posner, 2016). Additionally, one learns most behaviors through the influence of an example or model; this learning can occur deliberately or inadvertently (Bandura, 1971; Shehata, Hopmann, Nord, & Höijer, 2015). Reinforcement is considered facilitative rather than necessary, as other factors can influence learning besides response consequences (Bandura, 1971; Manz & Sims, 1981). While reinforcement may increase the probability of reproducing the observed behavior, “a good deal of imitative learning can occur without any reinforcers either to the model or to the observer” (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963, pp. 10–11; see also Bandura, 1971). Extrinsic reinforcement is unnecessary, as observational learning can occur through the modeled behavior and accompanying cognitive activities (Bandura, 1971; Aronfreed, 1968). Therefore, while one can learn from the consequences of unguided actions, a good model is a much better teacher, providing a shorter learning process (Bandura, 1971).

Social learning theory acknowledges the important role of extrinsic feedback but provides other forms of reinforcement influences that have an effect (Bandura, 1971; Manz & Sims, 1981). Additional conditions of influence that affect people include the experiences or consequences of personal actions, the observed consequences of others, and the reinforcement one self-creates (Bandura, 1971; Davis & Luthans, 1980). Influence from observing others’ consequences is called “vicarious reinforcement.” Vicarious reinforcement comes as “vicarious punishment” when negative consequences are observed and “vicarious positive reinforcement” when desirable outcomes are observed (Bandura, 1971, pp. 24–25; see also Malouff & Rooke, 2008). Self-created reinforcement is called “self-reinforcement.” Self-reinforcement may come through self-esteem, self-evaluation, a positive self-concept, self-reward, self-direction, self-motivation, or self-encouragement (Bandura, 1971; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Social learning research has shown that one can successfully model self-reinforcement for a learner (Bandura, 1971).

In social learning theory, reinforcement serves “informative and incentive functions” (Bandura, 1971, p. 3). Therefore, within the theory, reinforcement functions in attention and retention subprocesses as informative and motivation as incentive. Observational learning translates into action when positive

incentives are present (Bandura, 1971; Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Chan, 2005). The anticipation of reinforcement can also help retain and provide motivation regarding the observed behavior (Bandura, 1971). Without direct personal experience of an action or direct personal reinforcement, one can learn and later imitate behaviors through observing models in action.

## Biblical Modeling

While Bandura did not develop social learning theory from a biblical perspective, the Bible has examples of leadership development that illustrate the later-developed social science theory. Jesus is a prime example of someone teaching by modeling through relationship (Mark 3:13–15). Even when teaching large crowds, Jesus mentored His twelve disciples and intentionally showed them how to live (Blanchard & Hodges, 2008; Malphurs & Mancini, 2004). Chuck Lawless (2011) points out, “Jesus told His disciples to make disciples, and He modeled for them how to do that” (p. 33). He called them to follow Him in relationship and then spent quality time with them, sharing life (Lawless, 2011). He modeled the behaviors He wanted His disciples to learn (Putman, 2010). Longenecker (1995) argues that the disciples were to be with Jesus to become like Him; through this relational time with Him, they grew conceptually, experientially, emotionally, spiritually, and practically.

The book of Hebrews gives another example of observational learning through modeling. The writer says we imitate those who are strong leaders of the faith. Hebrews 13:7 states, “Remember your leaders who have spoken God’s word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith” (CSB). First, the writer exhorted one to μνημονεύετε, which translates to “remember.” The verb means to recall from memory, “but without necessarily the implication that persons have actually forgotten” (Louw & Nida, 1996, p. 436). This remembering shows a time of attention and retention to recall the information learned. Social learning theory explains that one can learn and store behaviors for future action. Bandura writes that “from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action” (Bandura, 1977, p. 22). The Hebrews writer instructed his audience to bring back to memory what they previously learned.

The writer of Hebrews calls the audience to recall more than just verbal instruction. He says to ἀναθεωροῦντες, translated to mean “carefully observe.” One is to consider and think back on what has been observed (Louw & Nida, 1996). The observation was of the leader’s ἐκβασιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς, the “outcome” or “result” of the leader’s life (Louw & Nida, 1996, p. 637, 781). The word ἀναστροφῆς, translated as “of their lives,” means of

the leader's "behavior," namely the way they conduct themselves, with a focus on overt daily behavior (Louw & Nida, 1996, p. 503). The writer then calls the audience to μιμησθε, which translates to "imitate," that is, to behave in the same manner (Louw & Nida, 1996, p. 508). Thomas Schreiner explains that remembering leaders "doesn't just mean recalling their words, for their instruction was matched by their lives" (Schreiner, Köstenberger, & Alexander, 2015, p. 416). The writer of Hebrews urges his audience to put into action the same type of behavior they have learned by observing their leaders.

Paul recognized and encouraged imitation of what his audience observed in a desirable model. He also called others to imitate his example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1). Paul exhorted the church at Philippi to "join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do" (Phil. 3:17, NIV). He behaved in specific ways to be a model for followers to imitate (2 Thess. 3:7-9). Titus' teaching and behavior reflected on Paul, as his actions imitated Paul (2 Tim. 2:7-8; Marshall & Payne, 2009).

Paul's mentorship of Timothy is another a strong example of his modeling in relationship (1 Tim. 1:2, 18; 2 Tim. 1:2; 2:1; 3:10-11). In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul exhorted Timothy to be a model to others. He said that through Timothy's life, specifically "his speech, conduct, love, faith and purity," Timothy showed himself as "an example" (NASB). The word τύπος translated to "example," means "a model of behavior as an example to be imitated" (Louw & Nida, 1996, p. 591). This life imitation occurred in Timothy because he learned from and followed Paul's example as a desirable model. He observed and imitated Paul's teaching, conduct, aim in life, faith, patience, love, steadfastness, persecutions, and sufferings (2 Tim. 3:10-11). Leaders develop others by demonstrating character and competency, allowing others to follow what they see and hear (Phil. 4:9).

## Personal Development

A social learning theory-informed leadership development strategy evokes leaders' need to model appropriate and desired behaviors and traits. One implication of the theory for leadership development emphasizes leaders' prerequisite to exemplify the desired behavior (Allen, 2007). As role models, leaders need to behave in how they want followers to learn to behave (House, 1976). The leader must develop him/herself into the type of leader that s/he desires to be modeled. Blanchard and Hodges explain, "Effective leadership starts on the inside. Before you can hope to lead anyone else, you have to know yourself" (Blanchard & Hodges, 2008, p. 20). Thus, for leaders to develop others through modeling in mentorship, the leader must first spend time on personal development.

A leadership development strategy must first start with the development of a model. While Jesus developed the disciples to carry on His ministry, He prioritized time to go out alone to be with the Father (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). While Paul intentionally developed leaders to carry on the mission of spreading the Gospel, his leadership development approach first included his personal development to “serve as a role model to all” and be “worthy of imitation” (Ledbetter, Banks, & Greenhalgh, 2016, p. 124; see also 1 Cor. 4:16 and 2 Thess. 3:7–9). Leaders need to develop themselves so that they are worthy of observation and imitation.

Personal development is an important first step because observations of and experiences with the leader will be highly influential in the observer’s development. This influence occurs because “people become the leaders they observe” (Kouzes & Posner, 2016, p. 156). In his Gospel, Luke says that one who is fully trained will be like his teacher (Luke 6:40). Kouzes and Posner (2016) argue that exemplary leadership models are necessary because one must be able to see exemplary leadership in action to learn to produce it. Leaders will produce what they model, and they will model who they are.

Personal development must focus on value development. The social learning-informed leadership development strategy focuses on modeling proper observable behaviors. One’s core values guide decisions and actions (Kouzes & Posner, 2016; Putman, 2010). Values are the beliefs, standards, ethics, and ideals that drive a leader (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). They define one’s character and determine one’s behavior (Blanchard & Hodges, 2008; Covey, 2013; Toomer, Caldwell, Weitzenkorn, & Clark, 2018). Leaders grow outwardly as they grow inwardly, as developing one’s personal convictions and values produce leadership from inside out (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Maxwell, 2019). Warren Bennis (2009) says that “until you truly know yourself, strengths and weaknesses, know what you want to do and why you want to do it, you cannot succeed in any but the most superficial sense of the word” (p. 34). Leaders cannot effectively lead and develop others until they first identify and develop their own values.

Leadership is about influencing people by translating vision and values into “understandable and attainable acts and behaviors” (Ledbetter et al., 2016, pp. 8–9). Leaders are most influential when their beliefs and behaviors align (Stanley, 1999, 2003). They build credibility by being congruent and consistent when their values guide character and actions that match (Bennis & Goldsmith, 2010; Malphurs & Mancini, 2004; Haley, 2013; Maxwell, 2019). Credibility matters and is a crucial characteristic of a leader’s ability to influence others (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Malphurs & Mancini, 2004). To credibly model the right behavior with the right character, the leader must first develop the right values.

Leaders should work on their people skills as they build relationships. Leadership is fundamentally a relationship between the leader and the follower (Kouzes & Posner, 2016, 2017; Malphurs & Mancini, 2004). Thus, leadership requires the development of relationships (Maxwell, 1998; Wilkes, 1998). If leaders do not genuinely care about others, they will neither lead well nor develop others into effective leaders. The adage is true: they do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. Good leaders connect with others (Maxwell, 1998, 2004). Leadership should be based on personal relationships characterized by trust and strengthened into intimate relationships (Schein & Schein, 2018). Lingenfelter (2008) states, “The relational leader builds trust and influences followers through integrity of character and depth of relationship” (p. 111). To best model within relationships, leaders must develop their relationship abilities.

Proponents of social learning assert that leaders who do not model the desired behavior undermine efforts to effect lasting change (Allen, 2007). The leader’s modeling and behavior must be attractive and credible to the observer (Brown, Traviño, & Harrison, 2005; Bass & Bass, 2008). Mentors need to be self-aware as they serve as role models for their protégés (Bass & Bass, 2008). Leaders must know where they need to develop personally before they develop others. The central premise of Avolio and Gardner’s work on authentic leadership development is that leadership is developed in followers through the leader’s self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive modeling (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Once a leader has developed character, credibility, and competencies worthy of teaching, s/he can take the next step towards effectively modeling for others’ development.

## **Leadership Development**

Social learning theory prompts a leader’s development strategy to focus on modeling within relationship. This development strategy is intentional and shapes the character and behavior of the observer. Through this mentoring strategy, leaders influence behavior acquisition through attention. They reinforce behavior to affect retention and impact motivation. Finally, the model translates behavior for reproduction. In this way, mentoring in relationship fulfills the four main subprocesses associated with social learning theory.

### *Modeling in Relationship*

A leadership development strategy informed by social learning theory focuses on modeling behavior for potential leaders. Often, the lack of leadership development is due to a missing strategy rather than a lack of potential leaders. Leaders often do not immediately recognize the leadership potential

around them (Fletcher, 2018). Many times, leaders are already present and willing to learn but need someone with a strategy to develop them. Leaders should mentor and develop from this “emerging leadership pool” (Finzel, 2007, p. 181). One should hope to develop these potential leaders because leadership is learnable (Bass & Bass, 2008; Bennis & Goldsmith, 2010; Hughes, Beatty, & Dinwoodie, 2014; Kouzes & Posner, 2016). All people have untapped leadership potential (Tichy & Cohen, 1997). Because leadership can be learned, as it is “an observable set of skills and abilities” rooted in one’s behavior (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, p. 118; Kouzes & Posner, 2016), one can observe and learn effective leadership behaviors from a strong leadership model.

This modeling happens within relationship. Social learning informs this area of strategy, demonstrating that learning takes place among and through other people (Gherardi, Nicolini, & Odella, 1998). Leadership is relational (Burns, 2010); it is about people and thus exists in relationship (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2016). From a biblical worldview, God created people for relationship (Gen. 2:18; Jer. 24:7; James 2:23; also see Ogden, 2019). Don Howell (2003) says, “Biblical leadership is people-oriented” (p. 3; see also 1 Peter 5:2; Maxwell, 2019; Dockery, 2011). It is about building people (Fletcher, 2018). Without people, there can be no influence and thus no leadership (Malphurs & Mancini, 2004; Maxwell, 1998). Leadership is a relationship, and through the relationship, a leader develops others into leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Wright, 2009; Putman, 2010).

Modeling in relationship requires the initiation of connection before leading (Maxwell, 2019). Bruce Avolio (2005) says, “A basic lesson in leadership development is that one should try to know one’s followers before attempting to develop them into leaders” (p. 9). Leadership development begins with starting a relationship and getting to know each other (Maxwell, 2008). A biblical example is Paul’s close relationship with Timothy as a means for imitation, a key element of his leadership development method (Marshall & Payne, 2009). Modeling in leadership development influences others in relationship with them.

### *Investing with Intention*

Leadership development is an intentional process. Developing other leaders does not happen by chance. Tichy and Cohen (1997) recognize this need for intentionality and explain that great companies are deliberate, taking every opportunity to promote and encourage leadership at all levels, with top leaders personally committed to developing other leaders. Even when informed by a learning theory that asserts learning from observation, leaders should be deliberate and purposeful in their modeling. Modeling in relationship takes conscious, willful effort.

A leadership development strategy informed by social learning theory implies an investment on behalf of the leader. Leadership development takes time and resources (Maxwell, 2008; Tichy & Cohen, 1997). Lawless (2011) explains that “mentoring is costly” in the same way that one prioritizes spending time and money (pp. 24–25). Mentoring takes a willing investment of time to build relationships and see the results of the efforts put into leadership development (Longenecker, 1995). Because developing leaders requires a commitment to investing time and resources, a leader can develop only a few people at a time (Maxwell, 1995; Elmore, 2009).

### *Character Toward Behavior*

Leadership development influences learning character and behavior. A social learning theory-informed leadership development strategy involves continual learning and growth. Both the leader as model and the observer in relationship need to intentionally continue to learn. Leadership is a lifelong, continuous learning process (Ledbetter et al., 2016; McConnell, 2018). This lifetime learning includes personal growth, not only leadership skill development (Maxwell, 1995). As part of leadership development, the leader should model his or her own personal plans for growth while teaching and developing the potential leader’s personal plans for growth (Maxwell, 1995). Leaders should model regular learning, as the best leaders are constantly learning (Kouzes & Posner, 2016). When a leader fails to continue learning and growing, the leader jeopardizes influence on others.

Andy Stanley warns that without continual character development, one’s natural talent will eventually outpace one’s character (Stanley, 2003). When one’s character does not keep up with one’s talent, the pressures of success and exertion of power based on personal abilities begin to guide decisions and behaviors rather than foundational values. A leader’s character is not just a one-time pre-requisite, but an “ongoing context of the leader’s life” (Clarke, 2013, p. 183). It is character that “possesses the staying power and impact potential necessary for a lasting legacy” (Howell, 2003). Leaders cannot develop character in others if they do not already possess the character they wish to teach (Lawless, 2011; Maxwell, 2008).

Continued learning and growth compel leaders toward a place where they can lead from eminence, with a distinguished reputation as a great leader. Social learning theory asserts, “Whether or not a model is attractive, competent, and successful contributes to the overall probability of that model’s behavior being imitated” (Manz & Sims, 1981, p. 105; see also Bandura, 1977). It allows developing leaders a more significant margin for development. John Maxwell’s first law of leadership is the Law of the Lid, which states that “lead-

ership ability determines a person's level of effectiveness" (Maxwell, 1998, pp. 1, 5–7). Followers of a leader can only grow to the same level or those below the leader. As a leader's ability and effectiveness grow, the potential of those she leads also expands. Development and growth raise the level of a mentor's ability and effectiveness, and thus a mentee's potential.

A leadership development strategy informed by social learning theory involves learning reciprocation. Leaders learn from those with whom they are in a modeling relationship. Good mentors instruct and model competent leadership for their mentees to observe; they also observe the developing leader as he attempts to replicate what has been modeled (Malphurs & Mancini, 2004). Leaders learn where to adapt the strategy to meet the developing leader's needs through observing the developing leader. Effective leaders "adapt their behavior to meet the needs of their followers and the particular environment" (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2015, p. 98). As mentor and mentee observe each other, they learn from each other. Brown and Strawn (2012) explain that reciprocal imitation is a critical factor in development, as "we are formed and reformed by observing and imitating one another" (p. 117). As the mentor and mentee engage each other in an ongoing personal relationship, they help each other grow (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Lingenfelter, 2008).

### *Acquire Through Attention*

Leaders influence the acquisition of proper behavior through modeling in a way that allows high observational attention. Social learning theory informs the leadership development strategy to involve teaching desirable, effective behaviors. A necessary starting point for a mentoring relationship is attraction (Elmore, 2009); leaders are attractive as they provide desirable behaviors to the learner. Attractiveness of the model influences the learner's attentional processes observing the model and the extent to which the learner gains the modeled behavior (Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Chan, 2005). Leaders must show leadership attractiveness to the potential leader. Modeling involves a motivated attempt to resemble another person who possesses characteristics that one seeks to acquire (Bronfenbrenner, 1958). The model's "attractiveness is an important means of channeling observer attention to the model" (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). In social learning, the observed behavior is learned when attention is focused on the model and the modeled behavior (Brown et al., 2005; Wood & Bandura, 1989). Bandura explains, "The functional value of the behaviors displayed by different models is highly influential in determining which models will be closely observed and which will be ignored" (Bandura, 1971, p. 7; see also Bandura, 1977; Manz & Sims, 1981).

Not only do leaders need to display desirable behaviors, but they also need



to display the necessary leadership qualities. People will want to model after those with attractive, winsome qualities over those who lack appealing, pleasing characteristics (Bandura, 1971; Kram, 1988). Therefore, the leader attracts and can effectively develop potential leaders by modeling and teaching appropriate, effective behaviors.

A leadership development strategy informed by social learning theory includes providing a positive environment for leadership development. Leaders should create a leadership culture in order to create a leadership pipeline (Fletcher, 2018). Modeling leadership is part of the process for creating an appealing leadership development climate (Kouzes & Posner, 2016). Potential leaders are attracted to leaders who use modeling to influence (Clinton, 2012). Kouzes and Posner (2016) explain, “When there is a rich culture of leadership in an organization, leaders emerge, grow, and succeed. They prosper and contribute because they get the care and attention they need to become exemplary” (pp. 181–182). Leaders should provide a safe and effective environment in which to learn.

Therefore, leadership development is a product of a leadership-development culture and a mechanism for creating the culture (Fletcher, 2018). A positive environment (i.e., conducive to leadership growth) will attract leaders and provide a culture in which potential leaders thrive (Kouzes & Posner, 2016). Furthermore, a leadership culture reproduces the patterns of thinking and behaviors among leaders and followers within the leadership culture (Malphurs & Mancini, 2004). Strong leadership-developing leaders are role models who help create a mindset that developing others is what leaders do (Tichy & Cohen, 1997).

### *Reinforce for Retention*

The leadership development strategy reinforces observed behavior to effect retention. A leadership development strategy informed by social learning theory calls for further instruction. Describing the learner's desired behaviors facilitates retention (Bryant & Fox, 1995; Decker, 1984; Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Chan, 2005). Leaders should be aware of the need to verbalize and explain behaviors to best reinforce them properly. When one learns from observing a behavior, he may or may not consciously learn the value guiding the behavior. Also, there may be times when a proper behavior results in a negative consequence. Here, one may be discouraged from pursuing a behavior that has resulted in an adverse consequence, as people are most likely to adopt modeled behaviors that produce rewarding and successful effects (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

For example, a leader with values forming good character resulting in right

actions may model doing the right thing, even when the resulting consequences are not desirable. Good leaders “can be counted on to do the right thing” as they demonstrate “high standards of ethical and moral conduct” (Avolio, 1999, p. 43). Yet, doing the right thing does not always result in positive external consequences. Leaders developing leaders through observational learning will facilitate thinking and decision-making skills if they “verbalize their thought processes in conjunction with their action strategies” (Bandura, 1986, pp. 74; see also p. 216, 465). Leaders can give further instruction or explanation for one’s modeled behavior.

Biblical examples show this aspect of modeling in relationship. Jesus followed up actions with verbal explanations as exemplified by His instruction after washing the disciples’ feet (John 13:5–17). He explained His actions and the values behind them. One may need to give instruction when the learner observes the developing leader’s wrong behavior. Jesus explained servant leadership when He observed the disciples arguing over who is the greatest (Luke 22:24–27). At other times, an explanation may be needed, as a modeled behavior should be avoided. This behavior avoidance was demonstrated when Paul gave a warning to the church at Corinth about Israel’s negative history (1 Cor. 10:1–11). We find another example of instruction on avoiding certain behaviors when Jesus pointed out the behavior the disciples observed from other leaders of the time. He said not to lord authority over others like the Greeks, who were the majority leaders in the Diaspora, but to lead by serving (Matt. 20:25–28; Mark 10:42–45). Reinforcing a proper response to observed behavior through further instruction helps teach the proper behavior.

A leadership development strategy of modeling in relationship suggests the need for leader vulnerability, as vulnerability aids in retention. A commitment to modeling demands a level of honesty and vulnerability, as modeling may prove embarrassing (Longenecker, 1995). One must have humility to share both strengths and weaknesses (Maxwell, 2019). The biblical worldview of man’s depravity (Rom. 3:9–18) points Christian leaders toward being self-aware and vulnerable when developing others. A leader can be authentic amid weakness because all are fallible (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:23). Part of being an authentic leader is being vulnerable and transparent (Avolio, 2005).

The mentee may observe an undesirable behavior and its consequences. Leaders must be honest about areas of challenge. Research confirms “the best leaders are active learners, never believing that they know it all” (Kouzes & Posner, 2016; Putman, 2010). Leaders must be mindful and self-aware in order to develop properly amid mistakes and shortcomings. While the observer may properly assess a shortcoming through “vicarious punishment,” a leader should still be honest and vulnerable to explain undesirable behavior.

Developing leaders takes courage to be vulnerable and requires a leader who is well-balanced without “a lot of ego problems, unresolved power needs and conflicted feelings about his or her own competence” (Tichy & Cohen, 1997, p. 193). Leaders must have the courage to admit mistakes and reinforce proper behavior. A fear of vulnerability often hinders potential mentors (Lawless, 2011). Kouzes and Posner (2006) explain trust as “the willingness to be vulnerable and open up to others even when doing so may risk real harm” (p. 75; see also Kirkman & Harris, 2017; Lencioni, 2002). Leaders who share mistakes facilitate development and foster relationships. When leaders use a mistake as a teachable moment, they “showcase their own personal growth, they legitimize the growth and learning of others; by admitting their own imperfections, they make it okay for others to be fallible, too. We also connect with people who share their imperfections and foibles” (Prime & Salib, 2014, n.p). A courageous leader who desires to develop strong, effective leaders will acknowledge the improper behaviors a mentee observes, regardless of the personal consequences. This vulnerable transparency and honesty ground the foundation for building relationships of trust (Avolio, 2005).

### *Reinforce for Motivation*

A leadership development strategy also reinforces observed behavior to impact motivation. A social learning theory-informed leadership development strategy points a leader to build trust. Trust in the modeling relationship allows learning to increase within the attractiveness of the model, the safety of a strong culture and effective environment to learn, and the reinforcement towards a desirability to reproduce the behavior. Trust is a key leadership competency (Covey & Merrill, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 2017) and the foundation of relationships (Covey, 1991; Wilkes, 1998). It is an important factor in building mentoring relationships, as it acts as the “social glue that binds human relationships” (Chand, 2018, p. 57; see also Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Maxwell 1995).

Trust comes from consistency as a leader’s consistency builds credibility, allowing people to trust him/her (Haley, 2013; Maxwell, 1995). Maxwell (2008) states, “Consistency is a crucial part of developing potential leaders. When we are consistent, our people learn to trust us” (p. 84). When a leader’s actions and words consistently match, credibility grows, thereby increasing the attractiveness of the model and reinforcing the model’s behaviors. People want to follow and learn from leaders they trust (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Wilkes, 1998). Once a person trusts the leader, one then can trust the person’s leadership (Maxwell, 2008, 2019). Trust facilitates one’s willingness to connect with and learn from the leader.

### *Translate for Reproduction*

The leadership development strategy translates observed behavior for reproduction of effective leadership. A social learning theory-informed leadership development strategy implies a process that develops leaders who then develop other leaders. As leaders model leadership development to develop others, the developed leader learns to develop leaders. Maxwell (1995) explains, “True success comes only when every generation continues to develop the next generation, teaching them the value and the method of developing the next group of leaders” (p. 188). Christian leadership involves training leaders who will develop other leaders to continue the ministry for generations to come (Malphurs & Mancini, 2004).

Therefore, a leadership strategy that models proper behavior requires leaders to focus on multiplication. Steve Saccone (2009) states, “It’s better to invest in a few who will reinvest in others than to invest in many who may never reinvest in anyone” (p. 186). Investing in developing leaders who develop leaders multiplies a leader’s influence and effectiveness (Maxwell, 1995, 1998). Mentoring correctly is about multiplying through reproduction, as the crux of a leadership development strategy through mentoring is to move the mentee to the role of mentor (Elmore, 1998; Lawless, 2011).

A leadership development strategy that includes multiplication of leaders shows the leader to be a visionary; this is a characteristic that sets leaders apart. Leaders are forward looking and drive others towards the future (Kouzes & Posner, 2016). They have foresight and create vision and direction for the future as a primary responsibility of their leadership (Finzel, 2007; Sanders, 2007). They think ahead and plan for the future. An essential aspect of visionary leadership is developing the next generation of leaders (Moon & Dathe-Douglass, 2015). Good leaders envision their leadership’s future and strive to develop other leaders to take over as successor (Finzel, 2007).

A social learning theory-informed leadership development strategy suggests that leaders share opportunities to lead. While social learning does not require imitation or a produced behavior for learning to occur, imitation exponentially increases retention and behavior reinforcement. Brown and Strawn explain, “What we imitate in others readily becomes part of our own behavior repertoire, shaping what we do and ultimately what kind of person we become” (Brown & Strawn, 2012, p. 79). Lingenfelter (2008) argues, “One cannot raise and empower leaders without creating opportunities for them to lead” (p. 122). Once a developing leader has learned from the leader’s modeling, the developing leader should be allowed to put behaviors into practice in order to strengthen future action.

Thus, a mentoring leadership development strategy results in the deploy-

ment of developed leaders. A major purpose for leaders' growth and development is to send them out (Fletcher, 2018). Developing reproducing leaders will naturally lead to releasing them. Yet, the mentor must take the initiative to let go and deploy the mentee, empowering followers and sending them out to do the same behaviors that the leader has done (Lingenfelter, 2008). Jesus set this example as He appointed a few to learn from Him by being with Him to deploy them (Mark 3:14–15; Ferguson & Bird, 2018). As the developing leaders grow and flourish, there comes an inevitable time to release them. A leadership development strategy must include a plan for deployment (Malphurs & Mancini, 2004).

## Conclusion

Leaders should pour into others, thereby developing leaders. Implementing a leadership development strategy extends a great leader's influence. As they intentionally model in relationship, others learn and grow. The development strategy shapes one's personal values, building character, and grows one's leadership behaviors, building competencies. Maxwell (2008) states, "Great leaders share themselves and what they have learned with the learners who will become tomorrow's leaders" (p. 35). Through modeling in relationship, the leader builds trust and demonstrates proper character and behavior of an effective leader.

Through the social learning theory-informed leadership development strategy, the potential leader attains all four categories governing social learning: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Through the developmental work of the leader, the leader demonstrates a developed leader to the mentee. The mentee observes developing leaders' desirable behavior and experiences the consequence, or product, first-hand as a developed leader. Therefore, as a leader sends out the developed leader, the new leader can be held accountable to imitate the relationship's leadership development strategy.

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ARNDT BÜSSING, LORETHY STARCK,  
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**WELL-BEING AND DIGITAL MEDIA  
USAGE TO STRENGTHEN THE FAITH  
OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS DURING  
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**Abstract:** In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emotional, spiritual, and social well-being of 1,036 German Seventh-day Adventists were analyzed; usage of the Church's digital media resources was also analyzed. This study found that older peoples' well-being was particularly high, and this group also benefited from digital media resources. The findings presented in this article may encourage Christian and non-Christian communities alike to further expand their digital media resources to provide helpful resources during the successive waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** *well-being, spirituality, media usage, digital services, digital media, COVID-19 pandemic*

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected event for all people—even for Adventists who expect the imminent return of Jesus, an event associated with sudden personal and systemic crises of an unprecedented nature (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2015; Matt. 24; Luke 21). However, no one expected that local church communities' diverse life would come to a complete halt within such a short time. The pandemic's full impact and subsequent lockdown on parishioner's emotional, social, and spiritual life remain unclear.

Vigilance for the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting assessment of the emotional, social, and spiritual vulnerability of the religious community is at the core of creating a resilient organization. Testing, evaluating, and promoting change and adapting according to the constantly changing conditions is clearly a leadership task. Leadership is a community-

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focused process of the whole Church (Bell, 2014); to connect all these processes is associated with the organization's fundamental meaning (Buchholz & Knorre, 2012). Acceptance and processing of the crisis, solution orientation, improvisational capacity (i.e., flexibility), adaptability, future planning, and competitiveness are fundamental principles of resilient organizations (Hofmann, 2015). Usage of digital and social media on all church levels is part of a community-focused leadership process.

Providing activities such as devotions, sermons, worship services, discussion circles, Bible lessons, and youth engagements are all part of such interactive processes. A strong initiative, flexibility, energy, and high ability of the leadership to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and emerge stronger is a good prerequisite. Changes that are carried out and operated by grassroots are considered a solid prerequisite also for the competitiveness (attractiveness to people) of a (local) church (Buchholz & Knorre, 2012).

Digital communication, which is presented in a wide range of avenues via the Internet, has experienced a rapid increase because of the COVID-19 pandemic. One example is Zoom, a video conference platform founded in 2011. In the first five months of 2020, Zoom tripled its stock market value (from €61.20 on January 2, 2020 to €155.50 on May 6, 2020) (Finanzen.net, 2020). These digital communication companies are tasked with digitally replacing analog, private, and professional communication channels during home office and contact restrictions.

However, this form of communication has consequences for our human community. Our living spaces are changing, as is how we get in touch and exchange ideas. Yet “the special thing about this form of communication is that the digital medium of the Internet simultaneously separates people and brings them closer together” (Grimm & Delfmann, 2017, p. 1). Closeness is achieved by overcoming the physical distance; however, we feel separated due to the lack of sensory perception experienced when we are physically together.

A communitarian system, such as the Adventist Church, is where spirituality is directly shaped and acted out through analog encounters. A community of faith presupposes a physical presence in the sense of holism, and it transforms lives through personal encounters and a common location—that is, a literal meeting place. Digital forms of encounter, therefore, present a significant challenge for the growth of Christian faith and the satisfaction of the worshipper, individually.

The aspects of digital communication, as Charbonnier (2018) collates from different perspectives—those of “sign theory, engineering sciences, sociology of technology in the form of action-theoretical, system-theoretical and practice-theoretical philosophical approaches” (p. 238)—must be understood in the realms of theory and practice. Only when the effect of digital communication is understood in the church context can it be used and controlled appropriately

and satisfactorily. Charbonnier (2018) concludes, “the digital paradigm . . . (has an impact) in the everyday life of the individual, as well as in the social process” (p. 250). Although digital communication standardizes “reality and, at the same time, enables individual development,” it also marks a new “section of the history of technology and culture,” which requires a “critique of digital reason and digital practice” (Charbonnier, 2018, p. 250). This is especially true in a church that focuses on its communication partners’ existential needs and holistic well-being. This begs the question: how does the increase in digitalization determine and influence social, individual, and spiritual satisfaction?

General media application has been a part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for over 90 years, focusing on sharing inspirational information with others. As one of the first Christian radio stations in Germany, the “Voice of Hope” has become a modern media outlet centered on serving people’s needs both inside and outside the Adventist Church. Worldwide, Adventists use digital media in administration and church life. Text messages, email, messenger services, satellite evangelism and mission, service broadcasts, and videoconferencing have been a part of everyday church life—even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this, the use of digital media during the pandemic was a natural transition.

During the time of severe restrictions on the individual, as well as social, economic, and religious life, Germans studied and analyzed how “such a massive crisis affects us, how we react to alternative approaches such as ‘digital care,’ and, above all, how our faith and hope prove themselves in such a time” (Naether, 2020). Thus, the following questions were brought into the foreground: (1) How do the restrictions on social and community life affect German Adventists’ emotional and social well-being, and what do the limitations mean for parishioners’ spiritual life? (2) Despite the social restrictions, is it possible to stay in touch with family, friends, and the community at large? (3) What is the significance of social media for the strengthening of faith in times of crisis? (4) Are older persons less supported by digital media compared to younger persons? (This aspect is relevant because some argue that the elderly are unduly challenged by digital technology and that, therefore, social media are a tool to connect mainly with the younger generation.)

In terms of parish life management during the COVID-19 pandemic, community-based leadership presents a real challenge. For persons in leadership positions at every church level, new challenges have arrived, namely: (1) how to keep in contact with church members, (2) how to encourage social connections within the local church/church community, even in times of distance, and (3) how to support church members’ spiritual and emotional well-being through direct contacts and digital media interactions that could strengthen their faith, even in times of fear and insecurity.

Christians have been left alone with their fears and worries within some denominations, their religious needs unmet by their churches. Some local communities have experienced limited or even suspended religious life (Sulkowski & Ignatowski, 2020). Sulkowski and Ignatowski (2020) performed qualitative interviews with religious leaders of various denominations; these interviews found that the decisions concerning the religious community practices (i.e., suspension of services, Bible studies, etc.) “depended on ecclesiology and the way the Church was managed” (p. 5).

It might also be that religious leaders’ personal view regarding their “function” in the community plays a role. There were several anecdotal comments from Catholic priests and parish members that some pastors/priests have missed their parish members as an “audience” for their ceremonies but were not as interested in staying in contact with them during the rest of the week (i.e., via phone calls, newsletters, etc.). These priests/pastors likely view themselves as an integral part of the community and may view themselves as important leaders (“shepherds”) of their community (“sheep”) who have to perform the religious ceremonies for their community to follow. Therefore, not only the leaders’ views are of relevance but also the community’s perception. In fact, the “pastoral constructions of meaning and purpose of belonging” (Parish, 2020, p. 5) may allow parish members to perceive themselves as a community connected by their living faith experiences, wherever they are and however they may meet—either virtually or in-person (Parish, 2020).

Using various digital media resources such as live streaming religious services, inspiration speeches given by religious leaders, opportunities for synchronous and asynchronous worship, and the establishment of virtual communities with their own rituals and forms of worship were becoming part of religious community life, even before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, considering the pandemic, churches have had to rely much more on digital media, and thus the understanding of community is shifting.

Despite this shift, peoples’ essential need to be in close direct contact with each other, perceive each other as tangible beings, and interact with others in their full physical, emotional, and spiritual presence remains crucial. In many cases, this need goes unmet.

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

Members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Germany were invited via email, social media, and announcements during church services to participate in an online survey. Before completing the anonymous survey, participants were informed about their free will to anonymously take part. No individual

data was collected or stored, and no IP addresses were saved.

Surveys were completed between April 29, 2020, and May 17, 2020 (19 days).

## Measures

### *Sociodemographic Data*

The questionnaire asked for participants' gender, age-range (e.g., less than 40 years, 41-60 years, older than 60 years), and whether they had personally experienced the COVID-19 virus. All these were optional responses.

### *Emotional Well-being*

Emotional well-being was assessed with the German language version of the WHO-Five Well-being Index (WHO-5) (Bech, Olsen, Kjoller, & Rasmussen, 2013). Representative items include statements such as, "I have felt cheerful and in good spirits," or "My daily life has been filled with things that interest me." Respondents were asked to rate the intensity of such feelings across the previous two weeks; responses were scored with a six-point grading scale, ranging from at no time (0) to all the time (5). In this study, we report both the mean values (ranging from 0 to 5) and the sum scores (ranging from 0 to 25). Scores less than 13 may indicate depressive states. The scale's internal consistency in this sample was good (Cronbach's alpha = .846).

### *Spiritual Well-being*

Spiritual well-being was assessed with five items.

1. "I feel close to God." (Taken from Lyn Underwood's Daily Spiritual Experience Scales, 2006)
2. "I felt alive and fulfilled in my spiritual life." (Taken from the Spiritual Dryness Scale, with a positive phrasing [Büssing, Günther, Baumann, Frick, & Jacobs, 2013; Büssing, Baumann, Jacobs, & Frick, 2016])
3. "I felt that my prayers were really answered." (Taken from the Spiritual Dryness Scale, with a positive phrasing [Büssing et al., 2013; Büssing et al., 2016])
4. "For the past 14 days, I have been hopeful for the day of the Lord (i.e., for the return of Jesus)." (Referring to a statement found in Luke 21:28 that Jesus brings natural crises into a positive connection with His return, an important topic for Adventists, see Fundamental Belief 25.)
5. "I felt comforted by God in my challenges, worries and fears." (Referring to a comment by Flebbe [2017] that crises can be faced with God's solidarity and support [Ps. 23:4; 2 Cor. 12:9])

Respondents were asked to rate the intensity of such feelings across the previous two weeks; responses were scored with a six-point grading scale, rang-

ing from *at no time* (0) to *all the time* (5). Here, both the mean values (ranging from 0 to 5) and the sum scores (ranging from 0 to 25) were reported. The scale's internal consistency in this sample is good (Cronbach's alpha = .837).

### *Social Well-being*

Social well-being was addressed with two survey items: "During the past two weeks I have had people with whom I could share joy and suffering," and "Even in the COVID-19 crisis, I have 'allowed' contact with people with whom I feel comfortable without restrictions." Respondents were asked to rate the intensity of such feelings across the previous two weeks; responses were scored with a six-point grading scale ranging from *at no time* (0) to *all the time* (5). Here, both the mean values (ranging from 0 to 5) and the sum scores (ranging from 0 to 25) were reported. The two-item scale's internal consistency in this sample is acceptable (alpha = .718).

A further item asked whether the church and/or local community could mitigate the consequences of contact restrictions. Because this item would significantly decrease the two-item scale's internal consistency, it was used as an informative item only.

### *Usage of Digital and Social Media*

We also wanted to determine digital and social media's influence on emotional, spiritual, and social well-being considering the contact restrictions during the COVID-19 crisis. During the pandemic, several local and regional church resources became available online. Teams made up of the local/district pastor and media-savvy church members mainly started the local resources. The Hope Media Center, a division of the Hope Channel television station (which belongs to the Adventist Church), broadcasts Bible studies and sermons every Saturday. During the time of lockdown, live services were streamed on Sabbath.

In the survey, we first asked participants about their usage of social media in several areas. The first item asked participants about their personal gain from Bible lessons and discussion groups, youth classes, religious classes, church services, etc. We then asked about their feelings when they contacted pastors, fellow parishioners, and their church/local church community. We also asked whether utilizing digital media resources resulted in a strengthening of faith, specifically sermons, devotions, services from local pastors, services from the Hope Channel or other pastors from their region/district/city, offers from Adventist Youth, and websites associated with the Adventist Church. Participants could score the frequency of their perceptions on a five-point scale from *never*, *seldom*, *sometimes*, *often*, and *regularly*. Data were

reported as mean scores. For some analyses, the 10 media usage items were combined to a sum-score factor termed “Benefit from digital media offers” (ranging from 0 to 40), with acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = .753). Participants also had the option to share individual resources they had found beneficial. For that purpose, the responses in the optional free-text fields were qualitatively analyzed.

### *Statistical Analyses*

Descriptive statistics, analyses of variance (ANOVA), cross-tabulation (Chi test), first-order correlations (Spearman rho), step-by-step regression analyses, and internal consistency analyses (Cronbach’s coefficient  $\alpha$ ) were computed with SPSS 23.0. Cluster analysis was performed with SPSS 25.0.

Given this study’s exploratory character, the significance level of ANOVA and correlation analyses were set at  $p < 0.05$ . Concerning classifying the strength of the observed correlations, we regarded  $r > .5$  as a strong correlation, an  $r$  between  $.3$  and  $.5$  as a moderate correlation, an  $r$  between  $.2$  and  $.3$  as a weak correlation, and  $r < .2$  as negligible or no correlation.

## **Findings**

### *Demographics*

In this sample of German Adventists ( $N=1,036$ ), the proportion of women and men was well-balanced (55% women, 45% men). Most were 40 to 60 years of age. Overall, the cohort was representative of the Adventist Church in Germany (Table 1). Of the respondents, 1.1% stated that they had experienced the COVID-19 virus themselves; 3.7% did not respond to this question.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Data of Adventists in This Sample ( $N=1036$ )*

		Adventists in this sample	Adventists in Germany
<b>Gender (%)</b>	Male	45	40
	Female	55	60
<b>Age group (%)</b>	< 40 years (%)	22	24
	40-60 years (%)	43	35
	> 60 years	35	43
<b>COVID-19 infection (%)</b>	No	95	-
	Yes	1	-
	No response	4	-



### Overall Well-being

Within the sample, social well-being scored highest, followed by spiritual well-being, and emotional well-being (Table 2). Female Adventists scored lower for emotional well-being, but did not significantly differ from men regarding spiritual and social well-being.

Concerning age, emotional and spiritual well-being was highest in older respondents and lowest in young respondents, while their social well-being was not significantly different (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Well-being in the Sample, Differentiated for Gender and Age Groups*

		Emotional well-being	Spiritual well-being	Social well-being
Range		0-25	0-25	0-10
All (sum score)	mean	16.60	17.52	7.57
	SD	5.08	5.48	2.68
All (mean score)	mean	3.31	3.50	3.79
	SD	1.01	1.09	1.34
<b>Gender</b>				
men	mean	3.42	3.54	3.85
	SD	0.97	1.08	1.28
women	mean	3.22	3.46	3.74
	SD	1.03	1.10	1.38
F value		10.56	1.31	1.68
p value		0.001	n.s.	n.s.
<b>Age groups</b>				
< 40 years	mean	3.06	3.09	3.85
	SD	0.98	1.13	1.25
40-60 years	mean	3.14	3.44	3.69
	SD	1.03	1.05	1.36
> 60 years	mean	3.68	3.82	3.87
	SD	0.89	1.00	1.35
F value		39.98	34.01	2.16
p value		<0.0001	<0.0001	n.s.

With respect to social well-being, 75% of respondents stated that they “mostly” or even “all the time” have had people with whom, in the last two weeks, they could share joy and suffering, while 14% had “none” or “from time to time” had experienced such support. Almost three-fourths (71%) stated they “mostly” or “all the time” had “allowed” contact with people with whom they felt comfortable without restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, while 20% had “none” or had such contacts from “time to time.” Over a third (36%) stated the consequences of the contact restrictions could be mitigated by the local church/church community “mostly” or even “all the time,” while 48% stated that these consequences could “not at all” or “from time to time” be mitigated by the Church.

Based on these three well-being variables, we performed a Z-valued two-step cluster analysis and found three clusters of well-being (Table 3). The sharpest differences were between Cluster 2 and Cluster 3, with high scores for all well-being dimensions in Cluster 2 (47%). Cluster 3 (18%) shows very low emotional well-being (indicating a depressive state), low spiritual well-being, and low social well-being. The respective scores of these variables were in an intermediate range within Cluster 1 (36%). Within these clusters, the proportion of women is significantly higher in Cluster 3 (64%, compared to 55% in the whole sample;  $p=0.015$ ,  $\chi^2$ ). Persons with higher age were found predominantly in Cluster 2 (48%) and less often in the problematic Cluster 3 (18%) ( $p<0.0001$ ,  $\chi^2$ ).

**Table 3**

*Cluster Types of Well-being in the Sample*

	Range of Scores	Cluster 1 (35.5%)	Cluster 2 (47.0%)	Cluster 3 (17.5%)	
<b>Emotional well-being</b>	0-25	16.67 ± 2.93	19.83 ± 3.21	8.60 ± 3.26	F=857.50 *
<b>Spiritual well-being</b>	0-25	15.19 ± 3.60	21.74 ± 21.74	10.81 ± 5.29	F=787.19 *
<b>Social well-being</b>	0-10	8.82 ± 3.13	11.31 ± 3.13	6.54 ± 3.70	F=159.46 *
<b>Media usage score</b>	0-40	16.26 ± 8.24	19.48 ± 8.65	14.00 ± 7.34	F=32.20 *

Results are mean scores ± SD; \*  $p<0.001$

### *Usage of Digital and Social Media*

As shown in Table 3, many respondents utilized digital media with personal gain in Bible lessons (59% “often” to “regularly”) and stated that it was good to have contacts with their pastor or other parishioners (61%) and the local church/church community (67%). However, only 35% participated with personal gain “often” or “regularly” in discussion groups, youth classes, religious classes, church services, etc., compared to 65% who “seldom” or “sometimes” participated in such activities. For gender, men participated with less personal gain than women in discussion groups, youth classes, religious classes, church services ( $F=5.0$ ,  $p=0.026$ ). Further, men experienced slightly less gain through their contact with their preacher or other parishioners ( $F=4.0$ ,  $p=0.046$ ). Older Adventists in particular ( $2.31 \pm 1.07$ ) participated with personal gain in discussion groups, youth classes, religious classes, church services, etc. when compared to the younger participants ( $1.98 \pm 0.91$ ), while those between 40 to 60 years of age scored in-between ( $2.20 \pm 1.05$ ) ( $F=3.4$ ,  $p=0.035$ ).

Which methods of digital media most strengthened the participants faith (Table 4)? Of most value were (digital) sermons/devotions/services from the local pastors (75% were strengthened “often” to “regularly”), (digital) sermons/devotions/services from the Hope Channel or other pastors (73%), (digital) sermons/devotions/services broadcasted from their region/district/city (62%), and websites of the Adventist Church and/or its entities (60%). Less relevant were (digital) sermons/devotions/services from the community conference (46%), and of lowest relevance within this adult age sample the (digital) offers from Advent Youth (34%).

The digital media resources from respondents’ respective region/district/city were of slightly stronger relevance for women than men ( $F=4.0$ ,  $p=0.046$ ), while for all other strengthening resources no significant gender-related differences were found. With respect to age, the most significant differences were between younger and older Adventists regarding viewing the Hope Channel, ( $F=10.2$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ), regional resources ( $F=4.8$ ,  $p=0.008$ ), and local pastors ( $F=3.7$ ,  $p=0.025$ ); these items were more faith-strengthening to older Adventists than to younger ones. In contrast, the (digital) offers from Adventist Youth were of relevance particularly for the younger respondents ( $2.49 \pm 1.09$ ) compared to those in the 40 to 60 years age bracket ( $2.19 \pm 1.09$ ) or those older than 60 ( $1.60 \pm 0.81$ ) ( $F=14.1$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ).

The “benefit from digital media offers” scores differed significantly between the three cluster types of well-being (Table 3). The highest benefit was found in Cluster 2, and the lowest in Cluster 3 (Cohen’s  $d = 0.66$ ).

**Table 4**  
*Responses to the Media Usage Items*

	Seldom %	Sometimes %	Often %	Regularly %	Mean Score (± SD)
<b>Participation via social media</b>					
Participated with personal gain in Bible lessons	18	24	21	38	2.8 ± 1.1
Participated with personal gain in discussion groups, youth classes, religious classes, church services etc.	30	34	20	15	2.2 ± 1.0
It was good for me to have contacts with my pastor or with parishioners	14	25	26	35	2.8 ± 1.1
It was good for me to have contacts with my community/ church	12	21	18	49	3.1 ± 1.1
<b>Strengthened by . . .</b> (Digital) sermons/devotions/ services from my local pastors	11	16	21	53	3.2 ± 1.0
(Digital) sermons/devotions/ services from my region / district / city from Hope TV or other pastors	9	19	23	50	3.1 ± 1.0
(Digital) sermons/devotions/ services from my region/ district/ city	16	22	21	41	2.9 ± 1.1
(Digital) sermons/devotions/ services from my community conference	22	32	22	24	2.5 ± 1.1
(Digital) offers from Adventist Youth	34	33	16	18	2.2 ± 1.1
Websites of the Church and/ or its entities	18	21	18	42	2.9 ± 1.2

### *Qualitative Analysis of Individual Resources*

Nearly all participants shared positive and encouraging resources which can be put into the following categories.

- *Personal relationship with God*: includes themes of shelter in God, trust in God, Jesus as a friend, personal Bible study, prayer, reflection, and reading Christian literature.
- *Personal beliefs*: includes themes of God having everything in His hand, Jesus's Second Coming, and anticipating the New Earth.
- *Community media*: includes newsletters and emails from pastors and church leaders, and church services beyond the local congregation/region (i.e., via Hope Channel or other communities).
- *Community within the community*: includes prayer groups, house churches, discussion groups, local services, sermons and devotions, Bible classes, youth events, mail and messenger services, and video sharing.
- *Social community*: includes partnerships, family, friends, neighbors, friends of faith, phone calls, and contact via digital media.
- *Neighborhood help*: includes helping and care services for neighbors.
- *Silence and tranquility*: includes enjoying silence and tranquility, relaxation, and realignment.
- *Leisure time*: includes experiencing nature, walks, cycling, jogging, and enjoying hobbies.
- *Rationalism*: includes knowing that the crisis is limited and will come to an end.

### *Correlations Between Digital Media Usage and Well-being*

Emotional and spiritual well-being are strongly interconnected, while social well-being was moderately related to emotional well-being and weakly with spiritual well-being (Table 5). The digital media resources were marginally to weakly related to these well-being dimensions. *Emotional well-being* was weakly associated with the strengthening of faith from the Hope Channel or other pastors, while all other resources were only marginally related (Table 5). *Spiritual well-being* was weakly associated with the respondent's participation (with personal gain) in discussion groups, youth classes, religious classes, church services etc., with the perception that it was good to stay in contact with the local church/church community and with the strengthening of faith from regional and local offers, specifically from the Hope Channel or other pastors (Table 5). *Social well-being* was weakly associated with participating (with personal gain) in Bible lessons and the perception that it was good to maintain contact with local church/church community. All other variables were only marginally associated with social well-being.

The “benefit from digital media offers” score was weakly associated with spiritual well-being and marginally associated with emotional and social well-being (Table 5).

**Table 5**  
*Correlations Between Well-being Aspects and Usage of Media*

	Emotional well-being	Spiritual well-being	Social well-being
Emotional well-being (WHO-Five)	1.000		
Spiritual well-being	.513**	1.000	
Social well-being	.358**	.268**	1.000
<b>Participation via social media</b>			
Participated with personal gain in Bible lessons	.097	.143**	.263**
Participated with personal gain in discussion groups, youth classes, religious classes, church services etc.	.158**	.251**	.039
It was good for me to have contacts with my pastor or with parishioners	.115**	.189**	.181**
It was good for me to have contacts with my community/church	.168**	.202**	.244**
<b>Strengthened by . . .</b>			
(Digital) sermons/devotions/services from my local pastors	.187**	.264**	.130**
(Digital) sermons/devotions/ services from my region/district/city from Hope TV or other pastors	.207**	.248**	.107**
(Digital) sermons/devotions/services from my region /district/city	.177**	.287**	.111**
(Digital) sermons/devotions/services from my community conference	.158**	.158**	.108**
(Digital) offers from Adventist Youth	.102	.004	.035
Websites of the Church and/or its entities	.107	.186**	.194**
Benefit from digital media usage	.156**	.208**	.156**

\*\* p<0,001 (Spearman rho)

### *Predictors of Emotional and Spiritual Well-being*

Next, we aimed to clarify the predictors of emotional, spiritual, and social well-being, and thus performed step-by-step regression analyses. We included age cohorts and the “benefit from digital media” factor, which combined the 10 media usage items. As shown in Table 6, emotional well-being was predicted best ( $R^2=.32$ ) by spiritual and social well-being (which both would predict 29% of variance), and further impact of the “benefit from digital media” (which would add further 2.5% of explained variance). Spiritual well-being was predicted by four variables ( $R^2=.29$ ), emotional well-being (24% explained variance), “benefit from digital media” (adding 2.5% of variance explanation), age (adding further 2%), and social well-being (adding < 1% of explained variance). Social well-being was predicted with weak explanatory power ( $R^2=.15$ ) by emotional well-being (13%), as well as by “benefit from digital media,” spiritual well-being, and age (adding 3% of variance explanation).

**Table 6**  
*Stepwise Regression Analyses to Predict Adventists Emotional and Spiritual Well-being (Including the Influencing Variable “Benefit from Digital Media Usage”)*

	Beta	T	p
Dependent variable: emotional well-being (WHO5) Modell 3: $F=149.6$ , $p<0.0001$ ; $R^2=.32$			
(constant)		7.671	<.0001
Spiritual well-being	.379	13.360	<.0001
Social well-being	.250	9.105	<.0001
Age	.163	5.938	<.0001
Dependent variable: spiritual well-being Modell 4: $F=98.69$ , $p<0.0001$ ; $R^2=.29$			
(constant)		7.572	<.0001
Emotional well-being	.388	12.832	<.0001
Benefit from digital media usage	.158	5.700	<.0001
Age	.153	5.431	<.0001
Social well-being	.090	3.079	.002
Dependent variable: social well-being Modell 4: $F=43.54$ , $p<0.0001$ ; $R^2=.15$			
(constant)		11.336	<.0001
Emotional well-being	.305	8.896	<.0001
Benefit from digital media usage	.105	3.432	.001
Spiritual well-being	.107	3.079	.002
Age	-.091	-2.932	.003

\* Gender was not included in the regression models

## Discussion

Regarding Adventists' anticipation of Jesus's return at any time (Adventist Fundamental Belief 25), the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions affected the local church communities' religious and social life in different ways. The usual diversity of church activities was stopped entirely within a short time. As demonstrated by participants, their social, emotional, and spiritual well-being scored in an upper mid-range and was thus not generally restricted. Interestingly, the older respondents, who might be seen as an "at-risk group," had significantly higher emotional and spiritual well-being than the younger groups. Over half (58%) of Adventists maintained hope in Jesus' return (Luke 21:28: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."), while 27% did not state such hope. This hope was significantly stronger in the older cohort than in younger respondents ( $F=14.9$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ).

Adventist's emotional well-being during the COVID-19 restrictions was slightly lower (Cohen's  $d = 0.19$ ) as compared to a representative study of Germany, conducted by Brähler, Mühlan, Albani, & Schmidt (2007) and slightly higher (Cohen's  $d = 0.18$ ) as compared to a study among German Adventists (Büssing, Starck, & van Treeck, 2020a), both conducted before the pandemic. Whether this lower level of emotional well-being is an impact of the pandemic is unclear. However, emotional well-being was lower in women compared to men in all three studies. Perhaps this is because women allow themselves to be more sensitive and realistic about the dangers and burdens of life (Kuhl, 2001). In contrast, spiritual well-being did not differ between women and men. A majority felt comforted by God in their challenges, worries, and fears (81% "mostly" to "all the time"). Here, older respondents felt more comforted by God than younger ones ( $F=13.5$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ).

Most stated that they had "allowed" contact with people with whom they felt comfortable during the pandemic and have had people with whom they could share joy and suffering; however, 20% and 14% (respectively) had no such contacts or only had such experiences "rarely." This group (up to 20%) may suffer from social loneliness. A large proportion (48%) stated that their local church/church community could not mitigate the contact restrictions' consequences, while 36% were satisfied with the Church's abilities to support its parishioners. However, it remains unclear what precisely the interviewees expected from their Church. Therefore, their usage of digital/social media for spiritual well-being is an area of further research.

Using digital media has been practiced in local communities since the mid-1990s through satellite transmissions in context with evangelistic meetings (NET). Live worship Adventist church services have been broadcasted via the Hope Channel to congregations since the beginning of the 21st century.



Regular video conferences have been a part of the Church's administration (both at the conference and union level) daily routine for many years. Therefore, one could expect that these media forms are a powerful resource for community members, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several studies have shown that people are increasingly using digital/social networks and are socializing through digital communication services more often (Gupta, Armstrong, & Clayton, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2019). These social media platforms also allow the elderly social participation, and many people use these methods to communicate with family members or friends from a distance. Family connectedness, particularly for the elderly, is of exceptional importance (Cornejo, Tentori, & Favela, 2013); the elderly are always "looking for methods to stay connected and be informed" (Kiel, 2005, p. 21). In this sample of Seventh-day Adventists, the older age group particularly benefited from the Church's digital offers, indicating that the church's "digital inclusion" was compelling. Most participated via digital/social media (with personal gain) in Bible lessons or had contact with their pastor, fellow parishioners, or the local church/church community. Other resources were less often used (with personal gain), particularly discussion groups, youth classes, religious classes, and church services. However, although less frequently used, older respondents participated more often in discussion groups, youth classes, religious classes, church services, etc., than did their younger counterparts. The content of the digital offers seemed crucial in determining which cohort was reached.

Approximately 85% of Adventists regularly attended the weekly worship service before the pandemic (Büssing et al., 2020a). However, this study's findings show that both local, regional, and supra-regional (i.e., Hope Channel programming) digital offers have strengthened the respondent's faith during the pandemic. Only the efforts of Adventist Youth were less successful, particularly when trying to reach the older cohort. (This is understandable because the content of the Adventist Youth is geared towards the younger generation.)

Social media (i.e., Facebook, WhatsApp, Threema, Wire) were used (with benefit) by over 60% of respondents to have contact within the Church (67% "often to regularly," 21% "sometimes," and 12% "rarely") and to get in contact with their pastor or other members (61% "often" to "regularly," 25% "sometimes," and 14% "rarely"). These contacts were not age-related and were relevant for all age cohorts.

It seems that digital and social media were important for Adventist respondents to cope with the restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic and that they used these as resources to strengthen their faith. While these forms of media were regarded as necessary by some Adventists, their correlative association with emotional, spiritual, and social well-being was weak. Based on the actor-network theory, which examines the effects of technology on the

social network and its communication, digitized communication is a given part of the system. “Actors—people, media, machines or other artifacts— . . . are equally able to influence relationships and behavior of the actors in the network” (Ebner & Schön, 2013). How markedly digital forms of communication play a role in the respective system/network depends on the system/network’s preference, needs, and the basic practice tradition (Charbonnier, 2018). However, before COVID-19, digital communication was a secondary part of the Adventist worship structure. Digital media might have been used as presentation aids (e.g., a PowerPoint presentation to enhance the sermon) or organizationally (e.g., email or posts on social media) before the pandemic; however, Adventist worship services, as well as other relevant events and working groups, were predominantly carried out analogously through direct encounters. It is easy to explain why digital communication showed to have no real impact on well-being, as well-being is usually enhanced by personal encounters. Digital communication was not a traditional means of increasing well-being in community practice.

From the point of view of actor-network theory, before COVID-19, communication in the Adventist congregation was analog and not conducted by digital media alone; it was more a means of coordinating and starting real encounters, closeness, and collaboration, but not the primary means of communication. After the shutdown and digital “encounters,” the quickly established crisis communication could only dock onto the existing analog proximity and experience but not take their actual place. Therefore, it is not surprising that the best predictors of emotional well-being were spiritual and social well-being, while there was no relevant benefit from digital media usage. In contrast, while respondents spiritual well-being was predicted mainly by emotional well-being, there was a further influence of digital media usage and higher age. The identified predictors of social well-being were too weak upon which to rely.

There are several resources that Adventists rely on to maintain their well-being, not only the digital resources during the restricted time. These might be only additional resources—which are nevertheless important particularly for their spiritual well-being. The ability to deal with stressors (i.e., fear of virus infection, social isolation because of the pandemic restrictions) is closely linked to the availability of internal and external resources, including social relationships. Especially in times of crisis, it is important to actively use these resources (Paulsen & Kortsch, 2020; Krick, Felfe, & Renner, 2018). Access to the resources facilitates self-regulation, a strong predictor of resilience (Kuhl, 2001; Storch & Krause, 2017).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Adventists are increasingly experiencing what Jesus discussed in the parable of the 10 virgins (Matt. 25). Those who have a solid foundation will not be shaken in times of crisis. The skills and experiences

gained as part of their religious life (using the metaphor of “oil” in reference to emotional, spiritual and social attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors) can be utilized as a resource in times of need. Both the free text comments collected as part of this study and the findings of the resources used during Adventists’ phases of spiritual dryness (Büssing, Starck, & van Treeck, 2020b) support this notion. Adventists who can perceive God’s joyful and reassuring presence in their life are more resilient in crises. A varied and fulfilling life of prayer and devotion, supported by understanding, reflection, application, and experience, provides a firm foundation under challenging times. Those who can perceive the expectations of God and the Church in their religious life as “easy” (referring to Matt. 11:30, “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”) are often more resilient.

Digital media provides a method of keeping these facets of personal spiritual life vital, even during restriction and crisis. During the pandemic, digital communication has become even more central to local church/church community’s life. It should be noted, however, that because we are still amid the pandemic, it is difficult to predict how these experiences will shape the attitudes and behaviors of the community members when the pandemic ends—especially in a church that intends to support the existential and spiritual needs and holistic well-being of its members. Mature reflection, openness for self-criticism, and the ability to adapt are irreplaceable.

Some Adventists cannot cope with the restrictions nor fully benefit from the digital offers of the Church. They may miss in-person encounters with other members, as well as their pastor, and mourn the experience of “togetherness.” Since the crisis has eliminated the concrete and personally experienced love, appreciation, and stabilizing accompaniment by the community, the pandemic has hit some members particularly hard, while others seem to be better able to cope. Presumably, the digital media offers of the Church are not enough for these less-effectively coping persons. While this study did not examine other forms of support for these people, preventive advice and research should be carried out to determine professionally competent support and methods of strengthening this group of people before, during, and after a crisis.

## Limitations

This study was planned as an online survey, and thus persons without Internet access were not reached. However, the proportion of this study’s gender and age cohorts is similar to the general population of German Adventists and could thus be seen as representative for (baptized) Adventists in Germany. Moreover, this study aimed to analyze digital media usage, and therefore access to digital media was vital for participation. Further, we have no information about those who did not participate, including their reasons for not participating and their well-being, which might be strengthened by other, non-digital resources.

## Conclusion

Pandemics—both the COVID-19 pandemic and possible others in the future—will likely remain a part of our personal and ecclesiastical life, at least for the time being. The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is currently hitting several countries, with increasing numbers of infected and hospitalized persons. Further, local, limited, or complete lockdowns have to be expected. This study determined that religious support through digital media resources is an effective option of spiritual support. Whether these resources' usage prepares both active members and skeptics equally for future difficult times remains to be seen. Persons in leadership roles must carefully consider which persons within the community may feel isolated, those unreached by the Church's digital offers, who may be at risk for depressive states.

Approximately 18% of German Adventists are in this group (Cluster 3) and may require psychological and pastoral support. In contrast, a greater number (47%) of Adventists investigated have overall high well-being scores (Cluster 2) and seem better able to cope with the pandemic outcomes. This “high well-being” group includes persons of higher age who might have found strategies to cope during their life and who are probably more stable in their faith. Their self-perceived benefit from digital media offers was highest in the sample.

Christian leadership must consider as the pandemic continues that digital offers may not have reached all persons or provide a similar benefit for faith-strengthening, as found in this study. These interactions provide an excellent opportunity to socially connect and inform persons of similar faith and show interest in their personal situation. Persons in leadership positions need to recognize and support parish members who may experience periods of spiritual dryness (Büssing, Frick, Jacobs, & Baumann, 2016; Büssing, Baumann, Jacobs, & Frick, 2017; Büssing, Winter, & Baumann, 2020), a form of spiritual crisis related to perceived distance from God, feeling that prayers go unanswered—particularly in times of pandemic restriction and isolation.

When developing a common strategy for the future, we can only rely on assumptions of what may come. However, we must begin planning for the future, even though it is unknown; there is no point in merely waiting (Kawhol, 2020). It is clear that the context of church life is changing so quickly that previously used strategies must be reconsidered. It remains church leadership's task to set the course for communication processes to include the entire church community.

We are currently in the preliminary stages of this shift, and the changes have been carried out gradually. These short-term adjustments have developed a new dynamic that enables the Church to be experienced anew. Four main drivers influence this process: (1) digitization, (2) the overall significance of spirituality in society, (3) the influence of the Holy Spirit, and (4) the respective level of matu-

riety of the church organization. Modeling this process to local pastors and congregants within a specific environment/society provides an opportunity and a challenge for church leadership. This study has provided the first clues for reflection and provides a basis for further research. (Church leadership in Germany reflected this study's results on June 9, 2020 via video conference.) This is undoubtedly a first step in an open process of change.

The findings from Adventists in Germany presented in this article may encourage other Christian and non-Christian communities to further expand their digital media resources to present helpful supplies during the subsequent waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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W. RAY WILLIAMS  
**LEADING THE DISPERSED CHURCH:  
A CASE STUDY OF CONNECTIVISM  
IN PIEDMONT CHAPEL**

**Abstract:** Connectivism is a learning theory first proposed by Siemens and Downes (2005, 2009) as a learning theory for the digital age. This theory proposes that learning may occur external to the learner and teacher; it exists in the multiple complex networks with which the learner associates. In 2020, Corbett and Spinello followed up on Siemen’s work to move connectivism from a learning theory to a leadership theory. Connectivism is a leadership theory that specifically works in modern churches. This theory emphasizes the connectedness of all knowledge and the mutuality of those connections, becoming a tool used to build better teams in the local church, especially in this dispersed environment.

**Keywords:** *connectivism, leadership theory, community, dispersed church, COVID-19 pandemic*

In the spring of 2020, the world sprang into action to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In the United States, the preventative restrictions prevented the church from gathering together. Churches have practiced congregational leadership by gathering in person and conducting physical, face-to-face interactions. In this time of dispersed church leadership, a modern form of leadership is required to effectively lead the church. This article looks at connectivism as the theoretical underpinning for leading the dispersed church and can inform the church’s leadership in the 21st century.

A North Carolina government website offers an exemplar of the restrictions faced by churches and businesses across the nation (North Carolina, n.d.). For some time, in-person church services were completely restricted and all non-essential businesses were closed. As the restrictions eased, churches were only allowed small numbers of people in the building while observing social distanc-

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ing regulations and mask-wearing. All large events were restricted, even if outdoors (North Carolina, n.d.). This caused the church to seek alternatives to the traditional church environment.

Lifeway Research found that 78% of Protestant churches in the United States have less than 100 people in attendance weekly (Earls, 2019). These congregations were often close-knit families of people who met on a weekly basis, lived life together throughout the week, and formed close bonds with each other. Similar research by Lifeway indicates that no more than 50% of churches had any experience with live streaming events, and only 30% of churches were ready to shift to a digital format where the pandemic restrictions were first implemented (Earls, 2020). Although most churches had a Facebook and a small number had an active Instagram or Twitter account, many smaller churches were still reticent to accept or venture into new technologies or the digital environment (Smietana, 2018).

These conditions set the church to either move to use digital resources or fail in congregational leadership. Connectivism, as a leadership and learning theory, provides a theoretical underpinning that is well suited to this church environment. This theory offers the space and language for churches to venture into the digital realm for leadership and pedagogy in a way that is true to the ideals of community, connectedness, and episcopal leadership. This article will examine the church as a living community (i.e., a network of people) and nodes analogous to the network nodes in connectivism. It will then move to understand connectivism as a learning theory and a leadership theory. Finally, we will examine an integrated application of connectivism in the modern church setting.

## **The Church as Community**

Simon and Garfunkel once sang, “I am a rock, I am an island” (Simon, 1966). Counter to that, the church claims that humankind is not created to be alone (Pettit, 2008, p. 103). This is reflected through Scripture from the creation story of Genesis 1–3 to the formation of the nascent church in Acts 2:42–47 to the collection of Epistles written to instruct and encourage the early fledgling Christian communities. One modern theologian refers to the community as the “source of incomparable joy and strength” for the people of the church (Bonhoeffer, 1954, p. 19). In Hebrews 10:25, the people of the church are reminded that gathering within the community is a source of strength and resilience. Community and the building and leading of the community is an essential role of the church throughout the ages.

In some traditions, there is a specific theological statement regarding community. For these believers, the church community began with the assembly of disciples and continues today through the face-to-face groups that meet to teach, learn, and lead (Becker, 2008, p. 9, 13).



### *Defining Community in the Modern Church*

In a seminal work, Ladd referred to the church community as the reality of God's Kingdom in the present day (Ladd, 1959), a group of people working together to understand and grow in faith (Vander Wiele, 2014, p. 50). Additionally, Bonhoeffer (1954) suggests that community might also be viewed as both a physical and spiritual gathering of people in the name of faith (p. 21). The church community is a physical manifestation of spiritual truth.

In the modern world, we see the concept of community evidenced in several ways. The first and most visible are weekly gatherings of the community during which the rites and sacraments distinctive to each faith community are practiced. The most close-knit example is found in small groups that form in a church, providing a more intimate setting for learning and growing together in faith.

The idea of small groups as a part of the church has existed since biblical times (Acts 2:42–47). The modern small group came into being in the post-war years of the 1940–50s (Walton, 2014, p. 88). These house groups were extensions of the church community and not understood as a primary activity for building community. In the 1960s, under the influence of cell groups (or cell churches like the Yoida Church in South Korea), small groups became primary community pedagogy locations within the church (Walton, 2014, p. 97). In many churches, these groups morphed to take over and surpass Sunday School as the locus of small group interaction and stand at the heart of modern church movements, such as the Vineyard movement (Walton, 2014, p. 101). Today, in many traditions, small groups continue to be the locus of community and pedagogy within the church. Therefore, a church community is a people gathered together to practice distinctive rites and sacraments while meeting in small groups to promote community and formation.

### *The Community as a Network*

Digital communities operate as loose communities, and not all members of the community are active participants. On the other hand, church community provides a closely knit community where active participation is encouraged and expected (Campbell & Gardner, 2016, p. 65). Thus, online church communities have operated as an extension of and adjacent to the physical communities (Campbell & Gardner, 2016, p. 67).

Lowe & Lowe (2018) described the digital and physical communities as ecologies, borrowing the term from biological sciences. Each of these groups is an ecosystem related to and impacting each other in physical and digital environments. These communities can be thought of as network nodes defined by connectivism (Siemens, 2005; Downes, 2009). These nodes are the corresponding locations of knowledge that are then accessed through the network. During the

COVID-19 restrictions, the church has depended on these digital networks and communities to be the gathered church. In this time, the digital communities have become the heart of leadership and pedagogy within the church. With these circumstances in mind, it has become increasingly imperative to find a theoretical foundation for these networked communities to aid in advancing these communities in the 21st century.

## Connectivism

Given the church's dispersal in 2020 and the need for a true theoretical language to discuss leadership in dispersed digital community networks, the church requires a new way of exercising ecclesiastical leadership. In the past, the church depended on the community's physical presence to exercise leadership. Board meetings, councils, committees, and the celebration of rites and sacraments occurred within the confines of physical gatherings. Hebrews 10:25 admonishes the community to "not neglect to meet together" (ESV). This has been used to justify a requirement for physical gathering and downplay the effectiveness of other forms of meeting, whether telephonic, digital, or social media. Connectivism, as a leadership theory for the digital age (Siemens, 2005), provides the theoretical language that allows full consideration of the modern church in a 21st century, digital environment.

### *The Origins of Connectivism*

Siemens introduced connectivism as a learning theory in a blog post in 2005. In his introduction, he argued that the learning theories that currently dominated the educational sphere—specifically behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism—are inadequate, as they were developed when technology was not a primary factor in the learning system's development. He noted that technology is so pervasive that it infiltrates every aspect of the modern world (Siemens, 2005).

A core part of Siemens's argument was the massive development of information, given that one-half of the data available to a student today was not known a decade before. He accentuated the exponential growth of information and potential knowledge available. He cited one study that showed the amount of knowledge available doubles every 18 months (Siemens, 2005). Downes followed up on Siemens's ideas by talking about knowledge as a distributed commodity, residing within network nodes and available to learners who can maneuver through those nodes and discover the required knowledge (Downes, 2012, p. 85).

For connectivism, a primary liability in previous theories is the evaluation of knowledge for accuracy and worth. Previous learning theories were about the *process* of learning and did not make judgments about the *content* of learning (Siemens, 2005). In connectivism, these elements are just as important as devel-

oping the skill of evaluating knowledge and determining its worth based on accuracy, relevance, and application. Connectivism does not postulate a *right* place for knowledge to exist, only that the knowledge must be evaluated for worth and connected to other knowledge that assists the learner in understanding.

This theory cites several trends in learning, the most pertinent to this study being (Siemens, 2005):

- Learners will move through varied fields, many of which they were not educated.
- Informal learning is eclipsing formal learning in significance.
- The cognitive tools for accessing learning are being rewired.
- Knowing where to access knowledge is becoming as important as the why and how.
- There is a convergence in individual and institutional learning.

These trends are just as true in the modern church as in society, at large.

Considering this, connective knowledge is not knowledge obtained and retained by the learner but knowledge that is accessed by making connections through the network nodes in which the information resides (Downes, 2012, p. 299). Given the amount of information available to the learner, it is inconceivable that s/he might contain all the knowledge. It is just as important—possibly more important—to learn how to navigate the networks. Navigating the networks requires a meta-skill of making and discarding connections between nodes and assembling information in a coherent form (Siemens, 2005; Downes, 2012, p. 9).

When a learner accesses knowledge in the network and connects it to other networks of knowledge, they create a feedback loop where those new connections are now available to all on the network (Brieger, Arghode, & McLean, 2020, p. 325). There is no requirement that the learner memorizes connected knowledge; instead, s/he must remember the pathways that lead to access. Unlike previous theories, connectivism views knowledge acquisition as non-linear and less tied to the process and place of learning (Jung, 2019, p. 49). Jung viewed the computer network as a metaphor for the many networks in which the learner exists (Jung, 2019, p. 50), postulating that these networks (e.g., social, computer, familial, etc.) act as potential sources of knowledge that may be connected to other nodes in the network.

Due to a paucity of research data on connectivism (Corbett & Spinello, 2020, p. 5), Siemens and Downes pioneered the primary place of study: Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) (Jung, 2019, p. 51). The MOOC is a large online classroom that provides a peer-led, peer-evaluated, non-linear, distributed educational experience not defined by the classic definition of the classroom, student, and curriculum (Jung, 2019, p. 52). Social media is a learning tool and allows connection points to multiple networks where knowledge may reside.

### *Connectivism as a Leadership Theory*

In his 2005 blog post, Siemens opened the door for connectivism to have leadership and management applications. Given the pace, breadth, and depth of management and leadership decisions today, it is inconceivable that all knowledge exists in the mind of one or two individuals (Siemens, 2005). A variety of voices, multiple network nodes, and integrating information from various avenues to make coherent and effective decisions are required. Corbett and Spinello (2020) viewed connectivism as altering the leadership processes and decision-making (p. 1).

Another place to see connectivist leadership may be in the popular Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG). In 2012, a paper examined leadership within the games (Mysiriaki & Paraskeva, 2012, p. 223). These games involve large numbers of players that associate into guilds; there are no fixed leaders. Leadership is collaborative, and problem-solving is a task taken on by the entire team. Players are challenged with complex tasks that increase in difficulty as they proceed across a non-linear set of problems. Each decision results in facing different circumstances and requires renewed skills and management to make succeeding decisions. Ultimately, there is a common shared goal, unachievable by any individual player but attained through the guilds' combined abilities (Mysiriaki & Paraskeva, 2012, p. 225).

Informal leaders may arise for a given set of circumstances but are replaced by another, or a group of others, when circumstances change. Information that led to good decisions in the past may be outdated or otherwise faulty in future engagements. When viewed through the lens of connectivism, there are elements of chaos, network, complexity, and self-organization theories as predicted by Seimens (2005). The problems can only be navigated through the collective of the online community.

### **Application of Connectivism in the Modern Church**

The church uses several networks to provide leadership and community to its believers. In the past, this has primarily been accomplished through physical meetings of large or small groups. The church is becoming more defined by the smaller groups that informally assemble within the church, supplemented by larger assemblies for the participation in rites and sacraments. While some forward-thinking congregations moved strongly into the digital environments, others did not. The restrictions of COVID-19 have provided an opportunity for the church to reevaluate and even redefine community and community leadership. One such congregation is Piedmont Chapel located in High Point, North Carolina, USA.

### *A Case Study: Piedmont Chapel, High Point, NC<sup>1</sup>*

In 2014, a new faith community began in the Piedmont Triad of central North Carolina. The lead pastor, Mitch, was in his late 20s at the time and was an innovator. Accompanied by a group of about 35 people in the same age demographic, Mitch set out to create a church for the 21st century. From the beginning, Piedmont Chapel (PC) has been characterized by the presence of youth, use of digital media, and a collaborative leadership style. Without realizing it, PC has developed into an organization that is well-suited to demonstrate the reality of connectivism as a leadership model in the modern—even dispersed—church. At this early stage, PC built small communities that formed the larger church. These small communities were naturally grouped around personality, affinity, involvement in the church, and other criteria.

Even before the first gathering of any size, PC created an online presence. Through Facebook, a web page, and Instagram, PC created an online presence and persona. The designs were modern and even displayed a unique logo created by the team. Although it was clear that Mitch was the senior leader, all decisions were made collaboratively. At this time, only a few of the team lived in North Carolina; therefore, most business was conducted using various digital methods.

Once the team moved to North Carolina and assembled, the first physical gathering was planned—again using digital and physical meetings and methods. Even when meeting physically, the presentations and notes were all digitally based, and the collaborative tools were all web-based. From the very first meeting, the gatherings were recorded and, very soon, were livestreamed. Although there was a focus on physical gatherings, in large or small groups, this church's digital capabilities and footprint exceeded that of churches many times larger.

As the church developed, its online presence evolved and grew.<sup>2</sup> The livestream gathered near equal numbers to the 500-600 present in physical gatherings. Most business meetings were conducted through Zoom, Google Hangout, or FaceTime. Individual internet protocol (IP) addresses were monitored and revealed participation from Europe and Australia, as well as many places in the United States. Just as all these systems were being perfected, the COVID-19 restrictions impacted the church.

Within days, PC transitioned all worship services, leadership meetings, and even small group meetings to virtual formats and seamlessly went on with the life of the community. Except for the longing for physical contact that all corners of society experienced, PC continued to function without fail while other faith communities struggled to survive. To date, due to restrictions on rental spaces (e.g., the church met in a high school), PC has not resumed physical gatherings yet remains a vibrant, effective faith community.

<sup>1</sup>This case study is based on interviews and conversations with the staff, leaders, and members of Piedmont Chapel. It is also greatly influenced by the author's association with Piedmont Chapel.

<sup>2</sup>PC regularly counts unique IP addresses, knowing that a portion of those IPs account for multiple viewers. PC chooses not to estimate the total viewership.

PC has always collaboratively exercised leadership with many voices providing input to decision making. Pastor Mitch commented that there are many decisions made in which he is not—and does not need to be—consulted. These decisions are made by people with expertise and a vested interest in the particular area in which the decisions are made. Even the community calendar of events is developed in a team framework with input from many places. The leadership flows from the pastor to multiple groupings of people who concentrate on specific areas, yet have a voice and input into many other areas. The media team has input into the overall gatherings and physical or media presence of the church. The musicians speak to decisions of production and spiritual values. All of this expertise is collected and maintained in a network of people, Google drives, online resources, online scheduling, and online music storage.

During the COVID-19 restrictions, the church has used various methods such as asynchronous music production compiled into a seamless video presentation, video and music recording, teaching, and asynchronous decision making through email, text, and chat groups. The leader-pastor has continually drawn the community's focus to the enduring values and mission of PC, just as he did before. The COVID-19 restrictions have proven the church's strength and resilience and have encouraged even more people to become active participants.

It is also during this time that PC has experienced marginal new growth from members in the community. Individuals find PC online and become regular online attendees and financial givers. At the beginning of 2021, a small group of PC members were hosted by another member in Alabama, along with members from several other states.

### *Connectivism in Piedmont Chapel*

Siemens noted that connectivism is an integration of several theories (Siemens, 2005); considering this study, network and self-organization theories stand out; during the COVID-19 restrictions, PC also experienced chaos and complexity. Volunteer organizations differ from other organizations and require different leadership strategies. As Catano, Pond, and Kelloway (2001) indicated, volunteer organizations cannot reward the volunteers with the normal positive and negative incentives for work done (p. 256). This is supported by Oostlander, Güntert, van Schie, and Wehner (2014), who suggest that volunteers are motivated to achieve higher levels of actualization beyond a paycheck that provides for the life necessities (p. 870).

Self-determination theory (SDT) speaks to the “innate psychological needs” that cause a person to seek specific goals and pursuits (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 227). This theory moves away from more cognitive concepts of goal pursuit and returns to a precognitive idea of basic needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 228).

SDT tries to understand why a person volunteers for more work, tasks and goals, pressure, and oversight when there is no observable compensation. What motivates the volunteer?

Combine the above with the mechanisms of team assembly (Guimera, Uzzi, Spiro, and Amaral, 2005), and you find answers to the source of the energy and passion displayed by the leaders and volunteers of PC. The volunteers of PC are a very diverse population ethnically, culturally, and in age. Guimera, et al. (2005) argue that great diversity runs counter to good decision making and team cohesiveness, but diversity is necessary for good leadership and decision making (p. 697). PC exhibits great diversity and great coherence to a simple mission statement of “A Church for All People” (see more at [www.piedmontchapel.com](http://www.piedmontchapel.com)). This mission statement is continuously and consistently reinforced by leadership. In the current dispersed church, it is shared on all media platforms and repeated/accentuated in all forums, at all levels. At each of these levels, ideas arise for improving and developing new avenues to meet that mission statement.

Network theory also speaks to the success of leadership at PC. PC uses social networks extremely well; without knowing it, PC capitalizes on the power of the weak ties defined by Granovetter (1973). This interpretation of network theory gives evidence that small interactions between people can significantly affect leadership and decision-making (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1360). PC has used social media and other digital means in conjunction with physical interactions to develop a larger footprint. This is evidenced by individuals who log onto online streams and giving monetary gifts, even though they have never been in physical contact with the church. Small groups have been hosted and attended virtually by those who are not in the same state. PC has capitalized on the broadest idea of the network and those micro-connections between people.

The weak ties are where the innovation resides (Borgatti & Lopez-Kidwell, 2014, p. 4). PC is welcoming to and encourages innovation in all forms. PC has always depended on many overlapping and intersecting groups to provide the leadership and decision-making nexus of the church. From inception to the current day, many groups, some with weak ties, give input and innovative ideas to every part of the church community.

## Conclusion

Connectivism in Piedmont Chapel draws on the foundations of network theory and self-determination theory, and to a lesser extent chaos and complexity theories (which have not been explored here). The leadership of PC is exercised through a network of physical and digital nodes that consist of sin-

gle persons, groups of people, digital applications, and collaborative systems and relies on those strong and weak ties to invigorate innovation and decision-making. This community is a vibrant and growing community that has suffered little due to the restrictions of COVID-19. This resilience is because of the preexisting reliance on the network nodes for institutional knowledge and to provide the primary source of leadership and decision-making. Within this community of faith, there is a model of connectivism that may be the answer to church leadership in the modern, dispersed, digital world.

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# LEADERSHIP LIVED

ROB PARKMAN, RENÉ ERWICH,  
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**THE PREDICTORS OF SUSTAINABILITY  
AND WELL-BEING IN MINISTRY**

**Introduction**

Research suggests that, while leaders' health is a relevant consideration for the health of every organization (Wageman, Nunes, Burruss, & Hackman, 2008), vast improvement in understanding and praxis is urgently required in churches and faith-based organizations (FBOs). Witt (2011) reports the following detractors to pastoral health (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Witt's Research on Vocational Hazards in Christian Ministry*

Threats to Sustainability and Well-being	%
Pastors who feel discouraged in their roles	80
Pastoral spouses who feel discouraged in their roles	85
Pastors who do not have a close friend, confidant, or mentor	70
Pastors who stated they were burned out, and they battle depression beyond fatigue on a weekly and even a daily basis	71
Pastors' wives feel that their husband entering ministry was the most destructive thing to ever happen to their families	over 50
Pastors so discouraged they would leave the ministry if they could but have no other way of making a living	over 50

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London and Wiseman (1993, p. 22) also report inherent risks in vocational Christian ministry. They found that 75% of pastors reported a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry, 70% say they have lower self-esteem now than when they started out, and 40% of pastors reported a serious conflict with a parishioner at least once a month. More recently, the *New York Times* (Vitello, 2020) stated that

members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension, and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could. (n.p.)

Previous frameworks offer well-being solutions that are one dimensional. For example, research has largely been focused on the individual leader's spiritual practices (Chandler, 2010), physical health (Webb, Bopp, Baruth & Peterson, 2016), compassion fatigue (Pastoral Care Inc., 2015) or psychology (Olson & Grosch, 1991). A substantive chasm exists in the literature regarding the impact of organizational culture on the leader's well-being.

The current study focuses on the salient comprehensive factors that contribute to the well-being of the leader, such as personal initiatives (personal spiritual growth, coping mechanisms/choices, emotional/mental health, support networks, etc.), and systems initiatives (the health of the organizational context the leader works in). The working hypothesis is that a cooperative effort is needed between the leader and their organization to thrive.

## Methodology

This study was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Three primary research methods were utilized (survey, follow-up interviews and case study of a prayer counselling method). This was done to ultimately develop a way forward with an informed theoretical framework of sustainability in ministry.

The research began with a survey of a sample of 100 ministers from Western nations (e.g., Canada, USA, Europe, Australia and New Zealand) who serve full time in a Christian organization. The participants were senior leaders (72%), associate leaders (17%), support/administrative staff (4%), and other (7%). The average age of respondents was 52 and the average years of ministry service was 23; 86 participants were male and 14 were female. The survey contained thirteen questions and was administered via SurveyMonkey. This method proved effective as an instrument in identifying trends, giving candid comments after each question, and preparing respondents for follow-up conversations in the next stage of research. The analysis resulted in seven predictive categories of leadership health.

Follow-up interviews were then conducted to confirm the survey findings and to discover connections that the survey results did not yield. Ten survey respondents were interviewed by phone in a free-form format. The seven indicators of leadership sustainability and well-being were confirmed, additional stressors in ministry were divulged, and the composite factor of spiritual/mental processing emerged as the most significant predictor. The interview format proved valuable in understanding a practitioner's perspective of the practices, policies, and conversations that best serve leaders.

Following the interviews, a study was conducted, utilizing the spiritual/mental method of Dr. Ken Smylie (director of the Pastoral Counselling Center in Gainesville, Florida) in helping leaders increase resiliency through prayer counselling. This method was selected for analysis because 95% of Dr. Smylie's pastoral counselling clients have indicated an improvement in their emotional and spiritual state based on the Likert Scale, which allowed participants to express how much they agree or disagree with statements. Exploration into the method was conducted through a personal prayer counselling session with Dr. Smylie, analysis of a second case study session recorded on video, and follow-up phone interviews with Dr. Smylie. While people from varying theological traditions may take issue with certain finer points of Smylie's theology and approach, his prayer counseling sessions' basic structure can be easily adapted to different theological contexts.

The data was then analyzed and organized into a theoretical framework that fosters awareness, dialogue, and practice.

## Seven Predictors of Sustainability and Well-being

The survey results confirm and broaden previous research; these results create concern, reflection, and reform (Green, 2016). Each survey response informs dialogue and praxis as leaders revealed experiences that are not part of Christian organizations' the common knowledge (see Tables 2–5).

**Table 2**

*Survey Results: Most Common Challenges Christian Leaders Face Monthly in Their Role*

Monthly Leadership Challenges	%
Show signs of being burned out, discouraged, stressed, overworked	58
Experience conflict with those I am leading	57

See signs of my emotional and mental well-being being negatively impacted	51
Have concerns about my financial well-being	39
See signs of a lack of doctrinal agreement between myself and those I lead	39
My marriage is negatively impacted by this leadership role	37
The expectations on me are unreasonable	35

**Table 3***Survey Results: Top Sources of Stress Experienced by Leaders*

<b>Stressor</b>	<b>%</b>
Challenges from the congregation/people	60
Loneliness/isolation	45
Financial challenges	42
Practical theology disagreements (i.e., worship styles)	25
Lack of agreement with followers over what my role is	19
Feeling constrained in this position	18
Tension with other staff members	18

**Table 4***Survey Results: Top Ministerial Risk Factors Experienced by Leaders*

<b>Ministerial Risk Factor</b>	<b>%</b>
Work more than 46 hours/week	73
Significant stress-related crisis at least once in ministry	70
Ministry affected family negatively	43
Unable to meet demands of job	39
Inadequately trained to cope with demands	30
Do not have someone that you consider a close friend	24

**Table 5**

*Survey Results: Concerns Ministers Have if They Consider Leaving Vocational Ministry*

Factor	Responses
Concern about stress/burnout	9
Financial concerns	9
Conflict/organizational politics	8
Marital concerns	8
Lack of organizational support	8
Desire to explore another vocation	8
Purpose drift in organization	7
Lack of support network	6
Disappointment with God	5
Violation of a policy	5

Another revealing finding was that only 56% of leaders said they engaged weekly in activities that positively deal with the stress they experience in their leadership role. Palmer (1998) concludes that many pastors are not accessing stress management resources available to them, such as counselling, psychological tools, relaxation techniques, and assertiveness training.

The survey yielded many positive results related to ministerial health. While this may be counterintuitive, Robbins and Francis (2010) confirmed that high levels of job satisfaction and an awareness of the dangers of burnout commonly co-exist in Christian leaders. The levels of satisfaction in ministry that leaders experience in vocational service in key areas are indicated in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Survey Results: The Top Results for Satisfaction Experienced Weekly*

Positive Factor	%
My relationship with God is enhanced	85
My greatest strengths are utilized	79
I get excited about the opportunities in my role	76

Those that I lead show strong signs of support of my leadership	65
I am shown strong signs of support from my staff	59

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The survey indicated that leaders' most essential refueling fell into four crucial sustainability categories that predict well-being: spiritual, physical, mental, and social (Table 7).

**Table 7**

*Survey Results: Top 12 Practices That are Ranked the Most Important to Leaders for Their Overall Health in Ministry*

Practice	Weighted Responses
Read the Bible	23
Discussions with spouse/friend	22
Prayer/meditation	22
Weekly day off	20
Looking for signs of the activity of God	18
Regulate thought life	18
Get adequate sleep	17
Discussions with advisor	17
Rehearse what God has done in the past	17
Input of encouraging content (reading, podcasts, etc.)	16
Get physically mobile	16
Tie: hobby; socialize with good friends; intellectual stimulation	15

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Leaders also revealed three additional holistic sustainability predictor categories when asked to rank the factors that impact their longevity in vocational Christian ministry: vocational, organizational, and financial (Table 8).



**Table 8**

*Survey Results: Top 12 Factors that Impact Leadership Longevity*

Factor	Weighted Responses
I know how to personally and spiritually refuel	16
Discussions with spouse/friend	16
I have strong support in place from family and/or friends	16
I am careful to find alignment between my role and my strengths	13
I have good self-care practices in place	13
I know how to manage my expectations of myself	13
I utilize healthy ways of dealing with conflict	12
I have a mentor in the denominational/organizational structure	11
I know how to manage the expectations of others	11
I access continuing education to help deal with real-life leadership issues	10
I am reasonably compensated	10
I serve an organization that has systems in place to provide relief from workloads when leaders are facing conflict/crisis	10

The survey results consequently suggest that well-being best practices be implemented in each of the seven critical areas that predictably create leaders that last:

1. *Spiritual*: Have personal spiritual practices in place that regularly strengthen
2. *Physical*: Take care of their body so they can sustain their ministry vision
3. *Mental*: Regularly renew their minds so that they are redemptively processing ministry experiences
4. *Social*: Build an adequate support network around themselves, of safe people they can decompress with
5. *Vocational*: Engage in the process of aligning their strengths with their roles
6. *Organizational*: Place themselves in and create organizational systems, policies, and procedures that mitigate against stressors
7. *Financial*: Place themselves in and create healthy financial situations so financial concerns are not a distraction

## Follow-Up Interview Reveal a Composite Predictor

In the interviews, leaders were asked how they proactively addressed their own need for replenishment. The following sampling of their responses reinforces the seven predictors discovered in the survey.

1. *Spiritual*: “Daily time in Scripture . . . helped (my wife and I) to function better, and it has helped us at least to maintain our level of health (after burnout).” (Dale)
2. *Physical*: “I follow intense periods of work with equally focused rest.” (Jonathan)
3. *Mental*: “The leader must address the lies that the enemy has planted in their minds and replace them with the truth. To speak secularly, they need cognitive-behavioral therapy—taking negative beliefs and replacing them with positive beliefs . . . In this way the spiritual and mental areas overlap.” (Kelly)
4. *Social*: “Have people in your life that you are not learning from or pouring into—people that you can enjoy and be at rest around . . . I find it easy to be serious and maybe too task-oriented.” (Keith)
5. *Vocational*: “I could not lead just any organization. For me, it is all about call and alignment—I believe that is when God’s blessing falls. You must get the right fit.” (Al)
6. *Organizational*: “We will be judged based on how well we allowed the staff to flourish . . . we invest in the people who are leading because ultimately they get the results.” (Owen)
7. *Financial*: “There are times when it is tempting to go do something that makes more money. You get thinking about the future and wondering ‘who will take care of me?’” (Wayne)

The interviews also uncovered nine leadership stressors that the survey did not reveal.

1. *Unhealthy church culture*: “The lack of health in the church was the number one factor that led to my burnout . . . I have been granted one month off to get restored.” (George)
2. *Unclear expectations*: “We experienced tension when the uncommunicated outcomes were not met.” (Mel)
3. *Unrealistic expectations*: “You feel the pressure to find ways to please everyone, although that is impossible.” (Alex)
4. *Lack of pastoral care*: “There needs to be intentional pastoral care for those in ministry. If you feel cared for and valued, you start caring for and valuing others.” (Garth)
5. *Unhelpful volunteers*: “If they are not consistent, punctual, cooperative, team-minded, or soft-hearted, it can be very draining.” (Carl)
6. *People care and trauma*: “Leaders feel they can handle the stress of helping others with their issues and trauma—until they can’t . . . they face similar

occupational hazards to those who work in other people-helping professions.” (Bobby)

7. *Stigma attached to getting help*: “Professionals don’t want people in their circles to know they are dealing with something. Ministry people don’t want to be a recipient. They like to wait until they hit a crisis point before they get help.” (Adele)
8. *Strain on marriage relationships*: “Her interests are only important if they are supporting him. This leads to an inequity where there should be partnership.” (Max)
9. *Challenges for women in ministry*: “I was once told that I was getting paid less than a male counterpart in the same role as me . . . although I was more educationally qualified.” (Brynn)

Because gender issues are not within this study’s scope, see Bumgardner (2016) for further exploration.

One composite predictor came to the surface in the interviews more than any area: the combination of the spiritual and the mental. Many responses could have been placed in either or both categories. For example, one leader explained, “I have discovered that I personally need inner healing and deliverance. I need to find the spiritual oasis that will help me to root out the lies of the enemy . . . Otherwise, leaders will not know why they are sad, depressed, angry, and wanting to quit. We have to bring our lives to Jesus for Him to heal us” (Kelly). When the spiritual/mental predictor is given ample personal attention, it makes the leader is more resilient. Kidder (2017) emphasizes a similar approach, but describes it instead as cultivating biblical self-worth, depending on God for emotional health and reflecting on your identity in God.

Improved methods of mental/spiritual processing are also relevant to coping with organizational problems. For example, Gyuroka (2010) maintains that leaders are better served by learning to reframe their leadership challenges (i.e., adapting their way of thinking about problems and being willing to question accepted organizational procedures). Manders (2014, p. 114–115) likewise posits that critical leadership skills include dilemma flipping (the ability to turn dilemmas into advantages and opportunities) and constructive depolarizing (the ability to calm tense situations where differences dominate). Resilient Christian leaders can use this approach to invite God to help them get “the view from the balcony” (Gyuroka, 2010, p. 146) to have a more beneficial lens that helps them overcome leadership stressors.

The sustainability of the leader is thus enhanced by their engagement in processing life and ministry to integrate the spiritual and the mental. In other words, the leader receives God’s help in renewing their mind and, ultimately, their emotional state. This finding prompted the next step in the research process.

## Spiritual/Mental Method Increases Leadership Resiliency

A proven expert strategy for spiritual/mental health is the prayer counselling approach of Dr. Smylie. The following is an abbreviated transcription of a live demonstration at the Florida Together for Truth Initiative (Smylie, 2015), where a woman is helped to process the challenges she experienced through a lens of truth. (Note: Dr. Smylie's prayers are italicized.)

**Dr. Smylie:** *Jesus, would you pick a thought or a feeling or a memory, and would you gently bring it to Claudia's mind at this time.* So, Claudia, just briefly describe whatever comes to mind.

**Claudia:** As a child, I always heard about how disobedient I was. But I know that wasn't true—it was maybe a way to control me. And later I was part of a church where they would do the same thing . . . But I think the Holy Spirit was always trying to tell me “that's not true.”

**Dr. Smylie:** *Jesus, what is the lie?* What is the first thing that comes to your mind?

**Claudia:** That I should not even start to dream that I can get anywhere (in life).

**Dr. Smylie:** What if you were to say something like “*In Jesus's name, I reject the lie that says (and then fill in the blank).*”

**Claudia:** In Jesus' name, I reject the lie . . . that I don't deserve to be who I am or become what God wants me to become.

**Dr. Smylie:** Do you sense anything?

**Claudia:** It is easier to breathe . . . it is as if the way is free.

**Dr. Smylie:** *Jesus, would you tell Claudia what the truth is.* What's the first thought that comes to your mind?

**Claudia:** That I am loved unconditionally.

**Dr. Smylie:** That sounds like Jesus to me. Is it your will to accept what He says to you?

**Claudia:** Yes.

**Dr. Smylie:** Then it's yours. And what is the emotion or the feeling that comes having made the decision to accept what Jesus says to you.

**Claudia:** Now I have the feeling that I have space to grow, that I can be who I am supposed to be. I felt like I was in a jail and there was a limit on me, and now I am free.

**Dr. Smylie:** It's the truth that sets you free.

**Claudia:** Now I can breathe . . . now I feel I have more space to grow.

Smylie's process is to enter the prayer counselling session with calmness, gentleness, and a sense of confidence that any negative emotional stronghold can be addressed in counselees. Almost half of Dr. Smylie's clientele are voca-

tional Christian leaders seeking healing. He reports that he needs to approach Christian leaders with greater sensitivity because of their conceptions of themselves and frequent reluctance to receive help.

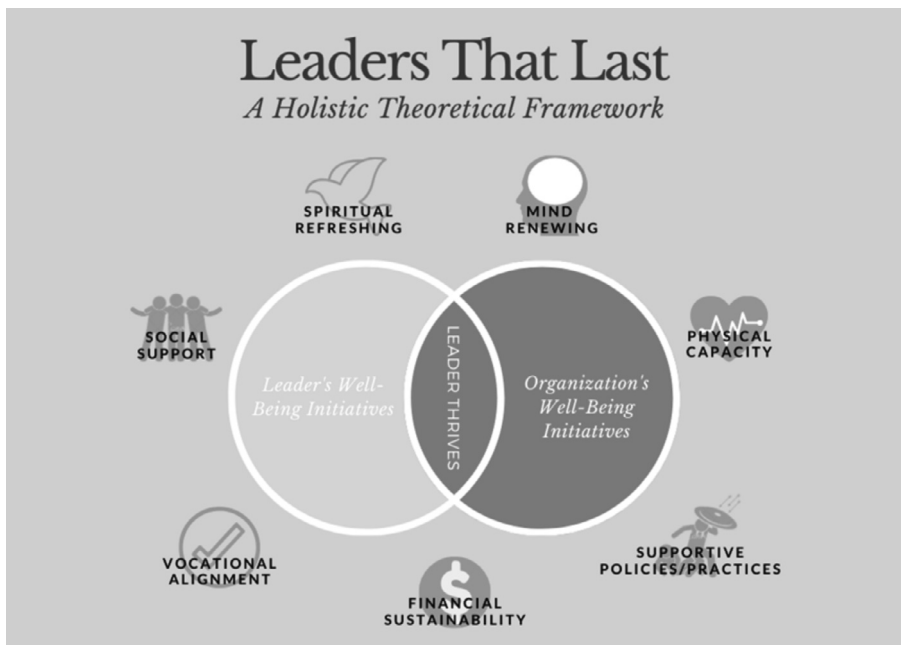
In his practice, the top indicators of leadership health/longevity are consistent with the data in this study, specifically dealing with emotional wounds, finding healthy ways to cope with unrealistic expectations, and getting adequate rest. His assessment is that transformative prayer should be part of the foundation of all ministerial training so people can experience personal freedom while they are young and not think it a foreign concept to get help when they are older. Clearly, ministries that address Christian leaders' spiritual and mental health need to be widely developed, supported, and accessed.

### *A Way Forward: Developing A Healthy Ecosystem*

The study's final stage is the development of a holistic theoretical framework for resiliency in vocational Christian ministry. We conclude that the leader's well-being initiatives, plus the organization's well-being initiatives, together provide an ecosystem where the leader can predictably thrive. It is a framework that is multidimensional and multidisciplinary. The framework is outlined in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Leaders That Last: A Holistic Theoretical Framework*



At the center, this framework encourages mutual ownership of leadership resiliency by the leader and those who supervise him/her. Leaders must exercise their agency to initiate all-encompassing replenishment strategies in each of the seven key areas. The strategic implementation will be unique to each leader as they reflect on what energizes them. Likewise, the organization must be proactive in designing a healthy atmosphere for the leader by engaging the leader in dialogue about how s/he may be supported in each domain. Supervisors can also identify and prepare for potential difficulties for Christian leaders in advance by asking themselves what leadership threats have emerged in the past in their organization and by asking experienced practitioners what they should be aware of when introducing leaders to their ministry. When both the leader and the organization take extreme ownership, the environment is optimized for the leader to thrive.

The domains around the core depict the intentional development of an atmosphere built around the leader by activating initiatives in the seven areas of leadership health. It is holistic in that it encompasses the spiritual and embraces other primary facets of human existence. The framework also suggests an interrelatedness of each of the seven leadership health indicators in the atmosphere around the leader. These areas often overlap, and an increase in health in one area can bring an increase in the health of other areas. A multi-disciplinary approach to leadership health is the most effective (Proeschold-Bell et al., 2011). The church in the West needs a renewed paradigm that sees all truth as God's truth and adopts the best that social sciences and physical sciences have to offer (i.e., breakthroughs in nutritional science, stress management, cognitive therapy, etc.). In another study, Brown (2011) similarly advocates for the abandonment of a single-focused system (a central focus on the welfare of the church) in favor of a multi-focused system (spirituality, health and wellness, relationships, personal growth, activities and interests, etc.). This framework also shows the highest impact areas weighted to the top and the lesser predictors towards the bottom.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the framework confirms that the multidimensional revelation of Scripture better serves us than one-dimensional frameworks. The following is a summary of how revelation speaks to each of the seven indicators of leadership health.

1. *Spiritual refreshing*: "Those who look to him are radiant . . ." (Ps. 34:5a, NIV)
2. *Mind renewing*: ". . . but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God." (1 Sam. 30:6, KJV)
3. *Social support*: "But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus." (2 Cor. 7:6, NIV)
4. *Physical capacity*: "The angel of the Lord came back a second time and

touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” (1 Kings 19:7, NIV)

5. *Vocational alignment*: “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” (2 Tim. 1:6, NIV)
6. *Supportive policies/practices*: “Do this so their work (as leaders) will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.” (Heb.13:17 NIV, parenthesis added)
7. *Financial sustainability*: “When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching . . .” (Acts 18:5, NIV)

## Conclusion

For the mission of the church in the West to thrive, its leaders must thrive. This research brings a deeper awareness of common occupational hazards and predictive well-being factors that will help pastors, educators, counselors, and supervisors put practices, relationships, and systems in place to increase longevity, fulfillment, and fruitfulness levels of ministers. It highlights the need for Christian organizations to be honest and open about the reality of ministry leadership challenges, rather than thinking that Christian leaders are (or should be) immune. The results show that leader’s sustainability is impacted by both personal well-being practices and an intentionally created organizational environment that enables and protects them.

Further areas of research include: (1) exploring gender differences in the experience of Christian leaders; (2) determining specific organizational cultural characteristics and practices that best support the leader; (3) discovering if there are statistical differences in clergy resiliency between countries in the West; (4) finding correlations and contrasts between leadership health levels in the West and other nations and identifying larger social trends that impact resiliency (aging congregations, secularization, two-income households, etc.); (5) analyzing possible differences in vocational satisfaction levels in church and parachurch ministries; (6) determining best practice for leadership transitions that support the incoming leader; and (7) ascertaining whether there are statistical differences between denominations/theological traditions.

As awareness of sustainability and well-being research increases, we anticipate that more Christian leaders in the West will be break free of stigmas about their human limitations and put comprehensive preventative strategies in place. They will feel the support of the organizations they serve.

Organizations will take ownership when replenishment strategies have been inadequate, churches will educate their congregations about the stressors in pastoral ministry, and training centers will better prepare Christian leaders for

the challenges that lay ahead of them. Ultimately, mutually developed and customized strategies will be put in place to ensure that leaders last.

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# DIALOGUE

## KIMON NICOLAIDES III

# ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE GROWTH AND VITALITY OF NORTH AMERICAN CHURCHES

Recent leadership research metrics may shed light on old questions regarding the value and spiritual quality of church growth, particularly in megachurches in the United States and Canada. This article examines two different leadership types—paternalistic and encouraging, the first of which has not been without its share of controversy. Both leadership styles and their accompanying characteristics are still exhibited in varying degrees by senior pastors of North American churches. We measured such factors using instruments the Paternalistic Leadership Scale (PLS) and the Encouraging Leadership Index (ELI).<sup>1</sup> These scales revealed highly significant statistical correlations when compared with their churches' growth rates and other spiritual vitality indicators. At predominantly mainline churches, higher growth rates and more spiritually healthy congregations were noted when the PLS score increased; we found ELI scores to moderate the associations between PLS and growth rates. Although scoring higher overall on both leadership indicators and having more spiritually vibrant congregations, we observed only weak or no correlations for evangelicals.

### Definition of Leadership Styles

For this research study, we defined the paternalistic leadership style to be both autocratic and nurturing in the exercise of hierarchical authority, providing parent-like care and guidance, whether in one's professional or personal

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<sup>1</sup>The acronym ELI (encouraging leadership index) refers to the six items of the fifth practice (i.e., encouragement) of Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory, ©2003 James M. Kouzes and Barry Posner. All rights reserved. It was used with permission. The abbreviated ten item version of Dr. Zeynep Aycan's Paternalistic Leadership Scale (PLS) was also used with permission granted through email correspondence.

life; followers of paternalistic leaders often demonstrate unwavering loyalty to their leaders (Aycan, Schyns, Sun, Felfe, & Saher, 2010). While paternalistic leadership is often frowned upon in the West, it is much more prevalent and accepted in non-Western cultures.

Encouraging leaders go further to inspire followers to reach beyond self-interested limitations or perceptions of themselves. Such leaders compel followers to higher levels of achievement and the pursuit of more ambitious collective goals. They employ strategies to describe such goals, convince followers of their merits, and encourage their accomplishment. Encouraging leaders show empathy, inspire self-reliance, foster solidarity, role-model, and support followers in their pursuit of goals (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990).

## Background

Accommodating one's culture—rather than confronting and transforming it—has always been problematic for the church. In fact, the challenge to bring equilibrium between the church's confrontational role and her ability to identify with surrounding culture has been on the forefront of the evangelical impetus ever since the Apostle Paul (Acts 17:22–34) (Keller, 2012). While presenting the Gospel requires some accommodation, balancing that with the Gospel's power to confront without diluting its message is challenging.

Western cultural values are informed by the enlightenment ideology. Reading the Bible through that lens hinders its potential for spiritual transformation. Adopting the surrounding culture's values will affect both one's practice of Christianity and understanding of the Bible. Some claim the Western church model needs to have a radically paradigmatic change in its self-perception (Reed, 2017). However, the existing Western institutional church model is not likely to accommodate too great a break with its own traditions.

Rodney Stark (2012) claims that as much as 70% of the population attends church (p. 7). However, such statistics can easily lead to false assurances and complacency. A Pew Research poll conducted in October 2019 indicated a 12% decline in American adults self-identifying as Christian over the previous decade (from 77% in 2009 to 65% in 2019), with the bulk of defections occurring among those of millennial age and younger.

While we could debate these statistics, Jesus exhorts us to use a completely different standard to measure our impact as Christians—saltiness. When we align with Western society's mores, this trait suffers; without saltiness, we are of no value to the Kingdom (Matt. 5:13). I am not suggesting that if a church lacks numerical growth, it is unfaithful to its mandate. However, a church's overall rate of growth shows its spiritual vitality. If the church in America is not growing, then something is wrong.

Jesus declared He would build His church (Matt. 16:18). Indeed, Christ's understanding of what it meant to "make disciples" reflected the values of His culture. Even today, we see that values upheld in thriving churches to have a closer approximation, on average, to those values which were operative in first-century Judea.

The traditional North American church model needs to be reevaluated. For this study, we used biblical criteria to evaluate church health and vitality. We then looked for correlations in churches' leader values. Leadership values correlating strongly with spiritually vibrant, biblically healthy churches were then assessed. While not relying solely on our findings to determine preferred values, we can still ask how values derived from the biblical standards versus cultural mores—and thus possibly display some confirmation biases (Nickerson, 1998)—are reinforced by Western ideologies.

## The Research Problem

For this study, the research questions focused on two main areas: (1) does church growth rate correspond to church vitality (where church vitality is an assessment of the numerical ratios of the baptisms, membership levels, church plants, giving, and missionaries supported to their current attendance)? If so, (2) does church growth rate correlate with the PLS and ELI scores (i.e., leadership style) of their pastors? Do either of these correlations depend on church size? Is the association between PLS and the church growth rate mediated by any other factor? If so, a mediating factor between the independent and dependent variables may explain why such a relationship exists. Here, the predominant candidate for being such a mediator is church tradition—was the church mainline or evangelical? Finally, (3) is the association between PLS and the church growth rate moderated by the ELI? A moderating variable is a separate/third variable that influences the relationship between an independent and dependent variable. Here, PLS scores were assumed to be the independent variable, and church growth rate and vitality were the dependent variables. We also asked if the strength of their relationship depended upon certain limits of the range of ELI.

Three primary hypotheses were tested initially and subsequently validated:

*Hypothesis 1:* There is a significant positive correlation between the church growth rate and church vitality.

*Hypothesis 2:* There is a positive correlation between the PLS of the pastor and church growth rate.

*Hypothesis 3:* The correlation of the PLS with the church growth rate is moderated by the ELI.

## Methodology

This observational study analyzed data from Christian churches evenly distributed across North America. The population came from a database of over 2,000 predominantly Protestant churches in the United States and Canada, ranging in attendance from 10 to 30,000. The sample was then stratified into three separate cohorts: small to medium churches (with 10 to 500 attendees), medium to large churches (501 to 2000 attendees), and megachurches (2001+ attendees). We randomly selected 900 churches from these cohorts and sent emails to their pastors, inviting them to take an online survey (via Survey Monkey). A \$30 donation was offered to participating churches as an expression of gratitude.

The survey requested information on attendance, membership, congregational age, baptisms, deaths, births, transfers, church plants/closings, and missionary support over the previous five years. The pastor also completed a leadership inventory. These data were used to profile church growth rates and vitality and two indices of their pastoral leadership: Paternalistic Leadership Scale (PLS) and Encouraging Leadership Index (ELI).

We applied quantitative and correlative analysis using a survey instrument comprising: (1) six items of the ELI, (2) a ten-item version of Aycan's PLS, and (3) questions on the demographics of the churches and their pastors. Of the 900 churches surveyed in the fall of 2012, 240 gave adequate responses<sup>2</sup> by spring 2013. By inviting 112 more megachurches, we increased our number of adequate responses to 274. Fully complete responses<sup>3</sup> (to measure vitality) remained at 156.

## Data Analysis

We used SPSS software (2012, Version 21) to perform bivariate regression analysis of the PLS and the ELI, with the respective church growth rates. We then used an Excel spreadsheet to compute the Comprehensive Church Growth/Vitality Factor (CCGVF), an estimate of church vitality that considered all the congregational demographic records collected from 2007 through 2012. A simple vitality factor (VF) was then deduced:  $VF = CCGVF - CGR$ .

## Findings and Application

### *The Correlations: CGR with CCGVF and VF*

The strong positive correlation between the church growth and the Comprehensive Church Growth/Vitality Factor indicated that about 86% of

<sup>2</sup>Adequately complete responses included those which contained data sufficient to correlate church growth rate with PLS and ELI.

<sup>3</sup>Fully complete responses contained sufficient data to compute church vitality, as well as church growth rate, PLS, and ELI.

the variance in the Comprehensive Church Growth/Vitality Factor could be accounted for by church growth. That suggests that the church growth rate is a valid measure of actual vital church growth instead of merely a reflection of congregational transfers or due only to more charismatic leaders' popularity. That allowed us to use the church growth rate, with more responses, than the Comprehensive Church Growth/Vitality Factor to measure correlations with the leadership style. About 10% of the vitality factor variance was attributed to church growth, and a 3.7% annual increase in attendance was found in churches with more paternalistic leaders. A similarly strong positive correlation found between the Comprehensive Church Growth/Vitality Factor and PLS supports the case that PLS positively influences healthy church growth.

### *ELI as a Moderator of the Correlation Between the PLS and Church Growth*

This correlation showed that there was about a 99.4% probability that 8% of the variance in PLS was attributable to ELI. Hence, we did a path analysis of PLS and ELI's correlations with Comprehensive Church Growth/Vitality Factor, church vitality, and the church growth rate. Path analysis can test a potential theoretical model. Here, we are assuming a direct influence is exerted on these variables (PLS and church growth) by force, in this case outside of those under consideration, i.e., ELI, that is causal, linear, additive, and measurable on a linear scale. Since causal relationships are directional in character, they may be plotted or represented graphically, hence the term "path analysis" (Dodge, Cox, Commenges, Davison, Solomon, & Wilson, 2006, p. 304).

We then found that for high ELI, the correlations of PLS with Comprehensive Church Growth/Vitality Factor were weak; for low ELI, PLS correlated strongly with the vitality factor and the Comprehensive Church Growth/Vitality Factor. At low ELI, a positive regression of PLS to Comprehensive Church Growth/Vitality Factor showed with 97.7% probability that about a 6.5% increase of Comprehensive Church Growth/Vitality Factor could be achieved with higher PLS. Still, there was a very high risk (99.9%) of suffering as much as a 10% decline in vitality due to the strongly negative correlation vitality had with PLS. That meant that ELI negatively moderated the correlation of PLS to church growth. It also presented a cause for concern for the churches of pastors exhibiting a low ELI.

Therefore, when pastors fail to encourage (low ELI), growth in attendances may still occur with more paternalistic leadership (high PLS), but at the same time VF will decline. But when more encouragement is given, higher PLS is not needed for higher growth rates. Although PLS and ELI have a strong positive correlation, a high ELI is still possible with a low PLS. In such cases

although CGR may not be adversely affected by a low PLS, it raises the question of the quality of the growth that occurs. Therefore, we also correlated VF with CGR for such cases. We found a significant positive correlation indicating with greater than 95% likelihood that a 10% increase in the vitality factor will occur along with a comparable rise in church growth when ELI is high, but PLS is low. That finding emphasizes the crucial importance of encouraging leadership for vital church growth (1 Cor. 14:3; Heb. 10:25).

The strongly negative correlation found between the vitality factor and PLS at low ELI scores is also a clear danger sign indicating that paternalistic leadership was not always the preferred style, even though whatever growth in attendances may be attained. We suspect this may be more characteristic of leadership found in some peripheral sects or cults more popular in high power distance cultures, which would make for a very interesting subject of further research. Previously noted strong correlations between high power distance orientation cultures and the rapid rise of megachurches may shed light on the high PLS correlation with church growth; we found this in our own megachurches since we know PLS is characteristic of those cultures (Waddell, 2005). It reinforces our understanding of the need for higher ELI scores. The encouraging function of the pastor is not optional in the development of spiritual maturity of the church. While paternalistic leadership may bring numerical growth, real church vitality and full spiritual maturity need strong encouragement from strong leaders.

### *Congregation Age Versus CGR*

Given the mean age of the church attendees within our sample, there was a 99.9% likelihood that as the mean age of the congregation increased there would be a comparable decrease in its church growth rate of about 6% per year. Based on past research this was no surprise. A rising median age of congregants has always been a danger sign for church growth, (Reeves & Jensen, 1984, p. 50; Colson & Vaughn 1994, p. 43). However, we also noticed that the effect congregation age had on church growth disappeared once the mean age reached 40 years, with no further declines occurring when the mean age was above that level. Thus, you could expect to find about twice that effect or closer to a 12% per year decline in church growth with an increasing mean age in churches where the congregation mean age had yet to exceed the range of 18 to 40 years of age.

### **PLS Correlations**

Biblical leaders both exert authority and practice love. The PLS measures the efforts of each. Western attitudes typically have an aversion to this leader-



ship style (e.g., Mandryk, 2010, p. 342; Tippet, 2013, p. 190; Barnett, 1953, p. 65–68; Allen, 1962, p. 29–30; Kraft, 2005, p. 83). Unfortunately, the term “paternalism” is stigmatized and considered pejorative; the concept has negative associations with imperialism and slavery linked to it. While paternalistic practices cannot justify such exploitations, neither do they need to be condemned along with them. In his autobiography, *No Continuing City*, Alan Tippett (2013) discusses Western Colonial era missionaries’ tendency to be overly paternalistic. I believe that the primary detrimental effects to which he alluded were due more to ethnocentrism than paternalism.

Because of this sordid past, disciple-making may be considered exploitive wherever a paternal nature is evident. Our society’s radical individualism exacerbates this perception (Krauthammer, 2013, p. 164). Teaching requires some condescension on behalf of the teacher, and learning requires the learner’s dependency upon the instructor. Thus, negative attributions, by default, can be attached to the attitudes or motivations involved. Edward Said’s work *Orientalism* likely capitalized on this trend as much as contributing to it (Said, 1979). Post-modernists bolster it (Colella & Garcia, 2004).

Max Weber (1946) argued that paternalism would become obsolete as organizations rely more on rules rather than the whims and dictates of authoritarian figures. He thought a paternalistic leader’s status, alone, demanded obedience, hence denoting an elementary form of traditional domination. He favored a shift from traditional to ration-legal forms of authority (Weber, 1968).

In other cultures, however, paternalistic leadership has always been widespread, if informal. Policy in most regions of the world carries some aspects of paternalism and holds no such negative connotations. The Chinese practice it, with the three primary elements of authoritarianism, benevolence, and moral leadership (Westwood, 1997; Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004, p. 91). The authoritarian element is rooted in Confucianism and legalism. In this tradition, the father is supreme—unquestioned, unqualified, and absolute authority. Yet, the “Confucian ideal of the five cardinal relationships and the norm of reciprocity” inspires its benevolent aspect (Cheng et al., 2004). Those relationships are the ruler-servant, the father-son, the husband-wife, the elder brother-younger brother, and the kind elder-deferent junior. In each case, the senior partner’s benevolence inculcates a reciprocal indebtedness and deference by the junior. Their highly extolled virtues of moral leadership are gratitude, loyalty, obedience, and compliance, ensuring a governance system that relies more on personal duty than rules or law.

Paternalistic leadership is also rooted in the “indigenous psychologies” of the cultures of Latin America and the Middle East (Aycan, 2006, p. 445). Hence, it is well represented and wholly exemplified within the biblical text pages: fulfilling

a human need for nurturing relationships over time to develop spiritual maturity. This has been shown to be crucial to understanding the meaning and the impact of many of Jesus's parables, including "The Prodigal Son" and "The Unjust Steward" (Luke 15:11–32; 16:1–9) (Yap, 2016). Western culture's individualistic values tend to shorten these developmental time frames.

Jesus, Paul, Peter, John, James and the author of Hebrews employ the idea of paternalism (Nicolaidis, 2013, p. 164). Our contemporary understanding of "disciple" has changed radically since the first century. If "disciple" meant only student, *manthano*, translated as "I learn," would have sufficed, with 24 New Testament occurrences. But *mathetes*, "a disciple," found 266 times in the New Testament, had already been used for centuries previously. This word means one who is a totally devoted follower of their spiritual leader, not unlike a child with his father, imitating their master in every respect. When Christ first called John and James to follow Him, they were with their father mending fishing nets. They left their father, Zebedee, with his hired men to follow Jesus (Matt. 4:22, Mark 1:20). Clearly, Jesus was now adopting the role previously assumed by their father. With these positive, Christ-like attributes and connotations in mind, we expected the PLS of pastors to correlate positively with church growth and vitality.

## ELI Correlations

If PLS meets all these biblical criteria, why add ELI to it? Implied in the definition of "disciple" is the expectation that s/he will eventually become a disciple-maker. Healthy churches do not merely produce disciples. They make disciple-makers with the goal of releasing disciples from previous allegiances implied in the paternalistic model. They must build the confidence needed for disciples to assume more responsibility and take greater risks in their own discipling endeavors. The aim is to instill enough courage into disciples to assume the risks of making disciples themselves. This requires encouragement and is one focus of Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory, which has been validated for over twenty years in the contexts of Western business management studies while stimulating some 500 academic studies (Leadership Challenge, 2013). Other correlations have linked the encouraging aspect of the Leadership Practices Inventory to Power Distance Orientation (PDO) (Ergeneli, Gohar, & Timirbekova, 2007). Hofstede (2001) writes:

Power distance is a term that describes how people belonging to a specific culture view power relationships—superior/subordinate relationships—between people, including the degree that people not in power accept that power is spread unequally. Individuals in cultures demonstrating a high-power distance are very deferential to figures of authority

and generally accept an unequal distribution of power, while individuals in cultures demonstrating a low power distance readily question authority and expect to participate in decisions that affect them. (n.p.)

High power distance orientation is a trait long associated with paternalistic culture and practice. Therefore, we included the encouraging aspect of the Leadership Practices Inventory here as the Encouraging Leadership Index (ELI). ELI, which moderates the correlation between PLS and church growth, has been described by its “individualized consideration.” We associate this characteristic with the individualized care of the benevolent leadership characteristic of PLS. Superiors who respect their subordinates both care for them and try to meet felt needs but give the appropriate support, including encouragement.

In Western culture, individualized consideration implies a relative degree of equality of respect, treatment, and rights accorded to both superiors and subordinates alike. It goes beyond magnanimity displayed on the job to an interest in a subordinate’s personal well-being. In Eastern, Middle Eastern, African, or Latin American cultures, benevolent leadership means “favor granting” to subordinates, where there is a large difference in authority between superior and subordinate, with constant reminders of that distance being invoked.

This understanding may explain the absence of any directly significant correlation found between ELI and church growth. While ELI does not correlate directly to church growth, it can affect it indirectly by strengthening the ministry and increasing leadership endurance. This may explain its direct correlation to church vitality. That would mean that while both PLS and ELI play significant roles in church growth, they build up the church members at various stages of their development. While many people directly associate Paul with the immediate growth of the church in Acts, Barnabas was working behind the scenes to provide encouragement (Acts 4:36: 9; see chapters 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 1 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 2:1, 9, 13; Col. 4:10). This ministry of encouragement is vital for the continued health of the church. Without it, the church would be inclined to schism, dissipation, and inward focus. While more encouraging leaders may not directly influence numerical growth, they can do so indirectly through their ministry to others. They directly impact church vitality, which is believed to be another indicator of spiritual health.

The very strong correlation between PLS and ELI shows that these two constructs hold certain biblical elements in common with each other (1 Thess. 2:11–12). Being paternalistic and encouraging are complementary leadership traits. A paternalistic leader is likely to be an encourager, and an encourager is likely to have paternalistic instincts. When pastoral ELI is sufficiently high, as might be expected, the correlation between their PLS scores and numerical growth rates disappears.

## Mega-churches and Denominational Affiliations

We found a dramatic difference in PLS and church growth rate correlations on the first three cohorts instead of those correlations when only 28 megachurches were included. The first regression had a correlation indicating a 98.8% probability of gaining a 2.7% increase in annual church growth rate with higher PLS. When combining the groups, the regression increased to a 99.8% probability of achieving a 3.9% increase in church growth overall with higher PLS. For so few churches to have this great of an impact upon the overall correlation, their own correlation had to be very high. We found a 99.5% probability that adjusting for PLS in these 28 churches would correspond to an overall increase in growth by a stunning 34% annually. Was that because of their mean congregational sizes? No, attendance levels did not correlate to PLS. Could it be because of denominational affiliation? Cohorts one to three were a mixture of mainline, evangelical, and Catholic and Orthodox churches, while the megachurches were primarily evangelical (five were mainline). We then asked, “Would evangelical pastors stand to gain more from strengthening their paternalistic leadership skills?”

Therefore, we did another correlation on the first three cohorts after segregating them into two groups based upon denominational affiliation: 173 evangelical churches comprised one group, and 87 mainline churches, plus two Roman Catholic and two Orthodox, comprised the second group. Contrary to our expectations, we found that the mainline church group leadership accounted for the entire significance of the PLS/church growth rate regression. That regression yielded a very strong likelihood (99.9%) of seeing an 11.6% increase in church growth in churches with higher PLS, while that of the evangelical group’s correlation did not meet the criterion considered to be statistically significant. We concluded that due to the already higher PLS scores of evangelical pastors, only marginal, if any, improvements could be gained by further increases. The benefits of this study would appear to apply primarily to mainline churches and their pastors, with the glaring exception of the evangelical megachurch pastors.

Unfortunately, our sample of these pastors was too small (only 28) to follow up with a study on the moderating effects of ELI. However, it raises the question again of how they are getting their high growth rates. Is it by high-quality spiritually vibrant disciple-making? And if so, what accounts for the apparent lack of multiplication in some of these churches? A mature disciple of Christ, by definition, can—and will—reproduce him- or herself. Such a follow-up study may provide some very enlightening answers to these questions. Given the rapid rise of this megachurch phenomenon in our culture, adequately addressing these questions could help illuminate potential leadership shortcomings and provide guidance in oversight or training if required.

## Implications for the Church

We cannot claim from these data alone that paternalistic leadership is more biblical than other leadership styles. However, within the present Western culture of the United States and Canada, this leadership style's practice appears effective when supplemented with high ELI, in enabling pastors of mainline churches—and possibly evangelical megachurches—to see more biblical fruit. Assuming a causal relationship, mainline churches should see no less than an 11% increase in annual growth rates by practicing more paternalistic leadership styles, again, with the proviso that ELI is not neglected.

Because of the discrepancy between evangelicals and mainliners, one may conclude that the most significant contributing factor to church health and vitality has to do with one's view of scriptural authority. If true, then gaining a higher view of scriptural authority would yield higher church growth rates (up to 7% annually). In contrast, church growth rates in the US and Canada are currently hovering at about 0.7% annually (Barrett, Kurian, & Johnson, 2001, p. 224), similar to the general population's growth rate.

About 25% of the Caucasian population (Pew Research Center, 2019, p. 23) in the US (63 million, per Ward, 2021) regularly attend a Protestant church. Thus, the church's growth should be about seven to eight hundred thousand annually (in which Protestants have remained consistently at an approximately 35% [Earls, 2019]). Seven percent of that is about 50,000 people every year, the equivalent of another twenty-five megachurches annually, or at least another half million in a decade. Hence, in ten years, there would be another half a million more real, active, and vital (assuming we do not neglect the encouragement factor) Christians living in North America, which would have an inestimable impact upon our nation's future, and the evangelization of the world.

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# BOOK REVIEWS



## BOOK REVIEWS

### **THE POST-QUARANTINE CHURCH: SIX URGENT CHALLENGES AND OPPOR- TUNITIES THAT WILL DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF YOUR CONGREGATION**

*By Thom S. Rainer*  
*Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum*  
*(2020)*  
*Hardcover edition, 115 pages.*

*Reviewed by JOANNE CORTES*

COVID-19 has impacted practically every church in the United States and across the world. In this book, *The Post-quarantine Church*, Thom Rainer looks at what our church may look like in this new era, post pandemic. He does not claim to have all the answers but asks the question that have many of us have been asking: “What will happen next?” Thom Rainer offers six urgent challenges and opportunities that may help a church determine the kind of future it will have. The first challenge Rainer suggests is that the church should gather differently and better, find innovative ways to use the church facility, and be ready to think of creative ways to reach people currently not being reached (p. 11).

The second challenge involves seizing the opportunity to reach the digital world by making a plan and thinking of social media channels that might be most effective for the church right now. One thing to be aware of that may jeopardize the church is being digitally busy while having no effectiveness. It is better to simplify content being shared (p. 25).

The third challenge suggested by Rainer is to reconnect with the neighborhood. Be a church in the community, for the community by having a clear purpose and mission, and being a positive influence to those in the near vicinity (p. 39).

Fourth, Rainer recommends prayer. Take prayer to a new and powerful level by praying regularly and asking members, as well as the community, to join in this challenge. Prayer can happen in an empty church building, via technology—basically anywhere (p. 55).

The fifth challenge reminds churches to, once again, rethink the use of the facility, as previously mentioned in challenge one. After the quarantine, churches can practically begin with a “new slate” and serve their communities in innovative ways. This is also a good time to partner with new organizations and groups (p. 69).

The last challenge (the sixth) suggested by Rainer involves encouraging churches to make lasting changes that will make a difference. To think strategically and to reevaluate ministry objectives, committee budgets, job descriptions, etc., so the church can be positioned in such a way so as to achieve success post-pandemic (p. 85).

The final chapter in this book examines challenges faced by the church that can also be opportunities. Rainer lists nine key changes for the post-pandemic church that also reinforce the earlier six challenges previously provided:

1. Simplicity will be vitally important.
2. Only outwardly focused churches will survive.
3. Worship service gatherings will be smaller.
4. “Multi” will multiply.
5. Staff and leadership realignment will focus more on digital proficiency.
6. “Stragglers” will become a subject of outreach and focus.
7. Digital worship services will be newly proposed.
8. Ministry training will change dramatically.
9. Pastors will leave their lead positions for second-chair roles.

Thom Rainer concludes the final chapter by articulating that “the post-quarantine era may prove to be one of the most challenging seasons for churches and their leaders. The opportunity to lead change is likely greater than at any other point in our lifetimes” (p.110). The pandemic has changed the world and the way we are used to “doing” church, yet there is a great opportunity in that we are practically given a blank slate—an opportunity to rethink, recreate, and revamp church.

Thom Rainer finalizes by imagining how the first-century Christians felt as they were trying to reach a world that needed to hear the good news of the resurrected Savior. I can only imagine their excitement and their fear. They knew the path ahead would be both difficult and dangerous. But they also knew their efforts would be worth the cost. (p. 110)

I recommend this easy-to-read book to any leader or pastor whose church is struggling because of COVID-19, who needs help in rethinking what church should look like after quarantine, who is ready to begin to think outside of what is normal, and who may be unsure if the church is

truly being effective and doing all it can to continue the mission during these uncertain times. As we enter this new era—this new “normal”—we cannot forget that Jesus promises us that no matter what we go through, even if it be a pandemic, He is with us always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:19–20). Let us not be afraid of what may come, but trust in the one who is with us all the way.

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## DISCIPLING IN A MULTI-CULTURAL WORLD

By A. Fernando  
*Wheaton, IL: Crossway (2019)*  
*Kindle version, 309 pages*

Reviewed by JONATHAN CHITWOOD

In *Discipling in a Multicultural World*, Ajith Fernando makes a valuable contribution to the theory and practice of discipleship, rooted in over forty years of multicultural discipleship experience. For 35 years, he served as the national director for Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka, and has since transitioned to being its teaching director. In his preface, Fernando explains that the purpose of this book is “to help nurture Christians to maturity and fruitfulness while taking into account an exciting challenge we face today. Many who come to Christ . . . may have different cultural backgrounds from those who disciple them” (p. 15).

Recognizing that “the exact way in which a person discipled varies according to the personality of the discipler, the personality and maturity of the disciple, and the context in which

the discipling takes place,” he seeks “to give biblical principles about discipling and to present examples about how they apply in daily life and ministry” (p. 15). The book is divided into two parts. Part one introduces the concept of spiritual parenthood, which utilizes the biblical metaphor of being born again to explain discipling as “an affectionate relationship of caring between people who see themselves as having a parent-child relationship” (p. 27). Part two examines how Christians change, including three agents of change, three kinds of transformation, and the role of the discipler in the change process.

This book has several strengths worthy of consideration. First, it presents an accurate perspective on biblical discipleship derived from the Bible, instead of perspectives derived from other sources that use the Bible to support preconceived ideas. For example, while other books on discipleship seem to portray the process of discipleship as an end rather than a means to an end, Fernando insightfully identifies the goal of biblical discipling as being able to “present their disciples mature in Christ at . . . the second coming and its accompanying events” (p. 34). Second, it presents a realistic perspective on biblical discipleship. For example, it acknowledges the realities of insecurity, pride, and selfishness for both disciplers and disciples, the cost, consequences, and potential liabilities of commitment, and the spiritual risks involved in confronting demonic powers without adequate preparation. Third, it presents a shared perspective on biblical discipleship, not limited to Fernando’s own experience. He freely quotes from other books on discipleship when their content or manner of communicating an idea fits his topic well. Fourth, it addresses the broad context

of guilt-innocence cultures, shame-honor cultures, and fear-power cultures, and how the power of the Gospel can be sensitively communicated with disciples in each culture.

Through application, this book provides several practical suggestions for ministry, in general, and cross-cultural ministry, in particular. One suggestion is “to pass up what looks like wonderful opportunities for service so that we can have sufficient time for personal ministry” (p. 43). Another suggestion is to ensure that every member in one’s congregation is cared for by training people to share in the load of caring (p. 56). For those working within an honor/shame cultural paradigm, the author suggests contrasting honor lost with honor gained by following Christ. For those working within a power/fear cultural paradigm involving demonic attacks, he suggests alerting others to pray when you need it, spending much time in personal prayer beforehand, and having a dedicated team of people who pray for you regularly (p. 238). Finally, for those working within a guilt/innocence cultural paradigm, he provides a chronological approach to presenting Christian truth that can help disciples develop a Christian worldview (p. 273).

Because we live in an increasingly multicultural world, there are greater challenges when discipling others. Not only does Fernando address many of these challenges in this book, but he does so with a depth of spiritual insight that is enhanced by an Asian perspective on Western culture. Readers will discover the best ways to avoid burnout, the solution to leadership insecurity, and the key to empowering junior leadership. They will better understand the role of community in discipleship, the importance of communicating prophetic vision, and why a place of significance should not be confused with promi-

nence. They will be better enabled to protect, warn, rebuke, and exhort with carefulness and tact. If implemented, the principles conveyed in this book can provide a holistic approach to ministry that can help disciplers and disciples alike. It is a must-read for those struggling to find balance in their personal life, those searching for effective ways of ministering cross-culturally, or those who simply want to gain a fresh perspective on discipleship.

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## **THE LEADER'S GREATEST RETURN: ATTRACTING, DEVELOPING, AND MULTIPLYING LEADERS**

*By J. C. Maxwell*  
New York, NY: HarperCollins  
*Leadership* (2020)  
Hardcover edition, 256 pages

*Reviewed by ANGEL D. ACEVEDO*

John C. Maxwell is a pastor, author, and speaker who has written many books about leadership. He is also the creator of the John C. Maxwell Team, a leadership, coaching, speaking, and training development program. In his latest book, *The Leader's Greatest Return*, Maxwell explains that any organization's success is based on having a culture that develops leaders. We see a lack of leaders in the world, across all types of organizations, because few have developed a culture to identify, attract, and equip new leaders. Some don't do this because developing leaders is difficult; it takes a lot of time, energy, and resources.

In this book, Maxwell identifies and expands on 10 steps that leaders can take to have or change their organizations into a culture that develops leaders. Why is such a culture important? Because we have a global leadership crisis, across businesses, nonprofits, families, churches, communities, etc. This is noticeable everywhere we look at today. Lack of good leaders in politics, religions, education, sports—you name it. However, the good news is that leaders can be developed. Although it is not easy, it is worthwhile. Such development is complex because it demands a significant time investment which never actually ends. In this fast and quick day and age, investing time in developing leaders is not something all organizations will do. When an organization stops developing and/or growing leaders, that organization will decay and eventually die; this is the consequence of not investing in developing leaders.

One thing that needs to be done to grow leaders is to start with those around us—those closest to us—because they will determine our teams' kind of success. Another thing needed to grow leaders is to change the leadership culture. "A leadership culture exists when leaders are routinely and systematically developed, and you have a surplus of leaders ready for the next opportunity or challenge" (p. xix). This is key. This is the role of the CEO, senior pastor, etc., to make sure both leaders and potential leaders are consistently being identified, trained, and developed.

Throughout the book, Maxwell gives readers ideas of how to attract, develop, and multiply leaders. One of these ideas is what he calls a "leadership table," which is a place to attract leaders into your organization. The leadership table is "where small

groups of men and women come together and discuss their experiences, apply values-based lessons to their lives, and hold one another accountable for positive change” (p. 22).

Identifying and attracting leaders to any organization is just the beginning and, compared to the other steps that Maxwell identifies, they might be the easy ones. Once you have the leaders, how can you motivate them to keep leading and passing on the baton to develop other leaders? “By far, the strongest motivator I’ve seen in people is purpose. The human spirit comes alive when it finds a cause worth fighting for” (p. 68). This is why mission and vision are so important in an organization. If these elements are lacking, most people will not be motivated to lead and serve.

When I started my career as a pastor, I spoke with one of my former pastors and friends, and he told me that the first thing I should do in any church that I pastor is to gather the saints and talk about the vision and mission of the church. Why? Because doing so will give the body purpose, which is the motivation to work, serve, and move forward. Maxwell tells his experience regarding motivation. How does the leader motivate people? His answer is that he doesn’t; he simply tries to inspire people and help them find their own motivations. Lead by example, just like Jesus, the greatest leader, did.

Lastly, Maxwell talks about compounding leaders’ effects, meaning that when a leader invests in developing leaders, they do the same. The author shares seven benefits of compounding leaders; here, I will only mention two. The first benefit is that “developed leaders help you carry the leadership load” (p. 198). There are few things as satisfying, in the leadership world, as having a team

that helps each other carry their load. The second benefit is that “developed leaders ensure a better future for your organization” (p. 203).

Maxwell says to “never be afraid to hire or manage people who are better at certain jobs than you are. They can only make your organization stronger” (p. 204). The leader cannot be selfish or prideful, because it is not about him/her, but about the organization. The church setting is not about the pastor, the leaders, how many people come to the church, how many good activities the church has planned, or how “successful” the church is. In the church setting, the vision is God’s Kingdom, and the mission is to make disciples. Leaders should be focused on who can lead effectively for God’s kingdom.

I give this book my highest recommendation for all who want to create a culture to develop leaders so that their mission, vision, and growth can be a reality. Ultimately, such a culture will allow a plentiful harvest of good and needed leaders in the world. As Maxwell writes:

Will it be challenging? Yes. Will it take a long time to achieve? You know it. Will you make mistakes? Undoubtedly. But will it be worth it? Absolutely! . . . Developing leaders is the most impacting and rewarding thing you can do as a leader . . . There’s no time to lose. Start today. (p. 208)

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## **THE SOFTER SIDE OF LEADERSHIP: ESSENTIAL SOFT SKILLS THAT TRANSFORMS LEADERS AND THE PEOPLE THEY LEAD**

By E. Habecker  
*Sisters, OR: Deep River Books (2018)*  
 240 pages

Reviewed by CARLITO P. QUIDET, JR.

This book's motif brings the reader's mental assent to the ridge of the soft leadership skills. Amidst the rise of soft skills in leadership, the harder side of leadership is also important. Both sides are essential to have an equilibrium in leadership. The doxological purpose of this 240-page book brings together four essential components of soft-skill leadership. The first type has two components, namely sanctuary and connection. The second type also has two components, namely deep-level relationship and followership.

The first component of soft-skill leadership is Sabbath. A leader should observe Sabbath rest, and it should be a time wholly committed to God. Sabbath is considered as a sanctuary that a leader shall observe. Everyone needs to have a connection with God. Spiritual and physical disciplines are observed during Sabbath, where boundaries in a sacred space are determined. Sacred space provides time for refocusing one's mind on the mind of Jesus, to achieve the goal of human existence. At this time, "heaven seems to touch earth and leader finds himself aware of the Holy, and filled with the Spirit" (loc. 349). Within this sacred space, a leader can renew his strength to pursue his vision and goal. During the

time of sacred space, heavenly wisdom is greatly achieved and the enormous power of God is gained.

The second component is connection, meaning connecting to the heart and mind. Staying connected to the heart is essential in leadership. "But once I had brains, and a heart also; so having tried them both, I should much rather have a heart." (L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, quoted at loc. 1167). Having the right kind of heart and staying connected to the heart is another soft skill that is a foundational focus for leaders (loc. 1189). Leading with heart starts with *being*, not *doing*. Proverbs 4:23 tells us, "Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life." Frances Hesselbein, a former chairman of the board of the Peter Drucker Foundation, puts it simply yet powerfully: "Leadership is a matter of how to be, not how to do it, noting that in the end, it is the quality of character of the leader that determines the performance" (quoted at loc. 1196). Knowing your heart means knowing yourself; being connected to the heart means to be connected with your whole being, who you want to be, and what changes need to occur. A leader is not a spectator but a player.

A creative leader can dramatically change the church/organization in significant ways. "Creativity is a soft skill that celebrates outside-the-box thinking, and can catalyze innovation and change" (loc. 1801). Creativity requires thinking outside the box. An exemplary leader never stops thinking; he analyzes things that matter to the organization. A learned person sees the future brightly and those who are willing to learn new things can change the world.

The third component involves deep-level relationships. The leader should be deeply committed to all his

subordinates and should demonstrate trustworthiness in all he does. Intimacy in leadership is also crucial. A leader shall invest his time in his subordinates. He must construct a bridge to connect to his colleagues and their families. Trust is essential in the organization for it helps people connect like a bridge over the river. “Effective leaders make developing and enhancing trust a top organizational priority” (loc. 1947).

Forming meaningful, deep-level relationships is an important component in leadership. A leader should seek to have a meaningful relationship with colleagues. Developing a relationship with the whole church/organization is a dynamic element of good leadership that focuses not on only one or two people but on everyone in the organization.

The fourth component is followership. The term followership is often an unpopular word in leadership but is a powerful discipline used to gain a great success within an organization. Unfortunately, only a few recognize this leadership component as effective. A person who desires greatness in leadership should be a good leader and a good follower. A leader in a big organization is a follower in other small-scale organizations. In life, everyone is part of both big and small organizations. Even the president of the nation, the highest person in the country, is a follower in other organizations such as church, the city or subdivision where he lives. The terms “leader” and “follower” are not mere titles, job descriptions, or personality types; rather, they are distinct roles that executives and managers are called upon to play (loc 2683). Habecker advocates the enculturation of leadership and followership.

Society is in love with leadership but view followership as undesirable. People don’t honor followership

because it appears as if it is on a downward trajectory. Aristotle wrote, “He who cannot be a good follower cannot be a good leader” (quoted at loc. 2662). Michael Hyatt also commented that “if you want to be a great leader, you must first become a great follower” (quoted at loc. 2662). Jesus Himself emphasized that if you want to be a leader, desire followership. The combination of leadership and followership is par excellent. Jesus is a super-follower and a super-leader; He was also the most successful leader on earth.

The book displays its wisdom through Scripture, as it explores biblical leadership passages to support good leadership practices. While the book springs from complex terms and references, it launches into a more practical leadership spectrum. It introduces a leader to leadership and advocates to do more than just form a connection; the reader is encouraged to cultivate the connection to bear fruit. The author promotes productivity in work and focuses on colleagues’ heart metamorphosis, fit for God’s kingdom.

The book fails to present hard-skill leadership, even a brief summary, so the reader could understand the whole view of the hard side of leadership. Although the book’s title is *The Softer Side of Leadership*, hard skill need to be carefully explained or the reader may assign such traits such as strictness, aggressiveness, energy, and bravery to be the hard side of leadership. There is a lack of integration between the hard side and soft side of leadership within the book such that verdant readers could go astray.

The book has a profound insight into leadership; reading this book helps leaders lead their organization with greater success. The presentation of concepts about leadership is,

at times, bizarre, and the principles being introduced can be unpopular, but for great leaders, they are proven to be effective. The leadership soft skills so that a reader can easily lose time while reading. Aside from learning, reading this book was enjoyable, for it captivated the heart and mind. The methods for successful leadership are brilliantly crafted and carefully extracted from real-life experiences.

I recommend that you read this book not only once but even twice or more, for it offers colorful leadership perspectives that can be attractive for today's leaders. The leadership principles are biblically, practically, logically, and philosophically associated with classic examples. This book is comprehensive and worthy of admiration within the realm of leadership, tailoring one's abilities to cope with the different dimensions in leadership. I recommend this book to any leader who is looking for greater success.

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## **ANATOMY OF A REVIVED CHURCH: SEVEN FINDINGS OF HOW CONGREGATIONS AVOIDED DEATH**

*By Thom S. Rainer*  
*Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing*  
*(2020)*  
*Paperback edition, 140 pages*

*Reviewed by BYRON H. CORBETT*

In his book, *Anatomy of a Revived Church*, Thom Rainer shares the valuable results of his research on hundreds of churches headed toward death but who reversed course and brought new life to their congregations. His thesis is straightforward:

change or die. Rainer believes this applies to churches as much as individuals and follows his thesis statement up with a challenge: "The choice is yours" (p. 23). After issuing that challenge, the author lists seven findings that characterize dying churches that turned around and entered into a new era of revitalization and growth.

The first finding was that revitalized churches accepted responsibility for their condition. "The first component boils down to the choice of blame and denial versus acceptance and responsibility" (p. 27). Second, revitalized churches overcame the traps of traditions; "where traditions become a fixation or obsession, they often become issues of idolatry" (p. 40). Those traditions include anything from worship style and order of service to the committee's functions and the usage of church rooms. Third, turnaround churches expanded their scorecards. They started counting things like worship attendance, giving, and conversions to evaluate their effectiveness. Fourth, they committed to powerful prayer. Rainer writes, "I have yet to see a sustained church revitalization that was not undergirded by a powerful movement of prayer" (p. 71). The fifth finding was that turnaround churches dealt with toxins. That means they found the courage to confront toxic people who undermined leadership and drove people away from the church. Sixth, they stopped looking for the proverbial "silver bullet," or magical, effortless solution to their problem such as a new pastor, more money, or contemporary music. The last finding of revitalized churches was they chose meaningful membership. "Membership has meaning. Membership means sacrificing for the greater good of the body. Membership has clear expectations" (p. 115).



Rainer also introduces the idea of a church accepting responsibility for its condition precedes its revival, writing, “We saw a commonality early in the turnaround, indeed before the turnaround became visible. Usually, a few leaders determined in God’s power that they would stop blaming others and other situations. They would take responsibility. . .” (p. 35). That is the most basic step toward revitalization because it creates an environment for change.

One finding that dying churches often ignore is the problem of toxic people in a congregation. It is essential to distinguish between a critic and a toxic member because while “disagreement does not equal toxicity” (p. 89), “a toxic member has a pattern of disruption, disunity, and negativity that is persistent, consistent, and intense” (p. 90). Confronting a toxic member is difficult, but ignoring him or her only makes things worse; ultimately, the church may even die unless it such members are dealt with. When a leader confronts a toxic member, they should “seek both the wisdom and the alliance of other members in the church” (p. 95).

Overcoming the idea of the “silver bullet” is also key. It means a congregation stops looking for an easy solution that will not require much work on their part and instead becomes willing to put forth whatever hard work and effort are necessary to turn their dying church around.

An underlying theme that ran through most, if not all seven, findings of revitalized churches is best summarized in the words of one of the people the author interviewed: “When our church started focusing on others instead of ourselves, the turnaround had already begun” (p. 129). That is a key idea that readers should not miss.

Although the book does an excellent job of dealing with the “what” of revitalization in the seven findings, it does not do as good a job of dealing with the “how.” The practical value would increase significantly if each result included specific examples of how churches actually implemented them.

This book would be a good discussion-starter for church leaders to address the condition of their own churches. A church’s board of elders could read the book and evaluate where their church is in terms of each of the seven findings. They could analyze each committee, program, or ministry for its effectiveness and decide whether it is still needed or should be replaced. The leadership team could develop ways to measure attendance, giving, and ministry involvement to help them identify trends sooner and test the effectiveness of the changes they were making. Another way to apply the ideas of this book would be for a church to require everyone who becomes a member through baptism, profession of faith, or transfer to participate in a membership class that incorporates information, expectations, and assimilation into ministry into its content so that the culture of the church would change.

*Anatomy of a Revived Church* is a necessary read for any leader or member who cares about their church, its health, and its mission. The seven findings are an excellent road map for church revitalization. The author draws on his wealth of church consulting experiences to illustrate them with stories to help readers recognize their own churches in what he is talking about.

We face a stern reality. First, in the United States, “Twenty churches close their doors every single day” (p. 14); second, in the last ten years, “the

number of churches near death has grown from 35,000 to 66,000” (p. 14). For many of our churches to avoid that fate, we must confront the truth that “if given a choice between life and death, most church members and church leaders choose death if they have to make substantive changes in their churches” (Rainer, p. 137).

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## **EIGHT INNOVATIONS TO LEADING MILLENNIALS: HOW MILLENNIALS CAN GROW YOUR CHURCH AND CHANGE THE WORLD**

*By Benjamin Windle  
Cheadle, Cheshire, United Kingdom:  
The Thrive Co. (2019)  
Kindle edition, 101 pages*

*Reviewed by IVANILDO ALMEIDA  
LOPES*

The Thrive Co. and author Benjamin Windle have made a significant contribution to church growth literature by giving practical ideas on how millennials can impact the world and the church. As it is known, many young people are leaving the church. “It is time to unleash a new wave of innovation, progress, and dare I say, experimentation with our ministry models. We have to try new things” (p. 15).

Understanding and knowing the people we are working with is one key to success. The world is changing at the speed of light. In fact, thanks to technology, it has been completely revolutionized. “Technology has permeated every area of our lives and become central to how we live, work

and socialize” (p. 31). We have to be acquainted with it. Unfortunately, the church hasn’t been able to follow this revelational trend. “As a result, many millennials have lost respect for the church because sometimes our values and actions have not been aligned with each other” (p. 39).

Let us explore the eight innovations to leading millennials given by Windle.

### **Innovation 1: Technology and Social Media**

Technology has conquered the new world, and the conquerors are the millennials. “Technology has shaped their thinking, facilitated communication, redefined community, become core to their learning, and become almost like a companion to them, which is extraordinary” (p. 45). Looking at this, one can recognize that resisting technology is resisting the new generation. It is taking away what they cherish most. “Millennials don’t want a ‘cool church’ . . . They want something they can relate too” (p. 51).

### **Innovation 2: Relational Leadership Style**

Many leaders believe that leadership is all about power. Unfortunately, this mindset does not work with the millennials. “Authoritative power does not connect with millennials—relationship does” (p. 53). It is crucial to work and invest in genuine relationships. People are the most important thing. “Leading millennials is more about being the guide on the side, not a sage on a stage. It is about sitting next to rather than in front of.” (p. 57). We need to be servant leaders.

### **Innovation 3: Collaborative Structure**

Structures are at the very center of

the church. Changing them may be very hard and may bring some frictions. But if we want to connect with millennials, we need to change. “Millennials are team-oriented and collaborative, and resist structure” (p. 58). This statement says a lot. Instead of sitting and giving orders, we are to relate and work as a team.

#### **Innovation 4: Dynamic Events**

Every year, leaders put much time and effort into creating a church plan—but often that plan does not include millennials’ basic needs. “Church calendars, programs, and schedules need to be reinvented for a new world” (p. 66). There is a need for adaptation and inclusion. “Discipleship is not about growing a big church. It is about growing big people” (p. 67). Programming should be geared to bring out the potential of millennials. This can be done by creating events that meet their inmost need.

#### **Innovation 5: Depth of Spiritual Discipleship**

Most times, we say that young people want nothing to do with spiritual things. “Millennials are biblically illiterate, but passionate about learning” (p. 70). We need to know how to share biblical knowledge in their own language and context. We need to be more intensive and go deeper. In fact, you need “to be a sheep yourself, even smelling like sheep.” (p. 70). This is true discipleship.

#### **Innovation 6: Facilities**

The place we provide for worship service is very important. Since it is one of the communication tools, we need to really work on that. The author says that we need to provide what technology cannot. “Church facilities cannot be simply functional—they must be culturally experi-

mental” (pg. 75). Church facilities must provide things that satisfy millennials’ deepest needs, allowing them to feel loved and have a sense of belonging.

#### **Innovation 7: Leadership in Finance**

We are living in a world of consumerism. And “millennials are the most consumeristic generation in history.” The great companies have recognized that and thus have fashioned and designed shopping for them. When we reach the millennials, they can contribute and support the church financially. “The millennials generation wants to see where and how their money will make a difference in a bringing about unity” (p. 81).

#### **Innovation 8: Social Rather than Political**

Most churches put much emphasis on principles and doctrines. “Instead of making specific political statements, consider focusing on justice issues, like feeding the poor, eradicating sex trafficking, helping orphans, helping those in poverty, etc.” (p. 84). In fact, these are things that are related to the millennials. “By effectively reaching and leading millennials, you have the power to grow your church for future generations . . .” (p. 87). Knowing millennials, understanding the way they live, and reaching out to them are keys to reconnecting with them and revitalizing the church and the world.

I really loved this little book. It is very well structured and practical. The issue under discussion is real and pertinent; we are all dealing with it. As a millennial, Windle speaks on things that he has gone through, and I could see that the book has a millennial touch. I highly recommend this book. If you are thinking of reaching out to millennials and the

younger generations, this is the right book for you. It is simple and easy to understand. “One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever” (Eccl. 1:4, NKJV).

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## DISSERTATION NOTICES

**Penna, H. L. (2020).** *(In)Effective Communication Strategies among Church Leadership: Assessing the Influence of Communication Channels on Effective Communication between Church Leadership and Their Members during the Coronavirus Shutdown.* MA, Baylor University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 28027190.

The Coronavirus shutdown forced many churches to move from in-person services to a purely online platform. This study looks into churches' communicative strategies during the Coronavirus shutdown to communicate with their members and reach their. This study analyzes the effect of limited communication channels on church communication. Data was collected through interviews with 21 staff members and leaders at various Christian churches. This study used qualitative methods and network sampling to find and interview participants. All data was coded using thematic analysis, generated from the components of Channel Expansion Theory, to analyze trends among interviews. This paper provides a discussion of effective church communication that offers insight into both the scholarly field of communication and practical strategies.

**Parker, H. (2019).** *Leadership of Heart and Mind: Examining the Mind and Skill Sets of Student Sustainability Leadership.* PhD, University of Southern Maine. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 13861238.

The study sought to answer three central research questions: What motivates students to become sustainability leaders in higher education settings? How do student sustainability leaders describe their role and effectiveness as leaders and collaborate with or compare to university personnel responsible for moving the institution's sustainability goals forward? What leadership qualities and skills have student sustainability leaders used to transform complex higher education cultures? The participants demonstrated a motivation to model, inspire and facilitate decision-making that recognizes the interdependence and interconnectivity of human and nonhuman systems, expressed a personal or spiritual connection to nature, and spoke of their desire to benefit present and future systems. These findings suggest that providing experiential, problem-based learning and peer and supervisory mentoring, as part of sustainability education, is of high value and that the shared skillset can build learning outcomes, experiences, and assessments. This study also suggests that higher education institutions reexamine their priorities, policies, and practices across the entirety of their systems to ensure that sustainability is part of the fabric of their culture and model sustainability as a priority that cuts across disciplines silos.

**Scott, E. C. (2020). *Millennials Living Online from Pews to Posts in Austin, Texas: A Qualitative Descriptive Study*. EdD, Grand Canyon University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 28150187.**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive design study was to explore how Christian millennials experienced networked religion on Facebook for shaping values and beliefs. The three research questions focused on how churched millennials engaged on Facebook for shaping values and beliefs and the spiritual meaning ascribed to the various forms of engagement. Also, the study explored how millennials perceived legitimate authority online. The research questions were answered by employing the purposive snowball sampling technique to select participants, conducting semi-structured interviews with 15 Christian churched millennials in Austin, Texas, and collecting data from participant's journals. Seven thematic categories emerged (a) experiencing religion on Facebook versus offline, (b) expressing religious identity on Facebook, (c) functioning as a networked community, (d) inspiring meaning and purpose, (e) interacting with others on Facebook, (f) perceptions about legitimate religious authority, and (g) religious influence. The results showed millennials experienced divine encounters as they exchanged information between social networks and community sources on Facebook. These encounters shaped values and beliefs and resulted in relational and spiritual meanings that supported spiritual growth. Participants recognized the changing role of clergy as the primary authority for answering religious questions.

**Danquah, C. J. (2020). *Leadership Imagery: Developing People with the Right Passion, Attitudes, and Knowledge for Effective Christian Leadership*. DMin, Asbury Theological Seminary. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 28027304.**

This project aims to suggest ways of improving Christian leadership succession within the Methodist Church, Ghana (MCG). Training next-generation leaders should not be an afterthought. This project focuses on a developmental strategy for young people that equips them with the right passion, attitudes, and knowledge for Christian leadership. The study examined the practice of Christian leadership and concluded that it requires sound biblical and theological understanding. The statement of the project's problem, purpose, rationale, and relevant literature were considered to establish appropriate biblical and theological foundations that will ensure an effective approach in raising Christian leaders. The project considered the history of Christian leadership by observing the execution of God's plan in times past through young people's development. The research methodology of the nature, purpose, and participants regarding criteria, ministry context, data collection, and analysis are considered. The project's evidence is then reviewed with respect to the pre- and post-test of the participants' aptitudes. Finally, the significant findings are discussed to ascertain the implication for ministry. Unexpected observations are shared, and recommendations are provided for further study.

**Williams, D. R. (2019).**  
*Phenomenological Study of Encouragement as a Protective Factor for New Christian Pastors.* EdD, Grand Canyon University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 13903419.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of encouragement as a protective factor for newly appointed Christian pastors in the United States during the first year of their pastoral appointment. The sample for this study was eight new Christian pastors from diverse denominations. The overarching research question that guided this study asked: What are the lived experiences of encouragement as a protective factor for newly appointed Christian pastors during their first year of pastoral appointment? Eight themes emerged: (a) new Christian pastors acknowledge their calling from God as a major source of encouragement, (b) need encouragement to ameliorate emotional vulnerability, (c) need encouragement to persevere when confronting problems, (d) credit encouragement for instilling confidence to pursue potential, (e) describe components of successful encouragement messages, (f) rely on their encouragement networks, (g) deem self-encouragement vital for thriving in their new roles, and (h) value encouragement when combined with organizational support. The findings in this research affirmed that for new Christian pastors, the foci, effectiveness, and atmosphere of encouragement could be described by three encouraging elements; who encourages, what is said in the encouragement messages, and when the encouragement encounters occur.

**Agbarakwe, C. O. (2020).**  
*Courageous Followership Behavior and Leadership Styles Among Christian Lay Leaders in Nigeria.* EdD, Grand Canyon University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 28257114.

Leadership entails leading and following. However, unlike leaders, not much has been studied about followers, and the question of whether how people follow determines how they lead had not been conclusively established. Specifically, it was unknown if the five dimensions of courageous followership behavior predict transformational and transactional leadership styles. A convenience sampling method was used to collect data from the target population of Christian lay leaders in Nigeria. The final sample contained 114 participants. The study was based on the courageous followership theory, the followership theory, and the full range of leadership models. The researcher used multiple linear regression analysis to address two research questions that examined whether the five dimensions of courageous followership behavior predict transformational and transactional leadership styles. The overall courageous followership model was also statistically significant in predicting transactional leadership  $F(5, 108) = 4.06, p = .002$ , and accounted for 15.8% of the variance in the transactional leadership score. However, only four courageous followership behavior dimensions significantly predicted transformational leadership style, and two dimensions of courageous followership behavior significantly predicted the transactional leadership style of Christian lay leaders in Nigeria.

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# MISSION

# THE JOURNAL OF APPLIED CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP MISSION

*"To provide a peer-reviewed published dialogue of applied research in Christian servant leadership across denominational, cultural, and disciplinary environments."*

This mission involves several elements that provide a greater sense for what the Journal seeks to accomplish. Explaining key words serves as a window into the "culture" of those operating the Journal of Applied Christian Leadership.

**Peer-reviewed:** This element describes the editorial nature of the Journal. The Journal encourages articles for publication that will be reviewed by peers in the field of leadership for evaluation both in content and style. This process will include ways of improving and/or other resources that might be considered as part of the dialogue. This will also allow for an expansion of the field to occur so that at the time of publication the article can have a wider audience.

**Published:** Our initial goal is that the Journal be a semi-annual publication with an eye of shifting toward a quarterly and then possibly monthly at some future point.

**Dialogue:** Descriptive of the nature of the inquiry, the Journal seeks to encourage a respectful dialogue between scholars, students and practitioners of leadership. Writers will present their findings in ways that while prescriptive also encourage dissent and a shared conversation.

**Applied:** The content of what is presented derives from strategies, principles, philosophies, and dynamic elements of leadership put into practice in a host of varied environments. What is presented is not an untried theory but a "theory-in-use" applicable to a place and time. Therefore, editors ask writers to use non-technical language accessible to practitioners.

**Research:** There are many leadership journals that provide an "anecdotal" approach to understanding leadership. While this approach is vital to growth in understanding, the rigor of research-based studies is vital as well to give a more rounded view-point toward leadership. Therefore, the vast majority of approved articles will consist of a research base to understanding. This is a core component of the Journal.

**Christian:** A second core component of the Journal is the focus of Christian principles as they intersect with leadership in action. While there will no doubt be "Christian" principles located in non-Christian environments, the tenor of the Journal will be based upon Scriptural elements of leadership.

**Servant:** A third core component of the Journal is the centrality of Servant Leadership. While this nomenclature is widespread today (even outside Christian circles), we recognize that "servant" leadership arises largely out of the life and leadership of Jesus Christ, and as expressed powerfully by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2. It is our dynamic understanding of His life and this passage that serves as a platform for our understanding of this core component.

**Leadership:** Every endeavor in human history has involved a leader of one type or another. The Journal is about leadership. It is about the way people motivate, inspire, and lead others to accomplish as a group what could never be accomplished by themselves, all the while providing a dynamic transformation for all involved.

**Across:** Leadership is exemplified across religious, racial, and national boundaries. Fundamental to a dynamic understanding and application of leadership is a soul belief that no one group has sole propriety of leadership wisdom. In fact, when the discourse concerning leadership transcends all time and space our comprehension expands and our practice of leadership moves with greater effectiveness.

**Denominational:** This first of three environments demonstrates the Journal's fundamental worldview that learning can take place regardless of creed and denominational divides. In fact, the more one studies various leadership issues throughout the denominational world, the clearer becomes the commonality of our leadership challenges. Since the Journal centers upon Christian leadership, it is imperative that our research expand beyond denominational borders.

**Cultural:** One of the greatest challenges facing any organization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the growing expanse of globalization. Whether that globalization is reflected in micro-globalization through immigration or macro-globalization through increased universal communication and transportation, fundamental to any leader of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the ability to lead across national, sub-cultural, and multi-cultural boundaries.

**Disciplinary:** A final arena where boundaries can be removed for the benefit of leadership comprehension is this vital area of academic disciplines. More often than not, various schools have made leadership the focus of study. Each school has provided incredible insight into the theory, philosophy, and practice of leadership. However, if our leadership comprehension is to expand, it will require the synergy of cross-disciplinary dialogue to occur. Increasingly in the leadership world, contribution is coming from such schools as history, sociology, theology, and even philosophy. To deny the interdisciplinary dynamic of leadership comprehension would substantially minimize and/or prevent leadership learning.

**Environments:** Finally, the Journal recognizes that the culture of leadership is influenced by the various environments where leadership is practiced and the skills honed. From the military arena (in either a peace-time environment or war-time environment) to the entertainment arena, leadership spans the limitations of environmental factors. Leadership is played out in the symphony hall as well as the science lab as well as the sports arena. If leaders are to grow so that followers and organizations and our world can become a better place, it is imperative that our understanding of leadership cross the expanse of time and space.

**S U B S C R I B E**

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## Call for Papers

*The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* seeks submissions from a multiplicity of disciplines by those researching various areas of Christian leadership throughout the world. We are looking for manuscripts engaging readers in areas like Christian ethics and leadership, diversity, organizational culture, change, mentoring, coaching, self-leadership, team building and a host of other leadership issues. We are most interested in those who are conducting research in any of these areas from a distinctly Christian perspective, including those investigating various leadership theories and how they influence or are influenced by Christian principles and practices. Manuscripts of research-based studies should be 20-25 double-spaced typewritten pages, including references, figures, appendixes, etc., with a 100-word abstract also included. References should be in APA style. See instructions online: [jacl.andrews.edu](http://jacl.andrews.edu).

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# Christian Leadership Center

The Christian Leadership Center is an interdisciplinary organization of Andrews University providing inspiration, on-going leadership development, coaching, consultation, and research for a network of church and community leaders throughout the world. It also sponsors the Journal of Applied Christian Leadership.

## VISION

Our vision is people transformed and empowered by Christian principles who provide outstanding leadership for the local church, and church and educational organizations throughout the world.

## MISSION

Our mission is to accompany and develop people in their journey as servant leaders in the church and as Christian market-place ambassadors in a changing world.

## GOALS

Our goals are:

1. Dynamic understanding: A shared and dynamic understanding of a Biblical model of servant leadership that informs the global practice of church and community leaders
2. Transformed leaders: Christian leaders transformed by a Biblical model of servant leadership
3. Leadership network: A Christian leadership network comprised of a pool of leadership specialists capable of providing global leadership training and development

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The Center provides people and organizations with ongoing leadership development based on the servant leadership model of Christ, including access to leadership development options such as:

- The 4-year Leadership Development Program
- Leading Organizations: A professional certificate in leadership
- Leadership evaluation for pastors and churches
- The 4-year Pastoral Intern Development Program
- Leadership team assessment and consultation
- Consultation in local settings
- Leadership coaching
- Research findings for improving leadership
- The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership (jacl@andrews.edu)
- Joint ventures in leadership development
- Event speakers drawn from our broad network of leadership professionals

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