



Cultivate Mission

Stephanie Lutz Allen



BOOK REVIEWS

Caveat: The following are descriptions of books I either recommend or think are helpful for understanding the movements impacting the church today. Listing a book does **NOT** mean I agree with everything in a particular book. I value reading from a wide variety of perspectives and theological persuasions. Therefore, no one title reflects my thinking or approach on everything. Also included are secular books I find to be relevant for the church today.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership On the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky

Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters

Scott Cormode

The Leadership Challenge

By James Kouzes and Barry Posner

LEADING CHANGE

Leading Change

John Kotter

The Missional Leader: Equipping your Church to Reach a Changing World

Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk

The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit

Craig Van Gelder

A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation

Rick Rouse and Craig Van Gelder

Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations

Gil Rendle and Alice Mann

Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders

Gil Rendle

The Multigenerational Church: Meeting the Leadership Challenge

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Transforming Congregational Culture

Anthony Robinson

Leading Congregational Change

Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem and James Furr

Diffusion of Innovation

Everett Rogers

MISSIONAL CHURCH

Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America

Darrell Guder, editor

The Continuing Conversion of the Church

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The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit

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Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness

Lois Barrett et al.

The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church

Reggie McNeal

The Emerging Church

Dan Kimball

ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

Understanding Your Congregation as a System

George Parsons and Speed Leas

Managing the Congregation: Building Effective Systems to Serve People

Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser

Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach

Peter Steinke

Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems

Barry Johnson

Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership

Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal

The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization

By Peter Senge

Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind

Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede

MANAGEMENT AND PERSONNEL

When Moses Meets Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations

Gil Rendle and Susan Beaumont

When Better Isn't Enough: Evaluation Tools for the 21st Century Church

Jill Hudson

Leading and Managing a Growing Church

George G. Hunter III

Evaluating Ministry: Principles and Processes for Clergy and Congregations

Jill Hudson

The Alban Personnel Handbook for Congregations

Erwin Berry

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High

Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzer

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Discernment: The Art of Choosing Well

Pierre Wolf

Sharing Wisdom: A Process for Group Decision Making

Mary Benet McKinney

Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders

Charles Olsen

Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations, revised edition

Suzanne Farnham, Stephanie Hull, R. Taylor McLean

CONFLICT

Conflict Management in Congregations

David Lott, ed.

Thriving through Ministry Conflict: By Understanding Your Red and Blue Zones

James Osterhaus, Joseph Jurkowski, and Todd Hahn

Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences

Gil Rendle

PRACTICING FAITH

Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People

Dorothy Bass, editor

Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life

Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, editors

The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church

Diana Butler Bass

CHURCH HEALTH/GROWTH/EVANGELISM

Raising the Roof: The Pastoral-to-Program Size Transition

Alice Mann

The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West . . . Again.

George G. Hunter III

POSTMODERNISM

A Primer on Postmodernism

Stanley Grenz

The Postmodern Parish: New Ministry for a New Era

Jim Kitchens

LEADERSHIP

Leadership On the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky

This secular book outlines the challenge for leaders who find themselves in the midst of leading complex organizations, and offers a framework for tackling their work. Behind the framework offered is insight into human systems that prevent a leader from missing the real dynamics. For instance, the authors claim that people don't resist change, they resist the loss they fear change will bring. Their thesis is that leadership is about framing the issues and giving the work back to the people who need to be doing it, rather than dropping visions from on high, or promising quick fixes. Most helpful in the book is helping a

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leader see when a situation calls for a technical fix (i.e. there is expertise that can be brought to bear on the situation) or an adaptive challenge (i.e. there is no known expertise; people need to learn new skills, behavior and attitudes in order to tackle the situation.) Lastly, they get to the heart of leadership through the last section on managing one's own issues and behaviors as a leader.

Although a secular book, there is a spiritual nature to how they describe the work of leadership. This may account for why the authors' concepts (such as adaptive challenge, creating a holding environment, doing balcony work, and giving the work back to the people) are all drawn on extensively in the church literature. A highly recommended read in order to understand how others are building upon this work. One might as well read the original source!

Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters

Scott Cormode

The thesis of the book is that "Christian leaders can use the preaching and teaching gifts that come most naturally to them to do the organizational work of leadership that seems unnatural to them." According to Cormode, the best leaders do not tell people what to do, but change the way they see the world, which then leads to new action. Cormode works out of the Max Dupree conceptualization of a leader as one who "defines reality." The author applies meaning making tools from social science to the task of defining reality theologically. Through timely examples and stories, the author makes his case well--simplifying complex concepts from the social sciences, particularly organizational learning (e.g. Chris Argyis and Donald Schon). Cormode draws extensively on the stories he wrote for the Christian Leader website about the fictional "Almond Springs" church. (www.christianleaders.org)

The author applies the concepts to a few issues as extended case study (e.g. money/giving). The concepts seem clear when he applies them to a case study, but more difficult when thinking of applying the logic to another issue. This indicates that the author is trying to teach a skill, and one does not become competent in a skill simply by reading a book. Nonetheless, his application of the "meaning making tools" to the issue of money/giving are insightful, and would be worth the price of the book for any pastor looking to transform the way they preach about money. The book would serve any clergy in the task of preaching, even though the point of the book is to help preachers apply abilities in this area to their task as organizational leaders.

The Leadership Challenge

By James Kouzes and Barry Posner

Based on extensive research regarding leaders around the world, Kouzes and Posner offer five practices that mark the type of leader people admire and follow. Leaders who practice these marks are therefore capable of mobilizing others to get "extraordinary things done in organizations." For leaders who want to know how to motivate others, this is a good read, as well as one that complements Senge's *Fifth Discipline* by fleshing out the idea of building a shared vision within an organization. The five practices are: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. Their thesis is that leadership is a learned skill; these practices provide the direction for effective skill building. For a secular book on leadership, the principles are applicable to life in the local congregation. A thick read, I suggest taking each section build around the five practices and reading over time, rather than trying to read all in one short time period. For a quick read, the authors wrote a shorter version for Christian leaders, *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge*. Both books serve as an accompaniment to their 360° assessment tool.

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LEADING CHANGE

Leading Change

John Kotter

Considered a classic on change management within the secular literature, Harvard Business School professor John Kotter outlines a process for leading change. His eight-stage process includes: establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering broad-based action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and anchoring the new approaches in the culture of the organization. These steps are explained with clarity, charts/graphs and vivid stories, all woven within a short and concise book.

Kotter's research was done in a business setting, thus the end goals of change are different and translation is needed for those seeking to draw from these concepts for leading change in the church. His work is quoted often in the church change management literature. For example *Leading Congregational Change* (Herrington, Bonem & Furr) draws heavily on Kotter's work, applying these principles within the context of the Southern Baptist denomination, and thus providing one example of how these principles could translate into a church setting.

The Missional Leader: Equipping your Church to Reach a Changing World

Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk

The authors combine their experience in organizational development and church consulting to address the question of how leadership can be developed within existing congregations for creating missional imagination and capacities. Missional church is defined using creative and nonacademic language. Seeking to move the missional conversation from Biblical and theological reflection toward leadership development, the authors offer helpful insights and tools. Their work is based on a sound application of the secular organizational literature to the unique nature of a congregation. The authors build on Roxburgh's image from his chapter in *Missional Church*, by extending the metaphor of leadership as cultivating/being a cultivator.

Particularly helpful are the description of leadership in a time of discontinuous change, an organizational chart of change cycles, and the role of conflict in leading change. They propose a change strategy based not on strategic planning, but more on a grass-roots experimentation and leadership development. They incorporate the research of Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovation*, and Heifetz and Linsky's, *Leadership on the Line* to frame their change methodology in social science research.

The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit

Craig Van Gelder

A follow up to his first book, *The Essence of the Church*, Van Gelder turns to an exploration of how the church can be led by the Spirit toward transformation. The book opens with a Biblical and theological exploration of the Holy Spirit, mapping the Spirit's role through the Old Testament, New Testament, and the modern context. The book of Acts is highlighted in the Biblical overview—describing how the Spirit led the nascent church through a combination of intentional strategy and the disruption of conflict and surprise.

The second half of the book explores the Spirit's leading of the church today, drawing on both a missional rethinking of the church and organizational theory. Decision making, strategic planning and leading change are all explored with an eye toward integrating a theology of the church and the Holy Spirit with organizational theory. Those who long for a book on leading change that takes social science theory and puts it in dialogue with a missional understanding of church and an active role for the Spirit in the life of the church will find this an extremely valuable read.

A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation

Rick Rouse and Craig Van Gelder

A very short read which summarizes in concise, easy-to-read language the present crisis facing the church, the theology behind missional church, and key aspects to leading change. The transformational keys focus on rethinking congregational identity, developing a vision, becoming intentional about developing disciples, cultivating a healthy climate in the congregation, building supportive teams of paid/lay leaders, dealing effectively with the inevitable conflict and practicing stewardship. The book's concepts are applied in a running case study of a fictitious church called "Amazing Grace." For those who find other books within the missional movement to be too academic, obtuse and lacking pragmatism, this might be the book you are looking for.

Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations

Gil Rendle and Alice Mann

Drawing on years of consulting experience within congregations, and using tools gleaned from the field of organizational development and strategic planning, the authors provide a resource for congregations looking to engage in strategic planning, assess their strategic planning needs and/or cultivate practices around strategic planning for the ongoing life of their church. In other words, the book offers tools for a "full-blown planning process," but can be used in congregations at various stages wanting to do work around the three questions of congregational formation: *Identity* (Who are we?), *Purpose* (What has God called us to do or be?) and *Context* (Who is our neighbor?). For those who believe that doing (ministry) flows from being (identity), and that identity formation is done in the context of deep conversations regarding spirituality and theology, this book provides a critical resource.

Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders

Gil Rendle

If the title describes what you're looking for, this is the book for you. Steeped in organizational system theory, it was a hard choice whether to put this one under "Organizational Theory" or "Leading Change." The book takes some of the fear out of change, and the conflict that change can produce in congregations. Rendle offers many helpful frameworks and tools with which to engage in the task of intentionally leading change, or responding well to the change that comes our way. Particularly helpful is chapter 5, "Riding the Roller Coaster: The Emotional Cycle of Congregations in Change," which could help church leaders live out a more adaptive response to the strong emotions change can bring.

The Multigenerational Church: Meeting the Leadership Challenge

Gil Rendle

A significant part of leading change today is helping congregations navigate the generational conundrum. Many books offer portraits of the generations and how they differ. But here the material is presented with an eye toward helping congregations not just understand the differences, but relate in a more productive through the differences. Particularly helpful is Rendle's unpacking of the consumer

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culture in which we live, and how this has influenced those in every generation to come to a church with a mentality focused on one's own preferences. This is a must read for church leaders who feel the pressures of different generations worshipping and serving side by side.

Transforming Congregational Culture

Anthony Robinson

Written by a pastor reflecting on his congregation's journey of change, this would be a good read for a leadership team in a mainline Protestant church looking to embark on or continue further in this type of journey. Robinson describes in plain language the situation of the church in the 21st Century, and articulates well the adaptive work congregations need to engage in as a response. The author asserts the need for congregational culture to move from civil religion to transformation of people, from an assumption of a latent Christian faith to intentional faith formation, and from a board culture to a ministry culture. Particularly helpful is his chapter towards the end describing why membership growth as the motivating goal could actually prevent a congregation from being transformed. The author makes extensive use of Heifetz and Linsky's *Leadership on the Line*, so those looking for an application of these leadership concepts to the congregation setting would benefit from this book.

Leading Congregational Change

Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem and James Furr

The authors share a process for leading change toward renewal which was born out of extensive learning and experimentation within a judicatory of the Southern Baptists in Texas. The book is both valuable and limited based on that starting place. The value is in hearing the stories and learning about the process developed from these experiences. The value also comes from a good integration and application of change management tools from the business and organizational field to the local congregation. For example, of particular interest is seeing how they apply Kotter's step of "establishing a sense of urgency" within the local congregation. Likewise, the authors apply Senge's *Learning Organization* to the local congregation, particularly examining one's mental model of church, enabling team learning, and practicing systems thinking. The limitation is that some of the book may not be transferable to other settings. For example, in the stage of developing vision, they assume a clergy centered process which may not fit in congregations with less authority vested in the clergy role. That being said, it is written as much as possible for a wider audience, and provides a good example of people applying sound change management principles to the local congregation in leading change.

Diffusion of Innovation

Everett Rogers

A secular, academic tome, Rogers surveys the research regarding how innovations are diffused through human societies. This material is used in both Van Gelder's *The Ministry of the Missional Church* and Roxburgh and Romanuk's *The Missional Leader*. The field of innovation diffusion began by agricultural researchers in the 1940's who sought to study how innovative advances were adopted by farmers. From there, it spread to sociology, business, marketing, etc. (e.g. By what process do people adopt the use of innovative products, such as cell phones?) The value would be for those who want to read further detail about the research regarding the types of people and situations in which experimentation with and adoption of new ideas takes place.

MISSIONAL CHURCH

Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America

Darrell Guder, editor

Written in 1998 by five professors and one practitioner, the book arose from a research process started in the Gospel and Our Culture Network, begun in 1980 in North America as an attempt to broaden and apply the discussion started by theologian and missionary Lesslie Newbigin in Great Britain. Considered now the clarion call of the missional church movement within mainline Protestant academia, the book makes the argument that the answer to the crisis of the church in North America will not be found by starting with method and problem solving, but in a theological rethinking of church identity (who we are) and purpose (what we are for).

They make this argument by developing the context of the North American church, demonstrating that the West is no longer a sending ground, but a missional receiving ground. The theological rethinking is rooted in the reign of God, the apostolic calling, and a rethinking of the Trinity which includes the Holy Spirit's role in the creation of the church. The concluding chapters move from identity and purpose to vocation. The book concludes by examining what leadership might look like to engage people in this changed vocation.

A highly theological and theoretical read, the book has achieved classic status for understanding the missional movement in North America. Chapters could be used individually for reading and discussion within a leadership team, such as Chapter 2, "Missional Context: Understanding North American Culture," for those who want to discuss the church's place in the history of modernity and post-modernity, or Chapter 4, "Missional Vocation: Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God," for those who want to discuss the *missio dei* as rooted in the reign of God.

The Continuing Conversion of the Church

Darrell Guder

Another theoretical and theological read (though described as "practical theology"), the book was written solo by Guder as a follow up volume to *Missional Church*. In discussing this book within a Doctor of Ministry group, I continued to misstate the title as "The Continuing Conversation of the Church," to which a colleague suggested I was guilty of the classic Freudian slip. It is much more comfortable to think of the church conversing rather than the church itself being converted, and the essence of Guder's argument articulates why.

The author seeks to develop a theology of evangelism, rooted in the mission of God. In Part I he roots this theology in the concept of witness, the common missional thread through the New Testament. Mission is witness, and involves proclamation (words/ kerygma), community (fellowship/koinonia) and service (ministry/diakonia). In Part II he develops his thesis that the witness of the gospel in our present time is hampered by challenges. It's the catch-22; as the church witnessed to the gospel, it also translated the gospel into its own culture, which then reduced the gospel by accommodating that culture. The author develops his argument well regarding the unique reductionism of the gospel in the history of the Western church. In Part III, the author turns to the implications of his argument for the continuing conversion of the church, though some of us might wish we could reduce the challenge to a conversation!

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The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit

Craig Van Gelder

Van Gelder brings together insights from theology, Biblical studies, social sciences, and history to help church leaders develop a missional understanding of church within the complexities of a denominationally diverse U.S. context. The value offered to church leaders is framing the present situation from these different lenses in order to understand the demands of church leadership today. Within the organizational framework, we are helped to see how different movements (such as church growth, church health, and denominationalism) fit in the grander scheme. Also seen through the organizational lens is the clarifying questions of church identity (nature), ministry (doing) and structure (organizing what we do). The historical framework provides the insights our many years of common history provide to the situation at hand. Lastly, the Biblical/theological lens summarizes much of the scholarly thinking on the church, particularly rooting the nature of the church within the doctrine of the Trinity from a Reformed perspective.

Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness

Lois Barrett et al.

The culmination of a project conducted by the Gospel and Our Culture Network, seven researchers sought to answer the question: *How would you know a missional church if you saw one?* The authors examined nine congregations of different sizes, denominations, and theological persuasions, and how they live out eight missional patterns.

These missional patterns explore areas such as: discerning congregational identity and call, biblical formation and discipleship, taking risks in the community, practices of the faith, worship as witness, and pointing to the reign of God in the world. The authors provide a concise definition of missional church which guided their research. For those who want examples and stories exploring missional church, this would be a good read. The value in the book is their description of bible study as missional formation versus spiritual enrichment.

The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church

Reggie McNeal

Claiming that the future requires not a methodological fix but a missional one, McNeal seeks to inspire conversations about a missional approach to church through describing six “realities” facing the church. These realities address areas such as: the change in society away from a church culture, the failure of a church growth approach for addressing the present crisis, the need for lay leadership in ministry, the need for spiritual faith formation, the role of vision and planning in missional church and the need for a new type of leadership. The author describes well the current situation of the church and a picture of the possible future. He does so in an accessible, challenging and entertaining way (in other words, the book can be inspiring, offensive and humorous all at the same time). This fits with the author’s stated goal, which is to “stimulate conversation.” In this the book succeeds, but offers less regarding how one might practically move in a new direction. The author describes the mission of God in more narrow ways than others. The mission of God is mainly portrayed as evangelism and personal salvation, rather than providing more full description of personal salvation combined with God’s concern for the totality of the human condition in a broken world.

The Emerging Church

Dan Kimball

Why is this book under the category of *Missional Church* and not *Emerging Church*? Because the value in this book is not as a *how-to* book for creating an emerging church, but as a case study of someone who looked at their community context with a missional lens, and asked how one could do ministry and worship in that context. Kimball was the founding pastor of Graceland worship services at Santa Cruz Bible Church, which broke off and is now Vintage Faith Church. The book offers a look at postmodernism from the perspective of the younger generation, and one church's attempt to bridge the gap. Being from the San Francisco Bay Area, I've heard people talk about their visit to a Vintage service, and their longing to copy aspects of how worship is done in this church. Yet the value is in reading about how Kimball explored his context as a starting place to constructing new worship and ministry to connect with his context. (Gotta love the candles!)

ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

Understanding Your Congregation as a System

George Parsons and Speed Leas

Church leaders who've found themselves scratching their heads, puzzling about the complexity of their situation would be helped by considering systems theory. The authors explain and apply organizational systems theory to the local congregation. The theory of systems indicates that any changes a congregation attempts might not be effective because the system seeks to exert pressure to return to normal. Thus, examining these system dynamics could free up an organization to effectively initiate change or handle the change that comes from either the natural development of the congregation (e.g. the pastor retires) or from the context (e.g. the ethnic make-up of the congregation's community shifts). Past congregational vitality may contribute to present atrophy, because organizational patterns and habits of past successes (which no longer work in the present) are held onto long past their effectiveness.

The book clearly articulates general system theory concepts such as homeostasis, polarity management, and the dynamic between formal/informal rules, roles, rituals and goals. The reader could find these concepts in the organizational or family systems literature, but here, the concepts are defined and exemplified in the context of the local congregation. The concepts are buttressed by Leas' extensive experience as a consultant in congregations. These well placed examples and stories help the reader connect the material all the more to the congregational setting.

Managing the Congregation: Building Effective Systems to Serve People

Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser

This is another good read from two authors trained in systems theory who apply these concepts to the unique setting of the congregation. Who is the manager of a congregation and what does he/she manage? The manager is a steward who acts on behalf of God, and who manages the congregation as a whole system, including all the components at the same time. A helpful systems diagram of the local congregation guides the reader through the chapters, which examine the environment (context), inputs, outputs, mission/vision, organizational design and interpersonal relationships that make up the

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complexity of a particular church. Their thesis is that in order to thrive, a congregation must carry out an exchange of mutual influence with its environment.

Particularly interesting is the last section of the book covering the congregation's relationships. The authors apply various streams of thought from the social sciences to the congregation, such as human resource management, power dynamic theories, conflict management, family systems theory, the learning organization and even TQM (total quality management). These snapshots all provide interesting frameworks in which to consider the life of the congregation, and which could aid church managers in thinking outside the box.

Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach

Peter Steinke

Another book which articulates General Systems Theory well, the author focuses on the human body as an example of a living system. Like the other two books, congregational health is defined, and a key part of this health is a congregation that has a purpose with an outward focus. The author describes the 10 principles that make for health in a congregation, how that health can be destroyed by "disease," and what could be done. Especially relevant is the way Steinke helps leaders see that, similar to the human body, congregations fight off "viruses" all the time. This is a significant reframe of congregational life. Thus, it's not so much that a person came and wreaked havoc within a congregation, but that a certain congregation was conducive to havoc-wreaking behavior. Then the question becomes—how does a congregation positively maintain health and prevent havoc-wreaking behaviors from taking hold?

Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems

Barry Johnson

This secular book explains one key systems theory concept—polarities—and how they operate in an organization. This is a very quick and easy read, with lots of diagrams and figures to illustrate the concepts. Parson and Leas' book makes extensive use of polarity concepts as applied to the congregation, and here is the original source! Several key polarities are explained that they don't cover, such as individual and team. A polarity consists of two concepts which appear to be opposites, but both are needed. Such as team work and individual initiative. Understanding polarities is a key way to make sense of organizational issues. An effective leader needs the wisdom to see these polarities at work, keep them in a healthy tension, rather than bouncing back and forth from the extremes of emphasizing one or the other.

Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership

Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal

If a church leader were ever to read one organizational tome, this is it! Two organizational professors/consultants seek to bridge the gap between organizational theory and leader/managers in any type of organization, whether school, business, government, or religious. The authors summarize organizational theory and apply it to real life through the process they described as "reframing." The book is structured around the four frames that leader/managers could use in their work: 1) *The Structural Frame*—organizing structures and teams for effectiveness, 2) *The Human Resource Frame*—improve motivation, meet human needs, build positive group dynamics, 3) *The Political Frame*—coping with power dynamics, conflict and organizational politics, and lastly, 4) *The Symbolic Frame*—shaping the organization's culture in ways that give meaning and purpose to work. For those who make it to the end of the book, the reward is an extended case study that brings it all together. The authors follow the

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story of a high school principal in a turnaround situation. Through this story, we see one leader in a real life setting apply the four frames in ways that helps him make sense of his organizational complexities and challenges.

The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization

By Peter Senge

This classic book of the *Learning Organization* movement outlines five disciplines which enable a leader to see their organization as a dynamic system with key leverage points rather than as a one dimensional, cause and effect chain reaction. The five disciplines are: engaging in systems thinking, examining mental models through inquiry and dialogue, encouraging team learning, building a shared vision which inspires commitment, and developing the personal mastery of all organizational members in the first four disciplines. According to Senge, these are the conditions needed to create a learning organization, defined as one where people continually learn together, think more expansively, and therefore are able to create the results they desire through generative change. Particularly helpful in this book is his explanation of systems thinking. As a business books, one needs to do the mental gymnastics to apply the principles within the unique system of the local congregation. See [Leading Congregational Change](#) for an example of one attempt at this application.

Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind

Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede

This book by father and son summarizes the father's extensive research on national culture and organizations. While intended for a non-academic audience, it is still fairly heady. The book summarizes Hofstede's five dimensions of cultures, applying them to various aspects of life such as business, school, family and leadership. The authors present their research on where countries fall within these dimensions. This would be a valuable read for churches who find themselves in communities with large influx of immigrants from all over the world (which is increasingly the case for many of our congregations). One could also learn briefly about the five dimensions on the author's website, and have fun clicking around to see comparisons of the U.S. with many different countries. www.geert-hofstede.com

MANAGEMENT AND PERSONNEL

When Moses Meets Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations

Gil Rendle and Susan Beaumont

Written specifically for those in large congregations, this resource would be valuable for church leaders of any size church. The book is organized in three parts. Part I theologically frames employment relationships in the church through the concept of covenant. This part is worth the price of the book alone, by delineating the differences between being an employee and a member of a congregation in a way that provides helpful language for discussing issues related the fuzzy boundaries churches experience in this area. Also helpful in Part I is the authors' description of how to effectively articulate outcomes for ministry. Those who have struggled with how to develop goals around the ambiguous work of ministry would find relevant tools here. Part II gives an overview of a performance

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management cycle for a congregation, covering such essentials as writing good job descriptions, hiring the right staff, supervising, delegating work, helping staff communicate more effectively around their needs and evaluating staff performance. Part III addresses specialized topics such as designing a staff teams for optimal supervisory and team relationships, conducting effective staff meetings, dealing with poor performance and/or bad staff behavior and terminating staff within the unique setting of the congregation (with those sticky-wicket issues like—keeping personnel information confidential when people in the congregation wants to know what happened and why to their favorite staff member).

Rendle and Beaumont draw on their consulting practice and knowledge of the secular management and organizational development literature to help frame the issues, describe insightful examples and provide flexible tools for use in the congregation. They draw on extensively on Buckingham and Coffman's management book, *First Break all the Rules*, which posits a management philosophy of hire right, define outcomes well and focus on an employee's strengths.

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Discernment: The Art of Choosing Well

Pierre Wolf

In the ongoing dialogue regarding the church in the 21st century, a longing is often expressed for engaging in spiritual discernment in order to hear God's voice. For those interested in exploring what spiritual discernment might mean or look like, this is a top read.

Wolff seeks to help individuals and groups increase their capacity for spiritual discernment, based on Ignatian spirituality. The author describes spiritual discernment using fresh, inspiring, and yet easy to understand language. The book is organized in three parts. The first part defines and unpacks the concept of spiritual discernment, rooting it in the framework of time, the tools of head and heart, and the cornerstone of gospel values. The second part delves into spiritual discernment for individuals, framing discernment as a Deuteronomy-like choice of life over death. Section three explores the topic of spiritual discernment with groups. Valuable insights are given for groups looking to make a common decision for their life together, with the caveat that groups can only practice discernment effectively to the degree that individuals have grown using these practices in their own life. Wolff provides a practical yet inspiring read for leaders looking to increase their capacity for spiritual discernment.

Sharing Wisdom: A Process for Group Decision Making

Mary Benet McKinney

Written by a Catholic nun for Catholic congregations, this small volume includes helpful ideas for any church board seeking to move away from a parliamentary decision making process toward a spiritual discernment process. McKinney does a good job articulating what discernment looks like for a board, and explaining the concepts in fresh and clear language. She gives many practical tips about process facilitation, which would be helpful even outside of implementing the *shared wisdom* model she advocates. For this and other reasons, the book would be a valuable read for pastors and/or board members.

McKinney contrasts throughout the book *parliamentary process* (based on a win/lose and a competitive/controlling orientation) with what she calls *shared wisdom* (based on prayer, sharing wisdom, letting go and seeking consensus). For this latter process, three prior commitments are essential. First, each person understands that they individually have a piece of the wisdom, but not the whole. Second, she stresses a prior commitment of board members for engaging in their own spiritual growth and development. And the third commitment is a version of holy indifference, a willingness to let go of needing to have one's opinion win the day and seeking instead the wisdom of the group.

Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders

Charles Olsen

Built on the premise that a congregation's spirituality will not rise above that of its leadership, Olsen seeks to help pastors and lay leaders transform themselves at the heart of their organizational life: board room culture. Through practical ideas, story-telling and theoretical information, Olsen provides resources to help church boards move beyond business as usual or the perfunctory prayer bookend, to meetings as a place where faith is formed and inspired. Worship and spiritual discernment replaces secular decision making methods. The author claims that this transformation helps the board lead spiritual transformation for the entire congregation, and function with less conflict and burnout of board members. Most importantly, *worshipful work* enables board participation to become a means of personal spiritual growth, rather than a means of disillusionment that can result from seeing the inner mechanisms of the church as a far too fallible institution. The book reads more like a resource guide; nonetheless, it contains good ideas to pick and choose from. The book makes a much needed case to transform board culture, a needed message whatever methods one chooses.

Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations

Suzanne Farnham, Stephanie Hull, R. Taylor McLean

An extremely concise yet inspiring description of how a group might orient their decision making in a more intentional way to discern God's guidance. The title of each chapter serves to focus the reader and heighten curiosity. Titles like "Engaging the Imagination," "Catching the Signals," and "Launching Out" pique one's interest and capture the theme of the short chapter. The concepts sing, in that they are written in an inspiring and poetic way. Therefore I used the book as part of my devotions, reading a chapter each morning. This might be a recommended way to have people read this short volume.

The book ends with nine appendixes which outline processes and give further definition of concepts for a group to consider. These would be useful for a church seeking to grow in spiritual discernment, and provides good process ideas without interrupting the flow of the chapters within the book. Overall, this is a very useful tool for churches thinking of doing ongoing church business, decision making, or planning in a different way. It would make a nice companion volume to Chuck Olsen's book, *Transforming Church Boards*, in that this gives more theory and flow of an overall discernment process, while the former book gives many practical "how-to" ideas for a tool kit of using spiritual discernment in church boards. *Grounded in God* provides a much more inspiring look at spiritual discernment than Olsen's book, such that people may be more eager to try something new.

CONFLICT

Conflict Management in Congregations

David Lott, ed.

Written by conflict experts like Speed Leas, David Augsburg, Gil Rendle, Alice Mann, and George Parsons, this book has excellent coherence for an edited volume. Each chapter could be valuable and used as a stand-alone, or appreciated for how it contributes to the whole. The book is especially good at understanding conflict between the pastor and the congregation. The chapters are collected into three parts, which cover (1) the system dynamics of conflict with the unique setting of a congregation, (2) responding to conflict, and (3) conflict in unique situations such as various cultures (African American and Asian) and yoked parishes. Particularly valuable are the chapters: *The Illusion of Congregational "Happiness,"* and *When Criticism Comes: Understanding and Working through our Defensiveness.*

Thriving through Ministry Conflict: By Understanding Your Red and Blue Zones

James Osterhaus, Joseph Jurkowski, and Todd Hahn

This book is a one-trick pony (i.e. it teaches one concept), but it's a good trick and an interesting, quick read. The author's make extensive use of narrative form, telling the story of one pastor's experience (and it reads like a novel, you get hooked). This narrative is intermingled with the straight prose section explaining the concepts. The narrative addresses the fact that there is much free-floating anxiety within a congregation as churches experience changing communities and declining numbers reflecting the secularization of our society. This book would be a great help to pastors looking to be effective in handling the conflict that is part of doing ministry. The one concept is this. People behave out of red zone and blue zone. Red zone behavior is driven by personal motives and emotional heat. Blue zone behavior is driven by a focus on the good of the church and clear expectations. Obviously, a church is better off when everybody, particularly the pastor, is able to interact in the blue zone. Easier said than done, thus, the book is very helpful. The book also applies Heifetz and Linsky's concept of adaptive challenge, and so would help providing more examples of what they mean by adaptive leadership. One of the churches in my Doctor of Ministry research used these concepts extensively on their staff team, finding it helpful in continuously interpreting their staff relationships, and their leadership in the wider congregation.

Behavioral Covenants in Congregations: A Handbook for Honoring Differences

Gil Rendle

This is an excellent resource for all who long for congregations to be places of civil behavior, especially in the midst of our complex and changing times. This book would be useful for congregations in the middle of conflict, or those seeking to find a better way of relating in a world of outward incivility. Rendle sets the challenge facing congregations within the wider struggle of our culture to engage civil behavior. He then describes what a behavioral covenant is and how it could be used in the life of a congregation. The author provides four modules of how to lead a congregation through creating a covenant, and provides resources to use in leading this type of process. A must read for judicatory staff.

PRACTICING FAITH

Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People

Dorothy Bass, editor

For those who are seeking to learn about the *practicing faith* movement of church renewal, this would be the first read. The thesis of this movement is that the concept of faith practices provides a way for contemporary people to deepen their understanding of and involvement in God's redemptive purposes for the world. A clear definition of what is meant by faith practices is provided, and rooted in both historical Christianity, the modern yearning for a coherent and authentic life, and the use of the term *practicing* in the social sciences.

A less theoretical book than *Practicing Theology*, twelve practices are explored by authors of different traditions, theologies and ethnicities: honoring the body, hospitality, household economics, saying yes and saying no, keeping Sabbath, giving testimony, discernment, shaping communities, forgiveness, healing, dying well and singing our lives. Though written by twelve different authors, there is coherence throughout. The rich storytelling throughout is enhanced by this diversity of perspectives. The book would be useful for clergy (sermon series here?) or lay people to use as a small group discussion book.

Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life

Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, editors

A follow up volume to *Practicing Our Faith*, this book is a more theological and theoretical look at the process of how reflection on Christian beliefs inform the practices that are done in response to God's activity for the sake of the world. The definition of Christian practices is deepened, and like the first volume, rich storytelling by a diverse set of authors brings to life various practices in different settings. For example, Gilbert Bond writes a chapter contrasting an Anabaptist and Afro-Baptist church and their practice of hospitality to strangers. Church leaders struggling with exhaustion and burn out might especially benefit from the chapter by Serene Jones, "Graced Practices: Excellence and Freedom in the Christian Life."

The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church

Diana Butler Bass

As director of *The Congregations of Intentional Practice*, Bass chronicles how congregations are changing through intentional engagement with Christian practices. She describes the paradoxical nature of these practices, which access the richness of the Christian faith throughout history, and yet at the same time pursue the innovation needed for a reconnection with the lived experience of 21st century people. Thus, she maps how congregations could avoid *tradition-maintenance* as an ineffective means of coping with the cultural change facing congregations in the U.S., moving instead toward the proactive process of *retraditioning*.

Extremely valuable is the survey of the history of American congregational forms, helping the reader see where the *intentional congregation* movement fits in the larger scheme. Also helpful is unpacking the liberal/conservative divide through practices, and contrasting *intentional congregations* with *established congregations*. Absent in the book is a fuller description of Christian practices, so those looking for this information would need to read other books, such as *Practicing Our Faith*.

CHURCH HEALTH/GROWTH/EVANGELISM
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Raising the Roof: The Pastoral-to-Program Size Transition

Alice Mann

Based on Arlin Rothauge's distinction of four types of congregations based on size, the book is very helpful for understanding congregational culture and behavior patterns which could act as barriers to new ways of being and doing the church. Mann draws on her extensive consulting experience in helping churches break down resistance to change which can result from long term culture. Particularly helpful is the description of lay and clergy roles within the different sized congregations, and how laity could be helped to understand the need for shifting their expectations of clergy. The book offers many practical tools and answers sticky questions, such as "When do we add a new worship service?"

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The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West . . . Again.

George G. Hunter III

"The Celtic Way of Evangelism" could be broken down into two sections. In each section Hunter integrates his description of the historical events surrounding the missionary movement in Ireland with social science, theology, and philosophy. In the first, longer section Hunter describes the historical development of the church in Ireland, contrasting St. Patrick's evangelistic methodology with the theories of communication starting with Aristotle, and continuing to Helmut Thielicke, Soren Kirkegaard, and Kenneth Burke. Sounds dull, but is actually a fascinating and easy read. In summary, Celtic evangelism is done via teams of people who build community through which the gospel is shared with sensitivity to indigenous thought and customs.

In the second section, Hunter demonstrates how the Celtic evangelism is relevant for today's secular society. Hunter claims that the Celtic understanding of helping people find faith through bringing them into Christian community is validated by the field of the Sociology of Knowledge, particularly drawing on Peter Berger's work in "The Social Construction of Reality." Lastly, Hunter provides examples and stories of how this could be relevant to a few streams within the U.S. population. In this last chapter attempting specific applications, he struggles to make his argument as clear and compelling as previous chapters.

Overall the book is a fascinating read, and his arguments regarding what is relevant and thus could be learned from Celtic evangelism merit our attention. The stress on hospitality and building relationships with those outside the church is similar to what others are stressing as the needed change from church doing mission *to* or *for* people—to church engaging people in the community in meaningful ways. It reminds me of the church in the book *“Practicing Theology,”* chapter entitled, *“Liturgy, Ministry and the Stranger”* by Gilbert Bond. This urban church decided to stop their “outreach” program as the government sponsored food distribution center in their neighborhood because of the ways it kept the people in the neighborhood at a distance and subordinate. Instead, they began a more hospitality-oriented ministry of inviting the neighborhood to community meals where outsiders met and sat at table with church members.

POSTMODERNISM

For those wanting a concise book to learn more about postmodernism and how it impacts the church, the following two books are helpful, and offer different strengths. (Kimball’s *The Emerging Church* also describes what is meant by postmodernism and its impact on the church, but I would not recommend that book for those who want to explore postmodernism in more depth.)

A Primer on Postmodernism

Stanley Grenz

Written by a seminary professor, Grenz takes a more academic approach by showing how postmodernism developed in the history of Western thought. Although based on his academic understanding, the intended audience is church leaders. He succeeds at communicating well to this audience (i.e. it is interesting, clear, and readable, but not boring, dry or dumbed-down). Also helpful is the way he demonstrates postmodernism as a movement in the academy but also pop culture. This description of postmodernism in pop culture helps his wider audience see and understand how pervasive the impact of postmodernism has been in our life. Written from a more conservative perspective theologically.

The Postmodern Parish: New Ministry for a New Era

Jim Kitchens

Written by a parish pastor, Kitchens does not spend as much time articulating the development of postmodernism as Grenz does, but goes right to providing a description of what it is, and how it influences the church today. Kitchens tells stories from his experience of parish pastor doing church ministry in a postmodern world. Written from a more liberal perspective theologically.

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