

Sustained:

Exploring Pastoral Leadership Transitions in Light of Old Testament Succession

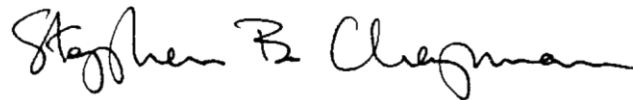
Narratives

by

Lesley Francisco McClendon

Date: April 1, 2020

Approved:



Rev. Dr. Stephen B. Chapman, Supervisor

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Rev. Dr. William Willimon, DMin Director

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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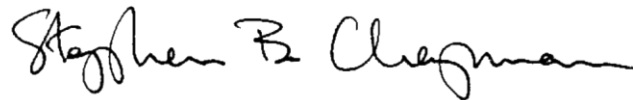
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Abstract

Pastoral succession is a necessary topic for non-denominational churches. According to the Barna research group, clergy are aging, candidate pools are shrinking and the North American Church as a whole is rapidly approaching a mass pastoral succession. One of the primary issues, however, is that there are not many models that are readily available for leaders to follow to transition well, meaning there is no plan in place before the actual transition occurs. Although transition may be difficult, it is in fact inevitable since one leader cannot stay in position forever. One of the more pressing issues facing our congregations is not the ability to address the what, but the failure to implement the how and when. The objective of this research is to convey the need for succession specifically in independent churches, encourage fellow pastors to think “with” the biblical narratives that highlight leadership transitions and consider what happens when these stories are read in light of contemporary questions about pastoral leadership and transitions. Finally, the goal is to help leaders and their congregations to see transition as an intentional, ongoing process instead of a one-time event and to provide the necessary tools to begin implementing the process of transition. The key ingredients of a healthy pastoral transition involve locating someone chosen by God and affirmed by the predecessor, who earns the trust of the congregation and leads with confidence.

Dedication

To my grandparents, the late Bishop Leslie W. Francisco, II, affectionately known as “papa,” and the late Naomi R. Francisco affectionately known as “grams,” who had a dream nearly four decades ago to plant a church that I now have the privilege to pastor. Without your vision, I may have never written this, so I hope my work honors you both in some way and that you are proud of how far our church has come.

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Introduction

Everything Has Its Time.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. - Ecclesiastes 3:1-8¹

Timing, a concept we are all familiar with but fail to take into account when it comes to thinking about pastoral transition. A problem I've noticed in many churches, specifically independent churches and those with no denominational affiliation, is a lack of transition planning. Financial consultant and tax expert Michael Chitwood did an extensive sampling of pastors across the country and discovered an astonishing fact. He concluded that by the age of 62 the average minister in America is either broke, sick or dead;² my grandfather fit all three categories by December, 1992. As a third-generation preacher, my goal is to help other leaders move from the idea of talking about succession to implementation.

¹ [Scripture quotations are from] New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

² Apostolic Information Services, "Broke, Sick or Dead." Accessed November 9, 2017, <https://www.apostolic.edu/your-pastor-your-shepherd/>.

What is meant by pastoral succession? Pastoral succession is defined as a “well-intentioned process of the shift in leadership, influence or authority from one directional leader to another.”³ Pastoral successions vary in nature and are included but not limited to: death, sickness, retirement, moral failure, unmet expectations, church splits, seasonal changes and a host of other things. Transition is inevitable, and in many of our churches, they happen by accident with little regard to intentionality. As cited in Ralph C. Watkins’s book on pastoral succession, pastor emeritus Rev. Dr. Samuel B. McKinney states, “transition is an active process and happens long before a pastor retires.”⁴

Change is not easy and often congregations are left hurting and in the dark due to the result of a poorly planned transition. The issue with avoiding a transition is that the organization suffers as a whole if there is no space for the next generation to step up and lead. Without careful consideration of what happens next, there is a good chance that the vision held by the congregation and/or its leadership will die with the predecessor; at times, forcing the church to either die or decline. All too often churches are left with the “no plan” method of succession because it has been the most common for years. A lack of proper planning typically ensures a myriad of problems: the new pastor has to learn too much on his or her own, there are constant comparisons with the predecessor, and/or the congregation is hesitant or refuses to adapt to new leadership

³ William Vanderbloemen, *Next: pastoral succession that works*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2015), 10.

⁴ Ralph C. Watkins, *Leading Your African American Church through Pastoral Transition* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010), x.

(the language of “but we’ve always done it like this” becomes a favorite expression).⁵ In seeking to understand transition from a long-term leader to an heir apparent I began to ponder two things: 1. Why is pastoral succession needed now more than ever? and 2. What makes for a successful transition? For all intents and purposes, this thesis is geared primarily toward autonomous churches with congregations led by the senior pastor.

Chapter One names the need for pastoral transitions and focuses on mainline decline in protestant churches. Don George says, “There are only two kinds of churches in America—changing churches and dying churches. A church that’s not changing is dying.”⁶ In his work, *Revitalizing Congregations: Refocusing and Healing through Transitions*, William O. Avery states, “my experience with Protestant churches across the United States for more than three decades suggests that many of these churches would rather die than change.”⁷ The American church is in crisis and if we do not get serious about the topic of succession our churches will continue to die. While mainline denominational churches are steadily declining, the independent church, more specifically megachurches, is growing rapidly. Warren Bird, research director for Leadership Network and author of more than two dozen books, asserts “since the 1970s

⁵ Marvin Anthony Moss, *Next: Surviving a Leadership Transition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013)

⁶ Terry Roberts, *Passing the Baton: Planning for Pastoral Transition* . Kindle Edition, Location 781. The author states Don George said this in a sermon at the South Carolina Assemblies of God District Council in May, 2014.

⁷ William O. Avery, *Revitalizing Congregations: Refocusing and Healing through Transitions* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), 2.

the number of large churches in North America has steadily grown, as has the average size of a 'large' church."⁸ When the Leadership Network assembled its first peer group of pastors whose churches comprised at least 1,000 members there were fewer than 100...that was over thirty years ago. According to a joint study by Leadership Network and the Hartford Institute for religious research, currently there are over 1600 megachurches (2,000 or more attendees) and approximately 3,000 more with an average attendance of 1,000 - 1,999.⁹ A large percentage of mega church growth is due to the leadership of the current senior pastor, which prompted me to ask if those churches will be sustainable after the pastor is gone.

Chapter Two explores the topic of succession in light of three prominent Old Testament narratives. Biblical accounts offer a wealth of opportunity for theological consideration. For the more successful models, I examine the leadership transitions of Moses to Joshua and Elijah to Elisha. While successful transition is ideal, it does not always happen, which prompted me to study the life of Eli and his failure to transition leadership to his sons. Since Eli could not successfully transfer the primary priestly responsibility to his sons, God uses Eli to train a young lad named Samuel who God eventually calls to serve as a prophet to Israel.

⁸ Warren Bird, "Putting 'success' in succession: prominent pastors go public with how to wisely pass the leadership baton." *Christianity Today* 58, no. 9 (November 2014): 50-53. *ATLA Religion Database*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 22, 2018), 52.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

Chapter Three looks into various types of church literature and assesses what different books and articles have to say about planning a transition. While pastors may know they need to transition many of them do not know how or when. Regarding transition, John Ortberg, senior Pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, says, “sometimes pastors don’t choose transition; it chooses them: or forced resignation, a health problem or family crisis, or even death.”¹⁰ These issues are a large reason why a large number of churches struggle in times of change. Chapter three provides a framework for dealing with the nuts and bolts of what to do during the succession process.

Finally, Chapter Four moves from planning to implementation. A plan does a church no good if it is not properly executed. Pastoral leadership does not stop when the departing pastor decides to leave. A smooth transition encompasses both the departing pastor and the arriving pastor working together to ensure the success of the organization. Despite all the facets of what it takes to ensure a seamless transition I hope to convey that a true church is more than an organization; it is a living *organism* beating with the life of God.¹¹ This is why it is so central to keep God involved in our decision making. Following the leading of God’s spirit prevents stagnation and breathes new life into the church where otherwise it may not survive.

¹⁰ Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Transition that Works*, 7.

¹¹ Roberts, *Passing the Baton*, Kindle Edition, Location 776.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined below for the purpose of this research:

The *Church*. For non-denominational groups, this is normally a body of believers within a local congregation.

A *Denomination* is a more prominent religious structure to which a congregation may be a member. Typically, churches with a denominational affiliation are tied to some sort of historical and/or theological tradition.¹²

An *Independent Church* is a church with no mainline denominational affiliation or one that wishes to hide their affiliation. “Independent Church” may also be used synonymously with the term “Non-denominational Church.”¹³

Mainline Denominations are comprised of the “Seven Sisters” of American Protestantism: The United Methodist Church, the United Churches of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopal Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the American Baptist Churches (USA), and the Disciples of Christ.¹⁴

A *Failed Transition* is the inability to gain respect from the congregation, or a constant decline in a variety of areas during one’s tenure or appointment.

¹² ARDA Religion Dictionary.

¹³ Olson, *Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 43.

¹⁴ Lantzer, *Mainline Christianity*, 1.

A *Predecessor* is a pastor who has served the same church for an extended length of time before transitioning to a successor. The term predecessor may also be used synonymously with the words *Departing Pastor*.

A *Successor* is defined as a pastor who succeeds the previous pastor who transitioned out of a ministerial assignment. The term successor may also be used synonymously with the words *Arriving Pastor*.

Pastoral or Leadership Transition refers to the “leaving or loss of one senior founding pastor or long-term pastor from a church. Transition is also the process by which existing leaders’ mentor and release emerging leaders into the practice of leadership along with its obligations, roles, and tasks.”¹⁵

Successful Transition ensures the successor maintains the same level of rapport or better with the congregation than the predecessor. A successful transition entails a smooth and compatible development sustained throughout the next pastoral tenure. This is not to insist that the new pastor is perfect but that there is overall harmony between leadership and the community. A successful transition can also be defined as a pastor earning or becoming a respected leader following the predecessor.

Succession is a term also used synonymously with the word transition.

¹⁵ J. Robert Clinton and Katherine Haubert, *The Joshua portrait: a study in leadership development, leadership transition, and destiny fulfillment* (Altadena, CA.: Barnabas Resources, 1990), 1.

Succession Planning details a process that provides detailed guidelines for the replacement of a leader.

1. Church is Changing

Church as we have known it is changing. Gone are the days of "build it and they will come." Once known as the central hub for religious experience and the place where families gather, many churches are competing with the rise of technology, sporting events, and personal preferences. Many congregations are aging, decreasing in size, experiencing financial insecurity, and other challenges.¹⁶ Several pastors and leaders are under-resourced and burnt out due to the demands of ministry and at times, unrealistic expectations.¹⁷ According to Thom S. Rainer, President of LifeWay Research Center, between 6,000 and 10,000 U.S. churches are dying each year.¹⁸ We must dramatically change the way we approach leadership and transition, or that number will continue to increase. However, while some churches are declining, others are thriving.

Mainline Decline

Author and historian Jason S. Lantzer names the Mainline as the "Seven Sisters" of American Protestantism: the United Methodist Church, the United Churches of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopal Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the American Baptist Churches, and the Disciples of Christ.¹⁹ Since the

¹⁶ Gail Cafferata, "Respect, Challenges, and Stress among Protestant Pastors Closing a Church: Structural and Identity Theory Perspectives," *Pastoral Psychology* 66.3 (2017): 311–33 (312).

¹⁷ Frederick, Thomas V, Scott Dunbar, and Yvonne Thai, "Burnout in Christian Perspective," *Pastoral Psychology* 67.3 (2018): 267–76 (269).

¹⁸ LifeWay Research Center, <https://factsand Trends.net/2018/01/16/hope-for-dying-churches/> (Accessed September 8, 2019)

¹⁹ Jason S. Lantzer, *Mainline Christianity: The Past and Future of America's Majority Faith* (New York: New York University Press, 2012). Accessed September 8, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central, 64.

nineteenth century, each of these denominations has represented different theological and traditional preferences yet serves as a home base for many practicing Christians. The denominations mentioned above are not to be labeled as a representation of all Christian denominations but perhaps as what Lantzer terms the “most culturally influential and demographically representative group of denominations at a given historical moment.”²⁰ In the 20th century, nondenominational churches began to surface in the United States along the lines of “Independent Churches.”²¹ Based on statistical data, it appears that nondenominational churches are benefitting from the decline of mainline churches. As cited in the *Salt Lake City Deseret News*, in an article written by Michael De Groote; Rodney Stark, a Baylor University sociologist, states: “Everybody knows that the so-called ‘mainline’ is now the sideline. The United Church of Christ, Presbyterians, Methodists, and the Episcopalians have been shrinking at a rather prodigious rate. However, that is not because people left the church; it is because people left THOSE churches.”²²

According to a 2014 study conducted by Pew Research Center, mainline Protestants suffer from one of the lowest retention rates amongst any religious tradition

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹ Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 43.

²² Michael De Groote, “The Rise of the Nons: Why Denominational Churches are Winning over Mainline Churches.” *Salt Lake City Deseret News*. Accessed September 1, 2019. <https://www.deseret.com/2011/2/26/20175868/the-rise-of-the-nons-why-nondenominational-churches-are-winning-over-mainline-churches>

while the Nondenominational family of the Protestant population is significantly increasing.²³

Table 1: Nondenominational Growth²⁴

	Among all U.S. adults			Among Protestants		
	2007	2014	Change	2007	2014	Change
<i>Largely evangelical denominational families</i>	%	%		%	%	
Baptist	17.2	15.4	-1.8	33	33	0
Nondenominational	4.5	6.2	+1.7	9	13	+4
Pentecostal	4.4	4.6	+0.2	9	10	+1
Restorationist	2.1	1.9	-0.2	4	4	0
Holiness	1.2	0.8	-0.4	2	2	0
Adventist	0.5	0.6	+0.1	1	1	0
Anabaptist	<0.3	0.3	n/a	*	1	+1
Reformed	0.3	<0.3	n/a	1	*	-1
Pietist	<0.3	<0.3	n/a	*	*	0
Other evangelical/fundamentalist	0.3	0.3	0.0	1	1	0
<i>Largely mainline denominational families</i>						
Methodist	6.2	4.6	-1.6	12	10	-2
Lutheran	4.6	3.5	-1.1	9	8	-1
Presbyterian	2.7	2.2	-0.5	5	5	0
Episcopalian/Anglican	1.5	1.3	-0.2	3	3	0
Congregationalist	0.8	0.6	-0.2	1	1	0
Friends	<0.3	<0.3	n/a	*	*	0
Protestant non-specific	<u>4.9</u>	<u>3.8</u>	<u>-1.1</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>-1</u>
NET Protestants	=51.3%	=46.5%	-4.7	100	100	

2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Before the dawn of the 21st century, much of what we know as American Christianity belonged to those outside the Mainline.²⁵ Are nondenominational churches

²³ “America’s Changing Religious Landscape.” Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (May 12, 2015) <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/chapter-1-the-changing-religious-composition-of-the-u-s/#measuring-and-categorizing-protestantism>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Lantzer, *Mainline Christianity*, 64.

a threat to the Mainline? If congregations can flourish without a hierarchy, it can cause those in denominational affiliations to question the benefits of more traditional frameworks.²⁶ In March 2010, a study conducted by LifeWay Research surveyed over 900 mainline pastors on the need for denominational affiliation. An overwhelming majority of pastors (76%) affirm the need to be a part of a denomination.²⁷



Figure 1: The need to be part of a denomination

A large majority (62%) also believe the importance of a denominational identity will decrease in the next ten years. Nearly ten years later, the polls seem to ring true.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., 90.

²⁷ “Survey: Pastors Say Identifying with Denomination Will Become Less Vital.” *The Christian Post*. LifeWay Research, September 13, 2011. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/survey-pastors-say-identifying-with-denomination-will-become-less-vital-55543/>.

²⁸ Figures 1 & 2. - Stetzer, Ed. “Do Denominations Matter?” *The Exchange | A Blog by Ed Stetzer*. *Christianity Today*, September 15, 2011. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2011/september/do-denominations-matter.html>.

Among Protestant pastors of denominational churches

I believe that the importance of being identified with a denomination will diminish over the next 10 years.

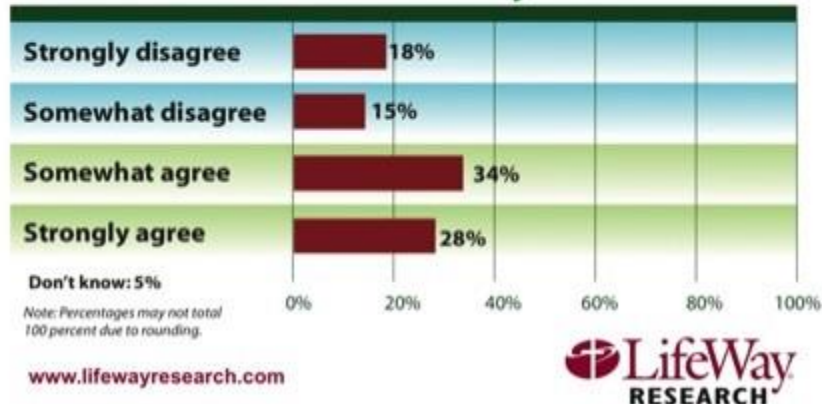


Figure 2: Denominations will diminish

Based on statistical data, it appears that nondenominational churches are benefitting from the decline of mainline churches. With the rise of the "Jesus Movement" and Calvary Chapel, nondenominational churches became increasingly popular amid the 1960s, about the same time when Mainline denominations started declining.²⁹ Independent churches came to prominence in the television era, welcoming airtime as a medium to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, something mainline denominations rarely welcomed.³⁰ The entrepreneurial vision of individuals wanting the freedom to develop and implement new practices caused many to break away from mainline

²⁹ Alister E. McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-first* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 406.

³⁰ The Internet age serves as another benefit, since a church can stream its services online at its convenience. Michele Rosenthal, *American Protestants and T.V. in the 1950s: Responses to a New Medium* (New York: Macmillan, 2007), 37.

denominations, encouraging more evangelistic and pastoral things that more traditional denominations often ignored.³¹

As cited by Alister McGrath in his book *Christianity's Dangerous Idea*, "the phenomenon of the "community church" allows entrepreneurs to develop their gifts in ways that would be impossible within the confining and restricting structures of most traditional denominations."³² Some people, especially the younger generation, are choosing to distance themselves from certain denominations because of all of the perceived baggage that comes alongside them. Nondenominational churches tend to give off a more welcoming vibe than traditional churches that may appear "stuffy." Some would argue that the independent churches are "full of marketing tactics, caring more about growth than doctrine."³³ However, with the alarming statistics, it is safe to assume that while mainline denominations seem to be diminishing, non-denominationalism is not fading away anytime soon.³⁴ "I am quite convinced that traditional denominations and churches will not completely disappear. But within another 50 years a lot more Protestant churches will look like megachurches and emergent/house churches," says Scott Thumma, Professor of Sociology and Religion at

³¹ Ibid., 406.

³² Ibid., 408.

³³ Lantzer, *Mainline Christianity*, 128.

³⁴ Kate Shellnutt, "The Rise of the Nons: Protestants Keep Ditching Denominations," News & Reporting (Christianity Today, July 25, 2019), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/july/rise-of-nons-protestants-denominations-nondenominational.html>)

Hartford Seminary in Connecticut, the home base of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.³⁵

Challenges of Mainline Denominations

According to author and researcher, Barry Kosmin, "The rise of nondenominational Christianity is probably one of the strongest trends in the last two decades."³⁶ Because of their detachment from labels, independent churches tend to have a wider reach and place a high priority on cultural relevance, which is both important and attractive to younger congregants. Kosmin also gathers that a change of scenery such as receiving a new job, relocating to a new neighborhood, or transferring out of state may result in leaving religious affiliations behind.³⁷ Changes to the workplace have also affected church attendance. With the rise of entrepreneurship, younger women entering the workforce and couples working together to make ends meet, time is a precious commodity.³⁸ Perhaps denominational churches are declining because when

³⁵ John Dart, "Going Mega: The Trend toward Bigger Churches." *The Christian Century* 127 (2010): 22. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001807713&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, 23.

³⁶ As cited in Meghan Davis, "Thriving Churches: Nondenominational Churches Find Strength in Leaving Associations Behind." *McClatchy - Tribune Business News* (December 21, 2012). <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/docview/1242162449?accountid=10598>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Carol Howard Merritt, "Generation to Generation." *The Christian Century* (May 25, 2016): 45. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/docview/1791027272?accountid=10598>.

essential meetings take place, the majority of the congregation is at work while the retirees end up making most of the significant decisions.³⁹

Nondenominational churches are enticing to people who are in transition because their requirements are not as strict. It is easy to get connected and involved in many of these churches and there are not nearly as many formalities. Leadership has the flexibility to create whatever type of program perceived necessary for whatever season. More traditional denominations must go through boards and usually cannot make spur of the moment decisions. A fair share of complaints stems from those who are in mainline denominations who get weary in the waiting game. With this approach, by the time something gets approved, a major opportunity has passed. Some think that people have left mainline denominations because these groups insist more on what they stand against than what they are for, while nondenominational churches tend to focus on what unites them rather than what divides them.

Forsaking Labels

Nondenominational churches, the fastest-growing religious market, are now classified as the second largest Protestant group in America.⁴⁰ Nondenominational churches consist of independent congregations that have no affiliation with an

³⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁰ Byron Johnson, "The Good News About Evangelism: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life." *First Things*, no. 210 (02, 2011): 12-4, <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/docview/847561077?accountid=10598>.

established mainline backing. These churches are typically planted or established by individuals who choose to form communities in their own unique way, especially concerning beliefs and practices. Research trends point to nondenominational affiliation becoming an increasingly popular decision. The 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) revealed the steady growth of nondenominational churches since 2001. Pastors are progressively rejecting denominations because they inhibit their churches' mission and ultimately, their growth.⁴¹ Some churches are affiliated with a mainline tradition but prefer not to make that information public.

An increasing number of churchgoers are redefining their religious affiliation as nondenominational; these people often are accounted for in the rise of the religious "nones." Because of the lack of descriptive categories, those who ascribe to more independent values often check "unaffiliated" to represent their religious preference. Parishioners are not falling away from the faith, but from the labels many faith traditions choose to hold. The inability to be labeled or defined and freedom from rigid rules and regulations continue to attract younger congregants. The fluidity of nondenominational churches is alluring for those who are not comfortable with old conventional ways. Taking part in something unique and culturally relevant with regard

⁴¹ Ed Stetzer. 2010. "Life in Those Old Bones: If You're Interested in Doing Mission, There Could Hardly Be a Better Tool than Denominations." *Christianity Today* 54 (6): 24–29. <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001786776&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, 24.

to styles of worship (especially involving casual dress) and community outreach are non-negotiables for many non-affiliated churchgoers. Generally, those who claim to be nondenominational still identify with the Christian religion; they report no denominational preference. When asked their religious affiliation, a nondenominational person might say, "I am just Christian" instead of identifying with a mainline denomination.

Why Can't We All Get Along?

There are pros and cons of both mainline and independent congregations. There is no shortage of complaints or concerns for either preference. Instead of going back and forth between which is better, what would it look like if traditional and contemporary churches refused to see themselves as rivals but as serving a wide range of people? Although nondenominational affiliation is increasing, certain aspects of a denominational structure may prove helpful. Denominations usually provide a sense of rootedness and history.⁴² Independent churches may not have the same tenure as mainline congregations; however, they are still a necessary component to the ever-evolving church as her congregants because of their ability to adapt in changing times.

Denominational preference or not, one thing for certain is that both churches are in need of pastors. While many are arguing why one church is better than the other, churches are aging and dying a slow death. According to Barna, tracking data published

⁴² Ibid., 27.

in *The State of Pastors* (2017), the average age of pastors increased by 10 years between 1992 and 2017 (from 44 to 54).⁴³ The generational spread also shifted during that time. While one in three pastors in 1992 was under 40, by 2017 the proportion had shrunk to one in seven. Today, there are more pastors over 65 than under 40. Barna analysts deduce that a shortage of pastors is imminent unless leaders and churches begin to identify, equip and release future church leaders.⁴⁴

Challenges of Nondenominational Affiliation

Mainline denominations have well-known staple churches, with large numbers; however, a 2018 study of the 100 largest churches in North America revealed that nearly half were nondenominational. Researcher and Christian missiologist Ed Stetzer states that “denominations can provide history and legacy to a generation longing for stability, something the independent church simply cannot.”⁴⁵ One of the challenges confronting independent churches is not knowing what the church believes precisely. Most congregants must attend for a while to find out the vision and mission of the church. Besides, nondenominational affiliation can also lead to a lack of doctrinal accountability, enabling a church to have extreme or at times unbalanced views. In light of church transitions, mainline denominations prove that not all structure is “bad.” Several mainline denominations possess internal offices dedicated to facilitating smooth

⁴³ Barna Group, *Leadership Transitions*, 2019.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Stetzer, *Life in Those Old Bones*, 27.

transitions within their contexts.⁴⁶ Therefore, the absence of denominational affiliation has complicated leadership transitions for some churches. Independent churches that lack denominational backing or a connection to a larger organization may suffer from a lack of resources as well as influence to sustain a growing congregation.

Nondenominational Sustainability

A significant concern with so many nondenominational and independent churches is, what happens to them in the long run? Growth is excellent, but is it sustainable? With thousands of independent, non-affiliated churches across the United States of America, how does one create sustainable ministry? Independent churches have proven that they can attract members, but can they retain them past one generation? Poorly planned transitions or lack thereof, negatively impact the sustainability of congregations and communities. Without an understanding of succession and transition, how will the independent church ensure its longevity? Will all of the good the church has done be unaccounted for and left to fall by the wayside?

A challenge of several independent churches is personality-driven leadership which may prove problematic when it comes time for the senior leader to transition out of the ministry or to a new endeavor. Due to the pastor's large amount of influence, much of the responsibility lies on him or her to formulate strategies that help secure the

⁴⁶ Erica J. Dollhopf and Christopher Scheitle, "Decline and conflict causes and consequences of leadership transitions in religious congregations," *Journal for The Scientific Study Of Religion* 52, no. 4 (December 2013): 675-697 (675). *ATLA Religion Database*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 22, 2018).

longevity of a church.⁴⁷ Many congregants invest so much into their senior leader that when they finally do leave, many members leave with them. If this is the case, what ensures that congregation's vitality for the future if the pastor experiences health issues, retires or passes away? Although every pastor does not have the same makeup or leadership style, it is hard to assess in a time of transition whether the church's commitment to the community or the influence of the pastor is enough to create longevity as a church. What would it look like for church leadership to have shared authority instead of hierarchical leadership?

Ready or Not, Change is Coming.

Many pastors would admit that the most challenging part of pastoring is not establishing or growing a church but after years of doing great work, passing the baton to the next generation. "Leaders must have some sense of agility and adaptability in order to navigate the potentially turbulent waters of transition." Failure to handle transition properly can result in a career or organizational disaster. How well the transition is stewarded will determine the ultimate success or failure of the transition for leaders.⁴⁸

When King Charles II of Spain died in 1701 with no heir, the result was the War of Spanish Succession, which embroiled France, England, Italy, Austria, and the

⁴⁷ Marc E. Royster Sr., "Pastoral Leadership Behavior, Church Growth and Membership Longevity: A Multiple Case Study" (Northcentral University, 2016), 3. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/docview/1784010577?accountid=10598>

⁴⁸ Christine M. Riordan, "Navigating through Leadership Transitions: Making it Past the Twists and Turns." *Ivey Business Journal (Online)* 72.3 (May 2008): 1.

Netherlands in a conflict that lasted 13 years. Planning ahead for succession matters. It's a lesson churches are learning, too, especially congregations with lead pastors of long tenure. How well a church plans for leadership transition may determine its long-term health. Failure to plan may result in stagnation, or as Spain discovered, serious conflict.⁴⁹

Many nondenominational congregations have yet to tackle the critical moment of succession in pastoral leadership.⁵⁰ Failed succession can be catastrophic and expensive. Think of churches like the Crystal Cathedral, led by Robert Schuller, which had to file for bankruptcy and ended up selling their beautiful edifice to the Catholic Diocese of Orange County, California. In churches that are not denominationally affiliated and have no hierarchical leadership structure; is it incumbent upon the pastor or congregation to provide long-term sustainability? Are pastors acting too much like solo practitioners, taking matters of succession into their own hands? If there is no plan in place after the founding or senior leader steps down, perhaps more cases like Robert Schuller and the Crystal Cathedral will surface.

What would it look like if pastors formed the kind of communities that could not only survive but welcome a transition of leadership? A challenge to this new current paradigm is to create systems that will continue ministry long after a pastor transitions so that both the pastor and the congregation are overall healthy. Well-intentioned transition is paramount for the sustainability of a leader as well as the people who

⁴⁹ Skye Jethani, "Heir apparent: A retiring pastor and his successor discover what it takes to make a transition plan work," *Leadership* 26.4 (2005): 51.

⁵⁰ Ted Campbell, *The Sky Is Falling, the Church Is Dying, and Other False Alarms* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 93. Accessed September 13, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

follow. Pastors who engage their church leadership teams with training and development have better odds of retaining active members during times of transition.⁵¹ A successful transition is not devoid of its share of problems along the way; however, the implementation of a successful transition plan ensures a favorable outcome for the predecessor, successor, and the future of the church. In contrast, if the transfer is not well thought out, planned, or implemented, it will result in the plateau, decline, and finally, the extinction of the church.⁵² In that case, we must not view succession as an event, rather as an opportunity to transfer the Christian faith to the next generation.

⁵¹ Judith Corbett Carter, "Transformational Leadership and Pastoral Leader Effectiveness," *Pastoral Psychology* 58.3 (2009): 261-71, <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/docview/199303673?accountid=10598>

⁵² Jamie J. Ornelas, "An Examination of Stagnancy and Decline in the Methodist, Holiness, and Assembly of God Movements and their Implications for the Victory Outreach International Church Movement" (Azusa Pacific University, 2018), 68. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/docview/2089996167?accountid=10598>

2. Models of Biblical Succession.

There are various types of transitional leadership throughout the Old Testament, including specific scriptures in the Bible that give direction to help us reach a theological understanding of leadership.⁵³ Traditionally, the categories of priest, prophet, and king have been viewed as most significant. But whether priestly, kingly, prophetic, or something else, the topic of transition is critically important. There are at least three well-known cases in the Old Testament where a shift in leadership must occur. In one instance, we see a well-intentioned and thoughtful succession from Moses to Joshua.⁵⁴ The transition story of Moses to Joshua is a smooth one in comparison to the story of Eli and his sons. Eli's improper preparation of his sons to faithfully and excellently safeguard their priestly duties resulted in God raising up another priest (1 Samuel 2:35). Since Eli's lineage was no longer fit for the work of the priesthood, God tasks Eli with training young Samuel, who eventually becomes a major leader in Israel. The third example highlights Elijah transitioning prophetic authority to Elisha so that he could maintain God's presence in his nation.

These biblical characters offer a wide range of mentorship: Moses mentors Joshua and Elijah mentors Elisha. At times, a mentor guides, but he or she may also show what not to do, as in the case for Eli, his sons, and Samuel. One must not assume

⁵³ Patrick D. Miller, "Toward a Theology of Leadership: Some Clues from the Prophets," *The Asbury Journal* 47.1 (1992): 43.

⁵⁴ Bob Russell and Bryan Bucher, *Transition Plan* (Louisville, KY: Ministers Label, 2010), 142.

that there is one set transition for leadership but several since there are different needs and contexts. These biblical figures serve as mentors, and although the way these figures approach various situations should not be used as a “handbook,” if one takes a thematic approach, discussion about leadership is evident.⁵⁵ Not to suggest that ministry leadership is equal to the priestly and prophetic leaders previously mentioned, but to observe those individual biblical narratives, whether favorable or not, indicates what it means to live under the call of God.⁵⁶ The basis of pastoral identity is in fact seen in the Old Testament offices of prophet and priest, positions occupied by the spiritual leaders or “pastors” of that era.⁵⁷ The prophet serves as one who is called out by God to speak the Word of God and the priest is to reveal the holiness of God. The prophet and priest complement each other well, as the prophet represents God to the people, and the priest serves as the representation of the people to God.⁵⁸

Joshua Appointed Moses’ Successor

Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint someone over the congregation¹⁷ who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd.”¹⁸ So the Lord said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him; - Numbers 27:16-17 (NRSV)

⁵⁵ Fazel Ebrihiam Freeks, “Old Testament Figures as Possible Current ‘Mentors’: Exploratory Pastoral-Theological Reflections,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 30.2 (2016): 236–48.

⁵⁶ Miller, “Toward a Theology of Leadership,” 43.

⁵⁷ John E. Johnson, “The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (April 1995): 182–200 (184), <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000893456&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

⁵⁸ Johnson, “Old Testament as Paradigm,” 187.

Throughout the book of Numbers, the Lord provides spiritual leaders in the form of priests and their assistants to journey along with God's people during times of uncertainty and despair.⁵⁹ In an age where it is easier to change affiliations and vacillate between congregations based on personal preference instead of commitment, Brown concludes "The message of Numbers is of striking contemporary relevance with its assurance that we are greatly valued and made for community by a God who cares."⁶⁰ Numbers rehearses the assurance of a secured future.⁶¹ The story of Joshua succeeding Moses is so important that we see it on three further occasions (Deut 3:21-29, Deut 31:1-7, 34:1-12). Moses was a multi-faceted leader. He served as an official in the Egyptian hierarchy and presumably received an Egyptian education. He persuaded the Israelites to follow him on a journey all while asking God to provide for their basic needs and was a man who laid down the law. As anointed and skilled in leadership as Moses was, his time of death was still inevitable.

The narrative in Numbers describes some ideal characteristics of leaders, both young and old, during a transitory period. One of the highlights in this narrative is Moses' dependence on God. Moses, an extremely busy leader, always took time to commune with the Lord. Although Moses could not enter the promised land due to his disobedience, he sought the Lord fervently for a successor who could lead the next

⁵⁹ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Numbers: Journey to the Promised Land* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 2002), 20.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

generation into the land (Numbers 27:16-17). This narrative suggests that the mark of a true leader is one who will champion the next generation even if he or she does not get a chance to see the fullness of what God has on the horizon. In praying for his successor, Moses blends leadership qualities that portray strength and love, something Joshua needs in order to be a capable commander and a caring shepherd.⁶² Strength and compassion are two factors that ensure Joshua cares not only for the strategy to lead his soldiers but also a concern for their sanity and sustainability after a battle.

It is no surprise that the Lord commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous, for Joshua's task was a difficult one.⁶³ He needed both compassion and courage to lead the troops and to shepherd his flock. When the Lord appointed Joshua as Moses' successor, he did not intend that Joshua should merely be a replica of the previous leader.⁶⁴ Determining a new leader normally takes into account various qualities, qualifications, and experience; however, God's process was vastly different.⁶⁵ Current skillsets are inadequate for new territory. Joshua was one of the Lord's most faithful servants, and he served as an army general in addition to being Moses' chosen assistant (Exodus 24:13). He also had a "positive outlook," as he was one of only two spies that brought back a good report after spying out the land of Canaan.

⁶² Ibid., 251.

⁶³ Joshua 1:9 (NRSV).

⁶⁴ Brown, *Message of Numbers*, 252.

⁶⁵ John Goldingay, *Numbers and Deuteronomy for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2010) Location 1550, Kindle Edition.

Joshua was not a carbon copy of Moses, but he knew Moses' leadership style and his dependence on God after assisting him for over 40 years. Moses was a reluctant representative; God had to coax him into accepting the call.⁶⁶ Sometimes leaders express excuses as to why they are not fit to lead, but God is not interested in any form of escape. The Lord revealed to Moses that Joshua had the Spirit, and that Moses was to lay his hands upon him and give him some of his authority.⁶⁷ The authority of Joshua comes from God, but Moses is responsible for its affirmation.

Divine approval is seen as significant in this story, therefore presenting a challenge not to overlook God's part in calling those God wants to use.⁶⁸ God interacts in the life of a leader to point out potential, develop potential, guide the leader into service and ultimately use that leader for God's purposes. When Moses lays his hands on Joshua, he is signifying identification. In essence, he is stating that Joshua is to be his new replacement, and Joshua now has the authority that Moses once had.⁶⁹ Predecessors must be willing to share some of their authority with emerging leaders if there is to be a valid transfer of leadership. Again, dependence surfaces as a critical theme in this leadership transition. Joshua was commanded to stay before Eleazar the priest and all of

⁶⁶ Josiah Derby, "Three Unlikely Leaders." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 31.1 (January 2003): 53–56 (41), <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001355188&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

⁶⁷ Numbers 27:18, 20.

⁶⁸ Kay A. Fountain, "An investigation into successful leadership transitions in the Old Testament," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7.2 (July 2004): 187-204 (190), *ATLA Religion Database*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 22, 2018).

⁶⁹ Goldingay. *Numbers and Deuteronomy for Everyone*, Location 1570, Kindle Edition.

the congregation to be commissioned, revealing his submission to authority and willingness to serve the people.⁷⁰ Joshua stood before Eleazar, but Eleazar stood before the Lord, indicating signs of submission and accountability for both parties.

Joshua Succeeds Moses

⁷ Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: "Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. – Deuteronomy 31:7 (NRSV)

In the first few verses of Deuteronomy 31, Moses tells the people that he is old and tired, and reminds Israel that Joshua is the chosen vessel to lead them into the promised land. Joshua differs from Moses in that he was not apprehensive or reluctant about the call, as Moses was.⁷¹ Moses assures Joshua that the Lord will be with him, so he has no reason to fear. God later confirms the almost the exact wording of Moses and commissions Joshua to be strong and bold, for God would be present. It is helpful to hear the voice of one's leader, but it is even more beneficial to have the approval of God. Both Moses and Joshua understood that the Lord was Israel's ultimate leader, and God used them merely as agents for an appointed time to advance God's agenda.⁷²

Joshua's succession was not immediate. It became apparent in the book of Numbers when God instructs Moses to commission him in front of the priest and the

⁷⁰ Numbers 27:19.

⁷¹ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy: Not by Bread Alone* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 287.

⁷² Brown, *Message of Deuteronomy*, 287.

congregation. Not only is leadership initiated by God, but in this case, acknowledged by people. Joshua was seen as an ideal leader in the eyes of the people because of his established credibility from his success on the battlefield and his confidence in the Lord (Exodus 17:8-14, Numbers 14:6-9).

Joshua remained a faithful assistant to Moses until it was his time to transition. However, after Deuteronomy, the time finally comes where Israel must adjust to life without the previous leader, Moses. It is of no surprise that Joshua is spirit-led and full of wisdom.⁷³ As the Israelites prepare to take new territory, Joshua keeps the attention of the people fixed on the Lord instead of a human personality. Joshua stresses the importance of God's promises.

Throughout Joshua's journey as a leader, specifically in the first chapter of the book of Joshua, God provides explicit confirmation and encouragement. Three times the Lord tells Joshua to be strong and courageous (Joshua 1:6-7,9). In the course of doing so, God also challenges Joshua to maintain those practices of meditation and obedience which would ultimately secure his success. According to Clinton and Haubert's study, *The Joshua Portrait*, the success of Joshua's succession is predicated on several things: 1. The selection of the successor was deliberate and well-intentioned; 2. Moses entrusted Joshua with more responsibility over time; 3. Moses invited Joshua to observe and witness his experiences with God and; and 4. Joshua was appointed and publicly

⁷³ Deuteronomy 34:9.

affirmed by his master.⁷⁴ Joshua gleaned much from Moses' leadership. As the servant of Moses, Joshua observed everything Moses did, even the way he approached God.⁷⁵ Moreover, many of Joshua's actions echoed Moses' actions. For example, Moses led the Israelites through the Red sea to dry land, and Joshua led the people through the Jordan River onto dry land.⁷⁶ Because of the mentorship of Moses, Joshua became well-trained and qualified to lead the Israelites.

Eli's Wicked Sons

*Now the sons of Eli were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord or for the duties of the priests to the people.*⁷⁷ – 1 Samuel 2:12-13 (NRSV)

Eli's sons, Hophni and Phineas, are guilty of using their priestly roles to promote their selfish agendas. These worthless sons give a clear warning for ministry leaders not to manipulate others for personal ambition.⁷⁸ Pastors must be careful not to abuse their authority and instead focus on helping people serve God rather than fulfill his or her greed. Supposedly, the reason for the downfall of Hophni and Phineas is due to their willful rejection of the Lord.⁷⁹ Although Eli's sons were far from God, scripture describes a young man by the name of Samuel, who "grew up with the Lord." (1 Samuel 2:21) A

⁷⁴ Robert J. Clinton and Katherine Haubert, *The Joshua portrait: a study in leadership development, leadership transition, and destiny fulfillment* (Altadena, CA.: Barnabas Resources, 1990), 101.

⁷⁵ Freeks, "Old Testament Figures as Mentors," 243.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ As noted in [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), at 1 Samuel 2:12–13.

⁷⁸ Mary J. Evans, *The Message of Samuel: Personalities, Potential, Politics, and Power*, The Bible Speaks Today (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 34.

⁷⁹ Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1986), 84.

distinction emerges between Eli's sons, whom the Bible describes as scoundrels, and Samuel, one who continues to grow in stature and favor with the Lord.⁸⁰ Eli's sons lost favor with both the Lord and people, but Samuel gained favor with both.

Succession Gone Wrong

³⁰ Therefore the Lord the God of Israel declares: 'I promised that your family and the family of your ancestor should go in and out before me forever'; but now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me; for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt. ³¹ See, a time is coming when I will cut off your strength and the strength of your ancestor's family, so that no one in your family will live to old age. ³² Then in distress you will look with greedy eye on all the prosperity that shall be bestowed upon Israel; and no one in your family shall ever live to old age. – 1 Samuel 2:30-32 (NRSV)

Despite the smooth transition of Moses to Joshua, there are times where transitions may not go as planned due to varying circumstances. In 1 Samuel, the “PK's” (= priests' kids) Hophni and Phinehas were a disgrace to God, having no regard for the obligations of the priests to the people. The sons' evil deeds cause a disdain for worship among the people.⁸¹ As sixteenth-century commentator Joseph Hall states: “A wicked priest is the worst creature upon earth.”⁸² The failed transition of Eli to his sons clearly shows that behavior is not merely transferable from generation to generation, especially for natural heirs.⁸³ After Eli heard all that his sons were doing, he confronts them, even in his old age. In hopes of correcting his sons, Eli does not offer a stern rebuke but

⁸⁰ Stephen B. Chapman, *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 83.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸² As cited in Chapman. *1 Samuel*, 82.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 84.

instead lists a series of questions, to which he receives no response. Perhaps the refusal to listen to the critiques of their father is in part, the reason for the Lord's desire to kill them. Failure to properly prepare a successor for transition is costly. By eating the choice parts of the sacrifices, Eli was also to blame, seeing that he was complicit in the sins of his sons (1 Samuel 2:29).

Eli received a word from a "man of God" concerning the Lord's judgment on Eli and his family. God promised to continue Eli's priestly lineage (1 Sam 2:30), but the contempt of Eli's sons breached that contract. It is usually thought that "man of God" implies a prophetic figure. In his rebuke, this prophetic figure shifts from rhetorical questions to forthright judgment on the house of Eli (1 Samuel 2:30-34).⁸⁴ Eli's inability to discipline and train his sons severed his entire lineage to the priesthood. Another admonishment to leaders is to discipline those that serve in authority but misuse their power. Eli had the authority to remove his sons from the priestly office, but he chose otherwise. Eli's shortcoming, however, is the way he attempted to punish his sons for bringing public shame, not necessarily the wickedness that lived inside them. The issue with Eli's discipline of his sons is not old age, but that he responds to something he has heard and not something he observed.⁸⁵

At what point did the sons need to have a consistent form of checks and balances to ensure they never strayed from their priestly duties? Leaders must be willing to

⁸⁴ David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2009), 71.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

guide and discipline when necessary, even at the cost of a potentially strained relationship. God will never allow allegiance to a family to get in the way of God's plans. If one does not honor the Lord, the Lord will not return the honor. God explicitly removes the house of Eli from priestly power and institutes a new priestly house for his pleasure (1 Samuel 2:35).⁸⁶ Eli's sons die, and the future of his household is no longer secure (1 Samuel 2:36). Presumably, Zadok replaced Eli as the new priest but the placement of Samuel's calling immediately after the house of Israel is cut off reveals, in terms of national leadership, Samuel as Eli's effective replacement.⁸⁷

God's Plan – Samuel's Calling

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. – 1 Samuel 3:1 (NRSV)

When corruption arises in a particular leader, sometimes people assume the entire organizational structure is corrupt, and God is not present.⁸⁸ However, while Hophni and Phineas were doing what they deemed appropriate, Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord (1 Samuel 2:21). God abhors the actions of Eli's sons, yet God allows Eli to continue to speak to Samuel. Samuel has yet to learn the voice of the Lord. Before he knew the Lord, serving God meant serving Eli with gladness.⁸⁹ Chapter three shows us a type of role reversal. Earlier in this biblical narrative, God speaks solely to Eli, now God is no longer speaking to Eli but making God's voice known to young

⁸⁶ Chapman, *1 Samuel*, 83.

⁸⁷ Evans, *Message of Samuel*, 37.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

Samuel. As the Lord begins to speak to Samuel, Samuel mistakenly believes that God's voice is the voice of his mentor and priest. Each time God calls Samuel, Samuel runs back to Eli. A common thread of obedience is drawn out in this narrative.

In his commentary on *1 Samuel as Christian Scripture*, author Stephen B. Chapman writes: "The greatest paradox in the chapter is the one right at its core: Samuel is the person to whom God chooses to speak, but Samuel does not know what to say; Eli is the person to whom God does not choose to speak, but Eli knows what must be said."⁹⁰

What Samuel experienced was unprecedented as the word of the Lord was rare in those days (1 Samuel 3:1). As Samuel ministers to the Lord, Eli's eyes grew dim, and he no longer heard the voice of the Lord as he did previously. It is important to observe the difference between priests and prophets. Samuel does not get anointed as a priest, but he is called to be a prophet of God.

Samuel establishes a new method of appointment to the priesthood because God requires a faithful priest, not one who is egotistical and inconsiderate of God and God's people.⁹¹ While Samuel fulfills some priestly roles, he is ultimately called to be God's prophet. The significance behind the audible voice and messages from the Lord is to initiate Samuel's prophetic ministry, while the vision from the Lord concerning the destruction of Eli's house established him as a prophet. When Samuel receives a challenging word from the Lord to give to Eli, he is afraid to tell the vision. Eli

⁹⁰ Chapman, *1 Samuel*, 88.

⁹¹ Firth. *1 & 2 Samuel*, 72.

acknowledges God's sovereignty and instructs Samuel to communicate what God said. God raises a prophet who will speak what the Lord says. Because the Lord was with him and would not let any of his words fall to the ground, the community acknowledged Samuel as the Lord's prophet (1 Samuel 3:19-20)

Elijah and Elisha – Called by God

...and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. – 1 Kings 16:19 (NRSV)

Samuel grows in his prophetic calling and helps characters like Saul and David learn of their kingship. However, in light of the Elijah-Elisha narrative, transitional authority is altogether different. Charismatic kingship is derivative: Saul and David are not directly called of God but learn of their calling from Samuel, the prophet.⁹² While kings were designed to govern the land, prophets were speakers of truth in a particular socio-historic context.⁹³ People do not choose prophets; Goes does.

Elijah was known as a mighty prophet, one who worked miracles and a master of prophetic guilds.⁹⁴ In a day and age where being "called" is seen as glamorous and an aspiration, Elijah understands the weight of what it means to be called by God and prefers a different line of work. A host of commentators have argued that Elijah goes to Horeb to reject his calling as a prophet.⁹⁵ Elijah had very many highs but also a fair

⁹² Francesca Aran Murphy, *1 Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 119.

⁹³ Marty E. Stevens, *Leadership Roles of the Old Testament: King, Prophet, Priest, and Sage* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 32

⁹⁴ Freeks, "Old Testament Figures as Mentors," 245.

⁹⁵ Jerome T. Walsh, *1 Kings* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 265.

amount of lows as well, and in turn, is stressed out from his prophetic assignment and desires death. God does not get upset at Elijah for being discouraged and wanting to quit. God understands the frustrations of leaders and is always gracious even if one does not see it.

Depression is real, and although it may be weighty at times, a new sense of purpose can help, which is something God provides by giving Elijah a new commission.⁹⁶ Amidst the fear and depression Elijah faces, the Lord issues a new call, or "re-call," to his duties as a prophet.⁹⁷ God's remedy for prophetic burnout involves both a new assignment and the sure promise of a future that surpasses the prophet's success or lack thereof.⁹⁸ The story of Elijah reveals the necessity of faithfulness not only in the best or more enjoyable moments of ministry but also the rough ones when burnout is on the rise. One of the new commissions God gives Elijah is to find Elisha and anoint him as a prophet in his place (1 Kings 19:16) Elijah works through depression and accepts the call of God to disciple Elisha.

Elisha Becomes A Disciple

So he set out from there, and found Elisha son of Shaphat, who was plowing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. – 1 Kings 19:19 (NRSV)

⁹⁶ Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 127.

⁹⁷ Miller, "Toward a Theology of Leadership," 48.

⁹⁸ Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 129.

God begins the conversation of succession with Elijah even when he still has seven fruitful years of ministry left ahead of him.⁹⁹ Elijah is summoned by God to anoint his own successor, Elisha, as a prophet. Without even considering Elisha's opinion, God chose Elisha even before Elijah called him. When Elijah first calls Elisha, Elisha is plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, a foreshadowing of his "yoking" and "guiding" of Israel.¹⁰⁰ Without hesitation, Elisha accepts the prophetic call and becomes a student of Elijah, to one day be like him. As Elijah passes by Elisha, he throws his cloak over Elisha's shoulders, symbolizing his marking by the prophetic mantle. In throwing his mantle over him, Elisha "invests" Elisha into prophetic service.¹⁰¹ When Elijah takes off his cloak and lays it upon the shoulder of Elisha as he plows, nothing is said. The very act carries a significant amount of weight.¹⁰² Elisha leaves everything and follows Elijah, a tremendous sacrifice since Elisha apparently comes from a very wealthy estate.¹⁰³ Elisha, like Joshua, the successor of Moses, ends up serving in some capacity of apprenticeship before his transition as the primary leader.

Elijah is noted for his obedience, going wherever sent, up until his last moments on earth.¹⁰⁴ On each mission, Elijah attempts to convince Elisha to stay behind; however,

⁹⁹ Andrew Flowers, *Leading Through Succession: Why pastoral leadership is the key to a healthy transition* (print source unknown), 102-3. Kindle Edition.

¹⁰⁰ Peter J. Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 143.

¹⁰¹ Walsh, *1 Kings*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996, 279.

¹⁰² Ronald Wallace, *Elijah and Elisha: Expositions from the Book of Kings* (Edinburgh: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 54

¹⁰³ Wallace, *Elijah and Elisha*, 54

¹⁰⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 334

Elisha refuses. Three times he is told to stay behind — at Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho, and three times Elijah declares, "I will not leave you" (2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6). The text presents Elisha as a very loyal and faithful apprentice since the verb "leave" also indicates "abandon."¹⁰⁵ Elisha served as a disciple and apprentice of Elijah. He refused to be separated from him even though his mentor permitted him to stay behind. Successful biblical mentorship lies in a personal relationship with God through daily fellowship as well as the example one sets for a mentee's life.¹⁰⁶ Elisha knows that he is to receive the prophetic mantle. On each journey, Elijah and Elisha encounter a "company of prophets," who hold Elijah in high regard as their master. The company of prophets knows that he is about to be "taken," but Elisha does not want to hear this, as he already knows. Throughout Elijah and Elisha's three journeys, they must rely on the power of Yahweh. Upon completion, it is time for Elijah's ascension. Before his departure, Elijah grants Elisha one last request. Boldly and promptly, Elisha asks for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. In essence, he is asking for the infusing of Elijah's power as a prophet.¹⁰⁷ He is also requesting recognition as the rightful successor of Elijah. Elijah is not sure he can honor this request since he is not the giver of such a spirit. He does, however, give one criterion to determine this gifting after the fact. If Elisha can "see" the prophet ascend, his request will have been granted.

¹⁰⁵ Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 334.

¹⁰⁶ Freeks, "Old Testament Figures as Mentors," 246.

¹⁰⁷ Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Kings*, 335.

Elisha Succeeds Elijah

He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. - 2 Kings 2:13 (NRSV)

Elisha called Elijah “father, father” as they parted from one another (2 Kings 2:12), an endearment that correlates to ‘the *sons* of the prophets’ who appear throughout the subsequent ministry of Elisha, indicating the relationship of a prophetic leader among a few disciples.¹⁰⁸ During Elijah's ascension, the text reveals that Elisha “no longer” saw, signifying that he did see something and was qualified for the double portion. Although Elisha knew his master would be leaving, he was still not prepared. Elisha mourns and rips his clothes in two pieces. His prophetic career begins, and he immediately replicates Elijah’s ministry.¹⁰⁹ Elisha ventures to meet the company of prophets as his master did, and they affirm that the spirit of Elijah rests upon Elisha. According to 2 Kings 2, Elisha becomes the father figure to the sons of the prophets. By repeating the works of his master, Elisha establishes himself as the new “father” of the company of the prophets and gains preeminence among them.¹¹⁰

Theological Reflections

There are many similarities between the transition from Moses to Joshua and the transition of Elijah to Elisha. Just as Joshua was God's chosen successor for Moses, so

¹⁰⁸ Rickie D. Moore, “The Prophet as Mentor: A Crucial Facet of the Biblical Presentations of Moses, Elijah, and Isaiah,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15.2 (April 2007): 155–72 (162).

doi:10.1177/0966736907076334

¹⁰⁹ Leithart, *1 and 2 Kings*, 173.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

was Elisha for Elijah. Receiving the mantle of Elijah was a sure indicator that Elisha succeeded Elijah, making him the true heir to continue the prophetic calling.¹¹¹ As with Joshua, Elisha also established his credibility by gaining the trust of the people he was around. Elisha does this by refusing to abandon his mentor on his final journey, petitioning to be recognized as the true successor and lastly by the public display of authority he received.¹¹² Rickie D. Moore, in his work *The Prophet as Mentor*, argues that "the success, indeed, the succession of this mentoring relationship is shown to turn not so much on the *doing* of mentoring but rather on simply *being* a mentor and *being with a* mentor."¹¹³

Eli's sons gained authority directly from their lineage. God did not call them; they had no credibility with the people, nor were their attitudes supported by Eli.¹¹⁴ There was no transfer of authority from Eli to his sons, especially given God's disapproval of them. In contrast to the sons of Eli, Samuel lived in the same conditions, yet he was faithful to God's commandments. The transition of power between Eli and Samuel is a bit different than the others; however, Samuel also served his leader faithfully, was called by God and received credibility from the people because of the prophetic call on his life. Not only was he trusted by Eli with specific responsibilities around the sanctuary, he was trusted by God to serve a prophetic word to the house of

¹¹¹ Fountain, "Successful leadership transitions," 194.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 195.

¹¹³ Moore, "Prophet as Mentor," 164.

¹¹⁴ Fountain, "Successful leadership transitions," 196.

Eli, even in his youth.¹¹⁵ Regarding the transfer of power, Eli had to bow in submission to the will of God to accept Samuel as God's choice. Samuel established credibility with the people, and in turn, they looked to him for advice and guidance (1 Samuel 7:3). With the failed succession of Eli to his sons and the more successful transitions from the other narratives, one can deduce that God's wish is never to leave God's people leaderless or without guidance.¹¹⁶

Christian pastoral identity emerges in the heritage of the Old Testament offices of prophet and priest. As prophets, pastors are compelled to serve as the mouthpiece of God. At times, pastors, like prophets, are also responsible for going against the grain and speaking a word that challenges society and needs to be accessible. Pastors share a priestly identity by coming alongside, to console and care.¹¹⁷ As priests, pastors are sensitive to the concerns of the people, offer guidance and at times rebuke, and mourn with those who mourn. In light of these narratives, what makes for a great pastoral transition and great leadership? Is it likability, prestige, popularity, nepotism, hardened skin, or something altogether different?

With distinct narratives and methods of transition, the common themes conveyed are honor, loyalty, trust, and obedience to God. For successful transitions it is essential to take into account if a leader is called by God and remains faithfully

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 199.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 202.

¹¹⁷ Johnson, *Old Testament as Paradigm*, 194.

committed to the God who calls them. Joshua, Samuel, and Elisha know their greatness is not in and of themselves but the Lord. Personal humility plays a vital role as it indicates that one does not know the answer to everything. Secondly, when God calls a leader the people must see the predecessor publicly affirm and celebrate God's chosen vessel.¹¹⁸ At some point, in death or ideally while living, the older leader must transfer power to the younger leader. Moses trusted Joshua to lead and interceded on his behalf (Exodus 17:8-13). Moses knew that there were some battles he could not fight so he entrusted others to handle certain tasks.

Great transitional leadership is not merely about the characteristics one possesses, but how one can replicate leadership qualities in others. Tom Peters has said “leaders don’t create followers, they create more leaders.”¹¹⁹ Thirdly, the successor must be able to step up and lead boldly in the confidence of the Lord. Lastly, to ensure longevity, it is up to the leader to continue to mentor the next generation for sustainability and fruitfulness for the mission of God. Mentoring is most significant when the mentee gains insight from the mentor’s advice and care.¹²⁰ Typically, in a mentoring relationship, the mentor is older, and the mentee is younger. A great mentor is a person who encourages, motivates, nurtures, teaches and practices mutual respect.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Jim Ozier and James Griffith, *The Changeover Zone: Successful Pastoral Transitions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 8.

¹¹⁹ V. Van Vliet. “Tom Peters.” Accessed February 25 2020, <https://www.toolshero.com/toolsheroes/tom-peters/>

¹²⁰ Freeks, “Old Testament Figures as Mentors,” 237.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Mentors are also not easily intimidated, nor do they retreat when their mentee seems to excel. At the heart of it all, it seems that through these biblical narratives God is concerned with passing God's work to the next generation. Mentorship in the biblical sense proves that it is more beneficial to be "with" someone than simply giving someone a task list of things to do. Succession, although difficult, proves that only a vision from God can overcome generational division.¹²²

¹²² Moore, *Prophet as Mentor*, 172.

3. Every Pastor Needs a Plan

Many are familiar with the saying, "failing to plan is planning to fail." Pastoral transitions are critical in the life and maturation of every congregation and every denomination. Long pastorates do not ensure the survival, let alone the overall health of the church.¹²³ Most pastors do not even consider succession until presented with a problem or reason to make a change. Best-selling author and leadership expert John Maxwell measures a leader's successes by succession. Maxwell claims if you love your church and want it not only to survive but thrive for countless years to come, you need to transition well.¹²⁴

A prevailing thought pattern about leadership transitions is due to sickness, or what research expert Carolyn Weese describes as "ill-ness based" transition. She further exclaims, "pastoral departure is treated like a terminal diagnosis; just as no one plans for cancer, no one plans for a leadership transition either."¹²⁵ In light of Weese's ill-ness based theory, why is it that pastoral transitions frequently happen as a result of moral failures, sickness, or death? Pastoral transitions stem from a myriad of reasons ranging from retirement to crisis management. Regardless of why it happens, is there a way for churches to be prepared for when it happens? Without a clear plan of leadership

¹²³ Warren Bird, "Putting 'success' in succession: prominent pastors go public with how to pass the leadership baton wisely," *Christianity Today* 58.9 (November 2014): 50-53 (51). *ATLA Religion Database*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 22, 2018)

¹²⁴ As cited in Tom Mullins. *Passing the Leadership Baton: A Winning Transition Plan for Your Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), xiv.

¹²⁵ Carolyn Weese and J. Russell. Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom Speaking the Unspoken about Pastoral Transitions* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2012), 19

succession, we will continue to see congregations decline, families scatter, and ultimately the closings of several churches.

Every leader must think about transition, whether they want to or not. The Bible is very clear that every person has a date with death (Hebrews 9:27). Aside from death, leaders lose vitality and creativity as they age.¹²⁶ Perhaps senior leaders avoid planning for succession because they are not sure where to start, are nervous about their future, or are threatened by the entire process.¹²⁷ Whatever the case, leaders must understand that transition is *for you*, but it is not *about you*, it is about the overall health of the organization. Transitions allow leaders to look beyond their current state to their future possibilities.

There is very little research on the subject of leadership transitions. There is an assumption that if leaders get enough development, then the change will flow smoothly; however, there is little material on the process of transition itself.¹²⁸ Pastoral transitions should not be considered as an event but a process. Transition is undoubtedly not about adhering to one date set on the calendar. Successful transitions take time. According to their 2019 study of *Leadership Transitions*, Barna analysts grouped pastoral successions into three major categories:¹²⁹ 1. *Forced transitions*, due to unexpected or unfortunate

¹²⁶ Bob Russell, and Bryan Bucher, *Transition Plan* (Louisville, KY: Ministers Label, 2010), 42.

¹²⁷ John Finkelde. *Next! Future proof your church with succession planning that works*, Grow a Healthy Church (print source unknown). Kindle Edition.

¹²⁸ Kay A. Fountain. "An investigation into successful leadership transitions in the Old Testament." *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7.2 (July 2004): 187-204 (187). *ATLA Religion Database*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 22, 2018).

¹²⁹ Barna Group, "Leadership Transitions," 2019.

circumstances; 2. *Pastor-initiated developments*, motioned by the departing pastor; and 3. *Planned Transitions*, those planned ahead of the change.

Times of Crisis - Forced Succession

Things happen. At any moment, a pastor can resign, get sick, burn-out, commit a moral failure or die, potentially leaving the congregation in disarray. Some parishioners may feel anger, wonder what went wrong, look for someone to blame, and of course, worry about what will happen to the church.¹³⁰ Times of crisis pose the question, "Now what?"

One can only pastor so long before a change must take place. Transition is inevitable; sustainability is not. Pastors must understand that they cannot merely "pray" a plan into action. There is no magical launch formula or slogan that can propel an organization into greatness but implementing a series of decisions in the form of strategy can undoubtedly lead in the right direction. 28% of senior pastors experience forced termination.¹³¹ If possible, churches should have transition plans in place in the event of an emergency (death, sickness, moral failure) or an anticipated departure of the pastor. A crisis plan is not to suggest that the pastor is leaving. It offers guidance for unexpected events. Crisis prevention plans help limit confusion and dysfunction in

¹³⁰ Loren B. Mead, *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1993), 2.

¹³¹ Leadership Network research, as cited in VanderIbomen and Bird, *Next: Pastoral Transition that Works*.

churches. Linda Stanley, vice president and team leader for Leadership Network, asserts:

The “no plan” of succession has been the most common pattern over the years. The large-church pastors in our leadership communities, ages 45 to 65, may talk about succession, but few, if any, have detailed a plan.¹³²

A variety of issues arise when the pastor leaves suddenly due to several circumstances. A forced transition may cause the church to lose its credibility in the community. In the event of a sudden pastoral departure, the congregation must be informed and cared for immediately. Congregants are left in panic mode and need strong leadership and resources to help guide them through this traumatic experience. Resources may include contact information for therapists, pastoral counseling, and other referrals.¹³³ In times of crisis, a staff member or trusted individual needs authority to provide structure and ideas for moving forward. A trusted authority does not necessarily have to be a pastor but someone who can lead in times of crisis. Although a trusted authority may govern the direction of the church, there is still a need for someone who can lead the worship service until a plan forms. Whoever is leading the worship service must be sensitive to the needs of the congregation and offer hope and encouragement to inspire confidence in the church for the days ahead.¹³⁴ The goal of the crisis emergency plan is to restore the church to normalcy.¹³⁵ Crisis management plans

¹³² Warren Bird, "Putting 'success' in succession," 51. Accessed January 22, 2018.

¹³³ Weese and Crabtree, *Elephant in the Boardroom*, 189.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

often include interim ministers who help reduce conflict, assist the congregation with its identity, and help the church set goals for the future.¹³⁶ The interim pastor takes on the pastoral duties for the short term to free the leadership to focus on seeking a permanent pastor. An interim pastor helps set the stage for the new pastor by addressing gossip and clearing up misinformation. Although forced transitions are not ideal, when the congregation works together, they eventually move forward.

Every Church Has a Type

There is no one "right" way to approach succession. In any succession, there is no one-size-fits-all. Various contexts have different needs. What works for one church may not work for another. Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree, in their work *The Elephant in the Boardroom*, describe four types of church culture (a family culture, an icon culture, an archival culture, and a replication culture) and how to manage a successful transition within each culture.¹³⁷ Of these four types, two are personality-driven, while the other two are knowledge-driven. If a church is going to transition well, it must know its particular culture.

¹³⁶ William O. Avery, *Revitalizing Congregations: Refocusing and Healing through Transitions* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), 143.

¹³⁷ This model is introduced in chapter 4 and described in more detail in chapters 5-8, pages 57-125. Weese and Crabtree classify their findings as one church, four different variations: family culture, icon culture, archival culture, and replication culture.

Family Culture

The family culture, a personality-driven culture, is one that has a parental figure who acts as the head of the household, guides the flock, and executes those family traditions. Examples of family churches may include mainline churches or smaller community churches. Family culture identifies most with familiarity. Those that attend these types of churches may place a high priority on pastoral care and concern, in-home and hospital visitations, and frequent check-ins. Excellent member care becomes valued as tradition over time, and if a leader deviates or defers the responsibility to the laity, it may prove detrimental for the congregation. A pastor must build excellent rapport with the members to ensure the longevity of this type of church. Because the pastor assumes the role of a parent when a transition occurs, the congregation views the process typically as grieving a death.

For a family culture to transition well, there must be space for grief and a commitment to uphold certain traditions. Family cultures are not fit for a transition without adequate time to mourn their loss. If this culture is adequately cared for and managed during the transition, the church will be more receptive to a new pastor at the appropriate juncture. Because of their familial ties, members of the congregation prefer the successor to hold fast to the family values of the predecessor. This type of church benefits from crafting a transition plan well in advance, so it has the time to assess the best approach. "Family cultures value respect, loyalty, history, sharing stories, the

family unit, and community, and are a bit passive toward methods, formal processes, and outsiders."¹³⁸ To overcome what one may perceive as "lethal loyalty," the successor must win the hearts of the people to gain their trust, which may take a significant amount of time.

Icon Culture

The icon culture is another personality-based style that leans heavily on the public persona of the pastor. In these churches, the pastor typically represents "the face" of the organization. Churches known for their iconic culture tend to be mega-churches, technologically advanced churches, and large mainline Protestant churches. An icon culture prides itself on the personality and gifts of the primary leader. The leader is often charismatic or some visionary who has a knack for connecting people to the vision and ensuring their support. As this type of leader's credibility increases, so does his or her decision-making power. These personalities often call the shots, and as long as they remain successful and innovative, the congregation is satisfied. It can be hard for a church to move forward in an icon-based transition.

Transitions in icon-based culture are known for detaching ministry from one leader and giving credence to another. Icon leaders tend to have the flexibility to mentor a successor if they choose. This type of church culture does not have as rich a history as the archival culture meaning a pastoral transition is critical. Because they are relatively

¹³⁸ Weese and Crabtree, *Elephant in the Boardroom*, 84.

new on the scene, icon cultures have very little literature to guide them through a transition process. These types of transitions are tricky because of how public they are. Personality-driven churches need to affirm a divine mandate, even as they rely on their board and the professional advice of a consultant to handle all of the complexities of the transition. The icon culture values talent, skill, spontaneity, extraversion (at least when it comes to stage presence), and overall presentation, especially regarding branding and marketing. This style of transition is most likely what happens in most mega and independent churches and focuses mainly on how well one passes the baton. Iconic transitions must be careful about envy and discouragement and provide space for the new leader to lead according to his or her wiring, not that of the previous leader.¹³⁹ A healthy relationship between the predecessor and successor is most favorable.

Archival Culture

This type of culture is knowledge-based and prides itself on being in touch with the historical and universal traditions of the church. The archival culture comprises the more traditional churches such as the Roman Catholic or Orthodox church. These cultures are particularly fond of rich history and theology. Archival churches place a high value on liturgy, scripture reading, and sacraments. These churches have hierarchical governance that helps preserve the faith and longstanding traditions of the church. Because these churches are not personality-driven, they place a more significant

¹³⁹ Avery, *Revitalizing Congregations*, viii.

emphasis on community knowledge. Leadership transitions in these contexts are not nearly as devastating as the others as long as the broad focus and activities of the church do not change.¹⁴⁰

Transitions for the archival culture are best suited when knowledge tradition sustains the culture. Archival types are not as concerned about the change of leaders as long as the core beliefs, liturgy, and worship space remains. Dramatic changes to liturgy can grow or shrink a parish. Exorbitant amounts of power do not rest in the local congregation, but the hierarchical government, ensuring their leaders are chosen *for* them and not *by* them.¹⁴¹ Whereas the icon-based culture prides itself on extraversion, archival types are more introverted in nature. Archival types value history, heritage, loyalty, ritual, structure, and credentials. These types are somewhat opposed to spontaneity, change, and self-governance. Transitions happen organically in the archival culture because most churches in this model tend to operate the same way. Pastoral appointments to a local parish in this setting are frequent.

Replication Culture

The replication type is another knowledge-based culture that expects the pastor to multiply his/herself. Primary examples of a replication culture happen in parachurch organizations as well as some megachurches. These churches are concerned about

¹⁴⁰ Weese and Crabtree, *Elephant in the Boardroom*, 67.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 101

relevance and what is working now. Replication culture can be highly versatile, learning skills from a plethora of sources to train others. Replication culture relies heavily on training and development, which places the burden on leaders to possess skills in the area of mentoring and coaching. These churches are not necessarily dependent on the lead pastor but have a pool of leaders to choose from should anything ever happen. Replication churches have to be careful not to reinvent the wheel.¹⁴²

New pastors in replication cultures are often recruited internally, though this is not the case for all churches. As a knowledge-based culture, replication types pride themselves on thinking and explore how they can couple their thoughts with modern-day complexities. This culture places a high priority on teaching methods, mastering a skill and clarity, but is somewhat opposed to personality-based leadership, dependence, and external recruitment. Vanderbloemen suggests that "internal candidates" are often the best matches.¹⁴³ These candidates are selected from within the congregation and often hold the church's DNA with hopes to continue its mission and vision. These candidates ideally built trust with the congregants over several years, making it easier for the congregation to give their respect. Replication cultures always have a pool of leaders at their disposal since they are focused on effectiveness more than personality; however, the need for clarity is paramount. If the successor leads with ambiguity, it

¹⁴² Ibid., 68.

¹⁴³ Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 149.

creates an element of dissonance in this type of church. Long term planning is mandatory for replication cultures to thrive.

Every Church Has a Model

In their book *Leadership that Fits Your Church*, Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce explore models: transformational leadership, servant leadership, and inspirational leadership.¹⁴⁴ They assert that the leadership patterns are not mutually exclusive and that pastors tend to rely on more than one approach.¹⁴⁵ Style, in this context, relates to the methodology a leader employs. Although many pastors may possess traces of each, most pastors lead with a primary approach.¹⁴⁶

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders create trust by connecting them to a shared organizational vision and allowing congregants to feel an element of ownership in the goals of the church. A transformational approach to leadership rejects the “what’s in it for me” narrative and instead rallies around the church’s mission.¹⁴⁷ This style of leadership often reinforces the priority of the church to remember its purpose.¹⁴⁸ In his

¹⁴⁴ Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *Leadership That Fits Your Church: What Kind of Pastor for What Kind of Congregation* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 2012), 102. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 16, 2018).

¹⁴⁵ The findings in this chapter are based on Woolever’s approach to leadership facets.

¹⁴⁶ Woolever and Bruce, *Leadership*, 108.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁴⁸ Steve Echols, “Transformational/Servant Leadership: A Potential Synergism for an Inclusive Leadership,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 8.2 (Fall 2009): 85–116 (114). <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001755005&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

book *Transforming Leadership*, James McGregor Burns writes: “instead of exercising power over people, transforming leaders champion and inspire followers. Followers might outstrip leaders. They might become leaders themselves. That is what makes transforming leadership participatory and democratic.”¹⁴⁹ A pastor may be a transformational leader if he or she can encourage the congregation to think about old problems in new ways.

Servant Leadership

Well known for his work on *Servant Leadership*, Robert Greenleaf asks: “Servant and leader - can these two roles be fused in one real person, in all levels of status or calling?”¹⁵⁰ According to Greenleaf, the answer is yes, but only if the servant-leader is a servant first.¹⁵¹ Servant leaders differ from those who are leaders first because servant leaders are focused primarily on the needs of others. Those who take the servant leader approach are always wondering if the needs of the congregation come before the pastor's interests. Because they dedicate their lives to the needs of others, these pastors are often full-time in ministry. Skilled servant leaders are active listeners who tend to

¹⁴⁹ James MacGregor Burns, *Transforming Leadership: a New Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 26.

¹⁵⁰ Robert K. Greenleaf and Larry C. Spears, *Servant Leadership: a Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 21.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

listen more than they communicate.¹⁵² Greenleaf believes the model for servant leaders is *primus inter pares* - which is Latin for "first among equals."¹⁵³

Inspirational Leadership

An inspirational leader is a chief motivator and encourager of the flock. To lead inspirationally, one must have a positive approach to different situations. Inspirational leaders tend to believe the best in their people by speaking to their potential. These types of leaders refuse to settle for motivation alone and always invite members to take action. Inspirational leaders serve with enthusiasm and are passionate about advancing the mission of the church.

Reflecting on the various leadership styles previously mentioned, some may wonder if a pastor should be a 'builder' (one who is more entrepreneurial) or a shepherd (a more caring leader). While either style has its strengths and weaknesses, Scott Cormode proposes another model - the Gardener "who tills the soil and cultivates the environment...for the gardener acknowledges that (s)he can only evoke growth, never produce it."¹⁵⁴ In environments of ambiguity and when addressing adaptive challenges,

¹⁵² Kenneth H. Blanchard, Renee Broadwell, and John C. Maxwell, *Servant Leadership in Action: How You Can Achieve Great Relationships and Results* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2018), 15.

¹⁵³ Richard N. Stewart, "Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 4.1-2 (Spring, 2005): 192-95 (194). <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001695312&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

¹⁵⁴ Scott Cormode, "Multi-Layered Leadership: The Christian Leader as Builder, Shepherd, and Gardener." *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1.2 (2002): 69-104 (71). <https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001699751&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Cormode suggests that leaders move beyond builders and shepherds to serve as gardeners.¹⁵⁵ He also argues that these models are not merely "styles" but layers and "that the advanced leader must work in each layer simultaneously because each is present in every ministering situation."¹⁵⁶ Neither model has to stand alone because each model has something to offer for a specific purpose.

One church is not better than the other, and there are highlights and flaws in each; however, it depends on the culture and context of that particular ministry. Faithful leadership entails a match between pastor and congregation.¹⁵⁷ With reference to independently operated churches, the target of this thesis, the following research reflects the icon-based church with hints of replication culture. The icon-based type of leadership is not to suggest that the other models are irrelevant. They are useful when thinking of most nondenominational churches and certain facets of biblical succession. Pastors must steward leadership well. Bob Russell, the author of *Transition Plan*, had this to say regarding ministers, "There are three ways I can leave. You can carry me out, you can kick me out, or I can walk out. I choose to walk out."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 71.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 73.

¹⁵⁷ Avery, *Revitalizing Congregations*, 9.

¹⁵⁸ Russell, *Transition Plan*, 44.

Teamwork makes the dream work

Pastors in icon-based cultures assume the position of heroes, which poses a problem because should anything happen to the hero, the ministry suffers.¹⁵⁹ The heroic model, as described by Lovett Weems Jr., is a "self-defeating" model.¹⁶⁰ Outcomes may prove more favorable if the pastor transitions from the role of hero to a trainer.¹⁶¹ In earlier chapters, the following questions surfaced: Are pastors acting too much like solo practitioners, taking matters of succession into their own hands? Perhaps, but the idea that the pastor should not be involved in the succession process receives little support from the Bible.¹⁶² It is healthy to ponder; however, what would it look like if pastors formed the kind of communities that could not only survive but welcome a transition of leadership? Pastors in the icon culture play a huge part in choosing a successor, but they need a team to speak into the process. While the pastor may have a prominent perspective, securing the help of a team provides a more balanced view of the needs of the entire organization, not just the platform.

A balanced team consists of those who seek God and wisdom for how to move forward. One approach to building a health-based transition team is to adapt Carolyn Weese and J. Russell Crabtree's five key players in their notable work, *The Elephant in the*

¹⁵⁹ Weese and Crabtree, *Elephant in the Boardroom*, 163.

¹⁶⁰ Lovett H. Weems, *Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 72.

¹⁶¹ Lovett H. Weems, *Take the Next Step*, 23.

¹⁶² Andrew Flowers, *Leading through Succession: Why pastoral leadership is the key to a healthy transition* (print course unknown). Kindle Edition, Location 27.

Boardroom, which can effectively be geared toward thinking and creating a strategic succession plan for churches.¹⁶³ According to the authors, a healthy transition team includes five key players:

1. *The departing pastor* helps aid in the success of the pastoral transition. He or she must come to grips with the fact that one day, his or her tenure as lead pastor will end. It is the responsibility of a great leader to plan and initiate a transition process. Multiple sources imply pastoral transitions may require two to three years to execute, meaning that pastors must plan several years before they intend to leave. Departing pastors participate in the development of the transition plan and how to participate in that plan. The departing pastor must be accountable to the board and clear about his or her intentions for strategy, the date of departure, and plans after leaving. The board may suggest improvements, but if the wishes of the departing pastor are not respected, the pastor's departure may be masked as a transition when it is a termination.¹⁶⁴

2. *The board* is responsible for planning and execution.¹⁶⁵ The board needs to invest a considerable amount of time in executing the plan. The board provides specifications for potential candidates, job descriptions, transition consultants, assessments of the health of the organization (e.g., through interviews), and compensation packages, just to name several important tasks.

¹⁶³ Weese and Crabtree, *The Elephant in the Boardroom*, 47-54.

¹⁶⁴ Russell, *Transition Plan*, 63.

¹⁶⁵ Some churches may have an executive staff that operates independently from a church board that deals with these matters.

3. *The transition consultant* is a necessary addition who provides coaching and expertise that is relevant to today's environment. A transition consultant is there to give an objective view and often assists the board with strategies dealing with the timing of the transition, recruitment, and development.

4. *The personnel committee* is responsible for performance expectations, evaluations, coaching, and accountability. Personnel committees assist the board with pastoral specifications and provide transitional support to the successor for his or her first year of ministry.

5. *The arriving pastor* gauges whether his or her qualifications match the specifications of the position. The arriving pastor must be an active participant in the transitional plan set by the board and be willing to follow the established guidelines. Finally, the arriving pastor needs to honor the predecessor.

All five of these critical players rally together to provide training, devise plans and protocol, set goals for the organization, and determine how they are measured and add an extra layer of accountability for unmet expectations. Another component that makes transitions more successful is a bent toward innovation and adaptation – two elements that see succession not as a sprint but a marathon that is ever-evolving. The team model provides necessary dialogue at different levels and utilizes the gifting of

those in the congregation while also looking for new leadership resources where applicable.¹⁶⁶

Transition Strategies

Although systems and strategies are essential, the team must never forget God as the sole provider of wisdom and instruction. Everyone benefits most remembering that it is God's church and not their own. Once the team is convinced God has spoken and affirmed the successor, they should begin the process of transition.

There are several strategies for choosing a successor. One of the strategies may include selecting a family member of the predecessor, not for the sake of nepotism, but if the family member has the gifting and qualities for what it takes to lead the congregation forward. The team can also examine the current staff to see if someone may be a potential candidate for the lead pastorate. The congregation may be a bit more accepting if the change happens internally since that person is most likely familiar with the church's culture and mission. Perhaps the congregation needs a fresh face and vision; utilizing the board in searching for an external candidate could be helpful. If an external candidate is the best fit, it is beneficial to have him or her share the responsibilities of the senior pastor as co-pastor before any transition takes place.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Avery, *Revitalizing Congregations*, ix.

¹⁶⁷ Weems, *Take the Next Step*, 97.

One of the best forms of transition in the iconic church is an overlap between the pastor and the successor.¹⁶⁸ The church needs to see the departing pastor pass the baton and affirm the successor. Timelines differ based on the context of the congregation; however, a common approach is at least three to five years in advance before the pastor anticipates leaving.¹⁶⁹

Non-negotiables of the Successor

Every successor must meet a list of specifications as laid out by the team. This list is not exhaustive and has no particular order but provides basic guideline of what to look for when choosing an ideal candidate.

1. *Model of Character.* According to the Bible, much of the emphasis in determining who should lead should focus on character. The remaining emphasis should be on one's skill of teaching the Word of God to the flock.¹⁷⁰ It is not enough for a leader to possess a massive amount of skill if he or she lacks the character to maintain the skill. "A gift opens doors; it gives access to the great.¹⁷¹ But it is character that will sustain that access."¹⁷² A leader with exemplary character is consistent with his or her words and actions. Too many inconsistencies have the potential to breach trust.

¹⁶⁸ Weems, *Take the Next Step*, 92.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Walt Russell, *Sustainable Church* (print source unknown). Kindle Edition.

¹⁷¹ Proverbs 18:16.

¹⁷² Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck. *Designed to Lead: the Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2016), 93.

2. *Skill.* Once it is perceived that the successor has exemplary character, he or she must possess some type of skillset that benefits the congregation. Integrity and skill go hand in hand. David shepherded the people of Israel with integrity and guided them with skill.¹⁷³ The arriving pastor should have a fair amount of leadership ability, be skilled in public speaking to some degree, and effectively communicate and empathize with others.
3. *Knowledge of God's Word.* Pastors have to prioritize daily scripture reading, not just for preaching purposes but for personal development. In ministry, especially as a pastor, the road gets tough and knowing the Word of God is one of the key proponents to navigating that road. In addition to reading God's word one must also skillfully teach and apply it in multiple contexts throughout his or her pastoral tenure. If the successor does not know the word of God he or she will resort to their own doctrine and practices, ultimately leading the congregation astray.
4. *Sensitivity to the voice of God.* Leaders must always remember that the church ultimately belongs to God and God knows what is best for the congregation. The mark of a great leader is to never grow tired of hearing the voice of the Lord. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate guide and trainer. Sometimes when we may lack a

¹⁷³ Psalm 78:72.

particular skill, God's spirit enables us to do things that we could not do in our own strength.

5. *Vision for the Future*. Without a vision, people perish.¹⁷⁴ If the pastor does not establish a compelling vision, the members are left to their own devices. Churches need leaders who can articulate a vision worth following. People desire good leadership and they want to know where they are headed as a church. A great vision must be clear and captivating enough to inspire the congregation to action.
6. *Team Player*. Despite serving in an iconic culture, a leader must understand the importance of a team. As a team player, the leader ensures that voices are heard, and people are empowered to lead in their respective places.
7. *Humility*. A leader who operates in humility acknowledges that he or she does not know it all, admits mistakes when wrong and is not afraid to ask for help.
8. *Love for the church and God's people*. One of the primary responsibilities of a pastor is to care for people. If a pastor cannot love God's people, he or she is not qualified to lead a church.

Equipping the Successor

"Jesus' concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with (wo)men whom the multitudes would follow" - Robert Coleman¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Proverbs 29:18.

¹⁷⁵ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Westwood, NJ: F.H. Revell Co., 1964), 21.

Ideally, the predecessor mentors the successor. Mentorship is deliberate and time-consuming, which is why a well-prepared transition typically takes years. As a mentor, the predecessor is accessible and provides the successor with affirmation, visibility, shares responsibility, and develops communication skills. Not all predecessors serve as primary mentors to the successors. Some form of mentorship may be involved, but it may be indirect. If the mentorship is not direct or available, the leadership team must explore other options to effectively train and develop the successor in the areas that benefit the congregation. Leaders must be in contact with someone who can prepare but also disciple them. It is a disservice to leaders if they are taught to lead but not to follow Christ.¹⁷⁶ If the leader has the attitude and mind of Christ, it will be easier to follow that leader.

Telling the congregation

Informing the congregation of a change in pastoral leadership is a critical moment. There is an art to saying "goodbye" to one pastor while saying "hello" to another. Once the transition team finalizes the decision and details of succession, the church leadership is responsible for communicating the pastoral change.¹⁷⁷ Though this change may come as a shock to the congregation, church leadership must maintain that God is not shocked and that God is ultimately in control of the entire process. At this

¹⁷⁶ Geiger, *Designed to Lead*, 160.

¹⁷⁷ Ozier and Griffith, *The Changeover Zone*, 19.

point, the transition may warrant the congregation to enter into a time of prayer for clarity, direction, and confidence as it moves ahead.¹⁷⁸ It is helpful when the leadership is excited about the transition and not burdened by it. Good leadership sets the tone for how the congregation will react. Saying goodbye to a predecessor may be emotional, but it does not have to be detrimental. The administration should provide opportunities for members of the congregation to express well wishes. A proper "goodbye" may entail swapping stories, giving gifts, or even expressing appreciation in the form of thank you notes. If the congregation has the opportunity to present their blessings to their former leader, they may be more susceptible to receiving a new leader. In addition to providing opportunities for the congregation to say "goodbye" to their predecessor, they must have a chance to say "hello" to their new leader.

The role of the congregation

The congregation plays a vital role in ensuring the success of the transition. A transition does well if the congregation partners with the members of the succession team to make the next phase of ministry as smooth as possible. When the congregation loses a pastor for whatever reason, there is an identity crisis. Members may wonder who they are and what they will do in the future.¹⁷⁹ If the congregation can honor the legacy

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ralph Watkins, *Leading Your African American Church through Pastoral Transition* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010), 6.

of the church without being held hostage to the past, the church has a fighting chance for surviving a pastoral transition.¹⁸⁰

The congregation also has a responsibility to inform the new leadership of its history, not in a condescending way but one that is educational and beneficial for moving forward. The members must fight against disunity, not comparing or pitting the predecessor and successor against one another. The congregation has an excellent opportunity to practice hospitality and welcome the new pastor as a guest.¹⁸¹ To ensure a successful transfer of leadership, the members should graciously partner with the new leader to run with the vision that God has given him or her for the direction of the church. "A pastor who feels genuinely welcomed by and in the congregation is in a better position to serve you."¹⁸² When a pastor and congregation work together to serve one another, it demonstrates unity and establishes a relationship.

Caring for the Staff

"Remember in all the celebrating of departures and arrivals; not everybody is leaving. Essential team members are "holding down the fort.""¹⁸³ While caring for the congregation, neglect of the staff (full-time and part-time) is a possibility. Perhaps no group of people feels the emotions of transition more than those who worked with the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ George B. Thompson, Jr., *How to Get along with Your Pastor: Creating Partnership for Doing Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2015), 66.

¹⁸² Thompson, *How to get along with your pastor*, 66.

¹⁸³ Ozier and Griffith, *Changeover Zone*, 24.

pastor in some capacity. A primary responsibility of the predecessor could be showing staff appreciation for their commitment to the vision during his or her tenure. Public recognition goes a long way and assures the staff of their value, all while guaranteeing the thoughtfulness of predecessor.

Gearing up for implementation

What happens during transition is that key leaders "execute a set of actions that have been thought out in advance (with the skills and strengths of the participants in mind), planned and prepared for, and carried out with the precision of a successful team."¹⁸⁴ Despite the systems, structures, and procedures, Christian leaders must be open to the leading of God for a pastoral transition plan to be successful. The organization still should evaluate what type of church it is, discuss the preferred dominant style of leadership, and build a strong team. In addition to planning for a transition, the organization may want to consider developing an emergency plan should unforeseen circumstances arise.

Effective teamwork delights in communication. Never underestimate the need for constant contact and avoid the frustrations of continually explaining and reiterating the plan. It is better to over-communicate than to not communicate at all, which especially applies to congregants who may feel like they are in the dark during the transitional period. A key to a healthy pastoral transition is understanding that it is a

¹⁸⁴ Ozier and Griffith, *Changeover Zone*, 6.

process and not an event. Collaboration and conversation are critical amidst any change. When cooperation and communication unite, the focus is on the good of the community rather than an individual's need.¹⁸⁵

It is important to note that pastoral transitions are ongoing and require commitment from all parties to do their part for continued viability. It is common for several of the key players and the congregation to experience various emotions amidst a pastoral transition. These emotions may range from grief to gladness and everything in between. Since the congregation may experience different emotions at various times, leaders would do well to assess the congregation's emotional state, acknowledge any grief, and provide multiple tools for coping, if mandated. Despite the range of emotions, implementing an actively planned transition gives stability to the organization and security to the congregation; only then can one have a successful transition.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Marvin Anthony Moss, *Next: surviving a leadership transition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 58.

¹⁸⁶ Tom Mullins, *Passing the Leadership Baton: A Winning Transition Plan for Your Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 50.

4. PASS IT ON

Resigning or retiring from a church could potentially be one of the most emotional experiences of life. A pastoral transition is like having a funeral and a wedding simultaneously. It is difficult to say goodbye to the pastors who served for an extended amount of time, but it is also a blessing to embark upon a new journey.

Although it is perfectly fine to grieve the loss of something so dear, we must not become so focused on ourselves that we cannot rejoice that the church gets to continue making a difference and changing people's lives. Even worse than mourning the loss of our position is the thought of ignoring or failing to pass the baton to the next generation.

We are contending for the next generation.

When Joshua dismissed the people, the Israelites all went to their own inheritances to take possession of the land. The people worshiped the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel. Joshua, son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred ten years. Moreover, that whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them, who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.

- Judges 2:6-8,10 (NRSV)

One of the most sobering questions regarding transition is, "What will happen if we don't pass the baton to the next generation?" Just one generation after the Israelites entered the Promised Land; they had no concept of God. How did they lose their connection with God after God was so faithful to their ancestors and brought their families tremendous victories? Jethro mentored Moses, and Moses mentored Joshua; but

who did Joshua mentor?¹⁸⁷ What does it profit if we lead the most prominent ministries, preach the best sermons, answer the toughest of questions and attend every type meeting known to humankind, but fail to make space for those who are behind us? This question can be asked of numerous pastors today. A great leader thinks beyond his or her current tenure of ministry and spends a considerable amount of energy thinking of ways to pass on a rich legacy of faith to someone else.

Barna's research indicates that only one in seven pastors is under 40 years old.¹⁸⁸ Perhaps the younger generation does not see or sense the importance of the pastoral call, or maybe there is no one to mentor or make the room available for them in church leadership. Maybe older leaders find it challenging to mentor younger leaders because they are unsure if younger leaders desire mentorship, or they do not know how to approach someone younger than they are. Either way, a percentage of those under 40 are slowly removing themselves from the faith, and if we are not intentional about reaching them, we will lose them.

How can we, as leaders, create more spaces and opportunities for the next generation to serve even at a young age? When asked what church leaders did to prepare him for the ministry, Darrell Hall, Campus Pastor of Elizabeth Baptist Church in

¹⁸⁷ Rayford E. Malone, *The Joshua Dilemma: Mentoring Servant Leaders To Transition Through Ministry Succession* (St. Paul Press), Kindle Edition.

¹⁸⁸ Barna Group, "Leadership Transitions," 2019.

Conyers, GA, said, "there is a positive culture of training and equipping people here. It's a relational process rather than a recipe."

One of the distinguishing qualities of successful people who lead in any field is the emphasis they place on personal relationships.¹⁸⁹

– Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky

Personal presence is mandatory for establishing strong and lasting relationships. Mentoring from a distance may be more convenient, but it is not nearly as impactful. In his book *Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church*, Lovett Weems insists that "absence does not make the heart grow fonder in congregational life. Just the opposite is true."¹⁹⁰ Relationship building is intentional. As Bob Russell states, "the key to mentoring is association."¹⁹¹ He means that potential leaders need the chance to accompany current leaders to weddings, funerals, hospital and personal visitations, and other sacerdotal functions. Just as Moses allowed Joshua access, and Elisha was privy to the works of Elijah, leaders should be thinking of at least one person they can actively mentor over the course of their lifetime. Succession is more about building relationships than finding replacements.¹⁹² The saying, "leadership is caught more than taught," rings true when someone gets to see an up-close and personal view of what goes on behind

¹⁸⁹ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 75.

¹⁹⁰ Weems, *Take the Next Step*, 29.

¹⁹¹ Russell, *Transition Plan*, 146.

¹⁹² Flowers, *Leading through Succession*, 118.

the scenes. Leaders cannot allow fear or feelings of inadequacy to prevent them from passing the baton to the next generation.

Passing the Baton

Just six weeks after they had left Egypt, the Hebrew people began to grumble about their new leaders, Moses and Aaron. The exodus, which had begun with high drama and fanfare, soon deteriorated into murmurs and complaints. Ministry transitions today aren't much different. No matter how greatly anticipated the change, the question isn't really if dissatisfaction and opposition will arise; the problem is when. Pastoral transitions are tough; there's no way of escaping that. They are not just tough; they are inevitable.¹⁹³

The transition period does not end as soon as the new pastor receives the baton.

The establishment of the new pastor may take several years. Departing pastors have a responsibility to be accessible and to guide their successors along the way. After serving the same church for a considerable amount of time, there are certain things that the departing pastor may know that may help the arriving pastor navigate specific issues. Transitions are necessary, but they are not devoid of challenges. Even if the transition plan goes well, the new leadership may still deal with old problems. Several perceived issues accompany pastoral transitions, but many of them warrant potential solutions. Intentionally planning a pastoral transition gives the departing pastor time to stick around to see the fruit of the transition and know that his or her work is not in vain.

¹⁹³ Watkins, *Leading Your African American Church*, 1.

Seeing the succession plan to completion also shows the successor that he or she is valued and could add another level of trust to the predecessor/successor relationship.

Navigating Change

“At the end of a long and successful career, preparing your successor and yourself for the passing of the baton can be a leader’s greatest challenge.”

- Marshall Goldsmith

Preparing to pass the baton can be a challenging and lonely experience for a senior pastor. As mentioned in a previous chapter, many pastors would agree that it is not planting, building, or growing the church that is the hardest but passing the primary role of leadership on to someone else. Departing pastors are often fearful of what will happen after they are no longer serving in the central leadership role. It can be difficult for a pastor to step away from something on which he or she has spent a significant amount of time of investment. Pastoring a church for an extended period often results in the credibility of the leader, especially if the leader did a great job. Tom Mullins, the founding pastor of the non-denominational multisite Christ Fellowship Church, which boasts of over 30,000 members, believes “leaders must prepare mentally for a transition to deal with ownership and identity issues.” He compares transition to watching a child grow up and one day getting married:

You know it’s a wonderful thing for your kids to leave the nest and start their own families, but your heart still aches a little bit to know they aren't your babies anymore. You can't protect them the way you once did. You can't be the one who makes decisions for them anymore. You can't manage their lives the way you had. They belong to someone else now.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Tom Mullins, *Passing the Leadership Baton*, 38.

Leaders must always remember, the church does not belong to the pastor; the church belongs to God. Instead of sulking, Marshall Goldsmith believes this creates an opportunity for senior leadership to have a lasting impact on the organization through a chosen successor who will improve the organization.¹⁹⁵ Failing to pass the baton hurts the entire organization and jeopardizes everything. Below are many challenges and the explanations associated with not giving or handing off the baton well.

1. *Leading when no longer useful.* Ever heard of the phrase, be careful not to "wear out your welcome?" Wearing out one's welcome is what happens when pastors refuse to let go for whatever reason. The church could legitimately be in shambles and desperate need of new leadership; but the pastor becomes disillusioned by thinking the church is going to turnaround "any day now." By the time the pastor does decide to leave,¹⁹⁶ the successor steps into extra unnecessary challenges and disadvantages or the successor may have lost a great deal of zeal for the assignment.
2. *Losing one's identity in the church.* Pastors tend to struggle with the thought of transition because their identity intersects with their role as pastor. For most

¹⁹⁵ Joseph C. Santora, "Succession: Are You Ready? by Marshall Goldsmith." *Administration in Social Work* 34.4 (2010): 384-385 (384). *SocINDEX with Full Text*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 11, 2018)

¹⁹⁶ Warren Bird, "Putting 'success' in succession: prominent pastors go public with how to wisely pass the leadership baton," *Christianity Today* 58.9 (November 2014): 50-53 (52). *ATLA Religion Database*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 22, 2018)

pastors, leaving their churches will result in a significant identity crisis because they cannot separate who they are from what they do. One of the best things a departing pastor can do is figure out what he or she likes to do outside of the church. The task of finding other hobbies is one of the primary reasons why succession plans are given a minimum of one to three years so that pastors can have something to do when they depart.

3. *Undermining the successor.* Some pastors transition in word but not in deed, never fully allowing the successor to lead. The best thing a departing pastor can do for an arriving pastor is get out of the way. Departing pastors must remember they no longer hold the title of senior leaders and instead leave the primary decision making to the successor; although unintentional (or not) predecessors can also undermine their successors by affirming them privately while failing to support them publicly.
4. *Neglecting family.* Transition impacts more than the departing pastor; it also affects his or her family. Sometimes a pastor can be so consumed with how he or she feels that they fail to take into account the emotional state of those closest to them. Pastors' spouses and children can be some of the most neglected people in the church. One of the reasons the pastor's family members may feel forgotten is because they always feel the pressure to "put on" and encourage everyone else while failing to receive the same amount of

encouragement. A difficult task for families is learning how to communicate with one another outside of the business of the church.

5. *Believing one should never retire from ministry.* It is surprising how many preachers consider it a badge of honor to die in their pulpits. A common misunderstanding is that one can never retire from the ministry. This stance is not at all biblical. Priests were given a mandatory retirement age of fifty years old in the Bible.¹⁹⁷ Retirement gives way to the next generation of leaders. Perhaps leaders are afraid of the word “retirement,” potentially thinking it implies that they are old and washed up. Instead of thinking in terms of retirement, consider the word “repositioning” and ask, “what is God repositioning me to do in this next season of my life?”

A smooth handoff

Successfully passing the baton requires two things. First, it is up to the leader to slow down so that the successor does not drop the baton during the exchange; secondly, the successor needs coaching to carry the baton to the finish line.¹⁹⁸ While there are plenty of reasons to discuss what happens during a failed transition, many leaders wonder what to do after passing the baton. Here are a couple of things to consider:

¹⁹⁷ Number 8:23-26.

¹⁹⁸ Marshall Goldsmith, "Passing the Baton: Developing Your Successor." *Mworld* 9.4 (2010): 38-41 (38). *Business Source Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 11, 2018)

1. *Leave well.* People will never forget how you made them feel, so refuse to leave in the wrong spirit. The departing pastor must help his or her congregation savor the good moments and not leave a bad taste in people's mouths. Leaving on a lousy note will affect the congregation more than any sermon ever preached. Allow them to say good-bye and bless you. Pastors can easily dishonor a member of the congregation if they do not allow the member to honor them. If it gives the members joy to show their appreciation, let them have their moment.
2. *Allow time for grief.* Just as the congregation grieves the loss of a leader, the pastor is also grieving the loss of a prominent role. Leaders must refuse to suppress their emotions. Emotions take time to process; especially since the change is not only for the departing pastor but his or her family as well. The departing pastor may want to consider going to a grief counselor or talking to a trusted friend about his or her new reality and how it affects their life.
3. *Position the successor for success.* One of the best ways to set up the arriving pastor for success is to make the tough calls before transitioning out of office. A tough call is removing anything that hinders the overall health of the organization. Tough calls can take the form of repositioning staff, cutting budgets, canceling programs, or anything that would make the transition of the arriving pastor more complicated than necessary. A great predecessor does everything in his or her power to let the next person in line succeed.

4. *Publicly affirm and speak well of the successor.* If applicable, take time to mentor the successor intentionally, as Moses did with Joshua. When Moses left the scene, immediately, God's people were ready to move into the Promised Land,¹⁹⁹ in part because Moses championed Joshua and consistently edified him in front of the people. Even if there is no apparent bond shared between the departing pastor and the arriving pastor, it is still vital that everyone recognizes that he or she has the blessing of the predecessor for the work ahead.
5. *Pray for the successor.* The departing pastor knows all too well the challenges of leading that congregation. Interceding for the future leader of the church shows a substantial amount of humility and is a powerful testament of great character. Pray that God will grant the successor wisdom and give him or her the courage to lead the congregation. Commit to praying for the continued success of the successor's leadership as well as the health of the organization.
6. *Change the Narrative.* If members of the congregation complain to the predecessor about the succession, he or she can shift the perspective by saying something along the lines of "imagine the possibilities of where the Lord wants to take us through our new pastor!" This approach usually shocks people because they assume they can get away with saying whatever they want. Sometimes a member will try to overcompensate the predecessor with compliments, but it is

¹⁹⁹ Geiger, *Designed to Lead*, 19.

often a job at the successor. Usually, predecessors' words carry a fair amount of weight. Using words correctly could be just the remedy to give the congregants a new outlook and become more receptive to the arriving pastor.

7. *Find out what's next.* Don't just dwell on what was, actively imagine what will be. Retirement does not mean one has to sit around and wait for death to come knocking on the door. God has many more things in store for God's leaders; the context is just different. Since God may have more in store for the predecessor, it is so important to have a hobby or an extra skillset. With so much knowledge, one might consider consulting, using previous experiences to coach others. Perhaps a leader can take a different approach to pastoring and use their gifts to do virtual bible studies, conduct webinars on various topics, or write books. Ask God to help reveal the dreams and potential that may lie dormant.

Above all, conserve relationships. Entrust the care of the congregation to the successor but be careful not to burn bridges.²⁰⁰

Receiving the Baton

Following a predecessor can seem like an arduous task, but it is possible to do it well. Successors must learn to be comfortable in their own skin and not feel the need to replicate every aspect of the departed pastor. With so much transition at stake, one of

²⁰⁰ Vanderbloemen, *Next*, 173.

the primary responsibilities of the arriving pastor is to focus on the overall health of the church and pastor the staff and people through the transition. This is a critical moment for the arriving pastor to be sensitive to the needs of the congregation and to practice showing as much love as possible. Just as predecessors face a number of challenges, successors must be aware of the pitfalls of improperly stewarding transition:

1. *Being too proud.* Few things are more abhorrent than a know-it-all. God still requires humility as a requirement to serve as a leader. Arrogance is one of the easiest ways to lose credibility with a new let alone any congregation. Cockiness has no place in the pulpit; Conceit is not only a poor representation of one's character, but it is also one of the fastest ways to be terminated from the pastoral office.
2. *Refuse to change everything at once.* Reminding a leader not to change too quickly is most likely something that needs to be communicated often, especially in the first year of pastoral tenure. Arriving pastors must resist the urge to change quicker than the congregation has time to adjust. People need time to adapt to new leadership, let alone the immediate implementation of new plans and ideas. At this juncture, the congregation still views the arriving pastor as a guest. Standard practice for some new pastors is to leave everything as-is for a year. Avoiding sudden changes aids in securing the trust of the congregation. Although

the successor is full of exciting ideas and unlimited possibilities for the task ahead, the congregation is dealing with what may feel like the death of their former leader; another reason why things should not be changed so abruptly.

3. *Disunity* - Disunity in the church is not a new phenomenon, but it is one of the primary reasons why transitions fail.²⁰¹ Refuse to allow disunity to come against the implementation of a successful transition. If disunity persists amongst the congregation, then the arriving pastor may need to have some tough conversations both from the pulpit and to individual members who may be causing strife. God's blessing rests on a church that is united.
4. *Poor work ethic*. Pastoring is hard work, and laziness is not acceptable. Sometimes a poor work ethic can stem from a lack of training and development. The arriving pastor must understand the weight of the pastoral assignment and be willing to do whatever it takes to ensure the health of the organization. Leaders need to be mindful of the example they set before others.
5. *Self-gratification*. Be careful not to create a "me over we" culture. Pastoring is a job of service to others. As servant leaders, pastors are called to put

²⁰¹ Andrea Flowers, *Leading Through Succession: Why pastoral leadership is the key to a healthy transition* (print source unknown), Kindle Edition, Location 11.

the needs of others many times before their own. Arriving pastors have to fight against self-centeredness and craving the spotlight more than pointing people to the pure light, which is Jesus Christ. Successors must be careful of being overly ambitious and doing things in their own timing.

6. *Lack of spiritual development.* It is easy to get bogged down with the "work" of ministry; however, pastors should never get too busy to spend time with God. Daily devotion with God is what gives pastors the strength to maintain the burden of ministry. The more time they spend in the word of God, the more God can change their hearts. The less amount of time they spend reading the word of God, the less likely their hearts are to be changed for the better. Leaders must never forget that the church ultimately belongs to God, and it is God who provides the vision.

Stewarding Change

With so much change going on and problems to avoid, a successor may wonder what they can do to help ease some of the pains of transition. A successor should do his or her homework. Nothing shows appreciation more than learning the DNA of the new church. There are some things an arriving pastor may try to prepare for but may not learn until he or she starts pastoring. It should come as no surprise that leaders discover

some lessons on the job. The next several months or even years may feel like a whirlwind, but there are some practical tools an arriving pastor may find beneficial.

1. *Avoid the comparison trap.* A leader must not measure his or her accomplishment or lack thereof to the departing pastor. One of the ways to overcome this is to have a new task not previously done by the leader, which is seen clearly in the Joshua portrait, where Joshua is given a task to “possess the land,”²⁰² something his predecessor had never done or experienced. In the same manner, the successor must not compare previous contexts in which they served or where others are currently serving. It is not wise to assume that all churches operate the same.
2. *Honor the predecessor.* Vanderbloemen and Bird reveal, “Seamless transitions are rare, but they do happen, even in extreme circumstances. Most of the time the seamlessness can be traced back to a key principle: when the past is honored, future possibilities are unlocked.”²⁰³ Just as the departing pastor should be affirming, the arriving pastor needs to demonstrate honor. If the departing pastor was well-loved by the congregation, it might take some time before people adjust to the new leader. “Practically, honoring our predecessor means we should use TLC with members regarding a

²⁰² Robert J. Clinton, and Katherine Haubert. *The Joshua portrait: a study in leadership development, leadership transition, and destiny fulfillment* (Altadena, CA.: Barnabas Resources, 1990), 104.

²⁰³ Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 175.

predecessor. That's talk, listen, and confirm."²⁰⁴ It is important to speak well of them, especially in public settings. Speaking well of the predecessor establishes a good rapport with the congregation. A successor must honor the predecessor without becoming him or her. Instead, successors should lead with the talents God has given.

3. *Ask questions.* Asking questions creates buy-in for the new pastor and shows that he or she cares about the concerns and needs of the congregation. Asking questions may also indicate a sign of humility. People are much more considerate of pastors who are interested in something other than themselves. Inquiring about church history or certain traditions may cause some of the members to put their guards down and be more receptive to a new pastor.
4. *Show gratitude.* Appreciation goes a long way. Appreciative leaders affirm, encourage, and accentuate the best in their staff and congregation. One of the most vital lessons a new pastor can learn is that positivity produces productivity.²⁰⁵ Showing gratitude is mutually beneficial. When people genuinely feel they are valued, they may go out of the way to help in

²⁰⁴ Weese and Crabtree, *Elephant in the Boardroom*, 16.

²⁰⁵ Mary Lloyd Moore, Joseph P. Cangemi, and Jay Ingram, "Appreciative Leadership and Opportunity: Centric Approaches to Organization Success," *Organization Development Journal* 31.2 (Summer, 2013): 48-53, <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/docview/1399979033?accountid=10598>

whatever area is needed. On the other hand, when people feel unappreciated, there is little incentive to do anything at all.

5. *Earn the trust of the congregation.* Trust is required to pastor effectively. The arriving pastor is responsible for working on individual relationships with the members. The arriving pastor must never assume he or she has the trust of the congregation because of the role or title of “pastor.” The confidence of the congregation we serve is what gives leaders the credibility to lead well.²⁰⁶ Love on purpose, even when it gets hard.
6. *Guard against offense.* One of the most challenging tasks of any leader is coping with criticism.²⁰⁷ Even in the critical moments, leaders must learn to develop thick skin while maintaining a soft heart. Determine to love on purpose, even when it gets hard. Successors also have to understand regardless of how well his or her sermon translates or the amount of money raised for a particular cause, people will leave. Refuse to speak ill of those who choose to worship other places; bless them and pray they find a church that fits their context. Do not be afraid to pray bold prayers, such as, “for every single person that leaves this church, God, please send three more in their place who desire to serve.”

²⁰⁶ Weems, *Take the Next Step*, 26.

²⁰⁷ Russell, *Transition Plan*, 121.

7. *Be active in the life of the church.* Avoid the temptation of playing the role of a celebrity. As the saying goes, "no one cares how much you know until they know how much you care." Pay close attention to certain people and build relationships with people who may become advocates instead of adversaries.²⁰⁸ A healthy relationship is a currency to stronger, more efficient pastoral transitions.
8. *Plan ahead.* At some point, the successor becomes the predecessor. Planning in advance does not mean leaving soon, but we must not delay something for twenty years when we can begin thinking about it in two. At the very least, develop a crisis emergency plan so that if anything were to happen, the church would have some guidelines to follow. A crisis emergency plan does not even have to be extremely long; it could detail something as simple as selecting a trusted preacher friend who can stand in for a minimum of two weeks in the event something unexpected occurs.
9. *Lead with confidence.* Leadership has its share of challenges, and people can be intimidating, but as God told Joshua, "Be strong and courageous."²⁰⁹ Know that the Lord is present for the task ahead. As leaders, we can't forget our dependence on the Lord to lead effectively. As time passes by, it is easy to become complacent. Confident leaders are also knowledgeable in their

²⁰⁸ Moss, *Next: Surviving a Leadership Transition*, 24.

²⁰⁹ Joshua 1:9.

respective areas and take pride in being a life-long student. Leaders should never stop learning and should focus on both personal and preaching development.²¹⁰ Great leaders commit to sharpening any gift or skill they possess.

Managing unrealistic expectations

The ministry, like other occupations today, is much preoccupied with the discussion of "role models," "role expectations," "role conflicts," and such. The minister is expected to be preacher, leader of worship, counselor, teacher, scholar, helper of the needy, social critic, administrator, revivalist, fund-raiser, and a host of other sometimes impossible things.²¹¹

It is not easy being the new kid on the block, especially when everyone has an opinion on what the pastor should and should not be doing. John E. Johnson states, "Much of pastoral training has been devoted to the practice rather than the theology of ministry."²¹² Johnson suggests that the focus is more so on what one is "doing" (administration, preaching, small groups, etc.) rather than "being," which includes developing a theology to examine what God defines as ministry. There was a time when the pastor was known for primarily preaching and theology, but culture has evolved in its expectation of pastors. People now expect pastors not only to bring a theologically sound word but to shepherd, serve as a CEO, counselor, and other things that may be

²¹⁰ Andrew Flowers, *Leading through Succession*, 173.

²¹¹ Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 40.

²¹² John E. Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (April, 1995): 182–200 (182), <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000893456&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

unrealistic.²¹³ One of the most challenging realities is the expectation to do all of these things with a cheerful attitude yet without any form of additional compensation.

Members are often ignorant of all the work pastors do daily. One of the ways a pastor should deal with unrealistic expectations is by practicing self-care. Self-care is the deliberate act of taking care of our mental, emotional, and physical health. Pastors putting their health on the back burner is no longer an option. Statistics from a variety of sources show that pastors are facing burnout and crumbling under the weight of living up to other people's expectations.

Ryan Reeves, dean and an assistant professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, states: "We have a culture of workaholism, and we expect our spiritual leaders to be doing the same thing."²¹⁴ Not only do the congregation members voice their opinions, but pastors often attempt to fulfill their expectations. Just as the members communicate their needs, pastors have a responsibility to communicate their needs to their congregants as well. It may take some adjustments, but pastors have to learn to take time off and not try to please everyone.

Pastors need support

Despite the excitement or apprehension of the transition, both the departing and arriving pastor require care. Sometimes pastors are so concerned about others that they

²¹³ Johnson, "The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Ministry," 187.

²¹⁴ Jeff Brumley, "Experts: Pastor Burnout Results from Unrealistic Expectations," *The Florida Times-Union* (January 22, 2012). <https://www.jacksonville.com/article/20120121/NEWS/801259073>

can neglect their own well-being or the overall health of their family. While pastors are out attempting to guide everyone else, who is pouring back into the pastor when he or she feels depleted? Quite frankly, every pastor needs a pastor. Pastors need direction and mentorship from those who can see specific blind spots or an area where a leader is falling short. The guidance does not call for a constant string of rebukes but a gentle reminder to prioritize correctly.

Many changes are happening for both leaders; departing pastors are leaving long-held positions and relationships while arriving pastors are establishing new ones. In addition to needing pastoral support, pastors also need the support of the church as a whole. Having the support of the congregation and its leaders helps ease the burden of the unexpected. Congregational support may offer a hand in easing the transition of the departed pastor through gifts of love, well wishes and appreciation, while also welcoming the successor and his or her family to the community. The welcome for the arriving pastor should be ongoing until the family adjusts to their “new normal.” To ensure a family feels welcomed, the church may provide resourceful information regarding the best school districts, connecting them with real estate agents, places to eat, grocery stores, and gas stations, to name a few. The church could also get creative and find ways for the children of the new pastor to feel welcomed, if applicable. Churches

might even consider planning a yearlong welcome itinerary for the new family, one that is sensitive to their needs during the transition.²¹⁵

Regarding the previous pastor's departure, Barna indicates the best thing for church leaders is to have the outgoing pastor stay in the church as an associate pastor if appropriate.²¹⁶ If warranted, the predecessor may do well to remain as an associate pastor or an honorary pastor at large. Securing the predecessor's presence increases the likelihood of a successful transition, allowing the departed pastor to maintain the relationships built over the years while simultaneously championing the successor. This model may not be beneficial even if the transition was successful, which is why each church must assess its own needs and context.

Making sense of transition

A gentle reminder for anyone regarding a pastoral transition is to remember that the church does not belong to the predecessor or the successor, the church belongs to God. It is easy to say, but it takes humility on all sides to actively demonstrate. In thinking about teamwork and leaving a lasting legacy, I wonder: "What would it look if both the departing and arriving pastor worked together?" Predecessors and successors should "give mutual recognition as a way of minimizing the emotional and spiritual seam at the point of pastoral change."²¹⁷ The story of Elijah and Elisha reveals that

²¹⁵ Watkins, *Leading Your African American Church*, 19.

²¹⁶ Barna, "Leadership Transitions," 87.

²¹⁷ Weese and Crabtree, *Elephant in the Boardroom*, 54.

leaders can put personality differences aside and work to serve one another in a mutually beneficial way. Elijah mentored Elisha, and Elisha ministered to Elijah.²¹⁸

Pastors should do all they can to help and not hinder one another. When thinking about the passing of the baton in a relay race, both runners must remain in the same lane. Stepping out of the lines is to forfeit the race.²¹⁹ Simply stated, there cannot be two separate agendas. The common goal is to see the church last for generations to come. Churches must realize that healthy transitions are not over once the baton has been passed. Transitions are marathons, not events. The first year of transition offers a grand opportunity for reflection and evaluation. Consider utilizing key players from the transition team to put together a series of thought-provoking questions to assess the leader's performance and emotional well-being, how the transition has impacted the staff, and the overall health of the congregation. To keep the "success" in succession, constant communication must be prioritized.

To the Future

After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, ² "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. – Joshua 1:1-2

²¹⁸ 1 Kings 19:21.

²¹⁹ Russell, *Transition Plan*, 46.

“Moses, my servant is dead.” This news is not in the least bit exciting, but it is God’s reminder to Joshua that it is his time to assume leadership. Although all of Israel is grieving the loss of its great leader, God refuses to allow God’s plans to fail. God has specific instructions for how the Israelites are to cross the Jordan River and how they will possess wherever they *set their feet*.²²⁰ God guarantees the possession of the land, but the people have to fight to take it for themselves. One must always be sensitive to the leading of the Lord and follow God’s instructions. Joshua's leadership proves that the vision God may have promised a previous generation does not have to die, but it can live on through the next generation.

New leadership presents new opportunities. Leaders cannot always rely on what the previous generation stood for or valued,²²¹ especially if it does not contribute to the overall health of their God-given assignments. New opportunities give us a chance to “own” what the church is really about.²²² Moving forward however, does not mean dishonoring the past but improving upon its legacy. Consider the death of Moses; though he dies, the principle of obedience lives in Joshua.

Leaders must ask themselves: “How and what do I need to change to keep up with the future and to be of value to this organization?”²²³ What made a leader

²²⁰ Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 75.

²²¹ Loren B. Mead. *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1993), 3.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Christine M. Riordan, "Navigating through Leadership Transitions: Making it Past the Twists and Turns," *Ivey Business Journal (Online)* 72.3 (May, 2008), 2.

successful in a previous role may not be effective in the current position. Marshall Goldsmith penned an entire book titled "*What Got You Here, Won't Get You There*," stressing adaptability as an excellent leadership quality. Navigating transitions is as essential to the leader as it is the congregation. In moving forward, effective pastors realize the most crucial question is, "What is God most calling *us* to do in *our* situation?"²²⁴ Once God has tasked us to do something, we must be willing to comply, take the next step, and see what tomorrow holds.

²²⁴ Weems, *Take the Next Step*, 23.

5. Personal Reflections – Preparing for tomorrow, today.

"Everything we do today lays a foundation for tomorrow."

- Tom Mullins

The Old Testament offices yield a robust framework to measure not only pastoral identity but also a means for a transition. God actively pursued succession before the thought of it took root in the leader's heart. I cannot help but imagine that if God is interested in a succession, then the church has no choice but to follow suit. We can learn a lesson or two from God, who didn't wait to inform the people about a successor until Moses, or any of the other leaders in the biblical accounts, had died. God may not crack open the sky and verbally announce a successor, but I don't believe God is silent on the matter either. Pastors don't have to wait until they are nearing retirement to pray for their successor.

Planning for succession is both biblical and necessary. My admonishment to pastors is that we begin thinking about our departures sooner than later. After serving as a senior pastor for five years, it is a good time to assess what a healthy transition would look like. After entertaining the idea of an actual succession plan, we have to initiate the conversation with our leaders, even if it makes both parties feel uncomfortable. At the very least, if we cannot develop a comprehensive plan for a healthy pastoral succession, the very least we can do is implement procedures of what to do amid a crisis. When churches plan for pastoral succession, they are safeguarding themselves from the inevitable.

The reason why transition is such an important topic is that it helps us as leaders to see beyond ourselves. It is sobering to think that every church is only one generation away from extinction.²²⁵ One of the greatest lessons I learned is that, whether it is executed well or poorly, transition is costly. If executed well, transition can cost leaders to feel many emotions, such as dealing with the loss of influence or the feeling of starting over again. In the same manner, when a transition is handled poorly or does not happen, it can lead to the demise of one's church or, even worse, losing a generation.

Praying and preparing the way for the next generation is to have the mind of Christ. If we care about preserving our Christian faith, loving and shepherding people, prophetic preaching, reaching those who are far from God, leading them to Christ and mentoring the next generation, transition is urgent. We can't allow our fear of not knowing what to say or do prevent us from mentoring someone else.

Based on the research of this thesis, the key ingredients of a healthy pastoral transition involve identifying someone who is chosen by God, affirmed by the predecessor, can earn the trust of the congregation, and is able to lead with confidence. Transition may be tough, and the journey could be rough, but it is certainly worth pursuing. In the end, the old adage "the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step" evokes the right image. So, let's get to walking.

²²⁵ Vanderbloemen and Bird, *Next*, 118.

Appendix A

My Story of Pastoral Succession

The evolution and pastoral succession of C3 - Calvary Community Church

The Calvary Mennonite Church (Formerly known as Madison Avenue Chapel) began in 1952 as a Mennonite Church plant by a group of workers led by Nelson Burkholder, who was commissioned from Warwick River Mennonite Church in Newport News to pioneer a new church.²²⁶ The church began with the launching of street meetings held in the downtown urban area of the same city where African-Americans primarily lived. The initial vision of the church was to serve as an interracial congregation, something that was taboo at that period in time. After meeting for Sunday school in the community, Calvary Mennonite Church moved into a facility and held its first Sunday service on April 14, 1957, at 3115 Wickham Avenue in Newport News, VA. In 1958, with Nelson Burkholder serving as pastor, Calvary Mennonite Church had 10 members. Shortly after that, Leslie Walker Francisco II and his wife Naomi became acquainted with the Mennonite community and began attending and participating in the church. Leslie Francisco II became a deacon in 1960 and was ordained into the ministry there in 1966. By 1970 the congregation had grown to roughly 80 members as Leslie

²²⁶ Harold S. Bender and Samuel J. Steiner, "Calvary Community Church (Hampton, Virginia, USA)" (Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, March 2010), [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Calvary_Community_Church_\(Hampton,_Virginia,_USA\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Calvary_Community_Church_(Hampton,_Virginia,_USA))

served as co-pastor with Burkholder. In 1971, Francisco became the lead pastor with Nelson Burkholder assisting, and the following year, Leslie became the sole pastor. Slowly but surely, the white “drive-in” members stopped attending, leaving the hope for an interracial church unrealized.²²⁷

Evangelistic street and tent meetings were a focus of the ministry of Calvary Mennonite Church from its inception. They continued under the leadership of Rev. Leslie Francisco II as an integral method not only to draw prospective disciples for Christ, but those who would become church members and assist in laying the foundation for a new vision given to Rev. Leslie by God to build a new church in the neighboring city of Hampton. Street and tent meetings took place there during the summers of 1977-1979. Francisco had a spiritual renewal in the late 1960s that changed his ministry from the traditional Mennonite way of worship toward a livelier form coupled with the leading of the Holy Spirit. Pastor Francisco believed in taking risks of faith and was adamant about “obedience to the Spirit.”²²⁸

My mother, Natalie Andrea Gatling (at the time), can attest to the effectiveness of this evangelistic method, for the Gatling family (her parents, four siblings, and she) attended these meetings. They decided to leave their Baptist denominational roots to become Anabaptist members of Calvary Mennonite Church in 1977 after hearing the

²²⁷ Le Roy Belcher. *The Black Mennonite Church in North America, 1886-1986*. (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1986), 161.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

lively preaching of Rev. Leslie, who not only became her pastor, but also her father-in-law after marrying his eldest son, my father, Leslie Walker Francisco III in 1983.

From 1980 on, evangelistic meetings continued to be held in the Hampton area near where the Francisco family lived, as well as in Newport News. The goal was to utilize music from the praise team, choirs, and band, which my mother directed and for which she provided piano accompaniment. We also had dramatized productions and preaching to reach those who were unsaved and un-churched, and who would attend, accept Christ, and eventually become members of Calvary Mennonite Church in Newport News. Rev. Leslie, who was installed as a bishop in the Warwick District by the Virginia Mennonite Conference in 1984, desired to increase the size of the small congregation in Newport News so that a team could be sent from the church to pioneer a new work in Hampton. In 1985, Calvary Community Church opened its doors for its first Sunday service on April 27th with Bishop Leslie as senior pastor and his middle son Steven Hiawatha Francisco as assistant pastor. The new church edifice located at 925 Old Buckroe Road was built with the voluntary efforts of many Mennonite contractors and workers as well as the carpentry skills of the Francisco sons, Leslie III, Steven, and Myron. In the meantime, Leslie Francisco III also became the interim pastor of Calvary Mennonite Church. He became ordained into the ministry in 1986 and was installed as senior pastor of Calvary Mennonite Church in Newport News on June 1st of the same year.

In 1988, my father, Leslie, felt strongly impressed by God to speak with his father about merging the Newport News and Hampton congregations. His rationale was to strengthen the bond and to unite the churches in an effort to build and sustain growth for one congregation, as opposed to maintaining two fledgling congregations with minimal growth. After speaking with his father and the church council at the time, who agreed, the plan went forward. The Newport News location closed. Unfortunately, my grandfather's health began to decline rapidly, and as a result, he asked my dad to assume the role of senior pastor of Calvary Community Church. Dad agreed to pastor temporarily since my papa told him a replacement was on the way. There was in fact never another pastor coming, so my father assumed primary leadership for the church. After assuming leadership and revamping the structure and governance of ministry, the church doubled in its membership and continued to grow. Bishop Leslie saw firsthand the supernatural growth of the ministry which now included a preschool and before/after school program. The school program was launched in April of 1991 as a result of a God-given vision given to his son Leslie III, who asked my mother to research its feasibility as well as to launch and oversee the program. It quickly became Calvary Christian Academy, with a bustling enrollment and a waiting list of students. After placing the mantle of leadership upon my dad, Leslie Francisco II died due to complications of diabetes on December 13, 1992. He was only 62 years old.

On August 15, 1993, L. W. Francisco III was installed as a bishop in the Warwick District by Virginia Mennonite Conference. In the same year, a 3,000 square foot addition was constructed to enlarge the sanctuary and provide new offices, classrooms, and restrooms to accommodate the growth of Calvary Community Church and Calvary Christian Academy. In that same year, Calvary Community Church extended its spiritual guidance and financial resources to plant Calvary Community Church in Accra (Ghana). We also provided support by sending missionary teams and financial support from our church not only to Ghana to assist Nsiah and Janet Agyarko, who would become pastors of the church planted in Accra, but also to churches throughout Jamaica and others in partnership with Virginia Mennonite Missions.

As Calvary Community Church continued to grow locally, it became necessary to purchase another facility in the city of Hampton located at 2311 Tower Place to accommodate the multi-faceted ministries that served as an extension of outreach in the community. Calvary Bible College was established in 1997, which also operated under the same roof as Calvary Christian Academy while retaining ownership of the 925 Old Buckroe Road location. It was assumed that we could stop having two Sunday morning services each week once the church moved to the 25,000 square foot Tower Place location, and for a time, one worship service each Sunday sufficed, until we began to grow again quickly. In 1998, Calvary Community Church acquired another facility, Fellowship of Christ Church in Rocky Mount, NC, where Ronnie and Louvenia Pride,

ordained ministers at Calvary, were sent to become senior pastors. In 2000, a 25,000 square foot addition was completed to include a gymnasium, restrooms, locker rooms with showers, a commercial kitchen, bookstore, parents' room, an upstairs office complex, and a conference room which accommodated Calvary's local growth.

Many other leaders were added to the ministry, some becoming licensed while others were ordained in order to accommodate the spiritual and numerical growth of the congregation, as well as the other church plants that were soon to follow. In 2002, Flinn and Karen Ranchod of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, were sent to, ordained and financially supported by Calvary Community Church for service as senior pastors of Calvary Community Church located in Chesapeake, VA. That same year, Cornelious and Yolanda Carroll were sent and financially supported to serve as senior pastors of Abundant Love Christina Center in Houston, TX. In 2003, Steven Francisco and his wife Karla were commissioned and financially supported to serve as senior pastors of Calvary Community Church West in Carrollton, VA. On February 15, 2004, Calvary District was established and recognized by Virginia Mennonite Conference to relate to churches planted with pastors who were sent from and financially supported by Calvary with Bishop L. W. Francisco III serving as their overseer. In the same year, Steven Francisco unexpectedly died, and the ministry he started, and which was continued independently by his wife, later disbanded.

Calvary Community Church currently has a membership of about 1,200 under the leadership of senior pastor Bishop L. W. Francisco III. The growth of the ministry continues to abound as the next generation prepares to take the ministry to another dimension of growth. In 2010 we initiated a rebrand of our ministry and started calling our church C3, which is short for Calvary Community Church. We evolved from Calvary Mennonite to Calvary Community to now being known as C3 Hampton. After graduating from Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with a bachelor's degree in practical theology, I began serving as the Youth Pastor at our church. The church's influence continued to expand in growth and leadership along with the other church plants of C3 South Africa in Pietermaritzburg led by pastors Flinn and Karen Ranchod (2011), and C3 Atlanta in Georgia where my mother served as campus pastor (2013-2016). The thrust of evangelism that launched Calvary Mennonite Church in Newport News and Calvary Community Church in Hampton, VA, continues to attract and engage communities at home and abroad. Most of Calvary's church plants in VA, NC, TX, South Africa, and GA, started with home bible study groups that eventually moved into facilities to accommodate growth. Principle-driven, practical teaching and preaching for productive living is made available from the pulpit to the pew, to the virtual members and our visitors, who join us via Livestream each week to participate in C3's Sunday morning services, Facebook live devotionals and inspirational thoughts, and many other specialized leadership and ministry events.

2019 marked more than 30 years of full-time ministry for both of my parents and 33 years of senior pastoring for my father. Recently I asked him, "what prompted you to think about succession?" My dad explained that when he hit 55 in 2012, he could feel the "pastoral call" leaving, meaning dad didn't have the same zeal that he once had when he was 35. He wasn't burnt out, frustrated, angry, or ill, but he knew that he didn't have the same passion for ministry that he had when he was younger. At that point, dad knew he didn't want to become burnt out, frustrated, angry, or bitter towards the ministry. He needed to think proactively about what the church would look like in the future and how would he put in place transitional leadership, so when the time came to step back, it wouldn't be an abrupt change but an intentional change. One of the things that precipitated this thought: he was at a funeral, and the eulogist was a well-respected pastor in the community who was significantly older, maybe around 80 at that time and had his assistant on the stage the entire time. The gentleman preached the funeral, and when he got to the end, he started preaching the same message all over again, forgetting he already preached. After observing and watching him for a while and seeing how others had to keep him propped up in the pulpit, dad saw that people respected him because of who he was. At that moment, he learned that people could respect your history and show pity for your present reality. Unfortunately, the church kept this pastor in place until he couldn't function anymore, and then he died. The church eventually fell apart because the church didn't grow or excel.

I asked my dad what it takes to transition, to which he replied:

“It takes prayer to say, God is this your will and then to be able to do it in the right time change. You have to do a temperature check of your congregation and see if it is a young, middle-aged, or aging church. The church looks a lot like the pastor, and if everyone in the church is the age of the pastor, we need to ask ourselves if we are going to have the next generation present before the pastor turns 70. The transition period also gives the pastor a period of preparation for what’s next. If all you know how to do is pastor, it’s a scary thing to walk into the abyss of nothing.” – L. W. Francisco III

While pursuing the thought of transition, my dad took up golfing, aviation and considered writing a couple of books on mentoring and leadership development. He also admits that when thinking about transition, “the fear of the unknown and who am I if I’m not the pastor of my congregation?” really kicks in. However, in maintaining a consistent vision for church growth and church relevance, the desire was to create a ministry that would not be solely personality-driven or a ministry that existed for one set generation. The question became: “How do you put in place transitional movement so that new leadership could emerge?” He states, “by empowering those around you and releasing duties, which is hard because pastors think no one can do it as well as they can, but they get amnesia because someone opened a door for them.” I loved that he admitted to that. I often wonder why the current generation of leaders holds leadership positions so tightly when they started at a much younger age.

My dad knew he had to give the next generation an opportunity to serve in ministry. Upon that revelation, both of my parents took on the position of mentors. They both began incorporating mentoring into pastoring and intentionally started delegating more responsibility to other people. Of course, it wasn't all smooth, some people disappointed them, and others were a great fit, but they refused to let the fear of failure or a couple of bumps in the road prevent them from pouring into others and delegating more responsibility. Since the age of four years old, I always had a call to ministry, and I always wanted to be involved. At five years old, at my maternal grandmother's funeral, I started witnessing to people asking if they knew Jesus because one day, their time would be up just like my grandma Mildred. I carried that passion for leading others to Christ well into my later years and eventually earned a Bachelor of Arts in Practical Theology with a concentration in local church pastoring, and later graduated from seminary with my Master of Divinity degree in 2014. I became a primary candidate for passing the baton somewhere around that time frame, but we had to start an incremental shift so that I could be received by the congregation. I had to earn their respect, their confidence, and get trained educationally along the way.

When it came time to communicate a succession, my dad began by telling our family first that it was his goal to make that shift, which led to a season of disbelief by those closest to him because they felt he would never be able to walk away. Once the family could imagine the transition taking place, then it was time to disseminate sharing

that vision to the leadership of our church, communicating the intentions of where he saw the church headed. We set a goal of 5-7 years not only for my dad, the predecessor, to get his mind right but for me as the mentee, to position myself for the transition. We believe this is important for every congregation embarking upon a pastoral transition, not just our own. Through this entire process, we realized, it is just as important for the lead pastor to prepare himself or herself for their exit as it is to prepare a new pastor for an entrance. It is nearly impossible to stop pastoring without some type of spiritual, psychological, or emotional detachment because you've given the majority of your life to that ministry. In fact, it's healthy for the congregation also to see a natural and organic process of leadership transition taking place. In this way, no one is shocked or caught off guard because they've had the time to prepare for the leadership shift. When a transition is thought out and implemented well, it's not viewed as something forced on the congregation or taking too long waiting for them to vote because they had enough time for it to happen.

Over the past several years, I shadowed my dad. In 2015, I got married to Caleb McClendon, whom I met in undergrad in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2010 and ultimately moved from his hometown of Jackson, Mississippi, to Hampton, Virginia, in 2013. Caleb had been serving alongside me in ministry for several years, and in 2015 my father, Bishop L.W. Francisco III, commissioned both of us as the assistant pastors of the church and then started sharing some of the pastoral responsibilities. Caleb served more on the

creative side, and I quickly began doing the work of ministry in the form of weddings, funerals, conducting ministerial meetings, professional development, and preaching more frequently on Sunday mornings. One of the biggest takeaways we learned is not to talk so much about “retirement” but “empowerment.” In this way, we take the focus off of the individual and put the emphasis back on the larger picture of the moving the church forward. Ministry should be bigger than the individual. If the individual becomes bigger than the ministry, then it is no longer God's church but the personality's church. Once leadership accepts that it's not about one person, namely the current senior pastor, there's almost a natural orientation that takes place in the congregation. After that, it's taking it to a place of enunciation and then celebration so that the leaders can take it to the congregation. We believe succession should ultimately be a celebration, not a chore. Strategically, we don't use the word retirement; we use repositioning or empowerment. We are empowering our church to take the vision to the next generation, and we reposition ourselves to use our God-given gifts somewhere else.

Our transition plan did not come without its fair share of hiccups. We started planning for my father to pass the baton to me around 2013, three years after I served in youth ministry, and two years before I assumed the role of senior pastor. Initially, our goal was to transfer the primary role of senior pastor to me in 2019, but that didn't work out. We learned that it is better to work out the kinks instead of doing something for the sake of the date. This whole transition process has taught me a great deal of patience

and has also humbled me. At times I had to check my ambition and realize that I wasn't ready when I thought I was. We pushed our transition back one year, and I'm thankful we did so that we have more time to roll out communication a bit better and so that I can learn as much as I can and also continue earning the love, respect, and trust of not only our congregation but our leaders and staff as well. When my papa became ill and told my dad to fill in for him for a short while (because someone else would be coming to take his place), my dad started telling others he's been waiting for his replacement forever. We now know that replacement took 33 years as I am beyond honored to stand as a third-generation preacher and serve as my father's successor.

One of the highlights of this transition process was that my grandmother and our family matriarch, Naomi R. Francisco, saw God's promise in the third generation. Unfortunately, my grandmother and the co-founder of our church passed away February 5, 2020 at the age of 84 years old. "Grams," as I affectionately called her was always extremely supportive of this transition. Her final words of advice to me before her passing was, "if God ain't give it to you, it ain't gon' work." I hold those words near and dear to my heart and try to live by them. I was privileged on February 12, 2020 to give her eulogy. The presence of God was evident as I received countless testimonies of how her life was a blessing to many. Although my pastoral installation is scheduled for May 1, 2020, many in attendance felt that the moment I eulogized my grandmother served as my "inaugural sermon" and many exclaimed how they saw me in a new light

from that day forward. People who always called me Lesley suddenly started affirming me as pastor. It's funny how God works in the area of transition. I am beyond excited to see what God is going to do in the life of our church and I am honored to carry on the legacy that my grandparents initiated along with my sisters, Nicole Francisco Bailey, who serves as Executive Director of C3, and Lauren Francisco, Director of Outreach and Communications. Indeed, we are living in the promise of scripture, "their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed."²²⁹

One of the things that have constantly echoed in my ear is that the passing of the baton is not a one-time event but a race that will continue even after I'm gone. While our vision has evolved from the 1960s until now, our mission of building community, restoring hope and transforming lives remains the same and guides us as God's Spirit empowers us. With intentional transitions like the one we are in now; we endeavor to be a sustainable church with hopes of reclaiming the vision of becoming not only an interracial church but one that is interdenominational and has an international reach as well. We have always been future-focused, and together we are creating a legacy and impacting generations for years to come.

²²⁹ Psalm 112:2

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Biography

Lesley Francisco McClendon serves as Senior Pastor at C3 – Calvary Community Church in Hampton, VA. She teaches with vigor and passion, but aims to deliver powerful, life-altering messages with her simple, easy to comprehend delivery.

Lesley has a passion for bridging generational gaps and loves speaking to a broad range of audiences, although she often says that mid-twenties to mid-life crisis is her sweet spot. Teaching and motivational speaking oozes out of her pores, but constant learning is at her core. Lesley earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with a concentration in Practical Theology from Oral Roberts University (2010) in Tulsa, Oklahoma and later received her Master of Divinity degree from Regent University (2014) in Virginia Beach, VA. In 2020, she earned a Doctor of Ministry degree from Duke University. She is married to Caleb McClendon and together they have one son, Jackson Alexander Francisco McClendon.