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Pastors' Experiences of Role Expectations

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PASTORS' EXPERIENCES OF ROLE EXPECTATIONS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Pastors and ministers in Christian congregations experience the role expectations of multiple constituents. The literature on clergy roles and role expectations indicates that the role of pastors and ministers has developed and changed. The existing literature also indicates a lack of role consensus and the presence of role conflict and overload. These factors have contributed to many pastors experiencing a lack of job satisfaction and also the experience of stress, and many have left vocational ministry as a result of this stress.

The objective of this study was to research the experience of pastors in Brethren in Christ congregations in relation to role expectations held for them by various members of their role set, especially those of congregants. The research utilized both document analysis and qualitative research. The qualitative research was undertaken in semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of Brethren in Christ pastors who serve in solo-pastor congregations in the state of Pennsylvania and were within the first three years of ministry in their current congregation. Data analysis was done by means of a category system and this led to a number of analytic categories that were used for the interpretation of the findings. The transcripts of the participants' description of their experience, their reflection on that experience, and my analysis of these descriptions, add to the body of knowledge that exists regarding both congregant role expectations and pastors' experiences of these expectations.

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I appreciate the pastors who were willing to share part of their story and their journey with me. They gave freely of their time and openly and honestly shared the joy and pain of their experience. Thank you. This is your story.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Background

The question, “What makes an ideal pastor?” may appear simple and straightforward. Yet for decades, Christians have struggled to definitively answer it. As early as the 1930s, parishioners and authors alike found themselves unable to reach a consensus. For example, Mark Arthur May, writing in *The Education of American Ministers* (1934), comments,

What is the function of the minister in the modern community? The answer is that it is undefined. There is no agreement among denominational authorities, local officials, seminary professors, prominent laymen, ministers or educators as to what it should be. Such uncertainty persisted for subsequent decades, prompting H. Richard Niebuhr, a long-term professor at Yale Divinity School, to state in *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry*, (1956), “Entering the ministry is more like entering the army, where one never knows where he will land or live or what specific work he will be called to perform” (p. 51).

Niebuhr’s creative ministry metaphor points to the ongoing uncertainty about the expectations of the pastoral role, and partially explains why, in the 1970s, the Association of Theological Schools launched a major research project that sought to answer the question, “What makes an ideal minister?” Researchers in the United States and Canada pursued solutions to this elusive query by polling 1,806 laity and 3,089 clergy. The data were collected in 1974 and the results of the project were subsequently published under the title *Ministry in America*. However, far from providing a simple answer or answers, the results proved extremely complex.

During the 1980s and 1990s, leading Christian authors confirmed the ongoing uncertainty about the role of the Christian minister. For example, Wiersbe (1983) suggested that because many church members do not understand the purpose or function of the church, they find it difficult to know the purpose or function of the minister. Stott (1994), writing in *Ideals in Pastoral Ministry*, stated, “One feature of the contemporary church is its uncertainty about the role of its professional ministers. Are pastors primarily social workers, psychiatrists, educators, facilitators, administrators, or what?” (p. 67).

Problem Statement

Pastors in the Brethren in Christ Church, the denomination in which I serve, experience similar pastoral role uncertainty. Brensing (1991), writing in *We Have This Ministry*, the denomination's official text on pastoral ministry, states that Brethren in Christ ministers experience the same “apparent identity crisis” characteristic of many Christian ministers today. Brensing continues (p. 3),

While the basis for ministry was at one time self-evident, such is often no longer the case. With increased attention given to the social sciences and other disciplines, ministers frequently face frustration in determining just who they are. Are they public speakers? Counselors? Administrators? Therapists? If so, many feel only marginally competent and others grow weary under the burden of trying to be all things to all people.

In other words, Brethren in Christ pastors do not understand their role and, as a result, face the potential for fragmented and ineffective ministry.

Brethren in Christ History

In order to understand the present context out of which Brethren in Christ pastors operate, a brief historical overview is in order. The Brethren in Christ originated between 1775 and 1788 along the banks of the Susquehanna River, near the present town of Bainbridge in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The denomination has strong roots in the orthodox doctrines of pre-Reformation Christianity, but this historic Christianity was mediated through the Protestant Reformation. One of its constitutive traditions, Anabaptism, began as a movement within the Protestant Reformation that believed that the German and Swiss reformers—Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin, for example—had stopped short of complete reform. The Anabaptists felt that these reformers had collaborated and compromised with secular magistrates and powers. These Anabaptist Christians, often referred to as the “radical reformers,” believed that a complete reformation was necessary. Anabaptist communities developed throughout Europe in the 1500s and 1600s, and—because of the obvious threat they represented to the established churches—soon came under persecution. As a result, many Anabaptists left Europe for the New World in order to find religious freedom. Their spiritual descendants began to enter Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in or around 1710.

During the 1750s and 1760s, Philip Otterbein, a German Reformed pastor in Lancaster, and Martin Boehm, a Mennonite minister in Lancaster, began to promote revivalist Pietism throughout that area. In short time, a new religious awakening was experienced that broke through denominational barriers. Many people had new or renewed religious experiences and this pietistic movement sparked the beginning of a new religious society—the Brethren, later called “the River Brethren.” C. O. Wittlinger (1978, p. 27) points out that it was the military draft instituted by the Union Government during the American Civil War that created the

necessity for the denomination to register in Washington as a nonresistant organization. In the process of registration, the community adopted the name “Brethren in Christ.”

During most of its existence, the Brethren in Christ was a small, German-speaking, conservative denomination, primarily located in rural farming areas. Change occurred slowly among the Brethren and growth was primarily biological in nature. By the 1950s, some of the leaders of the denomination began to believe that only a “radical break with the past could give their movement a new and viable identity” (Wittlinger, 1978, p. 475). This perspective grew out of an awareness of lack of numerical growth in the denomination and an increasing awareness of the advances of other evangelical denominations.

The last sixty years have seen sweeping changes across the denomination and significant growth has occurred in both the number of congregations and the number of attendees. The denomination in North America comprises approximately 30,000 attendees in 300 congregations across the United States and Canada. These congregations are not spread uniformly across North America; rather, they are clustered in the Northeast (especially Pennsylvania), the Midwest, California, south Florida (mainly Hispanic congregations in the Miami area), and in Ontario, Canada.

The denomination in North America is organized on three official levels—local congregations, Regional Conferences, and General Conference.

Local Congregations

While some Brethren in Christ congregations are so small they may not have a pastor, most congregations have at least one pastor. The majority of Brethren in Christ congregations in North America count less than 100 people in weekly worship services. This is similar to other

churches in the United States. Hartford Seminary's church data center states that currently 59% of all churches in the US averaged between 1 – 99 people in weekly worship, and the median church in the US is 75 (http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html#sizecong). Such congregations in the Brethren in Christ are generally served by a single pastor—usually termed a “solo pastor” position. Some congregations are large enough to sustain multiple staff members, and in these contexts terms like “senior pastor” and “associate pastor(s)” are commonly used.

Regional Conferences

Local congregations are grouped together within geographic areas to form a Regional Conference. A bishop oversees and administers each of the seven North American conferences (six in the United States and one in Canada). The bishop serves as the leader for the conference and works with the lay leadership of each local congregation to find and appoint a pastor to that congregation. All solo and senior pastors are appointed by the bishop to serve in a specific congregation. Associate pastors in multiple-staff congregations are hired directly by the local congregational leadership.

In selecting a new senior or solo pastor for a congregation, the bishop normally meets with the elected church board to discuss the gifts, skills, and abilities that the board members desire their pastor to possess. Prospective pastors normally meet with both the church board and the bishop in order to determine the best match between pastor and congregation. Following these discussions, the bishop and church board discuss the candidate(s), and the bishop appoints the individual selected as the best fit for the congregation. The appointment is normally for a term of three, four, or five years, at the end of which a pastoral review process takes place.

Depending on the outcome of the review, pastors may be reappointed to the congregation or asked to leave for another position.

General Conference

The seven North American Regional Conferences of the Brethren in Christ Church form the General Conference. A Moderator and General Secretary, along with the bishop of each Regional Conference, provide leadership and oversight to the General Conference.

Pastoral Role Performance in the Brethren in Christ Church

In terms of the role expectations for pastors in Brethren in Christ congregations, multiple individuals function as stakeholders in the role performance of a pastor. Local congregants desire their congregation to be healthy and to meet their needs and the needs of their family and friends. Bishops desire congregations that are healthy, vital, growing, and contributing to the overall progress of the regional conference. Furthermore, because the bishop appoints the pastor, the bishop wants the pastor to succeed because an unsuccessful pastorate may call into question a bishop's discernment abilities or skills for making good appointments. General Church leaders, concerned with the program of the whole denomination, understand that healthy, flourishing local congregations will likely have greater capacity to fund and support the work of the General Church; therefore, they too seek pastors who perform well in their local ministry contexts.

At each and every level of the denomination, then, individual leaders want to focus on the role of the local pastor and his or her performance in that role. However, as with any professional role, the ability of an incumbent to meet role expectations is significantly dependent upon his

perception and understanding of the role as well as his ability to actually meet the role expectations.

It is my view that most Brethren in Christ congregations and solo pastors struggle with some aspect or aspects of pastoral role expectation and performance. The struggle may be due to role uncertainty derived from unclear expectations, or role conflict derived from contradictory role expectations, or even role overload derived from too many role expectations. Consequences of inadequate role performance may include unhealthy self-esteem that can exacerbate poor role performance and impact the emotional, physical, and spiritual health of the pastor and, consequently, the health of the congregation.

Hoge and Wenger (2005) and Davey (1995) have suggested that both pastoral burnout and clergy departure from local church ministry result, in part, from unclearly defined role expectations and misperceptions of role performance. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the U.S. experienced a shortage of clergy, and some commentators attributed this decline in ministry candidates to (among other hindrances) role expectation issues (Hoge and Wenger 2005, Davey 1995). This contributed to what the Alban Institute termed a “crisis” in leadership in American congregations (Alban Institute Special Report on “The Leadership Situation Facing American Congregations,” 2001). However, Warner (2010), writing for the Religious News Service, reported in May 2010 that recent statistics indicate a clergy glut. Warner linked this turnaround to the economic downturn. He argued older clergy, concerned about their evaporating retirement funds, have delayed retirement, thereby limiting the number of new pastoral positions available for younger ministers.

Purpose Statement

Given that much has been written over many decades about pastoral role uncertainty, and given that my own denomination's literature indicates a considerable level of role uncertainty among its pastors, there exists a need for research to investigate the role expectations that have been experienced by Brethren in Christ pastors. This research paper will begin to meet that need.

The specific purpose of this study is to use qualitative research methods to investigate the role expectations that Brethren in Christ pastors experience from their congregants and from other people in their role-set. This research will enable leaders in the denomination—from pastors to General Church administrators—to better understand how pastors experience congregants' pastoral role expectations and the potential consequences that may result from such experiences.

Glossary

The following are definitions of key terms that are used throughout this dissertation.

1. Role: A part one plays in society. One's role is comprised of a set of functions, behaviors, and expectations.
2. Role Theory: A theoretical lens that theorizes the functions and behaviors of individuals within a complex sociological environment. It is premised upon individuals behaving according to social identities and situations (Biddle, 1986).
3. Position: A status within society that includes certain rights, privileges, and responsibilities.
4. Role Set: The set or group of people that are in contact with the actor and have expectations for how the actor will function and behave.

5. Role Expectations: The expectations held by persons in the actor's role set concerning the function and behaviors of the actor.
6. Role Consensus: Agreement among persons in the role set concerning role expectations.
7. Role Conflict: The concurrent presence of incompatible and/or conflicting role expectations.
8. Role Ambiguity: Uncertain role expectations due to a lack of necessary information and/or unclear information.
9. Role Conformity: Compliance by the actor to some pattern or expectation for behavior.
10. Role Strain: The experience of an actor when the role obligations associated with the role are greater than can be accomplished without stress and strain.
11. Stress: The experience of the actor as a consequence of the culmination of physiological and psychological demands placed upon the actor in the role.
12. Coping: The process or processes employed by an actor to limit or negate the negative aspects of stress.

Research Questions

This research will seek to answer the following research questions.

1. What are Brethren in Christ pastors' perceptions of their congregants' pastoral role expectations?
2. How do Brethren in Christ pastors experience congregants' role expectations in terms of consequences?

3. What, if anything, have Brethren in Christ pastors done in response to their experience of congregants' role expectations?

Two clarifications are necessary at this point. First, the Brethren in Christ Church uses a variety of terms to identify its clergy. While “minister” is one of those terms (and, historically, the most popular one), the more common term today is “pastor.” The use of “pastor” in this study should be considered a functional equivalent for “minister,” “priest,” or “clergy.”

Second, the Brethren in Christ Church take an egalitarian approach to the issue of women in pastoral ministry. This means that no distinction is made on the basis of a person's gender relative to pastoral ministry, and therefore a pastor may be either male or female. However, this study uses the male terms “he” and “him” for three reasons. First, these terms reflect the fact that the vast majority (perhaps as high as 95 percent) of current Brethren in Christ pastors are male. Second, the use of a single gender pronoun will allow for ease of writing and reading. Third, the participants in this study were all male. The use of “he” and “him” is therefore accurate for this paper and in no way intended to construe a theological or personal perspective on the question of women in pastoral ministry.

Researcher Positionality

This research project is of interest to me for many reasons. I served for many years as a solo pastor in a local congregation. I experienced role uncertainty, role conflict, and role overload in various ministry contexts, and I am therefore interested in empirical research that may indicate whether my personal experiences are normal or exceptional.

I limited my study to full-time Brethren in Christ pastors in the state of Pennsylvania who have been appointed to a solo-pastor position within the three years immediately preceding the

research. By restricting my study to the scope of Pennsylvania, I intended to produce a study that focused on the geographic area in which the denomination started and where it currently has the most congregations. The restriction to solo pastors allowed for a focused study of those settings in which a single pastor carries the diverse expectations of each individual congregant. I do not mean to suggest that multiple-staff congregations experience fewer issues relative to role expectations; however, their context is sufficiently different to remove them from my study. Furthermore, because the vast majority of Brethren in Christ congregations in North America are solo pastor congregations, a research project that focused on these congregations will be of maximum benefit to the denomination. Finally, by limiting my sample to those pastors who have started their current pastoral ministry assignment within three years immediately prior to the research, I was able to target for study those individuals who were currently experiencing or had recently experienced congregational role expectations in a new appointment. This decision rested on the assumption that after three or more years in the same congregation, a pastor will likely have worked through the issue of role expectation. I also assumed that those pastors in an appointment for less than three years will have fresher recollections of these role-related issues; memory of conflict, ambiguity, and/or strain may be less clear in the minds of pastors serving for more than three years. For these reasons, I believe the quality of the data I received would be improved if the sample was restricted to those who had served in their current role for three years or less.

Summary

Congregants desire and expect their pastor to act in certain ways and to perform certain functions. These role expectations have been unclear in many congregations and denominations

across North America for many decades. The Brethren in Christ Church, the denomination in which I serve, is no exception to this pastoral role uncertainty. This study sought to identify what pastors actually experienced in terms of role expectation from their congregants. The study is the first of its kind in the Brethren in Christ Church, and it contributes to an existing body of knowledge on the issue of clergy role expectations. Although this study focused on only seven pastors, it has the potential to provide information that will help the Brethren in Christ—and perhaps other denominations also—with this important aspect of church life. Moreover, while this research focused exclusively on Brethren in Christ solo pastors, its conclusions may prove useful for other professions and for the theoretical body of knowledge in general.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviews three bodies of literature relevant to my study of Brethren in Christ pastors' experience of congregants' pastoral role expectations. First, I review a number of sociological theories: role theory, self and identity theory, and stress and coping theory. Second, I examine literature commonly read by and taught to pastors in ministerial training settings. Third and finally, I evaluate three research studies on the role of clergy. Illustrative of the complexity of the issue, these three studies constitute a significant block of the extant literature on the topic of clergy role expectations and therefore provide an important point of comparison with my own research. These three studies—conducted in academic settings and yielding robust conclusions—span a significant time period and represent different denominational settings; their very existence proves that the problem of clergy role expectations is both enduring and widespread.

Role Theory

Humans have long pondered their lives and the conditions of their existence (Turner 2007). Such inquiries constitute the lifeblood of religion, philosophy, ideology, and the many other constructs humans use to make sense of the self and the world. These ideas and systems of ideas do not just suddenly appear; rather, they reflect fundamental changes in the larger society and, often, in the distribution of power within society. These changes have forced the emergence of new ways of thinking—new theories that seek to explain how and why events in the world

occur and why humans behave, interact, and organize themselves in the ways in which they do. Social theory provides the framework for analyzing and seeking to understand the complexity of human behavior (Biddle and Thomas, 1966). The goal for sociologists is to determine whether or not the underlying forces that govern particular or specific cases can be discovered. Therefore, *theories* must be about generic properties and processes that transcend the unique characteristics of any one particular case or situation. In this way, theories seek to transcend the particular and the time-bound; instead, they focus on the generic, the fundamental, the timeless, and the universal (Turner, 2003).

The term “role,” as used in the context and concept of role theory, originated in the sixteenth-century theater, where it was used to explain the character and behavior of each person involved in the theatrical performance. Major sociologists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Durkheim, Cooley, and Sumner, did not utilize the term “role.” Nevertheless, Biddle and Thomas (1996) suggest that the perspectives and theories of these early scholars—especially on concepts such as social forces and the division of labor (Durkheim 1960), self (Cooley 1902), and social folkways and mores (Sumner 1906)—contributed significantly to the development of role theory.

Scholars trace the origins of contemporary role theory to the 1930s and 1940s with the work of Mead (1934), Linton (1936) and Moreno (1947 and 1960). Mead (1934) discussed “the generalized other” and “role taking,” arguing that humans seek to maintain order in constantly changing social structures. His work proved crucial to the development of the *symbolic interactionist* understanding of role theory (Biddle and Thomas, 1966). Linton (1936) discussed the concepts of “role” and “status,” and the relationship between the two. For him, “status” described position, rights, and duties, while “role” connoted the *application* of those matters in

different social contexts (Biddle and Thomas, 1966). Moreno (1946 and 1960) discussed two phases in the development of a person's role—role perception and role enactment (or role playing). For Moreno, role change and behavior change were potential consequences of the actor enacting the role and learning how to better perform the role (Moreno, 1960).

Biddle and Thomas (1966) report that other theorists—for example, Davis, Merton, Parsons, and Lang—further developed and refined role theory. Biddle (1986), writing about the entire scope of role theory, suggests that it is concerned with “a triad of concepts: patterned and characteristic social behaviors, parts or identities that are assumed by social participants, and scripts or expectations for behavior that are understood by all and adhered to by performers” (Biddle, 1986, p. 68).

In their respective overviews of role theory, both Biddle (1986) and Heiss (1990) admit that the scholarly literature uses the term “role” in disparate, confusing, and arbitrary ways. For example, scholars have variously used the term “role” to refer to a social position, to a behavior associated with a social position, or to individual or typical behavior. Moreover, the term is most frequently used to connote that which an actor is expected to do—the actions considered appropriate for the occupant of a position within particular social contexts. Sometimes these expectations derive from the larger society, from reference groups, or from the actor him- or herself. In weighing the importance of each of these expectations, Heiss (1990) suggests that the actor's views have the most direct effect on his or her behavior. While the expectations of other people affect the actor's behavior, they do so, in part, because they influence the actor's views.

Given the lack of a uniform vocabulary for role theory, Biddle (1986) provides the following summary of key concepts and terms.

- *Consensus* denotes agreement among expectations held by various persons. Some have asserted that social roles are generated when persons in a social system share norms for the conduct of a social position. Biddle (1986) examines a number of challenges to this position, primarily the thought that assumptions about consensus may sometimes prove untenable, and concludes that normal consensus may be unlikely in many contexts. In spite of this, the concept of consensus remains important to some theorists.
- *Conformity* refers to compliance to some pattern of or expectation for behavior. The pattern for behavior may be generated by expectations that induce conformity. This reality has led scholars to expend considerable time and effort on the relationship between expectations and behaviors. Biddle (1986) agrees that the evidence suggests that persons do conform to expectations that are held by others, are attributed to others, or are held personally by the actor.
- *Role Conflict* describes the “concurrent appearance of two or more incompatible expectations for the behavior of a person” (Biddle 1986, p. 82). Such conflict arises in situations in which there exists no consensual expectations for a person’s behavior, and may be accompanied by role stress.
- *Role Taking* focuses on the importance of attributed expectations and the role taking of the individual. It has been assumed that successful role taking will facilitate personal development and social integration.

Turner (1990) defines a *social role* as a comprehensive pattern of behavior and attitudes, constituting a strategy for coping with a recurrent set of situations that is socially identified—more or less clearly—as an entity. A social role is played recognizably by different individuals and supplies a major basis for identifying and placing persons in a group, organization, or

society. It can be thought of as consisting of rights and duties or of expected behavior, provided these terms are interpreted broadly (Turner, 1990).

Turner (1990) further suggests that social roles fall into four different types. The first type, *basic roles*, includes elements like gender and age. These roles are grounded in society at large as opposed to a particular organization. The second type, *structural status roles*, incorporates occupational, family, and recreational roles. These are attached to position, office, or status in a particular organizational setting. *Functional group roles*, the third type, are not formally designated or attached to particular group positions or offices. Instead, they are recognized positions within a particular cultural framework. Examples would include “mediator” or “devil’s advocate.” A fourth a final type, *values roles*, embody the implementation or negation of a recognized value or value complex; examples would include hero, traitor, saint, or criminal.

Heiss (1990) suggests that an *identity* is any characteristic that individuals use to define themselves. However, he also notes that, “in actuality people recognize that . . . proper behavior depends upon other’s identity [or role] as well as the actor’s” (Heiss, 1990, p. 95). For example, the role of pastor could be constituted by the pastor-parishioner relationship or the relationships of pastor-member, pastor-attende, pastor-bishop, or pastor-church board member, to name but a few. Heiss (1990) provides the following definitions:

- *Role-set*. This term connotes the theoretical understanding that a role is a set of expectations attached to a particular combination of actor-author identities (for example, those listed above).
- *Role-repertoire*. This term refers to the unit larger than role-set, and would include all the role-sets of a particular person.

- *Sub-role*. Sub-roles are the units that are smaller than a role-set. For example, a number of different activities are often involved in each role, and each of these activities may have different assumptions for proper behavior.
- *Role norm*. This term refers to the specific behavioral prescriptions which, when combined, make up a sub-role.

In light of these definitions, Heiss concludes that a role “appears to be a collection of discrete behaviors that are learned and applied in a piecemeal fashion” (1990, p. 95) and can be approached from both a structural and an interactionist approach. These approaches, Heiss proposes, exist not in opposition to one another, but operate at different levels of analysis and are therefore supplementary. The structural approach suggests that after an actor defines the situation, “he is likely to have a conception of the role he wishes to play and an opinion as to what others should do” (Heiss, 1990, p. 96). However, “an individual’s roles are largely learned from other people, and, therefore, actor and other are likely to agree about role definitions *only* if they have been exposed to similar influences” (Heiss, 1990, 96-97)—a conclusion supporting an interactionist approach. Heiss also purports that many theorists assume most roles have no societal consensus. Furthermore, even with consensus, interaction would require more than just a mechanical reading of a script because roles do not cover every eventuality. Thus, he deduces (quoting Davis) that an actor’s role understandings can often involve “tentativeness” and a lack of clarity (Heiss, 1990, p. 97).

All of the above helps to explain the occurrence of *role strain*. This strain may be experienced as role conflict (the existence of incompatible elements in a role repertoire) or, even if incompatibilities did not exist, as the inability to live up to a role’s demands because of lack of time, energy, or resources. Such stress may lead to role overload. An actor may adjust to role

strain and/or overload by changing the role definition during interaction or by acting inconsistently with the role. Acting inconsistently with the role, however, assumes the violation of an internalized set of role norms. In this sense, internalization does not mean an undying devotion or absolute commitment to a certain set of role norms.

If this is true, how then do actors learn roles, develop preferences in terms of roles, and deploy roles in interaction? Heiss (1990) addresses such questions in presenting contemporary role theory. Working from the assumption that “people come to interaction situations with previously learned role repertoires, that they choose particular roles for the encounter, and that those roles serve as guides for their actions” (p. 101), Heiss argues that *social learning theory* provides the best explanation for how actors learn roles. According to Heiss, social learning theory, as developed by psychologist Albert Bandura, claims that though the acquisition of new behaviors can occur through direct experience involving trial and error as well as the selection of effective responses, human beings amass most of their ideas about socially acceptable behaviors by observing the actions of others. In other words, people learn largely by visual observation of overt responses by others. Through effective contact, attentive learning, and verbal coding, an actor develops a repertoire of behaviors, but only some will be used. Heiss asserts that actors choose behaviors for performance, at least in part, based on the extent to which certain behaviors have been tied to reinforcement (p. 103). Thus, for Heiss, role learning and deployment are shaped by observation and reinforcement—in other words, through socialization.

Heiss (1990) suggests three major divisions of socialization context: (1) anticipatory socialization—unintentional preparation for a role that the actor does not play and will not play in the immediate future; (2) explicit training—intentional socialization for a role that the actor does not play; and (3) in-service or tenancy socialization—role learning that occurs while the

actor is playing the role to which he is being socialized. Heiss suggests that the versions of roles that have been observed most frequently will be assumed to be more acceptable generally than versions that have been observed less frequently.

Pastors certainly undergo all of these divisions of socialization. From the very moment they become part of a local congregation (which for some may be in early childhood), they experience anticipatory socialization for the pastor role. Most pastors and all Brethren in Christ pastors also experience explicit training of some kind. In the Brethren in Christ context, some pursue seminary education; others complete their training through the acquisition of an undergraduate degree. For others still, training may take the form of the denomination's "Directed Study Program," a sequence of required and elective courses taken in a part-time, distance-learning format. In addition to formal academic training, in-service training occurs at many levels: reading books and journals, attending seminars and conferences, and conversing informally with friends, peers, and mentors.

However, the models of ministry taught at the seminary level or articulated in the ever-increasing volumes on pastoral theology may differ significantly from those models encountered by individuals in a specific congregation. Furthermore, the pastor may not be the only participant absorbing these various pastoral models; the average congregant develops his or her own concept of proper pastoral behavior from the same numerous—and sometimes conflicting—sources. As a result of this socialization regarding pastoral role expectations, both the pastor and his/her congregants often know several versions of a particular role, and they must select the one they wish to use. In choosing which particular role to play, actors rank the various ways they know to play the role according to a hierarchy of prominence, and this ranking occurs on the basis of preference ratings. Scholars indicate that it is not always easy or possible to account for the level

of preference associated with each definition, but Heiss (1990) believes that the general preference level of a particular version of a role will be the direct function of the anticipated total profit associated with its performance. Total profit is here understood as the sum of the reward expected from others (role partners and third persons) and the expected self-reward, minus the anticipated costs. For a Brethren in Christ pastor, the significant others will include the church board, the bishop, the whole congregation, the community, the pastor's family, and self. Since these significant others likely will not have the same or similar role expectations, role dissensus may occur. According to Heiss (1990), the literature on role socialization makes clear that any circumstances that increase the possibility that an actor and an other have had dissimilar socializations, increases the likelihood that they disagree in their role definitions. As a result, they will know different versions of the same role and will have different preference hierarchies.

Furthermore, role theory provides clear insights into the consequences of role dissensus. If not resolved, role dissensus threatens to make the interaction of actors difficult and unsatisfactory. Behaviors will not mesh, and cooperative action will be difficult to achieve. Mutual dislike is likely to develop because each party will suspect that the other is behaving improperly. Heiss (1990) suggests that even the knowledge that "one's interaction partner sees things differently may be sufficient to cause a significant degree of enmity" (p. 120). These consequences are most likely to occur when the nature of the interaction requires agreement and coordination between actor and other. As noted earlier, role conflict in any form can lead to stress, necessitating subsequent attempts to cope. Hoge and Wenger (2005) discovered that many pastors cannot cope and consequently leave ministry.

Heiss (1990) outlines a number of strategies for removing role dissensus, including persuasion, education, manipulation, appeal to rules or authority, coercion, and negations (or

bargaining). However, he states that the achievement of a working consensus on role definitions may not be possible; even if it is achieved, there exists no guarantee that the rest of the encounter will proceed routinely. This may lead, for the actors, to role strain. The role strain may take the form of role conflict and/or role overload. When role conflict occurs, the options for the actor may be quite limited; in fact, the “only way that actor can avoid negative sanctions is to renegotiate or to drop one or more of the roles that contain incompatible elements” (Heiss, 1990, p. 126). It may be that the actor can choose to fail in one or more of the roles. Failure is likely to take place in the roles with the lowest cost for failure or with the role partner who has the least ability to impose costs. If failure proves unsatisfactory, Heiss concludes, “the cost of performing the role has increased to such a level that termination might very well be the option with the lowest cost” (Heiss, 1990, p. 126). In other words, an actor’s inability to resolve role dissensus could result in a loss of his position.

Another option—role change—includes its own benefits and risks. The phrase refers to “a change in the shared conception and execution of typical role performance and role boundaries” (Turner, 1990, p. 88). Turner (1990) distinguishes role change from a number of other theoretical concepts. First, he distinguishes it from *role transition* or *role reallocation*, both of which refer to the movement of an individual out of one role and in to another. He also distinguishes it from *normal variability*, wherein each incumbent may develop a “uniquely individual version of a particular role within generally accepted boundaries” (Turner, 1990, p. 88). Finally, Turner distinguishes role change from *deviance*, which he defines as behavior interpreted to be outside the role boundaries (rather than a new or different way of playing the role). Turner also cites Allport’s *J-curve*; this framework suggests that while some degree of

individual deviance from a given social norm might be expected, deviance that reaches a tipping point (say 50% nonconformity) fundamentally changes the role.

Turner (1990) identifies a number of ways in which roles can change, and also enumerates four primary sources out of which the impetus for change might grow. For instance, he argues that roles can change when new roles are created or established roles are dissolved. Additionally, roles can change quantitatively, as when duties or rights are added to or subtracted from the role, or when the power and prestige associated with a role is lost or gained (also known as role expansion or contraction) Roles can also change qualitatively, which Turner defines as a change in the relative salience of a role's component elements by substitution of elements or by reinterpretation of its meaning. Since a role always bears a functional and/or representational relationship to one or other roles, change in one role always means change in a system or other roles.

Concerning the impetus for role change, Turner (1990) has identified four primary sources: (1) widespread misfit between role and person; (2) prior change in the role of a significant actor; (3) change in the environing social structure; and (4) change in cultural values as they apply to the role and its various goals and functions. However, Turner notes, not every attempt at role change is successful or complete. An incomplete role change may take a number of forms. These can include informal role definitions, idiosyncratic roles, and substitutability (Turner, 1990).

Turner (1990) also addresses informal role definitions and variations. He interprets a series of studies by Zurcher (1983) by suggesting that, in most cases where a role incumbent improvised roles that deviated from the official role, such improvisation occurred because of role-related challenge to the incumbent's self-conceptions, especially when the setting denied

incumbents sufficient personal autonomy. The result in most cases was an informal version of the role that varied from the formal role version. The role incumbents were satisfied with the deviation, and the legitimate role definers and enforcers either ignored the variation or resigned themselves to patterns of petty deviation. In this way, accommodations were made to the role without requiring role change.

Finally, Turner (1990) considers *occupational role change* by distinguishing between *professionalization* and *deprofessionalization*. In general, Turner asserts, scholars have distinguished between professional and nonprofessional occupational roles on the basis of “exclusive expertise, based on extended education, adherence to strict ethical codes, service orientation, commitment to a view of the profession as a calling, and a publicly acknowledged right to autonomy in carrying out duties” (Turner, 1990, p. 92). Other defining characteristics have also been applied to professionalization, including the establishment of training schools, the founding of professional associations, and the power to establish boundaries around the task domain. The pressure for role expansion may come from the role incumbent or from external legitimate role definers.

Deprofessionalization has been defined as “a loss to professional occupations of their unique qualities, particularly their monopoly over knowledge, public belief in their service ethos, and expectations of work autonomy and authority over the client” (Haug, 1973). On this latter point, Haug and Sussman (1969) point out that, contrary to the assumption of autonomy and control over their work, most professionals are employed in some kind of organizational bureaucracy. This organizational setting adds the authority of an administrator as well as the organizational rules and norms, thereby reducing the authority and autonomy of the professional.

In addition to the organizational setting pressures toward deprofessionalization, contemporary society has exerted other significant pressures. These include the rise of general education, the computerization of knowledge and its increasingly widespread accessibility, and the stressing of the superiority of experience over formal education (Turner, 1990).

The clergy profession undoubtedly has encountered many (perhaps all) of the pressures toward deprofessionalization listed by Turner (1990). Historically, clergy functioned as some of the most educated people in any given community. However, in more recent times, considerable pressures—among them the rise of general education, the ease of access to computerized (and printed) information, and the emphasis on life experience as opposed to formal theological education—have contributed to the deprofessionalization of the clergy role. Some clergy have responded to the pressures toward role change by resigning from their positions and pursuing other employment opportunities; others have adopted various levels of role change (Hoge and Wenger 2005, Davey 1995).

Turner (1990) presents a general model for role change in which he discusses the impetus to role change and the factors in role negation. The impetus to role change (cultural values, social structures, demographic and/or technological change) may change supporting networks, alter role change, and add the possibility of a role/person misfit. At this point, the role incumbent may be relocated (and no role change occurs), or the incumbent may be given an idiosyncratic role. If neither of these two outcomes occurs, the result will be an unacceptable representation of the role, disfunctionality, and/or role untenability.

The factors that lead to role negotiation (costs of alternatives, structural autonomy, incumbent unity and mobilization, mobilized client demand, cultural credibility, institutional support) may ultimately lead to resignation or to a new accommodation or role change. The final

outcome is dependent on many factors and, according to Turner (1990), is “seldom consensus. It is usually a mixture of accepting the bad with the good, seeing no other feasible way to arrange things, and some consensus, with only faintly visible coercion in the background because of the unequal power of parties to the accommodation” (p. 108).

Self and Identity Theory

“Self” and “identity” are popular concepts in social psychology because almost every area of the discipline touches on some aspect of a person’s or group’s self and/or identity (Owens, 2003). “Self” and “identity” are complementary terms that have much in common. Self subsumes identity in the same way that it subsumes self-concept. The central quality that distinguishes self from identity is “that the self is a process and organization born of self-reflection whereas identity is a tool (or in some cases a stratagem) by which individuals or groups categorize themselves and present themselves to the world” (Owens 2003, p. 206). Owens (2003) defines self as “an organized and interactive system of thoughts, feelings, identities, and motives that (1) is born of self-reflexivity and language, (2) people attribute to themselves, and (3) characterize specific human beings” (206).

Since antiquity, theologians and philosophers have wrestled with questions of self, such as, “Who am I?”, “Why am I here?”, and “What does my life mean?” The key to answering these questions is human reflexivity, or the ability to view oneself as an object capable of being “not just apprehended, but also labeled, categorized, evaluated, and manipulated” (Owens, 2003. p. 207). Identity is subsumed within this broader concept of self. Both terms constitute categories used by people to specify why they are who and what they are, and to locate themselves relative

to other people. Therefore, identity includes both a sameness to others (“I am like them”) and a distinctiveness (“I am not like them”) (Owens, 2003).

Self-concept theory includes four principles of self-concept: reflected appraisals, social comparisons, self-attributions, and psychological centrality. Self-concept is also understood as a social product (the result of social environment) and a social force (influencing a person’s cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, and influencing groups and society as a whole). Owens (2003) summarizes self-presentation theory as a concept that sees people as actors who “assume roles that they perform for ‘audiences’ in social situations” (p. 210). He further comments that actors’ “role performances are guided by the impressions they wish to impart to one another or to the audience” and are codified in “impressions management tactics” (p. 210).

Concerning identity, Owens (2003) lists three key aspects in contemporary social psychology: personal, social, and collective. Concerning personal identity theory, he comments that this concept derives from general principles of symbolic interactionism and the influence of Mead (1934). Personal identity theory rests on four basic premises (Owens 2003, p. 251):

1. That people are actors and reactors.
2. That “human action and interactions are shaped substantially by the definitions actors derive from the situation and these definitions are based on shared meanings that arise as people interact with one another.”
3. That “the meanings people attribute to themselves, and thus their self-concepts are crucial to the process that produces their actions and interactions.”
4. That “like other meanings, self-conceptions are molded in the course of interaction with others and are largely the outcomes of others’ responses to the person.”

In defining a related concept, role-identity, McCall and Simmons (1966) conclude that it consists of “the character and the role that individuals devise for themselves when occupying specific positions” (p. 67). This role identity stems from the “imaginative view [a person had] of himself *as he likes to think of himself being and acting* as an occupant of a position” (McCall and Simmons, 1966, p. 67, emphasis in the original). In this way, role-identity serves as the primary source of a person’s action plans and thus influences his or her everyday life. Owens (2003) summarizes the impact of role-identities on a person by stating that role-identity theory provides a view of people who are capable of “creativity and improvisation in the performance of their roles” and yet at the same time are “guided by the overall requirements of their social position” (p. 216).

Since people have multiple role-identities, theorists have sought to explain how individuals prioritize their roles. They suggest that the multiplicity of role-identities is predicated on a hierarchy of prominence, which itself is predicated on a number of factors that the individual must weigh in terms of his or her self-concept. An individual’s social identity, for instance, is derived from the groups, statuses, and categories to which the individual is socially recognized as belonging (Owens, 2003). The labels by which a person is known (pastor, for example) are ways that the world encounters the individual. This labeling from the outside (sociological labeling theory) is distinct from social identity as a “cognitive tool individuals use to partition, categorize, and order their social environment and their place in it” (Owens, 2003, p. 224).

It is certainly true that the self-concept of “pastor” is a social product. The product has been many centuries in the making. Those involved in the manufacturing process have come from many different and distinct cultures. The history of the role, both in self-concept and the

role expectation of others, is replete with major shifts in understandings. As individuals accept and assume the role of pastor, they and their audience are not co-creating the role *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), but from an already existing, and often deeply ingrained and passionately defended, existing definition. Further, there exist not only passionately held definitions and expectations but also conflicting expectations—conflicting both between the actor and the audience, and between different members of the audience. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for a pastor to be able to impart universal and lasting change to the expectations and responses of others to his or her behavior, thus role conflict is to be expected. Even if agreement could be reached on the specific role expectations and identities of the role of pastor, it is unlikely that the involved parties could determine a mutually agreeable hierarchy of prominence. Thus, role overload is to be expected.

Role conflict and role overload most likely will result in the inability of an actor to be comfortable with his- or herself. Simmons (2001) identifies three factors contributing to comfort with self: (1) the absence of negative emotions regarding oneself; (2) feeling familiar with oneself and at ease and at home when thinking about oneself; and (3) having low to moderate emotional arousal with respect to self. Since it is unlikely that all pastors, if any, ever reach this level of comfort with self, consequent stress and burnout are not uncommon among pastors (Hoge and Wenger 2005, Davey 1995).

Stress and Coping Theory

A great deal of research has been done to identify how humans experience and cope with stress. This research is entirely consistent with a present-day social psychology that seeks to

establish the unities between social structure and the inner functioning of individuals (Pearlin 1989).

Stress research is typically viewed as a sub-specialty within medical sociology. Yet this perspective may obscure commonalities with more traditional sociological areas of inquiry, especially social stratification theory. Often stress research tends to be concerned less with the origins of stressful life experience (such as structure, roles, and other social constructs) than with the consequences of such experiences for outcomes of illness, especially psychological disorder (Aneshensel 1992).

Stress research suggests that stress often starts with an experience—an exigency that people experience or confront. Individuals perceive that exigency as threatening or burdensome. In many cases, stress-inducing exigencies do not occur in a vacuum, but rather can be traced to various social structures and the individuals' location within them. These include social stratification, social and economic class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. The stress process typically has three domains (Pearlin, 1989):

- Stressors: the exposure to and meaning of stressors; the entire constellation of stressors made up of both events and strains.
- Stress Mediators: access to stress mediators and the effects of mediators—coping and social support
- Stress outcomes: the psychological, physical, and behavioral manifestations of stress.

One structural context that has been studied in stress and coping theory is that of social institutions and their arrangement of statuses and roles. Incumbency in a major institutionalized role (such as minister or pastor) necessarily entails persistent encounters with a host of conditions and expectations that exert a structuring force on the experience of the incumbent.

When these experiences are threatening and/or problematic, the incumbent may experience stress. Studies have shown that such experience is common among incumbents of occupational roles (Kahn 1973) and also family roles (Pearlin 1983). Furthermore, incumbents of any role seldom, if ever, act in isolation; rather one role is part of a larger role set of complementary roles around which an incumbent structures important interpersonal relations (Pearlin, 1989).

Concerning stressors, social scientists are primarily interested in the societal, naturalistic causes of stress, whereas scientists from other disciplines such as biology and/or medicine are primarily interested in the mediation and outcome of stress. Acute stressors usually are equated with objective, discrete events that are not the result of the individual's psychological functioning. Chronic stressors, in contrast, are seen as subjective, influenced by emotional functioning, and lacking a clear origin in time (Kessler 1985).

Scholars have given particular attention to life events as stressors. Life events research, by and large, has been based on a key, albeit untenable, assumption: that *all* change is potentially harmful because all change requires readjustment (Pearlin 1989). However, since change appears to be a normal and inexorable feature of social life and of aging, a more helpful assumption might be that undesired, unscheduled, non-normative, and uncontrolled changes—and not just change *per se*—are harmful (Pearlin, 1989).

Another major type of stressor involves the relatively enduring problems, conflicts, and threats that many people face in their daily lives. Often these are experienced in connection to the social roles and role sets that people occupy. Problems rooted in institutionalized social roles are often enduring because the interpersonal relationships and activities they entail are similarly enduring. Generally, these institutionalized roles are considered very important, so difficulties

within them have the potential to affect the incumbent significantly. The difficulties come in many forms:

- Role overload occurs when the demand on an individual's energy and stamina exceeds her or his capabilities.
- Interpersonal conflicts within role sets, one of the most often-reported types of chronic strain, occur when an individual experiences difficulty interacting with another or others in complementary roles.
- Inter-role conflict is found at the juncture of different roles, especially the demands of both work and family. Individuals experiencing inter-role conflict typically feel unable to satisfy the demands and expectations of one of these roles without forsaking the other.
- Role captivity occurs when an individual feels trapped in a role or roles he or she would rather not occupy. Individuals do not necessarily feel that the demands of the unwanted role are especially difficult or beyond their capacity; rather, she or he simply desires to be and/or to do something else.
- Role restructuring is an important and often overlooked type of stressor. While it is virtually inevitable that relationships within a role set will undergo change, such change—even if desired and planned—necessitates alterations in long-established patterns of interaction, expectations, and behavior. This restructuring is seldom easy and can even result in a sense of betrayal, status loss, and/or a violation of expectations. These kinds of strains may develop insidiously and may persist until the involved individuals readjust to the new reality and norms that govern the relationship. However, by that time, another restructuring may already be underway.

Events and strains converge in people's lives in different ways. For example, events can lead to chronic strains. This can occur when the event adversely alters other aspects of life that can then become strong sources of stress. Examples of this would include involuntary job loss, or divorce, the death of a spouse, or a similar event. These events might cause economic hardship, social isolation, or personal conflict, and the stress impact of these may even be greater than the event that caused them. Also, chronic strains can lead to events. Furthermore, strains and events provide meaning and context for each other and can have a cyclical relationship.

Stress theory and coping theory operate under the assumption that significant stressors rarely, if ever, occur singly. Rather, these theories suggest that individuals who are exposed to one serious stressor are likely to be exposed to others also. Thus, clusters of stressors may develop as one event leads to another or triggers chronic strains, which then lead to other strains and events. These clusters may comprise different events and strains and may be rooted in problems that originated in institutionalized roles. *Primary* stressors are those that are likely to occur first in people's experience, and *secondary* stressors are those that occur because of the primary stressor.

Scholars have identified several distinct sources of chronic stress. Aneshensel (1992, p. 21), provides the following summary:

[Sources of chronic stress include] barriers in achievement in life goals; inequity in the form of inadequate rewards relative to invested effort or qualifications; excessive or inadequate environmental demand; frustration of role expectations; and resource deprivation. Chronic stressors also include difficulties associated with participation in institutionalized roles (Pearling 1983); enduring interpersonal difficulties (Avison & Turner 1988); status inconsistency, goal-striving stress, and life-style incongruity

(Dressler 1988); disjunction of economic goals and educational means (Farnworth & Lieber 1989); social and economic hardship including poverty, crime, violence, overcrowding, and noise (Pearlin & Lieberman 1979, Eckenrode 1984), homelessness (La Gory et al 1990), and chronic physical disability (Turner & Noh 1988).

Concerning role stress, the sources of ongoing role strain include “difficulty in satisfying role demands, interpersonal conflict with other in the role set, incompatible demands across roles, role captivity, gains or losses of roles, and restructuring of continuing roles” (Aneshensel 1992, p. 21).

Despite the proliferation of identified sources of stress, scholars have concluded that the experience of stressors does not necessarily result in stressful outcomes. Scholars have observed that the presence of a “mediator” can in fact mitigate the effects of a stressor. A variety of mediators have been identified, including coping, social support, and the self-concepts of self-esteem and mastery. These aspects of self offer personal resources and appear to serve as barriers to the effects of stressors.

Coping refers to the actions that an individual takes on their own behalf in an attempt to lessen the impact of a stressor (Pearlin and Schooler 1978). While rooted in an individual’s action, coping strategies may be learned from the individual’s membership groups and/or reference groups in the same way that other behaviors are learned and internalized. Thus people who share life circumstances are also likely to share coping behaviors. Moreover, although forms of coping might vary between individuals, the essential function of coping remains the same: either to change the situation that has led to the experience of the stressor, to manage the meaning of the situation in a manner that reduces its threat, or to keep the symptoms of stress

within manageable bounds (Pearlin, 1989, p. 250). Coping behavior differs from coping resources—the preexisting assets such as self-esteem that are called upon when stress does arise.

The phrase *social support* refers to the resources that an individual may use in dealing with life problems (as distinguished from the totality of the social resources on which one may potentially draw). Supporting relationships are found in virtually all institutional and social contexts (religion, occupation, family, and neighborhood, for example). Just as the forms and functions of support may vary with the nature of the relationship from which support is drawn, scholars have provided evidence that the effect of support is constrained or enhanced by the context in which relationship exists (Pearlin 1989).

Definitions of support abound, but most include whether a person's basic social needs—affection, esteem, approval, belonging, identity, and security—are satisfied through interaction with others (Cobb 1976, Thoits 1982). House and Kahn (1985) have identified three distinct dimensions of social support: integration, the existence of relations; networks, their structure; and support systems, their socio-emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal dimensions (Aneshensel, 1992, p. 17).

In addition to examining the methods by which individuals mediate stress-inducing events or other stressors, scholars have also devoted focus to the results of those mediations. As termed by scholars, *resolved life events* are those circumstances from which individuals derive positive meaning for themselves and for their futures, and from which they obtained new skills, confidence, or positive self-attitudes (Thoits, 1994). Turner and Avison (1992) argued that only unresolved life events are emotionally distressing, and suggested that “successfully resolved life events should not be counted when estimating an individual's burden of stress” (p. 38).

However, while resolved life events may be events from which an individual has learned or has grown, such a designation does not necessarily mean that the problem has been rectified.

In another study of the results of stress mediation, Thoits (1994) considered the outcomes of problem-solving efforts to show that individuals are often activist on their own behalf. Previous stress studies typically portrayed people as passive beings buffeted by external forces; these studies used language like “exposed to” and “at risk of,” giving the impression that negative events lurk in the environment, ready to pounce. Without minimizing the presence of environmental causes of psychological disorder, Thoits restores agency to individual actors by suggesting that people should also be considered as subjects in control of their own lives (1994, p. 144). Researchers who consider an individual’s personal coping resources (such as self-esteem, a sense of control, and social support) presume that these resources promote effective coping with stress and can help buffer the damaging consequences of stress.

Thoits’s view (1994) of the psychological activist is derived from symbolic interactionist theory that suggests that people, by assuming the role of specific and generalized others, conceive of themselves in terms of important social roles (e.g., parent, spouse, worker, church member) and thereby derive self-evaluation, at least in part, from the adequacy of their role performance. He writes, “Because role-identities are key sources of self conception and self-evaluation, individuals should be motivated to protect their self images and/or self-esteem by (a) actively trying to solve problems which may threaten these aspects of self-conception, (b) removing themselves from intractable difficulties, and/or (c) compensating for painful circumstances by investing themselves in other more rewarding role domains” (Thoits 1994, p. 144).

Thoits (1994) suggests two types of problem-solving actions: reversals and extrications.

In the face of negative events or chronic difficulties in a particular role domain, individuals can act to *reverse* or convert a negative situation to a positive one. For example, major failures in the workplace might be reversed by an individual's efforts to improve her job performance.

Alternatively, individuals can *extricate* themselves by voluntarily relinquishing a problematic role. For example, divorce constitutes a form of extrication wherein the individual voluntarily removes himself from the role of spouse. Similarly, quitting one's job is a form of extrication from the role of employee. In these examples, a divorcee or former employee might find a new partner or job, thus further solving the problem. Extrication is restricted to voluntary exits from occupied roles that are not followed by role re-entry.

According to Thoits, successfully solved problems are role reversals or extrications that result in lower difficulties than previously experienced in a given role domain. Unresolved problems are role difficulties which persist or increase over time, regardless of one's problem solving efforts.

Beyond reversals and extrications, scholars have suggested other means by which individuals may attempt to counter the difficulties faced in particular roles, including compensating for unresolved problems in one domain by deliberately increasing involvement in other roles or by acquiring additional roles (Gecas and Seff 1990; Sieber 1974). For example, an individual in a difficult job situation may devote more time and energy to family, church, or athletic activities. Purposefully engaging in rewarding activities in other role domains can help to counterbalance the distressing impacts of unsolved situations. Compensation is not a problem solving efforts *per se*, as it does not reverse, eliminate, or otherwise manipulate a difficult situation directly. However, it does require purposeful, deliberate acts, which indicate agency. For this reason, mental health experts consider compensation a useful means by which to deal

with role stress since, from their perspective, effort—not success or failure—produces the greatest benefit. In this view, simply taking problem-solving action may bolster an individual’s sense of control or self-esteem, thus reducing psychological symptoms.

Pastoral Theory

This section of the literature review considers the literature commonly read by and taught to pastors in ministerial training settings. While this literature does not reflect consistently the rigors of scholarly research and writing, it nevertheless represents a body of knowledge used in the training and equipping of clergy and provides critical insights into the self-understanding of pastors in their role. For this reason, it must be taken seriously in this study.

The professional literature governing the clergy/pastor profession contains widespread acknowledgement of the existence of pastoral role uncertainty throughout time. Stott (1994), Mayhue (1995), and Means (1993) all contend that, throughout its long history, the church has oscillated unsteadily among different models and emphases in pastoral ministry. There has seldom been any clear consensus about the role and function of ordained clergy. All three scholars agree that varying circumstances and differing biblical emphases have caused this lack of consensus. Means (1993) writes,

Of course, no single or simple historical pastoral role exists. An enormous variety of ecclesiastical traditions exist, and Scripture gives only a broad outline of pastoral work, leaving ample room for the great diversity of roles throughout history and in our contemporary world (p. 80).

In an effort to examine in depth this “great diversity of [pastoral] roles,” both Means (1993) and Stitzinger (1995) explore the role of the pastor throughout various periods of church

history. Stitzinger identifies the early church period (A.D. 100–476) as the time period in which two important shifts took place: simplicity to complexity, and organism to institution. Means (1993) suggests that the emerging dominance of the priestly role of the minister during this period occurred, in large measure, because of the writings of John Chrysostom (ca. A.D. 349–407). Means (1993) refers to Chrysostom’s work *On the Priesthood*, in which he emphasized the importance of administering the sacraments and of mediating between God and humanity. Regarding the importance of administering the sacraments, Stitzinger comments, “The rise and development of sacerdotalism with its elevation of the clergy to the status of priests, in effect, made the minister an instrument of the saving grace of God as he participated with God in the salvation of human beings” (Stitzinger 1995, p. 42). It is believed that through the offering of Christ in the Eucharist the grace of God flows for the good of mankind. Pope Pius XI (A.D. 1857–1939) reinforced this model in his work *On the Catholic Priesthood*, and the priestly role of the minister continues to dominate the Roman Catholic tradition to this day, with other pastoral roles subordinated to this central priestly ministry.

During the medieval period (A.D. 476–1500), the preeminent pastoral role changed to embrace that of the government of souls. Pope Gregory I (A.D. 590–604) contributed to the understanding of this pastoral role in his *Book of Pastoral Rule*. In it, he discussed the qualifications and duties of ministers and listed thirty types of members with rules of admonition for each. While never diminishing the reality that pastoral ministry involves the sincere directing of souls in order that they might come to eternal life, recent scholarship has suggested that, during the medieval period, this governing role often became excessive and corrupted. Frazier (1973), writing about this period of church history in *Should Preachers Play God*, comments:

Preachers told kings when they could go to war and which wars were holy. Preachers told scholars what they might study and what might not be examined. Preachers told lenders what was reasonable interest on a loan and what was exorbitant. Preachers told powerful men whom they might marry and if they might get a divorce (Frazier, 1973, p. 13).

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century brought significant change to the understanding of the pastoral role. The Magisterial Reformers maintained the emphasis on the role of the magistrate, who compelled individuals in matters of faith but also believed in the central responsibility of the minister to preach and to teach the Scriptures. As a generalization, the Reformation vision of the pastoral role involved preaching, praying, administering the sacraments, presiding over the church, and caring for the needy.

While various reformers did emphasize different aspects of the pastor's role over the others, most gave primacy of preaching—the role of prophet. Niebuhr and Williams (1956) comment that, during this period of church history, pastors often preached seven or more times a week. Niebuhr and Williams (1956) report that Martin Luther's (A.D. 1483–1546) preaching ministry lasted from about A.D. 1509 until three days before his death in February 1546. It was not unusual for him to preach three or four times on Sundays. On Mondays and Tuesdays he would preach in Wittenberg on the catechism and on Bible books every other day. Likewise, in Geneva, Switzerland, John Calvin (A.D. 1509–1564) preached every morning, and in nearby Berne, great crowds came to hear the regular preaching of Ulrich Zwingli (A.D. 1484–1531) (Niebuhr and Williams 1956). These reformers insisted that the preaching of the Bible was central in worship and that the sacraments could not be separated from it. The design of church

buildings began to change and, increasingly, the pulpit became the central point of the sanctuary—a physical recognition of this new role prioritization.

In the New World, the Puritan Richard Baxter (A.D. 1615–1691) helped to further shape the developing pastoral role. Baxter’s writings were mostly in the areas of practical divinity or pastoral theology. His best-known work, *The Reformed Pastor*, was first published in 1656 and has enjoyed perennial popularity, including many reprintings. Baxter’s pastoral role emphasis was the two-fold duty of ministers to watch over their own lives, and to provide personal spiritual care to those under their charge. Contrary to what the preceding may suggest, Baxter did not relegate preaching to a subordinate position. He recognized the importance of the public preaching and prayer, along with the administration of sacraments like baptism and the Lord’s Supper, as important aspects of the minister’s work. However, he strongly encouraged the personal pastoral care aspect of the pastoral role as an additional emphasis to that of preaching. As he wrote in *The Reformed Pastor*,

I know that public preaching of the Gospel is the most excellent means of ministry because we speak to so many at once. Other than that single advantage, it is usually far more effective to preach the Bible’s message privately to a particular sinner. In public we may not use the more homely expressions, and our speeches are so long that we overrun our hearers’ understanding and memory. Thus they are not able to follow us. But in private we can take them at their own pace of understanding and keep their attention by argument, answers and objections as they raise them. I conclude, therefore, that public preaching is not enough. You may study long, but preach to little purpose, unless you also have a [personal] pastoral ministry (1974 ed., p. 114).

Baxter demonstrated the importance of this personal pastoral ministry by making it his primary ministry, allowing it to occupy the largest part of his time. Relying on two assistants, he often ministered in this way with up to sixteen families per week, until he had catechized all eight hundred families in his parish.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, no single pastoral model emerged. Means (1993) suggests that this period was characterized by pastors who attempted to do almost everything. They functioned in the roles of believer-saint, biblical scholar, preacher-teacher, priest, liturgist, evangelist, father-shepherd, and discipler. They preached, taught, led worship, administered sacraments or ordinances, exercised oversight, and gave care to individuals in need. To be sure, certain pastors excelled in certain aspects of their ministry and consequently believed these to be the primary roles.

During the twentieth century, there emerged an increasing emphasis on the pastor as shepherd. Popularizing this role were a handful of widely used practical theology texts, including A. M. Hill *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (1928), Wilson T. Hogue *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (1929), and G. B. Williamson *Overseers of the Flock* (1952). These classics on practical theology emphasized the pastor-shepherd image of the minister. Best exemplifying this trend was Hill. Educated at Oberlin College and Yale University, Hill served as a successful pastor, evangelist, and college teacher and president. His book emphasized the pastor-shepherd aspects of the pastoral role, including pastoral visitation of the sick, bereaved, poor, aged, and needy.

Later in the century, the pastor-shepherd role was further detailed by Eugene L. Stowe, General Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene, in his 1976 text, *The Ministry of Shepherding*. Stowe argued that the most basic and biblical model of ministry is that of

shepherding, and that ministers need to return to this personal pastoral care model of ministry. For Stowe, this is the “fundamental role” of the minister’s position. He writes,

...in recent years there has been a tendency to cloak the man of God in more modern garments. Some have cast him primarily as a counselor. Others have seen him as a coach. Certainly there is an element of truth in these and other designations. But no other name describes his fundamental role and total task quite like the word pastor, which literally means “shepherd.” Nothing else quite embraces the whole scope and spirit of this unique ministry like the term shepherding (p. 10).

Such writing provided a classical model for the pastor-shepherd role.

Even as the pastor-shepherd ministry model took hold in the early to mid-twentieth century, yet another model of pastoral ministry emerged: the pastor as enabler. In this model, the minister enables the laity to move from passivity to significant involvement in the church. This new model was intended to combat the existence of excessive clericalism within the modern church by stressing both the servant role of pastors and pastors’ need to equip laity for ministry.

Hutcheson (1979) describes the enabler model of ministry as one in which the pastor “is a relatively uninvolved technician who understands the process by which things are accomplished and who enables others to achieve goals” (p. 54). He traces this model of ministry to the 1940s, a period in which there existed a significant societal emphasis on interpersonal relationships as well as a widespread suspicion of hierarchical control within organizations. In this period, people—including churchgoers—preferred to make decisions on the basis of mutuality and group consensus, not because of top-down mandates. Hutcheson believes that in this context “authority” became “perhaps the dirtiest word in [the] lexicon” (p.

53). Schaller (1979) adds that the enabler model of ministry often meant the minister was not an initiator and did not take leadership responsibilities (p. 162). He believed that this model of ministry peaked in popularity during the 1960s and has been in slow decline since.

One factor potentially contributing to the decline of the pastor-enabler model was the rise of the Church Growth movement. This movement within evangelical Protestantism developed from the foundational work of Donald McGavran. McGavran, the son of missionaries in India, served as a missionary in India for thirty years. During these years of missionary endeavor, he studied a number of congregations in an attempt to understand why some grew while others plateaued or declined. He published his findings in a 1955 book, *The Bridges of God*. McGavran had little idea that his slim volume would launch a revolution in pastoral ministry.

As a movement, Church Growth proclaimed that the role of the pastor was the primary catalytic factor in church growth—growth, in this context, being primarily defined as numerical increase in terms of membership and attendance. One of McGavran’s successors, C. Peter Wagner, captured this sense of pastoral significance in no uncertain terms: “There may be exceptions, as there are to any church growth principle, but make no mistake about it: it is a rule. If your church is not growing and you wonder why, take a close look at the role of the pastor (1986, p. 47).

The specific pastoral role or task promoted by the Church Growth movement was that of leadership. While the literature does not specify which of the numerous leadership theories was preferable, it seems that the Church Growth movement tended toward theories of leadership that allowed the pastor to function as a commander in chief or CEO. This emphasis on the pastor as leader led to a number of additional adjustments in pastoral role theory. First, and contrary to the prevailing pastoral role theory of the day, the pastor would no longer serve as a “shepherd” that

cares personally for people on an individual basis, but instead would minister as a “rancher” who makes sure that people receive care from someone else. Wagner (1986) illustrated this shift in expectation and terminology by stating that a pastor will have members he cannot pastor (care for) on a personal level because the church will become too large to sustain intimate connections. The solution, according to Wagner, lay in becoming a rancher rather than a shepherd. The sheep should still be shepherded, Wagner argued, but the rancher should not do it; he simply makes sure that others can and will.

Second, the Church Growth movement moved the pastoral role away from enabler to equipper, thereby once again re-aligning pastoral role theory. In this equipper model, the pastor must actively take control and lead the congregation, providing direction and empowering others to own church ministries. In this model, an equipper functions as a leader “who actively sets goals for a congregation according to the will of God, obtains goal ownership from the people, and sees that each church member is properly motivated and equipped to do his or her part in the accomplishing of the goals” (Wagner, 1986).

The third adjustment to pastoral role theory that grew with the Church Growth Movement was the move toward gift-based ministry. In this model, ministers and members of the congregation exercise their ministries in accordance with the specific gifts and abilities they possess. For example, if the pastor lacks the skill(s) for a certain aspect of ministry and repeatedly demonstrates failure in this area, he should not be required or expected to do it. Another person, one with demonstrated gifting in this particular area, should assume the responsibilities. This principle also applies to the laity as they serve in the local congregation.

Despite the significant changes to the role of pastoral inaugurated by the Church Growth movement, new pastoral role theories have continued to emerge in the last two or three decades.

The majority of these new theories stress the pastor's role as leader. This emphasis on leadership in the church flourished, in part, because of contemporary secular society's emphasis on leaders and leadership. To a great extent the church has borrowed, often without appropriate discretion, society's prevalent leadership vocabulary and models (Hybels 2002; Maxwell 1998; Roxburgh and Romanuck 2006; Herrington, Creech, and Taylor, 2003). This is not to say that secular organizational theory and leadership theory cannot be helpful, but that careful selection is necessary if models and theories from the business and political realms are incorporated into the church.

The following review of organizational and leadership theory will be helpful given the widespread adoption into the church of many of these theoretical perspectives.

Organizational Theory

In his preface to the fifth edition of his text, *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems*, Richard Scott (2003) accurately depicts the variety and complexity of organizational theory when he communicates his purpose in writing: to "tame and order a field that, at first exposure, appears chaotic and, indeed, is crowded with competing theories and paradigms" (p. ix). Scott admits that organizations, and the contexts and cultures in which they operate, have experienced change. However, he argues that three more or less distinct perspectives have been developed in the study of organizations—organizations as rational, natural, and open systems. These perspectives are not single, unified models, but represent approaches that contain numerous specific models. Furthermore, the three perspectives "partially conflict, partially overlap, and partially complement one another" (Scott, 2003, p. 31). The following are definitions developed by Scott in order to distinguish one model of organization from another.

1. Rational systems: Organizations are collectives oriented to the pursuit of relatively specific goals and exhibiting relatively highly formalized social structures.
2. Natural systems: Organizations are collectives in which participants are pursuing multiple interests, both disparate and common, but the participants recognize the value of perpetuating the organization as an important resource. The informal structure of relations that develops among participants is more influential in guiding the behavior of participants than is the formal structure.
3. Open systems: No organization exists separately from its environment. Open systems perspectives seek to account for the impact of the environment upon the organization. The organization is seen as a system of interdependent activities—some tightly connected and others loosely coupled. Therefore, organizations are congeries of interdependent flows and activities linking coalitions of participants embedded in wider material-resource and institutional environments.

Regardless of its structure, every organization ought to exhibit an effectiveness in its operation. However, the problem with the term “effectiveness” is that there exists little agreement or shared understanding regarding its proper definition. For many organizations, effectiveness is not just difficult to define; it is also difficult to measure. While it might appear that defining and determining effectiveness is a relatively straightforward issue, experts in organizational analysis know that the pursuit of this apparently simple matter usually leads to complex and controversial issues (Scott, 2003). This is certainly true in the life of a local congregation—not just in terms of the overall goals of the congregation, but also with regard to the role of the pastor.

Scott suggests that the three organizational perspectives—rational, natural, and open—can help account for the variance in the criteria and measures of effectiveness (2003). Those that prefer a rational system model and who, therefore, see organizations as instruments for the attainment of goals, will emphasize the effectiveness criteria that focus on the quality and quantity of outputs. By contrast, people who prefer a natural system model of organizations will see the organization as a collective both capable of achieving goals and, at the same time, interested in maintaining itself as a viable social unit. This perspective will add a set of support goals to the output goals, thus establishing a different effectiveness metric. In the event that the support goals and output goals coincide, the support goals are often given preference. Finally, an open system perspective will view the organization as highly interdependent with the environment in which it operates, and may view effectiveness as the ability of the organization to exploit its environment.

A further complicating factor in organizational effectiveness is the multiplicity and variance of participants and constituents. In other words, the criteria and measures of effectiveness held by owners, administrators, workers, customers, and society in general will seldom match. In the case of the recent trend of (often overseas) outsourcing, the stockholders' desire for profit may be in considerable conflict with the workers' desire to have a job and the community's desire to maintain the physical presence of the factory or plant. The criteria proposed by each group will not only vary, but will vary according to self-interest. Furthermore, the criteria may be stated in ways that make them appear to be universal and objective. As a result, the various constituent groups will likely experience a lack of commonality and convergence, as well as the presence of conflict.

One of the specific difficulties that every organization faces in the pursuit of effectiveness is that of goal setting—deciding what objectives the organization is seeking to attain. Organizational goals, in the view of Scott (2003), are “among the most slippery and treacherous of all those employed by organizational analysts” (p. 292). Problems encountered in goal conceptualization often stem from the fact that organizations use goals in at least five different ways:

1. Cognitive use of goals: Those who prefer a rational systems perspective most likely prefer the cognitive use of goals into practice. In this use, goals are viewed as providing the necessary criteria for choosing between different courses of action.
2. Cathectic use of goals: Favored by the natural systems perspective, this use of goals emphasizes goals’ roles in identifying and motivating participants. This perspective is helpful when goals are vague and general. An example of this from a congregational perspective might be the claim that the church is “preparing or helping families and individuals to be healthy.” While a laudable goal, it does not provide sufficient detail for specific decision-making when alternative courses of action are available.
3. Symbolic use of goals: Whereas the cognitive and cathectic uses of goals emphasize the efforts of the participants of the organization, the symbolic use of goals is often aimed at the organization’s audiences. As such, these goals may impact the organization’s ability to acquire resources.
4. Justification use of goals: Scott quotes some analysts who believe that goals are often used to explain and justify prior action. Used in this way, goals are a means of explaining the acceptability and desirability of past actions.

5. Evaluative use of goals: Goals are also used as a means of evaluating organizations and their participants.

Beyond varying uses of organizational goals, a further complication relates to the fact that different constituencies within (and even without) the organization may have different, even conflicting goals. Organizations must resolve the questions of how, where, and by whom goals are set and accepted.

Scholars have identified three types of constituent-based goal setting, best understood as points on a continuum. At one end is the owner, charismatic leader, or entrepreneur who sets organizational goals in a hierarchical fashion. At the other end, goals are defined by some form of consensus in which all participants share. Between the two (but not necessarily in the middle) is the concept of the “dominant coalition” (Scott, 2003, p. 296). In congregational life, these points on the continuum can be best represented by the pastor-leader on one end and by the assembled congregation on the other end. The “dominant coalition” is less easy to define, and may be the official group leadership of the congregation, such as the church board.

It is certainly true that local congregations exist to attain certain objectives and goals, although those objectives and goals may not be universally agreed upon within a given church community. Disagreement about ultimate goals and objectives often exists in congregations and denominations. Scott (2003) cautions that this can be very destructive. “Apart from any considerations of self-interest,” he writes, “. . . such emotional reactions stem from the half-conscious realization that any challenge to the ultimate objectives calls into question the premises around which the entire enterprise is structured” (p. 52).

While it is difficult for any organization to specify clear, unambiguous goals, churches often experience such difficulties in greater volume. As an organization that is primarily run by

and dependent upon volunteers, and that is centered on the vagaries of belief and faith (which vary greatly from person to person), the local congregation operates in complexity and experiences ambiguity on many key issues: its reason for existence, its goals and objectives, and its metrics for determining and measuring effectiveness, among others. As a result, the role of the pastor charged with leading the congregation is extremely difficult. Such complexities undoubtedly contribute to the often-short life span of local congregations.

Kaufman (1991) argues that, because death comes eventually to the vast preponderance of living things, there must exist inside such organisms some quantity that limits their life span. With regard to organizations (as opposed to other living entities), Kaufman suggests that, though seemingly “naturally” immortal, they do, in fact, cease to exist in significant numbers. This phenomenon—the death of an apparently naturally immortal entity—requires explanation.

One could argue that not *all* organizations die. For example, in Christian theology, the Church constitutes an institution that has lasted two thousand years and will remain, in one form or another, until the end of human history. However, even this perspective does not take into account the reality that no single specific congregation has lasted throughout these two thousand years. Even the great churches to which some of the New Testament letters were written are no longer in existence.

For Kaufman (1991), the solution to “organizational death” lies in an open systems perspective that views any given organization as always interacting with, and interdependent with, its environment. However, Kaufman (1991) notes a conflict between organizational flexibility that allows for accommodation to environmental change, and organizational effectiveness that is maximized through routinization, which often precludes flexibility. Organizational adjustment is change intended to match change in the environment; such change

seeks to keep the organization operating as well as or better than it did before. This is a strategic calculation that requires frequent, strategic measures believed to be appropriate responses to changing conditions in the organization's environment. Such adjustments are not easily made. Organizations must navigate through the treacherous waters of conflicting opinions about numerous factors: the environmental changes and the necessary corresponding organizational changes; the methods and processes utilized to make the decisions concerning the required adjustments; and the implementation and execution of the adjustments, to name a few. These factors are further intensified with the differences in vested interests in the organization and the proposed adjustments. Kaufman (1991) concludes, "While adjusting to the volatile environment is the obvious theoretical means by which organizations can keep themselves alive indefinitely, the practical difficulties of adjusting are not so easily overcome" (p. 47). Thus he concludes that, often, the primary reasons for organizational survival are neither the skill of the organization's leader nor the organization's flexibility. Rather, success lies in the workings of chance—just pure good luck.

Kaufman's open systems perspective emphasizes the importance of the environment in organizational life. Lawrence's and Lorsch's contingency model has a similar emphasis (Scott, 2003). Both perspectives agree that the environment is subject to change—sometimes rapid and substantial and, at other times, slow and relatively small. As Kaufman (1991) notes, "The environment of organizations is extremely volatile" (p. 171). This assessment, however, seems to over-generalize the rate of change within organizations (even if tempered by removing the word "extremely"). That an organization's environment changes is unquestionable. Yet if "volatile" describes change that occurs quickly and/or easily, Kaufman's assessment simply does not hold true for many organizations. For certain organizations, change may be slow and predictable for

certain periods of time. During these periods, organizational adjustment can improve fitness, and thereby prolong life.

Perhaps more than many other organizations, churches struggle to deal with and adapt to change. Many people turn to the church (and their individual religious faith) as a place of abiding stability in a world of unsettling change. By its very nature, the church claims to have principles and beliefs that transcend time; in the past, it has exercised great effort to prevent this unchanging faith from accommodating too easily to modern society. However, this desire to remain “faithful” and provide a safe and stable sanctuary from unsettling change stagnation, irrelevancy, and—eventually—to decline and death. Studies estimate that every day in the United States, eight churches close their doors for the last time.

In staving off stagnation and decline, some congregational leaders often given into the temptation to reorganize—that is, to just move things around. Such an approach does not address the real needs created by external or internal change. Other leaders, studies show, prefer to introduce change into their organizations, “constantly creating new directions, agendas, and priorities that, particularly in leadership-driven organizations, can create a state of continual crisis” (Hickman, 1990, p. 139). Yet “continual crisis” is not a comfortable state for any organization, especially churches.

Leadership Theory

In the same way that organizational theory is “a field that, at first exposure, appears chaotic and, indeed, is crowded with competing theories and paradigms” (Scott, 2003, p. ix), so too leadership theory has become increasingly overloaded with paradigms seemingly at odds with each other. Commenting on the concept of leadership, Rost (1993) states, “It has been the

subject of an extraordinary amount of dogmatically stated nonsense” (p. 179). Rost (1993), writing at the end of the twentieth century, reviews and critiques the literature produced by leadership scholars and practitioners, concluding with a call to “forsake the old paradigm and begin a new life for leadership study and practice” (p. 187). Despite such calls, the theory of the field deserves a significant overview for the purposes of this project.

From the time of its release, James MacGregor Burns’s 1978 book *Leadership* became a seminal text for the field of leadership studies. In it, Burns draws a distinction between “transactional” leadership based on the exchange of valued things between leader and follower, and “transformational” leadership that seeks to engage both leaders and followers to higher levels of motivation and sacrifice for the greater good. Burns further developed his concept of transformational leadership in his 2003 text, *Transforming Leadership*.

For Burns (2003), leadership is not only a field of study, but it is a master discipline that “exploits the findings of political science, history, sociology, philosophy, theology, literature, and psychology” (p. 9). He admits that the expanding field of leadership studies has not reached complete agreement on even the most basic words and terms such as “leadership,” nor has agreement been reached on a unifying theory of leadership. However, it is possible to group leadership theories according to the question or questions the theory intends to answer.

Great Man or trait theories of leadership address the specific question, “What is a leader?” These theories answer the question by specifying or identifying traits, characteristics, abilities, behavioral patterns, or skills that successful leaders possess and/or demonstrate. If a definition is offered by a trait theorist, it normally begins with the phrase, “A leader is ...” and concludes with a list of traits (e.g., “... is a servant, is charismatic, is ethical, takes initiative, shows excellence, is goal-oriented, is inspiring, is good at communicating, has positive self-

regard, is empowering,” etc.). One problem with these theories has been identifying characteristics that differentiate leaders from people with the same traits yet who do not lead.

Management (supervision) theories of leadership address the specific question, “How do leaders get people to do what they want them to do?” These theories are concerned primarily with organizational or group performance. This type of theory (transactional leadership, transformational leadership, democratic leadership, LMX, the Four Is, path-goal, etc.) tends to dominate leadership thought, and discussions of “different” theories are usually limited to this type. The essential problem with these theories is exploitation. For instance, Marx argued that capitalism could only work if workers are paid less than they are worth. If they are paid according to their worth, the owners may not profit. Thus, owners must exploit their workers in order to succeed as leaders.

Management theorists undertake two important missions: (1) to justify the superiority of the leader, and (2) to get people to accept the leader’s role in the economy. This might be done by inspiration, coercion, exchange of valued things, conformance, etc. For Marx and other conflict theorists, these attempts are aimed at getting people to accept their own exploitation.

Relationship theories answer the question, “What is leadership?” by defining leadership as a relationship among people with mutual wants and needs who are striving for mutual goals. Examining this theory in a commercial or business setting sheds light on its limitations. No one goes to work to make someone else rich. While such an arrangement maintains the appearance of mutual goals, the relationship between owner and worker can become one of conflict.

Process theories answer the question, “What is leadership?” by defining leadership as a process of dynamic interaction among people who align themselves to solve specific problems or

to achieve specific objectives. These theories might see the leader in more symbolic terms rather than as someone expected to produce certain outcomes.

Burns (2003) argued that transformational leadership effects changes so comprehensive and systemic that a new culture and new values emerge in place of the old. The first task on the work agenda of this type of leadership analysis is an understanding of human change. In his analysis of human change, Burns considers whether human beings are destined only to react to change or if they can control their future through intended change. If human beings are capable of causality, what is the mysterious “X Factor” that is essential in transformational leadership? Bass (1985) argued that transformational leadership motivates followers to do more than the expected by: (a) raising followers’ levels of consciousness about the importance and value of specified and idealized goals; (b) getting followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team or organization; and (c) moving followers to address higher-level needs.

Congregations and Transformational Leadership

This “transformational” leadership paradigm has, in recent years, become particularly popular in church leadership circles (Hybels 2002, Frazee 1995, Maxwell 1992). For the most part, this interest in transformational leadership among pastors has arisen in response to two alarming trends in American Protestantism: (1) the number of “unchurched” people in the United States, and (2) the number of “plateauing” or “declining” churches in the U.S.

The term unchurched, though used in different ways by different researchers, generally refers to an individual that does not belong to a religious faith community and/or does not attend a religious worship service on a regular basis. In 1990 an estimated 55 percent of Americans

were unchurched, with a prediction of 65 percent by the year 2000 (Malphurs, 1993, p. 13). However, in 2000, Gallup estimated the number to be closer to 43 percent.

At the same time, statistics reveal that 80 to 85 percent of established churches in America are either on a plateau or in decline, in terms of attendance at weekly worship services (Arn, 1973, p. 16). Put another way, the vast majority of U.S. congregations are stagnant or dying. Statistics also show that an average of 50 to 60 congregations in American Protestantism choose to dissolve every week; by contrast, only five to ten are able and willing to redefine their role (Schaller, 1991, p. 111).

These troubling statistics help to explain the dramatic increase of literature in recent years that argues for strong church leadership to ensure the survival of the Church in America. Particularly interesting in this literature is the extent to which it relies upon secular organizational and leadership theory, especially the need for the pastor to be a “transformational” leader who can stimulate organizational transformation in order that the congregation might become effective in its ministry and, thus, survive. “Transformation,” in this context, refers to “substantial and discontinuous change to the shape, structure, and nature of the organization, rather than incremental adjustments and fine-tuning of the current situation” (Hersey, Blanchard, Johnson, 1996, p. 520). Such change is also deep and pervasive rather than shallow and contained, affecting every part of the organization.

One of Wagner’s most significant contributions to the literature of the Church Growth movement was his categorization of seven vital signs of a healthy church. In his schema, the first sign of a healthy church is the present of a strong pastor: a possibility thinker capable of becoming the dynamic leader of the congregation in order to appropriately transform the

congregation and make it effective in ministry. This summary of the required leadership closely matches Burns' (1978) description of transformational leadership.

From a congregational perspective, in a national context of general decline, it will be necessary for the leader(s) of local congregations to become change agents in order to facilitate organizational transformation. According to Schaller, "One of the more highly visible methods of intervention in congregational life is the appearance of the skilled, persuasive, respected, influential, and effective leader who (a) has a vision of a new and different tomorrow, [and] (b) can persuasively communicate that vision to others" (1991, p. 24). He also contends that "revitalization as a movement requires certain types of leaders, who by temperament, are reformers, not revolutionaries, who are patient and able to accept a long-term view of the process of change, who view compromise as a useful tactic in that long-term process, and who are comfortable working within the existing structures of society" (1991, p. 68). Schaller's description of the type of leader required for congregational revitalization fits the model of transformational leadership described by Northouse (2004), in which the leader acts as a strong role model, exerts idealized influence, and provides inspirational motivation. It also fits the situational leadership model proposed by Hersey and Blanchard.

While the literature universally calls for strong leaders to enact change to prevent stagnation and decline, change is seldom, if ever, universally welcomed in congregations. Some churchgoers oppose change simply because they do not see the need for it. Barker points out, "What may be perfectly visible, perfectly obvious, to persons with one paradigm may be quite literally invisible to persons with a different paradigm" (1989, p. 42). Many people are comfortable with the status quo, especially if they perceive their personal needs as being met. Others have the vested interests of position, power, and prestige in a local church, and change

can threaten these positions. Still others resist change because they feel overwhelmed by changes in other areas of their lives; since, in a world of fast-paced change the church is often expected to be a place where people can find the comfort of constancy and familiar traditions, such deviations from the familiar and stable become “most threatening” (Malphurs, 1993 p. 88). In other words, change introduces complexity and uncertainty for church members. The natural tendency is to resist such feelings by opposing the change. Given this reticence toward change, leaders must work within the culture of the congregation to achieve necessary results.

Congregational culture consists of the traditions and values a church has acquired over the years of its existence. The primary motivating factor in the congregational culture is the church’s value system. Schaller (1991) concurs, noting, “The values of any organization [including congregations] control priorities, provide the foundation for formulating goals, and set the tone and direction of the organization” (p. 153).

A significant amount of literature related to change theory is available. For example, Lewin (1947), developed his three-stage theory of change comprised of (1) Unfreeze the present situation; (2) Move to a new level; and, (3) Refreeze at the new level. Kotter (1996) suggested a sequential and interdependent eight-stage change process. This process has been adapted and used, with some success in congregational transformation efforts (Herrington and Bonem, 1998).

A church’s core values govern its life and ministry. They explain why a church does what it does. They represent the church’s priorities and shape its ministry decisions. Malphurs (1993) points out that one of the most important jobs for change agents is to help the church re-envision its values before attempting to alter its programs (p. 84). Frazee (1995) believes that the governing board must adopt several values that are inbred into the life and culture of the church, and must also set the ground rules for change to prevent the church from returning to the same

position as before (p. 49). However, changes of this magnitude do not come easily, especially in an organization committed to what it believes are universal and unchanging issues of faith.

Situational leadership is a theory based on the premise that different organizational situations require different leadership styles. Leaders, therefore, must be flexible enough to adjust and adapt their leadership styles and strategies to the specific situation. The most common example of situational leadership theory was developed in the late 1960s by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, and has since undergone regular refinement and adjustment. The Hersey/Blanchard model is rooted in two basic concepts: the leadership style or behavior of the leader, and the developmental level of the follower(s). The leader is encouraged to change leadership style between directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating, depending on the competence and commitment levels of the followers. The developmental level of the follower changes in relation to competence and commitment. Thus, the leader adjusts the leadership behaviors to match the followers' levels. This, of course, assumes that the leader is capable of both identifying the development level of the follower and also of changing leadership behaviors. The leader must also recognize that a follower of high competence in one role may have low competence in a new role, thus necessitating constant situational adjustments by the leader.

This model can, it seems to me, be applied to congregational life. Admittedly, few congregations would willingly describe themselves as low commitment and low competence. However, pastors and other leaders might consider their congregations to be low in commitment and competence, in light of the very high levels of commitment and competence needed to achieve organizational effectiveness—that is, to identify and accomplish shared objectives. Pastoral leaders are then required to exercise flexible leadership that directs, coaches, supports, and delegates, with the goal of enabling the congregation to move from a low development level

(i.e., low competence and low commitment) to a high development level (i.e., high competence and high commitment). However, the role of the pastor dictated by the application of situational leadership theory to congregational life may deviate considerably from the role expectations held by the congregation for the pastor. In such cases, the pastor may be required to revise his role.

Summary of Pastoral, Organizational, and Leadership Theory

This section of the literature review has examined the role of pastor across Christian history, paying particular attention to the role expectations placed upon pastors by congregations. At different times the pastor has been envisioned as a priest who administers the sacraments; as a preacher/teacher who expounds the scriptures; as a governor of souls and shepherd of the people in his care; as an enabler, equipper, and rancher who oversees the others that serve; as a catalytic, transformational leader charged with bringing about growth. In some instances one role or task seemed to replace its predecessor. However, in recent decades these different roles have become layered, one placed upon another, so that they now co-exist in confusion and compete for prioritization. Many authors have noted this confusion and competition for prioritization (Wiersbe 1983, Stott 1994, Brensinger 1991). Stott, writing in *Ideals in Pastoral Ministry* (1994, p. 67), exemplifies this trend by observing, “One feature of the contemporary church is its uncertainty about the role of its professional ministers. Are pastors primarily social workers, psychiatrists, educators, facilitators, administrators, or what?”

Even the relatively small denomination in which I serve has not escaped this confusion and competition, as evidenced by the words of Brensinger (1991, p. 3):

While the basis for ministry was at one time self-evident, such is often no longer the case. With increased attention given to the social sciences and other disciplines,

ministers frequently face frustration in determining just who they are. Are they public speakers? Counselors? Administrators? Therapists? If so, many feel only marginally competent and others grow weary under the burden of trying to be all things to all people.

Means (1993) believes that despite the vacillation of previous generations with regard to the role of the pastor, they probably had a clearer conception than that which exists today. Despite the vast amount of literature available on the role of the pastor, clergy are still handicapped by widespread confusion and ambiguity about pastoral priorities. The next section of this literature review will illustrate this confusion and ambiguity.

Previous Research Studies

Ministry in America

Ministry in America is the product of the largest research study ever undertaken into the role of a minister in congregations in North America. In 1974, researchers funded by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada polled 1,806 laity and 3,089 clergy in an attempt to find an answer to the seemingly simple question: “What is an ideal minister?” Far from providing a simple answer or answers, the results were extremely complex.

The research methodology included a sequence of six steps that took general descriptions of ministry and reduced them through organization by factors: 1,200 general descriptions of ministry were grouped as 850 items describing specific actions of ministry. These were reduced to 444 items that best describe ministry and reveal patterns. These items were then clustered into 64 dimensions of ministry that represented 11 areas of ministry. Because the data came from national random samples, the researchers believed that the information could be generalized to

seventeen major families of denominations. The resultant report, *Ministry in America*, contained over 570 pages of detailed analysis and explanation, including sections by various authors tasked with interpreting the data for their respective denominations.

Schuller, one of the three writers of *Ministry in America*, concedes that an impressionistic scanning of the literature on pastoral ministry produced during the late 1960s and early 1970s reveals significant changes to earlier concepts and models of ministry. While acknowledging other periods of significant change in the understanding of pastoral ministry, he argued that the earlier changes in ministry models came more from the pressures of the surrounding culture; by contrast, the changes of the 1960s and 1970s developed from the clergy themselves. This “internal questioning of their role,” he suggests, “was sometimes prompted by a fear of ineffectiveness, but was nevertheless a continued search for relevance” (Schuller, Strommen, & Brekke, p. 3). As a result of this period of questioning, Schuller concluded, clergy left ministry for other professions and fewer people sensed (or were willing to follow) ministry as a vocation. Such dire straits in North American ministry made the research into pastoral role expectations all the more significant.

The research identified eleven themes or factors of ministry, including both functions (activities a minister should do) and issues of personhood (qualities a minister should exemplify). Respondents rated seven of these themes/factors as “quite important”; two as “somewhat important”; one as “undesirable”; and one as “detrimental” (Schuller et al., p.25). The following is a summary of these findings.

Table 1

Themes Rated “Quite Important”

Theme Title	Theme Description	Average Rating	Rank
Open, Affirmative Style	A style of ministry that reflects a minister who is positive, open, flexible; who behaves responsibly to persons as well as to tasks	2.18	1
Caring for Persons Under Stress	Psychologically informed counseling skills that are made readily available to people experiencing stress and delivered with minister’s empathetic involvement	1.98	2
Congregational Leadership	An administrative style that implies shared leadership, that builds persons into cooperative community, that is efficient, and that properly utilizes conflict	1.97	3
Theologian in Life and Thought	Broad general knowledge and theological understanding built on careful thought and reflection; and conscious examination of minister’s own life	1.88	4
Ministry from Personal Commitment of Faith	An approach to ministry that reflects a deep personal faith commitment, is centered in strong biblical affirmation, and emphasizes evangelistic and mission goals	1.82	5
Development of Fellowship and Worship	The ability to promote a sense of mutuality in the entire worshiping community, to preach with competence and sensitivity, and to lead worship in aesthetically sensitive ways.	1.79	6
Denominational Awareness and Collegiality	Basic knowledge and prudent appreciation of collegial openness in relation to one’s denominational identification.	1.65	7

Note: These seven themes were rated as “quite important,” that is, they received a rating between 2.49 and 1.50 on a scale from +3.0 to -3.0.

Table 2

Themes Rated “Somewhat Important”

Theme Title	Theme Description	Average Rating	Rank
Ministry to Community and World	An active concern for oppressed people and social issues evidenced by aggressive political leadership, promotion of understanding of issues, and champion of unpopular causes	1.32	8
Priestly-Sacramental Ministry	A ministry reflecting priestly commitments and stressing the sacramental and liturgical aspects of the faith and the celibacy of the priest	0.24	9

Note: These two themes were rated as “somewhat important,” that is, they received a rating between 1.49 and 0.00 on a scale from +3.0 to -3.0.

Table 3

Themes Rated “Undesirable”

Theme Title	Theme Description	Average Rating	Rank
Privatistic, Legalistic Style	A style of ministry that precludes involvement in community programs or politics, reflects a legalistic orientation to ethical issues, and dominates decision-making processes	-1.25	10

Note: This theme was rated as “undesirable,” that is, it received a rating between -1.50 and -0.51 on a scale from +3.0 to -3.0.

Table 4

Themes Rated “Detrimental”

Theme Title	Theme Description	Average Rating	Rank
Disqualifying Personal and Behavioral Characteristics	A self-serving ministry characterized by undisciplined living, irresponsibility, professional immaturity, and pursuit of personal advantage.	-1.80	11

Note: This theme was rated as “detrimental,” that is, it received a rating between -2.50 and -1.51 on a scale from +3.0 to -3.0.

In addition to the identification of ministry themes, *Ministry in America* also identified a number of items relevant for the purposes of this project. These are:

- models of ministry—the observation that nuance and prioritization of tasks and themes lead to distinct ministry models;
- clergy-laity contrasts—the observation that there were significant differences in role understanding and preference between the clergy and the laity; and
- commonalities in ministry—the observation that there existed significant agreement on the clergy role expectations across denominational boundaries.

Models of ministry. Strommen, one of the three authors of *Ministry in America*, noted that “denominations as well as individuals differ in their concepts of what constitutes an effective ministry” (Schuller et al., p. 54). The report suggested that these different concepts of effective ministry are to be found in the nuances of the pastoral role as expressed through the relative emphasis and prioritization given to various distinct aspects of the role, rather than in an outright rejection of certain elements of the role expectations. To illustrate, Strommen commented that some denominations (and individuals) believe that “the primary emphasis of ministry should be on the encouragement of spiritual sensitivity—commitment, forgiveness, freedom, and

renewal—while others believe that the essence of ministry lies in a stress on liturgical and sacramental elements; still others maintain that the chief concern of ministry should be in the field of social action” (Schuller et al., p. 54).

Using various statistical models, researchers determined which differences of emphasis and prioritization were most significant, and, as a result, developed four discernible models of ministry functioning in the minds of people and shaping their understanding of ministry. As the report noted, “Each model or concept influences the priorities that people give to a range of generally acceptable functions and qualities of ministry” (Ministry in America, p. 54).

Model 1: spiritual emphasis. This model of ministry places particular stress on the importance of ministry arising from a person’s personal commitment of faith, exemplary living by the pastor, and an evangelistic concern.

Model 2: sacramental-liturgical emphasis. This model relates to how people viewed the priestly-sacramental aspects of ministry. It included viewing the congregation as a Eucharistic community that emphasizes ordination and the minister administering the sacraments.

Model 3: social action emphasis. This model of ministry was “discernible, but far less obvious” (Ministry In America, p. 66) than the first two models. In this model, a special concern is placed on ministry to the community and to the world that includes promoting interest in community issues and causes and supporting unpopular causes. Clergy that favored this approach to ministry had a strong negative reaction to items such as “Precedence of Evangelistic Goals” and to a “Law Orientation to Ethical Issues” (Ministry in America, p. 68).

Model 4: combined emphasis. The fourth and least distinctive model of ministry is a combined emphasis on the first three models. Some people viewed this model as reflecting a

balanced approach to ministry wherein the particular emphases of the other models are all taken seriously, and one emphasis does not eclipse another.

Clergy-laity contrasts. Strommen (1980, Schuller et al., p. 70) also points out that the research found considerable difference in the ministry perspectives and expectations between the clergy and the laity. While some agreement did exist, one-third (twenty-one) of the sixty-four core cluster profiles indicated significant disagreement. Of these twenty-one, nine related to a desire for a “Ministry to Community and the World” (meaning that the pastor would give considerable time and effort to ministry outside of the local congregation); five related to the need to be a “Theologian in Life and Thought”; and the remaining seven related to a variety of areas.

The researchers concluded that “no area of ministry draws as sharp a disagreement between clergy and laity as the importance of ‘Ministry to Community and World’” (Ministry in America, p. 74). In general, the laity did not want the pastor ministering outside of the local congregation to the community and even further afield; when asked, most indicated that such ministry would be “OK—if there’s time.” Clergy, on the other hand, gave much higher value to these tasks.

Commonalities in ministry. While the *Ministry in America* study indicated different models of ministry and differences in the perceptions of clergy and laity, the research also found significant commonalities among clergy and laity regardless of denominational affiliation. Such agreement most often occurred in the areas of “Open, Affirming Style,” “Caring for Persons Under Stress,” and “Congregational Leadership” (Schuller et al, 1980, p. 79).

General conclusions from *Ministry in America*. Writing in *Theology Today*, Mulder (1981) draws three conclusions from the *Ministry in America* research. First, he notes that “the

personal characteristics of ministers are the most valuable” (Mulder, 1981, p. 229). Ministers, the study shows, are expected to be caring individuals who respond to others with openness and warmth; they must show appropriate confidence and yet also humility.

Second, Mulder observes that, “despite the forces that create social homogeneity or ecumenism in American Christianity, there are deep and continuing differences in the conception of ministry among the various American denominations” (Mulder, 1981, p. 229). For example, while some denominations desired ministers for whom ministry emerged from a personal commitment to faith, other groups found this a more controversial characteristic. Mulder (1981) concludes that the “theological traditions are more enduring than they sometimes appear” (p. 229).

Third, Mulder (1981) points out the differences between clergy and laity on specific ministry expectations. In this regard, Mulder generally concluded that both clergy and laity desire a theology that expresses itself in the conduct of ministry.

Importantly, he does point out that the *Ministry in America* report reflects what people *think* ministers should be, not what people *ought to think* ministers should be. Therefore, in Mulder’s view, the church and its seminaries should work to broaden the vision and understanding of ministry.

The authors of the *Ministry in America* study acknowledge that their research encompasses a variety of ministry skills, competencies, and approaches, as well as personal characteristics and faith perspectives. In many congregations, members expect an “all-around” minister, and the study (both in the high ratings of ministry themes and in the generally high degree of agreement among raters) confirms this “all-around” expectation and terminology (Schuller et al. 1980, p. 50). The authors reflect:

This aggregate of themes likely leaves the minister or priest with the sense of a heavy load: “How can I be personally and professionally competent in all these areas?” “Should I even seek to be?” “Don’t these themes reflect unrealistic expectations from which people need to be freed?” But in the midst of the questions, one must also ask, “Do the themes suggest quality and grace, wisdom and love, caring and competence?” To the extent that they do, they must be respected as meaningful goals toward which the maturing minister or priest should grow. (p. 50)

At the same time, the authors also counsel, “Laity and clergy should beware of the abundance of themes reflecting very high expectations. Few ministers or priests can excel in all areas where expectations are high. Laity must not allow unrealistic expectations of ministry to become normative” (Schuller et al., 1980, p. 50). Thus, their conclusions reveal the complexity dogging pastoral role expectations.

“On the Role of the Episcopalian Priest in the Pastoral Ministry”

Three years after the publication of *Ministry in America*, Burdsal, Newton, and Yates (1983) conducted a study on the role of Episcopal priests in pastoral ministry, and published the findings in the *Journal of Pastoral Psychology*. Their study sought to identify empirically and measurably the dimensions that were considered important by lay people in evaluating their priest. In conducting such a study, the researchers admitted at least one problem associated with focusing exclusively on lay expectations of the priest: introducing a market economy mentality, as though asking, “What kind of minister do people wish to buy these days?” rather than, “What ministry qualities should all priests demonstrate?” However, they also acknowledged the fact that the needs and expectations of the laity do define a significant aspect of the role.

The research utilized an 83-item questionnaire developed from existing instruments and from an interview survey carried out on laity from a national selection of Episcopal parishes. Two hundred and twenty-one parishes responded with complete data. A factor analysis performed on the data yielded eight useable factors: (a) Pastoral Sensitivity; (b) Administrative Skills; (c) Scholarship; (d) Personal Integrity; (e) Innovation; (f) Personal Spirituality; (g) Meaningfulness of Services; and (h) Laity Involvement.

The research revealed the many and varied role expectations held by church members. The laity had a very demanding image of what they expected from their parish priest. Their expectations included both role functions and demanding personality characteristics. The majority view emphasized a serving style of ministry wherein the priest meets the needs of the existing members.

“What do lay persons want in pastors?”

Almost three decades after the *Ministry in America* study, Lummis (2003), a sociologist of religion at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary, conducted very similar research in an attempt to answer the question, “What do lay people want in pastors?” The research, conducted between the fall of 1999 and the fall of 2001, involved interviewing lay leaders of Protestant congregations, especially those who had chaired pastoral search committees or had served on pastor-parish relations committees. Lummis also interviewed denominational officials responsible for assisting congregations in securing pastoral leadership and asked about their expectations for pastors in the congregations they lead or assisted. The results of the study were presented in 2003’s *Pulpit & Pew*, a major research initiative on the subject of pastoral leadership based at Duke Divinity School and funded by the Lilly Endowment.

In her study, Lummis examined the criteria churches use in selecting their pastor(s) in an attempt to uncover the clergy characteristics and competencies most desired by congregants. Her research concentrated on congregations capable of providing a full-time salary package; this, generally, meant congregations with an active membership of 200 people or more. As a result, Lummis developed a list of nine criteria that congregations believed to be important in their pastoral search. As with the *Ministry in America* research and the Burdsal, Newton, and Yates study, Lummis discovered that lay people have expectations for both what a pastor does (functions or competencies) and who a pastor is (character, characteristics, etc.). The following table presents the nine criteria important for choosing a pastor.

Table 5

Lummis' Findings from What Do Lay People Want in Pastors?

	Title	Summary
1	Demonstrated competence and religious authenticity	Search committees seek pastors with the ability to do the work required and who evidence a genuine religious life that brings together both “head” and “heart.”
2	Good preacher and leader of worship	Regional leaders and lay leaders differ regarding what constitutes good preaching. Lay leaders generally care less than judicatory officials whether the sermon reflects careful scholarship and organization and are concerned instead that it relates to their own life and engages them personally.
3	Strong spiritual leader	Lay leaders want a pastor with a deep commitment to religious beliefs and the ability to inspire spirituality in others. But many judicatory executives regard this as problematic because of the difficulty in determining who will be a good spiritual leader for a particular congregation.
4	Commitment to parish ministry and ability to maintain boundaries	Lay members and search committees generally expect their pastor to devote him- or herself primarily to ministry and to take minimal times for other pursuits. This

		<p>criterion, Lummis suggests, is a key place where lay visions of ideal ministry run counter to current thinking among those who counsel clergy about the importance of maintaining boundaries and the need to find time for other interests.</p>
5	<p>Available, approachable, and warm pastor with good “people skills”</p>	<p>Regional leaders across denominations cited the pastor’s ability to show church members that he or she likes and will care for them, as an essential quality for search committees. This quality, however, can be situation-specific to the culture of a particular church or region.</p>
6	<p>Gender, race, marriage, and sexual orientation of clergy</p>	<p>Male leadership is a criterion for most search committees, even in denominations that have ordained women for the past fifty years or more. Typically, search committees want pastors who are married men with children, under age 40, in good health, with more than a decade of experience in ministry. Such criteria are often not expressed to regional leaders, particularly in liberal mainline Protestant denominations, where lay search committees know it is unacceptable to refuse a candidate because of gender, race, or ethnicity.</p>
7	<p>Age, experience and job tenure of the pastor</p>	<p>The laity often wants a young married pastor as a way to draw in young families, but also a pastor with experience. The dramatic increase in older, second-career seminarians, however, has changed the relationship between age and experience. Rather than having twenty years of experience, many middle-aged pastors today have just received their M.Div.</p>
8	<p>Consensus builder, lay ministry coach, and responsive leader</p>	<p>Lay leaders want pastors who are responsive to their concerns and who can initiate revitalization in the church, while also soliciting the opinions of members and engaging them in operationalizing ideas.</p>
9	<p>Entrepreneurial evangelists, innovators, and transformational reflexive leaders</p>	<p>Many lay leaders and search committees say they want a pastor who will help to grow the church, but do not want to undertake or think about the necessary changes that will be required—a clear disconnect between words and desires.</p>

Lummis acknowledged that getting the best pastor for a particular congregation is not a straightforward process. It is complicated by the issue of whose opinion really matters—is it the search committee, the judicatory leader, the members of the congregation, the community in which the congregation is located, or perhaps even the pastor him- or herself? The research found that, even among search committee members, there seldom, if ever, exists a singular opinion on pastor role expectations. Rather, there was a varied, often wide-ranging, and sometimes conflicting mix of opinions. In choosing a new pastor, search committees differ in the abilities and characteristics to which they give priority, and these expectations were based on their past experiences with clergy, as well as a host of other factors and influences.

Lummis (2003) concluded by stating that the research described the ideal pastor for many congregations in this way:

He or she would have the ability to envision theologically faithful patterns for their congregation's future and the entrepreneurial talents necessary to propose effective methods of realizing these patterns. In addition, such pastors would possess the charisma and people skills to mobilize congregational support for change, giving members' voice in refining the vision and putting the plan into operation.

Lay and regional leaders also want pastors who can preach wonderful sermons, conduct inspiring worship services, competently teach, care, counsel, and console (p. 24).

Once again, as in the previous studies, Lummis' research revealed that pastoral role expectations are multiple and complex.

Summary

Such confusion, overload, and conflict arise not only as a result of opposing priorities among congregants, but also as a result of differing expectations on the part of pastoral supervisors, denominational officials, and even the pastor him- or herself.

These studies, however, provide no qualitative insight into the experience of pastors with regard to congregant role expectations. My project seeks to fill that void within the literature.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I reviewed a number of studies that examined the expectations of others for pastors and members of the clergy. In none of these studies did researchers take a qualitative approach—that is, they did not investigate the actual experience of the pastor in navigating the expectations that others had for him. The purpose of this present study is to explore the actual experience of Brethren in Christ pastors concerning the role expectations of their congregants. Several research questions guide the present inquiry.

1. What are Brethren in Christ pastors' perceptions of their congregants' role expectations?
2. How do Brethren in Christ pastors experience congregants' role expectations in terms of consequences?
3. What, if anything, have Brethren in Christ pastors done in response to their experience of congregants' role expectations?

In assessing pastors' experiences of congregant role expectations, this study seeks to address a troubling recent development in North American pastoral ministry: the ever-increasing number of pastors leaving vocational ministry. Multiple studies (Hoge and Wenger 2005, Davey 1995) have estimated that between 1,500 and 4,000 pastors leave ministry every month. Some of these former ministers pointed to congregational turmoil or situational conflict as the impetus for their departure; others blamed their congregations for overwhelming them with unrealistic expectations, negative criticism, and/or misplaced anger. Still others reported being fired from

their post because their congregation believed the “perfect pastor” was “out there,” waiting to be found.

By assessing through qualitative methods the experiences of pastors in navigating congregants’ pastoral role expectations, this study aims to provide struggling pastors with examples of how—and how not—to respond to role confusion, overload, and conflict. Because pastoral role confusion, overload, and conflict often result in significant stress, fatigue, and burnout, this study has the potential to make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of pastors, their families, and their congregations.

Specifically, this study seeks to serve leaders—both denominational officials and congregational pastors—in my own church community, the Brethren in Christ. Like those working in all denominations, Brethren in Christ leaders need to understand how pastors experience the role expectations of their congregants.

This study is the first of its kind in the Brethren in Christ denomination, although it contributes to an already extant body of literature on ministry in the Brethren in Christ context. Though focused on only seven pastors, the study nevertheless promises to yield information of significant value to all Brethren in Christ ministers. In much the same way, though focused on a specific denominational community, my research could be useful for other professions and for the theoretical body of knowledge in general.

Intended Audience for the Report

The audience for this report is the Leadership Council of the Brethren in Christ Church. This Council includes bishops and other General Church leaders, and is responsible for the credentialing and oversight of pastors within the denomination. Additionally, while not the

intended audience, all Brethren in Christ pastors (and likely pastors in other denominations) may benefit from its insights as they seek to minister amid myriad congregant role expectations.

Researcher Positionality

I have been serving in pastoral ministry for 30 years. Throughout my career, I have pastored five different congregations in four different denominations in five different countries. For the last thirteen years, I have served as a pastor in the Brethren in Christ denomination.

My personal experience leads me to believe that pastors are often confused about their role, and perhaps even overwhelmed by it. This has often been my own experience, and I suspect I am not alone.

In view of my position and expectation, I endeavored while conducting this study not to allow my personal biases to influence the conclusions in any way. To avoid the introduction of such bias, I performed member checks with each of the pastors I interviewed.

Research Methodology and Strategy

This research utilized both document analysis and also qualitative research that focuses on the experiences of pastors. The qualitative methods allowed pastors to express their experiences of role expectations. Qualitative research describes and explores experience in great detail and in “real world” settings (Patton 2002). It can also provide rich insight into human behavior (Guba and Lincoln 1994) and, in the specific case of phenomenological research, attempts to understand the meanings people bring to the phenomena under study by emphasizing the individual’s subjective experience (Tesch 1990, Mertens 1998). Qualitative research does not

assume the existence of a single, objective reality; rather, it emphasizes the ways in which actors construct realities based upon their personal experiences (Krauss 2005).

Research Participants

This study employs a case study methodology that focuses on seven cases. The cases represent a purposeful sample taken from all full-time Brethren in Christ pastors in the state of Pennsylvania that serve in a solo-pastor congregational setting and have been appointed to their position within the last three years.

Purposeful sampling is the deliberate selection of a particular setting, individual, or activity for study based on the assumption that it, or they, can provide important information not obtainable from other sources (Patton 2002; Maxwell, 1998). Purposeful sampling benefits this study in that it provides information-rich cases suitable for an in-depth study.

In obtaining my purposeful sample, I used readily available denominational records to produce a complete listing of all pastors who met the criteria. I selected the twelve cases and contacted the pastor to invite him to participate in the study. I also provided assurance to each pastor that his comments would remain completely confidential.

Data Collection and Analysis

The research employed semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions in order to gather perceptual information regarding each pastor's experience of the expectations of his role in the congregation. The questions explored the individual's experience of his congregants' pastoral role expectations and how the individual had been impacted by that experience. These

interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed. Participants were made aware of the recording and were asked to sign an informed consent form.

The interview guide was developed from the currently available denominational literature on the role and duties of a pastor. I used a panel of pastors not included in the sample to assist in the production of this interview guide; this panel also served as a peer debriefing group.

Data analysis was done by means of a category system. Specifically, I developed category descriptors and codes, and identified themes and patterns in order to construct a framework suitable for communicating my analysis of the data. I also maintained an audit trail of key analytic processes and decisions.

Data and Analysis Quality

As already indicated, I brought certain biases to this study. I am a pastor who has experienced role confusion, conflict, and overload. I assume that other pastors have experienced the same. Given my experiences and assumptions, I guarded against the introduction of bias in the course of my research. I was committed to ensuring that my data collection and analysis was credible and did, in fact, reflect the experiences and feelings of the participants, rather than my own preconceptions. Specifically, I ensured this quality by using careful methodology, including prolonged engagement in the field, and by utilizing member checks, whereby I summarized interview proceedings and asked participants to verify whether or not my notes accurately reflected the participant's position. I also provided to each participant both a transcript of the interview and my initial analysis of that interview. In so doing, I intended to verify with each participant that the analysis accurately represented his experience and his intended description of

that experience. These member checks established the accuracy of the interview transcriptions (taken from digital recordings) as well as the analysis that I developed from them.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the due address of ethical considerations, I took the following steps. Upon the approval of my dissertation proposal, I submitted the document to Indiana University of Pennsylvania's (IUP) Institutional Review Board for its approval of the study. Next, I informed each potential participant in my study of my position as a doctoral student at IUP and explained the nature of my research, including details about data collection, analysis, and use. I then asked each potential participant if he would like to volunteer to be a part of the research. I assured him that his participation would remain confidential, and that no information that may identify him would be shared with persons in his congregations or in positions of authority in the denomination. I also ensured that there existed no conflict of interest between my potential participants and me.

Subsequent to the participants' agreement but prior to data collection, I asked each participant to sign an informed consent form; they also received a copy of the raw data (following transcription) as well as a copy of the findings, so that they could review both documents for accuracy and credibility.

Delimitations

I limited my study to full-time Brethren in Christ pastors in the state of Pennsylvania who have been appointed to a solo-pastor position within three years of the research.

The restriction to full-time Brethren in Christ pastors reflected my view that full-time pastors are more likely to experience the full range of congregant expectation. While the Brethren in Christ have many part-time pastors who also may experience role confusion, overload, and conflict, I suspect that congregant role expectations will have a greater impact upon those pastors employed full-time by the church.

The restriction to the state of Pennsylvania made possible a study focused in the geographical area where the Brethren in Christ started and where the denomination currently has the most congregations. This restriction provided greater access to the participants for prolonged engagement in the data gathering and member checks.

The restriction to solo-pastor congregations reflected a dominant assumption of the scholarly literature: that in these settings, one pastor carries the diverse expectations of each individual congregant. By operating on this dominant assumption, I do not mean to suggest that multiple-staff congregations experience no issues with regard to congregants' pastoral role expectations; rather, my focus indicates that their context is sufficiently different so as to remove them from my study. Furthermore, because the vast majority of Brethren in Christ congregations in North America are solo-pastor congregations, a research project that focuses on this type of congregation will be of maximum benefit to the denomination.

The restriction to those who started their current pastoral ministry assignment within three years of the research allowed me to focus on current cases wherein the participants have recently experienced or continue to experience varied congregant role expectations. This restriction rests on my assumption that, after three or more years in the same congregation, a solo pastor is more likely to have worked through the issue of role expectation. Furthermore, the brief

time frame enabled participants to recall, with considerable clarity, their experiences, resulting in a higher-quality data set.

Limitations

This study used rigorous methodology to ensure its credibility. Although qualitative research has been shown to generalize poorly (Patton, 2002; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Neuman, 1997), I believe this study has potential applicability to those beyond the target audience. In qualitative research, such transferability is determined by the degree of similarity between the study and other contexts (Mertens 1998). By using rigorous methods, including thick description and multiple cases, I strengthened both the external validity and the likely transferability of the study.

In the course of research, I also demonstrated this study's dependability and confirmability by use of both a dependability audit trail and confirmability audit trail.

The dependability audit trail will attest to the quality and appropriateness of the inquiry process. This will be especially necessary if any part of the study changes in order to respond to emerging patterns in the data. Mertens (1998) comments that this change of focus "is acceptable and to be expected in qualitative research, but it should be documented" (p. 184).

Confirmability, in qualitative research, is evidence that the influences of the researcher's judgment and biases are minimized and that the data and the analysis and interpretation are actual as opposed to figments of the researcher's imagination (Mertens 1998). This will be demonstrated by a confirmability audit in which my field notes, interview transcripts, and data categorization and analysis will be submitted to a peer review group to be certain that my conclusions are supported by the data.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this multicase study was to explore with a sample of pastors their experience of congregants' pastoral role expectations. Such a study promises to provide pastors, congregants, and denominational leaders alike with a more informed perspective for the placing and supporting of pastors in ministry, especially in the early years of solo-pastor appointments.

The research questions for this study were: What are the Brethren in Christ pastors' perceptions of congregants' role expectations? How do Brethren in Christ pastors experience congregants' role expectations in terms of consequences? What, if anything, have Brethren in Christ pastors done in response to their experience of their congregants' role expectations?

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from my fieldwork. It begins with a document analysis of materials produced by six of the seven bishops of the Brethren in Christ Church, in which these leaders sketch out their pastoral role expectations. Then, it uses this context as a way to frame the qualitative material obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews with a purposeful sample of seven Brethren in Christ pastors. In these interviews, pastors had the opportunity both to share their experiences of congregants' pastoral role expectations and to reflect on those experiences.

This chapter is only a presentation of the findings, and as such is rendered as objectively as possible and without speculation. The following chapter (Chapter 5) provides an analysis and interpretation of the findings. Chapter 6 presents conclusions and recommendations.

Document Analysis

In 2007, six of the seven bishops of the Brethren in Christ Church in North America met to discuss their role expectations for the pastors they appoint to leadership positions in Brethren in Christ congregations. (The bishop absent from these discussions leads the Southeast Regional Conference, one of eight administrative districts in the North American church and the district comprised mainly of Spanish-language congregations.) Out of this discussion came a document on bishops' pastoral role expectations, which was presented to the denomination's Leadership Council? I analyzed this document in an attempt to gather data by document analysis that would provide a broader context for my qualitative research with pastors.

This analysis was important because it provided key data on bishops' conception of the pastoral role. Bishops play a crucial role in administering and supervising pastors in the local congregational context. They help congregations identify key aspects of needed and desired pastoral leadership, and they lead the pastoral search process. They appoint pastors and support them in their ministry; they conduct mid-term and end-of-term performance evaluations and/or reviews; and they determine when a pastoral reassignment should occur. Thus, an understanding of their conception of the ideal pastoral role will provide a useful context for examining pastors' experiences of their congregants' pastoral role expectations.

In their discussion, the bishops identified the various primary categories of congregants in every congregation. Bishops then ranked each of these categories according to their perception of the category's impact on pastoral activity. The categories of congregant identified by the bishops included:

- Gender (male or female)
- Marital status (single, married without children, married with children)

- Education level (high school diploma, college degree, graduate degree)
- Employment level (blue collar, professional, etc.)
- Income level (wealthy, two-income family)
- Faith-journey status (Christian or non-Christian, new Christian, “seeker,” theological orientation)
- Congregational history and involvement (long-timer, tenure in congregation, level of financial support for the church, level of involvement in the church, Church Board member or other church officer/committee member, attendee, stakeholder status)

The bishops also acknowledged the presence of another group with a stake in the pastor’s work: themselves and other denominational leaders.

In their discussion, the bishops identified five congregant categories that, from their perspective, exerted the greatest influence with regard to the pastor:

1. The formal leadership of the congregation, especially the Church Board
2. The informal leadership of the congregation
3. Large donors to the congregation
4. Those involved in the ministries of the congregation
5. The denominational leaders and/or the bishop

In assessing the bishops’ work, I found it interesting that these leaders identified themselves as the least influential among the top five influencers of pastoral activity. The consensus of the group appears to me to be one of concentric circles that begins with the formal leadership of the church and radiates outwards to the denominational level. This is especially

interesting in the Brethren in Christ where it is actually the Bishops who appoint pastors to each congregation.

Beyond identifying the key influencers of pastoral activity, the bishops also discussed their perceptions of congregants' common expectations for pastors. They identified eleven expected tasks of ministry:

- Preaching
- Pastoral or congregational care
- Administration / Communication
- Leadership
- Fiscal management
- Outreach
- Discipleship
- Church growth
- Maintaining church unity
- Counseling
- Modeling spiritual life

The document indicates that the bishops could not come to complete agreement on the reasonableness or unreasonableness of these eleven expectations. However, the document does indicate general agreement about the tasks of preaching, congregational care, leadership, church growth, and modeling spiritual life as reasonable expectations. When asked to rank these “agreeable” expectations in order of importance, the bishops derived the following list:

- Preaching
- Congregational care

- Leadership
- Outreach/growth
- Modeling spiritual life

For some of these expected tasks, the bishops added descriptive words. For example, with regard to preaching, they included descriptors like “inspiring,” “good,” “interesting,” and “relevant.” For congregational care, they included “compassionate” and “loving,” while for leadership they included “effective.”

As part of their discussion, the bishops also produced a rank ordering of the key roles and tasks generally expected from pastors. The ordering represents the bishops’ perceptions of the importance or significance of each of these roles/tasks. Table 6 on page 89 presents the results of this ordering. The table also indicates ranking using a weighted score in which a value of 5 was assigned for a first place ranking, 4 for a second place ranking, 3 for a third place, etc. The total values using this weighting are shown in bold.

Interestingly, the table indicates that the bishops could not reach unanimous agreement and that not every bishop ranked each item. Indeed, the rankings reveal considerable difference of opinion among the bishops concerning the key activities of the pastor. Nevertheless, the fact that these seven activities received the rankings they did, indicates a general level of agreement on the *nature* of expected pastoral roles and tasks, even if there does not exist unanimous agreement on the *ranking*.

Table 6

Bishops' Rank Ordering of Expected Pastoral Roles and Tasks

Role or Activity	Weighted value ranking	# of times ranked 1st	# of times ranked 2nd	# of times ranked 3rd	# of times ranked 4th	# of times ranked 5th
Sound biblical preaching/exposition	24	2	2	2		
Personal faith and life	23	2	2	1	1	
Visionary/Missional Leadership	19	1	3		1	
Developing/empowering laity	11			2	2	1
Pastoral Care-giving	10	1			2	1
Administration	2				1	
Resource management and generation	1					1

It is especially interesting to note the rankings given by bishops to the task of “Pastoral Care-Giving.” While one bishop ranked this as the most important task, this single instance can be considered an outlier. Removing this outlier from the calculation reduces the numerical value of this task from 10 to 5 (see Table 6). While this reduction in value does not change the position of this task in the rank ordering, it does significantly increase the gap between it and the next highest rated task (developing and empowering the laity). Two bishops did not rank pastoral care-giving at all in the top five tasks.

The reality of divergent views among bishops is important for a number of reasons. First, as the people selected to fill an official structured role that is responsible for appointing pastors to congregations, it is concerning that no one task garnered more than one-third of the votes as the most important task for pastors. In fact, the six bishops ranked four different tasks as the most important task for pastors. Second, the bishops represent a relatively small group of individuals that might be reasonably assumed would share a similar perspective regarding the pastoral role. If this group has disparate views and expectations, it should not surprise us that congregants do also.

The document also details a discussion among the bishops regarding the sources from which congregants develop their expectations for the role of pastor. The group generally agreed on four categories of role-expectation sources. First, the bishops agreed that congregants derive their pastoral role expectations from their past traditions. Bishops used phrases such as “their past,” “their upbringing,” “their previous church experience or background,” “their early church experience,” and “their experience of previous pastors” to better define this source.

Second, bishops asserted that congregants derive their pastoral role expectations from pastors of other churches, especially those encountered by congregants through electronic media

such as television, video, radio, and the Internet, as well as print media such as books, magazines, journals, and similar publications. Also included in this influence group were people from other congregations (both within and without the Brethren in Christ) with whom congregants might discuss pastoral role expectations.

Third, the bishops identified the Bible or biblical teaching/principles as a source of congregants' pastoral role expectations. In their estimation, congregants are deeply influenced by what they read in the Bible and/or by what they hear preached or taught in regard to biblical pastoral role expectations.

Fourth and finally, the bishops concluded that congregants derive their pastoral role expectations from other members of the congregation.

If such assessments accurately reflect the forces influencing congregants' pastoral role expectations, two general conclusions are appropriate. First, members of congregations rely on extremely subjective personal feelings and experiences to determine how a pastor should perform his role. Second, members of congregants use pastor-to-pastor comparison as an appropriate guiding reference for determining role expectations.

I find it significant that the Bible or biblical teaching/principles was ranked as the third most influential source of expectations, especially for an evangelical group like the Brethren in Christ, who claim a high view of Scripture. Moreover, I find it equally significant that denominational writings—such as the *Manual of Doctrine and Government*, which contains an outline of the role of the pastor in a Brethren in Christ Church—were not mentioned at all as a source of influence.

In addition to the sources of congregants' pastoral role expectations, the bishops also discussed their perceptions of the sources determining pastors' pastoral role expectations. They

agreed that most significant influence was a pastor's sense of his call to ministry as well as his understanding of personal gifts and abilities. As a closely related influence, the bishops identified a pastor's personal experiences with other ministers he admired or considered a mentor/role model. Other influences included formal ministerial training and pastors prominent in popular media.

While the bishops also mentioned the Bible as a source influencing pastors' pastoral role expectations, they concluded that it did not serve as the primary source of influence. Rather, as the above-mentioned list indicates, the bishops saw pastors' role expectations as influenced by many different sources. They concluded that, while pastors try to ensure that their personal expectations for ministry roles reflect what they believe the Bible teaches, pastors do not look to the Bible as their only source of role expectation influence.

Finally, the bishops agreed that the expectations of congregants—especially congregants in formal leadership roles, or those considered significant stakeholders in the congregation—also influence pastors' sense of role.

The document concludes with a report of the bishops' discussion of the impact of pastoral role confusion. With regard to congregants, the bishops agreed that pastoral role confusion could result in tension, conflict, disappointment, and/or disillusionment, as a congregant might feel that her or his needs (or the needs of others in the congregation) are not being met. Such individual congregant responses could lead to larger problems within the congregation as a whole: distrust toward the pastor, withholding the pastor's permission to lead, a shortening of pastoral tenure, and reduced energy and effectiveness in the corporate witness and ministry of the congregation. Moreover, with regard specifically to the pastor, such role confusion could contribute to personal

stress; introspection; fear; guilt; and lack of joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment in ministry—all of which might result in shortened pastoral tenure and shortened pastoral careers.

Participant Interviews

The findings from this document on Brethren in Christ bishops' pastoral role expectations provide a suitable context in which to place the findings from the in-depth interviews conducted with a purposeful sample of seven Brethren in Christ pastors. These interviews provided pastors with the opportunity both to share their experiences of congregants' pastoral role expectations and to reflect on those experiences.

These interviews were conducted with the only seven pastors in the North American Brethren in Christ Church who met all the criteria for inclusion in this study. (Chapter 3 outlines the criteria for study participants.) Since all seven consented to the proposed interview, this sample represents the entire target population.

In terms of design and implementation, each interview was conducted at length using a semi-structured approach organized around the three primary research questions identified for this study.

The section below organizes the findings according to each research question, rather than chronologically according to interview. It also places the interview findings in the context of the document analysis findings.

Research Question 1: What Are Brethren in Christ Pastors' Perceptions of Congregants' Role Expectations?

The interviews explored two primary areas of the perceptions of pastors regarding congregants' pastoral role expectations. First, they explored participants' perceived communication of role expectations during the interview/appointment process for their current position. Second, the interviews considered participants' perceptions and/or experiences of congregants' pastoral role expectations upon the participant's arrival at and early service to their current congregation.

Perceptions of expectations prior to arriving at the church. The data revealed divergent role expectation perceptions and experiences for the participants in the study. Some spoke favorably of the candidating process, expressing positive feelings about the information they received about the congregant expectations they would face in their role as pastor. Others, however, spoke unfavorably about the helpfulness of the candidating process in terms of providing reasonable information on congregants' pastoral role expectations.

Two of the seven participants described at length extensive conversation regarding the pastoral role expectations of their potential new congregation. One of these participants indicated that his extensive role expectation conversation grew out of the fact that the congregation had been served by an interim pastor during their pastoral vacancy. This interim pastor had undertaken an extensive process of congregational conversation regarding both the mission/purpose of the congregation and the type of pastor needed to lead the congregation forward. The participant commented:

Prior to the interview process there was an interim pastor here, and he had gone through a process with the bishop in regards to doing a survey on what the church was looking for

in the next pastor. So they had pretty clear expectations or pretty clear desires as to what they were looking for in the incoming pastor. That survey and the results of that survey were actually given to me in the interview process. Then also there were a number of times through phone interviews or personal interviews where those expectations were talked about by the pastoral search committee.

When asked if the congregational survey data accurately represented the views of the search committee, the participant responded:

I think that the survey represented the search committee's perspective fairly well. Now there were things that I believe the search committee found to be more critical moving forward or bigger issues than what may have been pulled out from the survey, or vice versa. For example, in the survey, there would have been a handful of people that said to them visitation is an important thing. The search committee, I don't know if the discussion ever came up, as to intentions in regards to visitation. I don't know that they would say that it wasn't important, but was it significant enough to really get into it and talk through? That didn't happen. I think that the expectations were pretty clear, and I think that one of the things that plays out in the long term is they may have an expectation of, in our case, an expectation that we were going to in the future do something to accommodate the people that were coming to the church in regards to size, just because of our space issues. They knew that there was an expectation there, that I would help lead them in that direction, whatever it might be.

This participant talked at length about the perceptions of pastoral role expectations that he developed as a result of his interview process. The following excerpt—a verbatim response to

the question “If you were to summarize as best you can what were the primary tasks for you to perform in your role as pastor, what would they be?”—illustrates those significant perceptions:

Probably the top three, and these are not necessarily in any specific order, but as I think through those months of talking with the church, I think that probably the primary three that I saw was clear direction for the church, and that kind of involved leadership.

Helping to identify a clear direction as well as communicate and have people believe in the direction of that church. So that whole leadership key was pretty intentional.

Administrative kind of stuff was pretty strongly communicated, that administration was needed. That kind of ties into the leadership one. Then I think the other two that really jumped out at me was they were looking for clear teaching with clear application on Sunday mornings. Teaching was a big part of the expectation. And then the third piece was training, motivating, equipping other leaders within the congregation, to see the strength of the ministry grow because of the strengths of the leaders that are attending here.

For the other participant who recalled extensive conversation about role expectations during candidating process, these conversations developed because of his intentional and deliberate inquiries on the subject. In his interview, this participant recalled that, upon receiving a call from the bishop inviting him to consider interviewing for the vacant pastor position, he asked, “Why me? Why are you asking me to consider this congregation?” According to the participant, the bishop responded with an overview of the congregation’s history and with his assessment of both the congregation’s needs and desires in terms of a new pastor. Recalling the interview process with the search committee, this participant noted:

In the interview process, I asked, “What do you expect or want in your new pastor?” of five people who were on the search committee. We have bishops ... the bishop was there as well. So I asked, “What do you think are the top expectations of the people in this congregation for the next pastor?” They answered that question. It was based on their opinion, based on their sense. Trying to get a sense of roles. What are the main things they think this position should be doing? Who should I be?

When asked if he recalled their response, he replied:

Yeah, I might have it written down. I think the preaching/speaking/communication was one of them. Authenticity, I think, was another one. The character stuff versus the role stuff came to the forefront way more for this group of people and, I think, this church. Then some stuff surrounding values from the leadership standpoint. The previous pastor was talked about as the chief value holder, and that this position and this person really needed to grab onto the values of this church and be able to hold on to those to help move the church in that direction. One of the only roles that I remember being talked about or to-dos was the speaking/communication. Most everything else had to do with characteristics of a person and/or values, from what I remember.

When asked if he was surprised that the search committee identified only one function or task (“speaking/preaching”) for the new pastor, and if he expected them to identify certain roles or tasks that did not come up, he responded:

Yeah. I can’t honestly remember if the preaching/speaking even came out at the beginning. I think, from what I’m remembering, almost everybody’s minds immediately went to the type of person that the pastor should be versus what the pastor should do. So then I questioned some more of that. Nobody thinks the pastor should be doing these

other things? They said, no, really, we don't think people are as concerned about that stuff in this context.

When I asked what he meant by "that stuff," he clarified: "Visitation. Hospital. Keeping up with the pastoral care stuff."

In the course of the interview, this participant was asked whether or not he felt that these expectations would have been shared and discussed in the interview context had he not asked specifically about them. He replied:

No. Especially in that interview, I think they were more trying to get to know us as people and who we were. They definitely had some questions about what would you do with ...? Or how would you go about doing this or that? But for that group of people, I don't think it was their main concern. They were looking more for a fit with who this church is, in terms of its expressed values and mission. Someone could come in, whether they did everything the same way as the last person or not, that would be an expression of the same sort of values. That to me is my overarching memory of what they were concerned about.

Of those participants in the study who spoke unfavorably about the helpfulness of the candidating process in terms of clearly communicating congregants' pastoral role expectations, one participant commented:

I can't even say that there was a process, other than the interview. I got a call from the bishop saying, "Would you be interested in interviewing for this church?" I asked a few basic questions—where is it, size of church, that type of thing. I came for interview. It was typical questions they would ask of a pastor. What are your strengths, leadership abilities, those types of things? The bishop debriefed with me a little bit following that,

saying, “You did really well here, here are some things I want to talk to you about that might help you if you if you get called back for another interview.” That never really happened. I got called for the second interview. But there was really no communication about those things he was talking about, so I wasn’t really clear exactly about what they were, other than being maybe more assertive or more firm in what I was feeling. That was what I got from him at that point.

Then I came for the second interview, which was different in the approach. It was the board and their spouses, so I got the spouses’ perspective from where they sit in the church. You see different expectations from people. Some of it was about prayer—what is your feeling about prayer? What are things you like to speak on? Following that interview, I had a little bit of follow up with the bishop. He said, “I’ll call you.” Then I got the call a few days later saying they would like to invite me to come and be a part of the church. So there really wasn’t a whole lot of preparing for what that looked like.

A second participant, when asked if he had participated in a conversation about the role expectations of his prospective congregation, replied:

It’s funny, there was not, although they [role expectations] were there. Some couples in particular had very high expectations of what that would mean for them. ... The focus of the conversation was totally on the mission and who we’re going to reach or how we’re going to connect with those people, logistics, how/when/where, that kind of thing. So we had a clear plan going forward that way, but there was not some stated standard to them to say this is what I will do or won’t do in terms of pastoral expectations for them. If I could repeat history, I certainly would. I would make that clear.

When asked if he had any sense of how people in his fairly new congregation had developed their pastoral role expectations, this pastor pointed to members' experiences in other congregation as a primary influence. He commented:

The people I'm thinking of in particular, they had a fairly traditional church experience, having been in established Methodist churches, having grown up in mainline church, having even been to the church that we launched from, but even that church, well, it being newer itself and nontraditional in form, in practice, the pastor assumed a very traditional pastoral shepherd/caregiver. That was forming their expectations of what they thought my role in their life would look like.

A third participant also spoke unfavorably about the candidating process and the communication of congregants' pastoral role expectations during that time. As he recalled, "I guess there wasn't really any conversation about that." This participant shared that, in reading books about church leadership, he had identified six major factors crucial to congregational effectiveness: preaching, teaching, worship, children's ministry, welcoming, and assimilation. Yet during his interviews with leaders from the prospective congregation, he did not discuss the congregation's expectations for leadership in these various facets of church life. In sharing his experiences, he lamented the fact that the congregation projected these leadership expectations onto him; moreover, he regretted that his tone and demeanor communicated surprise, disappointment, and a sense of being hurt by these projections. He commented:

I just knew that there were six major things that we needed leadership-wise to get the church off the ground. The preaching and teaching was me. Worship leadership, children's ministry, welcoming and assimilation would be another leadership area, which has kind of fallen on me. Assimilation has kind of fallen on me just because that takes

time, and it's usually better that the pastor goes and visits new people and gives them brownies or pies or just makes them feel welcome than a random member of the church. Also, some of the planned outreach, I could never really get someone to do that. That's kind of fallen on me as well.

Three of the seven participants commented on the fact that, in their interview process, church members referred to the performance of previous pastors—sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly—as an indicator of their pastoral role expectations. One participant stated that his current congregation's expectations for him as pastor were “reactionary” to a prior pastor. As this participant recalled, church members would identify traits, roles, or tasks as either a former pastor's “strength” or “weakness”; they wanted their new pastor to continue in this former pastor's strength areas while improving upon his weakness areas. He concluded, “I think, yes, absolutely, the previous pastor's role here played a big part in expectations for the incoming pastor.”

Another participant shared his perception that the church board sought to determine the qualities desired for their new pastor based upon what they liked or disliked in previous pastors. He commented, “They talked about a prior pastor who did visit. It seemed to me [that] the board was figuring out what they wanted as they compared and contrasted with previous pastors.”

A third participant described how, in the interview process, he discovered that the leaders of the congregation expected his leadership style to differ considerably from that of his predecessor:

So there was an expectation for me that had to do with the style of leadership that I was following, that the style of leadership that was unappreciated by some in my predecessor. Once he got an idea, he wanted to make it happen and the church would have to follow.

As opposed to a more collaborative, “Is this where we should go together?” The sense, among some, was that’s where we’re going, come along. If you don’t get on board, too bad for you. I’m caricaturing that, obviously. That was the sense. I heard that even before I started, certainly a good bit soon after I started. The expectation was, “I hope the new guy has a different leadership style.”

Beyond this specific expectation to be different, “I don't recall that there was any written communication,” he stated. “If there was, it obviously didn’t make much of an impact because I truly don’t remember getting a job description, or anything saying here is what we’re looking for. So all of my sense of what their expectations were would have come through conversations.”

Interestingly, several participants mentioned that the candidating process revealed role expectations for pastors’ wives, as well. These expectations, for at least one participant, came to the surface during a discussion of the church’s previous pastor and his wife. In the following length excerpt, that participant makes a number of (both explicit and oblique) references to his particular congregation’s expectations for the pastor and the pastor’s wife—expectations based on the congregation’s experience with a previous pastors and spouses.

They were asking that they would like to have a team, a husband and a wife, not that my wife would be involved as much as I would be, but that she would be supportive.

Apparently, there’s been a scenario in the past that wasn’t that way. I assured them that from the prior church we were at that my wife was my best critic and support. They also left it be known that they really missed, apparently in prior pastors, a visiting pastor. Ok, I recall that. They were asking me about my preaching, and they had heard two of my tapes. I said I have always shared a lot of scripture in my preaching. They left me know right away that’s something they want. I guess some pastors maybe say a verse then

preach on it. Throughout my message, I'll be sharing verses and passages and what have you. Since that, I've had a lot of comments from the congregants along that line. So it's something they enjoy. One other thing in sharing with the search committee that night, I mentioned to them that I'm a people person. I love people. I love to be with them. That seemed to resonate with them. They didn't want a person who would preach and [run] out the door. Of course, I think that lends itself to my visitation, too.

Perceptions and experiences of role expectations upon arriving in new role. My interviews with the participants not only explored their perceptions of congregants' expectations of the pastor in the interview/candidating process; they also probed pastors' perceptions of congregant role expectations upon arrival in the new congregation. While the participants communicated varied experiences, most (but not all) recalled that the expectations they received during the candidating/interview process matched those experienced during the initial period of service in the church.

One of the participants who spoke favorably about the interview/candidating process, also spoke favorably about his experiences in first serving the congregation:

I think that as a whole, the expectations prior to coming as opposed to once we got here were pretty accurate. I think that they did a fairly good job of representing what was going to be the expectations. When we got here, I think I indicated this a little bit earlier, I think one of the biggest things that I needed to begin to work with was on the relational end of things, in regards to some that had been hurt through the last year and trying to work with healing there as well as some people's personalities within the church and just learning the personalities. Learning how to work with them best. To bring them on board

with the significant change of new leadership within the church, not only a new pastor in leadership. I came to this realization a few months after I was here, they've not only gone through this pastoral change, but they also went through this huge structure change, which I didn't really put that piece together before being here for a few months probably.

Because when I came in, it was new, but I expected it to be new because I was new to their structure. So I didn't necessarily put together the piece that this was new for the 200 people that are worshipping here, too. So they had gone through a lot of pretty intense change, so there are just some personalities that were having a hard time with some of that, that were trying to default back to where it had been, because that's where they had been more comfortable. It was trying to figure out how do I work with those kinds of things. That was kind of where some of the surprises came in, I guess. I think some of them, looking back now that I know more the dynamics, could have been mentioned through that process that this person is going to have a hard time; I could tell you that today, after knowing that person for a year and a half. This is going to be a struggle for them, and it's probably going to be a struggle as long as they're here. Some of that stuff could have been indicated a little bit more clearly, I think, but the expectations on myself.... we did talk about this in our interview process, about how the church handles conflict and those tough situations. it was pretty brief, so as there was this I don't know if you call it conflict necessarily but definitely tough situations that arose from all of the change over the course of a year and a half or so the makeup of the church, the history of the church, and from what I've been told, just the location, where we sit geographically, the idea is you just sweep stuff under the carpet. You ignore it and it just

goes away. It hasn't been a healthy method of handling it up until now. So we've kind of worked with that.

Another participant, when asked how his actual experience of role expectations in serving the congregation compared to his perceptions during the interview process, spent a long time in silence before saying, "It's been nothing but positive. I'm delaying answering just to check myself on that. Just in case I'm not remembering something, or listening to something." He continued:

... the previous pastor and I are quite different in personality, in leadership style, probably preaching style. I'm saying that without any comment on one's better than the other, just different. Whatever my style is, it seemed to really, really fit with what the [church name] wanted or needed or expected in contrast to previous. There were many people that spoke highly and didn't speak highly of my predecessor's preaching, friendship and connection with him. He's got a set of skills that he's got that I don't. Administratively, he's excellent. I can't hold a candle to him. I've tried to. So I've heard some of those kinds of comments that I could feel bad about, but I choose not to. It's been, except for a couple of those administrative comments, very positive.

Yet not all participants reported such positive experiences. One spoke at length about the disconnect between his early perceptions of congregants' expectations, and his subsequent experience while in the ministry context:

One dear brother came to me directly and said, "You're not the same pastor we hired." I tried to help him see that we need to grow and change. If we stay still or stagnant, we're going to be dying. That dear man, I guess I could say, he caused me to do a lot more

praying. It really did get difficult for a while. There was a lot of hurtful things said that should not have been said to any pastor. I guess they forget we have feelings, too.

Another participant also reported a difficult experience in navigating congregants' role expectations. He commented on the variety and divergence of those expectations, saying:

Everybody has a different expectation. If you tried to follow what everybody wanted, you'd go out of your mind, because everybody has a different expectation of how you should do things, the way you should do things, and what I've learned is to take those and say, "Okay, is this what I feel that this job involves?"

This participant also shared the following story of an experience that he felt clearly illustrated the way in which different congregants held different expectations for him in the pastoral role:

Last summer we were preparing to go on vacation, and there was an older couple in our congregation and she'd been experiencing some health problems—nothing serious, but health problems. They're in their nineties, so you can expect that. Somebody in the congregation very close to them approached me, and it was just a few days before we were leaving, and said, "Now if she dies, you're coming back for the funeral, aren't you?" And I said, "No, I'm not." And they were kind of surprised at that. I said, "Listen, I've paid for this, I can't get out of this, and so I don't have the ability to do that." [The congregant] said, "I thought you would just come back for the day." Now we were going to Virginia, 6.5 hours away. I told her that's going to be impossible to do.

But there's that expectation that regardless of what you're doing, you're going to drop that for something that's here. Again that's an individual expectation. I found a lot of those, in all different ways. You're going to be here on Sunday to preach, you're going to be here at the different events. Even that grows to any time the doors are open, we

expect you to be here. And I've even had to say, "No, I'm not going to be here for this."

And some people that offends or hurts, but that's life. I can't possibly be at everything for them. I can't really nail down any kind of overall expectation from the congregation, other than the typical pastor role of you do weddings, you do funerals, you do baby dedications, baptisms, you preach.

Several pastors described being made to feel like "hired help," as if they had been hired to perform certain duties. One participant stated that a congregant "basically said to me, 'You're full time, so you're ours. We have every right to look at you and question and look [at you] under a microscope.'" This participant felt that such an attitude "did, in a sense, take freedom from me to be myself. Until I got to the point where I said to my wife, 'I can't please everybody all the time.' That's what I was trying to do." He further recalled sharing these sentiments with a friend, who in turn asked him, "'Who are you serving? Who is your employer? Is it God, or is it your church or your board?'" This question, the participant reported, gave him a new sense of freedom to "be himself." Interestingly, this pastor also shared that he later experienced significant congregational stress and relational breakdown between him and certain members of the congregation.

Another participant also described feeling like "hired help," although such feelings reflected the general *attitude* of many congregants, rather than a direct statement to that effect. In this participant's experience, nobody in his congregant ever "made a statement along that line—'Well, that's what you're paid to do'—that kind of thing. [But] I have felt that, but not that somebody has come up to me and said that right to my face." He shared a story of one congregational leadership meeting in which he most explicitly felt this sense of being "hired help":

I remember in a board meeting one time bringing up a suggestion of something that I thought I would like to do. It was to get a leadership group together and discuss how we see the church. The person that was chairing the board at that time said, “So should we empower the pastor *to do what he’s supposed to do?*” That’s not what I was looking for, but there was that feel of, “Well, that’s *what you’re supposed to be doing.*” Yes, I’ve felt that, but not that it’s been said directly to me in that way. It’s just innuendo.

Several participants described their congregants’ expectations of the pastoral role as resulting from prior history and experience in other congregations and with other pastors. One stated that his congregants’ “background and their experience of church and of pastors” significantly shaped how they came to view him as pastor. In this regard, he felt that his role was made more challenging by the fact that “the previous pastor was the sort of person who would have been involved in absolutely everything, and would have been in everything, and was a hub of activity in the church.” The participant reflected that, in his opinion, the previous pastor was not good at “setting healthy boundaries and expectations”; as a result, the congregation came to view the pastoral office in a certain way. Moreover, this particular congregation had recently added to its membership roll many people from a non-church background; these relatively new believers “did not have the same expectations,” according to the participant, as those members of many years. This situation further compounded the reality of different, and often conflicting, role expectations for the current pastor.

Another participant provided an alternative perspective on this issue of previous church experience affecting congregants’ pastoral role expectations. He stated, “If you have fond memories or fond experiences of pastors as a kid or teenager, or very negative experiences, they shape your expectations. You either want someone like that if it was positive, or don’t want

someone like that if it was negative. That certainly shapes it. The expectation question is shaped by someone's history.”

Research Question 2: How Do Brethren in Christ Pastors Experience Congregants' Role Expectations in Terms of Consequences?

The study participants not only provided data on pastors' experiences of congregants' pastoral role expectations; they also supplied data regarding consequences experienced by pastors because of their experience.

The data indicated that some of the participants experienced diverse expectations from different stakeholders within the congregation. As noted in Chapter 1, the system of pastoral appointment within the Brethren in Christ Church involves a bishop appointing a pastor to a particular congregation following a discussion and interview of several potential appointees by a search committee comprised of members of the congregation. Usually this search committee includes members of the church board, the lay governing board of the congregation. For this reason, one might expect the church board to communicate clearly to potential pastors the pastoral role expectations of the congregation.

However, the view of the church board does not necessarily reflect the views and expectations of individual members and groups of individual members within the congregation. The reality of multiple constituents, many of whom may not have had a hand in the pastoral search process, can lead a multiplicity of role expectations.

In his interview, one participant described feeling that he met the expectations of the church leadership but not of other groups in the congregation. From his perspective, the presence

of multiple generations within the congregation contributed to the diverse expectations. He reflected:

For me, the biggest thing, and I think that this is coming into an established church that's a multigenerational church—we have a lot of younger families, but we also have a group of 40 or 50 senior citizens. I know that I do not—at least I feel that I do not meet as a whole the needs of the senior citizens nearly to what their expectations would be.

This participant was then asked to describe how he came to know that some congregants felt a lack of met expectations. Did they come and tell him in person? Did a third party directly communicate the group's feelings to the participant? Or did he hear their concerns “through the grapevine”? He responded:

It would be another person that's contacting me; it's the same two or three people. Let me rephrase that: there are two or three people that contact me that say that they've heard from somebody that they would like to be visited more. I've had that from those two or three people a couple times each, so not an overwhelming amount, but enough that it then gets you thinking, “Is the whole seniors group going and complaining?” It gets on your mind, and then you begin to wrestle with it. Am I failing in meeting this need? I think that that's where it becomes a thing that I begin to struggle with and say, “Am I meeting their need?” The seeds have been planted in my mind through these other emails or contacts. It's not that the individuals themselves have indicated to me that I'm not meeting it, but it's these third-person contacts that plant that seed and then my mind just goes from there. How big is this mess?

Another participant described the reality of multiple and contrasting expectations. As he reflected, he communicated a sense of being overwhelmed and frustrated—not as a result of

divergent or competing expectations, but because of the *volume* of expectations. Reasonable as they all may be, he reflected, there were just too many to handle. He described it this way:

Many times I've felt overwhelmed because of those expectations. I understand it, because this is a ministry that they're involved with, their hearts tied into it, so they give it their all, and they expect you to have that same thing without the realization that everyone else here has that same expectation for their role in their ministry, and they want you to do that. So it's been hard to have to tell people no, or to say, "No, I can't possibly be involved in everything," or, "That's not an interest of mine." You don't want to hurt their enthusiasm, you don't want to hurt their feelings, but just as they are uncomfortable getting up in front of a group Sunday morning and being able to talk, for me to have that expectation of them is not fair. So you almost have to explain it to them in that way:

"Listen, I've been here four nights this week, I'm done being here at night. You have to understand I have a family." So it's being able to say no, but to explain why. Sometimes that gets frustrating, because you think, "I shouldn't have to explain that," but they have to get an understanding of it, so that when the next time it rolls around, they'll understand. If you don't give an explanation, they're going to keep asking, and they're just going to get their feelings hurt, or to an extreme: "Well, I'm done doing this ministry, he's not interested in it." So you have to explain to them.

Two participants described how, after changing their method of ministry in their current congregation, some congregants reacted negatively. One of the participants was serving in a long-established congregation; the other, in a newer congregation he had helped to start.

The participant serving in the long-established congregation expressed that, in his first few months at the church, he "met [congregants'] expectations and really felt what they

expected.” He also described being on a “personal journey” in his own life and ministry—a journey that resulted in his changed perspective on the congregation needed to function to fulfill its mission and vision. He recalled:

I think I would have to admit that was a personal journey at that time. When I would look back to my upbringing, most everything I knew was very conservative preaching and teaching. I would not say that I don’t appreciate my heritage; I do. But as the church began to evolve or try to meet our present generation, definitely there’s going to be some changes happening. . . . I think that these people could not see the necessity of changing their approaches or methods as far as their outward attire and appearance and so forth. To me, a new generation is who we need to reach.

The participant leading a newer congregation described a different context. Because of his involvement in the congregation from the its beginning, he explained, congregants did not have expectations based upon a previous pastor in that congregation. However, they did have expectations based on their personal church experiences in other congregations. Furthermore, they also had expectations that reflected the participant’s role in the early phases of forming and launching the congregation. The participant acknowledged that, because of the many changes that occur in the early months or years of a new church, he had changed his pattern for performing his role—a change that became problematic for some people. He also described not feeling aware of this reality at the time of its occurrence:

The people I’m thinking of in particular, they had a fairly traditional church experience, having been in established Methodist churches, having grown up in mainline church, having even been to the church that we launched from, but even that church, well, it being newer itself and nontraditional in form, in practice, the pastor assumed a very

traditional pastoral shepherd/caregiver [role]. That was forming their expectations of what they thought my role in their life would look like. ... I have two halves to me, and they are always in conflict. One is highly relational and I love walking with people and being in their life and encouraging their discipleship, walking with them through milestones and what not in the journey. This other part of me that is very driven and mission focused. What brought us together was the right side, which would be relational—kind of laid back and fun, excited, passionate about the future. That's what drew us together. Once we launched, then I went into this mission mode, which was about getting it done, who we're reaching, connecting with new people. I have a pattern in my life of being good at connecting and being good at connecting people into a group. So if you've read [Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point*, there's that connector—that's me, connecting them to the group. But then what happens is I become a lynchpin in that group. So the group's together around me. When I remove myself from that, if there's not been enough time, that group will fall apart because they've not connected with each other; they've connected with me. The group didn't fall apart, but because they were attracted that way, then once we started, those same skills were now applied to other people, to new people, connecting new people, and then to just directing the mission itself, and probably were not as evident in their life. In a sense, I can't totally blame them, but the whole thing was unspoken. I wasn't even aware at the time that this was what's going on with me.

The way that I chose to spend my time when we started was to connect with, be the lead connector with those who are new, get them connected into the church. So I was meeting with new people, I was making phone calls, I was trying to get them connected,

to find a place for them. The other thing was preparing for Sundays, so sermon prep and the worship gathering preparations. A lot of administration, which I'm not good at. But there was not a strong infrastructure in place to support administratively the role, the tasks that I at least was taking on. Administration, connect with new people, Sunday morning. I really didn't spend a lot of time at that point with existing congregants or pastorally supporting the existing people. I was doing a lot of that with new people.

This pastor also reflected on the consequences of this change and its resultant disapproval, as he witnessed them. Among a core group of people within the church, he described seeing “resentment, stress, and burnout.” From his perspective, these results occurred within the first six months of the new church's start. He further recollected:

Then relationally, there [was] some substantial breakdown with some of the people we started with within 9-14 months, where there was avoidance. There was outright obvious bitterness. There was a weird interpersonal conflict that blindsided me at the time because they didn't feel supported by the pastor and weren't finding ways to stay supporting other people and receiving that themselves.

Several of the participants described how both their sense of personal gifts, abilities, and strengths and their views on the pastoral office/role differed in some ways from the views and expectations of some congregants. One of the “difference issues” most frequently mentioned by the participants was congregants' expectation that the pastor would perform the role of pastoral visitation—that is, visiting regularly with congregants even when no particular problem nor concern necessitated a pastoral visit. One pastor commented:

I don't do well with visitation just for visitation's sake. If somebody is sick and in the hospital or going through crisis, no problem at all with trying to be there and visiting with

them. [But] just to show up at the door to shoot the breeze for a half hour, I don't do it. I know that in the past, that has happened, and that that is important and significant to some in that particular geographic group, that generational group.

Another participant confessed that visitation “is one of those areas where, from time to time, I'll catch wind that someone would like it if I just show up at their house.” As he reflected on this expectation, he stated, “I know that I kind of miss it on that one. There are people that love that kind of stuff, but it's not me.” He continued to reflect on why he did not consider visitation—a clear expectation from some congregants—as one he would strive to meet. “I guess I just think of how I'm using my time throughout the week,” he added. “I know it's valuable to them, but it's hard for me to take the time from other things that might be more crisis-prone or preparation for Sundays or vision and direction kind of preparation.”

The data from multiple interviews revealed that participants experienced physical and emotional consequences as a result of their experience of congregants' role expectations. One participant stated:

I've definitely seen how it's affected me. Insomnia sometimes. Inability to eat because I'm stressed over something. Fatigue because it's been two weeks of nonstop, three weeks of nonstop. I definitely see how it's impacted me in those ways.

Another participant described an organizational issue within his congregation that resulted in his experience of significant stress and other consequences. He commented:

It got pretty nasty during the course of time, and there were a lot of phone calls being made and a lot of discussions happening and it was very stressful. That was probably the one time that it impacted my sleep. For a couple weeks, I had a really rough time sleeping. Again, it's just my mind going on. What's going to happen next? Who else is

going to be contacted and called? How do we handle it, as a church board, as leadership?
What's our best way of handling this kind of a situation?

A third participant indicated that his experience of congregant expectations significantly reduced his job satisfaction. He stated:

I certainly think expectations have affected me, both positive and negatively. Especially if I do something out of somebody else's expectations, it lessens definitely the joy in it for me. I start doing it maybe even begrudgingly which then just affects you as a person, then it affects ministry. So then parts of ministry are I'm doing it because I'm supposed to, or these people expect me to do this. It's no longer a joy in that. So it either affects me to the point that I don't want to do it, or I just do it, but I'm going through the motions because I have to. I just think expectations of pastors, at least for me, the way I've experienced them, are key, and can either be real helpful or not so helpful.

One of the participants talked about the sense of frustration he experienced when his "reasonable expectation" of the pastoral role differed from that of one of his congregants. He described being particularly frustrated by the fact that some congregants expected him to meet with them as soon as a problem arose, when in fact this "emergency" might have been going on for a prolonged time. He shared:

It's because you place such importance on the value of people's lives that their idea is you'll give up everything to take care of that. Even when you get these frantic calls from somebody: "Our marriage is in trouble." How long has it been going on? "About a year." Now you're just calling me, but they want to meet immediately. You're to drop everything to meet with them. It doesn't always work that way. They get offended if you say, "I don't have any time until next week," and they will say, "But we really need to

see you right now!” But there is that expectation because it’s my life, my life is valuable, you need to drop everything for that.

In this reflection, this participant expressed not only a sense of frustration about congregants’ “urgent” needs, but also about their perceived opinion that only they had needs or difficulties that required the pastor’s attention. He reflected:

It’s a crisis in their life. For them everything around them stops, other than this crisis. But they don’t have the understanding that other people are having those same things. Maybe a different topic, but it’s still a crisis in their life. You’re dealing with that crisis, but they can’t see beyond where they are. People are very self-focused. They don’t see beyond their own worlds, so they focus in on that. They have a hard time seeing that other people are dealing with those same kinds of things.

The data also yielded evidence that consequences not only affected the pastor/participant, but also his spouse and, in some situations, his children. One participant described it this way:

I began to bring work home with me mentally a little bit more than normal. I don’t try to necessarily check out when I leave the office, but I do try to be at home when I’m at home, so that my kids have my attention, my wife has my attention. The time together is very important to us. I know that when I am working with a dynamic like that senior group, or if somebody comes in and spends 20 minutes telling me how they wish we sung more hymns or whatever the case is, and everybody is telling them this, according to them, then I begin to think, as I’m heading home and at home, I begin to kind of check out in regards to being there for my family. My mind is just on other things. It’s on trying to play the game of who would have contacted them? Who was upset? Who do I need to

be trying to touch base with and talk to and try to, you know, whatever the situation requires? So I definitely find I'm bringing it home emotionally a lot more.

Another participant discussed how his wife and young children have experienced negative consequences as a result of his pastoral role. He suggested that while his young children do not fully understand why dad is "more intense or more tense than normal," they do recognize that he is not his normal self and this reactions to them have been "harder" or "sharper" than normal:

They definitely know when my mind is on other things. I remember one day we were walking up to the park together, and I was anticipating an email in regards to a situation I was working with. So we were walking through the field going to the park, and he is talking and telling me all about his day, and I'm sitting and checking my phone for emails and reading through an email that I had been waiting for. Finally, he looked up at me and said, "Are you even listening to me?" The answer was so obviously no, and it was because of this external factor that I had brought home with me and was still working through. I think that he absolutely knows there are times when Dad is at home, and there are times when Dad is physically at home, but mentally, he's not there. And he's old enough to sense that. He doesn't make the connection necessarily that it's because of something going on at church. We've been pretty intentional to not bring the garbage home with us. Or at least not to communicate the garbage at home. So I think that they pick up on that kind of stuff. I think that there are days when he just senses that Dad's a little bit more grouchy, or whatever the case may be, or whatever word you use there.

An older participant with adult children discussed how the pastoral office and role impacted his family. He admitted, "There have been instances where something has come up that

has definitely affected how I respond, my mood, even down to not being able to eat because of being stressed.” This participant further commented that his wife and adult children helped him to process his experiences as pastor. He stated:

But one nice thing is I’m able to process a lot of that with my spouse. My two older sons are young adults and I can even process some of that with them, especially my middle son. He’ll ask me questions, and I’m able to talk about some of those things with him. I don’t have to shield them from a lot, as if they were younger. We as a family can even process some of this stuff.

Another participant commented on the fact that being married to a pastor generally carries a set of expectations for the spouse. He reflected:

I think that by default, because of being married to the pastor in the church, she obviously cares deeply about me physically, mentally, emotionally, all that kind of stuff. So if she sees me struggling with certain areas, it’s hard for her. Then she does become a part of that. It’s just kind of one of those natural things that it’s going to be a part of her role, to walk with me through those times.

Several participants described the decisions they had made to involve their spouses in all aspects of their work by discussing all aspects of ministry life, even the less pleasant ones. One participant stated:

We promised when we were married never to keep a secret one from the other. She knew everything. In one sense, I think that was good that I could get it off my chest, and she seemed to be able to be strong and handle that. We could pray together.

One participant shared that he also talked with his spouse about his experience of congregants’ expectations. While recognizing the helpful aspects of such a discussion, he also

acknowledged that, as a result of the sharing, his wife experienced feelings of anger toward some members of the congregation. He commented:

We typically talk through almost anything that's weighing on me. We just find that that works best for our marriage. She is able to, when there is something heavy on my shoulders or on my plate, she is able to know that there is something going on. If I choose not to invite her into that situation or include her in that situation in what's going on, to allow her to kind of understand and support me through it, we just find that creates almost another tension at home. We've gone about it from the perspective that the marriage is vitally important to us, so we don't want to add extra tensions. For us, we talk through those things. I include her in a lot of discussions in regards to the heavy things. I think for my spouse, one of the things that just comes out of the bringing stuff home is sometimes almost feelings of anger towards individuals. She'll know the back story to what's going on. Then she'll see the reaction of somebody and say, "How can they react like that?"

This participant recalled a specific situation in the life of his congregation, in which a member of the church contacted his wife and expressed their dissatisfaction with his role performance. He commented:

During that time, she was having a really hard time with a sense of anger towards the individual that was, in her perspective, trying to hurt me and the church. We've had great opportunities to pray with each other, to deal with the emotions that come with it and to support each other through those times, but she definitely carries a heavy load when that kind of stuff happens.

Contrary to what the preceding data might indicate, not every participant in the research described feeling comfortable in discussing with his wife the difficult situations and stresses that occurred in his work. One participant stated that he “wanted [his wife] to be able to come to the church to worship” and therefore did not want to tell her “the ugly stuff.” He continued:

There are things that she doesn’t know, that I don’t tell her, because I try to shield her from some of that stuff. But again I want her to come here and be able to worship and feel that this is her church and her family. There’s stuff she doesn’t know.

Another participant described how his wife’s knowledge of certain church-related struggles ultimately empowered her to lead him out of bitter feelings. He admitted that he had begun to feel bitter toward some congregants who, in his opinion, did not like his pastoral role performance and therefore worked to stir up difficulties for him. He also admitted to speaking negatively about these individuals to his wife. He recalled asking his wife, “Why do these people have to be like this?” He then shared his wife’s response: “She finally rebuked me one day. She said, ‘Honey, you need to let go of that and give that to God or bitterness is going to eat you up.’” As a result of his wife’s intervention, the participant indicated, he realized that he had allowed himself to become that which he so often preached against.

As he continued to talk about this self-awareness, he stated:

So there was a point where I really had to do some soul searching. Asking God to fill my heart with love for those people regardless of what I would get in return. It was months that I wouldn’t have a handshake at the door. They would duck out another way. So the Lord said to me, “You go over and purposely, if you have to get in front of them and get a handshake.” So I started doing that. Well, they were friendly. They’d shake my hand,

but never would they come to me. The Lord just helped me to see you're not responsible for the way they are and think, but you are responsible for your own heart.

Research Question 3: What, If Anything, Have Brethren in Christ Pastors Done in Response to Their Experience of Congregants' Role Expectations?

The research also attempted to discover how participants responded to their experience of congregants' pastoral role expectations. The findings reported under the second research question indicate that some participants relied heavily upon their spouse and/or other family members as a means of support and encouragement. Several talked about the importance of friends. However, one talked at length about his lack of friends in his current community and church. This lack of friends was, for him, "probably the hardest thing." In his own words:

The church I was in prior to this one, I had a lot of friends because I had been in that church [for] 14 years and I lived in that county 20-some years. I had a lot of friends. So we moved to a new area. It's not far away, but it's not close, not that you can just go hang out with somebody. My wife and I both feel like we don't have friends. We have people here that we know, that we've done things with, but people that we really feel like we can relax with, kick back with, not talk church the whole time, we don't have that. Within the congregation, there are some people that I trust, and I know that what I say won't go anywhere, but there are still certain parts that I don't go that far with. I don't have anybody that I feel like I can sit down and just pour everything out. I don't feel like I have that, and that's been the hardest part for me.

This participant described how the denomination had tried to help by connecting him with other area pastors; ultimately, however, this strategy did not allow the participant to develop significant relationships or friendships. Regarding these denominational connections, he stated:

I'm involved in a cluster group, a cohort, that type of thing, which has been good, but it was taking a person and parking them in the middle of people that had already established relationships. I felt many times I was on the outside looking in. It's nothing to do with them—they're great guys. It's just that they've established relationships. They've known each other for years, and here's the new guy on the block. Even at that I felt kind of distanced, like I don't have that.

Several other participants described their desire to establish a strong understanding of their pastoral role within their current congregation, and not let the expectations or frustrations of others change their role performance. When asked how he responds to congregants who approach him with their views, concerns, or suggestions, one participant replied:

Hopefully I'll listen to them and listen openly. Then if possible, within myself try to determine, are there parts of this that are healthy or real, that I should be paying attention to, or are there other parts that it's just OK, that is these people's issues, and I've just got to deal with that and let that roll off me. Personally, even though I may think that it is harder for me to do that well, my plan would be, if they're open to me, and would actually say that to me and not to somebody else, then to be able to have that conversation with them, hear it. In that conversation, especially if initially I don't think this is even realistic, I want to be able to say that and why. If I know I'm not going to meet that expectation, tell them that plainly, but then also hopefully listen and if there are

parts of it that I could be or should be meeting, because I think, “Yeah, that’s reasonable,” then try to do that in the future.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from both a document analysis of materials on pastoral role expectations produced during a meeting of Brethren in Christ bishops, and also from interviews conducted with pastors who met the sampling criteria for inclusion in the study.

The data from the document analysis indicated that there existed little agreement among the Brethren in Christ bishops about the role of the pastor. Furthermore, the data indicated that bishops saw congregants’ pastoral role expectations as varied in terms of what congregants expected and desired in pastor, and in terms of how congregants developed their expectations.

The data from the participant interviews revealed that pastors’ experience of congregants’ pastoral role expectations also varied considerably. The data showed that participants’ experience resulted in specific instances of role confusion, role conflict, and role overload. Moreover, it indicated that participants’ experiences also caused personal and familial stress.

The data from the document analysis and the participant interviews was presented in this chapter without significant comment or interpretation. Chapter V will further analyze and interpret the findings. Chapter VI will draw conclusions and present recommendations.

CHAPTER V
INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

Patton (2002) states that qualitative research needs to provide “sufficient description to allow the reader to understand the basis for an interpretation and sufficient interpretation to allow the reader to appreciate the description” (Patton, 2002, p. 503). Chapter IV provided the thick description from the participants in the study. This chapter will provide analysis and interpretation of those findings. The analysis is organized by the analytic categories that are directly aligned with each of the study’s research questions (which also served as the framework for coding data and for presenting the findings in Chapter IV). The analytic categories are:

1. Bishop perceptions of the pastoral role and congregant expectations
2. The lack of role clarity and consensus (Research Question 1)
3. The presence of stress (Research Question 2)
4. Attempts to cope (Research Question 3)

Overall, this study found that the bishops did not convey unanimous agreement on pastor role expectations, and pastors did not experience role consensus but instead experienced role ambiguity, role conflict, role strain, and role overload. As a consequence, the pastors experienced stress that resulted in both physiological and psychological symptoms; this stress frequently impacted the pastor’s spouse and/or other family members. Pastors attempted to cope with stress in a number of different ways.

Specifically, both the document analysis data and the participant interview data yielded important conclusions. The data from the document analysis indicated that there existed little

agreement among the bishops about the role of the pastor. Furthermore, the document analysis also indicated that bishops believed congregants' pastoral role expectations varied both in terms of expectations and desires, and also in terms of sources of influence.

The data from the participant interviews revealed that pastors' experience of congregants' role expectations also varied considerably. The pastors' experience of congregants' role expectations indicated instances of role confusion, role conflict, and role overload. Some pastors also talked about stress they and their families had endured as a result of their experience of congregants' role expectations.

Analytic Category #1: Bishop Perceptions of the Pastoral Role and Congregant Expectations

The organizational polity of the Brethren in Christ Church in North America is a mix of both congregational and Episcopal systems. From the congregational system, the denomination draws its emphasis on each congregation as an autonomous unit that, under the direction of an assigned pastor, takes responsibility for decision-making at the local level. From the Episcopal system, the denomination derives its emphasis on a regional cluster of multiple congregations, with each regional cluster overseen by a bishop responsible for both the appointment of pastors to each congregation and the supervision of those appointees.

Given the significance of both the autonomous pastor-led congregation and the supervisory bishop to Brethren in Christ polity, this study examined both groups' experience of and reflections on pastoral role expectations. The document analysis component of this study, which focused on the bishops, revealed that while these leaders have authority over pastors, they believed they were the least influential constituency of five constituencies mentioned in a

pastor's role-set. As outlined in Chapter IV, bishops agreed on the following ranking, imagined as concentric circles of influence: the formal leadership of the congregation, especially the Church Board; the informal leadership of the congregation; large donors to the congregation; those involved in the ministries of the congregation; and the denominational leadership and/or the bishop. While the participant interviews, which focused on the pastors, did not directly address the same question, participants did indicate the significant role that bishops play in a pastor's understanding of role expectations prior to beginning ministry in, or even interviewing at, a new church. The bishop is the person that discusses with congregational leaders and pastoral search teams what they need and desire in a new pastor. The bishop is also the person who makes the initial contact with a prospective pastor and outlines the potential congregation and its needs.

At the same time, the participants in this study also talked at great length about their conversation with the leaders of the local congregation, not the bishop, concerning the pastoral role in that congregation. Two of the seven participants spoke about extensive conversation regarding the pastoral role expectations held by the leadership of the new congregation. One commented that this conversation was driven especially by the fact that an interim pastor had served the congregation and had done significant work in helping the congregation reflect on their needs and desires for the new assigned pastor.

The data indicated that not all of the pastors felt the information they received from the bishop was clear in addressing role expectations. Further, participants reported a lack of consistency (in terms of expectations) among the people serving on the search committee. Moreover, they claimed that the views of the bishop and search committee were not always consistent with the actual expectations and preferences they experienced from congregants while

serving in the congregation. This supports the view of Heiss (1990), who argued that many role theorists believe that most roles do not have societal consensus.

Concerning the influences that contribute to a person's role expectations, Heiss (1990) commented that "an individual's roles are largely learned from other people, and, therefore, actor and other are likely to agree about role definitions only if they have been exposed to similar influences" (p. 96-97). This present study confirmed Heiss' perspective insofar as it revealed that individuals within the pastor's role-set have not been exposed to similar influences. Rather, congregants' role expectations are often shaped by influences far different than those shaping pastor's own expectations; even when the influences are similar, they have varying levels of authority.

The document analysis revealed that the bishops believed congregants' previous experiences were the most significant influence on their pastoral role expectations. This experience included their past or their upbringing, their previous church experience or background, their early church experience, and their experience of previous pastors in that congregation. The bishops suspected the second most influential source of pastor role expectation was the influence of pastors of other churches, especially those observed through media such as television, radio, Internet, books, magazines, and journals. Also significant, according to the bishops, was the impact of people from other congregations. This data confirms that congregants' pastoral role expectations are very subjective and are therefore likely to lack significant consensus.

The document analysis also revealed that bishops believe pastors derive their personal role understanding from multiple influences that vary in significance. For pastors, these influences included a personal sense of call; an understanding of personal gifts and abilities;

personal experiences with an individual in pastoral ministry, especially mentors or role models; formal training, such as seminary education or undergraduate work; pastors prominent in popular media; and the expectations of members of the pastor's congregation, especially those in formal leadership and/or those considered significant stakeholders in the local church. Their view concurs with that of Heiss (1990), who hypothesized that a person's personal experiences are the most significant variable in role definition.

The document analysis revealed that Bishops were able to identify collectively eleven common tasks of ministry that congregants expect their pastor to perform. The eleven tasks were preaching, pastoral or congregational care, administration/communication, leadership, fiscal management, outreach, discipleship, church growth, maintaining church unity, counseling, and modeling spiritual life. However, the bishops could not reach unanimous agreement on the reasonableness or unreasonableness of these eleven tasks being expected from one pastor. There was general agreement that the tasks of preaching, care, leadership, church growth, and modeling spiritual life were reasonable expectations. When asked to rank these various tasks in the order of importance, the final order of the group was preaching, congregational care, leadership, and outreach/growth. Some bishops wanted to add descriptive words to these task descriptors. In relation to preaching, they included words such as "inspiring," "good," "interesting," and "relevant." For pastoral/congregation care they included "compassionate" and "loving," and for leadership they included "effective."

The perspectives from bishops concerning what congregants expect is very similar to the findings in the research conducted by Lummis on the criteria churches use in selecting their pastor(s). (Further information regarding the Lummis study can be found in Chapter III.) That study produced a list of nine categories of criteria that congregations believed to be important in

their pastoral search. The study also indicated that lay people have expectations for both what a pastor does (tasks or functions or competencies) and who a pastor is (character and personal characteristics). This present study revealed pastoral role expectations similar to those identified by Lummis.

The Lummis research also showed that participants modified tasks such as “preaching” and “leadership” to “*good* preaching” and “*strong* spiritual leadership.” The document analysis in my research confirmed that Brethren in Christ bishops have similar qualifiers or modifiers for the tasks that pastors perform.

Analytic Category #2: The Lack of Role Clarity and Consensus

(Research Question 1)

The participants in this study had varied experiences in terms of clear communication and understanding of the pastoral role prior to beginning ministry in their congregations. Some of the participants were not able to recall any substantial conversation about role expectations. When asked about the extent of conversation on the subject, one participant commented, “I don’t recall that there was any written communication. If there was, it obviously didn’t make much of an impact because I truly don’t remember getting a job description, or anything saying here is what we’re looking for.” Another commented, “I guess there wasn’t really any conversation about that.” This participant described talked about his sense of being overwhelmed by the number and variety of expectations held by his congregants; furthermore, he talked about being disappointed and hurt when he could not always meet those expectations.

The research findings indicated that those who had the most conversation about role expectations were those who had initiated the conversation with the bishop and search

committee. One example of this was the participant who described asking the bishop, “Why me? Why are you asking me to consider this congregation?”; the bishop responded with an overview of the congregation and what he believed the congregation needed, and was looking for, in terms of their next pastor. This particular participant also initiated the conversation with the search committee. Recalling the interview process with the search committee, the pastor stated, “I asked, ‘What do you expect or want in your new pastor? . . . What do you think are the top expectations of the people in this congregation for the next pastor? . . . What are the main things they think this position should be doing? Who should I be?’”

Another example of the pastor initiating the conversation about role expectations came from the participant who described his conversation with the search committee. In recalling this conversation, he detailed the results of a survey conducted by the congregation to ascertain the expected role of a new pastor. He felt the committee clearly communicated what congregants had said they desired and expected. However, he also admitted that the search committee viewed some expectations to be more critical or more important than others. Thus, while there might have been reasonably clear communication of congregant expectations, the fact that one part of the pastor’s role-set viewed various tasks as more or less significant than other parts of the pastor’s role-set indicates a lack of role consensus, as described by Biddle (1986).

The experience of another participant clearly illustrates this lack of consensus. Commenting on the divergence of expectations held by congregants, he stated, “Everybody has a different expectation. If you tried to follow what everybody wanted, you’d go out of your mind, because everybody has a different expectation of how you should do things, the way you should do things...”

These findings are similar to those of Lummis (2003). Her study acknowledged that getting the best pastor for a particular congregation is not a straightforward process, but one complicated by the issue of whose opinion really matters. Does the search committee, the judicatory leader, the members of the congregation, the community in which the congregation is located, or perhaps even the pastor decide what qualifies as “best”? Lummis (2003) discovered that even among search committee members there was seldom, if ever, existed a singular opinion on pastor role expectations; rather, these groups exhibited a varied and often wide-ranging mix of opinions, and often these opinions conflicted with each other. According to Lummis, search committees differ in the abilities and characteristics to which they give priority; these differing expectations arise out of members’ past experiences with clergy, as well as a host of other factors and influences.

Role theorists are clear about the implications of role dissensus in terms of consequences (Heiss, 1990). They agree that, if role dissensus is not removed, the interaction of pastor and congregants will most likely not proceed smoothly and/or satisfactorily. Further, these scholars contend that behaviors will not mesh and that cooperative action will be difficult to achieve. Mutual dislike is likely to develop because both pastor and congregant will view the other as behaving improperly (Heiss, 1990, p. 120). Heiss suggests that even the knowledge that “one’s interaction partner sees things differently may be sufficient to cause a significant degree of enmity” (1990, p. 120). These consequences are most likely to occur when the nature of the interaction requires agreement and coordination between actor and other. This is exactly the situation in a congregational context where pastors rely on congregants as both volunteers who serve in the church and also as donors who support the church (and therefore pay the pastor’s salary).

Lummis (2003) acknowledged that many congregants definitely carry a sense of “what kind of pastor do we want to hire?” This sense of employer/employee contributes significantly to the expectation that the pastor conform to expectations. Several participants in this present study described experiences wherein congregants communicated both the employer/employee relationship as well as the expectations that accompany this framing of the relationship. One participant described how a congregant said to him, “You’re full time, so you’re ours. We have every right to look at you and question and look under a microscope.” Another described how a congregant discussed with him certain role expectations and then said, “That’s what you’re paid to do....” Both the lack of role consensus and the employer/employee perspective held by congregants are likely to contribute to an unclear sense of self and role-identity for the pastor.

As noted in Chapter II, McCall and Simmons (1966) defined role-identity as “the character and the role that individuals devise for themselves when occupying specific positions” (p. 67). This role identity stems from the “imaginative view [a person had] of himself *as he likes to think of himself being and acting* as an occupant of a position” (McCall and Simmons, 1966, p. 67, emphasis in the original). However, in a situation with different constituencies that each possess different sets of expectations, it is unlikely that a pastor will be able to develop his or her sense of self and role. While a pastor may have an imaginative view of how he likes to think of himself being and acting, the disparity between that imaginative view and the many and varied actual views of other people in the role set is likely to be a source of personal dissatisfaction and role stress.

Role conflict and role overload will likely result in an inability for an actor to be comfortable with himself. Owen (2003) reports that in relation to the concept of “comfort with self,” an actor will need (1) the absence of negative emotions regarding oneself, (2) feelings of

both familiarity with oneself and of ease when thinking about oneself, and (3) low to moderate emotional arousal with respect to self. This study indicates that pastors experience the expectations of congregants in such a way that they are unlikely to have comfort with their selves and are likely to experience stressors and stress.

Analytic Category #3: The Presence of Stressors and Stress

(Research Question 2)

Chapter II provided a summary of research on stress. Stress research considers both the origins and the outcomes of stress (Aneshensel, 1992). The research indicates that an actor's experience of, for example, social structures, roles, and other social constructs, may be perceived as threatening, difficult, or burdensome (Pearlin, 1989). Further, an actor's incumbency in a major institutionalized role, such as that of pastor, necessarily entails persistent encounters with conditions and expectations that an actor may perceive as threatening and/or problematic; as a result, the actor may experience stress. Studies have shown that such experience is common among actors in institutionalized and occupational roles (Kahn 1973, Pearling 1983) and also in family roles (Pearlin, 1983).

This study confirmed that participants experienced stress at those times and in those situations where the role demands and expectations on that participant's energy and stamina exceeded his capacities. One participant commented, "Many times I've felt overwhelmed because of those expectations." Another stated that that many congregants fail to have the "realization that everyone else here has that same expectation for their role in their ministry, and they want you to do that. So it's been hard to have to tell people no, or to say, No, I can't possibly be involved in everything...."

Another participant described how congregants' expectations were difficult to meet. In attempting to satisfy his congregants by performing the role according to their expectations, he quickly became dissatisfied. For him, the role became unsatisfying because he could not perform it in a way that was consistent with his own sense of self and identity. He expressed it in this way: "If I do something out of somebody else's expectations, it lessens definitely the joy in it for me. I start doing it maybe even begrudgingly which then just affects you as a person." He continued by saying that he was performing aspects of his pastoral role "because I'm supposed to, or these people expect me to do this. It's no longer a joy in that. So it either affects me to the point that I don't want to do it, or I just do it, but I'm going through the motions because I have to."

These participant responses from pastors indicate that relationships within a role set do undergo change, especially as expectations are expressed and experienced. These changes, even if desired and planned, necessitate alterations in the ways in which people perceive of themselves, others, and the role being performed. Role-restructuring is one potential outcome of the experiences that participants described. However, this restructuring is seldom easy and can result in a sense of betrayal, status loss, and/or the violation of expectations. These may develop insidiously and may persist until the people readjust to both the new reality and the new norms that govern the relationship.

Participants reported experiencing both physical and psychological symptoms as a result of their stress. For example, one participant stated, "I've definitely seen how it's affected me. Insomnia sometimes. Inability to eat because I'm stressed over something. Fatigue because it's been two weeks of nonstop, three weeks of nonstop." Another said, "It was very stressful. That

was probably the one time that it impacted my sleep. For a couple weeks, I had a really rough time sleeping.”

The study showed that stress induced by role confusion or conflict affects not only some pastors, but also their spouses and other members of their families. Some pastors talked of their spouse becoming burdened and stressed by both the pastoral role expectations for the pastor and by the impact of the role upon the pastor. One pastor commented about his wife, “She cares deeply about me physically, mentally, emotionally, all that kind of stuff. So if she sees me struggling with certain areas, it’s hard for her.” Another pastor spoke of how his wife had become angry at people in the church because of their treatment of her husband, the pastor: “She was having a really hard time with a sense of anger towards the individual that was, in her perspective, trying to hurt me and the church.”

The data from this study clearly indicated that pastor’s experience the expectations of congregants in ways that produced stress. The study also revealed that pastors’ spouses and/or family members also experienced stress as a result of both the pastor’s experience and/or the spouse’s own personal experience of congregants’ expectations.

Analytic Category #4: Attempts to Cope (Research Question 3)

This analytic category is related to the third research question: “What, if anything, have Brethren in Christ pastors done in response to the experience of congregants’ role expectations?” As noted in Chapter III, the experience of stressors does not necessarily lead to stressful outcomes. By posing this research question, this study sought to determine if pastors developed any coping mechanisms had been used by the pastors in response to the consequences of their

experience of congregants' role expectations. The data indicated that pastors did utilize some, but not many, significant coping mechanisms.

Some participants indicated that they had used various aspects of role-change or role-restructuring as coping mechanisms. As deployed by the pastors, these mechanisms were intended to remove stressors by removing role dissensus. The literature review in Chapter II indicated that sometimes successful attempts are made to remove role dissensus. This can include the use of education, persuasion, manipulation, appeals to rules or authority, coercion, and/or negation (bargaining) (Heiss 1990). However, Heiss states that the likely achievement of a working consensus on role definitions and expectations may not be possible. When role conflict does occur, the options for the actor may be limited and the "only way that actor can avoid negative sanctions is to renegotiate or to drop one or more of the roles that contain incompatible elements" (Heiss, 1990, p. 126). It may be that the actor can choose to fail in one or more of the roles. Failure is likely to take place in the roles with the lowest cost for failure or with the role partner who has the least ability to impose costs. If all else fails, "the cost of performing the role has increased to such a level that termination might very well be the option with the lowest cost" (Heiss, 1990, p. 126). Hoge and Wenger (2005) stated that role conflict is a significant reason for the large number of clergy who leave local church ministry.

Several participants in this study talked about how they try to have a good understanding of what their congregants expect or need from them. Some, however, indicated that they try not to let the expectations—or frustrations—of others change their role performance. For example, one participant stated:

Hopefully I'll listen to them and listen openly. Then if possible, within myself try to determine, are there parts of this that are healthy or real, that I should be paying attention

to, or are there other parts that it's just OK, that is these people's issues, and I've just got to deal with that and let that roll off me. Personally, even though I may think that it is harder for me to do that well, my plan would be, if they're open to me, and would actually say that to me and not to somebody else, then to be able to have that conversation with them, hear it. In that conversation, especially if initially I don't think this is even realistic, I want to be able to say that and why. If I know I'm not going to meet that expectation, tell them that plainly, but then also hopefully listen and if there are parts of it that I could be or should be meeting, because I think, "Yeah, that's reasonable," then try to do that in the future.

The findings of the study indicate that some participants relied heavily upon their spouse and/or other family members as a means of support and encouragement. Several talked about the importance of friends. However, one talked at length about his lack of friends in his current community and church. This lack of supportive friendships was, for him, "probably the hardest thing" about pastoral ministry. In his own words,

My wife and I both feel like we don't have friends. We have people here that we know, that we've done things with, but people that we really feel like we can relax with, kick back with, not talk church the whole time, we don't have that. . . . I don't have anybody that I feel like I can sit down and just pour everything out. I don't feel like I have that, and that's been the hardest part for me.

This study also revealed that attempts to cope with stress—even attempts endorsed by participants' sponsoring denomination—actually failed, leading participants to experience other negative emotions (such as loneliness). For example, the same participant quoted above described his denomination's efforts to help him cope with role stress by connecting him with

other area pastors; however, this strategy did not help the participant to develop significant relationships or friendships. In fact, as a pastor new to the area, he felt on the “outside” of the group; the other members had already established relationships with one other, and he felt unable to “break in.” He commented,

I felt many times I was on the outside looking in. It's nothing to do with them--they're great guys. It's just that they've established relationships. They've known each other for years, and here's the new guy on the block. Even at that I felt kind of distanced, like I don't have that.

Given that these small groups of pastors (called cohorts) function as one of the denomination’s major efforts to provide peer support, this participant’s experience may be a cause for serious concern. In this instance, his effort to cope—in an environment sanctioned by the denomination—not only failed to provide support, but actually increased his sense of isolation.

The data gathered in the study also indicated that questions about coping yielded the least detailed responses from pastors. If the amount of data gathered in the interview is an accurate indicator of the coping mechanisms utilized by pastors, the study indicates a significant dearth in this area. A lack of helpful coping mechanisms will further exacerbate the experience of stress among pastors, and likely will lead to role extrication.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Review of the Study

At the beginning of this report, I noted that the role of a pastor in a Christian church is uncertain. This uncertainty is nothing new. The expectations placed upon pastors may have been clear at one time, but the march of time has added new facets and expectations to the pastoral role. Rather than replacing those that preceded them, these new facets and expectations have been added to existing expectations. As a result, the pastoral role now exists as a complex, multi-faceted entity wherein different individuals within the pastor's role-set often have conflicting and/or overwhelming expectations for the pastor.

On many occasions throughout the twentieth century, authors have noted the confusion surrounding the role of pastor. May (1934) writes,

What is the function of the minister in the modern community? The answer is that it is undefined. There is no agreement among denominational authorities, local officials, seminaries, professors, prominent laymen, ministers or educators as to what it should be. This widespread disagreement about the role or function of a pastor has also been experienced in the Brethren in Christ Church. Brensinger (1991) described this "apparent identity crises" in the denomination's textbook on pastoral theory and practice:

While the basis for ministry was at one time self-evident, such is often no longer the case. With increased attention given to the social sciences and other disciplines, ministers frequently face frustration in determining just who they are. Are they public speakers? Counselors? Administrators? Therapists? If so, many feel only marginally

competent and others grow weary under the burden of trying to be all things to all people.

Because of this well-documented role uncertainty, conflict, and overload in most Christian churches but specifically in the Brethren in Christ denomination, this study set out with a specific purpose: to use qualitative research methods to investigate the role expectations that Brethren in Christ pastors experience from their congregants and from other people in their role-set. It sought to answer three specific questions:

1. What are Brethren in Christ pastors' perceptions of their congregants' pastoral role expectations?
2. How do Brethren in Christ pastors experience congregants' role expectations in terms of consequences?
3. What, if anything, have Brethren in Christ pastors done in response to their experience of congregants' role expectations?

To answer these questions, the study first conducted a document analysis of materials produced by Brethren in Christ bishops regarding pastoral role expectations. Using this analysis as context, the study then examined the experiences of a purposeful sample of Brethren in Christ pastors, relative to congregants' pastoral role expectations, through semi-structured interviews. Chapter IV outlined the findings of these interviews; Chapter V provided analysis. This chapter summarizes the study by presenting some conclusions and positing recommendations for the Brethren in Christ Church.

The literature review chapter of this study provided an overview of a number of sociological theories that were helpful to both inform this study and provide perspectives for analysis of the data. The literature that proved most beneficial for this study was that of role

theory. Role theory helps us understand that individuals live and function as members of social groups, such as congregations. These social groups expect certain behaviors and tasks for group members, especially those who occupy a position within the group structure. A person may be sanctioned if he does not behave according to the expectations of the role or position. Sometimes the tasks and role expectations are simple and clear, and may be codified and clearly communicated. However, often expectations are not clear, different members may have conflicting expectations, and the accumulation of many and divergent expectations can lead to role confusion, role conflict, role strain, and role overload. Role theory, and the existence of other studies that utilized role theory, greatly benefitted this study because they allowed me to undertake the study and analyze the data utilizing theoretical perspectives and constructs that are understood and accepted in sociological study.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The first major conclusion of this research is that pastors experienced role confusion, role conflict, and role overload. Among both bishops and pastors themselves, there existed much agreement about the central functions of the pastoral role.. As revealed in the document analysis, bishops collectively identified eleven common tasks of ministry; they generally agreed that preaching, pastoral care, leadership, church growth, and modeling spiritual life constituted the baseline of reasonable pastoral role expectations. The interviews with pastor-participants revealed similar expectations among pastors. Similar tasks and functions were identified in other studies, such as Lummis (2003).

Yet the research also indicated that pastors experienced *much different* expectations from various people within the congregation. Congregants expected their pastors to be everything

from a visiting shepherd to a preaching prophet, from a visionary leader to a capable administrator. Some even seem to expect the pastor to be all of these *and more*. Moreover, the nuancing of these tasks with descriptors like “*good* preacher” and “*strong* spiritual leader” created additional—and sometimes greater—expectations on the part of congregants. As a result of these voluminous (and sometimes conflicting) expectations, pastors confessed to experiencing role confusion, conflict, and overload.

The research also revealed that role conflict did not simply exist between the pastor and his congregants, but between different congregants as well. The nuancing mentioned above provides a useful illustration of this intra-congregational conflict. What one person considers “good preaching” may vary drastically from another person’s conception of the same act; “strong leadership” to one person might feel dictatorial and autocratic to another. In this sense, the research reveals that, while many congregants agree on the basic tasks and functions of ministry (i.e., preaching, leadership, etc.), disagreement and misunderstanding occur on the basis of task/function *performance* and *measurement*.

Furthermore, the research showed that role confusion, conflict, and overload occurred often because of inadequate conversation about pastoral role expectations between bishop and congregation, bishop and pastor, and pastor and congregation. In particular, the pastor-participant interviews revealed a significant variance in the scope and extent of conversation on these matters in the pastoral search process. Some participants reported only minimal conversation, if any, on role expectations; others reported that specific conversations about role expectations developed only when initiated by the pastor.

Based upon this first conclusion, I recommend that the crucial figures in a pastoral role-set—the bishop, the congregational leadership, the members of the congregation, and the pastor

him- or herself—engaged in a more intentional and structured conversation about pastoral role expectations. This conversation should cover both the tasks/functions of ministry that the pastor is expected to perform as well as the way in which congregants expect these tasks/functions to be performed. This conversation should be sufficiently detailed so as to leave little room for misunderstanding. It should also be sufficiently inclusive in terms of those who participate, so as to develop a consensus of understanding among all those in the pastor's role-set. Finally, the conversation should be sufficiently documented so that its record might be used as a basis for ongoing conversation.

The second major conclusion of this research suggests that as a result of experiencing congregants' role expectations, pastor-participants did experience stressors that led to stress-induced physiological and psychological symptoms. The data indicated that role confusion, conflict, and overload resulted in loneliness, low self-esteem, and job dissatisfaction. Several participants described how stress impacted their physical wellbeing, manifesting itself in symptoms such as fatigue, loss of appetite, and insomnia. Several pastors also discussed the impact of stress upon their marriage and family relationships.

A third major conclusion of this research is that pastors did not seem to have effective coping mechanisms to help mediate their experience of stressors. None of the pastors described significant effective coping mechanisms. For at least one of the participants, even a denominationally sanctioned peer group (or cohort) provided little support in coping with the loneliness he and his wife experienced in their new congregation. Some described relying on a spouse or other family member for support; however, the family circle may not be the most appropriate source of stress mediation because it opens up the possibility of stress transfer from the pastor to a family member. If such stress extends to the spouse and/or other family members,

there exists the increased potential for exacerbated stress levels and a decreased potential for a pastor's long-term, healthy working relationship with that particular congregation.

Based upon these second and third conclusions, I recommend that bishops and church boards be made aware of the significant possibilities for stressors and stress in pastoral life; I further recommend that they develop, adopt, and implement specific strategies to help pastors and spouses, particularly in the early years of ministry in a new congregation. These strategies should include regular conversation between the pastor and church board regarding the issue of role expectations and performance. Since it is unlikely that such a system will be developed and clarified perfectly prior to a pastor's arrival in a new congregation, I recommend that church boards work with pastors to develop and implement these systems soon after a new pastor's arrival.

I also recommend that this conversation be revisited regularly within the first year or two of ministry, perhaps at intervals of six months or less, depending on the circumstances. The conversation should include the pastor, the church board, and the bishop, although it may also prove helpful for the congregation as a whole to become aware of these ongoing conversations and any role clarification that arises from them.

In addition, I recommend that both the General Church and the Regional Conferences develop helpful peer support structures for pastors. Because the bishop serves as the pastor's direct supervisor, many people view the bishop as a "pastor to the pastors"—and someone who ought to provide the kind of emotional support necessary for this position. However, the bishop also holds responsibility for the performance evaluation of the pastor, and ultimately makes decisions about whether or not the pastor should continue in his/her current congregation or move on to a new assignment. As a result, this supervisor role presents an inherent conflict of

interest, in that pastors may not be willing to share their struggles, fears, and stresses with the person who will decide their future in vocational ministry. For this reason, I would recommend that bishops and other denominational leaders work to establish a peer system in which pastors are connected to a confidential “buddy.” Ideally, this “buddy” would be a more experienced pastor capable of providing counsel and support to the younger leader. She or he could make regular contact with the younger pastor, providing a safe environment for conversation and confession. She or he could also assist in easing the new pastor into the existing networks of Brethren in Christ pastors. I would also recommend developing a similar “buddy” system for the spouses of new pastors, for similar reasons. Of course, this “buddy” system would prove easier in locations with a high concentration of Brethren in Christ churches, such as parts of Pennsylvania.

Finally, I recommend that the denomination continue to engage in conversations about pastors’ experiences of congregants’ pastoral role expectations. This research demonstrated that, while there exists an awareness of the problem of role confusion, conflict, and overload, very few efforts have been made to address it. The variety of experiences described by pastors in this study—all of whom served in the three Regional Conferences with congregations in Pennsylvania—indicates that bishops do not always raise the issue with pastors and churches. The denomination should make this an oft-discussed subject, with the dual goal of providing greater clarity and helping pastors and congregations function successfully. For if congregations are to be healthy and vital, pastor and congregant must work together in mutually supportive ways. While pastors and congregations can and should work to clarify role expectations, the denomination should proactively lead the conversation.

Given that the Brethren in Christ hold to the authority of the Bible in faith and practice, the church should endeavor to define and clarify the role of the pastor according to biblical understandings, rather than outside sources of influence or information. Because a pastor who seeks to initiate a reconsideration of the biblical pastoral role opens himself up to charges of role definition according to personal preferences rather than corporate consensus, the denomination should initiate a conversation on the topic, at either the Regional Conference or General Church level.

This study focused on the experiences of solo pastors in Brethren in Christ congregations in Pennsylvania. While qualitative research is not generalizable, I feel strongly that the observations, conclusions, and recommendations in this study will have value for solo pastors in all denominations and locations beyond the sample utilized in this research.

However, the context in which pastors serve is not unique to pastoral ministry. Like clergy, other professions that have historically been served by individuals who undergo specific education, training, and certification or credentialing have experienced similar pressures. Pastors have experienced the increase of education and training of the laity that has blurred the once clear separation between clergy and laity. Technological advances such as the web have made it possible for congregants to experience some of the best preachers and teachers in the world through audio and/or video. Congregants can, and frequently do, browse the web and draw their information and expectations from multiple sources. But pastors are not alone in this. Teachers experience the expectations of parents who have access to many online and print sources of educational philosophy, curricula, class room etiquette and discipline. These parents want their child to have the same education that is available to children in another school across the town, city, or even the country. Doctors experience the expectations of patients and family members

who have utilized Web M.D. or some other online medical resource. Or perhaps the patient has read what the leading hospitals or doctors in other parts of the country (or world) are doing for other people with the same or similar illness. These patients and families expect their doctor and their hospital to provide similar care. Lawyers encounter the expectations of clients who have are familiar with sources that offer online legal advice or documents. The world has changed and continues to change for those in professional roles. I believe that it would be beneficial to undertake research similar to this study among professionals in other fields of service. Perhaps their experience of role expectation might be similar to the pastors in this study.

Moving Forward

The early part of this report described in detail the conversation and conflict that has dogged the successful definition of the pastoral role throughout the twentieth century. That conversation and conflict continues today, and as reported at the beginning of this study, such conflict has resulted in many pastors' exodus from vocational ministry. Yet in the midst of this crisis, men and women continue to follow God's call into the pastorate.

The best way to illustrate the present dynamic of North American Protestant ministry—both the struggles and blessings—is to conclude with an excerpt from one of the most popular evangelical Christian blogs, The Jesus Creed. On August 31, 2012, The Jesus Creed posted the following entry, written by a guest blogger named John Frye and focusing on the term “pastor” as a banged-up yet beautiful word. I have copied the post in its entirety.

I desire to motivate gifted leaders to consider vocational pastoral ministry, yet I do so with some seasoned hesitation. The word “pastor” is being buffeted and the vocational pastor is being urged to step into the shadows. The era of “the pastor” is over

in the minds of some. To encourage young leaders to wade into these already turbulent waters requires of them backbone and vision. A lot of smart people over the years have attempted to infuse the word, the idea of pastor with relevant, yet *alien* meanings.

Nothing can be more perplexing than the contemporary idea of “the pastor.”

In my journey as a pastor, I have been coaxed to become many things I am not. I have been exhorted to be “a coach.” Sports, that’s it! I am a coach; the church is a team. Oh, wow, how did I miss it? That will revive pastoral ministry. I have been urged to be an ecclesial CEO. Hey, Jesus was one! Business, that’s it! Now we’re chasing those BHAGS! I was advised to be a teacher and teach the whole counsel of God which meant expository preaching through the entire Bible. J. Vernon McGee, where are you? So, education! That is the answer. We just can’t tolerate biblical illiteracy. “Matthew, Mark, Luther, and John.” We’ve got to fix this with education. At another pastors’ conference, the magic bullet was counseling. The pastor is to be a non-directive, empathetic, boundary-keeping counselor. The therapeutic world will save the day and perhaps the church! Dump Richard Baxter for Carl Jung. The Bible is a veritable pharmacy for the sicknesses of mankind. There’s more. The best pastors tell funny, funny stories. Entertainment, we adore you. To pastor is to be a religious stand-up comic. “Did you hear the one about the priest, rabbi, and...?”

Not content to fix our eyes on Jesus, the Good (John 10), Great (Hebrews 13) and Chief Pastor (1 Peter 5), some have sought hard to hijack terminology from the prevailing institutions of the culture. The lingo is recruited into vocational pastoral work. Coach, CEO, Instructor, Counselor, Comic. Entrepreneur is in vogue these days. Did you know

that the “apostles” were entrepreneurs? Are we ashamed of or embarrassed by biblical, pastoral terminology?

All this wordsmithery reveals the sad loss of awareness of the staggering uniqueness of the pastoral vocation. Drinking from the splashing wells of culture has poisoned the quiet waters that Jesus the Pastor offers to those who want to be like him as pastor. Some in the contemporary church need to think hard and long about this: Jesus did not say in John 10; “I am the Good King/Lord/ Priest/Apostle/ Evangelist/Teacher.” The writer of Hebrews did not title Jesus the Great Apostle/King/ Evangelist/Teacher. Peter, very familiar with Jesus, did not describe Jesus as the Chief Apostle/ King/ Evangelist/Prophet. With all the divine titles available to Jesus (John), Priscilla (did she write Hebrews?), and Peter, why did each select the title “shepherd”? Why were the multiple-gifted elders/overseers of Ephesus (we assumed they received the gifts of the Spirit) urged by Paul “to be *shepherds* of God’s flock” (Acts 20:27)? For some today that is so not right. Paul should have said, “Be prophets, apostles, evangelists, teachers of God’s flock.” Why does Peter exhort the elders “to be *shepherds* of God’s flock” (1 Peter 5:2)? That cannot be legitimate, either. *Be pastors* of God’s flock? I am so tired of hearing the shrill question: Why is this one gift so elevated?

Let’s pause a moment before the word pastor. Is shepherd just metaphorical, cute language covered in dust and cobwebs? Think. Is it possible that the numerous pastor-centered New Testament texts took deep root *in the imagination* of the early church leaders? Could the Church Fathers (and Mothers) have discerned that the word *poimen* (shepherd) wasn’t just *a title* elevated to some alleged position of power and control, but a word that revealed a way, a life-calling? Could the worn-out old word intentionally

reflect the very heart of God-in-Jesus Christ for people, both lost and found? In the context of leading and serving God's people, could it be that the word and idea of shepherd carries *a nuance that even Jesus himself preferred?*

Here's my hunch. I could be wrong. When we pick through the rubble of evangelical wrangling about the local church, we find a pearl of great price. Though the word "shepherd" is archaic in this digital age and the imagery very Ancient Near Eastern, not post-modern, still the word reveals energetic dimensions of the heart and actions of God for people that *no other word* carries. When I read the Gospels and I encounter Jesus *the Pastor* and when I study the Gospels as *pastoral manuals* (not just as preserved written strata from which to mine systematic Christology), God help me, I want to be a pastor. Pastor is such a beautiful word.

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