Memoirs of Resistance and Change within a Shared Pastorate

Jon K. Nelson

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Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

MEMOIRS OF RESISTANCE AND CHANGE
WITHIN A SHARED PASTORATE

Written by

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

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MEMOIRS OF RESISTANCE AND CHANGE
WITHIN A SHARED PASTORATE

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JON K. NELSON
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ABSTRACT

Memoirs of Resistance and Change within a Shared Pastorate
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Doctor of Ministry
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2019

This project is a case study of resistance within the adaptive change process of the first shared pastorate between two long established declining sibling churches: Pioneer Presbyterian Church of Marinette, Wisconsin and First Presbyterian Church of Menominee, Michigan. It examines the differences in their responses to their decline, the changing world around them and lessons that can be learned about how early organizational culture imprints with the capacity or the lack of capacity to change.

The first section examines the context of the ministry and the pastor. The community and congregational context of these congregations provides insight into their differing responses towards the shared pastorate and adaptive change. Furthermore, the pastor’s history, knowledge, and adaptive capacity further influences a congregation’s ability to navigate decline and change. The second section examines death, loss, and the grieving process within the context of a shared pastorate. As a congregation approaches organizational death, can the grieving process help it to find acceptance and a new pathway forward? Finally, the third section provides a narrative of change and resistance over the eight years of the shared pastorate.

Adaptive change requires a leader to pivot and reframe in response to resistance. A shared pastorate between declining sibling congregations brings unique challenges for a pastor leading adaptive change. This paper is a reflection upon the journey to assist two congregations despite resistance to find acceptance in the midst of the grief and loss to their changing situation.

Word Count: 240 words
To my parents who now reside with the saints in the glory of our Lord.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my cohort, doctoral supervisor, and the staff of the doctor of ministry program for their encouragement and support throughout this program. I also thank my congregations for their patience as I worked and stumbled my way through this program. Most of all, I thank my wife and daughter who teach me every day the grace and joy of God. Thank you for being my village of support.
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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

A Parable of Two Sisters

There was a wise and successful businessman who had two daughters whom he loved dearly. In their appearance and personality, both daughters resembled their father but in different ways. The sisters, however, did not resemble one another. Both sisters admired their father, and the father was proud of his daughters.

The daughters eventually left home and started their own families and careers. They were successful in their own differing ways. Their father, knowing that he would soon travel to a distant country, called his daughters together. He advised the sisters that although he might be away, he was confident that together they could handle any problem.

The sisters lived their lives independent of one another. They each had different interests and friends. They thought of their father frequently and hoped that he would soon return.

News came one day that their father had perished in a foreign land. The business and property were divided equally between the sisters. The father had bequeathed a special family heirloom to his daughters, an heirloom that had been in the family for generations, a mirror split into two halves. On the back was engraved Psalm 133:1 so that when placed together it read, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live in unity!” In his will, each daughter was given a half of the mirror and a reminder of their father’s advice that together they could handle any problem.

As is often the case, the daughters drifted back into their separate lives and soon forgot their father’s advice. They had their struggles and triumphs that they handled on their own and within their separate families. They both missed their father and, especially in hard times, yearned for his wise counsel. On occasion, each sister would gaze into her half-mirror and remember better times with their father.

As time wore on and their families left home, the sisters remembered their father, but only as each recognized her own traits, for they had lost touch with one another. Eventually both sisters passed away. They were each buried in the family vault along with their father. Upon the entrance of the vault was engraved the words of Psalm 133:1, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live in unity!”

For over one hundred and fifty years, Pioneer Presbyterian of Marinette, Wisconsin (Pioneer) and First Presbyterian Church of Menominee, Michigan (FPC) have grown up as sibling Presbyterian churches. Founded by the same pastor on opposite sides
of the Menominee River, they have developed beside one another while also being independent and often in competition.

For the last thirty years, both churches have been in the midst of decline. FPC’s rise and decline has been quicker and more drastic, while Pioneer’s has been more stable. Their respective histories and contexts help to explain their differing responses to decline and the change process. Eight years ago, due to declining membership and resources, both churches determined that each congregation could no longer afford a full-time pastor so I was called as their first shared pastor. Written from the perspective of a memoir, this paper is a reflection upon my efforts to lead these congregations together into shared missional ministry. These are my experiences with these two congregations as we traveled together upon the circuitous and often frustrating route of change, the resistance that incurred, and what I learned about adaptive change along the way.

A parent’s toil and love raising sibling children is an apt metaphor for my work with these two churches. As a sibling growing up in a loving and dysfunctional family, this metaphor relates to my emotional and spiritual journey. Within my family of origin, I too have navigated the stormy waters of change. In my life and ministry, I have found that the emotional growth of families and congregations are similar; they are often messy undertakings that do not follow a linear route. Families and congregations are as unique as the individuals and cultures that comprise them.

Perhaps this is why God has chosen to do much of his work in the context of dysfunctional families. The Bible is filled with stories of God working within and through dysfunctional family dynamics: Sibling rivalry, resistance, betrayal, and favoritism are but a few examples. These biblical narratives assist leaders and
congregations by giving context to God’s work in leading change. Working through change is an incarnational ministry in which God is willing to come down and enter into the messy areas of our lives.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an example of one such journey of change by reflecting through the lens of my experiences in reference to family systems, adaptive change theory, and practical theology in order to learn about change and resistance within a shared pastoral model of ministry. Furthermore, in these congregations’ differing responses to the changing world around them, this project seeks to learn how the individual organizational cultures of these congregations have imprinted their capacity or lack of capacity to change.

My route of understanding the adaptive change process has been winding. A cohort colleague refers to this as the “fog” of adaptive change. Like many pastors, I fell into a pastorate in need of adaptive change, but my knowledge was markedly inadequate. I did not possess the skills or understanding to lead my congregations where they needed to go. I entered this cohort of leading change with the hope that I could turn things around for these congregations. I discovered along the way that I needed to learn a new way of leading and thinking about ministry.

Many doctor of ministry projects and programs follow a theory to practice model. As Tod Bolsinger points out, leading adaptive change requires a different paradigm because it requires leaders to make adjustments as they are engaged in ministry, learning in order to fulfill a missional purpose.¹ Leading adaptive change requires an iterative

process of observation, interpretation, and experimentation. It requires leaders to learn such skills as “getting up on the balcony” and “listening to the songs beneath the words.”

Therefore, an important aspect of this paper will be reflecting upon my own learning as I have stumbled and adapted through this process. It has been helpful to reflect upon my own resistance and collusion within the change process alongside the churches. As Bolsinger points out, adaptive change challenges and tests us as leaders. It requires us as leaders to experience and navigate profound loss. It has required me to “learn to lead all over again.”

Over the last eight years, FPC has tread the pathway towards congregational death. At the initial writing of this paper, FPC’s leadership board was contemplating whether the congregation could continue to afford a part-time pastor. My previous project was identifying the stages of a dying congregation and assisting FPC through the process of death and grief. I had hoped that by acknowledging their grief, the members could move toward a new reality. However, the congregation continued to resist accepting this reality. Much of the research and work of the original project has been integrated into the final phase of this paper, which offers the congregation the tools and knowledge that the congregation will need to process its grief.

Leading change is always a grieving process because it involves dealing with loss. In the last three years, I have worked through the stages of grief following the deaths of my parents. My mother’s death was sudden and unexpected. My father, however,

\[2^{\text{Ibid., 112-114.}}\]

\[3^{\text{Ibid., 18-19.}}\]
suffered three years with dementia before allowing himself to die. Towards the end, hospice assisted my dad and me through his final days. As these congregations have moved closer to organizational death, I realized that the grieving process and hospice care were another set of lenses from which to reflect upon my work with both of these congregations. When facing the upcoming death of a loved one, siblings and families often handle death and grief differently; likewise, these sibling congregations have dealt and processed their decline and grief differently.

None of us are born a blank slate. Nature and nurture play an important role in our development as an individual. At birth, nature imprints us with the genetic code of our biological parents. We are further influenced by the histories of our family of origin and the culture in which our parents were raised along with the surrounding culture in which we were raised. Likewise, a shared ministry is born and developed out of similar influences. A shared pastorate is imprinted and affected by the cultural understanding of its members along with the cultural and societal influences from the communities, which the congregation is birthed.

Part one of the paper examines the context of the shared pastorate. I begin with my own context growing up as a younger sibling child in a dysfunctional family. My context provides a reference point to reflect upon my decisions and leadership while leading these two congregations into adaptive change. Next, I turn to the context of the communities and then the churches. As a shared pastor of two congregations, I have had the opportunity to examine and compare the resistance to change within both churches. Their histories provide a glimpse into how two small Midwestern mainline congregations are handling the changing context of societal and cultural shift away from Christendom.
As within many families, the more conflicted child often receives more attention. FPC has been the more difficult of the two congregations. As a result, the congregation has resisted the change process more outspokenly. Therefore, more focus has been given within the paper to explain the ministry context and resistance of FPC. A less in-depth ministry context of Pioneer provides a broader outlook of the whole change initiative.

If my family of origin and hospice experiences are lenses, theologies are the frames in which the lenses are held. Theologies allow us to angle our experiences so that we can examine them through our knowledge of God and God’s interaction with us. Part two seeks to understand the adaptive process of these churches over the last eight years through two of these theological frames. The first frame is a theology of sibling congregations and family systems to assist in understanding the differing responses towards the change process of these two congregations. The second frame is a theology of grief and death reflected through the Christian hope of life and resurrection. The literature overview chapter is composed with the goal of assisting FPC to face the reality of its situation while also knowing that God calls the congregation through death to new life.

Part three will provide a narrative of change and resistance in the different phases that I have employed through this adaptive change process. The overarching theme has been addressing the adaptive challenge of cultural change through a shared pastorate. The first phase incorporates my initial attempts to direct both churches towards shared ministry outreach and vision. When this did not work, I pivoted to the second phase, which was to focus more directly with FPC upon its looming organizational death. The
third phase morphed to a hybrid of the first two phases in order to encourage both congregations to work together as I ended my time as their shared pastor.

Resistance is a natural part of the change process and is to be expected. A leader of change cannot give up once he or she meets resistance. In declining churches, leaders must help a congregation accept the reality they face, walk alongside the congregation through grief, and assist the members to look towards a future they find difficult to envision. FPC’s continued resistance towards change is directing the congregation further towards organizational death.

As a resurrection people, Christians are called to face death but not see it as the end. As pastors, we are often called to assist our members in dealing with death and loss. While there is a myriad of resources for redeveloping an organization and leading change, unfortunately there is a dearth of resources assisting congregations and leaders to discuss, plan and lead through the end of a church’s ministry. My hope is that this project provides pastors and church leaders a resource to understand grief and adaptive change as it relates to declining congregations’ choice to share a pastor.

This project is about not giving up in ministry amid resistance. It is about accepting reality, learning from failure, and walking through grief. Adaptive change requires the ability to pivot as necessary based upon the changing needs of a congregation. This project is also about pivoting and reframing as congregations resist change.

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The decline and possible demise of a church is an unpleasant future to grasp, but our hope as Christians is that out of death comes new life and resurrection. The immediate future is bleak and unclear for FPC, but, as Scripture witnesses, our God is always faithful. Hopefully, the insights gained from this project will assist in understanding the challenges modern congregations face as they wrestle with changing times and the reality of the decline of mainline Christianity. The people of God have often thrived when faced with hardship, and it is as an exilic people that we are led by God faithfully into the promised land of hope and resurrection. It is in our faith in God that we ultimately find renewal and new life.
CHAPTER 1:
MY SIBLING CONTEXT

Ruth Haley Barton encourages congregational leaders towards an emotional and spiritual “homecoming” by laying claim to their experiences and emotional pasts. She observes, “Then we are in a position to take responsibility for ourselves rather than be driven by our unconscious patterns of manipulating and controlling our reality.”¹ My emotional and spiritual homecoming runs through my family of origin. And since this is a project about leading change within “sister” congregations, paying particular attention to my own family of origin, allows me both a lens for viewing the churches and an opportunity to become more aware of my own biases.

I was raised in a loving and dysfunctional family. My mother was chronically depressed and undiagnosed throughout my childhood. My father came from an alcoholic family and he eventually also turned to alcohol to cope with the problems of our family. I am the youngest of two sons. My brother is four years older.

My earliest family memories are positive. My parents were supportive and loving towards me and my brother. As I entered elementary school, my brother began to act out aggressively towards me and others. Later in counseling, I learned that this was the role that my brother took on within our alcoholic and dysfunctional family system. As the “black sheep,” he distracted the family from addressing the serious problems facing the family. He became the problem. I in turn took on the opposite role of the “good child.” My brother and I played our roles well.

My parents focused their attention on the problems of my brother while lavishing praise upon me for my “good” behavior. We hungered for the attention of our parents, but we received an unbalanced diet. I grew up feeling guilty for receiving positive attention while my brother was often told, “Why can’t you be more like Jon.” Since my brother was the eldest, I imagine this was hard for him to hear. Therefore, my brother rebelled. He often engaged in fights at school and with me. His grades suffered while he drew inward. He identified as the outcast.

My brother became increasingly abusive and controlling towards me as we got older. By the time I reached middle school, I avoided my brother. I returned my brother’s abuse by excelling. I was friendly and kind. I had many friends. I never got into a fight at school. I participated in sports, band, and honors classes. I also became active in our church youth group.

My brother left for college but later dropped out after two years. He then joined the Army. With his leaving, I enjoyed the peace away from my brother. However, my family no longer had my brother to draw focus away from our parents’ problems. To
cope, I sought activities outside of home as much as possible. I spent most of my time with friends and church activities.

I commuted my first year of college, but during the first summer I left home. I returned only for short visits, eat a meal, and wash my laundry. I never stayed overnight. There were too many painful memories.

When I was eighteen, my dad accepted his alcoholism. He entered treatment at a hospital and attended Alcoholics Anonymous. At first, I doubted his perseverance, but he never drank again. His treatment opened a doorway of healing for the rest of my family. The program that my dad entered treated the whole family as a system. My mother and I were expected to receive counseling as well so that we too could understand the alcoholic family system and our part within that system. My mother went through the motions of the program, but she never fully accepted her mental illness as a factor in our family’s dysfunction. However, once the light was cast upon our family problems, it became harder for my family to ignore.

I entered counseling with a desire to make sense of our family’s past. Even before counseling though, I was cognizant that my family was broken. This awareness was most likely a factor in my choice of psychology as a major within college. I wanted to understand and “fix” my family problems. Subconsciously, I continued playing the role of the family fixer. This role continues to be at the heart of who I am today. It is one of the roles I often take on as a minister. Because of the counseling I received, the realization comes quickly that I cannot fix systems that do not want to be fixed. I realized early in adulthood that I could not fix my family; I could only work on myself, but it still does not stop me from yearning to fix it.
My mother and brother continued to run away from the reality of our family problems. My dad focused upon his problems, but he displayed difficulty confronting my brother and mom with their denial. I, on the other hand, no longer wanted to deny what had happened to our family. While I could not force my family to accept the problems of the past, I often confronted them with the reality of our past problems. This often caused a rift between my family and me, especially as I pointed out the family secret of my mom’s depression.

My family still relied emotionally upon me. I called the paramedics each time my mother attempted suicide. I also had my mother committed to a psychiatric ward after my father burned down their house due to his dementia. Even though these actions often caused conflict between me and my family because they revealed the family’s dysfunction, the alternative was untenable. I took on the role of the ‘responsible bad guy,’ while I still yearned for harmony within the family. I have carried this past into my ministry; it is why I gravitated towards learning more about adaptive change. A broken system bothers me.

I have learned that a piece of adaptive change is not trying to “fix” the problem alone but creating a healthier environment for change and giving the work back to those motivated to bring about change.² I have learned to become more cognizant of my desire to “fix” along with an understanding of when to push the truth and when to back away. My family of origin has been a wonderful test case for understanding adaptive change and family systems.

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² Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 167.
Currently, my brother and I are not close, but there has been healing. I continue to leave the door open for us to discuss our childhood, yet he is still resistant to enter into our past. I no longer blame him for what transpired. I have forgiven him for his actions against me as a child. We were playing the roles we were handed as children. However, those actions continue to keep us from being close.

My mother yearned for my brother and me to get along. Perhaps this is why I desired these sibling churches to work together. I yearn for peace, harmony, and connectedness, but I have witnessed personally and professionally that it cannot be forced. Conflict and problems cannot be ignored; otherwise, they will fester and grow. Instead, adaptive change requires a willingness to enter into conflict, manage it, and harness its energy. I continue to develop these adaptive change skills; they have assisted me as a leader towards rectifying my spiritual and emotional homecoming.

My history and context impacted my choice to accept this shared pastorate. From my earliest experiences, the church was a community where I could find an alternative reference point in order to navigate my life. Church was a place of centering peace, a place I could leave my family issues behind. However, I can see that my choices in my life and ministry continue to be influenced by my family of origin, for good and for bad. Pioneer more closely resembled the congregation I grew up within. Its values connected with me and made me feel more at home. As the dutiful forgotten sibling in this shared ministry, Pioneer and I share a common role and relationship.

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3 Heifetz and Linsky, Leadership on the Line, 102.
CHAPTER 2:
MENOMINEE, MICHIGAN, THE LITTLE SISTER CITY OF A DECLINING MIDWESTERN REGION

Financial Better Times:
From Lumber Boomtown to Declining Manufacturing Town

Marinette, Wisconsin and Menominee, Michigan grew up together on opposite sides of the Menominee River where the river meets the Green Bay of Lake Michigan. The Menominee River serves as the border between Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Both cities originally grew as logging towns from the mid 1800s. The Menominee River provided access into the interior forests where trees useful for building grew plentiful. Marinette’s and Menominee’s locations along Green Bay provided a quick transportation route to the growing cities of the east and south. In relaying the history of the Marinette/Menominee area, Larry Ebsch states, "It was from these vast timberlands came the lumber, shingles, laths, and other wood products that built the cities

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1 Larry Ebsch, “Last Sawmill on the River Remembered”, Eagle Herald (Marinette), Byelines, July 9, 2012 - The first sawmill owned by William Farnsworth and Charles Brush sent the first load of white pine to the Chicago market in 1836. By 1896, there were sixteen sawmills along the river and another nine along the bay within the cities of Menominee and Marinette.
along the western and eastern shorelines of Lake Michigan and other developing towns in the upper Midwest.”

The logging industry drew immigrants seeking employment and a better life. Many immigrants grouped together into specific neighborhoods where they shared a common culture, faith, and language. In Menominee, these neighborhoods were French Town, Killogobin (Irish), Dominac Finn Town (Finnish and Irish), Wanek Avenue (Polish), German Town, Dutch Town, Swede Town, and Little Russia.

Although logging was the key source of employment into the early twentieth century, given Menominee’s and Marinette’s locations on Lake Michigan, other industries such as fishing, paper production, and manufacturing grew alongside the paper industry. As wooded areas were deforested, the logging industry declined in the early 1900s, and these other industries began to take a more prominent role. Karl Krog, writing in the *Marinette County Historian* said, “The city needed to find new industry to replace the abandoned lumberyards and empty buildings along the Menominee River.” By the 1930s, the reign of the logging industry had ended. In 1917, the last log drive was conducted along the Menominee River; and in 1931, the last saw mill along the river sawed its last log.

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3 This information was collected from a drawn map provided by the Menominee Historical Society.


At the turn of the 20th century, both communities were at their population peaks. In 1900, the city of Menominee had a population of 12,818 and the city of Marinette had a population of 16,195. By 1920, the population of Menominee dropped to 8,907 and gradually rose back to 11,289 by 1960. Since 1960, the population of the city has slowly decreased. By 2014, the population of the city of Menominee had shrunk to 8,458.\(^6\) The city of Marinette had a more gradual decline from its peak to the current population of 10,897 last reported in 2014.\(^7\)

Comparing the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census data, the population of the area has become older. In that ten-year period, the population of Menominee decreased by 9 percent. Those under 20 years of age decreased at a greater rate of 22 percent and ages 20-44 decreased by 26 percent. However, individuals age 55-64 increased by 52 percent. In the ten years, there were 1827 fewer people in the Menominee area under the age of 45 while the number of individuals over 45 years of age increased by 412. The most significant decrease was among those ages 35-44, which saw a 37 percent decrease, 783 fewer individuals. In 2000, 58 percent of Menominee was under the age of 45. In 2010, it was down to 48 percent. The city of Marinette saw a similar trend.\(^8\)

One possible explanation for the greater decrease among the younger ages is the effect of the 2008 Great Recession, which could have impacted the finances of these


younger workers more significantly than the older population. While the younger population would have seen it as more necessary to move away for work, the older population was perhaps more established and able to weather the recession better. Also, the lower cost of living and house prices could have been a contributing factor in older individuals moving to the area. Another possible factor is that older family members returned to take care of elderly family.

To this day, manufacturing is the key employer for the area. Comparing business data for the two counties in 1993, 2005, and 2015, the three largest employment sectors were manufacturing, retail, and health care.\(^9\) Manufacturing employees increased between the years of 1993 and 2005 by 154 employees and then decreased by 709 employees by 2015 (an 8 percent decrease). Retail has steadily declined by 39 percent over the same twenty-two-year period. Health care rose by 1,287 more jobs by the year 2005 and then a loss of 402 jobs by 2015. As the community has aged, jobs have migrated towards health care, but manufacturing is still an important part of the area’s economy. Many young adults have left to find work in bigger metropolitan areas such as Green Bay, Milwaukee and Detroit. Most of those who have left for college do not return except to visit family.

Another major shift for local manufacturing has been the purchase of several of the larger businesses by non-local and foreign corporations. Marinette Marine, which builds the Littoral Class destroyers for the U.S. Navy, is owned by an Italian company;

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Enstrom Helicopters is owned by a Chinese corporation; Ansul Chemical, a fire extinguishers manufacturer, was bought by Tyco and then recently bought by Johnson Controls, which is headquartered in Milwaukee; and Air Gas is owned by a French corporation. Each of these corporations were once locally owned and operated. Most of the executive and office support staff positions have been consolidated and moved out of the area. Most of the jobs that remain for younger adults are typically technical trade positions such as welding, nursing, and health care that require a technical school degree. The Northeastern Wisconsin Technical Center has recently expanded its local school to meet the demand for these jobs, while there are fewer job opportunities for college educated young adults.

A Tale of Two Cities/States/Regions:
Independence, Interdependence, and Competition

Menominee is unique geographically and sociologically. It is separated from Marinette and Wisconsin by the Menominee River. Menominee is a part of the Upper Peninsula (UP) of Michigan, which is separated from the Lower Peninsula by Lake Michigan. The Mackinac Bridge connects the two peninsulas at its closest point where Lake Michigan and Lake Huron meet. Menominee is the furthest point south in the UP. Residents of the UP are known as *Yoopers* and there is a sense of pride about being separate from the Lower Peninsula.

The UP was given as a compromise to Michigan in 1836 over a land dispute with Ohio concerning a region along the Michigan/Ohio border, a 468-square-mile area known as the Toledo Strip. The Toledo Strip was an important acquisition for Ohio because it
provided river access to Lake Erie. The concession however was unpopular among Michigan residents and was originally voted down, but a financial crisis and pressure from Congress finally ensured ratification. The UP makes up 29 percent of Michigan’s land mass but has only 3 percent of the population.

The UP has been a rich depository of natural resources for Michigan. Iron ore mining, logging, and fishing attracted many settlers. However, since state permitting and regulations are handled in the state capital of Lansing, 237 miles from the closest point of the UP, there has often existed a feeling of disconnect and cynicism within Michigan politics. It is commonly expressed that Lansing only cares about the riches of the UP and not its input. This issue has recently come to the forefront as a copper mine along the Menominee River has been proposed and permitted by the state of Michigan. Signs protesting the mine stating, “Save the Menominee River,” are commonplace. There has been frustration voiced by some that Lansing is not listening. Decisions about taxes and school funding are also handled on the state level, which adds to frustrations as Menominee and UP populations decline along with local school and government budgets.

Another boundary separating Menominee from most of Michigan is time. Since 1973, the counties of the UP that border Wisconsin, including Menominee County, are in the Central time zone where the rest of Michigan is in the Eastern time zone. This has at times worked to the advantage of local churches such as with First Methodist Church of Menominee, which recently shared a pastor with a Methodist church in Escanaba.

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Michigan, an hour drive away. The time change allowed the pastor to leave the worship of the church in Eastern Time and arrive at the same time in Central Time to lead worship at the other church. Normally though, the time differences causes confusion when working across time zones.

These separations have resulted in a sense of regional independence for “Yoopers.” Independence is amplified for Menominee residents because Menominee borders Wisconsin. Menominee residents take pride being separate from their southern neighbor of Marinette. There is a spirit of pride and competition that flows on both sides of the river. Local Marinette historian Karl Krog wrote in an article for the Marinette County Historian about the retail business of Marinette in the 1920s and noted, “Marinette business leaders were more interested in the immediate need of competing with the neighboring city of Menominee rather than compiling figures on how well they were competing for the area’s retail trade.”12 The competition is more pronounced in Menominee because Marinette does not face the same isolating barriers as Menominee.

Despite Yooper independence and regional competition, both communities are interdependent economically and socially. Many individuals cross the river to work and shop. Almost all the name brand retail stores are in Marinette. Many individuals have lived in both communities at one time in their lives. Many have spouses who are from the opposite community, as well as family who live across the river. The two community hospitals were consolidated in 1983 into Bay Area Medical Center.13 Most of the medical


clinics are in Marinette because of the higher cost for malpractice insurance in Michigan. The Airport, Chamber of Commerce, United Way, Red Cross, and Rotary Clubs have also consolidated as the population and resources have decreased. While there are some individuals who will only shop and conduct business on one side of the river, the vast majority of residents interact with one another freely and openly.

Lifting up the shared needs and interdependency between the communities became an important educational goal of the project and the shared pastorate. Like the sisters in the parable, the communities and congregations need one another. Unfortunately many within both congregations and communities resist accepting this new reality and hold tightly to their independence.

**Ethnic and Religious Identification**

The cities of Menominee and Marinette have four Roman Catholic churches, fifteen mainline protestant churches and fifteen evangelical protestant churches. Of the Marinette County population in 2010, Roman Catholic adherents were 24.1 percent, 14.9 percent Evangelical Protestant, 9.3 percent Mainline Protestant, and 51.8 percent had no affiliation.\(^\text{14}\) Of the Menominee County population in 2010, Roman Catholic adherents were 33.5 percent, 14.4 percent Mainline Protestant, 10.1 percent Evangelical Protestant, and 41.1 percent had no affiliation.\(^\text{15}\) Denominationally, the Roman Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran Church of America have the most adherents in the two counties.


\(^{15}\) Ibid.
Many of the churches were founded by ethnic communities to provide worship in their native language and to share a common cultural heritage. This is particularly true for most of the Lutheran, Evangelical Covenant, and Roman Catholic congregations. Within these two communities, St. John’s Catholic was founded by French-Canadians, St. Adalbert’s Catholic by Poles, Central and Our Savior’s Lutheran by Norwegians, Bethel and Zion Lutheran by Swedes, Christ, Trinity, and Faith Lutheran by Germans, and Bethany Lutheran by Danes. Over time, these churches either switched to only worshipping in English or consolidated with English speaking congregations.

In contrast, the local Presbyterian, Methodist, United Church of Christ, Episcopal, Baptist, and Assembly of God congregations were not formed by ethnic communities. These congregations were formed by parishioners identifying with certain theological traditions and movements. While all local mainline churches have declined in membership over the last forty years, it has been more pronounced in these non-ethnically founded churches. In the last seven years, the local Presbyterian and Methodist pastors have begun serving two or three congregations where previously each congregation was able to support its own pastor. Grace Episcopal Church of Menominee can no longer afford a priest and now utilizes four volunteer lay deacons to share pulpit responsibilities. The sole United Church of Christ congregation can only afford a part-time pastor for their small congregation.

According to Evangelical Lutheran Church of America statistical data between 2005 and 2010, five of the six local congregations have seen a decrease in average
weekly attendance while one has maintained its membership but has not grown.\textsuperscript{16}

According to the pastors of these congregations, this downward trend has continued since 2010. Where previously the two largest of these congregations had assistant pastors, these positions no longer exist.

The Roman Catholic congregations have consolidated along with priestly responsibilities as adherents have dropped. According to the Association of Religion Data Archives, between 2000 and 2010, Catholic adherents has decreased by 3,034 individuals, a decrease of 27.4 percent.\textsuperscript{17} Of the five active Catholic churches in the city of Menominee in the 1960s, now only two remain. Catholic school attendance has also decreased significantly over the years.

The three largest congregations in the area are Faith Church, New Life Church, and Calvary Assembly of God. Attendance and membership records are more difficult to ascertain from two of the three churches because of an informal understanding of membership. Faith Church has a membership of 273 members with an average weekly attendance around 400 participants. This includes adults and children. It is estimated that New Life and Calvary are about the same size as Faith Church.

Even with these medium sized churches, total participation in worship services within the area is a smaller portion of the population than in the 1960s. While a few

\textsuperscript{16}“Projected Change in Population from 2010 to 2015 by ZIP Codes and Change in Congregation Average Attendance from 2005 to 2010 for the Northern Great Lakes Synod,” \textit{Evangelical Lutheran Church of America: Research and Evaluation}, accessed October 18, 2018, \url{http://download.elca.org/ELCA\percent20Resource\percent20Repository/5G_NorthernGreatLakes_map.pdf?_ga=2.105378563.1256548881.1535985775-1502263651.1535985775}

\textsuperscript{17}“Religious Traditions: Menominee County,” \textit{Association of Religion Data Archives}, accessed October 18, 2018, \url{http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/v/c/26/rcms2010_26109_county_name_2000_ON.asp}
congregations have shown increases, overall church attendance has declined in the area. The effects of this shift away from church attendance has had a significant impact upon the local churches in its resources and influence.

The loss of influence and resources has at times encouraged local mainline Christians and clergy to voice suspicion towards the “newer” congregations of Faith, New Life, and Calvary. Instead of examining the success of these congregations and partnering with them, the local mainline congregations have often clustered together along theological perspectives. Post-Christendom requires a new outlook for congregations. Adaptive change encourages congregations to seek new paradigms and associations within the Church, to return back to Spirit focused missional outreach and cooperation of the early Church. This pivot of perspective has been a difficult shift for most congregations within the area to make. Divisions still run deep within the Christian communities.

**Midwestern Cultural and Sub-Cultural Influences**

Family plays a large role in the culture of the area. The extended family is often the single most important social structure. Multi-generations of families often live in town or within the state and have regular contact with one another. Grandparents often step in to help with child care and support when needed. Holidays and vacations are times to connect with family. Four generations of a family are not uncommon in a church. However, the trend is for family activities to pull members away from church attendance rather than pull non-regular attending family members into more regular attendance.
According to police and city officials, drugs are a major problem in the area.\textsuperscript{18} This aligns with community perceptions according to a 2013 community study by the Tri-City United Way, which identified substance abuse as the biggest issue facing the community.\textsuperscript{19} Substance abuse affects many aspects of people’s lives and ripples into families and schools. Preceding the drugs, there has been a culture of alcohol consumption and alcoholism within the area for several generations. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Wisconsin ranks third in the country in bars and taverns per capita of the population, with one bar for every 1,862 residents.\textsuperscript{20} Wisconsin has almost as many bars as California yet has one seventh of the population. Back in 1984, it was reported that per capita alcohol consumption of Upper Peninsula residents was twice that of the Lower Peninsula.\textsuperscript{21} Drug use and addiction has increased drastically and has expedited the problems of addiction.\textsuperscript{22}

Alcohol consumption is a regular part of social life. This history has its roots when the area was a logging town; lumberjacks would come to town to drink in local taverns. Back in the 1900s, it was reported that there were at least twice as many bars as churches.

\textsuperscript{18} According to the Marinette City police chief, Marinette County sheriff, and Menominee City police chief who spoke separately to the Menominee/Marinette Rotary Club, May 2017.

\textsuperscript{19} “Community Conversation Survey,” Tri-City United Way, Marinette, WI, 2013.


\textsuperscript{22} “Wisconsin Epidemiological Profile on Alcohol and Other Drug Use” Wisconsin Department of Health Services; Madison, WI, September 2014.
At one time there were two local breweries in Menominee. Leisen and Henes Brewery founded in 1876, which later became M and M Brewery and the Menominee River Brewing Co. founded in 1886. Leisen and Henes was founded by John Henes and his father-in-law Jacob Leisen. John Henes had been born in Germany where as a young man he brought his knowledge of brewing to America. Larry Ebsch recalls, “The brewing industry was a highly successful one during Menominee’s history. It thrived for more than 85 years before increased operating costs and stiff competition from major breweries in the major cities made it difficult for the small-town brewery to survive. The brewing industry came to an end in Menominee in 1961.” 23 John Henes was an influential business man and philanthropist in the area; the large city park along the bay that he donated to the city bears his name.

To this day, local restaurants have large bar areas and are often more populated than the dining rooms. Many of the restaurants first began as taverns, serving food on the side. Wedding rehearsals, birthdays, anniversaries and football are among the regular celebrations that often involve alcohol. To those from other parts of the country, it is evident how much alcohol influences the local culture whereas many from the local area see it as a normal part of life.

Football is both a unifying and competitive pastime for both communities. Overwhelmingly, individuals in both Menominee and Marinette are Green Bay Packer fans. Team jerseys and green and gold paraphernalia are often worn to church services on game Sundays. Events in both communities are planned around the Packer home game

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schedule. Packer game schedules are distributed by local businesses and at community parades. Packer parties are a time for family and friends to gather together. Owning Green Bay Packer stock and season tickets are badges of honor. Relatives who have moved out of state often call and connect during the games. On Sunday, the game is on the main television in every bar, restaurant, and nursing home.

Given the competitive nature between the two communities, it is no surprise that high school football and sports rivalries have been a part of the history between these two communities. The M and M football game between the Marinette and Menominee High Schools is the longest running high school football rivalry in the nation. Larry Ebsch recalls, “[The] First M and M game played on Thanksgiving in 1894, Menominee won 14-4 before 500 spectators. The game was held on a crude playing field in Marinette.” Although in separate states and conferences, the game has been played almost every year since 1899. It is a source of pride for both communities.

In the past, some local pastors have tried to argue against the influence of alcohol and the Packers upon the community, but it typically fell upon deaf ears. It is ironic that temperance and Christian education were originally a rallying force behind the founding of many local churches. The founding pastor of Pioneer Presbyterian wrote in his autobiography about his local ministry, “I have labored much to promote the cause of temperance and education.”24 With the encroachment of football and youth athletics upon Sunday attendance and the influence of alcohol, it is obvious which side has had more of an impact upon the current local culture.

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Modern and Post-Modern Conflict in a Traditional Town

Both Menominee and Marinette are two traditional Midwestern communities caught between the philosophical, social, and economic effects of modernity and post-modernity. Built and flourishing at the end of modernity, the layout of the community reflects its Christendom philosophy of institutional oversight for the benefit of the community. Churches were founded as a stable force to promote society and governance. The tallest buildings of the community were and still are the spires of the churches and courthouses emphasizing faith and governance.

As boom towns, both Marinette and Menominee grew from the shores where logging and industry were best situated to transport their goods to market. Residential areas grew further inward but close enough that employees could quickly walk or drive to work. Churches and the city government rose together to bring order to the area and the layout of Menominee reflects this ideal. First Street is along the bay and was originally lined with businesses and store fronts. Tenth Avenue is the main artery to the waterfront. On Fifth Street and Tenth Avenue, two blocks away from First Street along the main avenue, First Presbyterian Church, the first organized Menominee congregation placed its church building; a block away, First Methodist; and two blocks away Grace Episcopal Church, which is situated across from the County Courthouse. Residential homes and businesses surround these areas.

Business and community leaders once encouraged church attendance. The local newspapers often had articles introducing new pastors and promoting faith events. Local community clubs and groups had an officer position of chaplain who would say prayers
at each function after the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. In the 1950s, the Christian and U.S. flags were prominently displayed in the front of every sanctuary. The implication was that churches and government worked side by side for the ordering of society.25

As church membership and attendance declined, attitudes shifted away from this Christendom ideal between Church and State. Among Christians, it is often remembered as “the good ol’ days.” New programs and solutions are typically geared towards bringing back this lost paradigm. Recently, citywide debates about the placement of a manger scene on public property emphasized the change in perceptions. The older generations of church goers bemoaned the cultural change while younger non-church attenders did not care. Churches have, by and large, become places that cater to their parishioners needs instead of places sending out Christians to engage the culture. Over the last five decades, atrophy has settled into most congregations and threatens to cut off the life of most area congregations.26

According to the local hospital chaplain, when death or crisis arise, many patients and families feel lost in dealing with spiritual matters. They are uncertain of where to turn. My colleagues in ministry report fewer requests to officiate weddings and many of those are held away from the church grounds. A growing trend among couples whose weddings I have officiated has been first comes children, then a house, and then

25 These insights are from interviews with local pastors and parishioners. Archived pictures of local sanctuaries from the sixties display flags in the front.

26 This assertion is based upon conversations with local pastors. Among the local mainline congregations, there have not been any ecumenical evangelism efforts for the last twenty years. In 2011, Pioneer attempted an evangelism course with other congregations, but none of the other area congregations were willing to participate.
Within many first marriages, it is common for there to be children from previous relationships. This is the new normal in which churches reside.
CHAPTER 3:
MINISTRY CONTEXT OF THE SHARED PASTORATE

A Brief History of Pioneer Presbyterian Church

Pioneer Presbyterian Church was founded in Marinette, Wisconsin in 1863. There were thirteen founding members. Many of these founding members were prominent leaders in the burgeoning city. Four of Marinette’s city streets still bear the names of these founders. The Reverend John Fairchild was the organizing pastor. In 1870, the first church building was built. U.S. Senator Isaac Stephenson donated the land for the church.¹

From its earliest beginnings, Pioneer had a fervor for mission. Its name reflected the congregation’s drive to spread the gospel to the reaches of the new wilderness. Several mission churches and Sabbath schools were established. Rev. Fairchild conducted mission services in Menominee, which led to the establishment of FPC. In 1889, the Bangs Street Presbyterian Chapel was erected. It served as a mission Sunday school for the fifth ward. There was also a mission Sunday school established in the

Menekaune neighborhood of Marinette. Pioneer established mission Sunday schools and churches throughout the county. These were known as “substations.” From these substations, three churches were established: First Presbyterian Church, Wausaukee; First Presbyterian Church, Amberg; and Faith Presbyterian Church, Crivitz.

In 1895, the original church building was moved and remodeled to build more Sunday school rooms. A new sanctuary was built in its place. The new church was dedicated on June 7, 1900. By 1907, Pioneer had grown to a membership of 646 with 593 children attending Sabbath school. It had also organized two congregations and seven mission stations in the county.²

In 1955, a building committee was formed to examine the expansion needs of the church. It was decided to purchase property on Riverside Avenue next to the Menominee River in order to build a new church building. Following its mission to deepen the faith of children, the Christian Education building was the first building to be erected and used on the new property. It was dedicated in 1959. The new sanctuary was dedicated in 1967. Built in the modern style and with a Garden of Eden theme, the new sanctuary was built in a semi-circle and accentuated earthy stones, oak woodwork, and green carpet and pews. This is the current sanctuary still in use. A new Casavante pipe organ was installed in 1983, but it is hidden behind a mesh in order not to distract from the garden theme of the sanctuary.

Pioneer’s current sanctuary and building resemble the buildings and sanctuaries I was familiar with in Southern California and Washington state. Most Presbyterian

² Ibid.
congregations in California and Washington were founded after World War II, especially congregations within the suburbs. Pipe organs were less common. Previous to taking this position, I had only worked or participated in one church with a pipe organ. Since Pioneer’s organ pipes were behind a mesh, it resembled a sanctuary I might expect to find in California or Washington. From the beginning, I felt more of an affinity with Pioneer’s building than with FPC’s.

In 1964, the first women were elected to Session. And in 2001, the Rev. Jeannette Hickman served as interim pastor and was Pioneer’s first woman minister. Rev. Hickman was much loved by the congregation; she opened the pathway towards calling a permanent woman pastor. The Reverend Kathleen Dooley followed in 2002 serving as Pioneer’s first woman permanent minister until 2007. Pioneer’s openness to female pastoral leadership displays a respect for leadership across genders.

From its beginnings, Pioneer has attracted many local professionals and business leaders. Many of its members have been members of local service organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, and the Marinette Women’s Club. These clubs augment the work of the local churches and there has been a long history of cooperation.

Within the church, the Presbyterian Women (PW) group has played an important role in serving the church. In the 1920s, PW began selling peanuts in order to raise money for the ministries of the church. This group became known as the Presbyterian Peanut Women. It continues to this day and now has as an equal number of men participating. It has been renamed the Presbyterian Peanut Guild and raises around $7,000 each year to support church ministries and mission. As times have changed and more women work outside of the home, PW has dwindled in size and serves mostly as a
social group for the older women within the church. In ten more years, it will probably cease as an organized group within the church.

Pioneer’s missionary zeal has carried forward into its current culture. In the last hundred years, there have been a number of retired missionaries as members. For the last fifteen years, Pioneer has been supporting a missionary in Thailand. This missionary grew up in the church and her parents are active members. There have been several potlucks and fundraisers in order to raise funds for the missionary’s work. She returns once a year to visit with her parents and update the congregation concerning her mission work. Her mission work is deeply valued within the church. Furthermore, Rev. Mansur, the interim pastor before I arrived, grew up in Papua New Guinea. He was the son of Lutheran missionaries. His guidance was well received and respected by the congregation.

The church has historical roots and a close relationship with Winnebago Presbytery, and the Presbyterian Church (USA). Previous to the formation of the PCUSA in 1983, Pioneer had been Pioneer United Presbyterian Church, a part of the United Presbyterian Church USA. The United Presbyterian Church USA was known as the Presbyterian Church of the North after the separation of the northern and southern churches during the Civil War. Pioneer was formed during the Civil War, in the same year that Lincoln gave his Gettysburg Address. These connections to the denomination run deeply within the church’s ethos and is in stark contrast to FPC.

Children are a vital part of Pioneer’s mission. From its beginnings, Sunday school stations were opened to reach out to children within the community. In 1907, there were
over 593 children attendees in Sabbath school. In the 90s, the church opened an after
school program to help local children with their school work. There are many members
who have shared with me their fond memories of their Sunday school experience at
Pioneer and the love and support they received. Besides Sunday school, about twenty to
thirty children meet once a month for games and activities led by the Christian Education
director.

Many outside groups use Pioneer’s facilities. These relationships began as a result
of members who also participate in these groups and opening the door for the church to
provide space. These groups are Narcotics Anonymous, the M and M Quilters, Weight
Watchers, Dickens Book Club and the National Association of Librarians. Pioneer has
had a long tradition of welcoming outside groups to use its facilities at little or no cost. It
is a result of its outward mission and community outlook.

A History of First Presbyterian Church
1868 – 1968: Lumber Barons and Presbyterianism

In 1864, it is reported that the Reverend John Fairchild, the organizing pastor of
Pioneer Presbyterian Church would “on occasion,” row across the Menominee River in
order to hold services in the dining room of the Ludington Wells store in Menominee. From
these services, First Presbyterian was born. Nine individuals signed the original
petition requesting that Rev. Fairchild organize a Menominee Presbyterian church. The
First Presbyterian and Society of Menominee, Michigan was officially organized on June

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3 Ibid.
4 The Centennial Committee of First Presbyterian Church, A Centennial History of the First
Presbyterian Church, Menominee 1868-1968, Menominee, MI, (1968), 2.
In 1868, the population of Menominee was around 500. Only a couple of years earlier Menominee had been reported as having “a few straggling houses on sand heaps here and there, surrounded by water and swamps.”

A seminary student, Henry Loomis, from Auburn Seminary in New York was given responsibility of caring for the new congregation until he returned to seminary in the fall. The first church building was commissioned and dedicated in 1869. Rev. Payson served as the first called pastor in 1869.

In 1877, the women of the church organized as the Ladies Foreign Missionary Society. A year later, The Ladies Aid Society was formed and purchased two lots for a new parsonage. In 1884, Menominee received its charter as a city. In 1887, construction on a new house of worship was begun. A separate Sunday school building had been built a year prior and named the Maple Park Mission. The building is on the other side of town from the current sanctuary and is currently the home of the VFW. The first worship service was held in the new church building on January 25th, 1888.

On February 21, 1911, a fire destroyed much of the new church building. The brick walls, foundation, and most of the stained-glass windows survived. Most of the records of the church were destroyed and later reconstructed by a former pastor. The congregation voted to rebuild the church and met at the local library in the interim. The refurbished church building was dedicated on April 7, 1912.

5 “First Presbyterian Church,” Menominee Herald-Leader, June 8, 1943.

6 A Centennial History, 4.

This is the current building used by the church although there have been additions and alterations over the years. It is an impressive brick church built with several spires in the Swiss Reformation style. The stain glass windows are a prized possession of the congregation. They were originally donated by wealthy parishioners in memorial of deceased loved ones. There are twelve sections of stained glass and eight are dedicated to relatives of the early local lumber barons: Spies, Wells, Stephenson, and Holmes.

First Presbyterian became known as the church where the affluent and professionals worshipped. There is a side entrance with gas lighting fixtures; it was reported to be the entrance for the wealthiest members who could enter and exit without mingling with the rest of the congregation. Wealthy parishioners purchased family pews, which were the first pews to be padded. Rev. Clayton Parcells, a retired Presbyterian pastor who grew up in the church and one FPC’s oldest members, recalls that wealthy parishioners would bring their Christmas offering to the front in a display of their wealth.

Session minutes from 1911-40 (Session minutes prior to 1911 were destroyed in the fire) paint a picture of a steadily growing congregation between 300-400 members with an average worship attendance between 200-250. Evangelism, temperance and Christian education of children appear to be three driving forces for local outreach in the area. Sunday school enrollment ranged from 254-375 individuals. The ages of Sunday school participants were not listed so it is unclear if these numbers included adult participants. Enrollment might have also included children from the Maple Park Mission of First Presbyterian, which was set up on the opposite side of town in order to reach children about Jesus. A 200th anniversary celebration of local Sunday School programs
listed in its program that First Presbyterian was the first church to have Sunday school classes in the Menominee area beginning in 1868.8

Through its earliest years, Session meetings were a less formal affair. The Session minutes in 1912 through the 1930s were handwritten reports. Six male elders would meet with the pastor in his study and discuss the spiritual and educational work of the church. A separate board of Trustees handled the building and finances. In 1925, the first class of three male deacons were elected.

In 1939, the membership of the church was reported as 393 members. In 1944, Rev. E.E. Buzza became FPC’s sixteenth pastor. When he left in 1957, Rev. Buzza was the longest tenured pastor up to that point. He is the earliest pastor of recollection among the current parishioners. A list of goals for the church was included in the 1945 annual report:

1. To develop a richer and more meaningful personal spiritual life – and to increase the spiritual life of our church.
2. To promote a more active fellowship program, which will enlist the cooperation of old members and solicit the interest of new people.
3. To achieve a new conception of the meaning of Stewardship, as it applies to our time and talents as well as our possessions.
4. To develop more evangelistic zeal, which will reach out to touch those not now being reached by church or Sunday School.
5. To inform ourselves more fully of our Church’s World-wide Missionary Program and to secure more participation in that program.9

It is also important to note that in this annual report the budget was presented to the congregation for approval. This is a shift from current practice in which the Session approves the budget and presents it to the congregation.

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9 “Report of Organizations for the Year 1945-46”, First Presbyterian Church of Menominee, MI.
After World War II, a period of membership growth began for the church. With it, a change in tone among the Session minutes and annual reports. The minutes reflect a more business-like tone and organization structure. There was an increasing focus towards the programs of the church. By 1948, the Session was expanded to nine male elders. The Board of Deacons was expanded to twelve deacons including both men and women. The choir also began to take a more prominent role in the life of the church.

Church school enrollment was about half of what it was in the 1920s and 1930s. A possible explanation of this is a focus away from church school as an outreach into the community through its mission stations to providing a single Sunday school program held at the church. Youth programs also began to take root at this time.

In the late 1940s, there appears to have been greater emphasis placed on the social fellowship of the church. In the 1948 Choir Report, the Choir President states, “It is most gratifying to sing to an audience as large as that present at the Christmas concert. This, if nothing else, makes the choir members feel that the time and efforts put forth in preparations are certainly well spent.” The youth reports also reflect more secular activities such as skiing, socials, and dances. It is, however, difficult to gauge the spiritual depth of either of these programs from a report, but the lack of discussion of faith and spiritual matters is notable and contrasts with the earlier records, which held Christian outreach as the main goal of the congregation. This might have been more of a reflection of the times in what was viewed as appropriate in an annual report rather than a lack of spiritual pursuit by the church. This trend towards growth, social and secular fellowship,

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10 1949 Annual Meeting of the Congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Menominee, MI, Choir Report.
and the business-like programmatic emphasis seems to have extended and magnified into the ministry during the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1958, Rev. J. Robert Ranck became the next installed pastor and was FPC’s pastor for thirty years. Given his long tenure, Rev. Ranck is the most remembered pastor of the current congregation. By 1968, membership rose to its highest point of 755 members. However, it appeared that there was a dissonance between the number of recorded members and those who actively participated in the life of the church. In 1959, one elder noted in her report to Session, “There are currently 709 members on the roll. It is estimated that only 120 of these are actively engaged in the work of the church.”

The pursuit of spiritual depth for a congregation in the midst of secular distraction is a common concern for pastors and Rev. Ranck was no different. In one of his reports, he stated the conflict well, “If our faith is to be deepened, our church life enriched, our service increased, it will be through God’s grace that we become ‘more than conquerors.’” He also noted, “Numbers indicate external facts, not spiritual depth.”

Because there are only a handful of current members that recall the church prior to 1955, it is difficult to ascertain the spiritual foundation of the church during its first hundred years. What is noteworthy is that FPC ended its first hundred years with a strong social footing within the Menominee community, but cracks in faith and spiritual depth seemed to be appearing.

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11 First Presbyterian Church, Menominee, MI, Minutes of the Session, April 26, 1959.

12 1961 Annual Meeting of the Congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Menominee, MI; Pastor’s Report by Rev. J. R. Ranck.
1968 – 2004: The Beginning of Decline

For its first hundred years, FPC saw consistent growth making it strong financially and in membership. It was the epitome of a successful Christendom church. However, its growing gap in the spiritual formation of its members did not prepare it for the cultural shifts beginning to take place in the 1960s and 1970s.  

According to member reports, Rev. Ranck was noted for his community outreach. He is remembered for baking bread, which he would personally deliver to new families within the community. His community outreach is supported by his annual reports in which he reported making between eight hundred to a thousand hospital visits and five hundred to six hundred personal conferences with members each year. Over his thirty-year tenure, his ministry left an indelible mark upon the culture and ministry of the church. Some share that Rev. Ranck was an outgoing pastor who was community driven. He was the first president of the Tri-City Ministerial Society, a group that continues to meet every Tuesday. Others have suggested that Rev. Ranck cozied up to the professionals and elites of the community.

At this time, the church became known as “the Country Club church” within the community for two reasons: 1) Many of its members were influential in the founding of the Riverside Country Club, and 2) its pride in the number of professionals and wealthy businessmen who often conducted business at the country club. Like the proverbial chicken-egg question, it is unclear which existed first: Did Rev. Ranck encourage a

\[\text{\underline{\text{13}} \quad \text{Because there are conflicting reports about the issues of the church during this period, it has been difficult to piece together a complete and accurate account of this period. Some of what has been reflected upon has risen from formal and informal interviews with congregational members over the past eight years.}}\]
church culture that favored the wealthy or was he a product of the church culture that already existed? It seems from reflections upon its first hundred years that this culture had already existed at FPC and then was also further encouraged during Rev. Ranck’s tenure.

Rev. Ranck’s wife Jean became the church’s organist and choir director during his time at FPC. She also taught the piano and organ to young students. She is fondly remembered by many. Others have said that she wasn’t one to be trifled with and never crossed in matters of music. Rev. and Mrs. Ranck were influential in the fundraising of the new pipe organ installed in 1983. The Rancks lived with their five children in the manse next door. There was a designated fund for the choir that was given to the church by the Ranck family in memorial to Jean Ranck’s service.

But even as important as the Rancks were within the life of the church, there were some who wanted Rev. Ranck to leave. Three years prior to his retirement, Rev. Ranck announced his plans to retire in 1989 after three decades of work. There were some who felt that his departure was dragging on too long and pushed that he be dismissed sooner. Apparently, this faction was powerful enough to encourage his departure by August 1988. Some members left because of how the Rancks were treated.

The next three years were tumultuous for the congregation as it searched for the next pastor. A series of four interim pastors served over a two-year period before calling Rev. David Dornack as FPC’s next pastor. Less than a year into his ministry, according to Session members at the time, the boyfriend of the gay organist made accusations against Rev. Dornack. He accused Rev. Dornack of making improper advances towards the organist. Even though the organist and Rev. Dornack both denied the accusations,
homophobic remarks among members caused divisions within the congregation. This was especially hurtful and disturbing to those who had gay and lesbian family members. Less than a year into his ministry, Rev. Dornack and his wife left. For the next year and a half, instead of calling another interim pastor, the presbytery assigned a moderator for Session and a local Lutheran pastor filled the pulpit on Sundays. In July of 1993, Rev. Bill Teague was installed as FPC’s next pastor.

FPC’s membership had been declining ever since its 1968 peak of 755 members. A large drop-off in membership occurred between 1968 and 1974 in which 218 fewer members were recorded. The cause of the decline is not reported in the minutes. Were the rolls incorrectly inflated and then cleared or did members leave on their own accord?

Before Rev. Ranck left, there were 471 members and when the dust settled with Rev. Teague taking the reins, membership was 390 members.

Rev. Teague served as pastor for almost five years. He was noted for his Bible studies. He started two mid-week Bible studies that many members of the current mid-week Bible studies participated within. His wife served as the Christian Education director for the church. He and his wife were actively engaged with a group of parents in leading the youth group. By their efforts, the Sunday school program and youth groups grew. Membership also stabilized and held relatively steady during his time at FPC.

Rev. Teague left in 1997. There isn’t a pastor’s report in the 1998 annual report. In 1999, Rev. Bruce Haapalainen was installed as the next pastor and was dismissed in 2003. Two factors led to Rev. Haapalainen’s dismissal. First, the church entered into a large and poorly managed renovation campaign in 2001 and secondly, Rev. Haapalainen was reported as not being around the church much during the week.
Perhaps feeling the effects of the stabilizing ministry of Rev. Teague and that the congregation’s problems were in the past, the Session decided to enter into a two-million-dollar renovation project that had been put on hold for several years. According to a Session member at the time, the plans had been drawn up years prior, the congregation was “flushed with cash in savings”, and the time seemed right to finally take on the project.

Phase 1 was the most ambitious part of the project and was to include a new elevator, renovation of the Fellowship Hall, an updated heating and cooling system, new church and pastor’s offices, the removal of the manse, a new entryway and the transformation of the Chapel into a new Gathering room. Phase 1 was to cost 1.4 million dollars and be completed by November of 2001. Phase 2 was to renovate the kitchen and choir rooms. Phase 3 was a renovation of the sanctuary. Phases 2 and 3 were estimated to cost around $300,000 each. With approximately $650,000 already received for the project and with pledges in hand for the remaining amount, construction began.

Piecing together details of the building project is difficult to obtain for several reasons: 1) people have different opinions of what went wrong, 2) almost all of the leaders who made the decisions are no longer members, 3) few records exist, and 4) it is a painful period that many would prefer not to remember. The one definite fact is that the project imploded during the first phase. Budget overruns, project delays, a lack of oversight, and poor communication led to frustrations among the membership and as a result, members pulled their building pledges. Two members, who were prominent local businessmen along with the church’s attorney, stepped in to help the Session manage the problem. After the dust settled, the church was left with a debt of approximately $160,000 and an
unfinished project. The two businessmen paid, out of their own pocket, for the construction costs to finish phase 1 and repair the demolition that had begun for phase 2. Between the end of 2000 to the beginning of 2004, membership dropped from 318 members with an average attendance of 136 to 251 members with an average attendance of 90.\footnote{2000 and 2003 Annual Meeting of the Congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Menominee, MI, Session Statistical Reports.}

2004 – 2011

The turmoil and discouragement that ensued around the flawed building campaign and the lack of leadership led to FPC contemplating whether it could continue. After Rev. Haapalainen was dismissed, Rev. Ron Helgerson was asked to fill in as pulpit supply. Rev. Helgerson was a retired United Methodist minister who had previously served in the area. Eventually, Rev. Helgerson was asked to stay on as the pastor. According to the Presbytery, his official role was as interim pastor, but, to the congregation, he was seen as the permanent pastor.

Rev. Helgerson was personable and accessible, traits that mirrored Rev. Ranck and contrasted with Rev. Haapalainen. Rev. Helgerson was well received by the congregation. His presence, personality, and experience stabilized the church. He also attracted former members of his previous local churches. With Rev. Helgerson, the congregation was able to take a breath from the disorder and problems of the past four years.

During this time, the congregation grew more distant from the Presbytery and Presbyterianism. There was discontent towards the Presbytery of Mackinac for its lack of
assistance during the congregation’s problems with Rev. Haapalainen. Furthermore, Rev. Helgerson ran the church and moderated the Session according to his understanding as a Methodist pastor. He described himself as a “Method-terian,” but there was a significant decreased emphasis given to Presbyterian polity during his tenure. The Session and congregation also relied further upon Rev. Helgerson for outreach into the community. The committees became informal or were outright abandoned.

Rev. Helgerson was an independent leader. He had made it known to parishioners that he did not need the job. This approach, along with the preceding turmoil, possibly created an unhealthy dependence upon Rev. Helgerson. There was a fear among the congregation of losing him. Although officially approved by the Mackinac Presbytery as an interim pastor serving thirty hours a week, Rev. Helgerson was understood by the congregation to be its regular pastor; he served for seven years and was greatly loved.

In 2007, Pioneer began its search for a new pastor. Pioneer had dismissed the pastor and was concerned that the congregation could not afford a full-time pastor. Shortly into the search, Pioneer approached FPC’s Session to discuss the sharing of a pastor between the churches. The Session turned it down because the congregation was pleased with Rev. Helgerson; the members did not want him to leave. Therefore, Pioneer searched for a part-time pastor on its own for nearly three years without avail. However, in 2010, Rev. Helgerson informed FPC that he would retire as soon as a new pastor could be located. This prompted FPC to contact Pioneer about resurrecting the idea of sharing a pastor.

Under Rev. Helgerson’s tenure, there had been some discussions of merging with the First Methodist Church of Menominee, which is only a block away. Some joint
fellowship events were attempted but were not well attended. From members’ recollections, the idea wasn’t approached as an equal merger. Many members hoped that First UMC would sell its building and then be consumed into FPC’s ministry. Understandably, First UMC decided not to pursue a merger. The congregation instead put its efforts into fixing the church facility. According to C. Jeff Woods of the Alban Institute, the idea of a dominant church consuming a smaller church is a common problem that merging congregations face.15 As I would later discover, FPC’s desire to dominate carried forward into my attempts to bring the congregations into shared ministry. Despite its problems, FPC members continued to exert themselves as the dominant congregation; like First UMC, Pioneer naturally resisted these assertions.

Little did I know that it was with these attitudes that FPC entered into discussions with Pioneer for a shared pastor. While both churches wanted to share a pastor, they did not want to share ministry. Using the adaptive change language developed by Heifetz and Linsky, a shared pastor was a technical fix to the adaptive problem of decline that both churches were facing.16 Woods also notes that within a shared pastorate it is common for one church to take a more prominent role in the search process. Since Pioneer already had been searching for several years, Pioneer and its pastor nominating committee took on this more prominent role within the search. During the interview process, it was Pioneer’s attitude and culture that drew me to the call. Woods further notes that it is common in a shared pastor call for the pastor to fit the culture of one congregation better than the other


congregation. This was definitely true in my call to these two churches. From the moment I started at Pioneer, it felt like a good fit. When I started at FPC, I thought to myself, “What have I gotten myself into?”

I began as the designated pastor of Pioneer and FPC on May 1, 2011. Perhaps because of Pioneer’s prominence in leading the search or my unwillingness to see the differences between me and FPC, I was naively unaware of the many issues of FPC. While Pioneer resembled the mission attitude and community outreach that I had been searching for in a call, FPC’s sense of privilege and entitlement were the characteristics I typically avoided. Pioneer also had issues, yet I was more cognizant of those problems at the beginning. With Pioneer, I at least shared similar values and a common ministry goal towards mission and outreach. Although they had a common founding pastor, these churches have existed and functioned separately for almost a hundred and fifty years before sharing a pastor.

**Membership**

*Age and Ethnic Makeup*

Currently, Pioneer has 108 members and FPC has 95. Average weekly attendance is around 48 members at each church. Worship attendance will spike to one hundred for special events such as baptisms and reception of confirmation classes. There are also a small but growing number of “friends” at each church who pledge and attend, but do not wish to join the church. Eighty percent of each church is over the age of 65. Roughly ten percent are between the ages of 40-64 and five percent are 25-39. The remaining five

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percent are youth that became members when they were confirmed in seventh or eighth grade. Once they are confirmed, these youth rarely attend worship. Almost all move away during college. There are five children between the ages of 2-12 at FPC and eight at Pioneer that are enrolled in the Sunday school program. About half of these children are brought regularly to worship by their grandparents. Sunday school attendance can spike to fifteen at Pioneer when visiting grandchildren attend, but this happens only a few times during the year.

Pioneer is one hundred percent Caucasian and FPC is ninety-nine percent Caucasian. There is one college student at FPC whose father is African-American. The European ancestry of the members’ is diverse and there is not one country that dominates. Most of the members’ families have been in America for at least three generations. Several have deep family roots in the community going back over a century. At both churches, it is not uncommon to have four generations currently worshiping. This was a nice change from my previous congregations of which most of the members were transplants from another part of the country and had family scattered across the United States.

Like the other Presbyterian congregations I have served, there are more women who attend than men at both churches. This is slightly greater at FPC in which there are more widows and women whose husbands are not members. Most married couples in which both are members typically attend worship together. There are a number of individuals at FPC of which the spouse is Catholic or worships at a different congregation.
Socio-economic Makeup

Both churches have their roots in the founding leaders of both communities. Many prominent community leaders and families once belonged to both churches, but this has dwindled over the years. Most members would be considered middle class. There are some poor members as well as some wealthy members at both churches. FPC was formerly known as the wealthy church, but this is no longer the case. Both churches are welcoming to those across the social strata, but reverence is still given at FPC to more affluent individuals.

Education Makeup

The vast majority of members at both churches have at least some post-secondary education. The percentage is greater than the Marinette and Menominee communities. There are teachers, school principals and college administrators, small business owners, factory managers, accountants, doctors, dentists, lawyers, and college professors within both congregations. There are also factory technicians, welders, and mechanics. Almost all graduating youth go onto college. The remaining attend technical schools learning a professional trade.

Church Finances

Regarding finances, Pioneer is a healthier church. Its giving is more evenly distributed across the membership, while FPC has previously relied upon the giving of a smaller portion of wealthier members. There are fewer of these big donors left. FPC also has a larger and older facility with higher maintenance costs. FPC has a $60,000 mortgage left from its renovation project. As a result, FPC has run a $15,000-20,000
budget deficit for each of the last eight years. These funds have been withdrawn from its endowment and investment funds. Currently there is approximately $160,000 left in FPC’s endowment and investment funds.

There is a “rising to fix a crisis” culture that has hindered FPC over the years. This was further exasperated after the financial problems of the renovation. FPC’s budget has become an expense budget based upon previous year costs. Congregational budgetary pledges are not made towards local, presbytery, or PCUSA mission or causes. If any monies are received for outside groups, it is passed along. FPC’s Session has chosen to review the budget quarterly. In my opinion, this choice was made partially because the financial outlook is bleak.

At FPC, significant priority is given towards the building. Four years ago, a bequest of $160,000 paid for the replacement of the roof. A new sound system was installed in the sanctuary as well as renovations to the chancel. A $15,000 gift was received to replace the air conditioning unit in the sanctuary once it had failed. In the first three months of 2019, the amount of $45,000 was raised towards the paying down of the mortgage. However, when I proposed paying $5,000 towards a consulting services to help deal with the church’s decline, $2,500 of which was going to come out of my continuing education funds, it was deemed too expensive and unnecessary.

In comparison, Pioneer typically breaks even or occasionally has small budgetary surpluses. Its finances are more orderly managed and reviewed monthly by a finance committee and the Session. Pioneer has historically sought alternative and creative means to fund the ministries of the church such using investments to offset personnel costs,
renting space to outside groups, and fundraising through special events. I have never had to worry about the finances at Pioneer while the finances are a constant concern at FPC.

**Leadership**

Over the last fifty years at FPC, the relationship between the pastor and congregation has been mixed and personality driven. When the pastor is viewed positively and trusted, the Session has functioned well alongside the pastor. However, particularly in the last thirty-five years, there has been a challenging spirit within the Session and congregation that encourages discord and mistrust between the congregation, pastor, and the leadership. While there have been incidents of mistrust at Pioneer between the laity, pastors, and Session, it is not the norm. In my eight years as the shared pastor, Pioneer has had a few difficult people to work with; however, as a congregation, they are positive. At FPC, it is somewhat opposite with individual members being fairly positive; however, when put together, the congregation has a tendency to be negative. This culture trickles down to the respective Sessions’ interactions with the pastor and staff. By and large, Pioneer’s Session is more trusting towards the pastor and staff and FPC’s is far more wary and challenging.

This has carried over to the acceptance of the shared pastorate by the congregation and Session. Originally, the shared pastor position was a designated pastoral position set for two years that could be renewed for another two years and then switched to a regularly installed position. After two years, Pioneer’s congregation approved the extension without reservation, whereas FPC’s session and congregation were more reserved and questioning towards the relationship. After four years, Pioneer
once again endorsed the transition to a permanent pastoral position. After sensing hesitancy by FPC, I encouraged a six-month discernment process at FPC to work through the congregation’s misgivings. In the end, I was accepted as the regularly installed shared pastor of both churches, but my experience with FPC has always had an air of suspicion and mistrust by the elders and congregants.

Pioneer, as a whole, is more self-sufficient and operates fairly well without direction from the pastor and staff. FPC, as a whole, is much more dependent upon the pastor and staff to fill in the gaps within its process and functioning. Pioneer is marked more by consistency in its functioning and process, whereas FPC struggles for consistency. With its sense of entitlement and lack of understanding about how to connect with the outside world, FPC is what Steve Yamaguchi describes as a “palace church.”

Worship and Congregational Life

Both Pioneer and FPC are mainly traditional in their worship style. A projection system was installed at Pioneer seven years ago that has allowed the introduction of contemporary music video into the service. The order of worship at both churches are similar and follow the traditional Reformed ordering of Preparation of Hearing God’s Word, which includes a call to worship, opening prayer, and confession of sin; Hearing God’s Word, which includes a children’s message, two scripture readings, and the

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18 Steve Yamaguchi, “From the Palace to the Streets”, The Fuller Studio, https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/from-the-palace-to-the-streets/
sermon; and *Response to God’s Word* with prayers of the people, offering, and communion on the first Sunday of the month.

The music is also typically traditional. Interspersed within the service are hymns. Pioneer uses the 1990 Presbyterian Hymnal published by the PC(USA) while FPC uses the Celebration Hymnal published by Integrity Music in 1997. In the last three months, I have been introducing one hymn into each service from the Glory to God Hymnal published by the PC(USA) in 2013. My criteria are that the tune must be uplifting (not a dirge) and easy to follow. The purpose is to include a wider range of songs and expressions of praise.

Both churches no longer have a regular organist but have a variety of musicians who provide the music. This partially resulted due to the shortage of organists within the area. Also, most organists now prefer not to be tied to one church every week. Pioneer began using this arrangement six years ago. FPC followed three years ago after the former organist and boyfriend became too difficult to work with.

This new arrangement has allowed for a variety of musicians and music styles to be introduced into both churches including the use of piano, guitar, ukulele, drums, harp, and organ playing Dixie land, folk, contemporary, jazz, and traditional. Traditional organ music is still predominating, especially at FPC. Pioneer has continued to have a small but faithful choir that sings once or twice a month while FPC has recently reintroduced a small choir back into its worship after disbanding the choir due to a lack of a director. A joint bell choir was formed in 2014 and has drawn members from various churches. Each choir is directed by a member volunteer.
Although I enjoy music, the worship music style has never been of prime importance within my ministry work. Prior to arriving at these churches, my wife and I preferred attending a contemporary worship held in the gymnasium of a large Presbyterian church. I also enjoy traditional worship elements and music. It is the outcome that I seek to emphasize rather than a particular form of worship. Like a missionary, I initially saw it as more important for me to fit into the traditions and styles of each congregation rather than trying to have the congregation adjust to my preferences. This was easier with Pioneer because of the congregation’s accepting and relaxed attitude.

FPC is more formal in its worship style. The members are more anxious about proper execution of the congregation’s practices. FPC’s rituals reflect the Masonic influence of previous members and elders. The members prefer the pastor to sit behind, preach and address the congregation from the pulpit. During communion, servers were trained that they should not turn their backs on the cross; therefore, they were taught to walk backwards up the aisles. The congregation is served communion after the pastor and organist are served. Over time I have directed the congregation away from such strong formality in an effort for FPC to be more accepting. At first, raising my hands during the singing of the Doxology and Gloria Patri led to a few people leaving in anger. Overall though FPC has been receptive to minor worship service changes.

FPC is predominately a “Sunday church.” Most of the members only participate within the life of the church on Sunday. If they have business to conduct with the church, they drop it off on Sunday. Pioneer’s members are more willing to stop by the church throughout the week. However, more FPC’s members participate in the Bible study held
on Wednesdays during the school year. This can be attributed to the leadership of Rev. Teague who was known for his Bible study lessons and teaching at FPC. With the introduction of the choir and bell choir, there has been an increase in mid-week participation among FPC members.

Both churches participate in the ecumenical Lenten Simple Suppers held between the Covenant, Methodist, UCC, and Presbyterian churches of Marinette and Menominee. I have also encouraged participation within the Community Good Friday service held by the Tri-Cities Ministerial Group. Pastors from different denominations are well received by both congregations. There has been a history of ecumenical cooperation in the community among the mainline churches for over fifty years. Both churches along with St. Paul’s Episcopal, and Peace United Church of Christ have used retired Methodist and Lutheran pastors to fill in during interim periods between pastors.

There is not a strong emphasis given to prayer at either church. Efforts for group prayer have met with poor results. I have introduced contemplative and centering prayer into the Session meetings and Bible studies. Proposals for a healing prayer service have been rejected. Over time, both churches have warmed up to lifting up individual prayers during the Prayers of the People within the Sunday service. This has had mixed outcomes. On the one hand, it has opened up each congregation to be more accepting of one another and the problems we face. The downside is that it can make the congregation more inwardly focused and provide a “family” feel to worship. A church planting pastor colleague once told me that in order for a church to have an outward focus, prayers are best shared in a small group rather than within the worship service.
Mission and Outreach

Over the years, FPC has drawn further inward in its focus. Throughout its history, there has been a large portion of the congregation that has sought self-interest. This has been both encouraged and battled against by the leadership of the church. During Rev. Ranck’s tenure, mission giving rose to unprecedented heights, yet at the same time Dr. Ranck was known to cater to wealthier members. Even at the early beginnings of the church, the church served both the needs of the community in outreach, yet also segregated the wealthy from the non-wealthy members in their own pews. This was not a conflict as long as there were enough resources to satisfy both values, but as resources and money dwindled, the focus turned inward towards saving the building, maintaining the status quo, and meeting the needs of the membership.

The differing focuses towards mission between the two churches is best exemplified in their differing approaches towards The Mitten Tree. Each church has previously had a tradition of placing a tree in the church during Christmas where members could place mittens that they had purchased on the tree for mission outreach. Pioneer would distribute these mittens to needy children within the community. FPC distributed the mittens to children who participated in the Christmas pageant. One could argue that FPC’s focus was to reward children and encourage their participation within the congregation, but the subtle difference is how mission serves the needs of the church versus how the church can serve the needs of the community.

There are many generous and wonderfully outward focused members at both churches who serve the community in many ways. The difference is how each church encourages and participates in mission. Pioneer is driven outward in its mission, whereas
FPC is driven inward. Every fellowship event and potluck meal at Pioneer is seen as an opportunity to raise money for mission. Mission is an important aspect of almost every activity that Pioneer coordinates.

FPC does not set aside money in its budget for mission. The Presbyterian Women raise money for mission through its bake sales and bi-annual rummage sales. In addition, two FPC members work diligently to put together Christmas shoeboxes that are sent to *Operation Christmas Shoebox* of Samaritan’s Purse. These efforts are generous and sacrificial. However, the focus among the congregation is towards supporting members in their mission efforts rather than mission for mission’s sake.

**Context Implications for the Project**

According to church and organizational consultant Kevin Ford, every congregation has its own unique “code” in which can be found its identity and focus.\(^1^9\)

*Code* describes the personality of a congregation defining its values, traditions, and rituals. Pioneer and FPC’s respective codes developed long before I ever arrived. Pioneer’s code draws the congregation outward towards mission and outreach while FPC’s code draws the congregation inward. Their competing codes is the adaptive challenge keeping them from shared ministry. Their differing codes would define much of my work between these congregations and this project. Unlike magnets, their opposite poles push them apart rather than drawing them together.

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\(^{19}\) Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to the Great* (Grand Junction: Saltwater, 2007) 56-60.
Furthermore, since both congregations and communities could look back towards better days when they were in competition and independent, both congregations have a sense of individualism that have made them resistant towards interventions that involve cooperation, especially across the river. This is particularly true for First Presbyterian, which has prided itself upon being unique and separate. As sibling congregations, this rivalry has influenced much of their history and interactions. It also frustrated my work towards drawing them together.

With the long and successful tenure of Rev. Ranck over three decades followed by three decades of decline and pastoral flux, the idea of getting the “right” pastor to turn things around is particularly attractive to FPC. In contrast, Pioneer has had a consistent history of briefer pastoral calls, seven to ten years on average, but Pioneer has regularly displayed more trust between the pastor and leadership. Furthermore, Pioneer’s history of slower and steadier decline in contrast to FPC’s more drastic and anxiety driven decline has produced a different sense of urgency for change within the two congregations. Interventions for adaptive change need to strike a delicate balance between securing trust and increasing pressure at differing absorption rates in order to encourage both congregations towards cooperation and change. Finding the balance between Pioneer’s lack of urgency and FPC’s propensity for distrust has made adaptive change interventions between the congregations particularly challenging.

Finally, as a congregation that has prided itself upon the number of successful business leaders among its ranks, FPC’s leadership style has been historically hierarchical and transactional. The members affinity for assertive and commanding leadership styles among their pastors and leaders impacts the congregation’s resistance towards
interventions encouraging inclusivity, reflection, and discernment. In contrast, Pioneer has historically emphasized servanthood and practicality among its members and leaders. Pioneer’s unassuming personality is resistant to abrupt and radical interventions arguing for a slower more steadied approach.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 4:
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of literature that informs the theological and practical framework of this project. Seven books were reviewed. The first group of books provides a foundation for understanding and leading in the midst of change. In *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, Tod Bolsinger discusses the need for transformational leadership within the changing dynamics of the church and culture requiring a reorientation of our thinking about the church, its purpose, and leadership.\(^1\) The next two books of this section provide a practical perspective of what happens as a church descends towards organizational death. *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* by Peter Steinke provides a glimpse into characteristics of healthy congregations. *Can Our Church Live?* by Alice Mann provides a process for churches to understand and examine the feasibility of redevelopment within their context.

The second group of three books assist in providing a biblical and theological framework to understand the grieving process and encourage the congregation from

\(^1\) Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 24-34.
denial and isolation towards acceptance and relationship. The first book of this section is *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Families* by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. It is a continuation of her work on the five stages of grief and outlines practical implications for professionals working through grief. In *Reality, Grief, Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks*, Walter Brueggemann examines how the Old Testament prophets’ called the people of God to hope while addressing the grief, denial, despair and false reality of exceptionalism; and how these issues are pertinent for today’s Church.\(^2\) In *Surprised by Hope*, N.T. Wright outlines the hope found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and how this affects the Church’s mission.

The final book reviewed, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* by Ray S. Anderson stands alone; it offers a practical and systematic theological framework to understand this shared pastorate. By blending theological reflection and practice, Anderson’s model of *Christopraxis* provides the missional and practical theology needed for congregations like Pioneer and FPC to reach outward and survive in a post-Christendom society.

**Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory**  
by Tod Bolsinger

*Canoeing the Mountains* by Tod Bolsinger undergirds much of the theoretical and practical understanding for this project of leading change within a church. Referencing the expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to find the Northwest Passage

and integrating insights from organizational leadership and missional theology, Bolsinger outlines the new skills required of pastors and church leaders to lead into the “uncharted territory” of a post-Christendom culture. Many of the big challenges congregations face today are adaptive challenges that require leaders to make hard choices, such as what a congregation must keep, and what it must let go. Adaptive challenges require learning and change, and especially pertinent to this project, “require leaders to experience and navigate profound loss.”

Bolsinger states, “Leadership is energizing a community of people toward their own transformation in order to accomplish a shared mission in the face of a changing world.” This requires transformational leadership of a leader that is found in the intersection of three components: technical competence, relational congruence, and adaptive capacity. Credibility and trust is gained in technical competence and relational congruence, but the primary task of a leader must be the creation of “a healthy culture with the capacity to experiment, innovate, take risks and adapt.” This kind of culture creation requires “identifying the gaps between aspired values and actual behavior, and then working with the leaders to bring every aspect of the organization into alignment with the core ideology (core values, mission, primary strategy).”

3 Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 11-16.

4 Ibid., 19.

5 Ibid., 42-44.

6 Ibid., 72.
Bolsinger argues that transformational leadership is a deeply relational process in which a leader calmly and intentionally raises the issues that keep a congregation stuck in the status quo. A local congregation includes the love, commitment, values and mission its members share. Adaptive leadership is about loving and being present with a congregation through the change process by creating an environment where new learning is possible and a community can let go and grieve so it can find new life, a new purpose, and a renewed mission. This is at the heart of this project.

**Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach by Peter Steinke**

Through a systems approach, Peter Steinke examines congregational health from the perspective of a living organism. By understanding a congregation as a whole, Steinke emphasizes the interconnectedness of the members and parts of a congregation whereby the health depends upon the interaction of all parts. “As a system, a congregation influences its own health.”

Using healthiness as a guide, Steinke provides a means to diagnose the unhealthy factors within these two congregations, factors that are impacting their vitality and ability to reach out. Steinke notes that “when an organism’s balance fails to some degree, or when the organism remains in a state of instability for too long, it is sick. When the

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7 Ibid., 88.

8 Ibid., 90, 136.


10 Ibid., 12.
whole process fails, the organism dies.”\textsuperscript{11} FPC’s ability to persevere is hindered by the congregation’s resistance to change and isolation. As Steinke points out, “The deeper into its course a disease proceeds, the stronger the means needed to stifle or reverse it.”\textsuperscript{12}

This project is about encouraging health within the congregation even in the midst of resistance. Steinke identifies seven health promoters for a congregation: clear direction and purpose, appraisal and management of conflict, clarity and specificity, energized mood and playfulness, mature interaction that fosters learning, healing capacities, and focus on resources or developing new ones.\textsuperscript{13} By promoting health, these congregations will hopefully be empowered to look realistically at their situation and prepare for their future. For Steinke, a congregations’ sense of mission is at its heart and soul and can never be assumed but “intentionally designed and continually redesigned.”\textsuperscript{14} This project will hopefully help both congregations to examine their mission and future together.

\textit{Can Our Church Live? Redeveloping Congregations in Decline} by Alice Mann

The book \textit{Can Our Church Live?} by Alice Mann is a guide for declining congregations to explore redevelopment and builds upon her work as a church consultant with the Alban Institute. Mann diagrams the typical life cycle of a congregation as a bell curve beginning with birth, moving to formation, pinnacling with a period of stability,  

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\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., Preface 1996.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 28-39
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 49.
\end{flushleft}
then moving downward into decline and finally death. In formation, a congregation answers three questions: 1) Who are we; 2) What are we here for?; and 3) Who is our neighbor? As a congregation enters into decline, if addressed early, it can take a fresh look at the formation questions. Mann terms this as ongoing renewal. As they move further into decline, she refers to the process as revitalization because there is still significant vitality within the congregation. Finally, before resources are depleted, the process can move to redevelopment. As a congregation slips further into decline, redevelopment becomes harder to achieve.

Although congregations often look inward towards programmatic changes, Mann notes that the principle factor for decline in mainline churches is the slow cultural change outside the church since the 1960s, whereby Christianity has lost its position as a culturally established religion. However, when an individual church’s decisions about programming, leadership, and finances are not based on understanding the external environment then a church will most likely continue to decline. “For regeneration to be possible at all, a congregation’s ‘inside’ has to start dancing again with its ‘outside’ realities.”

Mann observes that a congregation’s tolerance for change typically begins decreasing from its formation and hits bottom during the stability and early decline stage.

15 Alice Mann, *Can Our Church Live? Redeveloping Congregations in Decline* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1999), 2.
16 Ibid., 9-12.
17 Ibid., 19.
18 Ibid., 21, 38.
At this point, the leadership stops thinking about reaching people outside and instead focuses inwardly. A congregation’s tolerance for change will begin to rise slightly as some within the congregation realize that change is necessary. When the decline of resources combined with initiatives to change, a crisis point typically results. At this time, both energy and conflict arise. The congregation’s response through “creative adaptation” can direct the congregation upward towards redevelopment or downward as the congregation “moves towards death in a state of persistent denial, anger, or depression.”

In this project, this book provides a framework for congregation members to understand the process of redevelopment. This book is used as a book study for those in both congregations willing to examine the decline of their church and evaluate their congregations’ options. This book study is a follow-up and compliment to a previous book study of Canoeing the Mountains by Tod Bolsinger, which introduced interested individuals to the change process. In a discussion group, Mann’s book allows me as a leader to “hand the problem back” to the congregation and let it proceed accordingly. This project seeks to encourage the congregations’ through the grieving process and examine their future. The learning gained from Mann’s book allows for new learning to guide the congregation. When it eventually reaches the crisis point, the congregation will then be better informed to address the future and declining reality.

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19 Ibid., 37-44.

20 Tod Bolsinger in the Leading Organizational Change class seminars would encourage his class to “hand the problem back” to the group.
The grief process as presented in this project is based upon Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’ groundbreaking work with terminally ill patients analyzed in her book *On Death and Dying*. A goal of this project is to examine and assist FPC through the grief process and the congregation’s resistance towards change. A premise of this project is that there are similarities in how congregation members and leaders deal with organizational death and how we process grief of the death of a loved one, yet the emotions surrounding one’s own impending death or of a loved one are more intense and powerful.

Kubler-Ross outlines the stages of grief as patients deal with impending death. The five stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Kubler-Ross saw her research as an opportunity to refocus the discussion of death on the patient as a human being. She also wanted to provide insights that would improve the understanding of medical staff, clergy, and families about the grief process of their patients, members, and loved ones.21

Kubler-Ross notes that a greater fear and denial of death exists in our current culture. With rapid technical advancement, greater destructive weapons, social unrest, a lost perspective of suffering, and a declining belief in an after-life, there has arisen an increased inability for individuals to understand death. In Kubler-Ross’ opinion, society has poorly exchanged “religious denial of death” for an increased anxiety and

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aggressiveness in order to avoid “the reality and facing of our own death.”\textsuperscript{22} By contemplating the possibility of our death, practitioners and individuals are better to care for the welfare of patients, families, and perhaps our nation. This has possible implications that will be examined in this project pertaining to the welfare of FPC members in examining the possibility of organizational death.

According to Kubler-Ross, in denial, a patient says, “This cannot be true.”\textsuperscript{23} It serves a purpose as a buffer to deal with unexpected and shocking news. It allows an individual to collect oneself and mobilize “less radical” defenses.\textsuperscript{24} It is the “persistent nurturing role of the therapist” who has sufficiently understood one’s own death that can help a patient overcome his/her fear about their impending death. Kubler-Ross notes that it is therefore important for practitioners to examine more closely their own reactions around death.

After denial comes the next logical question, “Why me?” Kubler-Ross notes that this is the anger stage and is a difficult stage for family and staff to understand.\textsuperscript{25} However, a patient who is given understanding and time will move through their anger.

Next comes the bargaining stage in which a patient will try to postpone the inevitable through some sort of agreement. Perhaps this comes in a promise towards

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 27-31.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 51.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 57-58.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 62-68.
improved living or a life dedicated to God. Kubler-Ross notes that this stage is less well known than the other stages but equally beneficial to the patient.\textsuperscript{26}

When a patient is no longer able to deny or postpone their illness, a patient will come to a sense of great loss. Kubler-Ross call this the depression stage. The loss felt is not only towards the loss of the past but also of potential in the future. If the patient is allowed to express his/her sorrow, the patient will find final acceptance easier. It is when a patient is not allowed a chance to grieve the loss by family members and practitioners that a great conflict can arise within the patient.\textsuperscript{27}

The final stage is acceptance. Kubler-Ross notes that it is not a happy stage but almost void of feelings. It is not a hopeless “giving up” but more of a “quiet expectation.”\textsuperscript{28} An older patient towards the end of their life will typically find acceptance easier if the patient has found meaning in his or her life and contentment in their work.

Kubler-Ross also notes the importance of hope in patients dealing with grief. Patients needed to know that there was a possibility that something unexpected might happen such as remission. Patients showed greatest confidence in doctors who allowed for such hope.\textsuperscript{29} Finally, Kubler-Ross notes that when helping the patient, practitioners also need to care for the family as well because they are connected.\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 93-96.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 97-100.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 123-130.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 148.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 165.
\end{itemize}

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Reality, Grief, Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks by Walter Brueggemann

In his book *Reality, Grief, Hope*, Brueggemann argues for the prophetic call of the Church to be engaged in the tasks of realism, grief, and hope in contrast to the metanarrative of empire promoted in our current U.S. culture and politics after 9/11. Brueggemann traces this prophetic call in the sequence of Jeremiah (realism), Lamentations (grief), and Isaiah (hope) in response to the sequence of ideology-denial-despair that resulted among Israel before and after the fall of Jerusalem and Babylonian exile.

Brueggemann exhorts the Church away from the false narrative of empire, which promotes denial within the ideology of chosen-ness. In their unrelenting voice, the prophets exposed how the establishment of Jerusalem failed in their covenantal and neighborly practice. They countered the false ideology of the regime with a theology of realism that emphasized God’s desire for righteousness and justice. Brueggemann contends that within our current U.S. society and culture, this false ideology of chosen-ness is promoted within the governing ideology of U.S. exceptionalism, racism, and militarism.

Brueggemann notes that the false ideology of exceptionalism leads to denial. “When the ideology is one of assurance issuing in entitlement and privilege, it will not be
interrupted by facts on the ground, for such facts are characteristically ‘inconvenient.’”\(^{35}\)

The practice of grief, which recognizes loss, is the prophetic counter to this denial.\(^{36}\) The Church is therefore called to “embrace, model, and practice grief” as a counter to the ideology of exceptionalism.\(^{37}\)

Brueggemann argues that denial then leads to despair. The prophets countered the despair of the people with hope in God and God’s redemption.\(^{38}\) Within our modern U.S. culture, a despair generating anxiety has resulted and is acted out as “unrestrained greed, privatism, willing violence, and nostalgia for simpler times.” In the face of this “near-despair”, the Church is called therefore to the prophetic task of expressing hope through word and deed in the good divine initiative of God.\(^{39}\)

Brueggemann’s work is especially pertinent to this project. FPC has long embraced an ideology of exceptionalism and the empire thinking of Christendom. Brueggemann provides a theological understanding of the prophetic voice needed in order to counter the ideology, denial, and despair that FPC displays.

*Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* by N. T. Wright

This book serves as part of the theological understanding of the project whereas Christians rely upon the hope of resurrection when facing death. In response to the

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\(^{35}\) Ibid., 47.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 56.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 79.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 105-108.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 119-127.
contemporary confusion of society and Christians around the topic of death, N. T. Wright in *Surprised by Hope* reviews the early Church’s transformation, proclamation, and “surprising” hope found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its implications for the modern Church and all of creation. Wright calls the Church away from an understanding of heaven and “life after death” as the ultimate goal of God through Jesus Christ but towards a new worldview found in the hope of the early church that Christ’s resurrection serves as proof that God’s ultimate goal is the future resurrection, reclamation, and renewal of Creation.\(^{40}\)

In Jesus’ resurrection, God completed the inauguration of God’s Kingdom. The resurrection therefore calls the Church not to escape from the world but to serve as a “mission to the world based on Jesus’ lordship over the world.”\(^{41}\) The resurrection equips the Church with the knowledge of self-giving instead of self-seeking. Christians are “challenged to a new forgiveness, a new fruitfulness, a new following of Jesus, which will be wider and more dangerous than what has gone before.”\(^{42}\) The resurrection furthermore draws a contrast between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world sending the Church to proclaim and live out Christ’s lordship.

According to Wright, the resurrection changes our worship and understanding of the sacraments. He argues that the sacraments are more than just signposts. Baptism is an opportunity to participate in the “reality of new birth”, “a real dying to the old creation


\(^{41}\) Ibid., 233-235.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 240.
and a real rising into the new.”43 In the Eucharist, participants are called to taste the first fruits of the new creation given by the one who has preceded into the new creation.44 In prayer, God draws humanity into the same intimate relationship as experienced by Jesus, “intimate fellowship with himself.”45 In reading Scripture, the Old and New Testaments, we hear the uniform message of creation and new creation, covenant and new covenant.46 In the resurrection, we are called into a new understanding and a new life.

For a dying congregation, the good news of the resurrection brings the hope that even in death, there arises new life and new creation. By focusing on the hope of the resurrection, Wright builds upon the New Testament perspective that death is not the end. This perspective can help dying congregations see beyond their current situations towards a resurrected purpose and vision. Often dying congregations are trying to postpone death or recreate the old life and success of their past. The hope found in the resurrection of Jesus is about the creation of a new reality. It is about reclaiming a new and vibrant union with Christ that embraces death and looks beyond. Before the resurrection, the disciples could only fear death, but the resurrection transformed what the disciples thought was possible. By embracing their death and holding onto the resurrection, Pioneer and FPC could perhaps find the courage and inspiration towards a new life, a regenerated existence beyond their imagination.

43 Ibid., 272.
44 Ibid., 274.
46 Ibid., 281.
Ray Anderson defines practical theology as “a dynamic process of reflective, critical inquiry into the praxis of the church in the world and God’s purposes for humanity, carried out in the light of Christian Scripture and tradition, and in critical dialogue with other sources of knowledge.”47 For Anderson, practical theology is dynamic because it involves the circular integration of theory into practice and using practice in understanding theory. Practical theology therefore reflects upon theological truths by examining them in light of the experience as individuals and congregations practice and find meaning within their faith. Praxis is the process of reflective practice in light of the Scriptures, theology, and human knowledge.

Anderson adapted Don Browning’s model of practical theology adding a trinitarian theology within its foundation and exchanging experience for “Christopraxis” as the inner core. For Anderson, Christopraxis is “the continuing ministry of Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.”48 It is this incarnational and Pentecostal power of the Holy Spirit that empowers the ministry of the Church as it professes the resurrection of Christ.49 In Anderson’s model, a practitioner begins in the center reflecting upon the ministry of Christ at work in light of Scripture, and moving outward by asking, “What shall we do?” and, “How then should we live?”50

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48 Ibid., 29.

49 Ibid., 44-45.

50 Ibid., 29-30.
Anderson notes that mission theology is a crucial part of practical theology’s focus. At Pentecost, the disciples were sent out to carry Christopraxis out to the world. The ongoing mission of the Church is to embody the “incarnational nature of the Son of God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit” and share it with the world. To ignore the missional focus of the Church is to cut itself off from its essence and purpose in God’s work to the world and its empowerment through the Holy Spirit.

Anderson’s model has practical and theological implications for congregations in the midst of decline. As a congregation declines, inaction and maintenance of the status quo threatens to draw a congregation away from the life-giving and empowering missional work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers a congregation to reach outward into the world. By reflecting upon its call towards Christopraxis, a congregation

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51 Ibid., 29.

52 Ibid., 31.
can reconnect to the Christ-centered missional work of the Holy Spirit and reclaim its purpose. This also has implications for my original goal of the shared pastorate to assist Pioneer and FPC into shared missional outreach. I had hoped that by finding a common missional purpose, both congregations could recapture an enthusiasm for reaching outward.
CHAPTER 5:
A THEOLOGY OF SIBLING CONGREGATIONS

The Bible is rife with stories of how God often chose to work within and in spite of dysfunctional family relations. Conflict between siblings was a regular occurrence in the Old Testament: Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Miriam, Aaron and Moses, and Adonijah and Solomon to name a few. In the New Testament, Jesus’ family worried that he was out of his mind (Mk 3:21); and his brothers did not believe he was the Messiah during his lifetime (Jn 7:5).

In congregations, we often refer to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ; each one of us are a part of the family of God. This notion is reinforced in Scripture. When Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were outside asking for him, he replied, “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister.” (Mt 12:50)\(^1\) Paul also often addressed believers as brothers and sisters within his epistles. It is therefore natural for us to think of our congregation and fellow Christians as a part of our family of faith.

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\(^1\) All Scripture quoted is from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.
This notion of the congregation as a family also extends into how congregations function. Edwin Friedman, Peter Steinke, and others have applied Murray Bowen’s family systems theories towards congregations. Like a nuclear family, a congregation functions as an emotional unit dealing with its anxiety through *triangling*, *conflict*, *distance*, and *over/under-functioning*. Since the adaptive change process raises anxiety within a congregation, a leader of organizational change must learn how to manage conflict and resistance. Understanding family systems has been a useful tool in working with these two congregations.

When I refer to these congregations as sibling congregations, I am referring to their common heritage, founded by the same pastor, Presbyterian and similar contexts, and that they are connected by a shared pastor. However, like adult siblings that have created their own nuclear family, each congregation operates as an individual family system. As an independent emotional system, anxiety travels “infectiously” within a congregation among individuals but does not necessarily travel to the sibling congregation. The anxiety that FPC feels and spreads among its members will not be experienced in the same way by Pioneer, and likewise with Pioneer’s anxiety, because each congregation is its own emotional system.

However, connecting points between the congregations can trigger anxiety between the congregations. Because these two congregations share a pastor, anxiety can be transferred between congregations when contemplating the end of the shared pastor

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3 Ibid., 6-7.
relationship. This transference sometimes occurs in extended families dealing with the death or sickness of an extended family member. Adult siblings anxious with the death of a parent or family member may transfer anxiety from one family system to another. In shared pastorate congregations, leaders and regional bodies can help manage and calm congregational anxiety by acting as a “non-anxious presence.”

A difficulty in this shared pastorate relationship has been that Pioneer and FPC are in separate presbyteries. Systematically, this shared pastorate was not structured in a way to coordinate a shared response by the presbyteries. Adding to the difficulty is FPC’s reactive nature, which continues to isolate the congregation from the presbytery and other congregations. The original shared pastor arrangement created several triangles that placed me as the shared pastor in the middle between the two congregations, two presbyteries, and each presbytery with its respective congregation.

Another structural problem of the shared pastorate was that I could only be a member of a single presbytery. I chose Winnebago Presbytery because it was closer, healthier, and provided more resources. Among some at FPC, this was viewed as choosing Pioneer over FPC. At first, I tried to balance this by alternatively attending presbytery meetings between presbyteries. This had the effect of splitting my participation and disconnecting me from full participation in either presbyteries. Also, weather and distance often made it difficult to participate at Mackinac Presbytery meetings.

Friedman uses the term “non-anxious presence” to describe a leader’s role in being calm and self-differentiated. Peter Steinke describes the role of a congregational leader being a non-anxious presence in his book, _Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times_ (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2006) Kindle location 588-791.
Because FPC desires to be independent of Mackinac Presbytery, the congregation was not bothered by my lack of participation with Mackinac Presbytery. In fact, I often got the impression that the members saw my participation at Mackinac Presbytery as a nuisance and time spent away from my duties as pastor. I tried to encourage FPC’s participation within the presbytery by offering to drive a representative to the meetings. However, I was only taken up on the invitation once.

Using Bowen’s family systems theory to understand these congregations, as an anxious family system, FPC is more prone to under-function. As a pastor who tries to please and fix, I have the tendency to over-function. In anxious times of decline, FPC has expected the over-functioning of its pastors. When a pastor does not meet its expectations, or is perceived as under-functioning, the congregation has reacted strongly, as in the case of Rev. Haapalainen. It is the pastor that is often perceived to be the problem by many in the congregation.

Furthermore, this dynamic with FPC can lead to emotional and physical distancing. When the anxiety has become too great, some members either distance by leaving the church or through apathy. In return, the pastor too is prone to distancing, either emotionally by disconnecting from the members and physically by spending less time at the office or at church functions. When the anxiety continues to be unaddressed, it has resulted in the pastor either choosing to leave or being dismissed. Rev. Dornack and Rev. Haapalainen were examples of this unfortunate dynamic at play as the church failed to address the congregation’s anxiety in a healthy manner.

Pioneer, as a healthier system, does not expect the pastor to over-function. In fact, the congregation has been understanding when my pastoral attentions were focused more
on FPC. When problems arise, members are more likely to rise to the challenge. They spent three years searching for a part-time pastor before FPC decided to join in a shared pastorate. During that time, the interim was minimally available because he had a full-time position as a hospital chaplain. Pioneer has learned to pick up responsibilities where needed. Pioneer entered the shared pastorate with these skills.

It became clear early that I could not continue to over-function for FPC. A shared pastor who over-functions risks burnout. Boundary training assisted me to clarify healthy boundaries with the Session and congregation. Furthermore, the shared pastor agreement structurally deterred me from over-functioning because it required half time for each congregation. Over-functioning would have encouraged me to neglect my responsibilities at Pioneer. FPC’s Session has for the most part supported the half-time arrangement while many congregation members desire full-time commitment.

Learning to act calmly and clarifying boundaries has been helpful in calming the anxiety and building trust with these congregations. It has also been important to function well and competently in my duties as a pastor. Bolsinger refers to this as “technical competence,” and along with “relational congruity” helps to build trust, which is vital for leading adaptive change. With FPC, it has required a double portion of skills because of the congregation’s reactivity.

The Role of the Pastor in a Family System

The role of a shared pastor in a congregation is in many ways comparable to the role of a parent with adult children. A pastor is meant to guide a congregation into

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5 Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 43, 51-54.
healthy maturity much like a parent strives to raise her or his children to be healthy and mature adults. Paul draws the connection that a pastor should be assessed according to how well she or he manages and fulfills his or her role as parent and spouse: “He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way – for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church?” (1 Tm 3:4-5).

In a traditional healthy family, there are two emotionally healthy parents that work together to guide a family towards principled growth. In Presbyterian polity, it is the Session which ideally serves as the healthy partner discerning with the pastor what is best for the congregation based upon the principles of the congregation and denomination. The pastor serves as moderator and spiritual guide within the Session. According to the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (USA), “The session shall have responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the session shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have identified themselves throughout history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304).”

While this principled form of leadership is ideal, unfortunately like parents, pastors and congregational leaders are fallen individuals with differing abilities and self-
understanding. Add to that the prior abuses of former pastoral and congregational leadership, damaged congregational cultures, and anxious congregations dealing with societal shifts, leading adaptive change has never been more challenging, while also more needed.

In a shared pastorate between sibling congregations, adaptive change can be both more difficult and more bearable for the shared pastor. It is more difficult because the pastor often must partner with multiple leadership boards. The pastor also has to deal with different personalities, cultures, and work styles of the congregations. In my situation, there are also differing styles and resources provided by the two differing presbyteries. In describing a whole system, Peter Senge notes that “dividing an elephant in half does not produce two smaller elephants…You just get a mess.” In a shared pastorate, I would add, “Two halves of different elephants do not make a whole. It creates an even bigger mess.”

A shared pastorate can be more bearable because it allows a pastor to separate the difficulties and anxieties experienced at one congregation from the other congregation. When I was experiencing a difficult time with FPC, I had Pioneer to go back to the following day. While Pioneer had its challenges and challenging people, rarely did I have to deal with simultaneous problems and resistance by both congregations. It was as if one sibling knew when the parent was having too difficult of a time dealing with the other sibling.

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Treat their issues individually—In the complex situation of a shared pastorate, it is therefore important for the pastor to work with, understand, and treat the two systems as separate unique family units. When I first took the position, I would often describe the position as comparable to a parent with two children. A parent at times must give more focus to the child who is having more difficulty. As I learned in my own childhood, a parent while in the presence of either child, should refrain from comparing one child with the other. If a congregation is having a problem, it does not want or need to know from the pastor how the other congregation has dealt with a similar issue. Likewise, the pastor should not reveal the trials and difficulties of the other congregation. Vocally favoring one over the other damages trust and confidence. Like a parent, it is natural for a pastor to enjoy being around the less difficult sibling, but it is unwise to discuss it with either congregation.

Jesus and Paul are excellent examples in this regard. In the New Testament, there are not instances of Jesus comparing the disciples to one another. Even though they were diverse in backgrounds and temperaments, Jesus drew them together and treated each individually. Even when they argued about who was the greatest, Jesus emphasized how the greatest needs to be like a child (Lk 9:46) and become like the youngest and serve one another (Lk 22:26-28). Jesus did draw a comparison between the actions of Mary and Martha but only after Martha came to Jesus complaining of her sister’s actions (Lk 10:38-42). Jesus’ response does not express favoritism towards either of the sisters.

Furthermore, in his letters, Paul addressed the issues of the differing communities of believers separately. For instance, he did not compare the Corinthian believers to the Ephesians. Although there were similar issues and divisions within the
communities, Paul pulled them back to the bigger picture of unity as the body of Christ and God’s reconciling work through Jesus Christ.

*Work on your own issues and principles*—In a healthy or unhealthy system, it is important for a pastor to understand his or her own issues and anxieties. In a shared pastorate, it is vital because there are two or more family systems to work with. Leading adaptive change will raise the anxiety within one or both of the systems. In order to manage the anxiety and conflict, a shared pastor needs to remain calm and communicate clarity around his or her principles.

Jim Herrington, Robert Creech and Trisha Taylor note that Christian leadership and congregational transformation begins through personal transformation as an “inside-out” reflective process whereby a leader examines her or his own behavior within a community of grace and truth.\(^8\) This relates to the patterns of behavior and emotional maturity gained from our family of origin. “By learning to define ourselves within our family, we increase our ability in other relationships.”\(^9\) This assists leaders to remain calm in anxious situations. We cannot always change others, but we can definitely change ourselves.

James Osterhaus, Joseph Jurkowski, and Todd Hann talk about understanding our “red zone” and “blue zone.” Our red zone is about our issues that we try to protect ourselves. In the red zone, we are more defensive, resentful, and procrastinate. Our blue zone is value and principle based. In the blue zone, we are able to understand and

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\(^9\) Ibid., 96.
acknowledge our emotions. By understanding our triggers, we are better able as leaders to keep calm and lead more effectively in the midst of ministry conflict.\textsuperscript{10}

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us to take the “log” out of our own eye, before trying to remove the “speck” out of others (Mt 7:5). It is often too easy to find fault and blame with others instead of facing our own problems. If we are to be effective leaders, self-examination is crucial so that we can become aware of our own insecurities.

Within self-examination, by making ourselves consciously aware of our unconscious emotional and behavioral patterns passed along to us, a point of epiphany comes in which a leader is able to understand that she or he is a part of the problem. A leaders’ subconscious actions can encourage and collude with the resistance towards change. Bolsinger describes his moment of realization when a church consultant confronted him with his own role of keeping the church from change. It made him “queasy.”\textsuperscript{11} Later in the project, I will explain my own sense of queasiness as I realized my part within resisting change.

But a leader understanding her or his insecurities is only half of the personal journey, a leader needs to understand his or her values and principles and communicate them clearly. In self-management, Steinke urges leaders to know what they believe, their values, convictions and beliefs, to know what is worth “dying for”, and recognizing what we are certain and uncertain about.\textsuperscript{12} This allows a leader to take stands with courage

\textsuperscript{10} James Osterhaus, Joseph Jurkowski, and Todd Hahn, \textit{Thriving through Ministry Conflict} (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 104-106.

\textsuperscript{11} Bolsinger, \textit{Canoeing the Mountains}, 18.

\textsuperscript{12} Steinke, \textit{Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times}, Kindle location 760-779.
even in the midst of strong resistance and attacks. Principles and beliefs allow a leader to step outside of his or her comfort zone, beyond the behavior and emotional patterns that have kept the leader from engaging change. In principled action and awareness of one’s issues, a pastor is able to become a better leader by leading where the congregation is unwilling and resistant to go.

In a shared pastorate, it is common for the personalities of the congregations to be drastically different. Their values, beliefs, and convictions can be quite varied. It is natural for the pastor to gravitate towards the congregation that matches her or his values and beliefs. This was definitely the case for me with Pioneer and FPC. My values aligned more closely with Pioneer’s than with FPC. Knowing these differences has helped me to reflect and gain a better perspective.

Stay connected—In families as well as congregations, the ability to stay connected even in the midst of attack is crucial to parish work. The temptation within a shared pastorate is to withdraw to the other church. As Steinke points out that in the midst of conflict, emotional distancing and blaming often has the same effect as explaining, justifying, and defending; it makes things worse. By staying connected especially in the midst of resistance, a congregation learns to trust the leader. As with a child yelling to get its way, a parent who stays calm, principled, and connected will earn trust in the long run. Jesus, even in the midst of persecution and conflict, stayed connected with those who opposed him. He would eat with Pharisees and converse with

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13 Rev. Dr. Agnes Brady revealed this insight to me from her own experience as a pastor of several yoked and multi-point churches.

14 Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, Kindle location 750.
teachers of the Law who were trying to trap and trick him. Even on the cross, he offered up to God a prayer of forgiveness, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

Members of an anxious and resistant congregation are often unaware of what they are doing. The congregation is following the patterns to which it has grown accustomed. The attacks are not personal, even though it might feel that way. Bolsinger talks about separating our understanding of self from our understanding of our role. Psychologists call this differentiation. “How to be separate from the emotional gravity of an organizational system without having to separate from it.”

You cannot do it alone – Bolsinger notes the misguided popular belief that we can shoulder the burden of leadership alone. Like an old western, we often believe that all it takes is a single person to come in and clean up a town. (In my case, two towns.) As one who often took on the role of “fixer” within my family, this belief is especially enticing and pervasive in my sub-conscious. However, this belief in the lone hero often traps a leader into working against the change he or she wishes to accomplish. As Bolsinger notes, “Most of us haven’t taken seriously our limitations when we carry the burden of leadership alone…Frankly the stubbornness to think that we can lead without taking into account our limitations is much of what is burning us out, discouraging us from going even further into uncharted territory or, even worse, keeping us from seeing any of the real fruit of transformation.”

15 Bolsinger, Canoeing the Mountains, 211.

16 Ibid., 157.
thinking I could enact change within these two churches on my own. I was unwilling to see my own limitations both systematically and personally.

Systematically, the nature of a shared pastorate being two separate family systems with independent leadership complicates the change process. In a corporation, there might be cultural and systematic differences between divisions. Furthermore, division heads often have a loyalty towards their divisions and employees. However, the executive leadership of a corporation is positioned to encourage change because of its influence and authority over all of the divisions. This form of hierarchical leadership does not typically exist within a shared Presbyterian pastorate, especially one composed of congregations in separate presbyteries. The two separate leadership boards create a difficulty in bringing about unified change because each board member sees its congregation as the primary constituency.\(^{17}\)

A shared pastor however sees both congregations as his or her constituencies. I often experienced frustration when trying to persuade both boards for a unified missional outreach. Members of both boards resisted because they saw it as their responsibility to protect their constituencies and the independence of their congregation. This sort of systematic problem requires a new way of seeing the problem. This will be discussed further in the next section.

As Bolsinger points out, leading a group into shared adaptive change is “always relational,” therefore “to bring change we must enact relationally.”\(^{18}\) In order to enact

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 158.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 156.
relational change, Bolsinger encourages a leader to think not of one team, but six: Allies, confidants, opponents, senior authorities, casualties, and dissenters.\textsuperscript{19} A leader must interact relationally and differently with each of these groups in order to bring about change. They each offer something different to the change process.

It is important for a pastor to have confidants but not to confuse them with allies. Bolsinger describes confidants as individuals who care more about the pastor than the mission of the organization. These are typically found outside of the system and provide honest feedback for the leader about his or her leadership within the system.\textsuperscript{20} These can be friends, family, counselors, coaches, and colleagues in ministry (as long as they are outside the system). Because, as discussed earlier, our behaviors and emotional patterns are often sub-conscious, confidants play a vital part in helping a pastor see past her or his patterns and issues. Given the complexity of a shared pastorate, it is beneficial for a pastor to have a confidant who is familiar with systems theory and the change process.

In our work with congregations, it is important for us as pastors to remember that we only have one Savior, one Good Shepherd. As Paul reminds us, we are but one member of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-31). Just as God calls us into relationship with himself, so too does he call us out into relationship with others. Jesus built relationships with those he ministered to, and then he sent them out to share the relationship and knowledge they had learned.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 158-163

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 159.
CHAPTER 6:
A THEOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESISTANCE AND DEATH

Life and Death

From its outset in the first story of Creation, the Bible sets forth a description of how God instituted life within the universe through an act of change, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light (Gn 1:1-3).” Where there is life, there is also death. In the second account of Creation, the creation of the first human, God pronounced death as a result of disobedience against the commandment “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die (Gn 2:17).”¹ In Adam and Eve’s betrayal by eating of the forbidden fruit, God banished humankind from the Garden and separated humankind from the Tree of Life, which represents eternal life. According to Genesis, human death is therefore the result of humankind’s rebellion against God’s purposes and ordering. It resulted from the breaking of communion with God through sin and disobedience.

From the Genesis narrative, death is therefore natural only in the sense that humankind’s nature was changed through original sin. Although death is discussed theologically as a result of our disobedience from God, it is not implied within this project that an individual’s death is caused by sinful living. As Christians, we can accept that death is a natural part of our earthly existence while also living in the hope of eternal communion with God after death through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When creating a theology of death, human or organizational, one must take into account the intertwining dual notions of physical and spiritual death. As L. L. Morris notes, “Death seems to be necessary for bodies constituted as ours. Physical decay and ultimate dissolution are inescapable. However, the Bible speaks of death as the result of sin. The possession of eternal life does not cancel out physical death. The concept of death in the Bible is a concept in opposition to death in a spiritual state, not to the physical event of death. The inference that we draw from all this is that that death within the Bible as the result of sin represents more than bodily death.”

The Bible acknowledges both physical and spiritual death. They are interwoven concepts that cannot be separated within the Scriptures. It should also be noted that there are plentiful and copious arguments within modern theology and biblical studies about the overwhelming support that the Bible rejects the dualistic separation of the physical and spiritual of Greek philosophy, and instead reflects the Hebrew integration of body and spirit. The integration of the physical and spiritual realms along with the power of

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life over death is understood and most clearly seen in Christian theology within the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus. In the resurrection of Jesus, the physical and spiritual aspects of death are overcome through the physical and spiritual reality of life.

Although death is a reality of our earthly existence, the Bible emphasizes and encourages life over death. Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly (Jn 10:10).” Life is found in relationship with God. The Old and New Testaments encourage the people of God into relationship and communion with God. In the Old Testament, the Abrahamic covenant established an “everlasting” relationship with Abraham’s descendants (Gn 17:7). In the resurrection of Jesus, the New Testament proclaims that life is the final victory over death (1 Cor 15). In the gospel of John, life and death are often analogous to light and darkness whereas Jesus is the “light of the world” who has come into the world, gives life and overcomes darkness (Jn 1:4-5; 8:12).

Reformed theology expressed by the early reformers carries forth the notion from Scripture that death, both physically and spiritually, is punishment for sin, particularly the result of original sin. The Second Helvetic Confession written by Heinrich Bullinger in 1531 states, “By death we understand not only bodily death, which all of us must once suffer on account of sins, but also eternal punishment due to our sins and corruption.”

This concept is further echoed in the Scots Confession of 1560 and the Westminster Confession of 1649. John Calvin noted the spiritual repercussions of original sin that

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4 Ibid., 3.03, 11.

5 Ibid., 6.031-.036, 155-156.
Adam’s spiritual life was no longer “united and bound” to God, which resulted in the death of his soul and “the depravation of a nature formerly good.” For Calvin, Adam had lost the gifts and relationship of God endowed to him at Creation, which then carried forth to all following generations.

Modern Reformed theology often takes a more parabolic understanding of the Genesis accounts than the early reformers, but it does further develop this notion of sin as punishment, and that life and death are contrasts in relationship to God as Creator. According to Otto Weber, death results from sin and is “implicit in sin just as life is implicit in the ‘image of God.’” Weber maintained that death as punishment was not to be understood within a legal context but as “the comprehensive destruction of the relationship between Creator and the creature.”

Some modern theologians have however argued for an integration of Christian theology with a scientific understanding of death. Douglas Davies argues against what he believes is a negative emphasis of Christian theology upon death. He believes that “a redemptive attitude toward the world and our life within it” should be placed alongside the focus upon death and sin found in much Christian theology of sin and the cross.

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8 Ibid., 620.

Davies sees a need to de-romanticize Christianity’s commitment to the notion that death is evil in order to speak to a modern culture.

However, the modern Reformed understanding of death as portrayed antithetically to life does not negate an understanding of physical death as a natural part of the biological reality of our existence. A modern Reformed theology appreciates the physicality of death, and also looks beyond it. Wright notes that after the resurrection of Jesus, the New Testament community emphasized a hope in the redemption of the body.¹⁰ He warns Christians away from the dualism of separating the spiritual and physical in understanding in the establishment of God’s Kingdom and our existence after death. For Wright, the Old and New Testaments together relay “the story of creation and new creation” understood in the regeneration of creation.¹¹

This project therefore takes the Reformed perspective as found in Scripture that death, while a natural part of our biological and even a congregational existence, is in fact antithetical to the life known and experienced in relationship with God. Understood in this way, death is the absence of life lived in communion with God. Likewise, life lived in communion with God is the absence of death. Physical death, individually or congregationally, when experienced in a life lived in relationship and communion with God is merely a means of walking into greater life and relationship with God. As Weber argues, life is more than biological “existence” or “being.” It is the relationship to the

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¹⁰ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 147.

¹¹ Ibid., 280.
creative life-giving nature of God. “Life is thus the absolute opposite of non-existence, because it is life derived from God. Therefore, life is ‘original-ness,’ joy, and power.”

For the purposes of this project, it is beneficial to define death as the absence of life because it takes into account both the physical and spiritual notions of death. It also crosses over to assist in understanding the death of a congregation. Dying congregations are often impacted both spiritually and physically, but not necessarily. A dying congregation can be showing physical decline but can still be spiritually strong by being connected to its mission and faith. Likewise, a congregation can be physically strong in its membership and finances but spiritually disconnected from God’s purposes.

More often though, congregations slip into death both physically and spiritually. In his work as a church consultant, Thom Rainer often noted both physical and spiritual decline within dying churches. He hypothesizes that forty percent of churches in the United States are seriously unhealthy and showing increasing symptoms of spiritual and physical decay while another ten percent are in the final stages of death. Many churches lose sight of the mission that drove their birth and growth in the first place. Just as many unhealthy humans often die both physically and spiritually, so too will an unhealthy organization. Physically a congregation dies because it declines in members, finances, and resources to sustain its ministries. Spiritually a congregation dies because it has lost communion with God and God’s missional heart.


All is not loss though. Resurrection is possible for a congregation when it reconnects to its sense of missional purpose and learns to adapt to the surrounding culture. It is not an easy process for a congregation, but by establishing a learning attitude, a congregation can find new life as it reclaims its connection and communion with the Christ and God’s missional heart.

A Dying Congregation in Light of Practical Theology

Like many mainline congregations, FPC and Pioneer have been in decline for many years in both members and resources. While they are both physically dying, Pioneer has a stronger understanding of God’s missional purposes, and is therefore spiritually healthier than FPC. FPC has lost sight of the life offered by reaching outward. Member’s pursuit to save the congregation often revolves around the inwardly focused goal to preserve their traditions and building for their members. While there are some that might express this same desire at Pioneer, the general sense of the congregation is that its purpose lies in the missional outreach for the Kingdom of God.

It is in the loss of practice in the participation of the missional focus of the church that FPC is severing itself from the Christ-centered work of the Church. According to Anderson’s adaptation of Browning’s model, it is the inability to live out the “praxis of Christ” within its actions and understanding that distances the congregation from the power infused work of the Holy Spirit within the life of the Church. It is FPC’s resistance to ask how Christ should affect its outreach that is spiritually damaging the congregation. The congregation’s focus has moved inward upon itself rather than in an incarnational outward practice of sharing the life found in Christ to impact the outer community.
In contrast, Pioneer is energized and nourished in its mission activities and outreach. Although Pioneer struggles to draw new members in a post-Christendom culture, its missionary roots are still a vital part of its ministries connecting congregants to Christ’s work in the community. From raising money for local public schools so that teachers can provide for impoverished students to supporting missionaries abroad to Pioneer’s children playing BINGO with senior citizens at local nursing homes, Pioneer members are energized to reflect God’s love to their community.

As Bolsinger notes, “To live up to their name, local churches must be continually moving out, extending themselves into the world, being the missional, witnessing community we were called into being to be: the manifestation of God’s going into the world, crossing boundaries, proclaiming, teaching, healing, loving, serving and extending the reign of God. In short, churches need to keep adventuring or they will die.”\(^{14}\) It is the choice to focus inward rather than outward that is ultimately killing FPC both spiritually and physically. It is the absence of life that is bringing death. The congregation has lost the sense of newness and adventure that comes with the work of the Holy Spirit. In maintaining the status quo, FPC is tragically turning from the encouraging life-giving force of the Holy Spirit that inspires, motivates, and connects us to God and God’s Kingdom purposes. Essentially, like the wicked and lazy slave in the Parable of the Talents, in their fear of change the members are burying their talents in the ground (Mt 25:14-30).

\(^{14}\) Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 38.
It has been a long time since FPC has recognized the need to reach out. As Mann points out, this is often the case with congregations. Once a congregation has reached the approximate level of what it views as “success,” the members tolerance for change begins to fall quickly. The laity and clergy begin to look inward rather than outward. The decline often will continue until a crisis point of resources forces a decision towards change. At this point, the tolerance of change increases. It is at this crisis point that a comprehension for redevelopment may exist in order to pursue change, but often the resources of the church have dwindled to a point that makes redevelopment unlikely.\textsuperscript{15}\textsuperscript{15} But even if there are resources available such as with FPC, the decades of inward practices and focus have often diminished the congregation’s adaptive capacity to change. FPC has been disconnected from God’s missional purposes for such a long time that its members have difficulty recognizing their need for outreach both physically and spiritually. This in turn causes them to focus more inward. FPC’s history of inward focus has created a lack of adaptive capacity that will be difficult to overcome.

**Resistance and Change**

Leading change within a congregation is difficult due to the resistance that will inevitable arise. Heifetz and Linsky note the dangers involved in leading adaptive change: “Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people’s habits, beliefs, and values. It asks them to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express

\textsuperscript{15} Mann, *Can Our Church Live*, 42.
disloyalty to people and cultures. Because adaptive change forces people to question and perhaps redefine aspects of their identity, it also challenges their sense of competence.”

Resistance is found regularly in the Bible where it is often referred to as “hardening the heart” or being “stiff-necked.” Occasionally it was God who hardened hearts, for instance Pharaoh who refused to let the Israelites go free (Ex 7:3). Paul referring to Pharaoh’s hardened heart pronounces, “So then he [God] has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses (Rm 9:18).”

Other times, it appears that hardening is brought about by the individual, “Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness (Heb 3:8).” This form of resistance happens because one closes oneself off to listening, seeing, or participating in God’s work (Jeremiah 19:14-15, Mk 8:17 and Acts 7:51). Whether brought about by God or an individual, resistance is often portrayed in the Bible as an act of rebellion against God’s will and purposes.

However, not all resistance is portrayed as negative. Believers are encouraged to resist temptation (Prv 7:25-26 and 1 Cor 10:13), to stand against the spiritual forces counter to God (Eph 6:11-12) and turn away from sin (Lk 13:3). This is accomplished only by turning instead towards God.

In the New Testament, warnings about resistance are directed specifically towards spiritual forces and personal sin instead of resistance towards others or human authorities. Towards others, Christians are encouraged to follow the example of Jesus who submitted to the authorities and offered himself as a sacrifice (Heb 12:4-5). In the Sermon on the

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16 Heifetz and Linsky, Leadership on the Line, 30.
Mount, Jesus encouraged his followers “not to resist an evildoer,” but to turn the other cheek, love one’s enemies and pray for them (Matt 5:39, 44). Within the community of believers, Christians are encouraged to submit to the wisdom of the leadership (Heb 13:17), to confront others with their sins through a process that encourages reconciliation (Mt 18:15-20) and exhort one another to keep from sin (Heb 13:12-13).

In the polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA), ruling elders are elected by the congregation to “discern and guide in fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life.”17 They, along with the pastor, are responsible to lead a congregation to participate in God’s mission. They are to lead through reflection of Scripture discerning and acting in accordance to God’s will above the desires of the congregation. Unfortunately, many elders (and pastors) often consciously or subconsciously see it as their primary responsibility to answer to the will of the congregation. When anxiety rises due to the status quo being challenged, leaders are susceptible to resist adaptive change.

This leadership dynamic even affected the Apostles. In the New Testament, the Apostles carried out their central mission to spread the good news of the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Despite resistance from internal and external factions to focus inward, the Apostles and elders repeatedly affirmed this outward focused mission. They affirmed it in the confirmation of Peter’s baptism of the Roman Cornelius along with his family (Acts 11:1-18), and again in affirming the work of Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles (Acts 15:1-21). However,

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there were stumbles along the way. Paul confronted Peter in Antioch when he refrained from eating with the Gentiles because he feared the response of the circumcision faction. Paul noted that even Barnabas was led astray by Peter’s actions (Gal 2:11-14). Paul had the fortitude to maintain his focus upon the central mission and confront those who colluded against it.

Resistance is essentially distraction. It is obstacles put in the way by individuals to distract the leadership and group from addressing the issues that are keeping the organization from carrying out its mission. Heifetz and Linsky identify four common forms of resistance: Marginalization, diversion, attack, and seduction.\textsuperscript{18}

Marginalization is putting the issue aside by sidelining the importance of the leader or issue. It can be direct but often is indirect. “Tokenism” is a form of marginalization in which a person or group is seen to embody an issue and therefore is set aside.\textsuperscript{19} Making the person seem special is a seductive form of marginalization by keeping the individual and the issue in a little box so the person is not allowed to participate meaningfully in other issues.\textsuperscript{20}

Diversion is another tactic used to resist. It can be adding other issues to distract a leader from the issue they are trying to address.\textsuperscript{21} This will be explored further in Part 3 because the shared pastorate was a form of diversion from both of the churches.

\textsuperscript{18} Heifetz and Linsky, \textit{Leadership on the Line}, 31.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 36.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 38.
addressing their issues. A promotion can also be a form of diversion as well as increasing the duties of the leader to distract her or him from the issue.\textsuperscript{22} This is an enticing tactic used against a pastor who is an over-achiever or people-pleaser. In a shared pastorate, the list of tasks the pastor is expected to cover can be a diversion from focusing on the adaptive issue.

Attacking the leader or the message is a form of resistance. Paul had to deal with attacks from his opposition. Sometimes it was physical attacks from non-believers such as when he was stoned in Lystra and left for dead (Acts 14:19). More often though, the attacks were verbal from factions or individuals within the congregations. Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians an individual who opposed Paul in a manner that brought much sorrow that it had to be disciplined by the Corinthian elders (2 Cor 2:5-11). Paul was wise enough to assert that the pain received was not really against him but against the congregation. Reacting to attacks personally only makes the situation worse\textsuperscript{23} and can be a form of collusion away from the issue.\textsuperscript{24}

According to Heifetz and Linsky, seduction is the process in which an individual completely loses her or his sense of purpose and therefore is kept from addressing an issue.\textsuperscript{25} The desire for approval from supporters is an example of this form of resistance. Conditioning leaders by giving praise and then pulling support, individuals resist and

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 40.
  \item\textsuperscript{23} Steinke, Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times, loc. 750.
  \item\textsuperscript{24} Heifetz and Linsky, 44.
  \item\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 45.
\end{itemize}
sabotage change. Disappointing supporters is a difficult but necessary part of adaptive growth.

Bolsinger adds *work avoidance* as a form of resistance. By looking to the pastor or an authority figure as “the expert” allows the congregation to avoid doing the needed adaptive work for transformative change.\(^{26}\) Apathy/non-participation are common forms of *work avoidance* within a congregation. In its more destructive form, apathy and non-participation can take on a passive-aggressive tone as members or leaders indirectly sabotage efforts they have said that they support.

In adaptive change, resistance is to be expected. A pastor must be vigilant in recognizing resistance and also his or her collusion with resistance in order to encourage transformational change. Bolsinger urges leaders to focus more on being an expert experimenter and asking thought provoking questions in order to give the work back to the group.\(^{27}\) Because leading adaptive change is a challenging task fraught with dangers, it is wise for a pastor to have a support group of mentors, coaches, and confidants that assist the leader to see the resistance and collusion that can be subtle and easily overlooked.

**Grief and Hospice Care**

This finally leads us to grief. When a shared pastorate is the result of two declining congregations no longer being able to afford a full-time pastor, it is ultimately a ministry of grief. William Miller and Kathleen Jackson describe grief as “a specific

\(^{26}\) Bolsinger, 212.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 213.
reaction to a loss.” While grief is typically attributed with the loss of a loved one, grief can be experienced with any profound loss. In the case of a congregation, the reality of decline and an uncertain future often sparks a reaction of the grieving process within congregants, even though they are typically unaware of this process taking place.

In troubling times, Brueggemann discusses the prophetic tasks of church leaders to 1) promote reality, 2) walk in grief, and 3) point to the hope found in God. Although Brueggemann’s purpose in his book *Reality, Grief, Hope* was to address the current societal issue of exceptionalism within the United States, his biblical exegesis is applicable to the challenges of this shared pastorate. Declining congregations must wrestle with the new reality of the congregation from their previous reality. Furthermore, the five stages of the grieving process as outlined by Kübler-Ross provides a guide for pastors and congregational leaders to navigate the emotional responses of their congregants as they move from denial to acceptance.

Although Dr. Kübler-Ross identified these stages from her observations working with terminal patients, the grieving process did not begin with her work. These stages help to describe and name the grief process that God has given to humanity to assist through grief and loss. Although we identify these five stages, individually people move through the grief process differently. Kübler-Ross’s stages are not meant to be a rigid rule. Some individuals move quickly through grief and others take more time.

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Cultures deal with grief differently. Each culture has its own customs around death and dying. The Bible provides a glimpse into the grieving processes of the ancient Judean world. In the story of Bathsheba, she fulfilled a period of mourning for her dead husband Uriah before David took her as his own wife (2 Sm 11:26-27). In the New Testament, when Jesus raised the Synagogue leader’s daughter (Lk 8:49-56), the widow’s son (Lk 7:11-17), and Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44), professional grievers were hired to moan and lament the death in order to provide space for the loved one’s grief. These customs and traditions helped codify accepted norms within their culture.

The Bible bears witness to the five stages of grief. It also supports the idea that a group can experience the stages of grief prior to a loss. As Brueggemann points out, the leaders of Jerusalem lived in denial of the consequences of their ideology of “chosen-ness” even while the prophets warned of the looming Babylonian exile. Likewise, Peter and the disciples failed to accept Jesus’ prediction of his death and resurrection (Mk 8:31-33, Mt 16:21-28, Lk 9:21-22). Jonah 3:10-4:4 and Job 10:1-7 are clear examples of the anger stage. David in grief of his child’s sickness enters into bargaining with God by fasting, praying, and laying all night before the Lord in order to sway God away from his pronouncement that the child would die (2 Sm 12:15-16). In regards to depression, the Bible is rich with writings of lament such as Psalm 102, “Hear my prayer O Lord, let my cry come to you (Ps 102:1).” Finally comes acceptance such as when David upon hearing the news that his child died resumes eating and worshiping (2 Sm 12:19-23).

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30 Ibid., 42.
In the case of a declining congregation, denial often lasts years and even decades. Mann notes that within a declining congregation, unless the denial and blame of decades is replaced by “a learning stance,” death is the likely outcome.\(^{31}\) Unfortunately, declining congregations like FPC are often stuck in the denial stage. By the time a congregation finally begins moving toward acceptance and trying something new, it is already too late; the resources have decreased to a point that the congregation cannot mount an effective plan for redevelopment.

To move a congregation past denial, a leader of adaptive change must clearly lay out the reality of a congregation’s situation through facts, yet not distance the congregation so that the members marginalize the message or leader. This is a delicate balance that Jesus displayed as he confronted the problems and hypocrisy around him. At times he confronted the misguided ideology and hypocrisy of others directly by listing their wrongdoings, and then warning them to turn away from their misdeeds. In Luke 11:33-54, Jesus denounced the actions of the Pharisees and lawyers. This led to the Pharisees and scribes to become hostile towards Jesus and begin to plot ways to get rid of him, but they could not do this out in the open because the people respected and revered Jesus.

Other times, Jesus would confront a misguided reality less directly by introducing a parable. Through his parables, Jesus was able to engage the listener into confronting a false reality by imagining the true reality of God. Similarly, Bolsinger notes that the heart of adaptive leadership is being able to ask thought provoking hard questions that get at

\(^{31}\) Mann, *Can Our Church Live*, 7.
the truth. The goal is to engage the group in learning so that members are able to raise new questions for themselves. This project represents such an experiment in order to assist FPC past denial and move the congregation towards acceptance.

Acceptance is the stage that new possibilities can be imagined, but it achieved only after working through the other stages of grief. When a congregation is able to reach acceptance, members are able to look upon the reality of their situation without the hindrances of denial, blame, fear, and hopelessness and consider new avenues. As Christians, it is by picking up our cross and accepting our death that we are able to see the new life God offers. This is accomplished by walking with God through the grief process.

Hospice care compassionately helps individuals and families through grief to a new understanding and relationship with their dying loved one. In the same way, a pastor can compassionately help a dying congregation through grief to a new understanding and relationship with one another and the congregation. This is a ministry of incarnation, resurrection, and christopraxis in which the pastor helps congregants to invite the Spirit to journey within their grief so that they may find new life and reality as the body of Christ. It is in a new understanding that hopefully FPC could begin to look outward into missional outreach.

Although Pioneer is also in decline, it has not reached the point at which the congregation requires hospice care like FPC. The congregation is emotionally, spiritually, and financially healthier than FPC. Pioneer is less reactive and more trusting towards the

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32 Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 207.
leadership. Pioneer’s mission outreach is a practice of christopraxis that has kept the congregation connected to the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit within the community. While it is not at the point of dying, Pioneer is still in need of adaptive change in order to adjust to the changing context within a post-Christendom world. In Matthew 16:24, Christ encourages us to pick up our cross and follow him. Although it is not at the point of death, Pioneer could benefit by walking beside her sister congregation as FPC faces a likely death. Congregants could be drawn into a clearer understanding of their purpose and examination of the adaptive changes they require in order to avoid FPC’s fate.
PART THREE

MINISTRY PRACTICE
CHAPTER 7:
YEARS ONE THROUGH FOUR

This chapter explores the ministry practice implemented over the first four years within the shared pastorate. I examine the initial concept of the shared pastorate as an experiment in change for these congregations and their different reactions to this experiment. Furthermore, I reflect upon my initial pursuit to draw them together in shared ministry, the resistance that ensued, and the resulting realization that more substantive change was needed.

Shared Pastorate Experiment

From its conception, the shared pastorate was an experiment of change for both congregations. It was conceived to address the need of both congregations for ordained pastoral support within the new financial reality that neither church could afford a full-time pastor. It however was not designed to address the adaptive challenge of the ongoing decline of both churches within a changing post-Christendom society. None of the parties involved, including me, had a clear idea that this was the real issue needing to be addressed.
The shared pastorate as set forth in the *Shared Pastor Agreement* split the costs for a full-time pastor equally. It also accounted for an equal allocation of time by the pastor for each congregation. Mondays and Wednesdays were to be spent at Pioneer, and Tuesdays and Thursdays at FPC. It was generally understood that the time given to each church might fluctuate given extra needs such as weddings and funerals.

Mann notes that yoked ministry is an alternative ministry solution but is not to be considered as redevelopment because it does not involve a congregation redefining its identity and purpose. At best, a shared pastorate is a modest ministry of maintenance and is therefore not a model for growth. Both congregations desired to stop the decline, but a shared pastorate maintains the status quo of each church with the least amount of change and discomfort. The shared pastorate was therefore a technical fix to address the church’s financial and pastoral needs. We misunderstood its limitations.

Quickly it became evident that each church had differing expectations for the shared pastorate. From the beginning, Pioneer’s expectations were more in line with the shared pastorate as a modest model of maintenance. The congregation did not expect a drastic increase in growth while FPC consistently expressed a desire to return to its former growth and influence. Because FPC’s decline had been more drastic over the last twenty years, the congregation’s grief was greater than Pioneer’s, which experienced more steadied and slower decline. FPC members were more likely to reflect upon the past than Pioneer members. FPC members were also more reactive as they reflected upon the hurt and betrayal they felt by members who stopped attending or switched to other

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1 Mann, *Can Our Church Live*, 63.
congregations. They were angry at these former members, yet were unwilling to let them go.

In hindsight, I wish that I had recognized the grief that was evident among FPC’s members. I could have initially done more pastoral care and active listening to help FPC members move through their grief. Also, it would have been helpful to have understood the limitations of the shared pastorate and to have made that clear particularly with FPC. These initial differing expectations and unresolved grief impacted their differing stances towards the shared pastorate and the resistance that would follow.

Although the shared pastorate was not a “redefinition” of the congregation, it did require a new understanding of the role of pastor by each congregation. No longer would congregants see the pastor as “their pastor” alone. Now, members shared a pastor with another congregation, a congregation that each had strived to distance from over the decades.

Pioneer took a more welcoming posture towards the shared pastorate for Pioneer had first suggested it to FPC. In its demeanor, Pioneer is a more welcoming congregation. FPC only came to accept the shared pastorate after its current part-time pastor wanted to retire. Although I didn’t realize it at the time, FPC’s resistance towards sharing a pastor would define my ministry between both congregations.

Because of FPC’s hesitancy, the shared pastorate was originally defined as a designated pastor position. Within the PCUSA, a designated pastor serves for a designated trial term. After the trial period, the position then becomes a traditional pastor relationship. The purpose of a designated position is to give congregations the flexibility to experiment with a new ministry. Because this was a shift for each congregation, it was
appropriate that the position was a designated position. This position was unique in that it set forth two designated two year terms before transitioning to a regular pastor relationship. After each designated term, each church would determine if it wanted to continue with the shared pastor agreement.

Because of the resistance of FPC towards sharing a pastor, the ancillary effect was twice within the four-year designated term, I was required to defend my job with FPC. Pioneer members did not raise questions concerning the shared pastorate like FPC members. Pioneer members showed a greater acceptance of the shared pastorate from the beginning. Each time the shared pastorate came before the Session and congregation for approval at Pioneer, it was passed without a challenge. In contrast, FPC set a tone of suspicion towards the shared pastorate. Of the five FPC members on the pastor nominating committee (PNC) three stopped attending church within three months of my installation and a fourth has argued continually for dissolving the shared pastor agreement. Drop-off by PNC members is not unusual in itself, but the comparison is noteworthy that all five of Pioneer’s PNC members remained consistently active within the leadership and worship life of Pioneer during the eight years of the shared pastorate.

From the beginning, FPC’s Session showed resistance toward the shared pastorate and towards me as the shared pastor. One of my earliest mistakes with the FPC Session was pointing out that it was not operating in a traditional Presbyterian format through committees. I tried to explain that this was understandable given that my predecessor was a Methodist minister, and that he ran the church in the form he was familiar. This resulted in an elder resigning and leaving the church because he thought that I was disparaging the previous pastor. The previous pastor still socialized with many of the parishioners. In
order to avoid an early mutiny, I called the previous pastor and apologized for my part in the misunderstanding. While my error might have exacerbated the incident, the underlying reactivity of FPC’s Session displayed the reactivity that was commonplace within FPC’s past. It is this form of anxious reactivity that Steinke points out intensifies conflict, resistance, and division and is a warning sign of an unhealthy congregation.²

Another sign of unhealthiness was that FPC’s Session was easily swayed by the murmuring complaints within the congregation. The congregation didn’t like the changes that sharing a pastor brought such as reformatting the worship so that it worked more efficiently between both congregations. The changes were minor since both churches mostly followed the same format. Some FPC members did not like being similar to Pioneer and would noticeably mumble their displeasure during the service. There were also complaints that the service was too late although Pioneer had altered its worship time by an hour in order to accommodate FPC. FPC’s worship time changed by only thirty minutes. FPC’s Session wrestled with these and other complaints frequently at Session meetings.

In contrast, Pioneer’s members were more accepting of the format changes. There were some who complained about the changes, but they were often the exception. Congregants also did not typically mutter their complaints to others. Congregants were more likely to tell me their grievances directly, and not in a disparaging manner. There was a defining attitude at Pioneer towards serving rather than being served. Parishioner complaints were not brought up by elders at Pioneer’s Session meetings. Complaints and

² Steinke, Healthy Congregations, 53.
conflict did not fester but were handled more directly. Pioneer’s elders did not triangulate like FPC.

The problem at FPC was not the complaints but the way that the Session and congregation addressed the complaints. First, the complaints were often the result of gossip and whispers. Second, these complaints were often triangulated through the Session members to me. Steinke notes how these two practices of secrets and triangulation are like “viruses” within a congregation causing a congregation to become “an anxiety pit.”

I attempted to address these problems with the congregation and Session. I discussed with the Session the problems with triangulation and sought input about healthier means to address the complaints. I preached a sermon and wrote a newsletter article as well so that the congregation could also be drawn into the process. We also stopped the practice of anonymous suggestions. Unfortunately, these patterns were deeper than these minor interventions could address. This was a pattern that the congregation had developed over the last forty years. Back in the sixties, members would congregate at the country club and complain. Members and elders did not wish to openly oppose Dr. Ranck. Therefore this solution to their anxiety was created. I did not realize it at the time, but I was applying technical fixes to an adaptive issue. The congregation needed to be re-trained and the cultural problems addressed creatively. This was an issue that could not be handled from the top-down. It required the collective work of a transformation team to address.

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3 Ibid., 61.
The different culture and attitude at Pioneer encouraged a healthier response towards change efforts. From early on, Pioneer was willing to investigate new worship elements. A task group was put together to explore and implement video projection and contemporary elements within the service. There were some initial concerns about these changes raised by a few members, but the task force members were well respected within the congregation and communicated the purposes for the changes to the congregation. In the end the congregation recognized the need to explore new ways of worship that would appeal to a younger generation. It was understood as a means to relate better to the changes happening within the culture.

New worship elements have had a mixed response at FPC. At both churches, I introduced new forms of the prayers of the people. At first, FPC met these with resistance, but, by sticking with it, congregants have come to appreciate sharing their concerns out loud. They now see it as a vital part of the service. After several years, I was able to direct the congregation away from serving the pastor first during communion by explaining from 1 Peter 2:9 that we are all ministers of Christ, a royal priesthood. I would also sit among the congregation during special music and communion. The servers still revert back occasionally by waiting to serve the organist first.

Over time, I worked on making FPC’s congregants kinder in their interactions with one another especially during worship. I did not take personal their mumblings or resistance. I continued FPC’s traditions as they were defined and made adjustments wherever I could with justifications from Scripture, espoused values, and the surrounding culture. I made an effort to be kind to the congregants even when they were difficult. I kept my complaints to myself, and I never shared them with anyone at Pioneer. When
someone complained, I listened and thanked the individual for having the courage to tell me directly. I continued to preach about the call of the Greatest Commandment to love God and love one another. Over time, I wore down the complainers, and I believe they realized that I was not going anywhere. I would not say that I have been successful in making FPC an overtly kind congregation, but I have managed to soften some of the congregation’s more self-destructive impulses.

In much of my work with FPC, I saw a comparison with Jesus’ ministry. In Matthew 21:28-32, Jesus tells a parable of two sons and their differing responses to their father’s direction. The first son refused to go to work in the vineyard but then heeded his father’s direction. The second son agreed to work in the vineyard but did not fulfill his commitment. I see both sons’ responses in FPC. As a whole, FPC is often difficult when change is proposed; and sometimes with a lot of work, members will eventually and begrudgingly follow. There are other times that individuals will agree a change needs to happen but then not follow through. Pioneer reflects Jesus’ work with the disciples. Like the disciples, the congregants trust Jesus to lead them even though they are not sure where he is taking them.

Some of this can be explained from their different cultures and how this was dealt with by prior leaders. FPC identifies with its sense of privilege and status. Many of its members have grown in a culture in which they have expected to be served rather than serve. Prior pastors either catered to this attitude, fought against it, or a little bit of both. In contrast, Pioneer’s members have grown in a missionary culture in which a servant attitude is expected and encouraged. As the ministry progressed, I became more aware of these differing cultures, how they influenced members approach towards ministry within
each congregation, and the affect upon each congregation’s adaptive capacity towards change.

Staff and Session Resistance

Initially, there were some significant staff issues at FPC. The job definitions and roles were unclear. There was a culture of blurred boundaries between the parishioners and employees. Employees often took on roles outside of their job description to gain favor with parishioners. When I addressed these with the Session, elders at first voiced their approval of the needed changes, but when the employees complained to parishioners, the elders would place the blame onto me.

In one such exchange, I brought to the Session my concerns that the seventy-year old sexton was putting himself in danger by climbing on the roof. He was also showing some signs of memory loss and carelessness, which further endangered him. The Session suggested that I contact his daughter about these concerns. After expressing my concerns to the daughter, I received an angry phone call from the sexton’s wife accusing me of trying to “push out” her husband by making disparaging remarks about him and his fitness. The sexton later turned in his resignation. When parishioners heard about the resignation, they complained to Session members. The Session then reprimanded me for handling the situation so poorly. This was but one of many occasions in which FPC’s Session undercut my position and deflected blame.

This was a minor issue compared to the destructive culture and unhealthy dynamic that the Session promoted between me, the organist, and her boyfriend. In my first few months, FPC’s organist who also volunteered as the choir director resigned from
directing the choir. The choir had a troubled history and had shrunk to six women. I accepted her resignation and did not push for someone to take her place. It quietly disbanded. The organist was passive aggressive and had problems interacting with men. It was part of the reason why the choir had shrunk to include only six women. Because of her difficulty interacting with men, her boyfriend would step in and aggressively “bully” staff members with his intimidating demeanor. He also came to Session meetings unannounced to make his opinions heard. The organist refused to take direction and would complain to parishioners about me. The Session did not want to address these problems.

I convinced the Session that this dynamic could not continue and suggested that the elders establish a policy for Session meetings to be closed to outsiders. If someone wanted to address the Session, he or she would be placed on the docket. Non-Session members would then be excused to let the Session deliberate and conduct its business.

The organist and her boyfriend started complaining to the parishioners directly asserting I was the problem. They called the presbytery to complain about me. About three months later, the boyfriend demanded to address the Session about closing the meetings. I informed him when he was to be placed on the docket. He showed up at the beginning of the Session meeting. When I asked him to wait outside, he refused. He demanded to be heard. I then closed the Session meeting and informed the Session that we would resume once the boyfriend had left. Eventually he left. This incident raised the awareness among the Session members that these dynamics could not persist.

I began to discuss with the Session how we could improve the personnel practices of the church to address these problems before they grew to such a combustible end. We
were fortunate to have an elder who had human resource experience. He helped to design a process of regular six-month employee evaluations.

We also instituted the same employee review process at Pioneer. However, these sorts of problems never arose at Pioneer because the culture was healthier. Pioneer’s Session did not undercut my position; Pioneer had a more effective committee system to deal with problems before they became a crisis. Part of the problem at FPC was the lack of effective systems in order to deal with conflict appropriately, but the main problem was FPC’s toxic dynamic of pitting the pastor against members and employees. This dynamic was a means of distracting the congregation and leadership from addressing the real issues.

Although I am uncertain about the initial cause of this dynamic, it is seen throughout the wider Menominee community. There has been a long history of Menominee’s city council pitting the mayor and city manager against one another. A few years ago a city employee sued the city because of the city council’s lack of response towards years of verbal and physical harassment by an alderman. This dynamic is also seen within the local school district. Using the language of Steinke, the reactive and unhealthy practices of the larger Menominee community have infected FPC like a virus.

Another means of resistance to the shared pastorate by members at FPC was the withholding of monetary contributions by prominent donors. FPC had a history of relying on a small portion of generous donors to assist with the budget and through crises. As soon as I took the position, the largest donor reduced her giving in half. Two other major donors left the congregation within a couple of months of my arrival. Their giving amounted to twenty-four thousand in reduced annual income. The budget was already in
disarray before I had arrived; this reduction did not help. There were members who
blamed me for the loss of these large givers. A year into the position, the previous pastor
made a point to inform me that one of these large donors had donated significant amounts
when he became their pastor in order to keep him to stay. It was an unsubtle way of
pointing out that these financial problems would not have resulted under his watch.

As best as I could, I did not take these problems personally. The contrast between
the two churches along with the little historical information I was able to glean from
members and the presbytery revealed that there was something deeper going on. My
previous work with congregations and my family of origin issues helped me to realize
that these were symptoms of past woundedness coming to the surface.

Counseling had assisted me in understanding my parents’ issues with more
compassion. When I was in college, I had learned that my mother’s father had committed
suicide when she was twelve. This was a family secret kept from the grandchildren. As a
result of my grandfather’s suicide, the family was torn apart emotionally and
geographically. The older children remained on the farm with their grandparents while
the younger children, including my mother, were uprooted to live in a big city. This
information helped me to understand my mother’s chronic struggle with depression and
suicide. It helped me to see her as a loving mother who was weighed down with a tragic
past. My mother’s depression came from a genetic predisposition and a traumatic
woundedness. Watching my mother’s struggles encouraged me to listen to others with
empathy. I learned that there is a reason why people act and react the way they do. There
is a story behind their actions. It is true of congregations as well.
It was fortunate that the previous financial woes of a failed building project distracted the Session from blaming me directly for the loss of giving. Furthermore, in the first few years, the Session did not have a firm grasp of the financial issues facing the congregation. FPC had a sizable endowment that carried the congregation through. In my third year, a large bequest allowed for the replacement of the roof, which again distracted the Session from taking seriously the mounting financial issues. Organizational consultant Jim Collins notes that businesses do not die from a lack of earnings but from a lack of cash.\(^4\) This is a sad reality that I became aware of much later in the ministry as the Session considered whether the congregation could afford a part-time pastor.

In my own grief over my situation, I lived in denial of the financial reality I was unwilling to face. The signposts were telling me that it would only be a matter of time before my position would be in jeopardy at FPC. It was evident in FPC’s lack of trust, reactivity, and history that unless things changed, I would become the latest example of FPC’s collateral damage. As a pastor with a family, I did not want to lose my position. It was easier for me to ignore the facts about FPC’s precarious financial situation rather than address the issues with the Session and risk my position. This is the difficult grief work that shared pastors must often navigate while balancing their career, family, and church finances.

The financial health of a congregation is an important factor in the overall health of a congregation, but, even more importantly, is where it allocates its resources. The underlying problem was that somewhere along the line FPC had taken a wrong turn in its

sense of mission and purpose. The congregation’s resources were focused inward rather than outward. Money was always found or raised in order to fix or improve the building, but the leadership resisted allocating funds towards mission and outreach. Over half (and growing) of FPC’s budget is budgeted to maintain the building facilities. During my tenure, money was never budgeted for mission. When the question of a mission pledge was presented before the Session, the elders response was often, “We cannot afford it. We will send off what we receive.” On several occasions, I attempted to point out the discrepancy in FPC’s budget referencing the biblical call towards mission, but it was never taken seriously.

I later became aware that these decisions had more to do with our value differences. My values aligned better with Pioneer who also held mission outreach as a value and priority. FPC values its members. Meeting the needs of its members is its highest priority. FPC members also value a pastor that projects success and decisiveness like a CEO. FPC values the financial and educational accomplishments of its members and connections to people of influence. The previous pastor, Rev. Helgerson, aligned better with these values. Subconsciously, these value differences encouraged FPC’s resistance and Pioneer’s acceptance of the shared pastorate.

In the first four years of the shared pastorate, most of my energy went towards trying to create a healthier culture at FPC and more participation between the congregations. This had limited and often frustrating results. My instincts were to focus on the skills that I knew as a pastor. I started a joint pastor’s Bible study between the congregations with the goal of eventually studying the entire Bible. In order to have both churches participate, I scheduled a morning session at Pioneer and an evening session at
FPC. Surprisingly, I had better participation at both studies by FPC members. I learned that FPC had a previous practice of Bible studies, which was not true for Pioneer. Just as bad practices can lead a congregation in the wrong direction, good practices can help a congregation towards good habits and values. It is our practices and actions that often shape our values. The previous work of Rev. Teague in promoting Bible study had a positive impact upon FPC’s participation and valuing of Bible study.

I also combined the confirmation classes of both churches. This had the advantage of increasing the size of the class. For the last century, FPC had a long tradition of confirmation classes. It was highly valued by FPC. The pictures of the classes since 1956 were displayed prominently at the entrance to the fellowship hall. I therefore asked an FPC elder who had assisted with previous classes to assist me with the combined class. Like the Bible studies, time was split equally: Half of the classes were held at FPC and the rest at Pioneer. Pioneer would not have minded if the classes were held completely at Pioneer, but I felt that FPC needed to be encouraged to meet Pioneer in the middle and equally.

I also encouraged joint worship and interaction between the churches. Initially this had disastrous results. At my installation service, the choir directors of Pioneer and FPC were in a power struggle for control. This ended in FPC’s choir director refusing to play the organ at the installation. Pioneer’s organist stepped in to play. This incident resulted in hard feelings between the choirs and directors that discouraged further participation.

Joint worship services were not truly a joint venture. They were planned by one congregation and an invitation extended to the other congregation. There were certain
people at both congregations who would not attend joint services. This was partially due to the history of competitiveness between Menominee and Marinette, but it was also due to the competitiveness and hard feelings built between the two congregations over a hundred and fifty years.

Just as in a family, it is often easier to forgive the wrongs of those outside the family than to forgive family members. Sibling rivalry only increases these feelings. It often seemed that many members of FPC would rather work alongside a Menominee congregation of another denomination rather than work with Pioneer. Over the decades this built an animosity among some members across both congregations. This is one of the reasons that the shared pastorate was hailed by both presbyteries as a great opportunity for reconciliation between the congregations. Unfortunately, the presbyteries and congregations did not place the necessary planning and resources needed in order to work on the issues before calling a shared pastor. This was another example of the shared pastor serving as a technical solution to an adaptive issue.

There were a few successes though. Eventually a bell choir was started between the churches. FPC had a set of bells so the practices were held at FPC. One of FPC’s elders who had musical training volunteered as the director. This group has been a bright spot of cooperation between the congregations, and also an ecumenical outreach because it has attracted participants from other congregations.

There are a few reasons why this joint venture succeeded where others failed. First, the proposal for a bell choir originated from an FPC member rather than being imposed from the leadership, which allowed the idea to grow in support among the members before being attempted. Secondly, since the leadership did not have ownership
of the idea, both leadership boards could support the idea without fear of its failure. Third, the FPC member who volunteered to direct the choir was a bridge builder. He was well respected within both communities. He was the executive director of the local United Way, which serves both communities; his wife was a respected teacher at Menominee High School, yet they both lived in Marinette. Fourth, the choir began as a new small joint venture. Instead of trying to force two established programs together like the chancel choir debacle of my installation service, this new venture did not carry the emotional baggage and expectations of the past. Fifth, the director intentionally made sure that the choir represented and performed within both communities. Sixth, the members joined with a desire to learn and try something new. Finally, the bell choir fulfilled a need for individuals who enjoyed music and bells but did not have a bell choir at their congregation.

Sadly, other efforts at joint cooperation fell short. Joint planning between common committees of both congregations never worked. The Men’s Clubs were combined, but events were often planned by Pioneer members. Because Pioneer had a more active children’s program, FPC families were invited to participate in Pioneer’s activities. Some of these families switched their membership to Pioneer. FPC members felt betrayed and held it against the families who attended Pioneer family activities yet had kept their membership at FPC. When these families applied for camp scholarships from FPC’s Presbyterian Women’s group, they were denied and told to seek a scholarship from Pioneer.

A few themes arose: First, joint ventures were typically planned by the hosting church and the other congregation was invited to attend. Second, joint ventures were
more likely to succeed if they resembled a program from both congregations’ pasts. Except for the bell choir, if the event was a new venture for a congregation, it was typically resisted and poorly attended. Third, successful joint ventures rose from the grassroots of the membership. Finally, the leadership planning the event needed to be intentional and authentic in its invitation toward the other congregation. Both congregations could sense when an invitation was contrived or forced. Looking for bridge builders within both congregations is key to shared ministry. Later, as I was looking for people to join the transformation team, even the failed ventures were helpful in identifying those who felt drawn to building ministry between the congregations.

Besides joint ventures, I was becoming aware that there was something holding Pioneer back as well. Efforts at evangelism were met with hesitancy and resistance at Pioneer. The Alpha program was proposed by Pioneer’s evangelism committee and approved by Session, but the elders and congregation held back their participation and enthusiasm. The Alpha program was regulated to the background and eventually failed. Other events and proposals by the evangelism committee were also subtly thwarted by a lack of congregational enthusiasm and participation. The small evangelism committee was marginalized. Pioneer’s leadership gave lip service that sharing the good news of Christ was important, but the member’s actions showed something different.

I had a growing sense of frustration and bewilderment about what to do next. My previous training was not working. I attended two conferences that opened my awareness to a new pathway of leadership. In April of 2013, I attended a conference in which Kevin Ford spoke about his work with TAG consulting. Copies of his book Transforming Church were handed out. This book was my first glimpse into leading adaptive change. It
resonated with the problems I was facing with both congregations. When I returned, I bought copies for each elder of both leadership boards. During the next six months, at each Session meeting we discussed the book. It resonated with some of the elders of both congregations but left everyone confused about how to proceed.

The following year, I attended a conference in which Tod Bolsinger was the keynote speaker. Bolsinger taught from his research on the Lewis and Clark expedition; and how it described the leadership necessary for adaptive change. He had collected this research for his upcoming book *Canoeing the Mountains*. This was one more step into the broader understanding that these congregations needed to experience transformational change, a change that required a new type of leadership skills and a new understanding of the problem. By the end of the year, I had enrolled and been accepted into a new Doctor of Ministry cohort at Fuller Theological Seminary about leading organizational change led by Tod Bolsinger.

While I was discerning my next steps, the second two-year designated term of the shared pastorate was almost finished. Pioneer’s Session quickly affirmed ending the trial period and transferring the designated position into “permanent” status. FPC was again hesitant.

Kevin Ford states, “The only way for a church to move forward is to look back.”

Previously, I had problems convincing FPC to examine its past, so I saw this as an opportunity for the congregation to examine its past by entering into a discernment process about its future. I sought to collect data about FPC’s *code*. Ford describes a

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*Ford, Transforming Church, 69.*
church’s code as the unique personality of a congregation that “defines its identity and clarifies its focus….Code shapes tradition, values, and mission.” In order to find a congregation’s code, a congregation must examine several layers of concentric circles moving inward: architecture, décor, heroes, rituals, myths, strategy, mission, vision, and values. In reflecting upon these, the code is found in the center of these. Incongruence to the code causes a congregation to be conflicted and stuck. I hoped to harness FPC’s anxiety and resistance towards the shared pastorate to encourage the congregation to look within.

For the discernment process, I suggested a book by Roy Oswald and Robert Friedrich, Jr., Discerning Your Congregational Future: A Strategic and Spiritual Approach. As was advised in the book, an outside facilitator was sought to lead the discernment process. Since the Session was unwilling to pay for a consultant, I inquired with the presbytery. The presbytery recommended a retired pastor within the presbytery, Rev. David Henderson, who was willing to help. The FPC Session accepted Rev. Henderson’s help. This was a big step due to the congregation’s suspicion of the presbytery. A discernment committee was formed to help with the collection of information and to coordinate the process. Session’s goal of the process was to collect data in order to review the shared pastorate. My goal, expressed to the Session, was to further help the Session define the congregation’s mission and future.

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6 Ibid., 57.
7 Ibid., 79.
There were two problems with my strategy. First, the congregation and Session were untrained for spiritual discernment. FPC’s faith practice is transactional rather than reflective. The congregation focuses on performing the same rituals without much thought as to why. Most members do not possess the skills needed for self-reflection and awareness. Members often display an impatience towards reflection and a desire to rush to a solution. This has led FPC to make costly and callous mistakes such as the failed remodeling project under Rev. Haapaleinen. If it was not for the member’s hesitancy towards the shared pastorate, I doubt that the leadership would have willingly entered into a discernment process.

Secondly, because the stated goal of the discernment process was reviewing the shared pastorate rather than discerning FPC’s future, the committee focused on collecting data about my effectiveness as a pastor and the perceived role of the pastor. The scheduled events seeking input on the role of the pastor received good participation, while the gatherings that focused on reviewing the history and problems were poorly attended. I suspect that the troubled pastoral searches after Rev. Ranck led the congregation to be hesitant to look at their past. Also, the members sense of privilege reinforced over the previous decades led them to search for the “right” pastor that would fulfill their needs and grow the congregation back to its former stature of prominence.

The end result of the discernment process was a list of recommendations about how the pastor could better serve the members’ needs. This sort of pastoral wish list is often collected in the midst of a pastoral search process. Since FPC joined in the pastor search after Pioneer had already been searching for three years, I suspect that this process was initially passed over by FPC. If it had been done, perhaps it would have provided a
baseline to examine why the shared pastorate was not working for the congregation. Unfortunately, as is often the case with FPC, the congregation was arriving behind the process and from a place of reactivity and anxiousness.

The discernment process had mixed results. It allowed FPC to have a voice in the shared pastorate process and to give voice to those concerns. While the data collected was helpful, it did not help to discern the bigger problems FPC was facing. Consistent with its history, the congregation saw the pastor as both the solution and problem to the decline. This would be a constant roadblock to the congregation understanding adaptive change.

Another unforeseen result was that the process allowed resistant members and elders to give lip-service to having entered a discernment process but without giving a thorough effort. Later, as I would encourage the congregation to enter back into reflection, elders would point to the discernment process arguing that it had already been attempted. They would then proceed to problem-solving. This frustration over discernment would continue and gain support among Session members and the congregation throughout the entire change effort.

In the end, FPC hesitantly approved the continuation of the shared pastorate. The designated position transitioned to a regular pastoral relationship for both congregations. I entered this new relationship with a greater sense that transformational change was needed if both of these congregations were to survive. I did not yet know how this would be accomplished. The one thing I knew was that I needed more training and understanding.
CHAPTER 8:
PHASES OF CHANGE

This chapter examines the three remaining phases of the shared pastorate over the four years of my doctor of ministry studies. These phases were implemented to lead these congregations into adaptive change. Phase One was a continuation of my original goal to lead these churches into shared missional outreach. Phase Two was a shift to lead a single change effort within FPC alone and deal with the reality that unless FPC changed its practices, it would most likely “die” as an organization. Phase Two therefore shifted to examine grief within a dying congregation. The final phase examined the end of the shared pastorate and efforts to use the knowledge gained from the previous phases to assist these congregations as they faced an uncertain future. Since shared pastorates are becoming a growing model of ministry for declining churches and denominations, these phases provide insights for leaders contemplating or within shared pastorates. Each of these phases represents a pivoting of strategy to incorporate new information as well as countering resistance towards change.
Phase One
Shared Missional Outreach

In my first four years, I experienced resistance by FPC members and leaders towards the shared pastorate. Minor changes were achieved in the format and structure of the pastorate, but there was still much holding these congregations back from the transformative change needed to get them back towards missional outreach. As I entered my doctorate program, I was hopeful that it could assist me in figuring a way for these congregations to work together and outward. The doctorate was a means of carrying forward my original goal of helping these churches reach outward to the community in shared missional outreach.

Unfortunately, my initial understanding of the change process was limited. Furthermore, two misguided beliefs became factors that would plague my progress. First, I entered into the process attempting to be the solution. Subconsciously, I wanted to be the savior of these congregations by leading them into adaptive change and thereby reversing years of decline. By embodying the change process, I allowed the congregations to marginalize the change process. They associated the change efforts with my pursuit to obtain a doctorate. Particularly with FPC, the leadership and membership therefore never had to take ownership of the problem and solution. Since FPC already held a mistrust of the shared pastorate, it was easy for members to discard the need for change.

Secondly, like most pastors and congregants, I understood adaptive change in terms of a single program that would “save” these churches and bring about successful growth. I thought of adaptive change as a short-term implementation of a successful
program that would fix the problems of these declining churches. As Bolsinger points out, adaptive change is instead an iterative process of observation, interpretation, and intervention.\footnote{Bolsinger, \textit{Canoeing the Mountains}, 112.} It is not a process achieved alone but led through a leadership team. Adaptive change is a slow process of experimenting and learning in order to move a congregation toward its missional purposes. This often requires failure. Unfortunately at FPC, the congregants and elders also saw the change efforts as I did. They wanted quick solutions that provided large results. When these did not materialize, they began to discard adaptive change efforts.

Since there was a lack of enthusiasm within both congregations towards understanding or engaging in adaptive change, I turned instead to the sessions. I hoped that by identifying their independent mission and values, a joint vision and plan could be developed. Since previous attempts at joint leadership gatherings produced paltry results, I attempted to work separately with each board on identifying each congregation’s core values and mission based on Patrick Lencioni’s book \textit{The Advantage}.

On two consecutive Saturdays, each leadership board met separately at my house for a six-hour retreat. Previous to the retreat, the elders participated in the Gallup Strength Finder inventory to assess their strengths. The results were evaluated by a Core Clarity coach, which helped cluster each Session’s collective strengths and leadership patterns.

FPC’s Session did not have any clear patterns; the elders were diverse in their strengths and categories. Pioneer’s Session on the other hand shared more strengths in common. Over half had the strength of \textit{Harmony}. Core Clarity describes the \textit{Harmony}
strength as the ability to calm a difficult situation and lower emotional tension. Eight of the ten elders had at least one of the Harmony, Connectedness, or Includer strengths among their top five strengths. From these results, the Core Clarity coach determined that Pioneer’s Session felt a common desire for group cohesion, whereas this was not a priority for FPC’s Session.

My strengths coincided more often with Pioneer elders. I shared at least one common strength with six of the ten elders; two of the elders I shared two common strengths; and I shared three common strengths with one elder. Core Clarity also distributes the strengths into four quadrants based on the strength characteristics as external/internal and interaction/motivation. It was discovered that I shared the same quadrant profile as three Pioneer elders compared to one FPC elder. None of my strengths are located in the external/motivation quadrant. Three of ten Pioneer elders had at least one strength in this quadrant compared to seven of eight FPC’s elders. This perhaps explains why I felt more comfortable working with Pioneer’s Session. However, FPC had more elders that could balance out my deficiencies.

The strengths data provided me with helpful information in how to work with each elder and Session in leading adaptive change. With Pioneer, I challenged the elders to explore conflict by helping them understand that conflict is a useful component for learning and growth. I reassured them that Session meetings were a safe place to explore conflict because we could strongly disagree while also being respectful of one another. During Session meetings, I would try to draw out conflicting ideas and to withhold elders from the temptation to make peace.
FPC, on the other hand, was comfortable with exploring conflict within the Session meetings. However, I often needed to use my harmony skills to keep the Session’s reactivity from trampling upon one another’s ideas. As Friedman theorizes, FPC’s Session often gravitated towards the most anxious and least differentiated person at the meeting.² This kept the elders from examining and discussing the issues thoroughly and from making thoughtful and principled decisions. It allowed the Session to maintain the status quo and from confronting the need for change. The lack of self-reflection encouraged FPC’s spiral towards death.

During the retreats, each Session also examined their core values. I worked with both churches to assess their core values. FPC’s Session identified the congregation’s core values as openness, family, education, and music. Pioneer identified their core values as mission, Christian education, and fellowship. Although fellowship as a value could result in a congregation focusing inward; with Pioneer, it represented a broader desire to fuel and encourage the congregation’s outreach through fellowship by incorporating those on the outside into Christian fellowship.

Patrick Lencioni, in his book The Advantage outlines four categories of values within an organization: Aspirational, accidental, permission-to-play, and core values.³ Pioneer had correctly identified its core values. They are witnessed in the congregation’s actions and decisions. If the church failed to live by these values, there would be concern raised within the congregation. FPC’s Session misidentified all but one of the

² Friedman, A Failure of Nerve, Kindle location 1196.

congregation’s core values: family. At one time, the identified core values might have been accurate, but over time these values except family fell aside and morphed into aspirational values, specifically a desire to return to the “good-ole-days.”

Pioneer effectively identified its core values as mission, Christian education (particularly for children and youth), and fellowship. These were communicated to the congregation through a banner in the fellowship hall, at the top of the weekly worship bulletin, and monthly at the Session meetings. These values informed the Session and committees’ decisions by asking, “How does this action promote and display our values to the outside community?” An idea could be further energized and encouraged by pointing out how it fit with the values of the church.

In contrast, FPC misidentified three of its four espoused core values. Family was the sole core value properly identified, but it unfortunately manifested itself with the congregation and leadership focusing inward rather than outward. When the Session and congregation members distressed about declining membership and attendance, the first solution typically presented was, “Let’s call former members and encourage them to return.” This response resulted from the congregation’s unresolved grief over its decline. FPC has difficulty letting go of its prior status and situation. The current members have not fully grieved the loss of the members who left after the failed remodel. The congregation’s resistance towards self-reflection impeded my efforts to help FPC navigate their loss.

FPC’s second solution was “the pastor should make more house calls and deliver baked bread like Rev. Ranck.” On numerous occasions, I tried to emphasize that given the changing culture and lifestyles neither of these strategies would likely produce the
desired result. I offered to work with the Session on developing a new strategy for outreach that involved the congregation. This was seen as requiring too much time; the Session wanted a quicker solution.

Bolsinger notes, “A church culture built on meeting the needs of its members will struggle with implementing changes that depend on putting those self-interested needs aside.”⁴ For decades, FPC has reinforced a culture focusing on the members’ needs. Rev. Ranck was lifted up for his evangelistic efforts of connecting with new residents and inviting them to worship. Although I am sure that during Rev. Ranck’s tenure congregational members also invited others to worship, it was his efforts as pastor that the current members touted. The congregation resisted strategies that altered the responsibility of outreach from the pastor to the membership. As Senge notes, “Today’s problems come from yesterday’s solutions.”⁵ Because of Rev. Ranck’s success, FPC could not envision another pathway.

One elder did take it upon herself to make a brochure and knock on neighborhood doors inviting members to worship and offering camp scholarships for their children. While I commend the outward initiative, it was poorly conceived, planned, and executed. She was trying to renew Rev. Ranck’s efforts by taking on the responsibility of evangelism upon her shoulders. From my knowledge, it failed to encourage any neighbors to attend worship or camp. Furthermore, it gave the elders an excuse from attempting the reflection and planning needed to develop a better strategy. Whenever I

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⁴ Bolsinger, Canoeing the Mountains, 74.

⁵ Senge, The Fifth Discipline, 57.
suggested outreach, the elder who had attempted the initiative would bring up her previous attempt as proof that outreach had already been attempted and had failed to produce results.

Pioneer also struggled with developing a better evangelism strategy in the face of a changing culture, but its efforts at least reflected a different attitude and set of values. Pioneer’s efforts were not a means of serving the members like FPC. FPC saw outreach as a means to keep their traditions and preferences in worship while Pioneer’s values fueled its efforts towards outreach and mission. Looking back, I wish that I had spent more time helping Pioneer develop and adapt new outreach strategies rather than getting bogged down in FPC’s resistance.

Because FPC’s Session was averse to another planning meeting after the retreat, I spent time at the next Session meeting examining each congregation’s mission statement. Elders were asked to evaluate the congregation’s mission statement from three questions:

1.) Is it simple and straightforward so that every congregation member can understand and implement it within their lives?
2.) How does it help our congregation promote the Kingdom of God?
3.) How are we following this mission statement?

While Pioneer’s mission statement is simpler and clearer than FPC’s, it was still longer than it needed to be. There was an elder on Session who had been a part of the previous committee that had formed the current mission statement. He pushed that it not be altered. Given the Session’s desire for harmony and group cohesion, I was not persuasive in getting the elders to distill it into a shorter and more focused statement. Fortunately, it was written in a way that emphasized three verbs in relation to faith in Jesus Christ: introduce, deepen, and act. It was imperfect, but it was workable.
FPC’s mission statement was complicated, wordy, and confusing. Although it was framed and prominently displayed in the Fellowship Hall, the elders were unaware of its existence. When presented to the Session, elders easily discarded it, but after a congregational discernment process and a Session retreat, they were unwilling to enter into a process to draft a new mission statement. The elders instead voted to use the congregational aspirational statement from the discernment process: “Reach in; reach out; raise up through the love of Jesus.” They referred to this as the congregation’s vision statement.

The issue was that FPC was exceptional at “reaching in” particularly to its members, yet poor in reaching out. There were a few elders who realized that the congregation needed to learn how to reach out, but, in general, the Session and members were resistant towards examining this further. When I suggested that the congregation’s actions did not match the stated aspirations and values, many on Session became defensive. The elders that did recognize this gap would not engage in the conversation. This was a means of work-avoidance.

There was another dynamic developing that I was unaware of at the time. Because I was exhausted and frustrated with the resistance of FPC, I resisted challenging Pioneer to examine the gaps between the congregation’s stated values/mission and actions. Although Pioneer was more outwardly focused at its core and in its theology, the congregation had grown complacent. Congregants and leaders were uncertain about how to engage the outside culture. My inaction was a subtle collusion of work avoidance that kept Pioneer from working through the adaptive change process. Just as with my family of origin in which my brother’s issues kept my parents from addressing their issues, I let
FPC’s issues and resistance distract me from challenging Pioneer to align its values and actions.\textsuperscript{6} I enjoyed the peace and stability of Pioneer too much to provide the pressure required for its members to engage in transformative work. When I later realized my part in holding Pioneer back, it made me queasy to think that I was a part of the problem.

This is a difficulty that comes with leading adaptive change within a shared pastorate, and one of the reasons why Mann is correct to suggest that a shared pastorate is not a model for redevelopment.\textsuperscript{7} The emotional toll and weariness of handling resistance is difficult with one congregation, but adding another congregation to guide as well left me hesitant to engage the adaptive work that Pioneer needed to explore. For adaptive change to be effective within a shared pastorate, it requires more than a half-time pastor to lead. Mentors and coaches trained in adaptive leadership are helpful for a pastor, but a transformation team from within the congregations’ structure is vital to set the vision and keep the pastor focused on the adaptive issues.

I had hoped that by reviewing each congregation’s values and mission, both Sessions could find a common direction to rally around for shared missional outreach. Unfortunately, I discovered that not only did they not share any common values, but that, at their core, their values and mission drove them further apart. Like the parable of the two sisters, these sibling congregations did not see a need to work together. Pioneer’s values and mission drove congregants more outward while FPC’s drove congregants inward.

\textsuperscript{6} Bolsinger, \textit{Canoeing the Mountains}, 75.

\textsuperscript{7} Mann, \textit{Can Our Church Live?}, 63.
My doctoral cohort suggested that I use the story of their common founding pastor as an inroad and source for shared inspiration between the congregations. This story resonated with Pioneer but not with FPC. Whenever I mentioned Rev. Fairchild’s actions in the founding of both churches, FPC members would become quiet or argue their independence. The notion that FPC was indebted in any way to someone connected with Pioneer was not something the members wanted to acknowledge. Instead of encouraging conversation and cooperation, this story chilled FPC’s response. FPC’s sense of independence and desire for self-determination continued to keep the congregation from accepting the help it desperately needed.

These traits most likely developed early within FPC’s history as a church of privilege. As Yamaguchi points out, the palace church mental model is difficult for a congregation to shake, and only after experiencing deep pain and extolling a transformational cost. For over a century, FPC has seen itself as an island of self-determination. Filled with the financial and social elite within the community, it had never needed to rely upon others outside the congregation for assistance. When there was financial difficulty, a few wealthy donors stepped in to rescue the congregation.

This attitude carried into Rev. Ranck’s tenure. Pioneer members have reported that Rev. Ranck rejected invitations by Pioneer for joint ventures. During this time, there were a few families at Pioneer that switched membership from FPC because they did not like the culture of self-importance promoted at FPC. From what other pastors have

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8 Steve Yamaguchi, “From the Palace to the Streets”, The Fuller Studio, https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/from-the-palace-to-the-streets/

9 These reports came from informal conversations with Pioneer members over the past eight years.
shared with me, these sorts of sibling squabbles and differences are commonplace between sister congregations living and working within the same community, yet it is the reactive culture that sets FPC apart.

FPC’s pride is born from a spiritual immaturity and a lack of spiritual depth. Because it previously had been the champion of its fate, FPC has never been required to rely upon God. While individual members have gone through personal hardship, as a congregation, FPC has consistently relied upon its affluence to see the congregation through. As more affluent members passed away, members clung to their pride in denial of the congregation’s situation. FPC’s resistance and pride is a distraction from doing the painful and transformational grief work necessary for it to move forward. The congregation’s independence exacerbated its remodeling crisis with Rev. Haapalainen, which almost closed the church. It has isolated the congregation from the presbytery. Eventually, it led to the dissolvement of the shared pastorate between Pioneer and FPC. Unless something changes, it will continue towards its death spiral.

**Phase Two**

**A Single Congregation Change Initiative**

My attempts at joint planning between the congregations and committees continued to meet resistance by individuals and elders at both congregations. FPC was resisting as a means to avoid the painful work of reflection. If FPC admitted that it needed help, then members would have to admit that their mental model of privilege was flawed. Pioneer avoided shared ministry with FPC because of a lack of shared values and decades of hostility by FPC towards cooperation. Pioneer did not want to force a relationship that FPC clearly did not want. I finally accepted this reality that shared
missional outreach was not working or desired by either congregation or Session, especially at FPC. I therefore switched my focus towards a change initiative within one of the congregations.

I probably should have worked with the healthier and least resistant of the two congregations, but knowing that FPC would continue to be resistant towards the shared pastorate and uncertainty whether I could cope with additional resistance from members at Pioneer, I chose FPC for my change initiative. In addition, FPC’s Session and congregation were more anxious about their decline in attendance. Pioneer’s membership had remained stable therefore limiting the sense of need for change among Pioneer’s membership. I hoped that FPC’s anxiety could spawn enthusiasm for a change initiative.

When I informed both sessions of my new divergent focus for my doctoral project, both reacted positively. Pioneer was relieved that the congregation could continue unaltered, and FPC’s Session was hopeful that something could be accomplished to reverse the congregation’s trajectory. FPC’s enthusiasm was short lived.

One of my first tasks was to learn of the ministry context of FPC from their perspective. I had gained insights of the congregation’s history over six years of ministry, but I needed to fill in the gaps of my understanding. I planned a meeting whereby participants would break up into pairs and discuss one of three questions:

1.) What is one of your favorite stories or experiences at First Presbyterian?
2.) Who made a difference for you at First Presbyterian?
3.) Was there a special program or group at First Presbyterian that meant a lot to you?

The couples would then share with the group what they discussed. A follow-up meeting would then be planned to conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Obstacles, Threats)
analysis of FPC. The initial meeting was communicated for a month prior in the newsletter, weekly bulletin notes, and in the announcements before worship. I planned the meeting as not to conflict with any sporting events and to be held after worship. No one showed up.

If congregants would not come to me, I decided to go to them. Over the next few weeks, I sat down with members during coffee hour and asked them the three questions. I also scheduled individual interviews with older members at their homes. Like an investigative reporter, I dug deeper into the member’s memories and experiences. Through informal and formal interviews, examining Session minutes, and community research, I was able to better fill in the gaps. I however noticed among many of the interviews a hesitancy to discuss the problems of the past.

About the same time, I proposed to the FPC Session that a consultant be hired to help identify the congregation’s issues. Gaining an outside experienced perspective would be helpful. I had arranged for a consultant through Fuller Theological Seminary. The cost was five thousand dollars. I knew there would be concern about the cost so I was prepared to provide half from my professional expenses. The Session flatly rejected the proposal. Some elders claimed that it was too much money, but the underlying reason had more to do with FPC’s pride and fear of an outsider evaluating the congregation.

Among the FPC elders, there were a few that voiced their realization that things needed to change and that the old practices were not working. I was even able to gather these elders together to plan some next steps. They expressed a willingness to encourage others on Session to support changes. In the actual Session meetings, however, I was left alone proposing new steps. These elders would revert to suggesting the same ineffective
solutions of the past rather than trying to experiment. It became clear that the Session and membership wanted to give lip-service to the idea of adaptive change but did not want to engage in the work and self-examination needed to encourage it forward.

I began to realize that running a change initiative through the Session was ineffective. Bolsinger suggests two groups are needed to assist a congregation through the adaptive change process: a maintaining mission group and a transformation team. Ideally, the Session serves as the maintaining mission group that manages the anxiety of the congregation and does not obscure and sabotage the work of the transformation team. From past experience, it was doubtful the Session would resist sabotaging the work of a transformation team, but I did not see an alternative.

In order to put together a transformation team, I offered a video book study by Tod Bolsinger on his book *Canoeing the Mountains* produced through Fuller Seminary. While I opened the study to interested individuals of both congregations, I also began recruiting FPC members who were respected, innovative, and open to the idea that the congregation needed to function differently. My hope was that out of this study a transformation team could be formed. In the end, we had six participants within the study.

Dying and Grief

During this time within my personal life, I was dealing with the care and passing of my parents. As I worked through my grief, I noticed connecting points between my experiences with FPC and the grieving process. After the Session had rejected two of my

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10 Ibid., 165.
proposals for the change initiative, I experienced anger, bargaining, and depression. In the end, with the advice of my doctoral supervisor, I came to the final stage of acceptance that FPC was choosing to die. Alan Deutschman, in researching patients with terminal diagnoses, found that when given a choice whether to change their destructive lifestyle or to continue along the same path, ninety percent of patients chose to die.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Kindle location 151-173, 226-239.} I accepted that FPC was dying by its choices to do what was comfortable, its unwillingness to recognize the problems, and its refusal to work towards change.

I was uncertain how to proceed. I was also unwilling to throw a transformation team into a process that would most likely fail. However, I was also unwilling to give up. I began to think about my father’s experience with hospice care. Hospice was called to help after my dad 1) refused to eat, and 2) had lost enough weight to warrant hospice care. Hospice caregivers did not force themselves upon our family. Hospice offered its services. In the end, as my dad’s guardian, it was up to me to decide whether to receive hospice’s assistance for my dad.

Deutschman notes that \textit{fear, facts and force} are three techniques that do not work to bring about change. Researching successful change programs, he found that three techniques that improved success were \textit{relate, repeat, and reframe}.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Kindle location 452.} At this point, it was obvious that FPC was not buying into the need for change. I figured the best I could offer FPC was help deciding its future and to care for the members along the way. I could not force the congregation to accept what was happening, but I could encourage the members
and elders to examine the reality they were facing so that they could figure out some options. In hindsight, although sound in theory, this was an impractical premise to base an intervention with FPC. There was nothing from my past efforts that would lead me to believe FPC would accept its reality and reflect upon its impending death. The best I could hope for was to increase the pressure about the congregation’s situation, and hope that it would break through the denial.

I began with a sermon series on the five stages of grief, and how it related to congregations in decline. My purpose was to present the facts with the same careful bedside manner of a caring physician. It was also to present that there was hope and security even in the midst of pain and loss. Pulling from Brueggemann’s work, I sought to balance my messaging with the three prophetic tasks of reality, grief, and hope.

I was only able to get through two sermons before two FPC elders expressed their anger for suggesting to the congregation that it was dying. I apologized and referred back to the facts of the decline in membership, finances, and leadership. This had the effect that Deutschmann warned against. Providing facts was not an effective technique to encourage the congregation to change. I did not want to turn the leadership away from the needed grief work, so I took a break from the series and finished it a month later.

It was difficult convincing FPC’s Session to be more transparent with the congregation concerning its problems. During FPC’s Session meetings, I continued to emphasize the reality of the congregation’s situation, the fact that other congregations were facing similar problems and encouraging the Session to examine options. The Session instead decided to hide from the reality by voting to only look at the financial statement once a quarter.
Pioneer was calmer in its response, perhaps because the congregation was more stable in the three areas of membership, finances, and leadership. However, Pioneer also was not growing in membership and finances. Pioneer too was witnessing the changing trends in church attendance, and if not addressed, Pioneer would find itself in FPC’s shoes.

In order to balance the message, I started another sermon series titled *The Call to Community* in which I examined the biblical call towards neighborliness. I emphasized how members within the congregations were involved in community mission within their work at the church, volunteer work, and service organizations. I followed this up with a survey in order to assess what organizations and activities members were active in within the community. The survey also asked about members’ experiences with grief and Christian outreach. Based on past experience, I hypothesized that a survey on grief and outreach alone would yield few responses. These responses were to serve as a baseline for a complementary survey at the end of the initiative. The survey was conducted after worship on the two Sundays following the sermon series. Twenty-two individuals filled out the survey at FPC, and nineteen at Pioneer. This was approximately twenty percent of the membership of both congregations, which was the best response I had received thus far.

With FPC’s Session, I continued encouraging transparency with the congregation concerning the problems it was facing. For the first four years of the shared pastorate, the financial and membership problems were hidden within the annual report and never discussed with the congregation. At the last four annual meetings, elders were assigned to report updates about different concerns. At first, the elders tried to put a positive spin on
the issues. As the years progressed, the Session started to reveal more. At the most recent annual meeting, the financial and membership issues were fully disclosed. Although the congregational meeting was poorly attended, it was a step in the right direction for this Session.

In response to the growing budgetary issues, the Session reduced expenses and proposed a capital campaign to pay down the mortgage. One member provided a twenty-thousand-dollar matching grant to encourage the congregation. In two months and including the matching grant, the congregation raised forty-five thousand. In total, fifty-five thousand was raised since January almost cutting the mortgage in half.

Building upon FPC’s anxiety over the membership decline, I offered a book study of Alice Mann’s *Can Our Church Live?* to both congregations. My hope was to use this as another step towards developing a transformation team. I was able to convince two individuals from the previous book study to participate as well as a handful from the evening Bible study. Both Sessions were also encouraged to participate. In the end, there were eight participants, two elders from Pioneer and nobody from FPC’s Session.

After reviewing the options presented within the book concerning redevelopment, the study group concluded:

1) The shared pastorate was an insufficient model to promote redevelopment.
2) A merger would not be beneficial for either congregation.
3) Currently, a redevelopment initiative would likely fail within both congregations.

The group decided to continue meeting weekly in order to pray for both congregations, promote redevelopment, and explore opportunities for joint missional outreach. This group served as an informal transformation team.
As this new group met, a theme developed within our discussions about finding “a third way.” Instead of trying the same failed outreach efforts of the past or giving up by focusing inward, “a third way” was about thinking creatively and finding a new path for these congregations. The group was uncertain whether the congregation would accept a new path, but it was encouraging that at least it was ready to experiment. Prior to this group, I alone carried the burden of promoting adaptive change, now there were others within the congregations who saw the need as well.

The group brainstormed about community needs and ways to reach into the community. A consensus formed around the idea of reaching out to younger struggling families in the community. The group was uncertain about the needs of this population and how Pioneer and FPC could help, so the group decided to invite a school social worker to help the redevelopment group assess family needs. One of the group members had a contact with a social worker at the Marinette schools. There was also a social worker within Pioneer’s congregation that the group was contacting. Since it was summer, both social workers were on break. It was determined to contact the social workers again during the Fall.

In the meantime, the group was willing to help continue my work exploring grief and organizational decline. It was decided among the group that the congregations had not reached the crisis point. Mann describes the crisis point as the point in which dwindling congregation resources coincides with an openness for change.13

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13 Mann, Can Our Church Live, 43.
Because FPC had previously been resistant to exploring grief and decline, I decided to approach the topic indirectly. Jesus often used parables in order to discuss topics his listeners were resistant towards. I therefore decided to use the movie *You’ve Got Mail* as a means to form a discussion group around grief and church decline. *You’ve Got Mail* is a romantic comedy starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. Because of a new big-box bookstore nearby, a shop owner (Meg Ryan) is forced to close the bookstore her mother had founded. It is an exploration of grief as a business struggles with the changes of the surrounding culture. It was similar enough to the congregations’ situation of dealing with a changing culture without overtly focusing on organizational death.

The redevelopment group organized, advertised and sponsored an event in which both congregations were invited to a joint movie night with food and drinks provided. Besides the normal means of advertising, congregational members were also contacted by phone and invited. Members were informed that there would be a voluntary follow-up discussion group the following week, but it was not obligatory. Sixteen individuals participated including seven from the redevelopment group. The discussion questions for the following week’s follow-up meeting were passed out so that members could reflect during the week. The participants were also re-invited by phone for the follow-up meeting. Only one person outside of the redevelopment group showed up for the follow-up discussion. It was a good discussion, but it was not the response hoped for. It was, however, a first attempt and something to learn from.
As Bolsinger points out, leading adaptive change is an iterative process of observation, interpretation, and interventions.\textsuperscript{14} FPC’s Session wanted to find a big program to “save” the church from dying. At the same time, it was mired with the solutions of the past. On the other hand, the redevelopment group was taking steps for what Heifetz and Linsky call “getting up on the balcony.”\textsuperscript{15} Even though the movie intervention did not produce the discussion or reflection hoped for. The redevelopment group moved the bar slightly forward. It was able to encourage some members to indirectly approach the subject of organizational death, and thereby chip away at the wall of denial that was holding FPC back. From this data, interpretations could be developed and a new intervention attempted. These were promising steps but were too little, too late.

\textbf{The End of the Shared Pastorate}

During the prior Spring of 2019, because FPC’s Session was expressing concerns about the shared pastorate, I encouraged both Sessions to meet jointly to review the Shared Pastor Agreement (SPA) developed with both presbyteries before I arrived. Although the SPA stated that it was to be reviewed every year, it had not been jointly reviewed by the sessions since it was first signed.

Two members of the Commission on Ministry (COM) of Winnebago Presbytery were invited to lead the discussion. Mackinac Presbytery’s COM was also informed of the meeting but unable to attend. During the meeting, FPC elders expressed concerns

\textsuperscript{14} Bolsinger, \textit{Canoeing the Mountain}, 111.

\textsuperscript{15} Heifetz and Linsky, \textit{Leadership on the Line}, 51.
about being able to continue paying for a shared pastor. It was the first time that
Pioneer’s elders had heard FPC’s concerns or financial problems. Since it was an
informal meeting, no decisions were made.

At the following FPC Session meeting, it was decided that the COM liaison from
Mackinac Presbytery should be invited to discuss the ending of the Shared Pastor
Agreement. There were also some FPC elders who had not been able to attend the joint
meeting of the sessions.

At the next Session meeting with the COM liaison, the concerns of the shared
pastorate were discussed. The general sentiment of the Session was that the congregation
could not continue paying for a shared pastor and maintain the building. Many of the
elders thought it would be more beneficial to hire pulpit supply instead. The COM liaison
urged them not to rely upon pulpit supply as a solution because the congregation
probably would not be able to bounce back from the decision. A couple of elders
expressed that they needed to hire a less expensive non-Presbyterian pastor. These elders
believed that they needed to bring in someone new who could bring in new members.

I encouraged FPC’s Session to look at the path this was taking the congregation
towards. I affirmed that the Session had the right to end the SPA and to seek a new
pastor. I also explained the determinations of the redevelopment group that the shared
pastorate was not a path towards redevelopment. I continued to explain that it would be
better for FPC to work with Pioneer on a new plan rather than trying to go alone without
pastoral support.

Although I felt a sense of responsibility to direct the Session away from pulpit
supply, I knew that it hopeless. The elders were once again trying to solve an adaptive
issue with a technical solution. When faced with the financial reality that it could no longer continue with the current circumstances, the Session decided to save money by ending my position instead of envisioning a new existence without the building. FPC’s pride held them back from seeking outside help from Pioneer or the presbytery. FPC’s reactive isolation would be its downfall.

In the end, FPC’s Session decided to propose to the congregation the dissolving of the SPA and my call. At a joint Session meeting to discuss FPC’s decision, Pioneer’s Session listened and expressed sympathy for FPC’s situation. Pioneer elders asked if there was anything that could be done to figure out a new plan, but FPC’s Session had made its decision.

At the following Session meetings, I presented my Parable of the Two Sisters for discussion. Unsurprisingly, FPC’s Session did not have much to say while Pioneer’s Session engaged in a long and healthy discussion. Pioneer’s Session recognized that FPC was beholden to its building. The elders expressed sympathy about the way things had turned out. They noted with optimism that the shared pastorate had lasted over eight years.

About half of FPC’s Session continues to refuse to acknowledge the congregation’s impending end. The other half do not know what to do. The elders are tired. Some just want the struggle to be over with, but admitting it would mean that the elders would need to make some tough choices. Instead, they would rather live in denial. I wanted FPC to understand its grief as a means to finding a new pathway forward. In Jesus Christ, God calls humanity into death towards new life. Accepting the death of FPC’s current system and understanding could have led the congregation to seek a new
direction. It could have been a resurrection into being a new body of Christ.

Unfortunately the current culture and body was too sick to survive.

I continued encouraging both Sessions to remember that just because they were no longer sharing a pastor did not mean that their cooperation had to end. My hope was that they could still help one another and build upon the efforts of the redevelopment group. I continued to meet with the redevelopment group. When I am gone, their efforts and joint cooperation will be helpful to both congregations.
ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Looking back at the nearly nine years of this shared pastorate, it has been a challenging and faith-filled adventure. While I cannot say that I have been successful in my efforts to lead these congregations into adaptive change, the shared pastorate has been a fruitful experiment. I have been able to draw certain conclusions from my experiences with these sibling congregations.

The Shared Pastorate Model

Alice Mann is correct in asserting that a shared pastorate is not a model of redevelopment.\(^1\) At best, a shared pastorate is an alternate church model that can sustain a modest ministry, but it is not a model for transformative change. Its main purpose is to maintain the status quo with the least amount of discomfort to the congregations. In this regard, it achieved what it set out to accomplish. However, it also held both congregations back from adaptive growth and understanding.

In its structure, the shared pastorate empowered resistance to adaptive change by encouraging triangulation, marginalization, apathy, and work avoidance. While I bear responsibility in my collusion and failure to address these issues, the structure of the shared pastorate encouraged and empowered the congregations in their resistance. By placing the pastor in between the congregations, sessions, and presbyteries, it was convenient and easy for elders and members to distance themselves from taking

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\(^1\) Mann, *Can Our Church Live*, 63.
responsibility for change. For FPC, this was witnessed in its apathy, marginalization, and work avoidance.

Pioneer also engaged in work avoidance as my attentions were focused upon FPC. The shared pastorate did not cause the difficulties in outreach that each congregation faced, but it encouraged each to work separately rather than in unity to address their common problems. It also made it easier for both congregations to distance themselves from the congregational problems by placing me as the go-between.

The shared pastorate also encouraged denial of both congregations’ situation. By minimizing the reduction of resources over an extended period, it allowed the congregations to persist in their denial of decline. A drastic reduction or crisis might have raised concern more quickly, which might have encouraged an immediate response. By stabilizing both congregation’s decline, the shared pastorate allowed them to deny the reality that each congregation was moving towards death. Because the pastoral needs of the congregations were being met, there was not a sense of urgency to address the unsustainability of their practices, until it was too late.

Midway through my doctoral studies, I attempted to bring to light the structural problems of the shared pastorate. I recommended to the Sessions an exploration of a new pastoral model. I suggested a model in which the pastor focused one quarter of his or her time towards minimally maintaining the ministries of the congregations and half of his or her time focused on creating a new missionally minded outreach ministry. Neither session supported my idea. Later, the redevelopment group recognized the problems with the shared pastorate model, but, by this time, FPC’s Session had already begun to consider ending the shared pastor agreement. It was too late to alter the shared pastorate
into a more transformative model. In the end, FPC chose to end the shared pastor agreement rather than redesign it.

Deustchmann notes that in order for transformative change to occur, it requires radical adjustment. Minor changes and adjustments allow people to easily fall back into old patterns. At the beginning, I saw my efforts towards shared missional outreach as a way to adjust the shared pastorate rather than radically alter it. I was unable to reframe the problem in a way that the leadership would support. From Pioneer’s perspective, the shared pastorate worked so why should it be altered. For FPC, it was easier to blame the outreach problems upon the pastor instead of finding an alternative solution.

**Trust**

In my experiences, I have been encouraged in the knowledge that Scripture reveals that God chose to work through imperfect leaders to lead the people of God into the reconciling work of redemption. These great leaders were not given a direct plan to follow. Instead, they answered God’s call, and put their faith in God. They trusted that God would see them through.

As Bolsinger points out, the adaptive change process alters the way we lead. The adaptive leader must learn a new way of leadership, to lead differently. Leading adaptive change requires a leader to manage conflict and resistance in the context of relationship. An adaptive leader must refrain from *distancing* in response to resistance. Trust is a

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2 Deutschmann, *Change or Die*, Kindle location 749.

3 Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 18.
necessary asset in leading adaptive change. Without trust, one cannot lead a group into the “uncharted territory” of adaptive change.⁴

From the beginning of the shared pastorate, trust was an issue that each congregation handled differently based upon each congregation’s past experiences. Pioneer had a greater overall trust of its pastors and elders, whereas FPC displayed suspicion. FPC’s members were bi-polar in their trust of their former pastors; they either sang praises to the pastor or cast aspersions. FPC’s limited trust along with its reactive personality reduced its ability to accept the need for adaptive change.

Each congregation’s trust is connected to its understanding of leadership. FPC is personality driven favoring bigger and out-going personalities among its pastors. FPC is reliant upon the pastor for the functioning and well-being of the congregation. Furthermore, FPC relies upon the out-going personality of the pastor to attract members to the congregation. This would fit with what missiologists Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch describe as an “attractive church model,” which is a remnant of a Christendom.⁵ Frost and Hirsch describe this model as a “bounded set” that clearly marks those who belong and those who do not. FPC trusted pastors who fit this model and resisted those who did not. Unfortunately, as Frost and Hirsch point out, the attractional church model does not work in a post-Christendom culture; it draws a church inward and restricts its outreach.⁶

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⁴ Ibid., 15.


⁶ Ibid., 69-70.
Pioneer is less reliant upon its pastor. Members share the responsibilities of congregation leadership among the officers and laity. Because they disperse the responsibilities, Pioneer’s members are able to utilize a pastor’s strengths while compensating for a pastor’s weaknesses. This in turn builds more trust between the pastor and members.

Over the eight years, one of my principle objectives was to build trust between FPC and me. It has been a long and slow journey, which I have made progress, but the deficit of trust from the outset was too difficult to overcome. The lack of support and undercutting by FPC’s leadership damaged my trust in the congregation as well. Whereas I felt comfortable with Pioneer, I found it difficult to be authentic and unguarded with FPC. I did my best to act as natural as possible around FPC, but friends and family noticed my discomfort. I am sure that it was obvious to the members of FPC as well.

The New Testament often uses the Greek verb πιστεύω for “belief”. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament notes that this word shares the same root and underlining meaning for the Greek words for “faith” and “to trust”7 Therefore, belief in God is also trusting God, and having faith that God will fulfill God’s promises. Trusting God is a vital part of our faith. FPC’s resistance towards trust limits its faith expression. FPC’s suspicion towards pastors and authority figures works counter to trust because it suspects an ulterior motive.

There have been times that pastors, and people of authority betray the trust handed to them. FPC has unfortunately had some past incidents in which trust was tested. These include the accusations of homosexuality with Rev. Dornack and the avoidance behavior of Rev. Haapaleinen. These situations were exacerbated by the reactive responses of the congregation. FPC’s response to its pastors seems to run hot or cold. Either congregants love and trust them completely, glossing over their deficiencies such as in the cases of Rev. Dr. Ranck and Rev. Helgerson; or they crucify them, such as with Rev. Harnack and Rev. Haapaleinen.

Pioneer also had difficulty with a previous pastor, Rev. Dooley, but these difficulties were an outlier in the pastoral history of Pioneer. Rev. Dooley had some personal issues that distanced her from the congregation. Her position was dissolved and she left ordained ministry. Because Pioneer’s nature and culture was more trusting, Pioneer bounced back and entered into the shared pastoral relationship in a healthier and trusting manner.

Trust is a priceless resource for ministry. As Bolsinger points out, without trust, a congregation will not let a leader lead it into the unchartered territory of adaptive change. 8 If I had betrayed Pioneer’s trust, the trust would have been quickly withdrawn. Because of FPC’s reactive and troubled past, the members had difficulty trusting a pastor that did not resemble Rev. Ranck. The lack of trust mired FPC’s ability to discern God’s will. Members’ initial and continued suspicion of the shared pastorate and of me hindered them from considering that God could be directing FPC into a new direction.

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8 Bolsinger, Canoeing the Mountains, 54.
One of my colleagues after seeing the problems that I was having with FPC commented, “Jon, why do you keep fertilizing the weeds?” This colleague has served in multiple shared pastorates. Her point was that I was spending too much of my time trying to convince FPC to accept its need for adaptive change; the congregation was not accepting what I was proposing. At the same time, Pioneer was far more trusting and healthier. Furthermore, my values aligned with Pioneer’s. In hindsight, it probably would have been better to have worked with Pioneer alone towards adaptive change. I believed that by focusing solely on Pioneer I would have been betraying my responsibility as a shared pastor. Subconsciously, I wanted to save the members from themselves.

My own sibling history with my brother influenced my choices. I have a deep desire to save my brother from his isolation and self-destructive tendencies. Due to this desire, I had difficulty turning away from FPC. Focusing upon Pioneer renewed the feelings of guilt I felt over the positive attention my parents gave towards me. By focusing instead on FPC, I was trying to resolve my and my parent’s relationship with my brother. Like my brother, FPC did not want to resolve its past nor did it want my help. I wish that I had discovered my family dynamics earlier within the shared pastorate. It could have altered the outcome.

**Inward vs. Outward Focus**

While both congregations struggle with outreach, FPC’s inward focus has drawn it more quickly towards organizational death. In its values, resources, giving, worship, and ministry perspective, FPC draws inward rather than outward. It is a cultural issue that has plagued FPC for decades. It has increased as FPC draws closer towards closure.
These inward tendencies further increase the congregation’s suspicion and mistrust of those from the outside. The most debilitating aspect is that the congregation resists recognizing it.

FPC’s ministry practices are what Frost and Hirsch describe as a “bounded set.” A bounded-set attractional church is a church of like-minded individuals whose purposes are focused inwards and towards attracting other like-minded individuals.9 Frost and Hirsch instead argue that churches need to be missional and incarnational in their focus. Missional and incarnational churches are “centered-set.”10 A centered-set church is centered upon Christ. It is focused outward in its mission and not limited by its boundaries. It was my hope and goal to lead FPC towards an outward and missional focus, but the congregation consistently resisted these efforts towards a change. Members might voice that mission is important, but the congregation’s practices displayed an inward focus.

FPC’s inward ministry practices run counter to Anderson’s theory of christopraxis.11 By ignoring the outward mission of the Church and focusing inwardly, FPC has cut itself off from the essence and purpose of God’s work to the world. As Anderson describes, the congregation is turning itself away from the trinitarian and incarnational work of God. Not only is this causing FPC to die physically, but these practices are killing the members’ spiritually as well. By focusing inwardly, the

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10 Ibid., 68.

congregation is turning towards death instead of life by not heeding God’s call to live in relationship with God through his reconciling work to the world. FPC is closing itself off from the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

While Pioneer struggles to understand how to reach out to a changing post-Christendom culture, the congregation is healthier in its missional perspective. They recognize the need for the missional work of God to the outside community and world. Mission work inspires the members and directs them outward. In their mission work, the members feel connected to God. The Holy Spirit flows within and through their missionary zeal.

Bolsinger notes, “the focused, shared, missional purpose of the church or organization will trump every other competing value.”

FPC did not need to share the same values and mission as Pioneer, but the lack of mission made it harder to motivate the congregation towards change. FPC’s resistance towards examining and reflecting upon its purpose kept congregants from realizing the excitement and clarity that comes from knowing an organization’s direction and following it. It kept the congregation from knowing God and finding its purpose within the greater community. The members are the only community.

Caring for members is a noble and biblically supported effort. In Acts 6, seven deacons were chosen to care for the distribution of food to the faith community’s widows. However, these deacons were chosen so that the apostles and elders could focus

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12 Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 125.
on other ministerial tasks. For FPC, the members have become the main ministry focus. This lone pursuit leads the congregation further towards death.

Ironically, FPC’s choice to focus its resources upon the building and dissolve the pastorate actually damages its ability to care for the members. This will most likely hasten the congregation’s death because the leadership will not be able to provide the pastoral care and relationship that members have come to expect. FPC’s inward pursuits to cater to its members will lead to a quicker demise.

**The Focus on the Building**

Somewhere along the line, the church building became one of FPC’s core values. The fundraising and budget bears this out. Members and leaders talk about the church building as representing “home.” They describe it as a place that they associate with God. It is a source of pride for many of them. While this attitude and affection for a church building is common among Christians, as the early reformers pointed out, it leads to idolatry. This affection for the building unfortunately has limited FPC’s theology and understanding of missional outreach.

At some point, the members intertwined their notions of the building with their memories of loved ones. For FPC, “the church” no longer just represents the people of God, but it includes the building. Members have difficulty associating the one without the other. One of the goals of FPC examining its grief was to help the congregation to recognize and mourn its losses so that the congregation could move forward. One of these losses was the reality that the congregation was approaching the day that it could no

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longer afford its building. Unfortunately, the congregation did not want to examine the possibility of a church life separate from the building.

When the Session was contemplating moving towards pulpit supply instead of sharing a pastor, I tried to convince the elders that this did not have to be the end of FPC’s ministry. They could continue as a church by giving up the building and renting space. This would allow more resources to be focused towards redevelopment. The elders could not comprehend being the Church of God without the church building. Rainer notes that a congregation’s focus on maintaining the building over outreach is often a sign of impending death for a congregation.\textsuperscript{13} This is sadly the case for FPC. The failed building campaign seventeen years ago nearly ended FPC’s ministry. Unfortunately, by choosing the building over pastoral leadership, the building may once again seal FPC’s fate.

Two factors have assisted Pioneer from falling into the idolatrous building trap of FPC. First, Pioneer’s facility is newer. In the 1960s, the congregation decided to tear down the old sanctuary and build a new church facility at a new location. Some members still remember the old sanctuary, but they do not dwell on those memories. The new building was a part of the congregation’s vision to create a bigger space for Christian education. The mission drove the congregation’s enthusiasm. The second factor was that the leaders and pastors consistently reminded the congregation, “The Church is not a building. It is the people of God.” These messages and vision have stuck with the parishioners over the years. Many are still attached to the building, but not in the same

\textsuperscript{13} Rainer, Autopsy of a Deceased Church, 62.
way as FPC. Pioneer is more balanced in its understanding that the building serves the people and ministry of God rather than the other way around.

The Parable

In the introduction, I began with *A Parable of the Two Sisters*. I refer to this parable with two purposes in mind. First, it is a reflection of my own experiences leading these sibling congregations. Secondly, I wanted to give members and leaders of both congregations an indirect, yet familiar way to explore the results of the shared pastorate. In his book about the parables of the Jesus, Klyne Snodgrass writes:

“Stories are one of the few places that allow us to see reality, at least the reality the author creates. There, to a degree we cannot do in real life, we can discern motives, keep score, know who won, and what success and failure look like. Life on the outside virtually stops; we are taken up in the story. The storyteller is in control so that we are forced to see from new angles and so that the message cannot be easily evaded. Hearers become willing accomplices, even if the message is hostile. From this ‘other world’ we are invited to understand, evaluate, and, hopefully, redirect our lives.”

*The Father* - The father in the parable somewhat represents me, but it also represents any pastor of multiple congregations and the parenting role he or she plays. The father also represents God the Father whose wisdom, will, and love is the guiding source for Christian churches. A parable allows the reader to determine who and what the characters portray. Like Jesus often did in his parables, I wrote the father as a successful businessman to fit the context of these two congregations and draw them towards the father. These congregations, like many Presbyterian churches, often respect and value

business and success. The father also represents any parent who has struggled to keep their children working together.

*The Two Sisters* – The sisters represent any sibling congregation. Unlike Jesus’ parable about the two sons (Lk 15:11-32), there is not a distinction made between the actions of the siblings. This was meant to reflect the impartiality of the father, and also the ideal that parents love their children equally. I wanted to focus the attention of the reader on the main theme, which is the hope of the father that his daughters would work together. This was the hope of my mother with me and my brother, and the hope of many parents. The sibling stories of Genesis reveal the problems that occur when a parent has a “favorite” child. From my family of origin, I saw firsthand how favoritism damages a family. Just as we bring our histories into our parenting, I brought my history into my work with these churches.

*The Split Mirror* – When I presented this parable to both sessions and the redevelopment group, the mirror was never commented upon. The purpose of the mirror is to represent that each of the sisters possessed traits of their father. As they gazed in the mirror, they could see these traits reflected back to them, but it was only in combining the mirrors and the sisters gazing into the mirror together that they could truly see the image of their father reflected in both of them. These congregations have their unique gifts, talents, and purpose. I wanted these congregations to work together so that they could appreciate the separate traits of God that they represent. By coming and working together towards missional outreach, I shared in the hope of the father that these congregations could recognize that they were stronger with one another than separate. By working together, their separate traits would portray to them a better image of God.
The Tomb – In the parable as well as the shared pastorate, the goal of shared ministry and participation was never realized. The sisters were eventually united with their father in death. I do not know if this will be the fate of these churches, but they are moving in that direction. I have more confidence in Pioneer’s ability to continue as a congregation, but if Pioneer cannot find a means to adapt and reach further out to the community, it will eventually also succumb to attrition like FPC.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Although this is the end of this shared pastorate, it is a model of ministry that is growing among churches and denominations within the United States. As resources and membership shrink because of our changing culture, many congregations are coming to the reality that they can no longer afford a full-time pastor. Therefore, a shared pastorate appears to be a natural solution.

In my eight years within this community, I have seen shared pastorates grow from my two congregations to seven congregations sharing pastors; and there are more considering it. Shared pastorates have been a model more frequently utilized among rural congregations, but, as society changes, it is becoming more popular within urban and suburban congregations. Some rural congregations have a history of shared pastorates going back decades. Urban and suburban congregations contemplating shared pastorates could learn much from the experiences and wisdom of these rural congregations. I have benefited from local colleagues in ministry who have led shared pastorates.

Although more congregations are entering into shared pastor relationships, it is something that should be considered carefully by the congregations, pastors, and church
judicatories. Also, as more congregations shrink and are forced to adapt to a post-Christendom world, leading adaptive change within a shared pastorate becomes particularly challenging. Based upon the lessons I have learned, I have a series of recommendations for those within or contemplating a shared pastorate. I have grouped them together into three categories. First are recommendations to consider before entering into a shared pastorate. These recommendations can also be applied after a shared pastorate has begun, but they are more difficult to implement later. The second set of recommendations are actions to be taken at the beginning of a shared pastorate that will help encourage the adaptive change process. The final set of recommendations deal with what I have learned about leading adaptive change within a shared pastorate.

Preparing for a Shared Pastorate

For pastors, congregational leaders, and church judicatories planning for a shared pastorate, it is important to understand the limitations of a shared pastorate and to plan accordingly. I make these suggestions about structuring the shared pastorate properly so that the congregations, leadership, judicatories, and pastors can begin on the same page about the expectations for the shared pastorate. However, just as in my situation, shared pastorates often happen without appropriate planning and reflection. They are typically undertaken as a technical solution to an adaptive challenge. Applying a technical solution to an adaptive solution rarely works because technical solutions do not account for the emotions and conflicting values which keep a congregation stuck. Taking a pause for discernment and planning will better assist the congregations in the long run. In any
ministry, we often do not realize the need for planning and reflection until after problems arise.

After experiencing problems dealing with two separate presbyteries, I strongly suggest that one judicatory have oversight over the pastor and congregations. The pastor and congregations can then deal with and be held accountable to one regional body. When problems or concerns arise, the one judicatory has the authority to mediate between the two congregations and pastor instead of placing the shared pastor in the middle. Two judicatories increases the possible number of triangles within a shared pastorate.15 Friedman describes a triangle as “the manner in which the relationship between any two people, or given individual and his or her symptoms, can be a function of an often unseen third person, relationship, or issue between them.” The danger of triangles is that they do not allow the primary individuals or entities to work on the issues which is causing stress or anxiety. Triangles place the anxiety or stress upon the third individual. A shared pastorate is complicated on its own without adding numerous triangles to deal with.

I would also recommend that a formal agreement be prepared in writing stating the responsibilities and expectations of each congregations and the shared pastor. Included in this should be a process and plan for dissolution of the shared pastorate. The Shared Pastorate Agreement that Pioneer and FPC signed was a great help as it was ending. It helped each side to know the ground rules for the shared pastorate.

15 Friedman, A Failure of Nerve, Kindle location 3732.
The written agreement should also include some sort of plan for both leadership boards to discuss concerns and issues with the shared pastorate at least annually. It is helpful if the judicatory has oversight and responsibility for making sure that these discussions occur. I wish that FPC and Pioneer had an avenue to discuss FPC’s reservations and concerns with Pioneer along the way. By the time FPC’s concerns were brought up to Pioneer, it was too late. I often felt caught in the middle between both leadership boards and congregations. I felt ethically obligated to keep each congregation’s concerns and issues confidential from the other. If I had shared them without permission, it would have damaged the trust that I had built. A planned annual discussion or group to manage the shared pastorate would have been a great help. Perhaps the pastor nominating committee could have transitioned to such a committee because they have a vested interest in seeing the pastorate work.

Before a shared pastorate agreement is entered into, I would strongly suggest that both congregations enter into a period of supervised discernment about their congregation and the issues that each congregation is facing. What does the congregation hope to accomplish by a shared pastorate and to what degree will a shared pastorate further the missional goals of the congregation? Are there other models to consider? Alice Mann’s book would be a useful book study to help each congregations evaluate its goals for redevelopment and options. Ideally this would be led by someone outside of both congregations, perhaps a regional church leader or a local pastor. A leader with experience and knowledge about redevelopment and adaptive change would be helpful.

If the shared pastor is already in place, I suggest that the shared pastor not lead the discernment process but participate as an observer. This process would provide helpful
information for the shared pastor. By remaining a neutral observer, the shared pastor would be freed from embodying the redevelopment or change process. Since my adaptive change efforts were tied to my doctoral program, I embodied the change effort, which made it easier for FPC to marginalize the need for change. The choice for redevelopment needs to be placed back onto the congregation and leadership. As Bolsinger points out, this is at the heart of adaptive change. Instead of trying to fix the problem, a pastor who gives the problem back to the leaders and congregation allows them to solve the problem and find transformational growth. At the end of the discernment process, the results should be shared with both congregations. Both congregations should also be made aware of the limitations of the shared pastor model, and that the shared pastorate is not a model for redevelopment.

Preferably before entering into the shared pastorate, the pastor would benefit from reflecting about the unique role of a shared pastor. I would suggest that the pastor connect with some experienced leaders who understand shared pastorates, adaptive change, and grief. If one or both of the congregations are struggling to survive, is the pastor ready to serve as a hospice chaplain to the congregation(s)? It would be helpful for the pastor to also study systems theory and adaptive change. This was immensely helpful in identifying the problems and resistance of the congregations. I would also suggest that the pastor enter counseling or coaching in order examine his or her family of origin and sibling issues. As leaders, we do not come to a ministry as a blank slate. As I learned, my issues affected the way I led these two congregations.

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16 Bolsinger, Canoeing the Mountains, 167.
Early into a Shared Pastorate

As Bolsinger points out, the first priority for transformational leadership must be building trust. If the congregation does not trust the pastor, congregants will not follow the pastor into the unchartered territory of adaptive change. This is good advice for any pastorate but crucial for a shared pastorate because of the sibling rivalry that can evolve between the congregations. Trust is earned slowly but lost in an instant. Both congregations must feel as if they can trust the shared pastor.

Trust begins with “technical competence” in three areas: “Stewardship of the Scriptures and tradition,” “stewardship of souls and communities,” and “stewardship of teams and tasks.” However, this is not enough. It also requires “relational congruence,” which comes through our consistent following of our personal values through action in every relationship. Both congregations need to see their pastor consistently acting in accordance with her or his professed values. While these skills will not bring about adaptive transformation on their own, transformational leadership is impossible without them. If nothing else, beginning with these skills will bring about healthier relationships between the pastor and congregational members. It will also help mitigate the effects of the resistance incurred with adaptive change. Members will still resist, but they and the leadership will be in a better place to recognize that the pastor has the congregation’s interests at heart. Trust was harder to build with FPC than Pioneer, but if I had not consistently worked on building trust with FPC, I would not have gotten as far as I did.

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17 Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 51-52.
18 Ibid., 54-58.
19 Ibid., 66-67.
I would also recommend researching the context of both congregations and their communities as early as possible. Typically, the shared pastor is from outside the community and/or the congregation. If the pastor grew up or has close past ties to one of the communities and/or congregations, it will be an added burden to understand and be accepted by the other congregation. Rev. Helgerson history and connections were well received by FPC, but he was not well received or trusted by Pioneer because of his close connection with FPC. Like a parent, a shared pastor must understand and respect the unique personality, gifts, and culture of each congregation. Even though it is typical to share common values with one of the congregations, respecting the values of the other congregation is equally important. Although Pioneer was a better fit for me, understanding FPC’s context, culture, and values helped me to make connections with the members. It helped me to understand the reasons behind the resistance.

I would suggest writing the context and history of each congregation as if it was a part of a doctor of ministry project. Interview members; research both communities; read old leadership board minutes as far back as you can find; find out about the heroes, traditions, and rituals of each congregation; look for the values. This can be part of a greater discernment and visioning process involving a committee and leadership board. It can be done individually, but the more that members are drawn into reflecting upon the congregation’s past, the better they will later understand the adaptive challenges the congregation faces. This information will be immensely helpful for the transformation team as it engages within the adaptive change process.
Leading Adaptive Change

Leading adaptive change is difficult for any organization. A shared pastorate offers unique challenges because the shared pastor is dealing with two unique congregations with different values, cultures, traditions, identities, and personalities. Just as the congregations are unique, each will most likely differ in its adaptive capacity and health. Because of my family-of-origin issues, I tried to “save” FPC from its destructive and isolative behaviors. I learned that if one congregation is healthier and more receptive towards change than the other, it would have been better to have led the healthier congregation into adaptive change. If I had led adaptive change within the healthier and more cooperative Pioneer, perhaps FPC would have later recognized Pioneer’s adaptive success. Perhaps it would have encouraged FPC to engage in the change process. In the end I learned that adaptive change cannot be forced. As pastors, we need to know ourselves and sometimes learn to get out of the way of a congregation’s destructive and reactive patterns. It is okay to let a congregation follow the path it has chosen.

Adaptive change requires a team of people working together. A pastor cannot bring about adaptive change on her own. Adaptive change requires seeing the problem from a different angle than what we have been taught from Christendom and our formal education. This is true for the members and leaders as well. It is difficult for many to understand the need to change from the programs and behaviors that had previously brought success for the church. There will be a strong desire within both congregations towards the status quo. My mistake was that I assumed that if I could see the need for change that others, especially the leaders, would also see it. This was not the case.
I learned that not everyone has to be on board with adaptive change in order to move forward. It would have helped searching and recruiting for the transformation team earlier. I had an image in my head of what the transformation team should look like. However, I was surprised by the value that different perspectives or opinions brought to reflection. Cast a wide net because a diversity of opinions and perspectives will make the transformation team more effective, but also make sure that the transformation team is made up of motivated, innovative, credible, energetic, persistent, and mature individuals. Since there is a steep learning curve to understanding adaptive change, a book study on adaptive change was a great way to educate about adaptive change and find potential team candidates. I used Bolsinger’s *Canoeing the Mountains* because it provides a good summation of the adaptive change process and is written with congregations in mind. Even if one congregation is more receptive, I found that opening up the study to both congregations was a good way to begin sowing seeds in the other congregation.

For the transformation team, I would suggest using a separate group from the leadership board. I learned this the hard way. According to Bolsinger, the leadership board is best positioned to be the maintaining mission group. It does not have to do the work as much as support and not sabotage the transformation team’s efforts. The leadership board will eventually be responsible for institutionalizing the change or not.20

In a shared pastorate, there are typically two separate leadership boards. I discovered that this makes leading adaptive change within both congregations extremely difficult because of the adaptive capacity and awareness of each board. One or both

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boards may not recognize and support the need for adaptive change. If one of the boards is resistant, the shared pastor can easily be caught in the middle protecting the transformation team’s efforts. This in turn can cause the pastor to embody the change effort thereby increasing the congregation’s work avoidance through marginalization. This is another reason why it would have been better for me to have orchestrated an adaptive change effort solely with Pioneer as the healthier and more responsive congregation.

As congregations shrink, they tend to draw more inward. The adaptive challenge for many shared pastorates is to find a different way for the congregations to reach outward. The transformation team provides a safe place to initiate the adaptive change process of observation, interpretation, and intervention.21 As the team reflects upon the mission and values of the congregation(s), team members examine the gaps between the congregation’s espoused values and actions. A transformation team assesses the reasons behind the gaps. As Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow suggest, this is an opportunity to “get up on the balcony” and “listen to the song beneath the words.”22 This is the heart of interpretation.

Because of the delay in forming a transformation team until the end of the project, I did not have a group to help me interpret the results and plan future interventions. I was trying whatever I could to move the congregation forward, but without the assistance of a transformation team to help provide interpretation, the adaptive process was handicapped.

21 Bolsinger, Canoeing the Mountains, 111.

I learned of the importance to proceed through each of the steps of the adaptive change process consecutively. I also learned to be careful not getting stuck. Adaptive change is learned by doing and making mistakes. Do not wait too long trying to understand the adaptive process before being willing to experiment, but start small so the transformation team and you can survive the resistance.

Sermons and bible studies are useful to encourage and reinforce the adaptive change process, but they are not enough. Adaptive change requires interventions that challenge the status quo and create new behaviors. I often wanted to learn more than act. I found it uncomfortable moving the congregations outside of their respective comfort areas, not just because of the resistance, but also because of my training as a pastor to theologize and interpret over holding people’s feet to the coals. Motivating others towards action while simultaneously holding others accountable is one of the hardest skills for me. When we work with a transformation team, we are stronger because we balance out one another’s deficiencies and hold each other accountable to the adaptive process. I could have used this sort of accountability within this project.

Finally, I would suggest that a shared pastor needs to focus on self-care. As shared pastors, we will often be caught in the middle of both congregations expectations and problems. Self-care is vital to surviving the resistance that comes with adaptive change. I learned to be mindful of the grief that comes with leading declining congregations. As pastors, we experience many of the same emotions and sense of loss as our parishioners. Perhaps we do not remember the glory days of the fifties, sixties, and seventies, but most of us were raised with a Christendom mindset. As a pastor, I too grieve the end of the prestige of Christianity within our society. Jesus was faced with a
similar grief of his fellow Jews looking back to the glory days of King David and King Solomon. Jesus did not shy away from the grief of death but encouraged his followers to take up their crosses and follow him.

As Christians, we know that death is not the end of our life but a new beginning. I had hoped that by working through the grief process with each congregation that both could come to the peace of acceptance and find the hope of new possibilities. We never got there. In the end, resistance and collusion won out. In the reflection of my grief over the death of the shared pastorate, I have found peace that ultimately God is in control and thankfulness for what God has revealed through the process. It has been a God inspired journey that has changed me as a leader.


