LEARNING, LEADERSHIP, AND RAPID CHANGE
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Abstract: Ministerial leaders are often cautioned to avoid bringing about change quickly, without widespread support and an intense, long-term, or even grass-roots process. In many situations, however, leaders must choose between bringing about change quickly or allowing a ministry to career toward certain failure. In such cases, learning can play a vital role in ensuring that fast change is also thoughtful, educated, and contextually-appropriate. This article explores the theoretical underpinnings of leadership and change, describes the learning-oriented findings of a case study on change in campus religious life, and applies a grounded theory of learning and change to a current ministerial leadership challenge. The article asserts that learning about (1) theory, (2) history and context, and (3) the activity of similar ministry programs are the three keys to bringing about a fast change well.

When Change Must Come Quickly

Ministers in different contexts at times find themselves in situations where they need to bring about change quickly: A church in crisis, an agency that is financially insolvent, or a mediocre chaplaincy program stuck in a rut of ineffectiveness. Religious leadership literature and anecdotal evidence might suggest, however, that to push toward fast change is dangerous to the faith community and provides a ticket to termination for a ministerial leader. In their book *Resurrecting Excellence*, Jones and Armstrong write, "There are times to act swiftly and move boldly into the rough waters of our

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relationships. But often, quick movements cause churning waters to muddy further. Lurking under the surface are fears, emotions, and issues that are more likely to strike back than reach out."[1]

When I first entered ministry, I remember getting advice through a sermon from another young, female pastor about change. She said to a group of seminary students that, in the first three years of a new call, the pastor was asking for trouble if she tried to change anything at all. I took this advice to heart, although three years sounded like a long time! Soon after hearing this caution, I graduated and took a call as an associate pastor in a small congregation. My predecessor in the position was effective in her ministry, but she and I were so different from each other in our styles of leadership that I inadvertently brought about change immediately just by being my authentic self. I could not pretend to be someone else for three days, let alone three years, and maintain my vitality in ministry.

A few years after that associate pastorate, I found myself in a situation where immediate change was needed in a ministry I served. I was called to a campus ministry at a large, state university. Two years before I accepted this position, the ministry had undergone a rigorous visioning process involving the entire board of directors. The purpose of the process was to determine whether the ministry would remain active or shut down, as it was financially strapped and had very low student participation. The visioning process, which included an outside consultant, had resulted in new optimism about the ministry's assets (a large and well-maintained facility and healthy endowment), potential for growth (other campus ministries were growing), and relevance (the liberal, mainline church needed a voice on the campus). The board called a new campus minister just as this

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[1] L. Gregory Jones, and Kevin R. Armstrong. *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 73.

process concluded who, after ten months, left the position abruptly for personal reasons, having implemented neither new programs nor brought about any noticeable change in the ministry.

As I entered this ministerial context, with all the unrealized promise surrounding me, I was simply not in a position to wait to bring about change. The physical plant of the campus ministry center was in good repair but unclean and unattractive. There were no programs planned and no students involved, except for one baffled work-study student who had been listed on all official documents as the campus ministry student organization's president. Therefore, I had to bring about change quickly without a ponderous process with all stakeholders involved at every step. I had to implement changes on my very first day but felt deeply uncomfortable doing so, still living under the three year rule I had heard in seminary. In retrospect, I realize that I sought to apply a rigid, time-delimited rule for when to bring about change in a ministry setting without understanding the importance of context; the rule under which I was living lacked the agility and adaptability to help me in the setting in which I found myself.

Ultimately, although I made mistakes, the changes I made in that campus ministry context were accepted by stakeholders and welcomed on campus. They were accepted in part because the board was so anxious to see something (anything) happen to bring activity and students into the campus ministry. I had walked into what one might call a "CPR situation," with a ministry whose vital signs were undetectable. This gave me some license to try just about anything to forestall certain doom. The concern that led to the writing of this article is that religious leaders are often cautioned by their mentors and colleagues to avoid fast change in all contexts, and few resources are available to those who have no choice in the matter. This causes those who are called upon to bring about change quickly to feel isolated, adrift, or even ashamed.

More recently, nine years into ministry, I got this advice from a seasoned pastor: "Never tear down a fence until you know why the fence was there in the first place." This counsel made so much more sense to me than the three year rule, and it was something I was able to incorporate into my ministerial leadership practices right away. It is advice rooted in the idea that learning is essential to thoughtful change, which is the concept this article will explore.

Arguments against bringing about change quickly, such as the three year rule, are grounded in the following fears:

- Fear that a change might signal arrogance on the part of the minister.
- Fear that a change might suggest disrespect for one's predecessor.
- Fear that change might demonstrate an undemocratic, authoritarian leadership style to lay leaders.

To approach change from a posture of learning can address each of these fears while, at the same time, demonstrating to a congregation that change—as long as it is well thought-through—is not something to be feared.

Many of the changes I made in the campus ministry setting I described earlier were instinct-driven, yet each of them involved learning in some way. What would it mean to marry learning and fast change intentionally, using specific guidelines for what needs to be learned? What would those guidelines be, and what varieties of learning would need to take place for a fast change to be considered thoughtful? This topic is especially pertinent today, when many ministries are in "CPR situations," and where rapid change in the form of a quick turnaround or a graceful funeral is necessary.

This article explores the ways in which learning can help the minister who must bring about rapid change. First, it surveys theoretical principles that support the notion that learning can ensure that rapid change is not

thoughtless. Second, it describes a case study on a campus religious life change initiative that raised salient points around the way in which learning plays a role in change leadership. Finally, it applies grounded theory that emerged from the case study to a current ministerial leadership challenge, arguing that disciplined learning for rapid change can forestall some of the damaging effects of fast change.

Change Theory and Learning

In order to engage in thoughtful discussion about the nature of fast change, one must first ask, "Why it is that change usually is not fast, but rather ponderous, when institutions are left to their own physics?" An interviewee once commented to me, "It takes a lot of energy to turn a big ship around." This metaphor suggests that change usually takes a great deal of effort, which usually necessitates time, especially in the case of bigger "ships," or large or historic ministries.

Why does change usually take time? Most change initiatives include a balance between grass-roots efforts and top-down leadership initiatives.[2] The collaborative nature of effective change calls upon leaders to form relationships, build consensus, and foster what one might call *buy-in* or popular support. All three of these foundational practices in leadership for change require trust, which builds over time, through shared experience. Heifetz argues that leaders must give work back to the people at a rate they can stand;[3] a leader cannot force relationships, consensus, and buy-in, but must rather nurture each of these forces through patience, time, and pastoral persistence.

Yet what of the minister who arrives in a new congregation only to find that those who have risen to leadership positions are dysfunctional, unable to take on

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[2] Michael Beer, Russel A. Eisenstat, and Bert Spector, *The Critical Path to Corporate Renewal.* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1990).
[3] Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

the work of change, and not representative of the true will of the congregation? What about the campus minister who, as in the example I offered earlier from my own experience, finds no leaders in place among students and a *Go for it, as long as it works* attitude from her board of directors? Ministerial leaders in situations like these do not have the raw materials necessary to build relationships, foster consensus, and encourage buy-in. They must bring about change quickly, but how can they do so carefully and faithfully?

Change theory is a heuristic model, originating in business scholarship but more recently being adapted and expanded by scholars in education (most notably, Michael Fullan[4]) and religion (in addition to Dale, described in the next paragraph, see Herrington, Bonem, and Furr[5]), that seeks to understand the way in which change takes place in institutions. Change leadership theory specifically addresses questions about how change can be not just experienced but initiated by leaders and stakeholders in organizations. Change theory can be descriptive or didactic, detailing the steps toward change that take place or are put in place by leaders, or prescribing those steps to leaders or a community in need of change.

A number of respected change theorists point to learning as a crucial element in a change process. In *Leadership for a Changing Church*,[6] Robert Dale writes that the leader's first duty is to define reality for an institution. This first requires, however, that the leader him- or herself unlearns old paradigms so that she or he can effectively describe a new reality to a congregation. Dale argues that the leader must acquire self-knowledge in order to stretch and grow into a new understanding of

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[4] Michael Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change.* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), Michael Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2001).

[5] J. Herrington, M. Bonem, and J. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey.* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

[6] Robert D. Dale, *Leadership for a Changing Church: Charting the Shape of the River.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

reality, but he does not delve more deeply into the kind of learning on an institutional level that might render a leader capable of defining reality for a community.[7]

Hall and Hord[8] echo Dale's sentiment that changing one's self is crucial to change within an organization. They emphasize that leaders need to attend to bringing about change in individual stakeholders in order for a broad change initiative to work. "Since learning new information, skills, and behaviors is at the heart of any change project, facilitators would do well to keep this basic premise in mind as they consider, design, and deliver the interventions necessary for change process success."

Senge[9] names "Team Learning" as *The Fifth Discipline* for which his book is named. Whereas Hall and Hord focus on individual stakeholders learning for the sake of change in an organization, Senge emphasizes collective learning that can take place only through a team entering into dialogue, putting assumptions aside and thinking together as a group. He writes that, when this is done well, the team becomes smarter than any one individual participant in a change process.

Whereas Hall and Hord and Senge emphasize the change that takes place in individuals toward institutional change, Heifetz[10] focuses on the learning a leader needs to do about an institution before change can take place. In his step-by-step change leadership model, he first names identifying the adaptive challenge as a task for the leader. Learning why a function of an institution is not

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[7] Like other change theorists considered here, Dale makes no black-and-white distinction between teaching and learning. When a leader learns and then frames reality for another, she or he teaches while learning. For the purpose of this article, the terms are not used interchangeably, but it is taken as a given that learning flows seamlessly into teaching when a leader is guiding a community through a time of change.

[8] Gene M. Hall and Shirley M. Hord, *Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Potholes.* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 122.

[9] Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 10.

[10] Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers.*

working—beyond technical problems—is crucial to bringing about adaptive change to correct or address the institution's challenge.

A minister who has been called upon to bring about change quickly will not find comfort in the work of the change theorists named here. They each point to longer processes involving many stakeholders, deep discernment, and ongoing conversation. Hall and Hord write, "Change is a process, not an event"[11], and, in various ways, all of these authors presented here echo that sentiment. Furthermore, none offers concrete, succinct advice that could answer the question: *Learning about what?*

For the leader who must learn quickly and methodically, the advice to learn about oneself and to inspire learning in stakeholders sets up an unrealistic expectation; such deep learning often takes more time than the ministerial leader has the luxury to possess. As was noted earlier, building relationships, fostering consensus, and encouraging buy-in are important to change. Many ministry contexts, however, are not ready for leadership at that level, for a variety of possible reasons. Where does one find theoretical guidance for change that must happen quickly, in the absence of solid relationships, mutual trust, and a shared communal vision within in a ministry context?

Case Study Findings, Learning, and Change

In 2005, I conducted a study on leadership and change in campus religious life.[12] In order to understand how change takes place in the religious life programs of historically-Christian colleges, I studied the planning processes that led to the creation of three initiatives of the Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation (PTEV). By studying those processes at three

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[11] Hall and Hord, *Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Potholes*, p. 5.
[12] Sarah B. Drummond "Leading Change in Campus Religious Life: A Case Study on the Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation." Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2005.

different historically-Christian schools, I learned the extent to which planning processes are highly contextual, shaped by the settings where they take place. I also learned the ways in which learning was used as a tool to further visioning and to increase the quality and depth of planning processes.

The PTEV, an initiative of the Lilly Endowment, Inc., have attracted the attention of many parties interested in higher education in historically-Christian colleges and universities. Through a grant program, the Lilly Endowment has awarded $176.2 million over four years to colleges that devise creative means for engaging campus communities around the theological concept of vocation. The total amount granted was spread out among 88 schools that received funding, as well as an additional 11 schools which received planning grants of $50 thousand but were not awarded implementation grants of $1 million or more. In 2006, a number of PTEV grant recipients were able to continue their programs past the initial grant cycles with the help of "sustainability grants," where the Lilly Endowment provided matching funds up to $500,000 to PTEV programs able to garner significant support from their institutions.

The Lilly Endowment has a history of supporting programs in higher education and has recently focused on helping Christian colleges to reconnect with their particular religious traditions. The program it created in 1999 aimed to encourage conversation on traditionally Christian college campuses about the meaning of vocation. The purpose of the PTEV is to help Christian colleges to create programs that bring vocation to the center of institutional discourse. Lilly Endowment officials offer neither caveats nor disclaimers when they say that the program intends to bring about fundamental changes in the ways in which Christian colleges educate students.

The PTEV website[13] states that each grant recipient school has been given the freedom to design vocational

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[13] Retrieved November 1, 2004, from http://www.ptev.org/history.aspx.

discernment programs that suit their unique histories and campus cultures. Program goals include affording exploration opportunities to students discerning a sense of calling to Christian ministry, but the overarching program objectives are more comprehensive. They point to a need for young men and women to be encouraged to discern God's call as they make life choices typical of the college years: career, values, and relationships. Some of the activities supported by PTEV grants include "Incorporating the theological exploration of vocation into courses or campus experiences," "Developing or strengthening campus-ministry programs," and "Establishing faith and learning centers or institutes."[14]

The purpose of my study was to describe and analyze the processes through which different Christian colleges designed and implemented vocational discernment programs. Since each of the colleges included in this study underwent a planning year, funded by a $50,000 grant, it was the activities which took place during that year that were studied most closely; the planning year served to frame the cases under consideration.

The following three research questions guided the study:

- How does a leader or group of leaders bring about institutional change that reintegrates religious life with the academic mission of Christian higher education?

- How can a coalition of leaders from across a campus (student life, religious life, and academic departments) design and implement a program that connects their college's mission with a theological concept?

- How does the process of designing such a change initiative in itself catalyze transformation in a Christian college's sense of connection with its Christian religious heritage?

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[14] Retrieved November 1, 2004, from http://www.ptev.org/history.aspx.

On each campus selected, I interviewed religious life officials, faculty members, and administrators so as to investigate the creation of PTEV programs from a variety of angles. I conducted between five and eight interviews for each institution, and eighteen participants were interviewed in all. In addition to interview transcripts, data collected also included written documents, especially grant proposals and reports sent from colleges to the Lilly Endowment.

In order to analyze data, I created a coding matrix that connected the three research questions with relevant themes in change theory. The matrix was used to organize data, along with the help of the qualitative data analysis software, N*Vivo. "Learning" as a category for coding emerged from reading change theory literature. As coding proceeded, however, different categories of learning emerged that ultimately suggested a theory of learning for change that will be explored later in the article.

I selected the three Christian colleges included in the study by adapting a typology from Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield's *Religion On Campus*.[15] These authors had developed a typology for different varieties of American colleges and universities that captured forms of higher educational institutions in the broadest possible way. They defined four types of schools: large public university, small private college, historically-black college, and large private sectarian university. They then conducted a case study on religious activity in four schools that fell into these categories. For the purposes of this study, I simply eliminated the large, public university category, since I was only concerned with historically-Christian institutions.

My study therefore included a large, Jesuit Catholic research university in a metropolitan area, a historically-Black college with ties to a mainline Protestant denomination, and an elite liberal arts college with

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[15] Conrad Cherry, Betty A. DeBerg, and Amanda Porterfield, *Religion on Campus.* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

historic but loose ties to yet another Protestant
denomination. In each of the three institutions, learning
played a crucial role in the planning processes that led to
the creation of their satellite PTEV programs. From their
experiences with learning and planning for change, three
distinct types of learning emerged that will be explored
further in this article.

One might argue that learning played an especially
significant role in the case of the PTEV because one
might assume that those who planned the programs, by
their very presence in a higher education setting, by
nature appreciate the importance of informing one's self
before moving forward. At the large Jesuit Catholic
University, which I called "UCU," the planning
committee was deliberate about learning and evaluation.
Nearly every section of its implementation grant proposal
included a section on the learning process that led to that
component's design. Much of the energy around learning
was directed toward exploring and defining the
theological concept of vocation. One planning committee
member stated,

> [W]hat would happen frequently is that somebody
> would come with a concrete proposal to look at a
> program design that would lead [the Jesuit who
> chaired the planning committee] to trigger some
> fundamental reflection about the meaning of life
> or some other kind of thing. So we would go off
> into these really profound and kind of far-ranging
> discussions, and frequently walk away from it
> without ever having really resolved some of the
> practical things that were there to begin with.

If anything, UCU struggled to move beyond learning
(long, deep, meandering conversation about vocation) to
a concrete program design.

In addition to talking about vocation, the planning
committee considered the meaning of Jesuit higher
education. They realized that they had to move the
campus past a priest/nun stereotype of vocation, but they
also wished to contextualize their program in the broader
themes of Jesuit spirituality. As the committee, as a

group, studied Jesuit thought, they found ways of articulating and highlighting the tradition's value for reflection and service both in the program design and the implementation grant proposal.

The small, elite, liberal arts college included in the study, which I called "PC," emphasized learning in virtually every activity that took place during PC's PTEV planning year. This is due in part, perhaps, to the intellectual culture of the institution, where learning is deeply valued. Planning activities included a reading group for faculty, panels, and symposia, all of which were geared toward learning and teaching about the philosophical meaning of work. It was through learning processes that a once-skeptical planning group became excited about the idea of PC having a program on vocation.

In addition to reading about and learning about vocation, the planning committee also sought to learn about what their own students needed by way of vocational discernment. It was through focus groups that planners learned that, although PC students did not necessarily arrive on campus with a priest/nun assumption about vocation like they might have at Catholic UCU, some assumed "vocational" was related to "vocational-technical." On an anti-careerist, pro-intellectual campus, this was a dangerous stereotype. Therefore, attention was paid to teaching about the meaning of work, and also to avoiding use of the term vocation in favor of "ethics of work." In this way, the learning process assisted the planning committee in designing a program that was feasible in PC's context.

PC's program designers also paid some attention to what other PTEV programs were doing across the country. A small group from within the planning team traveled to different schools to look at other programs, as well as to learn about chapels, religion departments, and other types of initiatives. This afforded some planners with the opportunity to consider what ideas might or might not be easily imported into the PC program. Only administrators—not faculty members—participated

in these visits, however, which limited the impact of this form of learning.

At the historically-Black university included in my study, or "HBU," learning was carefully written into the planning grant proposal. Of the planning process' three stated goals, the second was to "greatly strengthen our knowledge and understanding of the role played by religious faith in life examination and decision making." The planning process included time and attention devoted to understanding the HBU student body's needs as well as visits to other programs. It did not, however, include a significant amount of time devoted to understanding vocation. It is clear that members of the planning team understood that to be the chaplain's area of expertise; the development officer who penned the final grant proposal stated that he left all theological writing and thinking to the chaplain, as did the rest of the committee.

Planning committee activities included a campus-wide conference on vocation that was meant to teach the community about the importance of callings. This included students as well as staff, but it was not well-attended. Planning also involved groups of HBU leaders visiting other campuses to learn their academic and religious programs. The planning year also included two trips where HBU's chaplain took groups of students to conferences for the purposes of getting them off campus and expanding their horizons.

It is clear from the findings of this case study that learning is highly contextual, as was every attribute of the planning processes at these three very different colleges and universities. More telling about the unique nature of the relationship between learning and change, however, was the distinct categories into which learning fell:

- Learning about vocation,
- Learning about their own contexts, and
- Learning about other campus' programs.

UCU was especially strong in the first category and gave an enormous amount of time to discussing the

meaning of vocation, perhaps because of the stereotype it, as a Catholic institution, needed to overcome related to avowed religious life. PC's process diligently included all three types of knowledge acquisition strategies, possibly because of its highly-academic, learning-oriented campus culture. HBU engaged in the second and third practices but, in part due to traditional deference to clergy in the Black Christian Church, defining vocation was left to the chaplain.

One could call the three categories of learning which emerged from the study "grounded theory" on learning and change. The data emerging from the case study suggest that learning of particular types are useful to planning for change, and the categories thus can be applied to leading change in other situations, especially when urgency will not allow for learning to emerge over a long period of time. The three findings from the case study can be articulated more generally this way:

- Learning about current theoretical writings and research related to the change in question
- Learning about the context's history and culture, and
- Learning about other institutions' programs.

Application of Grounded Theory from Case Study

I am currently attempting to use this grounded theory of learning and change to guide a change initiative in my current ministry. As the Director of Field Education for a seminary, I am responsible for the course that accompanies students' experiences in field education. At my seminary, this course has long been called "Practicum," and I was called upon as the new Director to make changes to the course based on some recent curricular revision and long-lingering concerns about the course.

I did not make the mistake of disposing of the course upon my arrival in this position, but I did make it clear to those leading Practicum groups and to other colleagues that the course would be revised for the second fall of my

tenure. This necessitated fast change, as rolling out a new course that involves numerous students and adjunct faculty members required taking immediate steps. Although one could argue that one year does not qualify as a fast change, I had to bring about change before having had the opportunity to build solid relationships, which caused the change to, if nothing else, *feel* fast.

I designed a three-pronged approach to learning that has thus far guided the restructuring of Practicum, and I adapted the approach from the grounded theory that emerged from the case study. First, I took it upon myself to read as much as I could about the *theory* supporting integrative learning in today's seminaries, asking colleagues for book recommendations and charging myself with becoming an expert in this area of ministerial leadership development.

Second, I set about understanding the history *and* context surrounding the course. I gathered documents related to Practicum and asked some long-time instructors in the course to work together to write a course history of Practicum. I spent time working with the seminary's Dean and faculty colleagues to understand the role the course has played in the curriculum. I connected with students taking the course and those who had taken the course previously through a focus group and two surveys, seeking to learn about their experiences.

Third, I have enlisted the help of a Practicum leader who recently received her Doctor of Ministry to assist me in a year-long study of *what other seminaries do* by way of a course related to field education. We will work together to create our own typology of integrative seminars, thus defining the options our seminary can consider when designing a new course for the future. In order to do this, we must understand as much as we can about the approaches to integrative learning of partner seminaries and how they have structured their field education course offerings.

In short, I initiated a systematic learning process grounded in the three categories that emerged from the case study on the PTEV. I set about learning the theory

that under girds the necessity of a field education integrative seminar, the history, and context of the course in this particular place, and the types of courses being offered in similar seminaries. The three categories of learning that emerged from my study helped me to initiate change quickly without irrational fear that I was missing something, or that a threat might lurk in one of my blind spots.

Conclusions

I therefore propose that this approach to fast change be used as one of the tools at the disposal of the ministerial leader in a setting that requires this sort of leadership.[16] For the pastor, agency director, or chaplain who must bring about change quickly, learning about current research and thinking, context/history, and other programs can help them to prevent the damage that often accompanies hasty change in a religious institution. Learning along these lines can address all three of the fears underlying the "three year rule" types of advice:

- <u>Fear that a change might signal arrogance on the part of the minister</u>. By assuming a posture of learning, the minister demonstrates that she or he wishes to approach change thoughtfully rather than arrogantly. To proceed first as a learner rather than as a change leader, the minister shows a congregation that he or she understands that the community is unique and must be understood before it can be led.

- <u>Fear that a change might suggest disrespect for one's predecessor</u>. By seeking to understand why one's predecessor made the choices he or she did, the ministerial leader shows a faith community

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[16] Other tools might include "step-by-step" change models, such as those suggested by John P. Kotter, *Leading Change*. (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), and Gary Hamel, *Leading the Revolution*. (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2000). Some have criticized a "step-by-step" approach (Fullan, *Leading in a Culture of Change*.), but they arguably are, if nothing else, thought-provoking.

that he or she trusts that the person made choices thoughtfully, doing what seemed right at the time. Excellent ministers, write Jones and Armstrong, are "interpreters." "Interpreters who cultivate continuity with tradition display a trust that our predecessors have also sought to be faithful, amidst the challenges and sins that mark all of our lives."[17]

- <u>Fear that change might demonstrate an undemocratic, authoritarian leadership style to lay leaders.</u> By necessity, at least one of the categories of learning suggested here requires active participation of the entire community in learning: the minister cannot learn the history and context of a program within a ministry setting without the help of those who have lived it. Ideally, however, members of the community can be involved with each form of learning. In the PTEV planning processes described here, active dialogue around the meaning of vocation became of a form of group learning, and travel to various PTEV programs gave a community a sense of what was possible.

A ministerial leader who has no choice but to bring about change quickly can rely upon learning in these three forms to keep him- or herself disciplined, so that fast change is as thoughtful and careful as possible:

- Learn the theory base that supports the change you wish to make,
- Learn about the history and context in which the change needs to happen,
- Learn about what other programs in similar institutions are doing or how colleagues in other places are addressing the same problem.

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[17] L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 131.

Sometimes three years in a setting can help a leader to be sure that she or he is not a leading change whose repercussions are a mystery. But when those three years are not available, living by the adage, "Never tear down a fence until you know why the fence was there in the first place," can be of great assistance. Whereas a time-bound rule can be rigid, restrictive, and grounded in fear of change, a learning-oriented approach to change can be adapted to any ministry context, celebrating the potential of the context by trusting that God has a plan that is ours to discover and interpret.