MULTI-LAYERED LEADERSHIP:
THE CHRISTIAN LEADER AS BUILDER, SHEPHERD, AND GARDENER
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There was a morning-after feeling of listless worry as the Reverend Dawn Lee asked the board members to take their seats. They gathered for a hastily-called meeting at the Elizabeth United Methodist Church on a Tuesday morning before work. They were there to discuss the previous day's sad news. The congregation is located in what was once an agricultural hamlet forty miles outside of Los Angeles. Over time Elizabeth grew from a village to a town, and then became a neighborhood of shops and apartments as urban sprawl overtook it. In the last few years, Elizabeth was dwarfed by the bedroom communities and commuter colonies that surround it. The neighborhood retained something of its small-town feel, however, because of its downtown shopping district, an area anchored by the Elizabeth Church, on one side of the quaint gazebo, and the Elizabeth Printing Company's phone book print facility, on the other. In fact, the two pillars of the community were so closely connected that parishioners often parked their cars behind the print plant on Sunday mornings. The board meeting was necessary because the plant was closing.

It had come as a surprise to everyone when the Elizabeth Company announced on Monday that it would close the phone book print facility and move its operations to a new, computerized plant a few miles away in the burgeoning suburb of Santa Eugenia. Everyone in the neighborhood had, of course, known about the new plant. They even took pride in it. The original purpose of the new plant (dubbed by local pundits, Elizabeth the Second) had been to expand the company's work into the specialty newspaper business. The plant would print small-run papers aimed at narrow audiences like soy bean farmers and pipe-fitters. Everyone thus took the company spokesman, Daniel Scott, at his word when he told them over a year ago that the company had no plans to close the older facility. "Elizabeth the First," he jovially said at the time, "will always be the queen of our operations." But the lifeless plant was already surrounded with a chained-link fence to keep vandals out. Dawn Lee could look out the window and plainly see that the queen was dead.

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"Should a pastor be an entrepreneurial leader or a loving shepherd," the popular Christian magazine asked, "a person who casts a vision or cares for broken people?"[1] The editors had assembled a special issue on leadership development and they wished to know which leadership style was more appropriate for a minister. So they set up a debate. The first respondent favored the Shepherd style. "Shepherds endear themselves to their flocks," he wrote, pointing out that a "ministry of presence" will have a more profound effect on people than will the programs a minister develops or the sermons she preaches. Warning readers not to "model their style after the megachurch pastors [who act like] CEOs," he concluded that his congregation grew not because of "my ability as a speaker or administrator, but [because of] my role as a servant-shepherd."[2]

The second respondent, of course, championed the Builder role for the leader.[3] He did so by focusing not on the well-being of particular individuals but on the health of the entire congregation. He also emphasized results over process. "The bottom line," he said (using a phrase common among Builders), "is that leaderless organizations don't work." Here he was echoing the sentiments in one of the most popular ministry books, Kennon L. Callahan's *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church*.[4] Callahan says pointedly, "Local congrega-

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[1]   "Shepherd or Leaders? Which is Job for Today's Pastor?" *Leadership Journal* (Fall 1996): 48ff.

[2]   There are two literatures being referenced here. First, there is the secular literature on "Servant Leadership" that comes from Robert Greenleaf and his disciples. The language of servant leadership resonates with many Christians because of the Old Testament tradition of the "suffering servant" and the New Testament call to be servants or slaves (Greek *doulos*) of Christ. Ironically, there may be some significant tensions between the Biblical understanding of servanthood and what Greenleaf means by servant leadership. But these are often conflated because of the vocabulary.
        The other important literature being referenced here is the post-World War II tradition of making pastoral care the most important responsibility of a minister. The literature on pastoral care is large, and not all of it demands that pastoral care dominate all other pastoral duties. But, as a backlash against hierarchical authoritarianism, many scholars have come to see that pastor primarily as a gentle shepherd nurturing a congregational flock. On Greenleaf, see for example, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977); H.B. London, "Why Pastors Must be Shepherds," *Leadership Journal* (Fall 1996): 48.

[3]   James Emery White, "Why Pastors Must be Leaders," *Leadership Journal* (Fall 1996): 48.

[4]   Kennon L. Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1983).

tions need more leaders and fewer enablers," using his own disdainful word for the Shepherd style. The very health of the church is at stake, he roars, because, "whenever the concept of the enabler has been linked with nondirective counseling techniques, the local church has suffered from dysfunctional leadership." Like the Shepherd proponent, he finally appeals to numbers to support his position. "The reactive, responsive, process-centered style of leadership," he charges, leads to "declining or dying congregations." He would rather be a Builder than a Shepherd.

So which leadership style befits a minister? Perhaps neither one works, at least that is what some recent authors believe. For example, Robert Dale, in *Leadership for a Changing Church,* discards both the Shepherd and the Builder model. "An entirely different leadership paradigm is arising," he proclaims. "Leaders now make sense rather than make [decisions]. More accurately, they make meaning."[5] This is what Max DePree meant when he said, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality."[6] And it is the sentiment out of which John Robert McFarland wrote, "The popular CEO and enabler models of ministry don't work [because] we are called to be God's prophets…in the biblical sense [of] 'speaking for God.'"[7]

A fitting image for this third model is the Gardener who tills the soil and cultivates the environment – for the Gardener acknowledges that he can only evoke growth, he can never produce it. The vocabulary that a minister plants in the congregation, the stories that she sows, and the theological categories that she cultivates, bear fruit when the people use those categories to make sense of the world around them. Sermons then become an opportunity for the Gardener to prepare the environment by weeding out some interpretations and planting others. For example, when a California law proposed to eliminate some rights for illegal immigrants, one pastor stood in the pulpit and said, "God repeatedly told God's people, 'Do

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5   Robert Dale, *Leadership for a Changing Church: Charting the Shape of the River* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 18.
6   Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1989), 11.
7   John Robert McFarland, "We Are Called to Be God's Prophets: Why the popular CEO and enabler models of ministry don't work," *Christian Ministry* (September-October 1998): 34-37.

not oppress the widows, orphans, and aliens in your midst.'" And, whether or not one agrees or disagrees with that pastor's politics, it is clear that he was giving people theological categories to make sense out of the questions that occupy them. That is how the Gardener model of ministry makes meaning: by planting vocabulary, sowing stories, and cultivating theological categories that congregants use to interpret the world around them.

Thus there are at least three leadership models competing for a minister's attention: the pastoral Shepherd, the productive Builder, and the meaning-making Gardener. Which one fits for ministry in the new century? Which one will benefit Rev. Dawn Lee as she settles in with her bleary-eyed board at the Elizabeth church?

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Everyone who reads this journal cares about good Christian leadership, about how it is practiced, and about how it is formed. And we all have at least a basic idea of what we mean by Christian leadership.[8] We all know that ministers have tremendous leadership responsibilities and we know that not everyone who leads is ordained. There is even something of an implicit consensus about good leadership. Most observers would say that good pastoral leaders have a call from God, a vision for mission, a heart for people, and an ability to get things done.

Even this rudimentary consensus, however, is based on a few basic assumptions about how leadership works. We assume, for example, that solutions exist for the problems churches face. We further assume that it is the minister's responsibility either to solve those problems or to empower others to solve them. And, of course, we assume that the best way for scholars to serve those decision-making ministers and people-empowering pastors is to provide them with resources in the form of ideas and techniques.

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8   Although the purpose of the journal is to include discussion of a broad range of understandings of religion, this article is written from a Christian context and can claim to speak with confidence only to that audience.

We take these assumptions for granted. And, in doing so, I believe we assume too much. Solutions rarely exist for our most important problems. Programs often accomplish little and a large portion of people do not really want to be empowered. So the minister can neither solve the problem herself nor empower others to do so. And in such cases neither ideas nor techniques will do more than give the appearance of help. As we shall see, the resourcing model of leadership and leadership education is only sporadically effective. Our assumptions foster a limited understanding of Christian leadership.

I want, therefore, to expand our notions of Christian leadership and then to suggest ways that theological educators can form leaders who will live into this expanded conception of what Christian leadership can and should be. The essay will come in two parts. This first essay will deal with the nature of Christian leadership, while the second essay will address the formation of these leaders.

The argument of this first essay divides into four sections. In the beginning, I will quickly explain the way that most people understand leadership, showing that leaders normally choose either to be a Builder who makes decisions or to be a Shepherd who empowers people. Then, I will show how what scholars call "ambiguity" and "adaptive challenges" render these decision-making and people-empowering models of leadership to be special cases that work best only under very specific conditions. The next section will develop a third model of leadership. It will argue that in conditions of ambiguity and when addressing adaptive challenges, leaders need to be Gardeners that cultivate congregational cultures, and not just decision-making Builders or people-empowering Shepherds. Finally, the concluding section will show how the three models – the Builder, the Shepherd, and the Gardener – relate to each other. Some have called the models "styles" that a minister fits to her personality. Others have called them "frames" that a pastor sees through depending on a situation. But I will argue that they are layers – and that the advanced leader must work in each layer simultaneously because each is present in every ministering situation. I believe we assume too much about Christian leadership and I hope to initiate a conversation about how we might practice and teach an expanded vision of what leadership can and should be.

The debate mentioned at the beginning of this essay is part of a long-running argument within Christian circles about the nature of Christian leadership. One side emphasizes efficacy, longing for leaders who get things done. The other side fears hierarchical domination and emphasizes empowerment rather than efficacy. Each side accepts the dichotomy that Builders tend to be authoritarian and that Shepherds have a hard time getting things done. That is why the Gardener model has gathered a following. But proponents of all the models take for granted that each one stands over against the others, begging the question, is one really best?

I intend to argue eventually that neither is adequate unto itself and that each one forms a piece of the answer. But before I can do that, I need to be more clear about what each model stands for and what makes each appealing. Perhaps the best way to contrast the models is to show how each one would approach exactly the same situation.

I. The Decision-Making Builder

In order to understand how the three leadership models differ from each other, let us take up Rev. Dawn Lee's experience in Elizabeth. The essay will present the case so that it demonstrates how she would act if she embodied each of the three models. In this section, we will present Rev. Lee as working within the Builder's organizational model of leadership. Then we will use her example to explain the model in detail. Ensuing sections will show how she would have acted if she were working within the Shepherd's interpersonal model or the Gardener's symbolic model. We begin from the builder's perspective.

> *"Thank you for coming out so early," the pastor said by way of introduction. "I know your time is short. So I will summarize where we are. I'll tell you what we know so far, I'll ask for your comment, and then we can set a course of action." Even without an agenda, Reverend Lee kept the group on pace. "I talked last night with our Lay Leader (Eugene Reed) and with the chair of the Church and Society Committee, who I believe will have the lead on any action we choose to take as a congregation. I also talked with Daniel Scott (the company vice-president who was also on the church board), who for obvious reasons could not be here this morning." The pastor's innate feel-*

ing of responsibility for her parish gave her cadence a sense of urgency.

"We know that the plant is closed with no plan for re-opening it. At first, a number of the older workers tried to protest when they learned they'd be laid off. But that's going nowhere. On the other hand, at least a few workers are being promoted. I know that Susan Sycamore was offered a chance to train last summer on the new equipment and it seems she is now being rewarded for her efforts." She checked her notes before continuing. "I am going to ask Eugene to speak and then turn it over to Alan Albright and Church and Society."

"We need to do something before Sunday," the Lay Leader began. "Many people read the LA Times and don't get local news. They are going to drive in Sunday and find the parking lot all fenced in. And it's going to hit them pretty hard." Eugene then looked over at Alan Albright.

"The Church and Society Committee believes that the congregation has to take some kind of leadership on this issue. Everyone's afraid that the old building will become a 'haven for crime and a magnet for vandals' – at least that's what this morning's paper says. They say this is the beginning of the neighborhood's 'long and tragic descent into decay.' I mean look at the headline, 'Is It Time to Bury Elizabeth?' We have to take some action and we have to do it now." The statement prompted a spirited discussion.

"I have a suggestion," Reverend Lee said a few minutes later. "The church newsletter is scheduled to go out this afternoon. I plan to write a letter that we can include in that mailing. It should arrive in people's homes tomorrow or Thursday. I will tell people to gather at the church Thursday night so that we can present a plan of action. In the meantime, I'd like to ask Alan's Church and Society Committee to come up with that plan. I will work with you, and I believe Eugene will want to be involved as well." The Lay Leader nodded. "We have a strong organizational structure so that we can respond quickly to emergencies such as this. Each of you heads a committee or represents a constituency that has something to offer. Please let Alan know how you or your folks can help." After a few questions, the meeting adjourned.

The Builder model says that leaders inspire action by making decisions and building structures. It is an organizational approach in that it sees the minister as the head of an organizational structure. Indeed, the model deemphasizes personal qualities such as gifts or callings and sees each orga-

nizational actor in terms of their role and responsibilities. So, for example, Rev. Lee does not refer to Eugene Reed by name but looks on him as the Lay Leader – emphasizing the prerogatives of his position rather than the uniqueness of his personality. By the same notion, a Builder's response to difficulty is to mobilize the organization and to work through committees. That is why the pastor asks Church and Society to formulate a plan.

The chief responsibility of the Builder begins with defining the goals of the organization. That is because the Builder believes that each individual will subordinate his/her own goals to those of the organization. Once the goals are defined, the Builder aligns the structure of the organization with those goals. So, for example, Rev. Lee expects the Lay Leader to help the congregation meet the crisis in such a way as to contribute to the overall mission of the congregation. The Builder then continues the progression by assigning organizational roles to fit the responsibilities of the structure. Thus, the Builder exercises her responsibilities by defining the organization's goals, aligning the structure with those goals, and then defining people's role to fit within the structure.

There are a number of Biblical precedents that illustrate the Builder model. The most common examples are Nehemiah and Jethro. Nehemiah took charge. He quietly assessed what was needed. He collected the resources. And only then did he gather the people to tell them what needed to be done. He even used a hierarchical division of labor to assign work on the walls. Likewise, Builders celebrate Jethro's advice to Moses. He told his son-in-law how to divide the people so that the burden did not fall to one man alone. When Builders look to the Bible, they see heroes like Nehemiah and Jethro.

The way that someone working out of the Builder model of leadership sees the very nature of organizations distinguishes her from those working out of other models. Builders see the organization as a structure. They emphasize denominational polity and the roles that it assigns for governance (e.g. elders, deacons, and bishops). They emphasize structural resources such as dollars, votes, land, and buildings – tangible things that do not need to be interpreted. And they

believe that the organization excels when they get the right people in the right roles pursuing the right goals.

This is why Rev. Lee asked a committee to come up with a plan in advance of the public meeting. She believed that leaders should set the proper direction and create the strategy, and then present that plan to the people. Indeed, her final words of encouragement to the church board show where she had placed her trust. "We have a strong organizational structure," she reminded her charges. So she felt confident that the congregation could "respond quickly to emergencies such as this." As a Builder, she believed in making decisions.

II. The People-Empowering Shepherd Model

Most ministers believe that they have to choose between the Builder model that we just observed and the Shepherd model of leadership. The most straight-forward way to compare these models is to tell the same story with the same main character, Rev. Dawn Lee. But this time we will tell it as if she adopted the interpersonal Shepherd model instead of the administrative Builder model. That means starting at the beginning because Rev. Lee would act differently from the start.

> As the board members trudged in, Pastor Dawn greeted them by name. She had talked to many of them the night before, and a few already this morning. "Let us begin with a prayer today," she opened, "for those who lost their jobs yesterday, especially for the older workers who likely will have trouble finding work." After the prayer, she turned to the business at hand.

> "Eugene suggested that we gather this morning," she said with a nod to the Lay Leader, "and I appreciate that. We have some really hurting folks in our community today. I walked out to the plant yesterday as the workers who had been discharged tried to mount a protest. They were too distraught. They felt betrayed and confused. They need our prayers. But there are others as well. Many of you know that our dear Daniel Scott is bearing the brunt of this. It was his job to announce the lay-offs even though he'd been the one who fought hardest against them. And Susan Sycamore must be feeling an odd assortment of guilt and joy today." Her voice trickled off as she thought about her flock.

There was a moment of hesitation as Eugene Reed took over the meeting. "We need to do something before Sunday," he began. "Many people read the LA Times and don't get local news. They are going to drive in Sunday and find the parking lot all fenced in. And it's going to hit them pretty hard. What do you guys think?"

"Dawn, I am a bit confused," Alan Albright said. "I did not know that Daniel Scott had opposed the lay-offs. Can you say more about that? If he did, then he can be a resource for us."

"Oh, I think Daniel would love to help us," the pastor said earnestly. "We talked for quite awhile yesterday, a couple of times in fact. He told me that the best he could do in the end was to get the severance and pension commitments from the company. Poor guy…he kept telling me about his dad." And then she repeated the conversation silently in her mind.

Daniel had said, "My Dad, Mick, used to be a foreman at the plant. And he thought of the people at Elizabeth as his people. So he'd take it upon himself to round up the workers and herd them off to church whenever he could. He thought it was part of his duty as a foreman. That's where I got a lot of my sense of responsibility for the workers. He thought of himself as their papa. And he thought that gave him the right to intrude into their lives if need be. And somehow he had the personality – the demeanor – to get away with it. No one seemed to think him manipulative or high-handed. If a guy was drinking away the rent, he'd do things like cut out a part of the guy's paycheck and deliver the rest of it to the guy's wife in the form of groceries – always with more food than that money should have been able to buy. Or if a worker's kid needed new shoes, somehow he'd know and make sure that someone dropped by with an old pair that could be polished up." Dawn recalled the catch in Daniel's voice before he continued. "My Dad was so proud the day that I got promoted to vice-president at Elizabeth. It was about eight years ago, and only about a month before he died. We sat in his hospital room telling stories about the old days at Elizabeth. I realized later that in almost all the stories there was --- well, there was this theme that bosses did stupid things that screwed up workers' lives. And I came to think of being a manager as kind of like being a doctor. You know the first rule of being a doctor, don't ya? The first rule is 'do no harm.' So a doc can't make things worse and that's my job, to make sure that the lives of my people get better not worse." Dawn could tell that he felt he had violated that code.

After Dawn had silently recounted Daniel's story, she snapped back to the meeting. She asked the board what the church should do. "This church belongs to you," she said, "and these people are your people." It was not that she did not have ideas herself on what to do. She simply believed that the community should take responsibility for itself. After a few minutes of discussion, someone suggested that the pastor write a letter to the congregation that could go out with the soon-to-be mailed newsletter. "Alright," Dawn said, "I'll invite anyone who wants to help to come out to a meeting on Thursday night here at the church. We need to do what we can for these people." When the meeting adjourned, she made an appointment to check-in with Daniel Scott.

The Shepherd model of leadership says that the way to inspire action is by empowering people. It is a pastoral care approach to leadership in that it sees the minister as the communal counselor for the congregation. The Shepherd leader emphasizes relationships rather than roles, people rather than positions.

The chief responsibilities of the Shepherd are to empower individuals and to design processes not structures. The Shepherd believes that the people define the goals of the organization and that organizational goals are the sum of individual goals. So, for example, if two people have competing goals for the congregation the Shepherd will encourage them both, trusting that eventually the church will be better for having empowered its members. By contrast, the Builder would have listened carefully to each goal and then explained which one fit with the congregation's larger (and more important) goal. The Shepherd would nurture both parties, while the Builder might end up nurturing neither one. If, however, the Shepherd found that the two parties were getting in each other's way or that the competition had become detrimental to each, then the Shepherd would design a process (but not a permanent structure) to adjudicate between the competing members.

The Biblical precedents cherished by Shepherds begin, of course, with Jesus. He is the Great Shepherd who lays down his life for the flock and who leaves the ninety-nine to rescue the one lost sheep. And he is the one who said to Simon Peter, "If you love me, feed my sheep." A Shepherd

points to Jesus' gentleness in dealing with the Samaritan woman at the well and the humility it took to wash his disciples' feet. These are the models that Shepherds hope to emulate.

Shepherds take a very different view of organizations than Builders do. Shepherds emphasize participatory governance (whether or not it fits nicely with denominational polity). They subscribe, whether they know it or not, to the motivational premise that years ago Douglas McGregor called Theory Y.[9]   He said, in 1960, that most managers (Builder-types) assume that people cannot be trusted because unsupervised workers shirk their responsibilities. He said that this oversight policy, which he called Theory X, was a self-fulfilling prophecy. He believed that people who are treated poorly, do poor work. So he offered a new theory. He assumed that people wanted to do a good job, but that they needed only to be properly channeled. He suggested that the organization can and should be a place where people can achieve the goals that matter most to them.

This means as well that the Shepherd places great emphasis on training people for their jobs.   Whereas the Builder looked for people suited to fill organizational roles, the Shepherd looks for people who can grow into their callings.   Shepherds assume that underachievers need teaching not re-assignment. And that is because they believe that the congregation's primary resources are not buildings or bank accounts.   They are people, relationships, and processes. Shepherds see the organization not as a structure built of roles but as a community defined by its relationships.

Thus Pastor Dawn sees the plant closing through the eyes of the people it affects. She prays for the displaced workers. She empathizes with Susan Sycamore's contradictory feelings. And she is especially concerned for Daniel Scott. In fact, she has come to see the whole situation through Daniel's eyes. That is why she will call him once more as soon as the meeting adjourns. And as a Shepherd, Pastor Dawn wants to let the board decide how best to address the situation. She has pointed them to the suffering and, in the

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[9]   McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960); see also Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

end, she tells them that "these people are your people." Pastor Dawn is a shepherd and she wants her church board members to be shepherds too.

III. *Why the Builder and the Shepherd Models Ultimately Fail*

The Builder and the Shepherd models of leadership are easily the most prevalent leadership models in American Christianity. But there is a problem with them. The Builder model and the Shepherd model deteriorate under certain organizational conditions, conditions that, unfortunately, are quite common in churches and seminaries. Scholars call these conditions ambiguity and adaptive change. Furthermore, scholars have discovered that the empowerment model as it is usually practiced depends on assumptions that do not hold in voluntary associations such as congregations. This section will explain these organizational deterrents to the decision-making and people-empowering models. It will then set the stage for explaining why a third model is necessary.

Ambiguity

Michael D. Cohen and James G. March wrote in 1974 a study of college presidents that is still in print a generation later. They described a series of problems in colleges. The study endures because the problems characterize a host of organizations, especially congregations. They used the term "ambiguity" to describe organizational conditions of unclear goals, uncertain technologies, and multiple constituencies. The concept of ambiguity calls into question the basic assumption of the Builder and Shepherd models, which assume that unclear goals, for example, should simply be clarified by the effective leader. Ambiguity refers to organizational conditions where it is impossible to clarify goals, define technologies and align constituencies. Let me explain what this means.

Unclear goals: It is not possible to clarify the most cherished goals that animate congregations. For example, most pastors acknowledge that numerical growth is not their ultimate goal. What they aim for is spiritual growth. They are pleased when greater numbers of people join their churches and occupy their pews. But it is only because the pastors believe that these new parishioners will encounter the Spirit of

God while they sit in those pews. The ultimate goal, they agree, is spiritual growth.

But spiritual growth is hard to define and even harder to measure. Pastors cannot know what is happening week to week in the minds and hearts of those who hear their sermons. Are congregants there to worship God or are they merely engaged in a cultural ritual? Even the congregant often has a hard time answering that question. Spiritual growth is a problematic organizational goal because it cannot be defined, measured, or even observed.

The other ultimate goals that matter most in churches are just as hard to clarify. What exactly is social justice and how will we know when it is increasing? We can observe proxies such as the easing of homelessness or a decline in the poverty rate, but these are mere shadows cast by this elusive thing we hope for called justice. Or, what of the most cherished goal of pastoral shepherds, personal growth? What exactly does it mean for a person to become more whole or to experience the love of God more fully? We can talk around it. But we cannot in the end say if someone is growing. We leave that to God.

Now let me be clear. I am not saying that these goals are wrong. Indeed, I believe that congregations and ministers share a spiritual mandate—and a divine responsibility—to pursue exactly these indefinable goals.

My point is this. The Shepherd and Builder models assume goals are unambiguous. But they are not, which means that it is dangerous to assume they are. In other words, the fact that congregational goals are unclear (i.e. they cannot ever be clarified precisely) severely limits the Builder and Shepherd models of leadership. For example, the Builder model is based on the premise that the pastor can and should make decisions that will enable the congregation to move closer to its most cherished goals. The Builder model says that the world provides feedback and that the Builder should continue programs that work and discontinue those that are failing. And the Shepherd model calls on a pastor to help people live out their God-given callings. But how will that pastor know if her decisions are paying dividends? And what can she observe that will tell her that people are really being empowered? The ultimate goals are simply too vague to pro-

vide the feedback that the Builder and the Shepherd models require.

Uncertain technology. Churches not only have unclear ends, they have uncertain means. The word "technology" in this case refers to the mechanism by which means lead unavoidably to specific ends. So if a person had a broken arm, the technology applied would be a cast. Likewise, if a city wanted to get cars to stop at an uncontrolled intersection, the technology they might apply would be a stop sign. And a stop sign is a fairly trustworthy technology, meaning that a city could trust that installing a stop sign would ensure that the vast majority of cars would stop at the corner.

Churches rely on far less certain technologies. For example, when a congregation decides it wants to grow, that congregation might initiate an outreach program intended to bring neighbors into the church. There is no guarantee that the technology (i.e., the outreach program) will do what it intends. Even a perfectly executed program might fail to accomplish its goals for reasons beyond the congregation's control. But the problem gets worse. Think about the technology of preaching. Its goal is to inspire people to love God and serve neighbors. How that happens is not well-understood. We have all known, for example, excellent preachers whose congregations never quite got the message. Or consider prayer. All Christian traditions teach their people to pray. But how prayer works is not exactly clear. Few Christians would say that prayer obligates God to do our bidding. And conversely, few Christians would say that prayer is merely self-talk. So almost all Christians believe that prayer does something, but few of us can say with any confidence precisely what happens when we pray. Our most trusted technologies—prayer, preaching, programs—do not lead to unambiguous ends.

The Builder and Shepherd models, however, operate as if these technologies are transparent. For example, the Builder model assumes that when the pastor makes a decision, it is not difficult to initiate his will. The important call, according to that model, comes when the Builder decides to enact the outreach program. It assumes that the success or failure of the decision depends on how well (i.e. how effectively) the program is executed. Likewise, the Shepherd model, which emphasized process, assumes that good

processes will protect people. But we all know that such is not always true. The Builder and the Shepherd model assume that spiritual technologies are unambiguous, when in reality they often lead to unpredictable results.

Multiple constituencies. The third characteristic of ambiguity is multiple constituencies. Not only are goals unclear, they are also defined differently by the various constituencies within a congregation. For example, a congregation may decide that one of its primary goals is to enable its people to worship God in spirit and in truth. The problem is that, for example, the youth and the senior citizens will likely have a very different definition of what worship means. So even as the pastor is getting feedback from one group that the worship experience is improving, the other group might be complaining to the pastor about the exact same experience. In similar manner, the techniques or technologies that work with one constituency will not work—or will not work in the same way—with another constituency. Again, think of the youth and seniors. A Builder cannot expect a program that works with one to work as well with the other. And a Shepherd cannot trust that youth will feel empowered by the same mechanisms that empower seniors.[10]

In short, ambiguity means that a congregation's most cherished goals are beyond our capacity to understand, its most trusted technologies do not lead to predictable ends, and its various constituencies have conflicting interpretations of success and failure.

Adaptive Change

Ambiguity is not, however, the only reason the Shepherd and Builder models often fail. Another involves the difference between technical problems and adaptive challenges. Ronald Heifitz argues that technical problems have known solutions or standard approaches to the problem. A broken toilet presents a technical problem. The pastor can call someone and

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[10] The problem is compounded because each person may reside within multiple constituencies. A grandmother is both a senior and a woman. She may serve on the Worship Committee and sing in the choir. And each of these identities may push her in a different direction. Since we cannot predict which identity will be most salient (nor can she), we cannot predict how she will judge a particular program. Ambiguity works at multiple levels.

believe it will be fixed. If the minister discovers that the elders do not understand the sacraments, she can teach a class for them. Or, if a church decides to initiate a capital campaign, there are experts that the church can call to teach then what they need to know about raising money and building a sanctuary. Technical problems have known solutions and experts who can address them with confidence.[11]

It is not possible, by contrast, for a congregation to solve an adaptive challenge without itself changing. Adaptive challenges[12] arise, according to Heifetz, "when our deeply held beliefs are challenged, when the values that made us successful become less relevant, and when legitimate yet competing perspectives emerge." Such a challenge is "distressing for the people going through it. They need to take on new roles, new relationships, new values, new behaviors, and new approaches to work."[13] And an adaptive problem will not go away no matter how many 'solutions' a congregation throws at it. Hiring a new choir director will not address the generational division in a church that creates a constant tension over worship style. The problem is too disruptive to simply fix.

Consider the outreach program described earlier. Reaching out to one's neighbors is a technical problem when the residents of the neighborhood are culturally similar to the people in the congregation. But if the neighborhood has changed—if, for example, a Hispanic population has moved into a previously Anglo neighborhood—then a simple outreach program will not work. Typically two problems arise. Either the Hispanic neighbors feel uncomfortable in an Anglo church or the Anglo congregants find that the Hispanic neighbors are changing the previously-Anglo service.

The key is the unspoken but tightly-held belief of the Anglo congregants that an outreach program would return the church to "normal." When the pastor calls a plumber to fix

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[11] Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) The fact that these technologies do not always work is not particularly relevant to this discussion. The issue is not efficacy as it was in the previous section. The issue is legitimacy. A technical problem does not cause the self-questioning that an adaptive challenge creates because the leader remains confident that she has legitimate options. When an adaptive challenge arises, the leader has no such options.

[12] The process of addressing adaptive challenges is called adaptive change.

[13] Ronald Heifetz and Donald Laurie, "The Work of Leadership," *Harvard Business Review* (January-February 1997): 124.

the toilet, it is a technical problem because he is confident that one day soon the bathroom will be normal. Likewise, when the attendance dips in a suburban neighborhood, a congregation can reasonably believe that one day soon the attendance will rise again—that is, that things will eventually return to normal. That is what happens with technical problems. With an adaptive challenge, things will never be the same again.

Adaptive change is hard. It asks people to alter behaviors or beliefs that they take for granted. It asks them to change the way that they see the world. Most people do not embrace such change. They need to be led to it. Heifetz points out that when people encounter adaptive challenges they are tempted either to avoidance (which happens when they do not feel the depth of the problem) or flight (when they feel the depth of the problem so much that it overwhelms them).

Forms of avoidance include "scapegoating, denial, focusing only on technical issues, [and] attacking individuals rather than the perspectives they represent." The appropriate remedy to avoidance is to make "people feel the pinch of reality." In other words, point out the internal inconsistencies in their behavior, show them the pain that the problem causes for themselves or others around them, and help them to see that the problem will not go away all on its own. Conflict is then a natural by-product of adaptive work. Leaders are often tempted to resolve too quickly the conflicts that develop. While it is true that the leader should not let the conflicts get out of hand, the leader may actually want to draw the conflicts out so that they continue to remind people of the particular places where work still needs to be done.[14]

Adaptive work also tempts people toward flight. People can become so frightened by an adaptive challenge that they run away from it. It is the opposite of avoidance, although it has the same effect. They feel the problem too deeply and it overwhelms them. This usually happens when a leader pushes people to change too quickly. What Heifetz calls "flight to authority" is a particular temptation in such times. It is the tendency of people to look to the leaders to "solve the problem." People facing adaptive challenges often act like passive fol-

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[14] Heifetz and Laurie, 128.

lowers. They claim that they will do whatever the leader asks of them. And then they blame the leader when she does not take the pain away. Flight to authority inevitably fails, however, for two reasons. First, the situation is not a technical problem that the leader can solve. And, second, it keeps people from doing the hard work of adapting.

Adaptive change undermines the Shepherd and the Builder models because each one tends to enable people to escape adaptive work. The Builder model is premised on the fact that the leader makes decisions. Yet Heifetz's main point is that the only way to defeat avoidance behaviors is to "put the work back on the people." In other words, the people themselves have to come to a conclusion after struggling with the problem. So any decision that the leader makes when encountering an adaptive challenge will inevitably enable a flight to authority. And that sets up blame. The congregation blames the leader for the fact that the problem still exists and the leader blames the congregation for inadequately executing his pristine plan for meeting the challenge. Either way the Builder model fails when it meets an adaptive challenge.

The Shepherd model has just as much difficulty with adaptive change. Shepherds tend to shield their people from pain. They are loathe to, in Heifetz's words, "turn up the heat" and make "people feel the pinch of reality." Shepherds are especially uncomfortable with conflict. They typically design elaborate processes to keep conflict at bay. But Heifetz found that groups working through adaptive change needed to be working through the conflicts that naturally occur when people's assumptions are challenged and their taken-for-granted behaviors are forced to change. Indeed, Nancy Tatom Ammerman discovered the necessity of conflict when she studied congregations in changing communities. In an extremely broad and unprecedented study, she and her team studied congregations in twenty-two communities undergoing significant social change. Some of the congregations adapted to that change, while others never grew beyond it. And a key to their ability to adapt was their experience of conflict. She found that no congregation that adapted did so without conflict and no church without conflict adapted.[15] In other words, Shepherds who protect their congregations from conflict make it impossible for their churches to adapt to significant social change.

Neither the Shepherd model nor the Builder model thrives when faced with adaptive change. Adaptive challenges undermine the Builder's decision-making model and the Shepherd's people-empowering model because the pastor cannot make decisions for the congregation without creating a flight to authority and because the people will not want to be empowered to address the problem (they will want instead to avoid it). Thus each model allows people to escape the hard work of facing the problem and struggling to come up with a new way of living in the midst of the changed reality. Nor does either model do well when faced with ambiguity. The unclear goals, uncertain means, and multiple constituencies erode the assumptions built into each of these models. This means that a third model is necessary.

IV. The Meaning-Making Gardener Model

There has been a growing dissatisfaction with the Builder and Shepherd models. The problem is more basic than an inability to deal with ambiguity and adaptive change. Shepherds claim that Builders are hierarchical and authoritarian, even as Builders claim that Shepherds are sentimental and ineffectual. Meanwhile, experienced pastors struggle to find a way to inspire action that walks a middle ground between these two extremes. Is there a way to inspire collective action without lording over a congregation? Is there are a way to inspire people without losing the initiative for action? The Gardener model argues that the best way to inspire action is to make meaning.

> *"Good morning," Pastor Lee said as she called the sleepy board to attention. "Even though our time is short, I want to begin as we always do with a devotion. It sets the stage for our work and it reminds us that God's love goes out ever before us." People nodded. They were used to her reflective introductions.*
> *"I've been thinking a lot since yesterday's news about our mission, our calling as a congregation. The Bible is filled with people whom God called. You know how much I love the Samuel story about calling the boy by name. And the Moses*

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15 Ammerman, "Skills and Competencies for Managing External and Internal Environments," Unpublished paper presented to the National Seminar on Religious Leadership, Yale University, January 22, 1999; for background on the study that led to these conclusions, see Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

story, about how God uses even reluctant prophets. But you've not really heard me talk much about Esther. I've never really liked the Esther story because God seemed so hidden. The book never even mentions God. After all, it seems like it's the rulers of the land who have all the power – just as it seems the Elizabeth Company holds all the cards. But in the midst of this seemingly secular story, Mordecai has a word for the queen. 'Perhaps you have been given power for such a time as this,' he says." The pastor paused and looked around the room. "For such a time as this," she said quietly. "For such a time as this." Then she shifted gears.

"When I came to this church," she continued with a new energy in her voice, "I asked people to tell me how this has been a church we can all be proud of. I wanted to know a bit about our congregational calling – our church's vocation. And I got all sorts of answers." She looked around the room for the Lay Leader. "You remember what you said, Eugene," she said with a twinkle in her eye. He nodded.

"Eugene told me about the Turtle Creek fire. He said, 'About ten years ago, probably more like fifteen, they built these apartments called Turtle Creek. Not the best you've ever seen, certainly not the worst. Mostly older people moved into them, lots of widows in one-room units. But not long after they were filled up, there was a big fire. About half the units burned. No one died, fortunately...although one fireman had to carry two old sisters down a flight of burning stairs. He just scooped them up, one in each arm.'" The pastor laughed. "Eugene always tells about the sisters on the stairs."

"Anyway," Dawn continued, "Eugene said that the Red Cross set up a disaster center down at the school. But that was only temporary. Many of these people — mostly women — did not have family to stay with in the area. So a number of church people took them into their homes — some for many months – until they could figure out what to do. Mick Scott organized the Elizabeth workers to donate used blankets, lamps, kitchen utensils, you know, stuff that you'd get at a garage sale. Then the people did not have to start from scratch. The church collected the stuff and distributed it. And the pastor – that's when Luke Chen was here -- got a couple of doctors to look after some of the women who could not afford the health care they needed. Pastor Chen even found a lawyer – someone the bishop knew -- who would help the little old ladies fend off all the ambulance chasers who wanted to take advantage of them. Most of those women have passed on now, although Birtie Blaines was one of them." The pastor paused to

*let everyone know she had finished telling Eugene's story. And
then she returned to her theme, "Perhaps we are here for such
a time as this."*

*Pastor Lee then opened a discussion on the Elizabeth
plant. Some people lamented the problems the plant closing
would create for the neighborhood and the congregation.
Someone else mentioned the newspaper headline. And others
expressed a desire to do something, although they eventually
admitted that they did not have any answers. Most people's
mood matched the dreary morning sky.*

*But not Eugene Reed. He was twitching with excitement.
"Don't you see," he almost shouted, "the pastor's right. This is
just like the Turtle Creek fire. Our neighborhood needs us. We
don't yet know what they need. But we did not really have
much of a plan immediately after the fire. All we did was gath-
er people together to see what we could do. And the plan
emerged." People started nodding, albeit tentatively, as
Eugene spoke. The momentum had changed. Hope had re-
entered the room.*

*After much discussion, Eugene asked the pastor to write
down her devotional thoughts about Esther and Turtle Creek so
that they could go out with the church newsletter. And he
asked her to invite people to gather on Thursday night. He even
added a note of his own to Pastor Lee's letter. "The communi-
ty has turned to us before in it's time of need," he said, "And
the church exists for such a time as this."*

The Gardener model inspires action by making meaning
-- where meaning making refers to the "process of creating
names, interpretations, and commitments."[16] This model takes
a homiletic approach to leadership in that it sees the leader as
theological interpreter, a prophet who points to God. The
Gardener plants vocabulary, sows stories, and cultivates theo-
logical categories that bear fruit when the congregation uses
those words, stories, and categories to interpret their world.
The Gardener believes that when congregants have a different
view of the world, they will then take different action.

Gardeners rely heavily on stories and rituals to create
this interpretive environment.[17] When Nathan the Prophet

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[16] Wilfred Drath and Charles Paulus, *Making Common Sense: Leadership as
Meaning-making in a Community of Practice* (Greensboro, NC: Center for
Creative Leadership, 2001 [1994]), 9.

[17] Indeed, there is even an implied narrative structure in the concept of meaning
making itself. Wilfred Drath, for instance, says that making meaning "is the

came to King David, for example, he was exercising such leadership. Nathan told the king a story about a rich man who steals another person's only lamb. That made the king angry because the king could feel the injustice implicit in the disparity of power. The king saw Nathan's story not only as an affront to Israel's laws but also as a distortion of God's hope for the people. In other words, Nathan gave the king a language for condemning all such acts. That is when Nathan could say to the king that David was the criminal in the story, that he had stolen not a lamb but Uriah's bride, Bathsheba. And the story pierced David's heart. Nathan could not command the king nor could he openly condemn the king. He did not have the authority that a Builder would need in order to act in such a situation. And the Shepherd model would not work for him either, since the king, of all people, did not need to be empowered. Indeed, his sin was an abuse of power. Instead the prophet forced the king to feel Heifetz's "pinch of reality." Nathan's simple story makes it impossible for David to escape his own responsibility because it changed the categories the king used to interpret his own actions. He came to call those deeds 'sin' and that realization led to repentance. That is what the Gardener model of leadership can do.

Gardeners take a different view of organizations. While Builders see organizations as structures and Shepherds see organizations as communities, Gardeners see organizations as cultures.[18] Cultures are rife with rituals and unspoken rules.

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process of arranging our understanding of experience so that we can know what has happened and what is happening, and so that we can predict what will happen; it is constructing knowledge of oneself and the world." The past (what happened), the present (what is happening), and the future (what will happen) form the beginning, middle, and end of a story. And any first grader knows that every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end – and that once you string together a coherent beginning, middle, and end, then you have a story. Drath and Paulus, 2; see also, Drath, *The Deep Blue Sea: Rethinking the Source of Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001) and Drath, "Changing Our Minds about Leadership," *Issues and Observations*, Volume 16, Number 1 (Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership, 1996), n.p.

[18] This cultural view of organizations changes, for example, the way that Gardeners would encounter the differences we mentioned earlier between youth and seniors. The Gardener would simply see them as two among many subcultures in a congregation. Each of the subcultures has its own beliefs, values, and goals. And it is perfectly natural for one person (say a grandmother who sings in the choir) to belong to overlapping subcultures. My subcultural understanding of organizations derives especially from the work of Claude Fischer and his "subcultural theory of urbanism." See, *To Dwell Among Friends: Personal Networks in Town and City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

They are defined by embedded norms and informal mores. Even the structure of the organization itself is understood as being about the "myth and ceremony" of the organization in that the structure (i.e. the formal organizational roles and rules for authority relations) simply codifies the accepted avenues for interaction.[19]   Thus, Gardeners believe that authority is constructed and that power moves informally through an organization. This is in particular contrast to the Builders, who believe that power relations are formally defined and unambiguous.   For Gardeners, everything is open for interpretation.[20]

Dawn Lee understood this idea that power is constructed, and that the important power is the power to interpret. She did not mobilize committees or comfort individuals. Instead, she told stories – stories that framed the plant closing in a new way. She understood that the history of the congregation provided a more powerful interpretive framework than anything she could create. And she knew that Eugene Reed was the most important person to get mobilized. Once she got him to see that the plant closing was like the Turtle Creek fire, she knew that he could mobilize everyone else. Dawn Lee planted the interpretation and knew that Eugene Reed would harvest the action.

The Gardener's meaning-making model of leadership is not, however, as familiar to Christian scholars as are the Builder and Shepherd models. So it will require a bit more explanation.   The next section will explain the Gardener model in greater depth and show how it addresses the specific conditions created by ambiguity and adaptive change.

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[19] The so-called "neo-institutionalist" branch of organization theory has developed this cultural understanding of organizations. See, John Meyer and Brian Rowan, "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony," in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, eds. Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 41-62; Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality," in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, eds. Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 63-82; and, on its application to religious organizations, Paul DiMaggio, "The Relevance of Organization Theory to the Study of Religion," in *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, eds. N.J. Demerath et. al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7-23.

[20] Alan Bryman summarizes the Gardener model as "a concept of the leader as someone who defines organizational reality through the articulation of a vision which is a reflection of how he or she defines an organization's mission and the

	Builder	Shepherd	Gardener
Inspires action by	Making Decisions	Empowering People	Making Meaning
Approach to Leadership	Organizational approach	Pastoral Care approach	Homiletic approach
Emphasizes	Roles and	Relationships Responsibilities	Vocabulary and Stories
View of Congregation	Structure	Community	Culture
Biblical Precedents	Nehemiah, Jethro	Jesus as Good Shepherd	Nathan with David

Table 1

"Leadership involves the creation of powerful narra-
tives," one scholar has said. "The skilled leader is one who can
both articulate and embody a complex of stories."[21] Indeed,
his "anatomy of leadership" distinguishes between an "ordi-
nary leader," an "innovative leader," and a "visionary leader"
by looking at the kinds of stories they tell.[22] Nancy Tatom
Ammerman came to a similar conclusion after studying con-
gregations that adapted to significant social change.
"Congregations engaged in a process of change," she said,
"will find themselves listening to new stories and teaching
new people old tales. But they will also find themselves lis-
tening to old stories with new ears."[23] Indeed, Lee Bolman

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values which support it...[It is] a depiction of leaders as managers of meaning
rather than in terms of an influence process." Bryman, "Leadership in
Organizations," in *Handbook of Organization Studies*, eds. Stewart Clegg,
Cynthia Hardy, and Walter Nord (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996),
276-292, quote on 280.

[21] Joel Kurtzman, "An Interview with Howard Gardner," *Strategy and Business*
(First Quarter 1999): 2.

[22] Howard Gardner, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership* (New York: Basic
Books, 1995), 10, 11.

[23] Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 61.

and Terrance Deal describe why these "symbolic" competencies are particularly important in churches. What this paper calls the Gardener model of leadership, Bolman and Deal refer to as symbolic leadership. "Symbolic leadership," they note, "centers on the concepts of meaning, belief, and faith." They go on to say that "visionary leadership is inevitably symbolic" and that "stories are the medium" through which these symbolic leaders communicate.[24]   During periods of significant social change, society looks to such symbolic leaders to weave troublesome events into a coherent narrative of hope.

The Gardener model works because, as Robert Wuthnow has shown, people "produce the sacred." That is, they construct symbolic representations that give meaning to their lives and then use these constructions to explain to themselves how God relates to the world. Some of "these symbolic frameworks," he writes, come as theological doctrines and ecclesiastical rituals. Others are communicated through narratives and "enacted" through practices. The Gardener who can shape the theological categories and provide the salient stories will strongly influence how people produce the sacred in their lives.[25]

Perhaps a more detailed example is necessary to show how this process of constructing the sacred takes place in people's lives. Although all Americans work within these frameworks, teens provide a particularly strong example of how Americans process spiritual symbols. Youth borrow theological categories from an array of symbolic sources, including and especially television. Before television (especially niche-

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[24] Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 253, 440, 258. For a prescient description of why churches have a particular need for symbolic leaders who can work under the conditions of "ambiguity" (i.e. unclear goals, uncertain means, and multiple constituencies), see DiMaggio, "The Relevance of Organization Theory to the Study of Religion."

[25] Wuthnow, *Producing the Sacred: An Essay in Public Religion* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994) 3, 27; Karl Weick has been particularly important in showing how all "sense-making" is a process of "enactment." In fact, most of the scholars who describe leadership as meaning-making acknowledge the seminal importance of Weick's work for showing how individuals process experience within organizations. See, e.g., Weick, "Enactment Processes in Organizations," in Staw, Barry and Gerald Salancik, *New Directions in Organizational Behavior* (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger, 1982) pp. 267-300; and Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub., 1979) and Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995).

specific cable television) became ubiquitous, "the traditional hierarchy of [religious] legitimacy was maintained," according to Stewart Hoover, "through institutional loyalty and participation. People who went to church heard the stories [and] celebrated the traditional symbols and values." But contemporary young adults and teens "lack the cultural memory of religion that would support the traditional view of the cross, for example."[26] Thus, for teens growing up in contemporary society, the media provides what Mary Hess has called an "environment for collaborative meaning making."[27] She quotes A. Medrano saying, "In terms of church life, shared media experiences provide the symbolic material for our imagination and the construction of religious identity."[28] Pop culture provides for youth, she notes, the "cultural databases that people draw on to make sense of their lives."[29] How does this affect a teen's religious understanding? Lynn Schofield Clark argues that youth act as *"bricoleurs"* in that "they see themselves as autonomous authorities over their own religious beliefs." In fact, Clark found that teens often drew from popular media (such as television shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) in order to explain to themselves how good and evil act in the world.[30] Thus, it becomes clear that providing symbolic frameworks in the form of faith-filled stories, theological categories, and spiritual vocabulary can strongly influence how people make sense of ultimate questions such as the role of God in their lives and the cosmic struggle between good and evil.

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[26] Stewart Hoover, "Religion, Media, and the Cultural Center of Gravity," unpublished paper presented to the Foundation for United Methodist Communications, Nashville, TN (May 1998).

[27] Mary Hess, "From Trucks Carrying Messages to Ritualized Identities: Implications for Religious Educators of the Postmodern Paradigm Shift in Media Studies," *Religious Education* 94:3 (Summer 1999): 278.

[28] Medrano, "Media Trends and Contemporary Ministries: Changing Our Assumptions About Media," unpublished paper presented to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Netherlands, Hilversum, Netherlands (May 1998), quoted in Hess, "From Trucks to Ritualized Identities," 277, 278.

[29] Mary Hess, "Walking with Our Youth," *Clergy Journal* (August 2001), 10, 11.

[30] Youth are only the most obvious example of how contemporary Americans appropriate their world through symbols and stories, often mixing and matching symbols in ways that the progenitors of the symbols never intended. Scholars of leadership have shown how this selective appropriation of symbols leads to self-authorship, which in turn places a premium on meaning making. I found, for example, that as Christianity moved in the late nineteenth century from a rural to an urban environment, urbanites mixed religious symbols, stories, and

Such interpretive frameworks make it possible for congregations to construct a communal understanding of a situation. Peter Senge calls this process "the development of collective meaning" and argues that it "is an essential characteristic of the learning organization."[31] And, as Alan Bryman summarizes, "Organizational members are not passive receptacles, but imaginative consumers of leaders' visions and of manipulated cultural artifacts."[32]   Their point is that leaders can control the array of cultural symbols that have salience in a congregation by choosing to highlight selected portions of the many symbols floating in society and in the Christian tradition. So, for example, the pastor cannot change whether or not the Elizabeth plant closes. But she can highlight which portions of the plant closing story are most salient for her congregation. And she can select which stories from Scripture and from the congregation's history to place alongside the plant closure. This is how a leader working within the Gardener model makes meaning.

Such an emphasis on meaning changes the very definition of a leader's work. For example, Linda Lambert has said that leaders evoke "processes that enable participants in an [organizational] community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose."[33] The three components of her definition involve communities…constructing meaning…to a common purpose. She argues further that such leadership is inextricably tied to learning.[34]

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ideas with cultural artifacts (i.e. symbols, stories, and ideas) from the secular society. The very meaning of Christian adherence, therefore, changed in urban America because alternate symbols were readily available. See, Scott Cormode, "Faith and Affiliation: An Urban Religious History of Churches and Secular Voluntarism in Chicago's West Town, 1871-1914," unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1996. On self-authorship, see, for example, Michael Ignelzi, "Meaning-Making in the Learning and Teaching Process," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* No. 82 (Summer 2000): 5-14.

[31] Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 241; cf. Senge, "The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organizations," *Sloan Management Review* (Fall 1990), 7-23.

[32] Bryman, "Leadership in Organizations," 286.

[33] Lambert, "Toward a Theory of Constructivist Leadership," in Linda Lambert et. al. The Constructivist Leader (New York: The Teachers College Press, 1995), 29.

[34] A host of authors have made the connection between learning and leading. The best author on the topic is Chris Argyris. See, e.g., "Teaching Smart People How to Learn," Harvard Business Review (May-June 1991): 5-15; on the application of Argyris' ideas to Christian congregations, see Anita Farber-Robertson, Learning While Leading: Increasing Your Effectiveness in Ministry (Washington,

The Gardener model of leadership assumes that learning is not transmitted as so many facts that can be poured into people's heads.[35]   Rather, learning is evoked, as people come to recognize patterns and give names to new configurations of experience. This is why the gardener is an apt symbol for this model of leadership. The gardener tills the soil and prepares the environment. But the growing itself is often beyond the ability of the gardener to control. Thus to evoke learning is like cultivating a garden. It comes when the environment is right.

Cultivating these learning environments becomes the principal work of ministry. The goal is transformative learning – that is, learning that inspires people to remake their assumptions.[36]   Such learning is, of course, difficult. The very defense mechanisms that Heifetz encountered – avoidance and flight – often allow people not to examine their assumptions.

The best way to help an individual or a community to face their assumptions and to do the hard work of adapting is to construct what scholars call a "holding environment."[37]   A holding environment is a safe place (a place where people are not threatened) that is at the same time uncomfortable. In a holding environment, people feel the "pinch of reality" without crumbling under the weight of the problem.

Perhaps another kind of example will solidify the explanation of the Gardener model and illustrate what scholars mean by a holding environment. It is a true story. The Dawn Lee and Elizabeth example had to be fabricated, of course, because there needed to be three different versions of the

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DC: The Alban Institute, 2000); see also Peter Vaill, *Learning as a Way of Being: Strategies for Survival in a World of Permanent White Water* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996).

[35] Hess, "From Trucks to Ritualized Identities."

[36] On transformative learning, see Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991) and Mezirow, "Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory," in Jack Mezirow and Associates, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 3-33 ; cf Sharan Merriam and Rosemary Caffarella, Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide (Second Edition) (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999 [1991]), especially Chapter 14.

[37] Heifetz uses this language, as does Robert Kegan. The term comes originally from D.W. Winicott. See Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers*, 103ff; Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) especially Chapters 8 (Learning) and 9 (Leadership).

same event. This next example, however, actually happened. And it is a particularly strong example because it takes place among Korean Methodists. The stereotype has been that Asian cultures tend to favor hierarchical Builder models of the leadership. But this story shows how the Gardener model can emanate from beyond the Anglo culture.[38]

The Anyang Korean Methodist Church, near Seoul, had out-grown its building and its parking lots. So the pastor wanted to move the congregation a few miles to an area that the city government would open to them. But there was a problem.

When Rev. Moonhyun Baik broached the elders about the move, they opposed it. The building had enormous symbolic importance to the elders and to the people of the congregation. During the Japanese occupation, Koreans were not allowed to worship God. The Anyang church protested and built this building. And, when the soldiers came and boarded up the building, the congregation worshiped just outside its doors. Some people were killed for this. This building became the place where the community stood up against the Japanese invaders. One elder summarized the sentiment of the people when he said, "My fathers died here and my brothers built it block by block." The church was not leaving its building.

This created something of an impasse. The pastor knew that the congregation needed to move, but he also knew that the people could not imagine how they could claim to honor their forebears if they did move. What was Rev. Baik to do?

Korean pastors carry enormous authority within a congregation and a community. So, at first glance, it seems that the Builder model might allow the pastor to make a decision for the congregation despite the opposition. There is, after all, a tradition of Korean pastors following their own counsel. But

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[38] For an application of the Gardener model to a different social location – one focused on gender issues – see Robin Ely and Debra Meyerson, "Theories of Gender in Organizations: A New Approach to Organizational Analysis and Change," in Research in Organizational Behavior, eds. Barry Staw and Robert Sutton (Amsterdam: JAI, 2000) Volume 22, 103-151; and Marta Calas and Linda Smircich, "From 'The Woman's' Point of View: Feminist Approaches to Organizational Studies," in Handbook of Organization Studies, eds. Stewart Clegg, Cynthia Hardy, and Walter Nord (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 218-257.

Korean elders also have great authority, especially those who are both advanced in years (i.e. elderly) and duly designated for congregational leadership (i.e. elected elders). And there was the implicit authority of the martyrs who died for the right of the people to worship in that building.

Often in such situations, Korean pastors who subscribe to the Builder model will choose to exert their authority even if some elders choose to leave the congregation. But Rev. Baik did not want to split the church. Or, a Shepherd pastor would often shelve the idea of moving because it might open too many old wounds. But Rev. Baik knew that the congregation had in fact outgrown the facility. Pretending the problem would go away did not seem much of a solution either. So Rev. Baik acted like a Gardener. He first decided to extend the process for discernment, giving the congregation time to grow into the problem. He created for the elders what we have called a holding environment. He never forced them to act, but he never removed the problem from their sight either. He gave them a safe place to work on the problem and he kept it ever before them.

His first move was to get them to feel the "pinch of reality." They needed to understand that staying in the old building was creating deep and significant problems. So the pastor conducted a survey that gathered the complaints about classrooms and parking in writing for the elders to see. He documented that some people had to circle for fifteen minutes looking for a parking spot. And, by planting the complaints of the people in the minds of the elders, he made it difficult to deny that the problem existed. In other words, he made avoidance difficult.

But when the results of the survey came back, he did not push his agenda. He had turned up the heat with the complaints, so he turned down the heat by letting the elders discuss the survey at their own pace. He did not want them to feel trapped any more than he wanted them to deny that the problem existed. The pastor kept the elders focused on the question but he did not assert his own prerogatives. "I will wait," he announced, "until everyone agrees with this project." And then he gave his reason, "If it is God's will, we all will agree with each other and do it happily."

Over time, some of the elders began to understand the need. Those elders argued now if favor of the project. But Pastor Baik did not let them advance their cause. No one had yet come up with a way to deal with the fact that the building itself carried deep symbolic meaning. He kept those who opposed the project from flying off by continuing to say that the church would wait for consensus. But he kept the elders focused on the problem out of a trust that eventually a new option would emerge from them.

After many months, an elder spoke who had not been particularly vocal. He was an architect who had used the months that the extended discussion created to research the church's problem. "I can design the new church right now," he began, "And we can use the blocks from the current church building to construct the new one. If we do this, we will need more money because we will have to dissemble our old building carefully enough that we can rebuild with it. But it is possible." It seemed that the new option the pastor hoped for had emerged.

Still, the pastor did not push the dissenters. "We respect you as aged elders and as elders of the faith," the pastor said, "We need more time to think and pray." He wanted to protect those who still did not agree with him so that there was time for the new ideas to take root. He wanted to let this solution that the elders had cultivated grow in the dissenters until it became their own.

The elders met many more times. But finally the elders all agreed. They would build a new church from the bricks of the old one. They raised the extra money and built a larger version of their church a few miles away.

Rev. Baik found a way to honor the elders in his church (and a way to honor the memories of the martyrs) and a way to meet the needs of the growing congregation. It was a solution that the pastor could never have imagined nor had the credibility to implement on his own. But by creating a holding environment where it was safe for the elders to struggle with the problem, he nurtured the people until a happy result sprouted in their midst.[39]

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[39] This case study comes from a Doctor of Ministry student at the Claremont School of Theology named Seungjun Park. It is summarized here with his permission.

So the Dawn Lee and Elizabeth scenario shows how a pastor can mobilize action by making meaning. And Rev. Baik shows how a pastor can construct a holding environment for dealing with adaptive change. In each case, the Gardener pastor planted seeds that others harvested.

V. MULTI-LAYERED LEADERSHIP

At least one important question remains. What is the best way to understand the relationship between these three models? I would argue that there are three levels for understanding the models. Rudimentary or novice leaders have one understanding. The competent or intermediate leader will have a deeper perspective. And the advanced leader will take a deeper view still.

The most basic leader will see each of these models as a leadership "style." His or her goal will be to learn one of the models. For example, she might decide that the Shepherd style fits most closely with her personality. And then she would seek to inhabit that style. She might cultivate her listening skills and learn various processes for helping people reach their potential. Indeed, most leadership books for novices advise them to find a style and master it.[40]

The problem is that over time the experienced leader learns that some circumstances do not lend themselves to the style they have mastered. The first reaction to such a realization is to learn how to turn every ministry situation into an opportunity to use one's best style. For example, a young minister with strong Builder gifts recently found himself in a situation more suited to a Shepherd. On the patio, after church, a parishioner recounted a difficult personal situation and asked for the church's care. A Shepherd would have felt quite comfortable at such a moment. But this young leader tried a different approach. He gently took the person by the arm and, with all sincerity and compassion, walked her over to another parishioner. The pastor introduced the other parishioner as the head of the congregation's Pastoral Care Team and assured the distraught parishioner she was in good hands. Indeed, the maneuver worked well. The Pastoral Care

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[40] See, for example, G. Lloyd Rediger, "Pastor or Leader?" *Clergy Journal* (November/December 1998), 25-28.

Team was quickly mobilized and the parishioner received just the care she needed. But the situation could have turned out differently. What if the same request for care played out in a grocery store, where no Pastoral Care team member was available? The young pastor would have had to muddle through, working out of his element.

As pastors gain experience, they come to see that each of them will encounter times when they will have to make decisions, comfort people, or interpret events. So the good pastor will begin to acquire skills to work with each of the models. At that point, the models stop being styles and become "frames."

In the book *Reframing Organizations,* Bolman and Deal created the language of frames because they believe that certain situations lend themselves to each of the frames. Organizational problems lend themselves to the "structural frame," or what we have called the Builder model of leadership. Interpersonal concerns call for the "human relations frame," or what we have called the Shepherd model. And vision questions open up the "symbolic frame," or what we have called the Gardener model.[41] So the intermediate leader discovers that different situations require her to adopt different frames of reference.

The advanced leader will, however, take an even more sophisticated view of how the three leadership models relate to one another. At some point it becomes clear that every ministering situation has in it elements of all three frames. Every situation has interpersonal implications because we are always dealing with people, just as every situation has organi-

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[41] Bolman and Deal add a fourth frame called the "political frame" wherein leaders see all organizational interactions as subject to negotiation between factions. I believe that adopting the political frame is out of bounds for religious leaders because such negotiations seem inevitably to create winners and losers. Proponents of the political frame would argue that my view is skewed because the whole point of the political frame is to create win-win situations. I believe, however, that constructing such win-win situations requires an organizational dexterity beyond the capacity of most religious leaders – with the implication being that those who wish to create win-win situations in actuality create contests where some parties win and some lose. I believe that church relations are politicized enough without our adding to the difficulty by trying to channel the factions. Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations;* perhaps the best representative of the win-win approach to the political frame is Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981).

zational concerns because those people are part of a community (i.e. the congregation). And, of course, every situation has spiritual or theological import as well.

Think back on the Dawn Lee and Elizabeth case. There were interpersonal concerns for the displaced workers, for Daniel Scott, and for Susan Sycamore. There were organizational issues about mobilizing congregational committees and finding a place for people to park. And there were spiritual questions about the mission of the church and the about the responsibilities of a parish to a local community.[42] And some people embodied all three categories. Eugene Reed, for instance, was both the Lay Leader (organizational role) and a disappointed parishioner (person). He also had deep investment in the mission of the church. Indeed, the same analysis could be made about each person in the case.

If Dawn Lee were an advanced leader, she would come to see that the three models of leadership are not styles or frames. Instead, each represents a layer present in every situation. There is always an interpersonal layer, an organizational layer, and a spiritual layer. And the advanced pastor learns to work in each one simultaneously.

And this creates a problem. The pastor often finds that addressing the pastoral care needs of the interpersonal layer actually make the organizational problem worse. And likewise, focusing on the theological problem might exacerbate the interpersonal issues. It takes a deft hand to discover how to let problems in one layer simmer while dealing with the more pressing issues in another layer.

The important point here is that none of the models should stand alone. Each has something to contribute because each addresses a separate layer. The Builder model helps the congregation define roles and set a clear plan for action. The Shepherd model enables a church to nurture relationships and address interpersonal concerns. And the

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[42] Nancy Ammerman draws the distinction between "parish congregations" and "niche congregations." Parishes focus on a given locale and therefore feel a responsibility for the people in their immediate vicinity. Niche congregations, on the other hand, focus on particularly constituencies without regard to locale. Since the Elizabeth UMC expressed deep feelings of connection and responsibility for the surrounding neighborhood, we could categorize them as a parish. A niche congregation might not have felt the same impulses. Ammerman, *Congregation and Community*, 34, cf. 384n58.

Gardener model points to the beliefs, values, and mission goals that form the spiritual core of a faith community. Each model is necessary because every ministering situation has organizational, interpersonal, and theological layers.