

Pulpit & Pew

Research on Pastoral Leadership

WHAT DO LAY PEOPLE WANT IN PASTORS?

ANSWERS FROM LAY SEARCH COMMITTEE CHAIRS
AND REGIONAL JUDICATORY LEADERS

by Adair T. Lummis



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Pulpit & Pew Research on Pastoral Leadership

www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu
Duke Divinity School
Durham, N.C.

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Pulpit and Pew Research Reports, No. 3, Winter 2003
ISBN: 0-9725644-2-X



FOREWORD

There's an old joke about a Presbyterian congregation in the South that was looking for a pastor who spoke with a Scottish accent and was a direct descendent of a Confederate general! Pastors today may not face quite as intimidating set of expectations; however, they may nevertheless be no less overwhelmed by those that they do encounter. From the ideal pastor portrayed by their seminary professors, the pastoral image that their denominational leaders project, the desires of laity who are members of pastoral search committees, and the hopes of rank and file lay members of congregations—the expectations for pastoral leadership are varied, daunting, and often in conflict with each other. Add to these expectations the self-image of good pastoral leadership that the pastor may hold, and the picture is even more complicated and challenging.

To understand some of the various expectations, we asked Adair Lummis of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research to interview lay leaders of Protestant congregations, especially those who have chaired pastoral search committees or serve on pastor-parish relations committees. She asked about their expectations for pastors of their congregations. Additionally, she also asked similar questions of denominational officials who assist congregations in securing pastoral leadership. The resulting summary of her findings is both interesting and informative. It helps to clarify what the primary and secondary expectations are that lay and denominational leaders have for their clergy.

As Lummis discovered, however, many congregations are unable to be “choosy” about the pastors who will give them leadership. Many, indeed most, Protestant congregations have quite small memberships, and a growing number of these are unable to pay a living wage for a full-time, seminary educated pastor. Even when the salary is adequate, the congregation's location may not be viable for clergy with working spouses. Thus, when Lummis interviewed denominational officials, she also asked them how they were meeting the needs and expectations of small congregations for pastoral leadership. She treats this issue in the second part of her illuminating study.

Following her analysis are commentaries from three persons who have read and reflected on the report. Two are denominational officials who work with large and small congregations in securing pastoral leaders; the third is from a lay person who has served on his congregation's staff-parish relations committee. Each extends Lummis' analysis and its implications. I believe you will find both her study and the reflections to be of great interest.

What Do Lay People Want In Pastors? is the third in a series of research reports from Pulpit & Pew, a major research project on pastoral leadership at Duke Divinity School with funding from Lilly Endowment, Inc. The project aims at providing answers to three broad sets of questions:

What is the state of pastoral leadership at the new century's beginning, and what do current trends portend for the next generation?

What is excellent ministry? Can we describe it? How does it come into being?

What can be done to enable excellent ministry to come into being more frequently, and how can it be nurtured and supported more effectively?

To learn more about Pulpit & Pew, I direct you to our Web site, www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu. You may also want to register to receive regular project updates from our electronic newsletter.



Jackson W. Carroll, Director
Pulpit & Pew: Research on Pastoral Leadership
Williams Professor Emeritus of Religion and Society

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In *What Do Lay People Want in Pastors?*, Adair Lummis examines the criteria churches use in selecting their pastors, working through lay search committees and regional judicatory executives. Lummis finds that, as a practical matter, pastoral searches are becoming an option only for larger churches, usually in urban areas, that can afford to pay a full-time salary. Otherwise, finding any trained pastor is a growing problem across virtually all denominations, particularly for small rural congregations.

In the first part of her paper, Lummis draws upon interviews with lay leaders and judicatory executives to outline the specific pastoral qualities sought by lay search committees in churches that can provide full clergy salary packages. Generally having active memberships of 200 or more, these churches are quite discriminating, with lay leaders often relying heavily on their own experiences with a previous pastor or two. Regional leaders often believe search committees' final selections are emotionally biased or arbitrary, but underlying such choices is a "gestalt" of pastoral attributes.

The following are the criteria Lummis found in her interviews and some of the implications of those findings:

- *Demonstrated competence and religious authenticity.* Search committees want pastors who have the ability to do the work required and a genuine religious life that brings together both "head and heart."
- *Good preacher and leader of worship.* Regional leaders and lay leaders differ regarding what constitutes good preaching. Lay leaders generally care less than judicatory officials whether the sermon reflects careful scholarship and organization and are concerned instead that it relates to their own life and engages them personally.
- *Strong spiritual leader.* Lay leaders want a pastor with a deep commitment to religious beliefs and an ability to inspire spirituality in others. But many judicatory executives regard this as problematic because of the difficulty of determining who will be a good spiritual leader for a particular congregation.
- *Commitment to parish ministry and ability to maintain boundaries.* Lay members and search committees generally expect their pastor to be primarily devoted to ministry and take minimal time for other pursuits. This criterion, Lummis suggests, is a key

place where lay visions of ideal ministry run counter to current thinking among those who counsel clergy about the importance of maintaining boundaries and the need to find time for other interests.

- *Available, approachable, and warm pastor with good "people skills."* Regional leaders across denominations cited the pastor's ability to show church members he or she likes and will care for them as an essential quality search committees try to find. This quality, however, can be situationally specific to the culture of a particular church or region.
- *Gender, race, marriage, and sexual orientation of clergy.* Lummis finds among other things that male gender still remains a criterion for most search committees, even in denominations that have ordained women for the past fifty years or more. Typically, search committees want pastors who are married men with children, under age 40, in good health, with more than a decade of experience in ministry. Such criteria are often not expressed to regional leaders but remain unspoken just beneath the surface, particularly in liberal mainline Protestant denominations, where lay search committees know it is unacceptable to refuse to accept a candidate because of gender, race, or ethnicity.
- *Age, experience and job tenure of the pastor.* Laity often want a young married pastor as a way to draw in young families, but also a pastor with experience. The dramatic increase in older, second-career seminarians, however, has changed the relationship between age and experience. Rather than having 20-years' experience, many middle-aged pastors today may have just received their M.Div.
- *Consensus builder, lay ministry coach and responsive leader.* Lay leaders want pastors who are responsive to their concerns, pastors who can initiate ideas to revitalize the church, while soliciting opinions of members and engaging them in putting ideas into operation.
- *Entrepreneurial evangelists, innovators and transformational reflexive leaders.* This area often presents a disconnect between what churches say they want and what they really want. Many say they want a pastor to help grow the church but don't want to undertake or think about the necessary changes that will be required.

In the second part of her paper, Lummis looks at the difficulty of recruiting pastors for small congregations. The issue, she says, is not a clergy shortage, but a salary shortage. Even with efforts to recruit more “good pastors” into seminary, fewer congregations are able to pay a full time salary sufficient to support a pastor and his or her family.

At the same time, many seminary graduates find that their educational costs have made it financially impossible to consider such positions and are instead considering other forms of ministry or non-church careers. Even if pastors are willing to serve part time, it is still difficult to find a secular job that pays sufficiently, both for clergy and spouse, and clergy and their families may find such areas socially isolating. Consequently, regional executives are struggling to find clergy for small, poor congregations, especially in rural areas.

Churches are addressing the rural clergy shortage in several ways, including financial supports and incentives, retired clergy, clergy from other denominations, ordination to less than full clergy status, and the use of laity as pastoral leaders. Regional leaders’ ingenuity in filling pastoral vacancies in small congregations with non-seminary educated clergy may cause unintended results, Lummis warns, potentially reducing the amount of authority national church and seminary executives can wield over congregations.

Lummis’s report also includes three responses from judicatory executives and lay leaders.

William Hopgood, a regional minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), says the reported criteria generally ring very true. He calls upon the church to recognize the plight of small churches and to work for creative ministry for all congregations, regardless of size. He also offers several suggestions in a time of clergy shortages, including a campaign to educate laity that good pastoral leadership comes in both females and males and in all colors.

Anthony Pappas, Area Minister for American Baptist Churches USA of southeastern Massachusetts, explores the implications of Lummis’s report, arguing that her findings reflect a lack of spiritual passion and faithfulness in the local church. He suggests that seminaries should be preparing entrepreneurs of change, rather than chaplains to the local church.

Timothy G. Turkington, a member of the Staff Parish Relations Committee at Duke Memorial United Methodist Church in Durham, N.C., offers a layperson’s perspective. He agrees that judicatory officials and laity have different understandings of the pastor’s job, but suggests that congregations should have a role, at least in part, in defining those duties.



INTRODUCTION: WHOSE OPINIONS MATTER?

When congregations have an opening for a full-time paid pastor, they typically form a “search committee” of lay members to decide what kind of pastor they need, conduct interviews with applicants, and present the final candidate(s) to the congregation and regional denominational leader for approval. (In United Methodist and Church of the Nazarene congregations, lay persons on the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee or Administrative Board do not search for their next pastor in the same way as other Protestant denominations, but they do tell the district superintendent what kind of minister they want and interview clergy considering the position). Regional judicatory leaders have the responsibility to help congregations get the best clergy leaders they can; in fact this is a core part of their job across denominations.

Getting the best pastor for a particular congregation is hardly a straightforward process for either the lay search committee or their judicatory staff advisor. Among the questions often voiced by lay persons or judicatory leaders are:

- Do search committees have clear opinions of the qualities and abilities they want most in their next pastor?
- What clergy characteristics and competencies do they want most and why?
- Is the kind of pastor the lay search committee wants the kind of pastor they really need—or can realistically get?

Through telephone interviews I explored these questions as parts of two Lilly Endowment funded research projects. In the fall of 2001, I interviewed a sample of lay leaders from several denominations and states, and between fall 2000 and spring 2001, I spoke with a sample of judicatory executives, senior staff and other regional leaders from seven denominations, distributed across all regions of the United States.¹

To anticipate the findings I will report, interviews with lay leaders suggest that most have strong feelings about—if not always clear descriptions of—the qualities and abilities they value in their present pastor or seek in their next pastor. Interviews with judicatory administrators indicate that most also have clear perceptions of what lay members say they want in their pastor, as well as having their own opinions on what kind of pastoral leadership their churches really need.

Some regional leaders question whether lay search committees have sufficient knowledge of what is really involved in pastoral leadership or of the church’s mission. They are apprehensive that search committees may seize on certain qualities they want in a pastor, only to ignore other essential pastoral abilities that are missing or serious flaws that are present in favored candidates. As an illustration of this phenomenon, two regional leaders from different denominations comment:²

The average congregation that has just lost a pastor has a tendency either to clone or demonize the previous pastor. They are limited in their experience to the previous pastor or two. It is almost ignorance feeding upon ignorance to ask a congregation what they want in a pastor. They want a wonderful preacher. They are going to evaluate some of the other stuff they saw. But they don’t even know what some of the weaknesses of their last pastor were, and they may be unaware of such things as administrative ability.

I am not sure that congregations recognize or understand what their real needs are in clergy



leadership. Part of the problem is that we deal with search committees made up of lay people who really have no clue as to what the job of the pastor is. The other part of it too, is that they may have one set of standards that says “*This is what we are looking for;*” while in reality, they get down to the question of “*Who is available and what we can afford?*” (emphasis supplied).

Lay leaders may concur that they have made mistakes in choosing clergy in the past, but they believe they are quite competent, and perhaps best able in conjunction with other members of their search committee, to find and call the right person for their next pastor. Members’ opinions of what kind of pastor would be best for their church do matter to their regional leaders. Judicatory executives and senior staff spend much effort and time trying to find clergy candidates to fill empty pulpits with the kind of pastors lay leaders say they want. They do so for several reasons. First, regional leaders are expected to be a resource when congregations are searching for a pastor; hence this usually creates a prime opportunity for the regional leaders to help a congregation and to be seen as helpful by the congregation.³ Second, the more valuable congregations find the services and resources provided by their regional executive staff, the more apt they are to support the missions of their denomination financially and in other ways. Third, the better the match between pastor and congregation, the more stable and less conflicted the church — which is a definite plus for regional leaders.

Pastors can also be the primary means through which regional leaders exercise influence over congregations in their jurisdictions. Regional leaders look for pastors who will work cooperatively with the denomination and whose leadership enhances the church’s presence and mission in the community and region. Likewise, they wish to avoid having pastors who eschew interaction with the judicatory staff and programs, and who may influence their congregation not to cooperate with the denomination. Pastors who are antagonistic to the judicatory sometimes have taken their whole congregation (sometimes just the membership, sometimes both entire membership and church property) out of the denomination. Less dramatic, but also problematic for judicatory leaders, are those affable pastors who are liked by most of their congregation but lack the leadership ability to help a stagnant church regain vitality.

Lay leaders in congregations of denominations with a congregational polity—that is, ones within a “free church tradition”—such as various Baptist and UCC (United Church of Christ) denominations, have a great deal more autonomy in hiring the kind of pastor they want. In the more connectional or hierarchical denominations, such as the Episcopal Church or the United Methodist Church (UMC), the regional executive has the right to appoint or approve pastors for all congregations. In most denominations, however, regardless of polity, wealthier congregations typically have more voice than other congregations in their choice of pastor. This is not only because the wealthier congregations can afford to pay higher clergy salaries and attract more applicants, but also because such churches typically give substantially more funds to support their regional judicatory. Regional judicatory executives do not wish to alienate their largest, wealthiest churches. Therefore, the richer the congregation, the more lay leaders’ preferences affect the congregation’s choice of a pastor.⁴

In contrast, small or poor congregations that are supported by their regional judicatory or that can only afford a very part-time pastor may not have any real choice if they want a pastor at all. If a congregation can only pay a small portion of the pastor’s salary, it will be fortunate if its regional judicatory appoints anyone to be its pastor and assists them with their salary. Many small congregations are also in rural areas, further exacerbating their problem in securing pastoral leadership. Few ordained persons are eager to go to rural congregations, even if the church pays a modest full-time salary. Even fewer clergy are willing to take a part-time position in small town or rural areas while having to supplement their salary with another job. Thus, finding any trained pastoral leadership for small rural congregations is a growing problem across denominations.

The following discussion, in which I explore these issues, is in two parts. The first focuses primarily on clergy characteristics that are priorities for lay search committees of self-supporting congregations that offer a full-time clergy salary package and are located relatively close to a populated area. The second focuses on regional leaders’ concerns in finding any clergy for their open pulpits in the other kinds of congregations—those that do not pay a full-time clergy salary and are often situated far from urban locales.

PART ONE: QUALITIES WANTED BY SEARCH COMMITTEES IN CONGREGATIONS OFFERING FULL SALARY AND BENEFITS

A. THE PROCESS OF CHOOSING A PASTOR

Outside of the more rural regions of this country, a substantial number of congregations are still able to afford at least one full-time pastor. In such congregations (those which typically have 200 or more active members) lay leaders are typically quite discriminating in choosing a pastor. Search committees have more resources at their disposal and more support in using them. Currently, church consultants and denominational offices provide lay committees with some of the same kinds of tools and methods for choosing new pastors that are used in hiring professionals and

managers in secular organization. These include surveys to garner opinions of members, handbooks on conducting pastoral searches, guides for

interviewing candidates, and the like.⁵ Lay committees are usually more willing to use such resources than in the past, in part because committee members have seen them used with some success in their places of employment or in neighboring congregations. The processes also seem to take some of the mystery and guesswork out of pastoral selection

My interviews indicate that lay persons rely heavily on their own experiences with a former pastor or two to form their opinions about the desired abilities and attributes of a new pastor. When I asked about the qualities they looked for in a new pastor that were present or absent in their previous pastor, or the factors that made them turn down candidates, they gave detailed and helpful responses as to what they considered to be important pastoral attributes. Lay leaders also form ideas of what they want from a number of sources, including observation of clergy of other congregations (not necessarily of their denominations) in the vicinity; experiences in their secular work; focus groups or surveys that ask congregational members for their input; and the large amount of time spent in their search committee meetings discussing submitted profiles, sermons heard or read, and interviews completed with candidates. When searching for a senior pastor of a larger congregation, the committee may

also invite a fellow church member who works in a secular administrative job to help them assess the managerial skills of potential candidates.

Despite their efforts to help congregations with the search process, and regardless of how long the search process takes, regional leaders sometimes perceive a committee's final choice of pastor as emotionally biased or arbitrary. This is especially likely if they heard remarks such as the following: "We were looking for experience, but the ironic part of that is that we did not hire experience. We went by gut feeling." Yet relying on gut feelings in making the final decision is often, as was the case with the committee making the comment, preceded by careful work in selecting a final slate from which to choose. As one member of the committee said:

We found out that [our previous minister] did not provide adequate information when he was hired. The search committee did not realize that he was asked to leave the other congregation, and that was not the first time. These are things we feel we should not have allowed to happen. This time we checked references very hard and listened intently to the answers to our questions. In checking references, we would ask, "If it ever came up, would there be a possibility that you would take this person back? Would you rehire this person?"

Further conversation with this lay leader and search committee members in other congregations suggests that what they called "gut feeling" is a gestalt of pastoral attributes they saw as important. This fact that this gestalt is sometimes hard to name contributes to committees sometimes having difficulty in articulating to each other and to denominational officials what criteria are more essential bases in choosing among candidates. The following typical statements illustrate mix of pastoral characteristics that lay leaders hoped would be embodied in their next pastor:

We are looking for a spiritual leader. A strong preacher. Someone who can help us with caring and can care for us. We have an older population here and we have a strong youth program at the same time. We are not interested in anybody whose objectives are community work or things like that.

Preaching is of paramount importance, and we also want a person who is interested in visitation and committed to growth of membership and who has a deep commitment to religious beliefs.

Regional leaders sometimes perceive a committee's final choice of pastor as emotionally biased or arbitrary.

Desired qualities of pastors may cluster and interconnect in the minds of lay members. That is, they may view “good preaching” as the primary means by which the pastor expresses spirituality, upholds religious beliefs, and attracts new members. However, lay and regional leaders often give emphasis to different criteria at different points in the search process. For example, certain desired characteristics may be basic for lay committees in their preliminary selection of a short list of candidates from a large number of profiles or applications. Other characteristics may be employed later in the process as secondary criteria, tipping the scale toward one candidate rather than another. Lay committees’ reliance on certain criteria as primary or secondary in their choice of pastor differs among churches. Criteria may vary in part due to the congregations’ denominational tradition, size, and location, but more likely because of search committee members’ own experiences with prior pastors. These themes will be among those explored in the following depiction of what lay leaders see as the most important clergy attributes when they are searching for their next pastors.

B. IMPORTANT CRITERIA IN CHOOSING A PASTOR

1. DEMONSTRATED COMPETENCE AND RELIGIOUS AUTHENTICITY

In a recent book analyzing what some have called “new paradigm” or “post-traditional” congregations, many of which are megachurches, Jackson Carroll (2000:86) described some of the characteristics of their pastoral leaders. Among the characteristics he noted was a blend of *demonstrated competence* as leaders and *religious authenticity*, as experienced by those who flock to their churches. They are also often quite entrepreneurial and innovative. Many of these pastors do not have a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree from an accredited seminary. Instead, they may have been ordained solely by the members of the church they started or undergone on-the-job training by a clergy mentor.

Pastoral search committees are likely to be somewhat more rare in these new paradigm congregations than in more traditional congregations. It is hard to replace an

innovator and founder. Further, because they are often independent or non-denominational, there are fewer external systems to legitimate applicants’ basic credentials as pastors for such congregations than is the case for most congregations of established denominations.

These differences aside, search committees in more traditional Protestant congregations also look for pastors who they believe will *demonstrate competence* in core ministerial tasks and be *authentically religious* — who will, as some say, have “head and heart together.” In seeking new pastors, however, these lay leaders have the advantage of being able to select from a pool of candidates with M.Div. degrees and who have passed the denomination’s ordination exams. They are assumed to have attained a certain level of competence and authenticity. Such denominational “gates” to full clergy status in mainline denominations allow lay leaders to give more attention to assessing applicants on what may be considered secondary criteria by those in other congregations.

Demonstrated competence in core ministerial tasks and religious authenticity usually remain primary qualities that most lay leaders say they want in their new pastor. Differences, however, emerge among lay leaders and between search committees in the standards used to assess competence and authenticity and in the particular competencies required. The most visible single place where both ministerial competence and religious authenticity are demonstrated is on Sunday mornings in the sanctuary, by how the pastor preaches and leads the congregation in worship. It is for this reason that pastors on the short-list of candidates typically are asked to preach and conduct worship before final selection.

2. GOOD PREACHER AND LEADER OF WORSHIP

Regional judicatory executives and senior staff interviewed report that most search committees say they want a pastor who is a gifted preacher, and they are probably more sanguine about their chances of getting such a pastor than is warranted. One judicatory executive wryly observed:

The number one thing they always say is that they want a good preacher. That always comes at the top of the list. I have yet to work with a search committee that says, “We are really look-

ing for a mediocre preacher.” That is unfortunate because that is what most of our [candidates] are!

Regional leaders also point to congregations that have unrealistic expectations about preaching:

Some churches in this conference say they want the best preacher available — one just this side of Billy Graham and Norman Vincent Peale if it is an older congregation, and Robert Shaw if it is a younger one. (United Methodist Church regional leader)

I have a few churches where their expectations of a minister far outweigh what they can pay. I say to them: “You want William Sloan Coffin on a salary for someone right out of seminary. Well, you are not going to get him.” (United Church of Christ regional leader)

Judicatory executives, who typically are seminary graduates, often with graduate seminary degrees, use different standards in evaluating how “good” the preacher is than do members in the majority of their congregations. By “good” some executives (and probably most seminary faculty) mean a sermon that is carefully exegeted, researched, or at least well organized and presented, so that the preacher engages the *minds* of the members. Regional leaders, however, suggest that relatively few congregations in their jurisdictions shared these criteria for a “good sermon.” In the words of one judicatory executive: “There are some congregations in this diocese that really *do* want a scholar, one who is a learned person, who is going to have a good knowledge base for sermons.” But, they add, such erudite and discerning congregations are a relatively small minority.

Lay leaders interviewed appear to care far less about whether the sermon evinces careful scholarship and organization than whether it relates to their more immediate life concerns and engages them personally. Leaders of pastoral search committees in four denominations illustrate this in the following comments:

The pastor we get has to be able to preach reasonably; he has to be able to *get to the congregation* with his preaching. That is primary.

Foremost we want a pastor who is able to relate his or her sermons to the congregation and to life experiences, trying to help us understand how to take the Bible and apply it to our daily living.

The style of preaching is very important to us.

We wanted someone who could take the scriptures and help us relate them to modern day lives. The pastor we have now is just excellent at that.

We heard him preach. It was like sitting in your own living room listening to somebody tell you a story. We really got very fortunate with this person.

We are looking for someone who really knows how to deliver a very good and insightful sermon. [This is] our top priority – partly because our last pastor’s sermons were in a word “superlative.” He gave challenging, insightful sermons that really made you want to come, just to listen to what he was going to say and how he was to going to say it. This is because he always built his sermons on some current event that was happening in the news. He would also do things that were very original – like he took the limericks out of a Dr. Seuss book and changed them into a sermon, and made it applicable to the members of the church.

The worship service involves more than preaching, of course. The length of the service, the choice of hymns, the use of various musical instruments, the images of God used in the liturgy, whether there is an altar call, whether and how communion is served, whether people sit, stand or kneel to pray, whether members are encouraged to give “testimony,” whether members are permitted to dance or speak in tongues, the implicit dress code employed by clergy and by lay members, how collections are carried out and announcements made, and many other such behaviors all contribute to the worship experience. Congregations differ in how they view such matters. Most congregations, even from the same denomination, have considerably different preferred practices and worship styles. These differences often lead to so-called “worship wars” both within and between congregations. For example, regional leaders from three denominations comment:

The worship style, as opposed to anything else, is what is causing the separation [between churches in our denomination]. In other words, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod style of worship has been typically more liturgical. In congregations that I see around my area there are also some congregations using what could be identified as a “contemporary style.”

I think style is a major issue, especially when it comes to music. I think a lot of Assemblies of God congregations are struggling with — *How far do we go in embracing contemporary music?*

Well, probably the code word here would be “worship wars.” The more formal liturgical Reformed Church in America congregations are just distancing themselves from the more informal, TV-style worship churches doing “interviews” and that sort of thing.

Lay leaders who are aware of these different worship and music styles may be particularly careful to ensure that the pastor they choose is compatible with the way they want worship conducted in their congregation. Sometimes this is simply reflected by whether they have a strong preference for organ music or guitars, but in other instances the worship style touches on core theological differences extant within the denomination. For example, one regional leader noted:

The Southern Baptist Convention is kind of split between what we call “moderates” and “conservatives.” We don’t look further at candidates if we get a sense that a candidate’s methodologies are not consistent with what we consider ourselves to be as a church and what we felt God has called us to do *and how to do it*. We very much practice a traditional worship style as opposed to contemporary worship style, so pastors who are geared more to the other would be less appealing to us. Also I guess our approach to evangelism is not a real overt *in-your-face* kind of thing. So if we felt the person wanted to play more of the

typical evangelist role in worship and the church, that probably would not be as appealing to us as someone who was more pastoral in his approach, if you will.

There are also instances in which a previous pastor did something so egregious during the worship service that lay leaders intend to ensure that this particular bizarre behavior will not be repeated by their next pastor. The following comments by two United Church of Christ lay leaders on previous pastors’ behavior are examples:

We don’t want someone in the pulpit with a dog again! (Real dog?) Yes. We need more uplifting candidates!

Our last pastor’s game plan was to come up to the Northeast (from the Southwest), take over a church, and drive people out if they resisted his leadership. What he started doing was pointing to people in church on Sunday, naming them, and saying, “What are *you* doing here?” [One Sunday when the pastor did this at length and vehemently, a highly respected senior member stood up in the midst of the shocked UCC church] and this gentleman said, “*You are not God!*” That was the beginning of his end here. We essentially fired this pastor. . . but he did not go out without a fight. And people left. We now have a super woman interim and people are coming here again.



3. A STRONG SPIRITUAL LEADER FOR OUR CONGREGATION

The pastor in the quote above was not ordained in the United Church of Christ. Congregations belonging to the United Church of Christ and other denominations in the “free church” or congregational tradition may hire any pastor they want without judicatory approval, even a pastor from another denomination. It may be instructive to note a major reason that this UCC congregation searched “far and wide” to hire this pastor from outside New England and the denomination was that the church governing board members were intent on finding a *strong spiritual leader*, which they felt was difficult to do in the region and denomination. This pastor, from their initial impressions and investigations, appeared to be just what they wanted. Indeed, he may well have been a strong spiritual leader for some churches, but

he was far too strong in ways inconsistent with the theology, mores, and values of this congregational church to be spiritually inspiring. Something like this may have been a factor in why a lay leader at another United Church of Christ congregation said that one of their priorities for a new pastor was: “a person who had a good strong UCC background, because we feel that our heritage is very important to pass on.”

Nonetheless, congregations want a pastor to be the spiritual leader of the congregation—to demonstrate what Carroll called religious authenticity, and this is a quality that most search committees yearn to find. How do they define this quality? How do they know when they have such a pastor present? As several lay chairs of search committees expressed it, we want: “a

There are no standard criteria for ascertaining or predicting who will be a good spiritual leader for a particular congregation.

person of faith,” “a person who has a deep commitment to religious beliefs.” Most would concur, however, that being a spiritual leader is more than personal piety on the part of the pastor; it is

the ability to inspire a spiritual sensitivity in others.

For example, here are reports from regional leaders of four denominations:

Laity increasingly tell me that they want dynamic spiritual leadership. There has been such a dearth of dynamic spiritual leadership in pastors. I experience laity that are hungry for that kind of leadership.

They say, “We want spiritual leaders; we want people who can *connect with us* at our level.”

They want somebody who has a faith of his or her own, somebody who has some spiritual depth, who knows his or her own faith, and *can articulate it*.

The underlying thing they are really looking for is a person of depth of faith and who *can convey that* to both the congregation and outside the congregation.

One of the first things they say is “We want a spiritual leader.” I am not sure they have the foggiest idea of what they mean. I think *spirituality* covers a multitude of sins. But they want somebody with the ability to be a good spiritual leader.

Regional leaders hear their search committees express this hope for a good spiritual leader, and they rejoice that committees make this a major criterion in their choice of a new pastor.⁶ At the same time, however, many judicatory executives are aware that finding such a pastor is problematic, because there are no standard criteria for ascertaining or predicting who will be a good *spiritual leader* for a *particular* congregation. This opens the door for lay committees to hire clergy who appear to be infused with spiritual fervor, but who may not have other requisite skills for leadership, or who may not have the theological understandings or worship style appropriate to the denominational affiliation of the congregation. In the opinion of another regional leader, this is especially a problem for small membership churches. They are often so afraid they will not have any ordained leadership that they become too indiscriminating on characteristics other than spiritual fervor in their choice of pastor.

The small churches that cannot afford even a beginning full-time pastoral salary in many cases now are happy to get anyone with blood pressure of ten over five! They are not very particular. They fall in love with some preacher who *loves the Lord*, and that is the end of that.

In lay search committees’ efforts to choose carefully, the absence of reliable indicators for who will be a good spiritual leader can lead them to focus on more observable criteria such as how the candidate preaches, conducts the worship service, and generally responds to members’ queries and concerns. For many lay members, the pastor’s spiritual integrity is likely to be indicated by how many hours he or she spends in church-related work, how warm and caring the pastor appears to members, and the pastor’s personal conduct in church and in private life. As one regional executive said:

I have to mentor every person who comes to me through the credentialing process. I tell them that, number one — a *call from God* in their life is critical. I don’t mean to sound hokey, but that’s true. Number two is *compassion*. You have to care about people. It is not just a job. Number 3 is *character*. You have to be a person of character today because people are looking at that; they are scrutinizing that. The old idea that just because you have “Reverend” in front of your name means you get automatic respect is gone. It is absolutely gone. You have to prove yourself every

day: the way you treat your family; the way you pay your bills; the way you drive your car. That is all critical to your ability to stand in the pulpit and declare the word of the Lord. Because if they don't see you live the life on the street, they are not going to pay you any attention in the pulpit.

4. COMMITMENT TO THE PARISH MINISTRY AND ABILITY TO MAINTAIN BOUNDARIES

Lay members and search committees also voiced expectations that their pastor should be primarily devoted to ministry and take minimal time for other pursuits. This is probably a key place where visions of the ideal pastor are most likely to run up against current thinking among professionals who counsel clergy. The old stereotype that the clergy vocation is a spiritual calling that demands pastors be available to the congregation twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, is seriously questioned today. Clergy psychologists and others who have to deal with clergy health problems and “burnout” now strongly caution pastors that to enhance their overall physical, mental, and spiritual well-being and maintain effectiveness as pastoral leaders, they must learn to maintain boundaries,⁷ particularly between church work and private time. This requires that pastors better manage their ministerial work and hours to reduce cross-pressures from competing duties and groups and negotiate an acceptable fit between expectations set by their congregations, regional denominational leaders, their families, and friends, and those they put on themselves and others. This is not easy.

Some judicatory executives try to recruit clergy into their jurisdictions who, in addition to their other abilities as pastors, have the facility and confidence to negotiate and establish reasonable expectations for themselves as pastors and persons. These are the clergy who can best maintain boundaries between their personal and professional time. As an illustration, three judicatory executives from different denominations comment:

We have always needed, but we need now more than ever, clergy who are clear about who they are, who have *good boundaries*. I don't mean people who hit other people with a club; but it is very helpful if clergy have some clarity about who they are and what their gifts are. If they are wishy-washy, they are going to get walked all over

in a lot of congregations. If they are strident people, the congregations are not going to appreciate that either. It is self-assurance; it is very helpful to congregations if clergy can bring that.

I think we need people who are a little more professional. Think about psychiatrists, for example. They can really be present to you while you are with them, but they do not worry too much about you when they go home at night. A lot of our clergy, I think, have almost too much of a pastoral identification, a codependency in a way. If you are a needy person and I am a needy person, I need to keep you needy in order for me to be satisfied. But if I am a healthy person, my goal is for your growth, even if I put my popularity at risk. I think a lot of the clergy have received training that is in a strongly pastoral mode, more mutual dependence. I don't think they have dealt too much with growth and change . . . or living with somebody through pain, not because you want to stay there with them, but because you want to help them move on.

The expectations of congregations today seem to be endless. There is no way for pastors to be a success if they try to live up to all the expectations of a congregation: they will always fail. I think so many of these expectations are unrealistic and unimportant, and yet you are judged on them. It is sort of like the Chinese water torture — drip, drip, drip. It wears a person down. Clergy need to take time off to take care of themselves; they need to take time for retreat, meditation, and prayer; and they need to go play.

Regional leaders, however, also want to ensure that congregations get clergy who are committed to parish ministry. Like lay leaders, they do not want pastors who would rather be doing something else than serving a parish, or who might come to feel that way soon after becoming a pastor. In illustration, two regional leaders from different denominations comment:

We have many clergy, unfortunately, who really would be much happier if they were bankers or bookkeepers, or in some cases, carpenters. But through doing some lay ministry, they have come to feel they should be clergy.

I think a lot of clergy [don't understand what it means to] work in the local church. A lot of clergy are coming out of seminary without some practical experience in how they are approaching ministry. That is why you find a lot of burnout. They don't understand how to lead a meeting or work through difficult situations, and there are

other typical issues they are not equipped to deal with. When these situations confront them, they tend to get discouraged. Then they want to go into some other area of ministry like chaplaincy, seminary teaching — those kinds of things.

If clergy who might be more effective in another career than parish ministry do not choose on their own accord to find a different line of work, many judicatory executives across denominations have developed ways to “exit” clergy from pastoral ministry into some other position.⁸ Some clergy who are *involuntarily terminated* by their congregations (that is, forced out by the lay governing board) may be pastors of particularly difficult congregations that they are too inexperienced to handle. Or, if they are recently ordained, they may have unrealistic expectations of what parish work entails. An Episcopal regional leader voices these possibilities:

Most of the graduating seniors from our M.Div. programs are in their second or third career. They don't want to be an assistant or rector of a small parish; they want to jump into the big time. I can get curmudgeonly with them and say, “What are you talking about? You are a rookie! I don't care if you were an investment banker.” Also, I think the days of “Father knows best” or “whatever the priest says” are gone. I think that is good, but there is a dark side to it too. If the congregation doesn't like the priest, they will find any way they can to get rid of him [or her]. They do not regard it as a covenant or kind of a marriage in which they are going to have some good times and some bad times, but they are going to weather it out. I think the level of conflict in parishes has increased. What we call a Canon 21, or the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, is much more commonly used today than, say, ten years ago.

For such reasons, both lay leaders and regional executives want pastors who have a real and a realistic vocation to parish ministry. More judicatory executives than lay leaders and search committees are likely eager to obtain clergy as pastors who, in addition to their other abilities, can be proactive in negotiating realistic boundaries and time demands

Lay members mainly care that when they need their pastor, they can get the assistance they seek. They want their minister to be committed to parish ministry as well as interested in their congregation in particular. Some lay members may view the number of

hours the pastor spends in congregational work as directly proportional to their pastor's spiritual depth. In illustration, four lay leaders describe why commitment to the ministry of the congregation, *as they define it*, is a priority for their next pastor to possess:

We wanted someone very serious about his call to ministry and the job that he did. We were not looking for someone who just happened to be a pastor because it was his job. It has to be someone who had a passion for it.

We want a spiritual leader and not somebody who is just punching a clock. We have had both types. One minister who is just punching a clock said: “Well it is time for me to go. Don't call me at home. And if you have an evening social event, don't expect me.” We, like everyone else, have made mistakes too.

One candidate we turned down seemed most interested in whether he could find a small farm so he could bring his [exotic animals] with him.

We turned one pastor's profile down because we decided this would be a person who wanted to play more than work — a person who is also into sailing. As we looked further, we became convinced of it. So we are not going to touch base at all with that person.

It may not be important to many lay leaders whether the pastor spends forty hours or fifty-hours a week ministering to the needs of the congregation. Rather, they are more concerned that their pastor set some regular times when they know they can approach him or her for assistance. The above comments from lay leaders further suggest that:

- Pastoral candidates need to avoid giving the impression, by emphasizing the importance of setting boundaries, that they are *less* work-committed than, for example, secular applicants for openings in firms where a search committee member may also have a role in hiring.
- Some applicants or new pastors may be unreasonable in insisting on boundaries in time or duties, limits which are then interpreted by laity as their pastor's setting him or herself above and apart from members of the congregation.

The following descriptions from lay leaders of what they want along these lines (or will try to avoid) in finding their next pastor are instructive:

Another thing that has been a concern of our search committee is the pastor's *time management*—how much he will be available in the office. So that the membership knows when—unless there is an emergency, of course—they could find him in the office.

We wanted someone who has an *open-door policy* — so that people know anyone could come in at any time unless the door is closed. Then you can usually ask the secretary if the pastor is in, and if he is busy; but you also let him know you are there.

I think the pastor who wants to be able to sit in his study and think long thoughts, read, and pray and come out once a week to preach just is not going to meet our needs. We need a minister who is going to *roll up his sleeves*, be in the middle.

We had a new minister. We asked if she could help us with a supper. She said, “Oh, I do not do that!” It was not a question! It was kind of almost a given. You would expect a minister to do that — just to be there, *to work with the troops*, which I feel is very important. . . Now, you cannot take anything for granted.

5. AVAILABLE, APPROACHABLE AND WARM PASTOR WITH GOOD “PEOPLE SKILLS”

Regional leaders interviewed across denominations cited the pastor's ability to show members of the congregation that he or she loves and will care for them, as an almost essential clergy quality that search committees try to find when choosing a new pastor. Regional leaders from five denominations explain:

Congregations want to be loved and cared for, loved and lifted up. If that is done, the congregation is happy — but I tell pastors the number one thing they want to know about you, is whether you love them.

A pastor has to love people, not with some objective idea of “love.” He has to like people. Congregations want that; they want a pastor who cares about them.

Bottom line — there has to be love between the clergy and the laity. If that is not there, nothing else clicks. If there is love, there is the spirit of accord, and from there it just flows — programs, administration, the running of the church — without a lot of mess going on.



You have to love people, because they are going to wear you out. If you are not ready to put up with them and allow God to help you love them through and in spite of it, you are not going to make it in the ministry.

We need clergy who have a genuine love of the congregation. . . . Deep down with all of the crap you get, you have to be able to say what the little book by Bonhoeffer said years ago, “I love these people.” And if people know they are loved, they will follow pretty well where you are going.

In some cases, clergy actually dislike their congregations, and the feeling among many members toward these clergy is mutual. In other cases, clergy do care deeply about the individual members and about the congregation as a whole, but they do not know *how* to express it in ways that communicate this to lay mem-

bers. Several regional leaders lamented not any lack of commitment to or caring for a particular congregation and its members on the part of their clergy, but more that the pastors lack “people skills.” For example:

Congregations are looking for pastors who have *people skills*. That is something tragically lacking in a lot of our pastors. They don’t even address that in seminaries; they teach the academic, not the people skills.

Pastoral ministry is a people-oriented profession. Some people just cannot work with people.

Many of the lay leaders interviewed said that their experience with past ministers has brought to the fore the importance of their new pastor’s being approachable – e.g., inviting confidences and questions; being

“Several members on our committee voted against him because he would not have eye contact with us when he talked.”

friendly, outgoing, slow to anger, eager to offer help; being a people person. In illustration, the following three lay leaders explain:

He has to be approachable. If someone has a problem, he has to be able to say, “Well come on up to the office and let’s talk about it.” A nice person would be an overriding consideration. If he had a short temper, that would throw him out of the ballpark immediately. He has to be a bit of an extrovert. If you are an introvert, sometimes you become unapproachable. He has to be approachable.

We were looking for someone who was perhaps a little more extroverted as opposed to introverted. A little more gregarious as opposed to being one who desired to hold himself in his office, or whatever. A little bit of a people person, someone who was out and about. Yet we wanted someone who was at the same time gentle and caring, and also very serious about his call to ministry and the job that he did.

We had a minister we dearly loved. He was very much by the book; we did not have to worry about our doctrine with him around! He wasn’t much of a people person, and [when he left] the congregation felt we needed someone with more people strengths. So that was one of the *major* characteristics we were looking for. If someone seemed a bit legalistic and uncomfortable in talking with us, we decided to look elsewhere. There

were a couple of folks that we thought would be good candidates, but they reminded us very much of our previous pastor, and we thought we needed a change.

Pastoral search committees try to ascertain this quality of “approachability” during interviews with prospective candidates. Clergy acting too extroverted or “overselling” during an interview can apparently be just as off-putting to search committees as the candidate who appears too introverted. It may be instructive to hear why search committees turned down or hired candidates on such bases, as reflected in the comments of lay leaders of four search committees:

One of the ministers that we interviewed, when he talked to you, he looked at the floor. He would not look us in the eye. Several members on our committee voted against him because he would not have eye contact with us when he talked.

His openness and friendliness! It was almost like sitting there and talking to your best friend. He thought about the questions before he answered them. He looked directly at us, and talked with us, not at us. It was very refreshing.

We have a very diverse congregation and we needed somebody who was going to be able to match that diversity. [Candidates’] answers to the kinds of questions we asked in the interviews tipped the balance more than anything else did. We had an umbrella chart. We said: “Here is the very conservative, here is the middle of the road, and here is the extreme liberal. How would you minister to those particular groups in a way that celebrates congregational diversity, but also tries to get some togetherness in the process of doing this?” The way the candidates answered that question was amazing. One candidate just rose to the top. He took about a minute to look at the chart, and he spent probably fifteen or twenty minutes answering how he would minister to each one of those congregants within the community, but yet keeping the church in line as a whole. Some of the other candidates just blew off the question, and said “that wouldn’t be a problem” for them.

There were four or five candidates that we actually brought here, talked to face to face, and spent the whole day with... at the end of the time, we on the committee just looked at each other and said “no.” We did not feel they would fit with our congregation. Some people tried to impress so much by just talking on and on. After it was

all done, I could have sold myself as a consultant to people who were job hunting because so many of them oversold. They just did not respond to the kinds of questions we were proposing. We hired a gentleman with good speaking and organizational skills, who was quiet, unassuming and something of an introvert, but we found he just needed to be drawn out.

Sometimes the problem with the pastor's apparent lack of people-skills is more situationally specific than a general ability; that is, the pastor does not have the people skills appropriate to the culture of the particular congregation and region. Three regional leaders explain:

They want people who "connect with us at our level." I just came back from a meeting in a rural congregation. They said, "We want someone who understands our culture here, the rural community, and how we function."

I would say relational skills are essential. Most of our churches are relatively unsophisticated. People are looking for someone whom they feel they have a personal connection to, someone they think cares about them and their interests, and also their local community. They want a person who will put down roots and live beside them, and go to the high school ball games, and show up to play golf with the old men's Tuesday Morning League.

Graduates from our seminaries are not well equipped to serve the ministries of most of our congregations in the South. Typically what I am finding is that people who have a greater familiarity with the particularities of the South tend to be better pastors. They are coming from other traditions than ours, mainly AME and Southern Baptist.

Lay leaders interviewed made similar comments about their desire to get a pastor who had the interest, experience, and understanding of how to minister to persons both within their congregation and without who live in the kind of community around the church:

We wanted somebody who was interested in a congregation of our size. . . in a relatively small town . . . and we wanted to make sure it was somebody who understood our area. If we sensed they felt we were a consolation prize, we did not want them.

We wanted someone who was good at working in the inner city because we are an inner city

church. We would not even consider many that applied because they were from out of state or small towns, and we figured they just would not know anything about urban ministry.

People coming in for interviews, they see the area (black and Hispanic) and get a little nervous. You have to be up front with them: "This is where we are. This is who we are." They have to be comfortable with it. Besides our liking the person, they had to like us. It is not like we are a suburban church with a wonderful back yard. . . . We decided that if we wanted to grow our church, we needed to bring in people from the neighborhood. The pastor we hired suggested that when we decide to go for an associate minister, we get either a Spanish or black person to bring in people and make them feel comfortable.

Perhaps one of the more subtle but important indicators of cultural fit between pastor and congregation is if their sense of humor matches. The following judicatory executive explains:

They want a priest about whom they can say, "He is one of us. When he tells a joke, we laugh," because he understands the context in which a joke will work. They want someone like them . . . and actually that is the person who is going to work out best.

Several lay leaders interviewed brought up the importance that their pastor have a "sense of humor" as part of his or her people-skills, but obviously a sense of humor that appeals to the congregation, or at least to the members of the search committee:

A couple of things we feel are very important in our next pastor are a *sense of humor* and skills in music.

He has good people-skills. He knows when to say something, and when not to. He has a good sense of humor and knows how to approach people. He can use humor in approaching an issue, and he can also listen to people and kind of figure out where they are coming from.

The person was very well qualified, and I liked the person very much, but it would have been hard culturally, a very hard match for our church. (*Why?*) Well, her personality. She had such a different sense of humor. It would have been really hard for people to understand her, where she might be coming from. She was just a little bit too out there for us because we are too conservative . . . just kind of every time we would say A, she would be off thinking about B.

6. GENDER, RACE, MARRIAGE, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION OF CLERGY

Cultural fit between pastor and congregation is often based on members' cultural or theological prejudices that their denomination considers unacceptable. Male gender has long been and still is a criterion of search committees, even in those denominations which have ordained women to full ministerial status for fifty years or more. Just as was the case fifty years ago, many congregations define the ideal pastor as an ordained man under forty years of age, in good health, with over a decade of experience as a pastor. He will also be happily married to a woman who does not work outside the home but volunteers many hours to church committees, and spends the rest of her time being a mother to polite, wholesome children.

While this is obviously a caricature, lay leaders of search committees that I interviewed were seldom exceptions to preferring a new pastor with most of the above attributes, especially having a wife. Two search committee chairs of congregations in different parts of the country and of two denominations that have long ordained women, explain why they chose a man as their pastor in part because he had a wife who did not work outside the home:

We checked references very hard, listened intently, and hired a young married man. His wife is a "home mom" and active in the church. She is a ball of dynamite, which we kind of saw when they came for an interview.

Our present pastor is married with four children. (Interviewer: *Was it important that he have a family?*) I think it was. We wanted at least a wife. And one way to make the church grow is to get a pastor with four children; that helps! I think a person who has a family probably can do a better job in ministry. In the Methodist church that is near our church, their past three ministers have not had this: one of them got divorced while he was here. Their other two ministers had wives who were also ministers who had other churches and did not participate in the church here. I feel that having a husband and a wife in the church is important.

Some of the preference expressed above may be because search committees are looking for a pastor who will exemplify their spiritual ideal of the nuclear family. For this reason, as well perhaps as some theo-

logical objections to divorce, many committees do not much want a divorced man — especially not a divorced woman — particularly if that person might be involved or dating. Even hiring married co-pastors can be unappealing to search committees, in part because, although the wife is in the church, she is still not the typical "mom." The following lay leaders who said their committee was open to hiring any one with the pastoral skills they were looking for, allowed certain profiles to "slide" for a while until the applicant got another position or they found others they liked to interview:

We sort of wanted one man, but he was divorced and living with another woman, and we wondered how that would go over with the congregation. We finally decided we were willing to take a chance, but by then he had already taken a position at a church in another state. Then there was another couple who wanted to be co-pastors, and we wondered how well they would work together . . . so we kind of let that slide.

Half of the ministers whose names we got were females and half of them were divorced.

I do not believe our congregation would accept a female solo minister.

If the congregation has had a past minister or interim whose behavior was upsetting or disruptive, this could make the search committee leery of hiring a pastor with similar demographic characteristics, particularly gender:

We had a woman who was an interim. Then the search committee really wanted a man. I thought she was wonderful, but others did not like that she changed the music. They wanted to use the same music. They did not like that she changed some of the communion formalities. This is an old German Evangelical congregation. They wanted someone of that heritage, of that sort. They are not too interested in hiring somebody who is "outside the box."



Problems occasioned by the health of the pastor or someone else in the clergy family may prompt similar consequences in what search committees look for in a new pastor:

We had a clergy couple. That worked out fine because those who wanted to talk to a man could do so, and those who wanted to talk to a female could do so. But [we would] probably not [call a couple] again. They had a disabled child and had some family problems. [The husband] actually went into counseling and got out of ministry.

The health of our next pastor is a concern of our search committee. This is because we had a pastor with major health problems who had severe cancer. She resigned some months ago, but we actually have been without a pastor for more than two years.

Regional leaders do not always hear why search committees reject one candidate and accept another. This is because many lay search committees, at least in the liberal Protestant denominations, are made aware⁹ that it is totally unacceptable to refuse to accept candidates for pastor because they are of a certain gender, race or ethnicity. Avoiding candidates based solely on personal characteristics such as their age and whether they are married is also frowned upon. However, regional leaders can guess quite well the search committee preferences:

In this Southern culture, people — if I let them really ask for what they want — would tell me they want a nice young man with a family. I told one church they could not even ask for that. Don't write it on paper.

First they want a young pastor. The majority would still like a young married male who fits the traditional stereotype of thirty years ago.

Churches are always asking for young pastors, young white pastors with families. They prefer a young man, but will take a young woman. I tell them: "As United Methodists we are called to be served by persons of all genders, of all ethnic backgrounds, so gender, race, and ethnicity are not issues in terms of our appointments."

They tell me they want "someone" in the pastor's family, [meaning a wife], "who can help with small groups or children's ministries." I look at them and say, "Well, do you know that a third of our UMC pastors are single now, and 50 percent of the people in the seminary are female?"

If I send out a profile of a pastor who is mediocre along with a picture of him with his family, and he is thirty-five years old, has a cute wife and two beautiful children, I guarantee he will be interviewed if not called.

More important than gender or age, but related to marital status and children, is the pastor's sexual orientation. Even in those judicatories of the United Church of Christ and the Episcopal Church, where gay and lesbian pastors are permitted and sometimes welcomed, search committees may not be so accepting. Several regional leaders in these denominations said that although search committees tended to be cautious about stating to them directly that they did not want a homosexual pastor, they used "code words" to try and communicate this. They say things such as: "We want a biblical preacher;" and in interviewing candidates couching this in words such as: "What are your feelings about authority of scripture?"

The lay leaders on search committees interviewed in the fall of 2001, however, seemed much more forthright in how they felt about this issue. They were also more frank about the ways they ascertained the candidate's attitude toward ministering to gay and lesbian persons, and his or her own sexual preference. Five lay leaders explain why their committee turned down gay and lesbian applicants:

Some ministers are gay, and unfortunately in our church right now, we have too far to go to heal (from the last minister) for that right now.

We are *not* interested in being an open and affirming church. So that is number one for rejecting candidates.

We felt our church was not ready to be open. We know our church, and we did not need this in addition to the problems we had [conflict occasioned by last minister]. We agreed on that. So right up front we asked candidates things about gay rights, etc. and listened very carefully to their responses. We do not have a problem with any members being gay or whatever. Everybody has a right to worship and there is friendship, etc. But there were a couple of people who were living with their — whatever-you-call-it — in an alternative situation. We thanked them for their profile.

One candidate we turned down was a female, and she was gay. She was in New York City, and she was very open about it. Our congregation just would not be accepting of someone like that that.

Not that everybody feels that way, but it would have been very difficult for that person. Our congregation is just not that progressive.

In two other congregations, the lay leaders said that while their search committee and membership would have accepted an openly gay pastor, they rejected homosexual candidates (or were rejected by the candidate) because their church was not officially “open and affirming,” that is, endorsing homosexuality as an acceptable life style:

We are not going to turn anybody down for being gay, but we don't want anybody coming in with an agenda. We will interview a gay candidate, but we don't want a gay or a non-gay person who says, “I am going to change this thing.” So if the person sounds like he or she has an agenda, we

just do not want that.

We do not want someone who has a hang-up because, we are not an “open and affirming” church. We had a candidate

“Some congregations have sort of suffered under the idolatry of the young pastor with family.”

who asked that question, and we said, “Well, no.” And the candidate said, “Well then, I am not interested in going to a church that isn't at least exploring it.”

In contrast, another congregation that is officially “open and affirming” included this position on homosexuality as a key criterion in hiring:

We did want someone who would be “open and affirming” whether or not he or she was personally gay. We had a lesbian-partnered woman as interim, and now we have a [heterosexual] black woman pastor who is a wonderful minister to everyone here.

The experiences of yet another congregation with the issue of clergy sexual orientation may be instructive. This is the search committee, mentioned in a previous quote by its lay leader, that, because of its apprehensions about members' reactions, let the applications of a divorced man living with a woman and a clergy couple “slide” until after many months and many interviews:

We found a pastor who has good people skills, preaches marvelous sermons, likes to visit, and has good organizational skills. He does not dive in there and tell everybody what “we should do.” He

is divorced and homosexual. He is openly gay, and has lobbied the state for gay people to have some living-together rights. Although the church is not yet open and affirming, it may soon be.

7. AGE, EXPERIENCE, AND JOB TENURE OF THE PASTOR

Search committees' typical preference for hiring a young married man as pastor may be less tied to clergy gender per se and more occasioned by their fond hope that such a pastor will attract similar young families to fill the pews and the Sunday School:

Some congregations have sort of suffered under the idolatry of the young pastor with family. They think this is going to solve all their problems and will bring in droves of young people, even if the average age of the community is fifty plus.

Every church wants a young white pastor with a family. Do they realize that one day that young white male will be older? They tend to think it takes a young person to attract younger families and younger people. I am not convinced of that.

In the minds of laity interviewed on a number of search committees, the age of the candidate appears to be often associated with their expectations of how much enthusiasm the person would bring to the job of being their pastor. The eagerness of some search committee chairs to get a younger pastor seems partly fueled by the fact that they simply want a change, because their previous pastor who had been with them some decades was considered stodgy, overbearing, and detrimental to church growth:

For quite a few ministers we interviewed, this was viewed as the last pulpit they wanted, one from which they would retire. Our last pastor was like this. He was also overbearing, wasn't willing to change. We wanted somebody younger, one who would be strong in working with youth.

One we turned down had already retired once. He was at the end of his cycle. Our previous pastor had been with us for nineteen years, so we have been through that. You know he was a wonderful pastor, but the church has not grown in the last eight years. We just hired a woman who is recent second-career seminary graduate (in early forties). She has enthusiasm, is caring, down to earth, and you know — alive!

We had the same minister for twenty-two years — a very long time. Not everyone, but many of us feel that maybe we should be looking at other modes or just other ways of doing things; so we are open to other possibilities. Our minister, much as we loved him, was very detailed oriented, and I think our church is looking for maybe a little more openness — letting people do what they think is important at the moment (in mission) without a lot of red tape.

Times of pastoral change are not only a major point where regional leaders can gain entry into and influence congregations,¹⁰ but are also opportunities for lay leaders to alter the climate and direction of the congregation. This seems to be one major reason why lay leaders interviewed are sometimes ambivalent about whether they want a pastor who will stay with them a substantial number of years, or someone whose tenure is likely to be shorter. For example:

When I first came to this congregation, the minister had been here close to twenty years. I just wanted a shorter-term minister. I really think that at some point the minister has done all he can do in a congregation, and the congregation is not going to grow. So at that time, I wanted us to hire someone who was close to sixty years old so that he would stay five or six years and leave. But this time, I wanted to hire one young enough who could stay fifteen years!

Thirty years ago there was far more association between clergy age and pastoral experience than there is today. Then most clergy in their mid-forties would already have had over twenty years experience as pastors. Now, with the growing number of second career entrants to ministry, a mid-forties pastor may have just received his or her M.Div. degree. Able college graduates in their twenties are apparently more attracted to other professions than the clergy.¹¹ Given this aging of new clergy, regional leaders find it particularly ironic that search committees also want a young pastor with a decade or more of experience:

Getting what search committees want in pastoral leadership is tough. Our average seminary graduate is in his or her forties, and our average UCC pastor is fifty-seven. Everybody is looking for a thirty-two-year-old with fifteen years of experience. We have one [candidate who meets these criteria].

After asking for a caring person, a good preacher, someone who will do adequate administrative

work, who will pay attention to all members of the congregation in pastoral care, they say they would like to have people with *experience who are young*. That is what they want. But our policy is that we do not allow negotiation around age, gender, and race issues. So of course we have a lot of older clergy.

Ninety percent of the time when we go to congregations and ask just that question you asked me, [“*What does the congregation want in the way of clergy leadership?*”] We hear: “We want someone *young* with experience; someone who won’t cost us much,¹² but who has already served three or four churches; we want someone who knows how to work with the youth and can get them involved in the church; and we want someone to take care of our elderly and our shut-ins.”

We are looking for someone preferably under the age of 55. The pastor who left at the age of 50 had been here for 25 years. The pastor before our senior pastor had been there for 35 years. We are looking for longevity and so are looking for someone 55 and younger. But we are *not* looking for someone who has just graduated from the seminary; we need somebody who can hit the ground running because we do have a very large, very hands-on, active congregation

Experience is more important than relative youth for most search committees seeking a senior pastor of a large, multi-staffed congregation. Big churches that can pay substantial salaries get many profiles, but not always profiles from applicants with sufficient administrative experience. Some judicatory executives are having the most trouble finding “good clergy” for their larger, well paying churches. One explains:

Our basic problem with finding good pastors is not for the starter churches, or even so much the next level. What is most difficult is finding *really capable* people for the larger more challenging churches. This is because when you have people who go to seminary mid-career, just about the time they have enough experience to take on a large church, they are ready to retire. And of course churches in other states that can pay a lot more than our better churches are pursuing the same small pool of people.

Lay leaders interviewed in congregations of over 600 members were especially apt to say that one of the criteria for their new pastor is demonstrated ability in church administration, a criterion that they had to use in turning down quite a number of applications:

We have turned down quite a few — especially those applying who had only been in very small congregations.

We are getting a lot of candidates with lack of experience as a senior pastor.

We turned down people who did not have a good administrative background to match their ability in the pulpit. Both were equally important to us. We have a thirteen-member staff and a large endowment, most of which is restricted. Administration is going to be a very important skill in the near future as we look hard at how we are configured and what we are going to do financially. We have got some boundary issues around members of the church becoming staff and inherent problems that come with that. We look for conflict management and resolution ability, and good administrative skills. We look for a track record here.

At the same time, even search committees of the larger, multi-staffed congregations do not want a senior pastor who focuses on administration to the near exclusion of other pastoral duties. As another lay leader put it:

We do not want a pastor who is so highly organized that he or she appears to be more interested in administration than dealing personally [with members]. We still want someone who has a relaxed style, more of a congregational style as opposed to a ritual style.

8. CONSENSUS BUILDER, LAY MINISTRY COACH, AND RESPONSIVE LEADER

Regardless of the size, location, denomination or current situation of the congregation, lay leaders interviewed want a pastor who is responsive to *their* concerns, who will help them go in directions they choose or would approve. Doing this successfully in churches that have recently undergone crises and fights requires a new pastor with good conflict management skills. The following lay leaders interviewed in three such congregations are aware that their next pastor will need such ability:

Currently we are looking for someone who is not afraid of conflict. By conflict I even mean as gentle as disagreement, because in our opinion as a search committee, conflict and disagreement are opportunities for spiritual growth. But our history in this church has been to avoid conflict. We

are very diverse. Even a pastor who walks on water is not going to satisfy everyone.

We needed someone who would be sensitive to the turmoil our church has been through over the prior minister. He left on his own accord but there was a lot of deceit and lying and a whole bunch of stuff that happened to people.

We were coming off sad times around conflict with the last minister who wanted to be king. We were looking for someone who can deal with problems within churches. There are problems in every church, ours certainly too.

Regional leaders across denominations generally would concur that the type of pastor who is most likely to be the cause and focus of church conflict is the pastor who is both dictatorial in style *and* new to the congregation. This is the pastor who goes into a congregation and, without trying to understand where the people there are coming from, attempts to issue directives and make changes, particularly around instituting new ways of operating. For example:

Some congregations have a history of continuous change of pastors that is sometimes due to things in the congregation. On the other hand, we have pastors who come here and are unwilling to meet the people where they are. That creates tensions. They desire to make changes without adequate preparation of the congregation for those changes. It is a kind of *authoritarian approach*.

Regional leaders hear from search committees that they definitely do *not* want pastors who take an authoritarian approach. Rather, judicatory officials say their congregations are looking for the kind of pastors who are “consensus builders” and “team players.”

Our churches want a consensus builder. Our churches are looking for somebody with a vision and some strength of leadership — leadership that has the ability to help people work together and does not *dictate*.

They want a pastoral leader who is not afraid to be part of teams, and who understands that even if he or she is a pastor, he or she is also part of congregational team. We do not want a pastor who is autocratic or authoritarian.

Lay leaders that I interviewed were quite definite that indeed, they would reject an autocratic pastor. They searched for a very different kind of pastoral leader — for example:

We did not want someone — because we had just had one of those — who wanted to be king. We all agree we need a minister who can delegate and lead, not dictate. One who helps people figure out things for themselves.

We are looking for someone who can really support us in and utilizes the systems that are already in place. There is a piece that the minister could play in stimulating and being a spark plug for a lot of leadership that already exists in this congregation. There are people who really want to come to church and put their lives aside for the day and be comforted and upheld. But there is definitely a group here (including the search committee) who do not consider themselves “sheep;” they are not looking for a “shepherd.”

A pastor with leadership abilities that are strong, but not overbearing, is probably the best way to put it.

We want someone who can empower leadership within the congregation, working with the laity, empowering their leadership.

We are looking for someone strong organizationally in leadership, leading but also helping identify people’s gifts for leadership and helping them to be able to use those.

A pastor with good leadership abilities, as search committee chairs interviewed would define these, is a pastor who can initiate some helpful ideas to revitalize the church. However, before the pastor completes plans, and definitely before implementing any changes, the pastor solicits the opinions of members and engages them in refining and putting these ideas into operation. In so doing she or he helps lay persons become lay leaders.

What these search committee chairs are voicing about clergy leadership dovetails with Jackson Carroll’s depiction (1991) of the contemporary exercise of pastoral authority. Clergy leadership is viewed as legitimate to the extent that clergy listen and respond to the needs of members, sharing with them the responsibility for making changes that are faithful to the Gospel. However, as Carroll notes, sometimes congregations are at a point that they need a strong, innovative leader with the vision and the charisma to move a stagnant church into a better future, even if at the outset many members are dubious about the new directions.

9. ENTREPRENEURIAL EVANGELIST, INNOVATOR, AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER

Choosing a pastor who is likely to lead the congregation in new and innovative directions is the kind of criterion that judicatory executives wish they could hear far more frequently than they do from search committees. As discussed previously, regional leaders know that lay persons want pastors who love, understand, and fit well in the culture of the church and community. They also realize that pastors with good “people skills” will be better able to move their congregations toward greater vitality and growth than pastors who are seen as dictatorial and abrasive. At the same time, these regional administrators tend to lose patience with placid pastors of stagnant congregations and with their lay leaders who block making changes that would help the congregation grow and become more vital. The following regional leaders from five denominations express their perturbation with this all too common situation:

What congregations usually want is the perfect father; somebody who will “love us, visit us in the hospital, very pastorally centered.” I want someone who is a go-getter, not issue oriented, or if they are, at least it is balanced. I want people whose lives have some evidence of excitement and passion. I think a lot of people have this image of the priest as having that placid face and kindly hands that hold yours and tell you everything is going to be okay.

By and large the old model of the country pastor is the kind of a model we do not hold up anymore. We are slowly retiring those clergy. Now we are looking for clergy who empower people to help the congregation become a permission-giving church, rather than a church that is only there to have its hired minister serve them.

We need people sensitive to the historical situation of the congregation, and yet who are not stuck in that history. At their best, some congregations have caught a vision for the pastor as someone there to equip them to be in ministry. Some are not there. Some still see the pastor as a hired hand to do the entire ministry. Frankly, I think those are the congregations who will struggle more in the future.

Some congregations just ask for “someone who will take care of them.” Now the best lay leaders

among them know that is not what they need. They ask for pastors who can help the church be more effective in making disciples; but that depends on the sophistication level of the church. We do need pastors who have some leadership ability to lead a congregation from where it is to where it needs to be. Those kinds of pastors are in short supply.

Quite a number of judicatory executives in different denominations provide consultants, resources, workshops, conferences, and other leadership development opportunities for their clergy and laity. They offer help in discerning the kinds of changes that may need to be made to revitalize congregations of different sizes, locations, and situations, and they also introduce new ideas. Especially in times of pastoral

“A lot of parishes say, ‘We want younger people’— except that younger people bring new ideas, and that is what they do not want.”

change, some judicatory staff report they try to get search committees and members to envision what they would like their church to be like in the future and then try to help them get a pastor who will match this future vision. For example:

What we do is to ask a question in our consultation with local churches that sort of gets at the future in a different way than asking people what they want, which is, “Where can you be in five years?” If they will answer that question, then we can be held accountable for helping them select a pastor who can help them get there. That is the basis of the appointment — neither what they want, nor what we feel like they need. It is rather coming to an agreement about what the congregation can be in five years.

Not all clergy or lay leaders who are invited to make use of these training opportunities do so, nor are all vacancy consultations effective in getting lay members to expand their ideas about what kinds of abilities they may need in the next pastor. Judicatory executives have little sympathy for those pastors who have made little effort to take advantage of leadership development opportunities or other types of continuing education. Such clergy now bewilderedly look at their aging, declining congregations and, as one judicatory executive reported, whine: “What’s wrong? We are doing exactly what we were taught in seminary

and have always done. What has happened to the church? We work real hard; we try real hard, but little changes.”

Regional leaders across denominations also tend to be exasperated with those search committees and congregations who say they want a pastor who will “grow their church,” but then do not want to undertake the necessary changes for this to happen. The following reflections from a regional leader illustrate this “disconnect” when the judicatory staff, as one put it, “provides the pastoral leader who has the skills the congregational search committee *says* it want, but that is not what it *actually* wants.”

A lot of parishes say, “We want younger people” — except that younger people bring new ideas, and that is what they do not want. They want to incorporate younger people so that they can teach them the ways of the old school.

Churches in this district want a pastor who will bring in new people, but they do not want the pastor to disrupt what has been going on. It is a real mixed bag.

Search committees say they want someone who will grow a church. Very often that is the one where their up-front asking is very different from what they really want. They want the church to grow without change.

Every congregation tells me they want to grow. I really push them on that. I have a bunch that I think don’t want to change, and I don’t think you can grow without there being some change. One of the most uncomfortable matches that I see is when a church calls a pastor who has a lot of new ideas and who is ready to help the congregation grow. The pastor gets there and the church says, “We don’t really want to do that.” I want to say to them, “If you really like things the way they are now, that’s okay. But then look for a pastor who is good at what you are doing now. Just don’t call me up and complain that you did not take in 100 new members the next year!”

I think some congregations want to be a chapel and have a priest come in and service their needs. When they die, they do not care what happens to the congregation. I raised the issue with this congregation whose church building is located in a vastly changing neighborhood. I asked, “What do we do about the large Hispanic population that surrounds this church? What about the Asians, who are also in this neighborhood?” One

lady said to me, “I am too old to learn Spanish.” I really think that was symbolic of the way a lot of those people are. Maybe two or three younger families in the church would be willing to go out and welcome in the people of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures, but unfortunately most would say, “I do not want to do it.”

A number of the lay leaders interviewed who hoped a new pastor would help grow their church probably had given only superficial thought to the changes that might be needed in their congregation to spur growth or retain new members. Such lack of foresight, however, is not universally true for lay leaders and search committees, as evidenced in the reflections of the following chair:

There are many, many people now who are unchurched in our area. We are not going to go out and formally recruit, but we would like to come up with some ideas for reaching out to others. We are hoping that a new minister might be talented in looking for new folks or just maybe new ways of reaching them through doing activities or ways of ministering to those families who have been coming to this area, because a lot of new building is going on. We are hoping that we can grow in a way that will keep those people involved. We looked back in our history and found that we would get to a certain point, and then long time members were not willing to make some changes that might attract and keep new people. Some people looking for a church might come and worship, and then say, “Well, I don’t know.” Our congregation was not really changing with the times. We found we would get to a certain point, and then the membership would drop back. Some people in the congregation don’t want to grow because our building is getting too small. We have a piece of land actually (a few miles away) and there are many who are saying, “Oh let’s move. Let’s build. Let’s just keep on growing. Then there are some saying, “I grew up in this church. We want to stay right where we are!” But we have a feeling if we do that— stay here — we are not going to grow.

A number of judicatory executives interviewed spoke about an ideal type of pastor as an entrepreneur, meaning more than a pastor’s superior skills at starting or growing a church. Similarly, when they described an ideal pastor as an innovator, they meant more than the pastor’s ability to devise innovative ways to involve members in the congregation’s min-

istry and mission. Their images of pastors who would be entrepreneurs and innovators often seemed to include the impression that such pastors might also be prophets or visionaries. Or as several UMC executives named it, transformational leaders.

These images are illustrated in the descriptions of the kind of pastoral qualities regional executives say they would like to find among their clergy and to hear included among the qualities lay search committees want in their next pastor:

Nobody asks me for a prophet! I want that. Someone who has not lost that idea of the pastoral mystery of death and life, sorrow and joy, the full range of emotions.

I am looking for clergy who have entrepreneurial skills and burn for the Lord.

We are looking more for entrepreneurial kinds of clergy who really are cheerleaders, coaches, and visionaries who empower people.

People need an entrepreneur, someone who will be a catalyst for change, and will do lay leader development, who can be a partner with them, and not do it all for them.

If the congregation is operating in a maintenance direction out of its Christendom model, it wants a pastor who keeps things harmonious and run things well. If the congregation is operating out of our mission posture, which we push churches to do, then they want more of a visionary *leader* who is capable of communicating, lifting up, training and developing the leadership of the congregation. That is a noticeable difference. We can almost tell whether a church has figured out our mission posture yet, in the way they write their job description.

We want pastoral leaders who are willing to hold out a vision and a mission, and willing to connect with God in the minds of the people.

I want a person who has the ability to create a vision, lead through change, endure conflict and take risks.

We want transformational leaders. They are the ones who can name current reality, who can hold a vision for good listeners, who know where the heartbeat of the congregation is, and can lead them around a common vision.

We want leaders for transition and change. Transformational leadership is a kind of by-word

here. There are plenty of great theologians who are even okay preachers, but who just do not know how to work with a congregation to make the adjustments that are necessary. The conference has instituted a three-year academy for persons straight out of seminary and clergy new to this conference to learn transformational leadership.

Chairs of search committees interviewed rarely used such images and terms to describe qualities they wanted in their next pastor. Only one search committee of a rather unique church mentioned looking for a learned pastor with a prophetic bent because:

Our church is a social justice center in this city, so we needed to have someone who had a good understanding of social justice; someone who would be comfortable being quoted by the newspaper; someone with a doctorate — at least the Doctor of Ministry level.

A number of lay leaders did proffer that their search committee hoped to find a pastor who had exciting visions about some future directions their congregation might take. Almost in their next breath, however, they averred they would avoid hiring any pastor who had an agenda, as several put it, for changes or new directions they are intent on pushing through at all costs. One lay leader explained:

We are looking for someone with vision — but who is not so involved that the congregation feels it has to follow every possible idea he or she has. Our last minister was very controlling. I think we are looking for a little more openness. We talked about being more of a mission church, maybe having individuals champion a cause and then just go ahead and do that. Rather than forming formal committees — letting people here do what they think is important without a lot of red tape.

C. WHO, THEN, ARE THE “IDEAL PASTORS?”

To sum up, a majority of lay leaders and judicatory administrators whom I have quoted, would concur with Carroll’s description (2001:82-87) of the ideal pastor for many congregations. He or she would have the ability to envision theologically faithful patterns for their congregation’s future and the entrepreneurial talents necessary to propose effective methods of realizing these patterns. In addition such pastors would possess the charisma and people skills

to mobilize congregational support for change, giving members voice in refining the vision and putting the plan into operation.

Lay and regional leaders also want pastors who can preach wonderful sermons, conduct inspiring worship services, competently teach, care, counsel, and console. In choosing a new pastor, search committees differ in the abilities and characteristics to which they give priority, based on their past experiences with clergy and a host of other factors and influences.

What happens, however, when lay leaders in a congregation disagree on their choice of pastor? There is always the possibility of future conflicts, resulting in lay or clergy leaders leaving. However, for most loyal and committed lay leaders, the following scenario, related by one, is more probable:

I was also on the search committee when we were hiring the previous minister. When we were searching for this one, somebody walked up to me and said they did not like the minister we hired before. I said, “I did not like the one before that you liked. And we both kept coming to church and working with the church!” That is one thing about this church, that even if we don’t like the minister we will come here and continue working.



PART TWO: THE PLIGHT OF SMALL CONGREGATIONS: GETTING ANY PASTOR AT ALL

A. CLERGY SHORTAGE OR SHORTAGE OF ADEQUATE PASTORAL SALARIES?

Are there clergy for all congregations? No. In fact, the regional leaders surveyed whom I quoted in the preceding section, are having a hard time finding all the clergy they need for their open pulpits. National denominational leaders and seminaries are also dismayed over the prospects of their respective denominations having enough “good” clergy in the future. Their gloom is occasioned by reports that most people entering their M.Div. programs are nearer age forty-two than twenty-two and, further, do not have as high GRE scores and academic averages as those entering secular graduate professional schools.¹³ Although seminary enrollment has remained constant in the larger denominations, the newly ordained are not going into parish ministry in sufficiently large numbers to assuage the concerns of denominational leaders about the future of their congregations. In order to turn around this situation, seminaries suggest allocating more denominational funds to their institutions for scholarships and educational programs, allowing them to produce more “good” pastors. However, there are problems with this scenario.

First and foremost, fewer congregations are paying full-time salaries sufficient for a family to live on comfortably. Many M.Div. graduates have willingly sacrificed financially to attend seminary, not only in terms of actual tuition and living costs, but also in income foregone through not pursuing more remunerative professions and careers requiring graduate-level degrees. True, seminarians may have left a corporate or top professional position to prepare for the ministry. Most are not expecting great wealth and prestige following ordination. However, entering seminarians do anticipate the rewards of having a fulfilling ministerial position that will provide at least modestly comfortable financial support. An increasing number of seminary graduates will find that most of the congregations open to them have small memberships and are located in rural and small town areas — or even in more populated settings — but pay only a minimal full-time or even part-time salary. Many will not be attracted to such congregations.

Second, neither regional executives nor the members of the smaller congregations may appreciate M.Div. gradu-

ates’ advanced learning as much as their national denominational officials and seminary administrators do. These national leaders and faculty want well-educated clergy, in part to maintain the quality of ministry as they see it and in part to retain the prestige of the clergy as an educated profession in society.¹⁴ Yet, a recent multi-denominational study by Dudley and Roozen (2001:66-67) indicates that the amount of the pastor’s education is unrelated to whether the pastor reports that the congregation has grown in the last five years, whether it is spiritually vital and alive, well organized, has clear mission and goals, or is interested in preserving its denominational heritage. These latter factors are often more important to regional judicatory executives and lay leaders than whether the clergy as an occupation is maintaining prestige in comparison to other professions, or even whether their denomination’s social standing in American society is better or worse than that of other denominations or faith groups. At the same time, seminarians and graduates may come to believe that their educational costs and rewards have rendered them too over-qualified for the available positions in parish ministry, and they may seriously consider other kinds of ministerial career or careers outside of the church altogether. This leaves regional executives struggling to find some kind of clergy leadership for small, poor congregations, especially those in rural areas. The reasons that judicatory executives and other officials who deal with clergy placement are finding it particularly difficult to find seminary-educated pastors for some of their congregations, and how they are addressing this problem, is the focus of the following discussion.

B. PROBLEMS IN GETTING PASTORS FOR SMALL CONGREGATIONS

1. THE PROBLEM OF SUFFICIENT INCOME

Unlike the congregational pastoral vacancies described in Part One, where lay search committees could pick among a pool of candidates with M.Div. degrees, the majority of vacant pulpits in most denominations are in small congregations that pay a very minimal full-time salary, if that. Consequently, unlike the congregations whose search committee chairs were cited in Part One, such small

congregations are having a great deal of trouble finding any candidates for their pulpits. According to regional leaders, small congregations located near theological seminaries of the denomination fare better, since they are able to draw on seminary students to serve as pastors while they pursue their studies. Small congregations in other areas typically cannot offer a salary that even new seminary graduates will find acceptable.¹⁵ Many seminary graduates across denominations have educational debts to repay on top of supporting themselves and often a family. Unless the newly ordained have private wealth or a spouse who makes a good income, taking on the leadership of a small parish at a minimal salary may not be financially possible. Regional executives in three denominations comment on the problem of getting good clergy,

Higher living expenses in urban and suburban areas may make it particularly difficult for pastors to take low salaried churches

or any clergy, for small churches:

With our larger churches that are doing well, it is pretty easy to get good pastors; with the smaller churches that are struggling, it

is difficult. Most of our churches have a full-time pastor, but in smaller churches that pastor may not be adequately paid.

Getting a pastor for the smaller congregation is a problem. The rule of thumb is that you need to have an \$80,000 to \$100,000 church budget in order to have a full-time person. For our smaller congregations, what they are fighting are demographics [that is, insufficient numbers to sustain such a budget and limited prospects for growth]. If we can get ten candidate profiles [for a small membership church] to look at, we are fortunate, and then those profiles are from people who, due to their ability, are forced to look at [the small church] market. Is that a nice way of putting it? Thirty years ago that was where someone out of seminary began — and those small churches understood themselves as a kind of grooming place for those just out of seminary. They were used to having young, fully educated, ordained clergy. They are not going to see those clergy any more.

We deal with very small churches. We are in a region that pays an average of \$10,000 or less for a full time ministerial position. Because of that, we are not likely to attract the cream of the seminary crop, and so we get diminished leadership

capacity. Then the stress continues: how do we keep the doors open, still reach out and do ministry, and have good leadership?

It used to be that these small churches were filled with entry-level people, those right out of seminary. Now, we have some seminary students coming out owing \$30,000, and we are sending them to an appointment paying \$25,000 a year. So when they owe more than they are going to make in one year, I can understand why they are reluctant to go.

In this conference we have the “double whammy” of the church not being able to provide adequate salary, and we have people coming out of seminary with such debt they cannot afford to take those starter churches.

Higher living expenses in urban and suburban areas may make it particularly difficult for pastors to take low salaried churches in such areas. However, in populated areas, clergy “tent-makers”¹⁶ can usually find full-time or part-time secular positions to augment the small salary they get from pastoring a congregation seven to fifteen hours a week. Tentmaker clergy make it possible for impoverished congregations to have their pulpits filled — if clergy have the time, energy, and dedication to pastoral ministry to combine pastoral work with another job. An insufficient number are willing or able to do both. Three regional leaders from different denominations explain:

Right now, the pastoral shortage I am facing tends to be in the part-time churches — the ones that cannot afford a full-time pastor. It is getting harder and harder to get people to fill them. Their full-time job is full, and they do not have time for the part-time pastorate.

Most of our churches are inner city. So the biggest problem we have is the grinding cost of property, whether to purchase or lease. It is just overwhelming. Then trying to find a place where the pastor can live, where there are half-way decent schools for his children and such, is very, very expensive. So as a result almost all of the pastors’ wives work, and most of our pastors are bi-vocational.

A big problem here is finding clergy for smaller churches that are no longer viable, that cannot afford full time clergy. We just don’t have folk available who can serve as part-time pastors. That is economics! This is an expensive part of the world.

2. THE PROBLEM OF CONGREGATIONS IN RURAL AREAS

Most small congregations are not in urban and suburban areas but in small villages and rural areas at a distance from any city or large town. Regional leaders generally report having an even worse time trying to find pastors for full-time and especially part-time pastorates in these locations. There are a number of reasons for this. On the financial side, even clergy who are willing to be tent-makers and serve a congregation part-time will have more difficulty in finding a sufficiently well paying secular job in these less populated areas. Pastoral positions in regions at a distance from urban centers increase the difficulty that the clergy spouse has in finding employment comparable to what he or she may have presently. Churches in these areas are unlikely ever to be able to increase the pastor's salary package significantly unless the economic fortunes of the communities change dramatically. To illustrate, three regional leaders from different denominations comment:

We are hindered because [our judicatory is] relatively small and rural. We pay very low salaries here. Those [rural location and low salaries] are our two biggest barriers to attracting good clergy; plus we have a lot of part-time positions.

We do not have much industry here. It is mainly small towns and farms. One church, paying a partial salary, has been vacant for a year now. About a third of our pastors have to work a secular job to pastor, and that is a tough situation here.

The dispersion of congregations and the difficulty in finding clergy for these congregations is our largest problem. This situation is not likely to improve because the smaller congregations in the rural areas and small towns economically are not going to find the financial resources to do much in increasing pastors' salaries.

Second, clergy and their families, used to having a circle of compatible friends nearby, may find that they are isolated from such support in serving a rural parish, regardless of how friendly the people in the congregation and community may be. Rural pastorates can be particularly lonely for single clergy.¹⁷ Regional leaders from two denominations comment:

One of the big difficulties in getting clergy to come to this conference is not because of the salaries so

much, as because this is a rural conference. Most of our clergy, who were raised and educated in urban areas, do not want to serve in rural areas.

In our area, the major issue is trying to find clergy who are willing to be isolated as far as not being close to other people. Some pastors prefer more populated areas where they have become accustomed to fellowship. When they have to be stuck out here next to no place, sometimes they find that very difficult.

Third, the rural pastorate can be stressful in ways other than difficulty in paying bills or finding a social life. Clergy may have to pastor two or three small churches, spending much of Sunday on the road driving between them, as well as during the week. A regional leader interviewed gave the following dramatic example:

We had one pastor serving four places in these outlying areas, four services on Sunday with 300 miles of travel. He did this for about twenty years, but he took another call recently. We are not going to get another man to replace him. I know that!

Lay members, perhaps especially of churches in rural locations, may be set in their ways and particularly unwilling to try anything new. Even if the pastor can initiate some different programs that energize the congregation somewhat and bring in a few new people, the resulting changes are not likely to be substantial. No matter what the pastor does, there is often insufficient population in the vicinity to allow a small town or rural church to grow, unless the surrounding community has an influx of new residents. This situation is not conducive to pastors' acquiring the kind of leadership reputation as being able to "grow a church" that appeals to search committees of more centrally located, wealthier congregations. Further, search committees of the larger, more urban congregations are apt to turn down candidates who have only experience as pastors of congregations in small towns and rural areas (as illustrated by the comments of lay leaders quoted in Part One). For such reasons, it is seldom a boost to a pastor's career mobility to serve small congregations in tiny towns for very long. Two regional leaders from different denominations explain:

We sometimes have a difficult time getting students to come our way, largely because students go to seminary to learn how "to grow a church." Then they come and look at our rural situations that are not growing. Probably seven out of ten

of our churches are in rural areas. We have had a hard time getting first-time pastors, and now we have a particularly hard time in getting *any* ordained clergy. The size of the church and the places in which they exist make a big difference in how well they attract ministers.

I think sometimes smaller churches are more difficult to deal with, and I am speaking of small churches in rural communities, not of small churches in the inner city. This is because people in the rural setting — the agrarian mentality — do not embrace change easily. So if the pastor goes in with an idea or vision of what he wants to do, and immediately thinks he is going to rally the congregation, he is in for a ride! I think also sometimes in the more rural areas, you have a lot of family involvement. So it becomes a real power source. It is very difficult to do anything that the leading family or families in the congregation decide that they do not want. They control the board, they control committees, and they may control the money. If you can get a pastor who will work with them, sometimes they can become your greatest fans and do wonderful things. But it is not easy.

3. THE PROBLEM THAT SECOND-CAREER CLERGY POSE FOR FILLING SMALL, ISOLATED CHURCHES

Many leaders of many search committees, as depicted in Part One, often want “younger” clergy to attract young families, while large, wealthy churches are looking for experienced, energetic clergy for a senior pastor position. As mentioned, many recent seminary graduates are in their early forties upon ordination. Consequently they are not apt to be experienced pastors in their middle age in comparison to middle aged clergy who entered as their first career. Some second-career clergy are also likely to have particular financial problems that make it difficult to serve as pastors of those small, rural congregations that can neither pay them much nor offer other amenities they may want. These older clergy are more likely to have families that they must support, and they typically have spouses who also have careers. Regional leaders from three denominations describe one or more of these issues with getting second-career clergy to take such positions:

My district is 80 percent rural, and people with

spouses who have careers are not willing to make some of the changes that serving a rural congregation requires. . . . [A working spouse] limits the clergy’s mobility.

The problem with second-career clergy? The golden handcuff. This how I describe situations where people have a spouse who has a career. So, when they are looking for an appointment, they are looking in a very limited geographical area because the spouse says, “I cannot move.” Or they have two children in college and need two incomes.

A fellow in my position cannot afford to go to a small church. My youth pastor (a young man) could afford to go into the ministry, and because he doesn’t have a family he can get established, and then move up or whatever. Whereas an older guy with a couple of kids, maybe one in college, there is no way he can come and take most of our churches. We are having an increasingly difficult time in finding qualified ministers who will come to our smaller churches.



C. DEALING WITH THE PASTOR SHORTAGE IN SMALL CHURCHES

1. JUDICATORY FINANCIAL SUPPORTS AND INCENTIVES

Subsidizing in part or full the salary of a pastor of a small congregation has long been a strategy that regional judicatories have employed to support new church starts or maintain churches in areas where they want to keep a denominational presence. When the regional judicatory offices pay the pastor's salary, the executive appoints the pastor directly, not necessarily giving the congregation a choice among several candidates.

Some judicatories in several denominations are using a variation of either supplementing pastoral salaries in rural parishes or offering other financial incentives to clergy to take these positions. One regional executive explains their judicatory program:

We had two sizable capital fund campaigns. From the first one, we have established an endowment out of which we can supplement salaries in smaller churches. Our current capital campaign, which is nearing its end, offers up to \$10,000 of debt repayment for anyone who will serve five years in a small church.

If, however, an increasing number of congregations become unable to support a pastor, such subsidies can get too expensive for judicatories to continue without making some difficult choices. A regional executive in a different denomination describes this dilemma in his judicatory:

Four years ago we had a pool of money in our budget called equitable salaries. This was used to pay pastors to be in churches where the churches cannot really support them. But we discovered that we were spreading this pool of money, which is some hundreds of thousands of dollars, across eighty to eighty-five locations. This meant that nobody was getting enough to make a difference. Ultimately the conference said: "We cannot afford to keep eighty tiny churches propped up. Let's identify those fifteen mission sites where we have to be, come hell or high water, and let's put all our money into those fifteen sites." That is what we have done, but that means there are some tough decisions to make.

Two executives in judicatories of different denominations have made policies against sending clergy with M.Div. degrees to smaller congregations:

For rural and small town congregations [in our judicatory], we do not have enough seminary-educated pastors to go around. So where do we put our pastors? We are not putting them into congregations that only have fifty people. It is not economical.

We will no longer assign a full-time elder [fully ordained pastor with M.Div. degree] to one congregation that has fewer than 250 members.

2. USING "RETIRED" CLERGY

Recruiting clergy retired from full time ministry is one way regional leaders across denominations fill their part-time pastorates in pleasant, even scenic, but bucolically isolated communities. Some regional leaders bemoan the fact that because of better denominational and secular pension programs, clergy are retiring at much earlier ages than was the case thirty years ago. However, retired clergy who still want to work can be a "godsend" for small town congregations that can provide housing, grateful and often elderly parishioners, but little salary. For example, regional leaders from different denominations comment:

What do we do with small parishes that can afford a half-time priest, if that? Pray someone drops from the sky! We use retired clergy — probably too much. Probably half of our retired clergy are involved in some ways in congregational ministry, on some part-time basis. According to our pension fund rules, they cannot work in the parish from which they retired. They do supply work and serve as interim ministers. We have some who have been serving in small places forever.

There are an increasing number of ministers who are what I call semi-retired that help us fill those small churches. I told two of our smaller, more isolated congregations which are getting ready to begin searches to capitalize on the fact that they each have a parsonage in a beautiful, beautiful location!

Find pastors to serve our more rural churches? We do it by hook or crook. The pay for these rural [UCC] churches is between \$12,000 and \$14,000 annually with no benefits. In one, we had

a Methodist pastor who served a [UCC] church after he retired.

Judicatory leaders using semi-retired, seminary-educated clergy of their own denomination to fill half- or quarter-time pastorates can be a workable solution, providing that these older clergy are willing to go to small congregations and that the small congregations are in typically rural areas with little chance of growing. Semi-retired clergy, working very part-time, are not likely to try to make changes in these small churches, which typically have an aging membership.

3. USING CLERGY FROM OTHER DENOMINATIONS

Several regional leaders interviewed were less than enthusiastic in filling their full-time parish openings with a pastor not of their denomination.

Using clergy from other denominations to fill open positions in congregations is becoming more prevalent. Several regional leaders interviewed were less than enthusiastic in filling their full-time parish openings with a pastor

not of their denomination, because congregations tend to lean in the direction of the present pastor's denomination and lose their own denominational identity. Another UCC judicatory executive went further in describing what happens when congregations take it on themselves to call a non-UCC pastor:

When we get people outside the family who get called [to serve a UCC congregation] but have no loyalty to UCC, they will often lead the church out of the denomination. We are particularly prone to that kind of situation.

Judicatory executives do not want to lose any congregation that is self-sufficient or shows possibility of being so. They are, however, more apt to approve a congregation having a pastor from outside the denomination become a paid pastor in one of their churches if this is an arrangement they personally have negotiated with judicatory executives of other denominations. For example, some times judicatory executives have one or two small congregations with growth possibilities and that are at a point where they are willing

to change (what some have called “learning point” for growth).¹⁸ It behooves them to find the type of pastors needed to help these congregations change, that is, the kind of entrepreneurial, transformational pastoral, reflective leaders described in Part One, even if this means going outside the denomination.

They may, however, have insufficient resources to support clergy of this caliber, regardless of denomination. This situation renders other types of interdenominational arrangements for joint support of congregations more appealing. In cooperative parishes between denominations, the maintenance and oversight of the church and selection of the pastor is shared with the official of another denomination. Such cooperative community congregations are most often churches sponsored by several denominations, established for the purpose of maintaining the church's presence in the area, or the presence of a church of a particular type—for example liberal Protestant congregation, or liturgical Protestant, or a congregation that reflects an evangelical perspective—in a region where most of the populace is of another faith tradition.

Full communion arrangements among certain denominations now permit congregations more flexibility in having their next pastor be of another (approved) denomination, without changing the denominational affiliation of the congregation. Three regional leaders, each from a different denomination, describe why they are supporting pastors ordained in other denominations for their full-time paid positions:

In this district, I have several Methodist churches yoked with other denominations in order to try and make these work: one that is Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist; one that is Methodist and Presbyterian, and another that is Methodist, UCC, Baptist and Lutheran. (Who gets to choose the pastor?) It is usually on a rotating basis. Once the pastor is in place, that pastor can remain through whatever that denomination's evaluation process is, as long as that pastor is deemed to be having an effective ministry there; or the pastor can request a move. If the next denomination's turn has a call system, the congregation will begin the process of connecting with this denomination.

Graduates from traditionally UCC seminaries are not well equipped to serve the ministries of most of our congregations. I am finding that the

most exciting candidates for pastors in churches that can afford full-time clergy are coming from other traditions. I have taken in some wonderful pastors from AME and from the Southern Baptists. We give them ministerial standing in the UCC, so they lay aside their previous credentials. There are congregations where we grant dual standing. We have a category, a provision in UCC, that says we can do this. That is, if a Lutheran minister wants to serve in one of our congregations but maintain his or her credentials with the Lutherans, we can credential this pastor within UCC, and the Lutherans will continue to credential the pastor in the Lutheran synod as rostered clergy.

In a lake region, there is a Lutheran pastor with a very small congregation. We have a congregation there too, somewhat larger and with a nice building. But their priest left there about a year and a half ago. A retired priest has been working as interim. We looked at all the options, and talked with the Lutheran church and their pastor. The congregations decided they wanted to work together. So now the Lutheran pastor has two bishops: a Lutheran bishop and an Episcopal bishop. Presently he is essentially the rector of the Episcopal parish. I think in time those two congregations are going to grow together, and will not only be sharing a priest, but hopefully sharing ministry and doing a lot of things together.

Some regional leaders find the legalities of joint pastoral appointments rather difficult to decipher and put into practice, as another Episcopal senior staff member explains:

In our diocese, our congregational development people are working with the bishop and staff of the ELCA synod to see if we can get a small Lutheran and a small Episcopal church, both of which are barely viable, to hook up. If we could hook them up somehow, they may be able to be a mission church rather than a maintenance place. We have begun those conversations, and have just drawn up how we are going to do full communion. We haven't done it yet. I love the title of a book that, I think, is called *The Orderly Exchange of Clergy*. There is nothing orderly about it!

In the above illustration, both Episcopal and Lutheran bishops, apparently concur that their two small churches might be profitably revitalized with competent full-time pastoral leadership, supported in part by both denominations. Judicatory executives

more gladly support these inter-denominational pastoral leadership arrangements when they see possibilities for turning a small church around but do not have the resources to do it well alone.

Judicatory executives, however, are less willing to provide financial and staff support alone or in concert with that of another denomination to provide a pastor for their small congregations that are not likely to grow. These latter congregations are apt to be in poverty-stricken distant towns or in isolated, rugged regions, where most of their semi-retired clergy would refuse to move as well. Often, these are places where there are few, if any, other congregations of the denomination within fifty miles. The rural South and Southwest, where the UCC is not strong, and in parts of the Southwest where the UMC is also somewhat weak in numbers (see Newman and Halverson, 2000), are the areas where Southern Baptists are regnant. Interviews indicated that both the UCC and UMC are often filling the pulpits of their rural, poorest congregations with Southern Baptist clergy. Although SBC-ordained clergy may (but not always) switch ordination credentials to these more liberal denominations, they often have some difficulty adjusting their more conservative theology and worship practices to those of the adopting denomination.¹⁹

Generally in small congregations distant from urban areas, judicatory officials are apt to relax typical denominational requirements for pastoral leadership in trying to recruit pastors of other denominations already living in the area to secure these churches. As two explained:

For these small rural UCC churches, we get anyone ordained who is around!

Since no one wants to come to this rural Southwestern area, we were having trouble getting clergy. We finally found some Southern Baptist pastors here who had to leave the SBC because of divorce. This does complicate identity with the denomination, although some of those have become more loyal [to the United Methodist Church] than the UMC-trained clergy.

Ideally, these small, far-flung congregations led by pastors ordained outside the tradition of the congregation will remain happy faith communities for a long time to come. Should such a pastor lead the congregation completely out of the denomination, it would

be unfortunate, but it would also make one less small church to drain judicatory resources. Regional executives are experimenting with other solutions in addition to using fully ordained pastors from their or any denomination to pastor their small churches in sparsely populated regions.

4. ORDAINING PERSONS TO LESS THAN FULL CLERGY STATUS FOR SPECIFIC MINISTRIES

Many congregations want ordained leadership, although their less sophisticated members may not be sure what this entails other than receiving denominational certification that one has acceptable faith, motivation, and skills for being a pastor. Members may not fully realize that their denomination has more than one level of ordination or that the pastor they have is not ordained to “full ministry” in their denomination.²⁰ As mentioned earlier, denominations typically prefer to have fully ordained clergy with graduate seminary degrees serving their congregations. Yet, as seen in the foregoing pages, newly ordained persons with M.Div. degrees are often unwilling or financially unable to take a low-paying pastoral position at some distance from an urban area. Judicatory executives, faced with filling the pulpits of such congregations, are becoming less enthused with their denomination’s preference for seminary trained pastors.

The Assemblies of God denomination has a seminary of its own, but it relies most heavily on training clergy within each of its districts, helping them move through various levels to full ordination. As one District Superintendent explains:

We have three levels of ministry recognition in the Assemblies of God: *certified minister* is the first level; then they move from there to become *licensed ministers*, and the next step is *ordination*. We in this district are starting our first class this fall in what we call the School of Ministry. We will be requiring it of all new certified ministers who come in. Next year we will develop a second level, plus repeat the first level. They we will develop a third and eventually a fourth level. Our General Council has a correspondence program that gives them knowledge from books. Our program will give them the practical training. We are going to tell ministers that they must have com-

pleted the four levels of our School before we will recommend them for ordination.

Other denominations make greater use of graduate level seminaries to train their fully ordained clergy. Nonetheless, several of the largest mainline denominations are using programs similar to those employed by the Assemblies of God in training pastors whose ordination status will be more limited or restricted than those with M.Div. degrees. Furthermore, a number of regional executives in these denominations are not relying on seminaries, but instead are training these pastors in their own judicatory programs.

Pastors ordained to these restricted orders in the mainline denominations rarely have a seminary degree and often not even a college degree. These persons are, however, required to have some type of ministerial training and official certification for what they will be doing in a specific locale. They are often limited to serving one congregation, and then under the loose supervision of a fully ordained person. Most are not paid salaries for their church work, but are reimbursed for expenses incurred. Denominations have specific names for these lesser, restricted orders, as well as regulations about where and in what capacities persons so ordained can serve congregations. Regional judicatories within each denomination, however, are defining and using these orders somewhat differently.²¹

One Methodist bishop was especially eloquent on why the conference is using more Local Pastors [lay persons trained and certified to lead a particular local congregation] now, as well as educating these persons within the conference:

We began as a church among the poor, but we have become a middle-class church. We are not very effective with the poorer churches anymore. One of the things we have discovered is that the most effective people with these churches are persons who are trained in our course of study, rather than in our seminaries, because they don’t lose touch with their people. In seminary, we basically educate them until they no longer communicate well with the people we send them out to serve. So we really have to find ways to do other configurations of ministry. I think it has less to do with theology, and more to do with class, ethnicity, and education in how you reach out to those populations. They need rules, they need structure, and they do *not* need complexi-

ties. They need to know the stories, and they need to know “how I might live my life.” It is difficult for us after we have gone to stage three and four faith development in seminaries, to go back and bring people along the same journey who are in stage one. Some see that as dishonest instead of understanding that where people are is where you meet them to do those things appropriate to faith development.

Although most regional judicatories are running their own training program for persons they intend to ordain to these restricted orders, a few judicatory executives are instead using a seminary they trust to provide this special training. Savvy seminaries are augmenting their budgets by offering special year long certification programs and, more typically, summer programs. One Episcopal bishop describes his program:

Now we don't always have just a crackerjack person for that small congregation in that isolated place. We have a program for the non-stipendiary (unpaid) priesthood. We send people who are at least fifty-five years of age to seminary for one year and count their life experience as the other training, and then we ordain them under Canon Nine. They become priests of congregations that cannot afford seminary educated, salaried priests. These non-stipendiary priests are not in the call system and only work under my assignment. In a sense they are the bishop's people, and they go where I ask them to go.



5. INNOVATIONS: LAITY AS PASTORAL LEADERS AND CLUSTER MINISTRIES OF LAY AND ORDAINED

Regional judicatories that have been experimenting with various ways of training and deploying pastors soon raise the question: Must we always have ordained persons, or persons in the ordination process, pastoring these small congregations?

Several bishops and district superintendents of the United Methodist Church spoke of how they are expanding their use of Local Pastors and their Certified Lay Speaker program. Lay Speakers do not stay in one church as a Local Pastor does; rather they are certified lay persons, trained to preach, who are sent out to congregations needing a preacher for a particular Sunday service. One UMC District Superintendent explains how it works in his conference:

We have churches that are not able to have the pulpit filled by a pastor, and so we train lay speakers in different churches who are willing to be sent out to the neighboring churches. So most of our churches do have somebody preaching every Sunday. Although this [Lay Speaker program] is denominational-wide, some conferences just don't take advantage of it. But we are in a rural setting, and it works extremely well. We probably have sixty Lay Speakers, and we will often send out ten or more on a given Sunday.

Sometimes District Superintendents use lay persons without certification to do much of the pastoral work, including preaching. For example:

We do use lay pastors and lay speakers, and we have another unofficial – don't challenge us on this, we will get in trouble — role called “limited population pastors.” These are our *non*-theologically trained lay people, volunteers in small churches. They are terrifically successful.

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod for some years has used non-ordained Commissioned Deacons to lead small, isolated congregations. However, the Synod does not approve of non-ordained persons holding this pastoral office and wants them to go to seminary and be ordained. This is not very realistic for many of these persons and places. Some districts have lay men who are college graduates (but not seminary educated) heading small parishes. More formally, one innovative district has established what they call a

Lay Assistant Program, administered through one of the Lutheran colleges, to provide assistance for their “circuit riders.” These are fully ordained pastors who have a number of widely dispersed congregations in their charge.

With the advent of the circuit rider ministry, we saw the need for more trained lay people to assist them. We now offer the Lay Assistant Program in three locations. This program consists of a number of core courses: in New Testament, doctrine, proclamation (basically preaching), how to write sermons, Bible study, history, survey of mission; as would go through their interview, and then they can be officially recognized in our district as Certified Lay Assistants. These are lay people who stay in their congregations, and are basically volunteers.

In several Episcopal dioceses, bishops and senior staff are experimenting with various types of teams composed of clergy and lay persons.

Some regional synods in the Reformed Church in America (RCA) are using lay persons not only as lay preachers on occasion, but also, without official approval, as pastors. One explained

they must do this for those small congregations for which they simply cannot get *any* ordained clergy. Another RCA regional leader, describes his approach in this kind of situation:

We have preaching elders; we do not actually have lay pastors. Well, this is controversial . . . because our polity does not really allow it to the extent we are doing it. I was just incapable of communicating to the Theology Commission of the denomination, which did papers on this, that our need for preaching elders was much greater than “occasionally” in their own church. I wish people on the Commission would come to our region, go sit in this church with twenty people there. Then they may start to understand this church is not going to have a full-time minister.

In several Episcopal dioceses, bishops and senior staff are experimenting with various types of teams composed of clergy and lay persons caring for a group of small congregations.

The following bishop describes a particularly innovative process:

We use a team that replaces the hired pastor for churches that cannot afford a full time priest in our rural isolated communities. The people on the team are often retired, but not necessarily. First we begin with a six-month formation process to make sure the congregation really gets it, really understands the ministry of the baptized and mutual ministry, and that they are willing to work at it. Then we have our mentors and our teachers come to them, and they meet almost weekly for a year and a half or longer. The whole team gets commissioned. Then from the team, two of the people become local deacons, and two become local priests. We don't just have one each, because that gets back to the old model again. One of the deacons is a servant deacon, an outreach deacon. The other is a caregiver kind of deacon, a catalyst for caring ministry. Then there is an administrator, two evangelists, and two catechists. These seven people make up the normal, sort of average team. The team can only serve in its local place. The teams evolve; some people die, some people move, and they are always bringing in new people. The team is mentored and we meet with them occasionally.

D. SMALL CHURCHES, NATIONAL DENOMINATIONS, SEMINARIES, AND LAY-LED MINISTRIES

In almost all of the established Protestant denominations, national denominational leaders and seminary administrators are calling for greater support of their seminaries and students to address the shortage of good clergy for the increasing number of vacant pulpits. They are mounting recruitment efforts and capital fund-raising campaigns to increase seminary endowments. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) raised nearly seventy million dollars for an endowment to “increase the overall number of pastoral candidates” according to a recent article in *Christianity Today* (Walker, 2001). Yet, the same article quotes the new LCMS President Kieschnick as acknowledging that such efforts will do little to help the small churches find ordained clergy. Rather, for small congregations he sees their vitality depending more on lay-led ministries, renewing the focus on the priesthood of all believers – the kinds of innovations that I have described above.

Some national and seminary leaders in LCMS and their counterparts in most other denominations will understand but still have qualms about the innovations. They are concerned about the possible “havoc” that lay-led ministries might wreak in their denomination’s traditions of pastoral leadership. Regional executives hear and work with this “disconnect” between ideal and reality as they try to find pastors for all congregations, but especially their small, isolated ones. Indeed, many of the regional executives that I interviewed are making substantial use of persons other than their seminary-educated clergy as pastors to a far greater extent than their national church executives realized. Many such “non-traditional” leaders are quite effective, but they need to be monitored to

assess the quality of their leadership and not simply uncritically used as a means of last resort as leaders of small churches. In last analysis, I believe that small congregations will be best served when various levels of denominational leadership – local, regional, national, and seminary — work cooperatively and strategically to address the needs of small congregation and the concerns raised in this report. Small congregations deserve good leadership, whether that leadership is provided by ordained, seminary trained leaders who are paid a full salary, or by certified or commissioned lay pastors who have the requisite commitment and training and are willing to give leadership with little or no compensation for their work.



1. Interviews that I did for other studies sponsored by the Lilly Endowment conducted at Hartford Seminary, purposively included questions posed to me by Jackson Carroll of Pulpit & Pew concerning what qualities, competencies and characteristics lay persons wanted in their pastors. These questions might have been touched on in connection with other research concerns, but would not have been explored if Carroll had not asked these questions.

Between the late fall of 1999 and the early spring of 2001, as part of an ongoing study of regional judicatories, I conducted open-ended telephone interviews with over eighty judicatory executives, senior staff, and elected regional leaders across the United States. These regional leaders were from seven denominations: the Assemblies of God, the Association of Vineyard Churches, the Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church.

In the fall of 2001, I conducted open-ended telephone interviews as part of revising the Hartford Institute for Religion and Research Pastoral Search Inventory and partly for the Duke study. Twenty-eight persons were interviewed, the modal group of whom are UCC congregants in New England, reflecting the clientele of the seminary. However, an attempt was made to select interviewees from other denominations and states, which resulted in twenty UCC, three Southern Baptist, three Presbyterian, one Reformed, and one other large semi-independent congregation (from a cluster composed of six churches). Twelve states were represented among those interviewed: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts from the New England States (sixteen interviews), as well as Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee. Twenty-four of those interviewed were lay leaders, who were currently or had been on search committees within the last couple of years; two were judicatory staff consultants helping congregations with their pastoral search: one Southern Baptist and one Presbyterian Church (USA) regional leader, and two were UCC interim ministers.

2. The quotes are edited for grammatical correctness and coherence in some cases. However the essence of the quotes has in no way been adulterated.
3. Loren Mead has mentioned many times and written in a series of “web-based insight essays” that when a congregation must begin a pastoral search, the judicatory has one of the best opportunities to intervene in the congregations and be thanked for their assistance. A majority of the regional leaders I interviewed also volunteered this observation.
4. Over half of the regional leaders in most of the seven denominations I interviewed volunteered the information that their wealthier congregations did not need as much judicatory consulting or denominational resources as did their other congregations. Larger richer churches also did not seek judicatory approval for their choice of pastor or easily accept judicatory suggestions for alternate choices. Further, a study of United Methodist clergy showed that the salary of the pastor was tied directly to the size of congregation, giving the larger congregations more “market power” in getting the pastor they wanted appointed (McMillan and Price, 2001).
5. It is true that the sample of lay persons was selected based on congregations that had used the Hartford Institute for Religion Research’s Pastoral Search questionnaire, often at the instigation of their regional office and/or their interim minister. Certainly, lay leaders in these congregations are not typical of all search committees. However, interviews with the larger sample of regional leaders indicate that most of the salaried judicatory executives and senior staff are indeed coming to congregations beginning a search and suggesting various resources and procedures to help the congregation decide about what kind of pastor they need. It is also true that regional leaders interviewed express frustration that lay committees were not as conscientious about using suggested methods for selecting their pastor as they would wish.
6. Bishop Charles Bennisson, reflecting on studies of ministry roles lay members and search committees look for in a pastor, sees as a “hopeful sign” that search committees still want a “person of deep faith” who can inspire members spiritually in a time when church and social “institutional structures are changing and official authority has suffered a loss of credibility.” Bennisson (1999:226).
7. Studies have shown that clergy who can maintain reasonable boundaries between their congregational duties and private lives and who do not impose unrealistic expectations on themselves, indicate they are in better overall health (physical, spiritual, social, and emotional health). Indeed, psychologists and other health professionals who work with clergy affirm this. Two published survey studies of clergy have indicated the strong connection between ability to set boundaries and overall health: Walmsley and Lummis (1997) for Episcopal clergy and spouses, and Zikmund, Lummis and Chang (1998) for clergy in fifteen denominations. Although both studies used many of the same items for the index on “ability to maintain boundaries,” the index used in the Walmsley and Lummis study (1997:54) has more of the items considered important by clergy psychologists in “boundary maintenance.” As can be observed from the list below, successful boundary maintenance for the pastor involves the pastor, the congregation, and the pastor’s family — all being realistic in negotiating their needs for those of others.

In the last year, I felt: (on a four point scale — usually true to usually false)

Able to maintain a separation between my congregational duties and my private life.

I had enough time to do what was expected of me by my congregation.

I had enough time to do what was expected of me by my family.

I had enough time to be alone for reflection, hobbies, reading and recreation.

I did not impose unrealistic expectations on myself.

People in the congregation understood my (and my family's) need for private time away from parishioners and the concerns of the church.

I felt I did not impose unrealistic expectations on members of my immediate family.

8. The United Methodist Church is not the only denomination that has established procedures for “exiting” pastors who should not be in this occupation but who are not leaving voluntarily. However, the UMC likely has a more extensive and routinized procedure than other denominations, since once in the system, clergy are guaranteed being assigned to a paying pastoral position. As one bishop described the system in their conference:

We present the facts to pastors who are not really cutting it. The best scenario is when they say, “I really cannot do this.” Then we help them. We have a team of lay people that will help them in finding jobs and work other than ministry. But if they disagree, the cabinet takes it to the Board of Ordained Ministry and can discontinue a person’s credentials after a hearing and due process. Usually we give the person two or three chances before it ever gets to this point.
9. Subtle but persistent attempts by some on search committees to hire a man in a judicatory where discrimination based on gender is not permitted is the subject of a case study by Fobes, 2001.
10. Along with other church consultants, Loren Mead (1991) advises that judicatory leaders have most opportunity to affect the direction of congregations at the point where they need to find a new pastor. By helping the church get the kind of the pastor they want, the congregation is aware of the value of their judicatory. By getting the right pastor from the judicatory standpoint as well, the connection between the congregation and the judicatory can be maximized.
11. As noted, Nesbitt (1997:90-106) reviews studies done in the last decade attesting to the continuing higher average age and lower academic abilities of entering M.Div. students compared to students entering secular professions.
12. From the limited sample of lay leader interviews in 2001, several heads of search committees who had hired a relatively young male pastor with a wife and kids, said that their congregation went between \$4,000 and \$10,000 over their initial salary package offering in order to get him to come.
13. Nesbitt (1997:90-106) reviews studies done in the 1990’s attesting to the continuing higher average age and lower academic abilities of entering seminary M.Div. students compared to students entering secular professional schools. More recently, Gustav Niebuhr (2001:A10) in a *New York Times* article restates these trends, implying from reports and interviews with national denominational and seminary executives that the situation is getting worse. This article indicates there are ever fewer seminary graduates applying for open pulpits. Also, the much larger ratio of second-career to recent college graduates entering seminaries continues unabated. Niebuhr illustrates his story with statistics from an ELCA study, indicating that 1) “The number of pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church has declined since 1990”; and 2) “as a result, the number of small congregations (fewer than 175 members) without a pastor has climbed.” The juxtaposition of these two pieces of information might well convey the impression that the reduction in congregational size is caused by the underproduction in seminaries of students interested in the parish ministry. In balance, Niebuhr does report that seminary M.Div. enrollment has remained constant in the larger denominations; it is just that the newly ordained are not going into parish ministry in sufficiently large numbers to fill empty pulpits. In personal communication in December 2000, the denominational president, the Reverend Robert Bacher stated that the ELCA study showed that there is a quite sufficient number of seminary graduates for positions that could pay a full-time salary.
14. An observation made by Jencks and Riesman (1968:199-254) appears to be as true now as it was in the 1960s. They argue that divinity, just like other occupations which wished to be considered prestigious and socially desirable, if it were to retain any professional standing, had to bow to the norms of university culture and establish graduate schools to educate aspirants in its theory, skills and philosophy. These authors depict the increasing educational requirements that denominations began to levy on aspirants for ordination and the accompanying increase in graduate degree programs in theology as evidence for the influence of the university culture on denominational leadership and individuals.

Increased expectations that aspirants to the ordained ministry will have graduate degrees have been most characteristic of the established denominations. However, this is becoming more prevalent in those denominations where the majority of ordained pastors do not hold M. Div. degrees, such as the Assemblies of God and the Vineyard.

The career value of formal education for pastors in predominantly Anglo denominations has been investigated by Perl and Chang (2000), and for clergy in historic black denominations by an ongoing study at the Interdenominational Theological Center. Both studies show that M.Div. degrees have more career payoff for clergy in getting the larger, better paying churches in those denominations where the M.Div. is *not* regularly required for ordination, that is, where it is more of a scarce commodity.

15. The recent ELCA study (Walker, 2001) found that low salaries were a major deterrent to seminary graduates taking positions in small churches.
16. “Tentmaking” ministry is a term derived for the Apostle Paul’s experience. He worked as a tentmaker to support himself while he engaged in his missionary work (see Acts 18:2).
17. Rural and small town areas are particularly difficult for many single women and men who serve as pastors, as their social life is more observable and observed in such communities, providing of course they have any. (Zikmund et. al., 1998: 34-40).
18. Loren Mead (1991:73) advises judicatory leaders “Put all your energy into congregations that are at learning points. The others? *Leave them alone!*”
19. Some pastors actually hold joint ordination credentials and report to two regional executives of different denominations, which is possible in RCA (often with PCUSA) and in UCC.
20. For example, two judicatory executives describe the kind of theological chafing point most likely to occur in using Baptist raised and ordained pastors, transfers in to their more liberal denominations:

We had an African-American pastor transfer into UMC who may have been Baptist of some independent sort. He ran into a big controversy over: “Why aren’t you baptizing infants, when that is the Methodist practice?” He says, “I cannot bring myself to do it because I was brought up Baptist.” We say, “Read the small print again!”

We got a young Baptist man with Bible school education, working as a ranch hand to serve as pastor of this small congregation, after their UCC minister retired completely. This young man was against women ministers and that kind of thing. But we got him two mentors in the vicinity, two women clergy. They have gotten him to respond well. It is absolutely amazing!

21. Zikmund et. al. (1998:3) describe the “challenge” of defining ordination as follows:

Some denominations have several “kinds” of ordination: ordination to deacons’ orders; ordination to lay eldership; ordination to sacramental authority, without full standing or access to denominational decision making; ordination with full membership in conference or diocesan structures.

In the United Methodist Church, the fully ordained, seminary educated clergy are called *elders* and those ordained to the restricted order, *local pastors*. Local pastors are restricted to doing the sacraments in one congregation only; they usually cannot go to another church and serve the sacraments. They must take part-time education usually on the weekends for some years and even then work under the supervision of an elder. In the Episcopal Church, permanent *deacons* are similar to the Methodist *local pastors*, who may stay with one congregation or move as the bishop pleases; however, they cannot consecrate the Eucharist. For this some dioceses prefer to use *Canon 9 nonstipendiary priests*, who have about the same educational preparation as the permanent deacons, but can work more independently and do more with the sacraments.

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CREATIVE MINISTRY FOR ALL CONGREGATIONS

A Response by the Rev. William Hobgood

Regional Minister, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Washington, D.C.

As a “regional leader” of the church, I normally suggest to congregational search committees with which I am working that among many mistakes that can be made, two very obvious ones to be avoided are working too fast (trying to make a call too quickly), or working too slow (taking too much time to do it). Of course there are many other mistakes these committees might make - and some do make many (if not all) of them!

Calling a pastor is among the most important decisions the congregation makes. No matter the congregation’s size, however long their average pastorate, whatever the degree of authority the pastor is allowed, this is the most visible person in the congregation. It is the pastor who, more than anyone else, is the congregation’s public “face.” And where the pastor and people care for each other, then the pastor’s presence *within* the congregation is vital as well.

The regional leader’s primary pastoral role is the oversight of the relationship of the pastor and congregation. In many traditional ecclesiologies the regional leader, often the bishop, is considered “pastor to the pastors.” There is also always leadership of the collective life of the congregations in the region required of this person. But the most critical day-in/day-out work of this leader is to be pastor to the pastor-congregation dynamics. I really take this to be my most important work: doing whatever I can, with whatever resources I can use with integrity, to help these relationships be as healthy and faithful as possible

To this end, then, a central task of the regional leader is to assist the congregation in seeking a pastor. Whatever the search polity, be it itinerant, as in the United Methodist Church, or called, as in the United Church of Christ, the regional leader is a crucial player.

But this role can’t be done with authenticity if the regional leader and the regional expression of the church, doesn’t have a healthy relationship with the congregation. By this I mean that if a congregation hasn’t had a positive experience with me or with the regional manifestation of the church during more normal times, then the likelihood of a constructive relationship during the search process will be seriously diminished.

Adair Lummis’s analysis of what lay people want in pastors is an important addition to the resources available to regional and congregational leaders who undertake

this essential responsibility. She shares out of interviews with many lay and regional leaders of these processes. Many of her generalizations ring very true and are not surprising to experienced hands. Some contain surprises.

The primary qualities sought, as identified by Dr. Lummis are: authenticity and competence, preaching and worship leadership skills, spiritual leadership, commitment to parish ministry, good boundary maintenance (that is, control of time spent in and out of parish life), pastoral approachableness and availability, acceptable gender-race-sexual orientation, age-experience and job tenure, consensus builder-coach-responsive leader, and entrepreneurial skills. I doubt if any regional leader will disagree with these as among the desired qualities of just about every congregation. I use a congregational questionnaire to ascertain the qualities most wanted, but can just about always name the top ten. The order may vary, but not by much. The questionnaire’s purpose is more for the members to establish ownership than for me to draw new information.

There are some mild surprises in Lummis’ findings. For example, that search committees may disguise worries about gender and sexuality with such questions as, “What are your feelings about authority of scripture?” or that more committees than many regional leaders might want to believe still prefer to call a male minister who is 35, with an attractive wife and no more than two or three well-behaved children. And, by the way, it helps if the wife doesn’t work outside the home, and can serve in myriad ways.

I have to say that as a regional leader I am not accustomed to these demands. They do not ring true to the committees with which I work. Am I a naive fool, or right; but only because my region is urban, on the east coast and of moderate to liberal temperament?

Whatever the answers here, it is important to hear the feedback to all the issues. Read and listen to Dr. Lummis’ findings. And then be prepared to explore some fresh ways of approaching ministry in the 21st century.

Her insights gained from conversations with and about small congregations are particularly illuminating. She makes a number of helpful suggestions about ways to identify possible pastoral leadership for small congregations.

Before implementing methods that might serve for the long haul, the church needs to recognize the place

and plight of small congregations, where the greatest difficulties occur in seeking pastors. Many congregations are small because they never grew beyond it. Started in small towns or parts of cities whose demographics changed, many of these congregations will, at best, maintain their present numbers.

Working with a small congregation in one city I found them determined to have a high quality of faith life in spite of limited resources. As one lay leader said, “We will be the best — family church in the denomination!” At the time hers was a clarion call to commitment. Five years later that congregation made the decision to end their life together. They simply couldn’t sustain the quality to which they believed God was calling them with the sparse tools available.

Some small congregations are this way because they were once larger, but most of the people left and the community changed. As a regional leader I find one of the most challenging matters is to work with shrinking congregations as they struggle simply to find the courage to face the future. Most just want to pull in and, like turtles, protect themselves from some unknown assailant. It is difficult to acknowledge that the mandate for which we were formed no longer exists, and to discern a new mandate that is radically different from that old one. Even then, the new mandate may not work!

How, then, can the church’s institutions work together for creative ministry for these congregations? And with the numbers of people in ministry diminishing, is this not a valid question for congregations of *all* sizes?

I want to suggest several organic movements that can assist in this important post-mainline time.

First, a massive educational program is needed to help people, particularly lay leaders, know that good pastoral leadership comes in females as well as males (some will argue that these days *better* leadership is coming from women), and in all colors. Sticking with that bias for a 35 year old man, married, etc., described above, unless challenged directly, will leave many congregations without pastors in a few years.

Second, educational institutions, particularly seminaries, must encourage people preparing for ministry to consider various options. Tentmaker ministries, for example, can be a specific way in which second career ministers combine their former vocations with pas-

toral ministry to give small congregations quality leadership. One regional leader, with 260 congregations (many with fewer than 100 members), spoke of the nearby seminary that led students to expect full-time, well-paid pastoral positions in congregations of 150 members or more, “and we only have 60 of these among the whole 260!” Seminaries need to recall that the day of many booming parishes was short-lived, if ever, and that we are today becoming more like the frontier church, where most pastors had second jobs.

Third, alternatives to traditional seminary degrees need to be further developed. Regional expressions and educational institutions are increasingly engaged in developing training alternatives. Too often, though, these are treated as stop-gap steps. They need to be accorded real credibility and dignity.

Fourth, regional expressions of the church need to beef up their work with congregations during the ordinary times, so that when extraordinary times (like a pastoral vacancy) come, trust will already be strong for the necessary co-working, particularly when new and unprecedented models of ministry are called for. *Transformational Regional Bodies*, written by two of the best, Roy Oswald and Claire Burkat (Life Structure Resources) is an excellent resource for this.

Fifth, whatever our polities, we need to be certain that, as we enter a new time in the provision of pastoral ministry for congregations, denominations are able to develop ways to maintain high quality among those called to be pastors. For years we deemed the Master of Divinity degree, for example, the central educational credential for pastoral ministry. As important as it still is, many congregations will not be able to afford a degreed pastor. We must be certain that criteria for the alternative paths are high and can be kept high.

Many parts of church life are changing. Thankfully, God makes it possible to provide ministry of a high quality even so.

William Chris Hobgood is a retired Regional Minister for the Christian Church Disciples of Christ in Arkansas and in the Washington, D.C. area. He has been a consultant with the Alban Institute for 17 years, and is the author of two Institute publications, The Once and Future Pastor and Welcoming Resistance.

THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL PASSION

A Response by the Rev. Anthony Pappas
Area Minister, Southeastern Massachusetts, American Baptist Churches USA

Adair Lummis has compiled an interesting and readable report on the expectations of laity relative to their pastor and on the analyses of judicatory staff who work with pastoral placement. The organization of the conclusions are cogent and helpful. And the content of the conclusions are highly consistent with what many who work directly with congregations have experienced. It seems to me then that the most productive way to respond to this report is to attempt to explore the implications implicit in these findings, implications for the congregations themselves, the judicatory staff that work with them, and the seminaries. And that is the enterprise I will try to initiate in this brief commentary. I will organize my remarks around two key questions.

Where does the Spirit come into play? Or, to phrase it differently, without passion what good are all our procedures and practices? While this was not a question directly addressed, it seeps through at a number of points. The most evident spot has to do with finances. While it is very true that many small churches cannot afford to pay for full time pastoral services, or if they can, pay barely at the minimal level, the deeper issue is “Why?” Statistics tell us that the average family in a mainline congregation gives (about 2.5 percent) at a level about one quarter of the nominal Biblical level (10 percent)! How many small churches could be players in the pastoral “market” if spiritual passion and faithfulness governed their priorities? But our faith is the dessert on our full plates, not the organizing principle of our lives. Or again, consider the finding that congregations balk at taking a hard look at themselves and are unwilling to take on the changes necessary to effective mission, relevance and growth. Most churches are apparently looking for pastors that will make the current members feel good, while God’s purpose for that congregation goes unfulfilled and unsought after!

I once had an arborist look at a tree next to my home. The tree was leafed out and the bark looked good, but it had one dead branch that we asked him to remove. After clambering around in the branches, he announced a more radical diagnosis: the tree was unsalvageable! After he had chopped it down, I examined the trunk. There was a thin ring of wood behind the bark, but the entire core was a spongy mush inhabited by one to two million ants! Maybe

this analogy is too severe, but if our congregations cannot rediscover their spiritual core, rekindle their spiritual passion, re-enter the center of God’s will, reports such as Lummis’s will, all too soon, take on the nature of autopsies!

Can anything be done? What if we were to focus on matters of the Spirit? What if judicatory staff were to deliberately attempt spiritual interventions? What if incoming pastors were to concentrate on matters of the Spirit before launching off into the busy-ness of programs? What if local congregations were to seek God’s face with even half the energy they have heretofore invested in preserving the status quo?

Can we retool our mental model of the pastorate? It seems to me that we have developed and suffer greatly from a mental model of the pastorate that is dysfunctional in at least five interrelated ways. It focuses on the wrong role. It employs the wrong filters. It invokes the wrong authority. It insists on the wrong number. And it requires the wrong tools.

The role most Master of Divinity candidates are equipped to fill upon graduation is that of chaplain—not so much chaplain in the arenas of health care or the military, but chaplain to the local church. Chaplains (as I am using the term) serve the morale function of caring for the individual while preserving unchanged the institutional setting in which they work. Just so, most entering (and existing) mainline pastors know how to care for whom they find, but hardly have a clue how to change things. Tony, you protest, that is a gross and unfair overgeneralization. Maybe so, but not by much. If you had spent the last seven years of your life trying to place some of the nicest, sweetest, caring-est persons God ever created into congregations that desperately needed total transformation, your protests would not be quite so loud. Given the state of the local church today, pastors need to be able to introduce substantial change, build social, cultural and programmatic structures that did not exist when they arrived, and constantly adapt to changing environmental dynamics. In short the role we should be preparing pastors for is that of entrepreneur!

So, given that we have built elaborate systems to produce chaplains, we have a filtering system that shunts would-be spiritual entrepreneurs into other vocations and retains those with extensive pastoral

care capacities. In addition to this, as Lummis all too clearly reports, we also filter out top quality performers. God can do extraordinary things with ordinary people, but isn't it arrogant to have in place a system that puts God to the test? Entrepreneurs are mavericks, results-focused, and impatient. They cause their systems lots of trouble. So we have opted for control and comfort in our denominational processes. Now we are paying the price.

And we have redefined spiritual authority in ways that preserve the status quo rather than ways that allow for the maximum amount of transformation. Spiritual authority has been reduced to denominational credentialing. But when I read the New Testament (remember, those were the Christians who turned the whole world upside down!), authority had more to do with the power of the Spirit, and ordination with the recognition of gifts in operation in the local assembly. Indeed, many candidates seeking pastoral placement today have the authority of the denomination behind them, but cannot tell you their spiritual gifts, cannot cite an instance where they developed a group in a positive direction, and cannot relate one case where other Christians recognized their abilities in shepherding.



All of this might not be so counterproductive if we had retained the New Testament model of multiple leadership in the local congregation. With multiple leaders there would be a better chance that an entrepreneur would be among them or that the combination of gifts would be more entrepreneurial. We place too much weight on the single office of pastor and lament when it collapses under that weight.

Finally, we can note that we have developed a system to transfer knowledge and we judge pastors on their knowledge handling skills, rather than on their behavioral and leadership skills. To get ordained in my jurisdiction, one needs three years of academics, a few hours of counseling and no congregational experience!

Of course, what we have built we can change. But it won't be easy. The president of a prestigious main-line seminary was confronted with the fact that his graduates were not placeable, or if placed, had inappropriate skills for our endangered churches. He acknowledged the truth of that description and went on to say that the politics internal to the seminary were such that no change was possible on the foreseeable future! He is a deeply Christian man and a very competent leader, but the institutional inertia was just too great. I still believe "what we have built we can change" but I am afraid that is more of a faith statement than an experience based reality!

Unfortunately, for the small church, it is in the position to catch the brunt of the pain and frustration of all these dynamics. Yet there is still much that can be done along the lines that Lummis identifies. Local leaders can be raised up and "authorized," team leadership can be developed, new constellations of relationship between congregations can be built. In fact, some small churches are so desperate that new, creative and "crazy" solutions are the only possibilities. Somewhere from this chaos at the margin, God may yet move us forward.

The Rev. Anthony Pappas is the American Baptist Area Minister for more than 50 churches in southeastern Massachusetts. Previously, Pappas pastored the Harbor Church of Block Island, Rhode Island, for nearly twenty years. He is the author of Inside the Small Church, Entering the World of the Small Church, and The Five Stones, a newsletter for small churches.

THE VIEW FROM THE PEW

A Response by Timothy G. Turkington, Ph.D.
Member, Duke Memorial United Methodist Church, Durham, N.C.
Associate Research Professor in Radiology, Duke University Medical Center

In “What Do Lay People Want in Pastors,” Adair Lummis provides an extensive and excellent report on responses from church members responsible for recruiting new pastors, as well as regional denominational leaders, to questions regarding the process of seeking and choosing pastors. I read this report with great interest, having served the last three years on my own congregation’s Staff Parish Relations Committee (often thought of as the least desirable committee to serve on in a United Methodist congregation!) During those three years, our three clergy stayed, and we had no need to search for more. “What people want in a new pastor” and “What people want out of their current pastor,” are really pretty similar topics, though, so the topic has more general relevance than just to search process.

The perspectives of those in churches seeking pastors, their denominational leaders, and even those in seminaries training future pastors, are understandably different but relevant. Comments from clergy who have attended my own congregation regarding the pastors’ performance bear out different expectations from those of most lay members of what a pastor is to be. This is consistent with points made in the report. A preaching style that may be attractive to other clergy (particularly those teaching in seminaries) can seem dry or irrelevant to many lay members. Entertaining sermons full of jokes and illustrations may be better received by many lay members, but could be considered off the mark by other clergy if the illustrations aren’t chosen carefully. In some cases, clergy, having served churches themselves and lived with the range of problems and issues that occur, can be pretty tolerant. Others, with very specific notions of pastoral roles and responsibilities, may be less tolerant of pastors’ shortcomings. Once, when introducing some church youth to a seminary teacher who worshiped in our church and who had taught most of our pastors, I mentioned that it must be scary to stand in front of a former seminary professor every Sunday to preach. The professor’s quick response was, “It’s scarier for me.” The larger point here is that judicatory executives who assist congregations in searches for pastors will have *clergy’s* perspectives, and that both complicates and helps the process of translating a congregation’s desires into a suitable candidate.

A pastoral evaluation form given our Staff Parish Relations Committee by the District Superintendent reads, “Which of the responsibilities and duties of a pastor does the church/charge believe the pastor is accomplishing effectively?” Common initial responses include “what *are* the responsibilities and duties of a pastor?” This serves to support the Lummis quote from a regional leader, “... we deal with search committees made up of lay people who really have no clue as to what the job of the pastor is.” While the question may serve as a useful common base for evaluation of the pastor by the denominational supervisor, the generic pastoral responsibilities (as specified at ordination) may have little overlap with the church members’ understandings of what a pastor is to do, or more directly, what they want their pastor to be doing. The committee takes a stab at answering the questions, probably reflecting their general like or dislike of the current pastor. To answer the quoted leader above from a lay perspective, why *shouldn’t* the congregation define the job of the pastor, at least in part? The congregation has a mission, and how the individual tasks are divided between lay members and clergy will clearly differ from one setting to the next. A large congregation, for example, with multiple clergy and other staff, should feel comfortable in determining what their various roles should be, in collaboration with the clergy themselves. There must be openness, of course, to the changes a visionary or prophetic pastor could foster.



The report demonstrates that a broad range of pastoral characteristics is important to lay people, varying from one congregation to another, and just as importantly, within a congregation. It has been my experience that preferences in pastoral traits can be closely related to the traits of recent pastors, whether positive or negative. This is not inherently good or bad, but reactionary stances are probably destructive if they are used too heavily in guiding the pastoral search. For example, a pastor who emphasizes social justice issues heavily may turn more conservative people off, but having planted seeds can open the door for a successor to address a similar agenda in a lower-key fashion without raising the same objections.

The process that leads to ordination includes many steps. A vote of support from the candidates' home congregation is one of the steps in our denomination. The candidate is being recommended by those who are probably in the best position to understand how he or she will function as a pastor. It is gratifying to send a candidate on from your congregation — the candidate's own sense of calling and the congregation's ministry are both affirmed. It is more difficult, though, to answer, "This is someone we would like to have as our pastor." It would be very difficult for the congregation to decline to make a recommendation. The congregation would be saying, essentially, "We know you best. Even with a shortage of pastors, we don't think you have the right gifts. Three years of seminary, a few hours of CPE, and some supervision by an experienced pastor probably won't change things, either."

One interesting point in the report comes from a denominational leader who says churches all want a good preacher, not a mediocre one, whereas most of the available preachers are mediocre! That most preachers are no better than average is a truism, of course, but the concept provokes many thoughts. First, why can't the average be pretty high? In other professions (say, dentists) there is a baseline performance that is expected. I have no idea how my dentist's performance compares to my wife's, or others, but I know he has appropriate training, credentials, and experience to do his job well. The "mediocre" or "average" tooth filling is sufficient, not so much because my standards are low, but because the credentialing standards are high enough. The training of pastors, likewise, should lead to peo-

ple who *will* be effective, at least in some settings. Second, is preaching ability (or spiritual leadership, or innovativeness, etc.) something that can really be put on a scale? Is there an absolute ranking of preaching capabilities, or are there qualities that can be specifically suited for specific congregations? Third, how does the denominational leader *really* know how a large number of clergy preach? Through reports from congregations or other clergy? Certainly not from having heard them him- or herself a few times each.

In the section on "Clergy Shortage or Shortage of Pastoral Salary," Lummis notes the dismay of denominational and seminary leaders over the shortage of good prospects. The point is made by the increasing age of entering seminaries, and the fact that GRE scores are not as high for seminarians as for other professional schools. As a lay person, I find neither increased age nor relatively lower GRE scores inherently dismaying. I expect, more than any specific quality, that my pastor is following a call. Seminary training should provide many of the tools. If too many seminarians graduate without good pastoral skills, it is probably not because of their age or their intellect. Not all pastors can translate the high-level academic learning in many seminaries into messages for their congregations, and the great risk is that once the training is finished, the pastor, who can't draw on the methods of biblical exegesis taught in seminary, must resort to popular books or even no external resources at all to help understand and relay the scripture. While a certain level of intelligence is necessary in a pastor, intelligence didn't rank too highly in the priorities of the interviewed congregations. The important points are: will the pastor be able to relate to church members and will the pastor be able to proclaim the word of God in a way that church members can grasp. Some of the solutions being found to facilitate the coverage of small congregations with pastors (such as short-term training) may be applicable to those serving in larger churches, as well. The nature of seminary training should be to take those with a clear, confirmed calling and build on their specific gifts in ways that will make them effective in leading appropriate congregations. Perhaps seminary training would be more effective if it were interspersed in the pastoral career instead of preceding it.

Beyond the work of this report, three areas could be explored more to help understand congregational desires and needs for clergy: the ability of a church committee to represent the congregation; the ability of a congregation (or representative committee) to honestly characterize its own needs; and the potential for congregations to be the nurturing communities in which future pastors will grow.

A great challenge facing any committee (church or otherwise) is to truly represent the larger body, in this case, the congregation. Unless a valiant effort is undertaken to poll and listen to the entire congregation (or a wide representation, for a large congregation), the committee's perspective on the congregations' likes and dislikes in pastors' traits and behaviors will be shaped primarily by their own perspectives and by those of the more vocal members of the congregation.

Even if a truly representative congregational view can be assembled, the broader questions remain, such as, to what degree should the evaluation and selection of clergy be a democratic process? The needs of a congregation may be evaluated better by a smaller, closed committee whose discussions can be candid, at the risk of being biased.

Will a congregation be willing to recognize its weaknesses (other than declining membership and finances) and then search for a pastor who can help address those, even if it means taking unpopular stands? In some cases, the congregation may be incapable of understanding what it needs or what will make it grow.

Finally, the nurturing of candidates for ordination must be seen as an essential ministry of individual congregations. A larger pool of candidates will be available if more people are receptive to exploring the possibility of ordained ministry, and this will be more likely in a positive, caring community with positive examples of leadership.

Timothy G. Turkington, Ph.D., is a member of the Staff Parish Relations Committee at Duke Memorial United Methodist Church in Durham, N.C. An associate research professor in the Department of Radiology at Duke University Medical Center, he conducts research on positron emission tomography (PET) scanning.



ABOUT PULPIT & PEW

Pulpit & Pew is a research initiative of the Duke Divinity School funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc., and aimed at strengthening the quality of pastoral leadership (clergy and lay) in churches across America. The goal of the research is to strengthen the quality of pastoral leaders, especially those in ordained ministry, through (1) understanding how changes in the social, cultural, economic, and religious context in recent years have affected ministry, (2) forming pastoral leaders with the capacity for continual learning and growth in response to these changes, and (3) identifying policies and practices that will support creative pastoral leadership and vital congregations as they respond to a changing environment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adair Lummis is a sociologist of religion at the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary. For more than 20 years, she has been engaged in studies on clergy and ethnic groups in Christian and other faiths, as well as program evaluation and policy research for national church agencies, seminaries, and regional judicatories. She received her bachelor's and Ph.D. degrees in sociology from Columbia University, New York.

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