



TWO FEET WALKING:

*An approach to
fostering healthy
congregations that
thrive*

Introduction

Congregational leadership is more complex than ever. It can be overwhelming to do the technical work of preaching, pastoral care, and church administration while also doing the adaptive work of mapping new ministry contexts and developing strategies for impacting those contexts with the Gospel.

It is increasingly clear that this is work that cannot be done by just one person, and it cannot be done in old ways. In this summary, we describe our best sense of the newly emerging work of pastoral/congregational leadership and propose a process that ***The Leader's Journey*** offers to support congregational leaders as they learn new skills for facing these demanding challenges.

Reflection Questions:

- How is congregational leadership becoming more complex in your context?
- How do you currently feel about the call to learn new skills and take on increasing complexity?
- What is your default reaction to increasing complexity? How would you like to respond instead?

We are regularly adding new Two Feet Walking resources on our website. You can find an updated list at theleadersjourney.us/2fw

The New Work of Pastoral Leadership

Congregational leadership is like two feet walking. Typically, a human body has two feet. When both feet work, it is a marvel to see what human beings can do in all kinds of circumstances as they walk, climb, dance, and run. Without both feet functioning well, we limp or hop, and it's harder for us to do many of the things that humans are designed to do.

What are the two feet of congregational leadership?

One foot is the personal development of the individual disciple/leader. The other foot is the organizational work of effectively mobilizing a group to achieve a shared mission.

In simpler times, it may have been easier for pastors to do both of these things in addition to their primary ministry responsibilities, but in the post-Christian, rapidly changing, and emotionally charged environment in which we are all living, it may no longer be possible for one person to lead all of this work.

Solo and lead pastors must, by definition, prepare to preach and then deliver sermons. They must attend to much of the pastoral care – hospitals, weddings, funerals, baptisms - alongside the basic church administrative tasks like meeting with volunteer leaders or convening staff meetings.

The pastoral staff in larger congregations has a similar set of duties. While they don't preach each week, they do have teaching/preaching assignments within their area of ministry for which they must prepare. They also have administrative

and pastoral care assignments, as well as specialized projects depending on their sphere of influence.

Pastors are burning out and churches are losing ground

There was a time when a pastor could meet the demands of ministry and get that work done, even if it was stressful. Today, the growing complexity of leadership and the increasingly rapid pace of change have placed extraordinary leadership demands on ministry leaders.

Tragically, these demands tend to eclipse two of the most important focal areas for pastors: the development of individual disciples and the effectiveness of the organization.

The result is that pastors are burning out and churches are losing ground. This is why it is more important than ever for pastors and churches to regain their focus on both personal development and organizational development. Our personal and organizational vitality depend on it.

Reflection Questions:

- Are you burned out or burning out? What about the staff and lay leaders in your congregation?
- If these are the two feet walking of congregational leadership (personal development and organizational work), describe your gait. Are you favoring one foot? Limping? Hopping? Dancing?
- How would you assess your own personal vitality? The organizational vitality of your congregation?

Additional Resources

- [How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You Are Going: Leading In A Liminal Season](#) by Susan Beaumont
- [Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory](#) by Tod Bolsinger
- [Leading in a Politically Charged Culture](#)

The first foot:

Developing Individual Disciples and Leaders

For generations, the personal development of disciples was about increasing biblical knowledge, committing to regular church attendance, and practicing some combination of the spiritual disciplines.

But the demands of our rapidly-changing world have also changed the way we develop ourselves to engage with that world.

Here is a partial list of the skills that we believe congregations must now incorporate as they develop disciples who can follow the teachings of Jesus in the real world and who can live missionally in a hostile or indifferent culture.

- **Knowledge:** Biblical literacy, church history, theology, hermeneutics
- **Spiritual Growth:** The practice of spiritual disciplines that grow capacity to love God and neighbor as self
- **Awareness of Gifting:** An understanding of one's passions and spiritual gifts and putting them to work effectively in a missional community
- **Emotional Growth:** A lifelong journey of growing emotional maturity
- **Boundary-Setting:** Establishing clear and healthy limits, with self and with others
- **Listening:** Deep attentiveness to others, with empathy and compassion
- **Cultural Competency and Bridge-Building:** Competency in crossing cultural, generational, theological, and/or socio-economic barriers and building trust

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- **Healthy Conflict and Confrontation:** Developing the skills involved in having crucial conversations
 - **Systems Thinking:** Understanding that we are part of a network of interconnected relationships, choosing how to show up in those relationships, learning to see presenting issues, and then discovering the underlying contributing factors
 - **Managing Anxiety:** Seeing and navigating the normal anxiety that results from living and working to achieve a shared purpose
 - **Curiosity:** The ability to confront personal mental models and biases, to greet differing viewpoints with openness and humility, and to learn new ways of thinking

There was a time when congregational leadership roles could be filled by recruiting gifted leaders and involving them in a weekend leadership orientation retreat. We believe that in our current context, congregations will need more than that in order to thrive.

Congregations need to have a comprehensive leadership development process for their pastor and for congregational leaders (paid and volunteer), which includes skill development in the above areas and more.

In this new era, effective congregations will highly prioritize a leader's personal development.

Reflection Questions:

- On a scale of 1 - 10, how would you rate your personal competencies in the skills listed above? Which areas are strengths? Growth areas? How would you rate the competencies of the members of your team and the leaders of your congregation?
- How are you currently developing yourself for learning and growth in these skills? If you have a team, how are the members of your team being personally developed for learning and growth in these skills?

The second foot:

Mobilizing groups toward a shared mission

At the same time that a pastor is developing herself personally, that same pastor must mobilize groups of people to effectively make disciples who achieve a mission together. But as the pace of change increases dramatically and as we minister in new contexts, this kind of organizational leadership continues to become more complex.

There was a time when denominational headquarters provided strategies, priorities, and programs for churches to implement. However, the pace of change has meant that a one-size-fits-all program is less and less lasting or viable in the local context. Although denominations have value, they can no longer provide the road map for the local congregation.

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effective or viable in the local context.*

Here is a partial list of organizational development skills that we believe congregations must incorporate as they mobilize individual disciples to work together to achieve a shared mission in the face of a changing world.

It is important to note that the personal skills that will empower a person to produce these qualities in an organization are in the personal development list above.

Organizational development skills

- **Discernment:** Practicing a corporate discipline of listening to God, listening to one another, and making decisions together
- **Grieving Loss:** Fostering the ability to name and grieve the losses of the past so that we can move forward into the future
- **Strategic Planning:** Facilitating the work of clarifying mission, vision, and values; setting goals to achieve them
- **Generating and Sustaining Creative Tension:** Naming current reality, discerning a desired future, and navigating the tension between them
- **Developing Measurements:** Finding the right metrics and scorecards for each part of the plan and regularly reporting on results in a way that evokes accountability, celebration, and curiosity
- **Accountability:** Establishing clear, intentional organizational charts that reflect high levels of accountability; and following through on those commitments
- **Clarifying Call and Aligning Purpose:** Getting the right people in the right seat on the bus and aligning staff job descriptions with congregational mission/vision/values and goals
- **Staff Development:** Offering clear, timely shame-free feedback on job performance reviews and providing resources for continuous learning opportunities
- **Leadership Coaching:** Coaching for individuals and teams that focuses on skill development while simultaneously growing the emotional intelligence of leaders
- **Feedback:** Developing feedback systems for staff and other leaders that provide resources for change and that achieve the changes needed
- **Healthy Conflict:** Mediating confrontations and disagreements that arise in the life of the congregation

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- How are you currently developing yourself for growth and learning in these skills?? If you have a team, how are the members of your team being personally developed for growth and learning in these skills?

Additional Resources

- [Learning Change Podcast Series](#)
- [Leading Change and Managing the Resulting Anxiety](#)
- [Doubling Down and the Anxiety of Change](#)
- [Building Trust for Change Leadership](#)
- [An Everyone Culture: Becoming a Deliberately Development Organization](#) by Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey

Learning to Lead Ministry in New Terrain

In his classic best-selling book *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, Tod Bolsinger describes the challenges, similarities, and differences of leading on-the-map and leading off-the-map.

On the map, we read and execute our work based on a map that has been prepared for us or that we prepare based on past experience. As noted above, much of the work that pastors do every day is on the map - for example, preaching, pastoral care, and church administration. _

“While many healthy churches are giving faithful witness to Christ across the globe, most leaders have not been trained for the challenge of trying to bring change to churches that need transformation in order to be faithful to their missional calling.”

— Tod Bolsinger

When we go off the map, the landscape is completely new to us and we have no reliable map to read. Bolsinger makes the point that the pace of change in our ministry context has become so rapid that we are often attempting to learn to do ministry in completely new terrain – we are going off the map, into an unknown context for which we have very few skills. At this point, leadership is about making a new map.

How do you keep doing your on-the-map work while also learning and teaching off-the-map skills?

Find a Guide

One solution is to hire a guide. Explorers who navigate uncharted geographical territory are wise to find a guide to help them – one who has experienced similar terrain. It is the same for leaders navigating new ministry territory.

Not only will a skilled guide help you to feel that you are not alone, but a guide can also point out pitfalls and help you develop the skill sets you need personally and corporately, to navigate the new land before you.

In the world of congregational leadership, this means finding a leadership coach. The goal of coaching is not only to help you survive but to grow and thrive.

The coaching process is designed to help you focus on both your personal development and organizational development without losing track of either. Moving beyond theory, your real-life ministry forms the context for the work you do.

The question is only whether you will engage the process.

Additional Resources:

- [Coaching: The Art of Creating a Safe and Challenging Space](#)
- [Can I Coach Myself?](#)
- [Let Us Help You Develop Leaders](#)

We Want to Help You and Your Congregation Thrive

At *The Leader's Journey*, our team is skilled at off-map navigation. We love coming alongside leaders and congregations to help them flourish in a changing world.

For more than 20 years, we have been helping pastors and leadership teams develop the personal and organizational skills needed in ministry. We would love to offer this service to you and your team too.

We begin by creating an environment for learning that is both safe and challenging so that your leaders can learn and lead in healthy and sustainable ways. Then, through a combination of regular training events followed by coaching around the mastery of skill sets, our team will work alongside you to increase your capacity to achieve your mission.

Our approach

We know a one-size-fits-all program is no longer sufficient to help you navigate the unique challenges of your congregational context and that's why we've developed three different approaches to better fit you and your context.

One approach to this is for you to ask: If the leaders in our congregation were walking with two feet, what would we be doing (or not doing) differently? As you identify gaps in your gait, ask us for a proposal for a process to help you fill those gaps and keep moving forward with two feet.

Another approach is to determine how much of your budget you want to allocate to leadership development. Based on your budget, we will help you assess your needs on both the individual and the organizational side of the work. Using that assessment, we will collaborate with you in developing an annual leadership development process for your congregation. Once that plan is in place, we will provide training and coaching that grows the leadership capacity and effectiveness of your team.

Our third approach is our annual church leadership course, ***Deep Change or Slow Death***. This course adapts our one-on-one, in-person consulting process into an online collaborative group course with participants from across the United States and Canada, making this process more accessible to church leaders in a wider range of financial situations.

Next steps

At ***The Leader's Journey***, we know you are leading off the map, and it is extremely challenging work. In a complex world, personal and organizational health are both more important and more difficult to sustain than ever before. If you are interested in engaging our team in the work of personal or organizational development, or if you would like leadership coaching, please let us know. We are ready when you are.

If you have questions, we would love to have a chance to answer them as clearly as we can with no hard sell. We're here to help you and your congregation navigate your changing world, to walk forward into new territory on two feet and thrive.

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