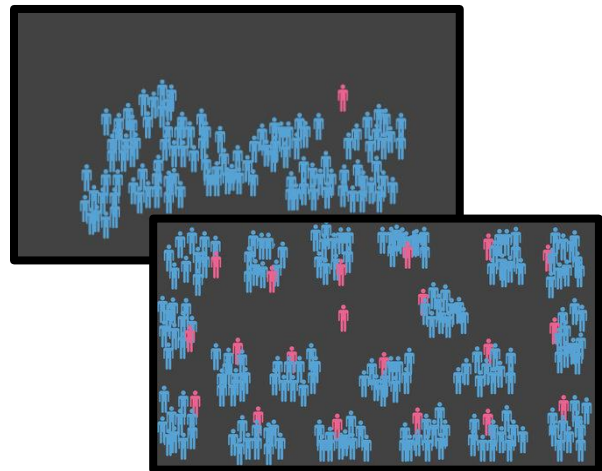


## Developing and Empowering Lay Leadership: A Ministry Multiplier AND a Crucial Self-Care Strategy

We've all been there... Facing a situation where we have an important project or initiative that needs to be led, and we look around and struggle to identify someone who has both the capability and availability to do what we feel needs to be done. The question is how do we respond to this situation as a leader?

A key difference between leaders who are situationally or temporarily effective (or not!) and those that are highly successful on a sustained basis is their commitment and ability to develop other leaders. This may be particularly critical for clergy, who often face a lack of adequate support staff, a weak structural hierarchy arising from the unique situation where those being led (congregants) are also benefactors, and finally, laity who often display more of a "consumer" mindset than an interest in the nitty-gritty of active lay leadership responsibilities. Pastors are further challenged by the traditional lack of leadership development training in seminary, compounded by the tremendously broad scope of daily responsibilities that they face (including spiritual and pastoral responsibilities, in addition to management and leadership). My personal belief (based on over 25 years in executive leadership in industry) is that these factors make the challenge of pastoral leadership even more daunting and difficult, by comparison.



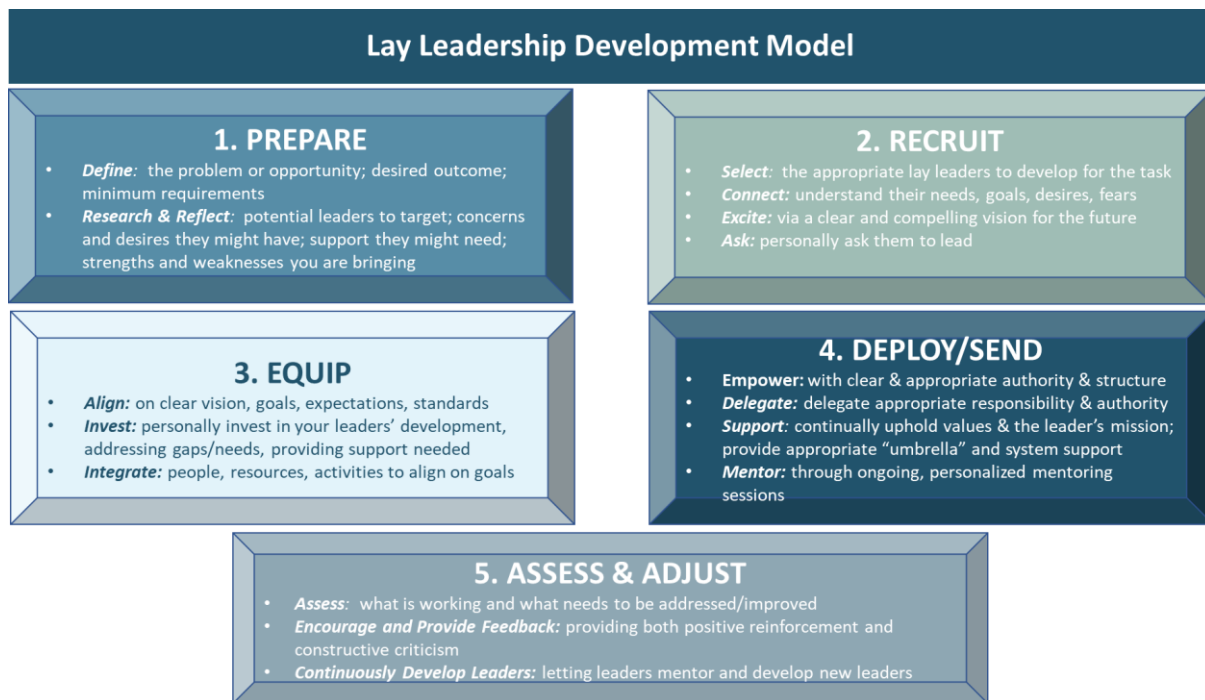
Research demonstrates the importance to the church and to clergy of a strong commitment to lay leadership development. Highly effective churches have been found to have a higher percentage of the congregation actively involved in leadership (typically between 8% to 12%) when compared to "average" churches (2%-4%).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the impact of the COVID pandemic appears to have made leadership development in the church even more critical. New research (February 2022) shows that developing and training leaders and volunteers now ranks #1 among 44 needs identified by pastors. When asked to name their single most urgent ministry difficulty requiring their personal time investment, pastors rated "developing leaders and volunteers" second (25%) behind "fostering connections with unchurched people" (28%).<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, leadership development is not an area that many clergy have a strong confidence in their abilities – nor is it an area where they spend much of their time. Developing lay leadership is rated among the activities in which pastors are least confident in their abilities (rated #83 of 92 activities rated).<sup>3</sup> In addition, over 70% of pastors surveyed indicated that they spend between 0 and 3 hours per week developing lay ministry and leadership.<sup>4</sup> As a result, most pastors are missing an enormous opportunity for a "multiplier effect" for their ministry with a direct impact on their personal self-care.

I propose that one of the most powerful decisions pastors can make relative to their ministry, as well as for their personal self-care, is an intentional commitment to developing and empowering lay leadership. Strong lay leadership has the potential to be a multiplier of your efforts, increasing the effectiveness and

efficiency of your ministry. Developing others recognizes that the capacity of the pastor is often a key constraint to church or congregational growth – and that as the needs of the flock exceed the capacity of the shepherd, the situation is likely unhealthy and unsustainable for both. Finally, a commitment to developing other leaders recognizes that we all have limits – and that pastors need a healthy “margin” in order for ministries and private lives to be healthy and sustainable.

Hopefully, this has caused you to pause and consider whether or not developing and empowering additional lay leaders would be helpful to your ministry or your self-care. As you consider how you might approach a refreshed commitment in this area, I would like to offer you a **simple five-step leadership development model (Prepare, Recruit, Equip, Deploy/Send, Assess & Adjust)**.



**Prepare.** It is important to first define the problem or opportunity in front of you, what you want the outcome to be, and what minimum requirements you have for a solution. This is the difference between “ready-aim-fire” and “ready-fire-aim” or just “fire, fire, fire...”. Too often when we consider lay leadership, we tend to either jump straight into action or “fixing” mode, which can cause a number of “short-circuits” or issues (including continuously engaging the same lay leaders regardless of their fit, interest, availability, or passion, or creating a misfit in skills between the lay leader and what is really required). It is critical to take the time up front to define “*what is the opportunity or issue?*”, “*what does success look like?*”, and “*what type of leadership am I looking for?*” Based on your reflection on these questions, you can then reflect on the strengths and gifts individuals within your congregation might have, and then identify those lay people who might be the best fit for the situation. You can also reflect on what you might anticipate their needs or concerns to be, so you can be fully prepared for the next step – **recruit**.

**Recruit.** In *Empowering Leadership*, Michael Fletcher identifies four critical components of what he calls “shoulder-tapping”: selection, vision, connection, and the “ask”.<sup>5</sup> A simple but disciplined management process for selecting lay leaders includes reviewing reflections from the preparation stage, gaining insights from others and seeking God’s direction. Given that one of the most important things leaders can do is to get “the right people in the right roles”, it is important to take the time and commit to a thorough selection process. Once a lead candidate has been identified, it is important to establish a connection where you can share with them a “compelling vision”, recognizing that “leaders don’t respond to need, leaders respond to vision.”<sup>6</sup> Personally engaging in this visioning process and inviting others into leadership is a vital step in building connection and commitment. People work for people, not for organizations, companies or causes – and it is important for people to understand what you see in them (“why them?”), what you expect from them, and what your personal interest is in them and in their success. It is also critical to provide an opportunity for potential leaders to voice their concerns or fears, as well as their goals and desires. The final step of the recruiting process is making the personal “ask”, including supporting the person through their discernment process through space, prayer and perspective.

**Equip.** It is critical to ensure that your leaders have the information, the skills and the support they need to be successful with the initiative or task assigned. An important element of equipping is to ensure you both are aligned relative to a number of key elements, including: vision, goals and expectations, standards and values, approach, priorities, tradeoffs and any support needs that are anticipated. Each of these elements are critical in terms of alignment. People are more motivated to achieve goals that they helped define and that they agree with (vision, goals, expectations, standards). If there are important requirements regarding “how” something needs to be accomplished (including who needs to be involved or engaged), it is crucial to identify this up front. If there is support that needs to be provided for the leader to be successful or for them to be confident and comfortable, this is also an essential alignment conversation. Importantly, we often forget that alignment is not possible without discussion – and we often “assume” that we are aligned on important things like vision or expectations or approach, only to find later that we were on fundamentally different pages. In addition, we may need to run interference with other stakeholders in order for our developing leaders to be successful. This is an important part of the equipping process.

**Deploy/Send.** The deployment step initially seems like the simplest step in the process – after all, don’t we need to just set them loose at this point? In reality, this is where many leaders fall short in their efforts to train and develop others. First, we need to make sure that the leader we are developing is truly empowered to accomplish the challenge set before them. Interestingly, the Greek root for empower (*endunamoo*) implies a strength that is given or shared. True empowerment requires us to clearly transfer “power” to someone else, with clear and appropriate decision-making authority. Further, we need to feel comfortable delegating responsibility to others so they can effectively lead. This can be particularly difficult for pastors, as you are often delegating to non-paid, part-time volunteers who may not have the same level of “ownership” in the issue or the path forward as you do. Nevertheless, delegating means giving something up (control) in order to get something in return (commitment and empowerment). Delegating requires us to think of ourselves as “coaches” not as “players” and to recognize the importance of letting the “players play the game” and not interfering or micro-managing.<sup>6</sup>



**Assess/Adjust.** Finally, we need to recognize that even a half-of-fame coach will make critical adjustments during the game. They do this by providing feedback and by taking an honest assessment of how things are going. What is working? What is not? Are we meeting our objectives or expectations? Why or why not? What have we learned? This is a step that we often ignore in ministry. Virtually every ministry or program has a natural life span. Absent an honest assessment process, these ministries tend to continue to operate year-after-year regardless of whether they continue to be relevant or impactful. When we really internalize that a choice to continue doing something is a choice to NOT open a door to do something else, the cost of running on “autopilot” becomes even more significant.

The Bible has a terrific example of the importance of developing lay leadership. In Exodus 18, when Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, visits Moses he is shocked at the workload Moses is experiencing as he leads the Israelites and settles disputes between them. Jethro counseled his son-in-law, “what you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you, you cannot handle it alone” (Exodus 18:17b-18). Jethro’s solution was to develop others to lead and Moses went through these same leadership development steps (reflecting on what was needed, identifying or recruiting the right leaders, equipping them, deploying them and then adjusting as necessary). The “Jethro Principle” or the commitment to developing lay leaders, made an enormous impact on the effectiveness of Moses’ leadership as well as on the sustainability of his personal self-care. I’m confident it can make a similar difference for each of us.

## Reflection Questions:

- How would you characterize the effectiveness of your lay leadership development efforts? How conscious or focused is your effort to develop laity’s ability to lead? What benefits can you envision from a more focused or concerted effort to develop lay leadership?
- Which steps of the lay leadership development model outlined above are most effective for you currently? Which steps could have the largest positive impact for you and your ministry moving forward if they were strengthened?
- What commitments might you consider to strengthen your abilities to develop lay leadership? What would be the benefits of these commitments to your ministry? Your church? Your self-care?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Barna, G. (1999). *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches*. Regal Books. 45-46.

<sup>2</sup> Lifeway Research, Greatest needs of Pastors Survey, February 2022. <https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/The-Greatest-Needs-of-Pastors-Phase-2-Quantitative-Report-Release-1.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Gortner, D., Johnson, A., & Burruss, A. (2012). *2012 Transition into Ministry Impact Study: Looking At Who We Are*. Virginia Theological Seminary. 20-21.

<sup>4</sup> Gortner, D., Mouzon, A., Johnson, A., & Burruss, A. (2014). *2014 Clergy Leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Are We Up to the Task?* Virginia Theological Seminary.

<sup>5</sup> Fletcher, M. (2018). *Empowering Leadership: How a Leadership Development Culture Builds Better Leaders Faster*. Thomas Nelson. 105-120.

<sup>6</sup> White, J. E. (2011). *What They Didn’t Teach You In Seminary: 25 Lessons for Successful Ministry in Your Church*. Baker Books. 167-168



## Additional Resources and Suggested Next Steps:

If you are interested in a deeper exploration of leadership development and empowerment insights and approaches applicable to laity, I recommend several outstanding readings as well as two powerful ongoing support opportunities.

My favorite books with solid insights into leadership development and empowerment include:

- *Empowering Leadership: How a Leadership Development Culture Builds Better Leaders Faster* (Thomas Nelson) by Michael Fletcher.
- *What They Didn't Teach You In Seminary: 25 Lessons for Successful Ministry In Your Church* (Baker Books) by James Emery White.
- *21 Qualities of Leaders in the Bible: Developing Leadership Traits Inspired by the Men and Women of Scripture* (Thomas Nelson) by John Maxwell.

In addition, the Pastoral Respite Ministry at Silver Bay YMCA (Silver Bay, NY) offers online Pastoral Self-Care Cohorts where groups of pastors come together to support each other and explore different wellness topics, including expanding leadership development skills. Please contact Rev. Garth Allen ([gallen@silverbay.org](mailto:gallen@silverbay.org)) or Rev. Bruce Tamlyn ([btamlyn@silverbay.org](mailto:btamlyn@silverbay.org)) if you are interested in joining a pastoral self-care cohort or in initiating a spiritual direction relationship to further support your self-care efforts.

Finally, if you are interested in exploring either a short-term or ongoing mentoring relationship to strengthen your leadership and management skills, including leadership development and empowerment skills, or to accompany you on your broader self-care commitment, please contact me at [ChrisClark@NorthernElmMentoringGroup.com](mailto:ChrisClark@NorthernElmMentoringGroup.com) (additional information on mentoring services is available at [www.NorthernElmMentoringGroup.com](http://www.NorthernElmMentoringGroup.com)). All mentoring engagements are conducted on a pro-bono basis, with the request that participants prayerfully consider a donation to Silver Bay YMCA's Pastoral Respite Program in lieu of mentoring fees.

## About The Author:

Chris Clark is a strategic, passionate, faith-based, retired executive with over 20 years of executive leadership with a successful global med-tech company, as well as extensive lay leadership experience. Chris seeks to help address what he refers to as "The Crisis in Comprehensive Pastoral Health" through public and lay advocacy, and by walking alongside pastors in individual mentoring relationships focused on providing leadership and management insights. You can learn more about Chris and his ministry, Northern ELM Mentoring Group, at [www.NorthernElmMentoringGroup.com](http://www.NorthernElmMentoringGroup.com).

