



Exodus of clergy: The role of leadership in responding to the call

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Leaders play an important role in clergy's response to their call. Toxic leadership, also known as the dark side of leadership, negatively influences their decision to remain in full-time pastoral ministry. There is a shortage of clergy in the Roman Catholic Church and a distribution or displacement challenge facing the Protestant church. This shortage adversely affects the future of the church as clergy play an integral part in the preparation of congregants for their works of service (Eph 4:11–12). The purpose of this study was to discover what factors were involved in clergy's response to the call to full-time pastoral ministry. A practical theological grounded theory approach was used to discover the properties of the category 'leadership'. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and data were coded using Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory methodology. The category of 'leadership' includes properties such as favouritism, leaders abdicating responsibilities, leaders taking no action/being inactive, leaders 'labeling' subordinates, leaders' 'unethical' behaviour, nepotism, poor conflict handling, poor handling of multi-racial issues, being placed on a pedestal, affirming subordinates and autocratic leadership style. Osmer's descriptive-empirical task was used as a practical theological lens through which to view the category 'leadership'. The results indicated three responses by clergy to the call to full-time pastoral ministry: not being called in the first place, a dual call (being bi-vocational or 'seasonal') and being called but leaving anyway because of, among other factors, toxic leadership. A steward leadership approach is recommended in response to the dark side of leadership.

In honour of

It is a great privilege to contribute, as a former doctoral student, to this Yolanda Dreyer Festschrift. Prof. Dr Yolanda Dreyer's academic accomplishments are varied in both quantity and quality. She is a pioneering and respected scholar, more-than-competent and well-loved supervisor, and generous colleague who has influenced the lives of many who have had the privilege of knowing her. Prof. Dreyer's research has focused on, among others, as this is by no means an exhaustive list in topic or date, women (1998–2000; 2002; 2007), authority and/or leadership (2000; 2002; 2007), the names of Jesus (2001; 2007; 2013), spirituality (2003; 2015), practical theology (2004; 2012), homophobia and or heteronormativity (2004–2008; 2014), pastoral care (2005), forgiveness (2005), youth (2007; 2016) and marriage (2008; 2011; 2013), and she still has a great deal to contribute in each of these research areas. Of specific interest to this author is Prof. Dreyer's research on forgiveness, leadership and the pastorate. Research on forgiveness has been prolific over the past three decades; however, the topics of self-forgiveness as well as the role of mercy in forgiveness remain largely unexplored territories. Research regarding the role of leadership in clergy retention (the topic of this article) is slowly being addressed, while research regarding the challenges clergy face in remaining in full-time pastoral ministry was the focus of this researcher's doctoral dissertation (Joynt 2012), under the supervision of Prof. Dreyer. This article is dedicated in her honour.

Introduction

There is a shortage of clergy. A lack of good leadership is one of the factors contributing to it. The dark side of leadership, also referred to as toxic leadership (Veldsman 2016b), contributes to the decision of clergy to respond negatively to continue with the call to full-time pastoral ministry. A grounded theory exploration 'discovers' the basic social process of responding to the call. Various categories contribute to the overall theme with 'leadership' being a significant aspect. The role of leaders – people with influence and/or power – whether mentors, senior pastors, bishops or denominational representatives, contributes to whether clergy respond positively or negatively to their call.

Note: This article represents a reworked version of aspects from the PhD dissertation of Shaun Joynt, titled *Exodus of clergy: A practical theological grounded theory exploration*, in the Department of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria, with Prof. Dr Yolanda Dreyer as supervisor. This was presented in draft form as a conference paper at the annual meeting of the Society for Practical Theology in South Africa during 18–20 January 2017 in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, South Africa.

Clergy shortage

Clergy fulfil specific duties within a church as an organisation (Heitink 2007:19). They are instrumental in its growth, both spiritually and numerically, by equipping members in their relationship with God, one another and those within their communities. A shortage of trained clergy adversely affects the growth of the church. Factors contributing to the shortage include forced terminations, change in vocation and sexual misconduct (Cousins 2010:53–54), as well as marital and family challenges, denominational and congregational conflict, feelings of burnout and frustration (Hoge & Wenger 2005:49).

Within the Roman Catholic church, there has been a growing shortage (worldwide) of priests, diocesan and religious, since the 1970s, while the Roman Catholic population has doubled from 653 million to 1229 million during the same time (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate 2015; cf. Mohler 2016). Diocesan priestly ordinations and graduate-level seminarians have not kept pace with Roman Catholic population growth even though this has been partially mitigated by an increase in permanent deacons (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate 2015) and the training of parishioners for lay ministry such as conducting funerals (The Scotsman 2016). The priest shortage extends to Ireland (The Irish Times 2014), Germany, where priests are being imported from India (Salden 2013), the United States, which is also importing priests from Asia and Africa (Catholic Online 2015), and Brazil, France, England and Wales (Future Church 2013). Sullins (2000:3, 16–17) agrees that there is a priest shortage but indicates its effect is minimised, citing the decline in mass attendance (CARA Services 2014) as an indicator that laity 'demand' or require less from clergy as well as the increased ministry of deacons and lay professionals. However, this does not hold true for the Roman Catholic church in South Africa, which has seen an insignificant decline in mass attendance (CARA Services 2014; World Values Survey 2013).

The clergy shortage is not limited to only the Roman Catholic Church, as the Anglican Church, United Methodists and Assemblies of God experience it as well (Milbank 2008:128). The Anglican Church within Malawi is experiencing it (Mbaya 2009:11). In South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church expect a clergy shortage within the next 8 years and presently deploy retired clergy to serve in local congregations (De Villiers 2010:8). This author has also witnessed it personally over a 25-year period (Joynt & Dreyer 2013:1). Overall, the Protestant church is experiencing more of a distribution or placement challenge in that there are enough clergy to service local congregations but inadequate remuneration and a resistance to relocate to an undesirable location have influenced their decision to decline the call to those congregations (Chaves 2001:36). There are two reasons for the resistance of Protestant clergy to relocate: (1) the spouse's inability to gain meaningful employment in the new location which is usually smaller or rural and (2) the higher salaries needed by mid-life or second-career clergy making them less mobile (Chaves 2001:36–37). The Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal (Charismatic) denominations of the Protestant

church face less of a clergy shortage, but still face one nonetheless (Holm 2005:11). A research gap existed in the context of the Charismatic church within South Africa, which led to a grounded theory exploration of Hatfield Training Centre trained pastors. Hatfield Training Centre is the Bible College of a Charismatic mega church located within Pretoria, South Africa, namely, Hatfield Christian Church (HCC). Pastors, after training, proceed to respond to their call at other churches – sometimes at HCC itself.

Called to be clergy

The concept and meaning of vocation, for Christians, has changed over time with scholars agreeing on four historical periods: the early church, the Middle Ages, the Reformation period and the modern period (Nel & Scholtz 2015:1). Within the early church vocation was 'understood as the call to discipleship that included the call to community' (Nel & Scholtz 2015:1). In the Middle Ages, 'only monks, priests and bishops had callings' while in the Reformation period Luther 'extended to secular work the dignity of a calling but also brought about a reversal in the valuing of the monastic ideal' (Nel & Scholtz 2015:2). Calvin opened 'the door to the later identification of vocation with one's occupation', resulting in the modern period's 'secularization of the concept of vocation' which by 'the end of the 19th century vocation was narrowly defined as any sort of work' while 'in the 20th century it became a matter of individual choice' (Nel & Scholtz 2015:3).

Barth (1961:598), situated within the modern period, draws a distinction between calling as vocation and calling as divine summons. He considers vocation being unique to every person and a framework for obedience to the divine summons (Barth 1961:600, 597). Vocation may change while the divine summons does not; however, this does not mean that the two are disconnected (Nel & Scholtz 2015:4). There is a 'tension between the understanding of vocation as an external call and vocation as an internal call' that appeared during the monastic period with a priest receiving an external call via the bishop or community and a monk receiving an internal call directly from God. A more contemporary understanding of vocation includes being 'your most profound and true self' and 'let[ting] your life speak' (Nel & Scholtz 2015:4). It is within this context that the call to clergy, as Christians, represents a divine summons to the vocation of serving God and others within the framework of full-time congregational ministry.

Nel and Scholtz (2015:5) state that clergy are 'called from among the working people of God (in a sense as one of them), with a specific calling towards the very same people'. This calling to full-time congregational ministry infers that the person (1) realises the calling to be a fulfilment of their life purpose as God's creature, (2) is willing to pay the price required by the profession, (3) is willing to be trained for the profession (both initially and ongoing) and (4) is committed to lifelong evaluation within the profession (Nel 2002:157). However, Nel and Scholtz (2015:5) suggest that the 'calling of a pastor has to be secularized' and be understood as a "job"

however important and responsible that calling and job may be'. The 'job' at hand is whatever is necessary to prepare God's people for the ministry or work they are called to do – equipping the seekers of the kingdom (Nel & Scholtz 2015: 5–6). This 'job' requires a level of competence similar to what is required of other professions (Nel 2002:153). In one sense, the calling of clergy is no different to other professions Christians may find themselves in, yet on the other hand it is 'a very high office to be involved in' (Nel & Scholtz 2015:6).

Leadership's role in answering the call

Leadership theories abound (Dinh et al. 2014) and it is not the scope of this paper to address either the full history or the many philosophies, theories, models, or styles of leadership (Scouller & Chapman 2014), however a very short summary will suffice. Theories have covered both micro processes (such as perceptions, emotions and cognitions) and macro processes (such as social-relational context), and the 'leader's role within complex systems for instigating organizational change and managing dynamic social networks' (Dinh et al. 2014:36–37). Theories have been categorised into four core groups: trait, behaviour, contingency, and power and influence (Mind Tools 2017). These have developed over different periods: leader trait theories (–1940), behavioural theories (1940–1960), and situational theories (1960–) (Middle East Technical University 2008). Styles have included situational, transformational, visionary, collaborative, servant, host, agile, adaptive and resilient (April, Kukard & Peters 2013: 1–6), as well as pragmatic, idealist, diplomat and steward (Murphy 2015).

Elkington (2013:3) defines leadership as 'an art and a skill in which a person or persons collaborate to construct shared meaning with a view to securing helpful outcomes'. Included in this definition is a recognised model of leadership identified as spiritual-based values leadership whereby 'leaders become leaders as they define a set of core spiritual values that define their core character– whatever its nature' (Fairholm 2015:13). An important aspect of spiritual leadership is culture creation which involves the 'displacement of coworkers' work values with those the leader sets' – core spirit values which powerfully trigger worker behaviour (Fairholm 2015:19). Leaders operating from the base of their spirit self-integrate their culture into their work community culture by: fostering unity, building a culture of mutual trust, building a work community, building harmonious relationships, building broad corporate structures, emphasising transformation, focusing on their coworker's individual spirit, exercising spiritual intelligence and fostering innovation (Fairholm 2015:20–22). The leadership practices required to bring about these changes are: being ethical, being 'in service' to coworkers, helping workers to also be leaders, maintaining profitability, sharing information, being sensitive to coworkers, being teachers and being inspiring, as well as empowering and nurturing followers, fostering creativity, learning self-control, setting meaning for the group and displacing follower values [from undesirable and destructive to desirable and constructive] (Fairholm 2015:22–26).

Peter Drucker states (Malphurs 2003:63) that the pastoral leadership of a large church is one of the three most difficult vocations in the world. For that reason:

pastors who lead the church will find it helpful to gain a stronger awareness of the nature of the church as a complex adaptive system. Such awareness will equip the pastor to look beyond the microcosmic forces that are creating adversity to the much larger macrocosmic realities that intersect, interact and, indeed, shape the various people and families who make up the church. (Elkington 2013:9)

This paper will specifically focus on two types of leadership concerning the role of leadership in clergy's response to the call: toxic and steward leadership. Both leadership styles include trait, behavioural and situational aspects.

Toxic leadership

Whicker coined the phrase 'toxic leadership' in her 1996 book *Toxic Leadership: When Organizations Go Bad* (IEDP 2014). The topic gained increasing focus after a study by anthropologist Dave Matsuda who was tasked by the US army to investigate a high suicide rate among soldiers serving in Iraq during 2010 (Boisselle & McDonnell 2014:11). His findings indicated that 'suicidal behavior can be triggered by a toxic command climate' (Zwerdling 2014). These findings were used to create a report for implementing changes within the armed forces (United States Armed Forces 2010). The high cost of toxic leadership is underlined by the financial cost (among others), estimated to be in the region of \$100 000, of the loss of a trained soldier because of suicide or desertion (Gilmore 2001).

Lipman-Blumen (2005b) defines toxic leaders as:

those individuals, who by dint of their destructive behaviours and dysfunctional personal qualities generate a serious and enduring poisonous effect on the individuals, families, organizations, communities, and even entire societies they lead. (p. 2)

Veldsman (2016b) refers to it as the 'dark side' of leadership. It is the continuous, deliberate actions by a leader to undermine the sense of self-worth and usefulness of an individual resulting in 'exploitative, destructive, devaluing and demeaning work experiences' (Veldsman 2016a). Toxic leaders 'deliberately destroy the fabric of the institution' (Veldsman 2016a). Section 11 of the Army Leadership manual describes toxic leadership in the following way:

Occasionally, negative leadership occurs in an organization. Negative leadership generally leaves people and organizations in a worse condition than when the leader follower relationship started. One form of negative leadership is toxic leadership. Toxic leadership is a combination of self-centered attitudes, motivations, and behaviors that have adverse effects on subordinates, the organization, and mission performance. This leader lacks concern for others and the climate of the organization, which leads to short- and long-term negative effects. The toxic leader operates with an inflated sense of self-worth and from acute self-interest. Toxic leaders consistently use dysfunctional behaviors to deceive, intimidate, coerce, or unfairly punish

others to get what they want for themselves. The negative leader completes short-term requirements by operating at the bottom of the continuum of commitment, where followers respond to the positional power of their leader to fulfill requests. This may achieve results in the short term, but ignores the other leader competency categories of leads and develops. Prolonged use of negative leadership to influence followers undermines the followers' will, initiative, and potential and destroys unit morale. (Department of the Army 2012)

A description within the church context follows. Rainer (2014) describes 14 symptoms of toxic *church* leaders as: (1) rarely demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit, (2) seeking a minimalist structure of accountability, (3) expecting behaviour of others they do not expect of themselves, (4) seeing almost everyone else as inferior to themselves, (5) showing favouritism, (6) having frequent anger outbursts, (7) saying one thing to some people, but different things to others, (8) seeking to dismiss or marginalise people before they attempt to develop them, (9) being manipulative, (10) lacking transparency, (11) not allowing for pushback or disagreement, (12) surrounding themselves with sycophants, (13) communicating poorly and (14) being self-absorbed. He suggests that toxic leaders 'can get away with their behavior for years because they often have a charismatic and charming personality. Charming like a snake' (Rainer 2014). One of the ways the Church of England is addressing toxic leadership is by identifying if their candidate's 'personal charisma' dominates over living out the gospel message (Gledhill 2014).

The question arises 'why are toxic leaders promoted?' According to Murphy and Cecil (2014:14) it is because they 'are adept at hiding their behaviour from superiors, allowing them to get promoted' and 'they get the mission done but leave a trail of destruction in their wake' (The Military Leader n.d.). 'Toxic leaders are not usually deliberately toxic, nor do they always recognize their own toxicity' (Gangel 2007:39). They are also not toxic all the time (Lipman-Blumen 2005b:2). Gangel warns that the 'most vulnerable type of toxicity for a congregation arises from an all-powerful pastor who reigns over all boards and committees, and the congregation' (2007:88). He lists the characteristics of a toxic leader as deceptive, autocratic, egotistic, incompetent, ignorant, cruel, evil, demanding and reckless (Gangel 2007:2–5). He also suggests the following reasons as to why people would work for a toxic leader: belief in the unbelievable, following the illusion (see Lipman-Blumen 2005b:5–9), desire for dependence (see Lipman-Blumen 2005b:3–4), fear and that there are no other options (Gangel 2007:5–6). Lipman-Blumen (2005c:3) adds that 'the barriers to escape appear much too high, be they psychological, existential, financial, political, or social' or a combination of these. She asks 'why do we followers not only tolerate, but so often prefer, and sometimes even create toxic leaders?' and suggests it is because of 'the internal needs and human condition of the followers; the interactions between followers and their own environments; and followers' relationships with toxic leaders' (Lipman-Blumen 2005a:1). It is important to realise that clergy are not exempt from exhibiting toxic leadership

(Lipman-Blumen 2005c:ix). It is worth noting that Greco (2014) suggests one response to toxic leadership as 'when a leader or organization begins to exhibit symptoms of toxicity, our voices can serve as a powerful antibiotic. Silence often empowers toxic leaders'.

Steward leadership

Steward leadership is not new as it was proposed in the 1980s (Wilson 2016:28) and is considered a precursor to ethical leadership research (Bachmann 2008:30). According to Wilson (2016), steward leadership is:

the efficient management and growth of organizational resources, through leadership of staff and activities, as a non-owning steward-servant, in order to achieve the mission according to the objectives of the owners. (p. 86)

Peters (2013) describes steward leaders as:

those who are motivated by justice and dignity and who can see the bigger picture. They are able to break out of the traditional selfish and narcissistic mould to become leaders who care about others. Their emphasis is on delivering results *with [author's own emphasis]* others – and they are skilled in bringing networks and resources together in pursuit of a common aim. (online)

Two key stewardship concepts are involving all stakeholders in the economy and decentralising leadership, particularly involving the younger generation (Stewardship Asia Centre 2016:4). For these and other reasons, steward leaders:

understand that their lives are not their own, seek intimacy with God as their highest calling, are secure in their identities ..., see those with whom they lead and serve as fellow pilgrims, regard all resources as gifts from God, recognize the spiritual battle they are in as they strive to lead as faithful stewards in a world of people playing the role of master, [and] have learned that victory starts with surrender. (Barnabas Foundation 2015:3–5; cf. Rich 2012:9)

Rich (2012:iii) indicates that 'a leader's self-identification as a steward leader is a predictor of a leader's attitude toward responsibility, authority, accountability, organizational ownership, and concern for the poor'. According to Geleta (2017), steward leadership starts with the leaders realising that their role is temporary in the greater scheme of things and that it needs to operate on three levels: individually, team, and global. Individually it requires promoting the well-being of each individual in the organisation; at the team level, it requires ensuring constructive team interaction; and globally it requires 'ensuring that organizational values and missions remain appropriate' (Geleta 2017).

There have been comparisons made between servant and steward leadership. One similarity is that both 'models emphasize the need to replace self-interest with service to others as the basis for using power' (Kaul 2014:5). However, an initial comparison between servant and steward leadership indicates that the former:

requires leaders to overcome their own interests and/or benefits in order to meet the expectations of others [*which are:*] identifying

and correctly placing talent, creating trust between leaders at various levels, listening well to feedback and other input, and driving employee involvement and engagement [*while the latter*] requires leaders to take responsibility, and to step back and allow employees and/or lower level managers to take on responsibilities [*which includes*] giving employees at all levels the opportunity to learn and develop, and making the work environment equitable for employees at all levels. (Stewardship Asia Centre 2016:3)

An example of servant–steward leadership is found in Jesus Christ who served both the mission (God’s will) and the people (his followers) in order to accomplish what he was sent to do (International Graduate School of Leadership 2016). This is underscored by John when he records Jesus’ words ‘for I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me’ (Jn 6:38 NIV) and Mark when he records Jesus’ words ‘for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mk 10:45).

A grounded theory methodology approach

The aim of this paper is to focus on the core category ‘leadership’ which has been identified as one of the reasons clergy leave full-time pastoral ministry in a church as an organisation. This core category emerged after conducting a grounded theory study.

Grounded theory was selected as a research methodology as it best suited the research question ‘why are clergy in South Africa leaving full-time pastoral ministry?’ Hussein et al (2014:3–4) list its advantages as: providing for intuitive appeal, fostering creativity, having the potential to conceptualise, providing a systematic approach to data analysis, and providing for data depth and richness. It is used widely across many disciplines as a systematically comparative inductive approach to gather data and build theory (Charmaz 2014:328). The process comprises collecting data (via interviews, observations, documents, etc.), coding (either manually or via software, or both) and comparing in cyclical patterns until categories and their properties are identified. The process is repeated until theoretical saturation is achieved, meaning no new codes nor categories emerge, and completed with the construction of a substantive grounded theory.

Traditionally the research process begins with a literature review, which informs the research question and theoretical framework, which in turn guides data collection and analysis (Elliott & Higgins 2012). Not so with grounded theory. According to Glaser (1998:67) a literature review would ‘contaminate’ the emerging theory by forcing pre-conceived ideas on it. The same for theoretical frameworks, which Glaser suggests should only be used to ‘help develop theoretical sensitivity’ (Elliott & Higgins 2012). This does not mean that grounded theory is devoid of any theoretical frameworks, but rather that they cannot be primary in the research process guiding data collection and analysis. However, this approach has remained contested. A preliminary literature review was

conducted to determine the research gap followed by an ongoing literature review as coding and analysis were taking place.

The study was conducted with participants from a church-based training institution. The required criteria included the following: (1) men and women who had commenced theological studies at an undergraduate level through the Hatfield Training Centre, located in Pretoria, South Africa, (2) had been employed fulltime in a pastoral capacity by a church and (3) had subsequently left fulltime pastoral ministry. Permission was obtained to access institutional records with the purpose of selecting qualifying participants of which records of 188 potential participants, dating back to 1989, were supplied.

A number of records were incomplete or out-of-date, thus reducing the potential sample size. Facebook (a social media platform) provided an opportunity to communicate with 50 eligible participants (43 males and 7 females) of which 15 did not respond. Thirteen participants met the criteria with 8 being interviewed in person and 2 telephonically because of distance constraints. Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted in three cycles with the 10 participants. Participants were all male as few females responded and those who did respond did not meet the research criteria. The age range of the 10 participants when leaving full-time pastoral ministry was between 20 and 57 years.

A summary of the process follows. One-on-one interviews were conducted in appropriate venues that facilitated dialogue. The interviews ranged between 40 and 90 min each. At the start of each interview participants were reminded of the purpose of the study, the procedure of the interview (including note taking and digital recording), the risks involved (none apparent), the benefits involved (a contribution to research), the right to leave without any negative consequences, and confidentiality. Semi-structured interviews using five open-ended questions were conducted with the view of understanding the entry into, time within, and subsequent leaving of full-time pastoral ministry in a church. Recorded interviews were transcribed and thereafter coded by hand and using software. Sometimes multiple codes were generated from a single line or sentence. Codes were grouped into clusters sharing the same properties, namely categories. Categories were used to construct a theory that describes the concept of responding to the call. The theory consists of six steps in responding to the call: preparation, growth, ‘fitting into’, defending, conflict and leaving. The category ‘leadership’ ranked second in significance, following the core category of ‘calling’ and it is located in the step called ‘defending’ of the basic social process labelled ‘responding to the call’ (Joynt 2012:193).

For the sake of understanding this author’s research approach, his research position may briefly be described as:

a social/critical realism research paradigm, a depth realist ontology (reality consists in three domains: empirical, actual and

real), a neo-realist epistemology, a grounded theory methodology, using interviews as a method, with an abductive reasoning strategy. (Joynt 2012:59)

Findings

A total of 235 codes were identified by means of 13 interviews, which were clustered into 12 categories. The category 'leadership' ranked second with 44 codes (Joynt 2012:174–178). The cluster of codes related to the category 'leadership' included properties such as favouritism, leaders abdicating responsibilities, leaders taking no action/being inactive, leaders 'labelling' subordinates, leaders 'unethical' behaviour, nepotism, poor conflict handling, poor handling of multi-racial issues, being placed on a pedestal, affirming subordinates and autocratic leadership style.

Favouritism (or not)

Participants indicated that they had experienced being on the wrong end of favouritism by falling out of favour, seeing nepotism practiced, or enduring direct opposition.

Interview 3:

'XXX wanted to have some shoulder on which he could lean and when I was just first in the ministry, XXX loved me, he liked, he took me along to a conference in YYY, so I had to drive the motor car, we were good friends. And then as time went on I did a couple of things wrong ...' (Participant 3, male, 76 years)

Interview 2:

'[A]nd we've worked up the ranks and he comes, he is not a cell leader in fact um, ja, he's not a cell leader, he's not anything, he just [*beginning*], in other words he by passes [...] I thought no, you know, but um, when the father doesn't have the same, heart towards his sons, some sons have privileges and it will never work, anyway for me.' (Participant 2, male, 32 years)

Interview 7:

'I was not the man XXX [*a pastor*] earmarked, I didn't want to be with him and he didn't want to be with me. It's as easy as that and at that point in time ZZZ [*another student pastor*] was part of the program. XXX and ZZZ most definitely developed a close relationship with one another and it was kind of categorically put to me, in not so many words, "I am kind of like treading water with you but I am not going to develop you in any way".' (Participant 7, male, 37 years)

Interview 3:

'You know XXX always had his blue eyed boys; there was always someone on the staff whom he favoured more than others.' (Participant 3, male, 76 years)

Leaders abdicating responsibilities

Participants indicated that they had leaders who were innovative yet not persistent in seeing things through.

Interview 3:

'[B]ut I felt that XXX was so much of a rondspringer, [*Translation: jack-in-a-box*] he didn't, he wasn't good at maintaining things [...] he would start a new thing and while it was new and fresh and everybody was excited about it, he maintained it. But as soon as it lost its freshness he just would drop it [...] They must make it die [...] Then he couldn't be blamed of making it die.' (Participant 3, male, 76 years)

Leaders taking no action, being inactive:

Participants indicated that they had leaders who were unresponsive to requests to engage regarding sensitive issues such as misunderstanding who is in charge or multi-racial matters.

Interview 2:

'I came to Pastor XXX and ZZZ but nothing was done. You know there was this, there was this um, similar to what happened with WWW, where I did come back to the leadership and say what is happening? Can someone explain to me, someone just clarify to WWW and I. I don't mind if I'm supposed to help WWW, I'll do it [...] I don't know it was the strangest thing and it seems funny for me to say it because nothing was done.' (Participant 2, male, 32 years)

Leaders 'labeling' subordinates

Participants indicated that they had leaders who negatively labelled subordinates, thereby limiting future growth opportunities.

Interview 3:

'And then as time went on I did a couple of things wrong, I think he thought I wasn't, ek was nie 'n [*Translation: I wasn't an*] innovator of new things, he called me, he would call me, and he would call other people that.' (Participant 3, male, 76 years)

Leaders 'unethical' behaviour/nepotism

Participants indicated that they experienced the negative effects of nepotism.

Interview 2:

'[T]hen he [*senior pastor*] approached XXX with the same thing and said 'XXX I want you, my son has got interest in the youth, I want you to involve him' and XXX and I are obviously different. XXX always wanted to please and um, so he, he went and invited um, the son and, and um, and in a very short space of time, I think it was 6 months there was an announcement made that he [*the son*] was gonna take over the youth.' (Participant 2, male, 32 years)

Interview 2:

'[W]hen UUU [*the senior pastor's son*] came in and when he was just about to be made pastor then XXX [*the senior pastor*] called all of us pastors, that was PPP, myself and QQQ and he said 'listen, I see that this um, your salaries are not good you know, and I want to up them, I want to, I want to um, double it'. (Participant 2, male, 32 years)

Lack of clear communication from leadership

Participants indicated that they experienced a lack of clear communication from their leaders.

Interview 2:

'[O]n the other hand I um it was a bit of a relief for me because there was no clear communication on what was supposed to happen and how it was to happen when it comes to the leadership of that church, so I was told or at least that's the impression I got, that I must go there together with the gentleman that was to plant the church.' (Participant 2, male, 32 years)

Being heard or listened to by leadership

Participants indicated that they felt they were not 'heard' or listened to by their leaders. The example below indicates the exception, when a leader asked how the participant was doing and 'actually' listened to the participant's response.

Interview 1:

'Um, he was very open minded. We had a meeting once or twice a month. Just had some coffee. And he asked, he actually asked ... personal [things] ... [my] opinion ...' (Participant 1, male, 35 years)

Equating serving God with serving leaders

Participants indicated that they equated serving God with serving their leaders.

Interview 3:

'[Y]ou thought you were serving the Lord by serving ZZZ or XXX.' (Participant 3, male, 76 years)

Interview 2:

'ZZZ is a cool guy; he likes to please [said of a colleague who handed over his ministry to another].' (Participant 2, male, 32 years)

Autocratic leadership style:

Participants indicated that their leaders exercised an autocratic leadership style not allowing for engagement by subordinates.

Interview 1:

'About the same thing and I was busy on the stage packing up the sound gear and I just heard the conversation. And then the senior pastor said to the youth pastor, 'This is my congregation, this is my church and I will make [do] as I want to'. And that is where I decided, this is my point where I say good bye [...] Well when I heard him say that to the youth pastor, that's control, that is manipulation, I am not going to stand for that, I am not going to be under that.' (Participant 1, male, 35 years)

Interview 2:

'[I] struggled through that, I struggled with seeing church leadership that way, you know it sounds like Zimbabwe, sounds like it, sounds like is that supposed to be in the church now? This control thing and this fear for the father. I cannot question, I

cannot, is that what's supposed to be the church, and I ja [yes], as far as I'm concerned, I don't see it.' (Participant 2, male, 32 years)

Interview 12:

'I felt that um, the pastor was a little bit controlling, you know.' (Participant 9, male, 38 years)

Discussion

Leaders, namely, people with influence and/or power, influence clergy's decision to leave full-time pastoral ministry. Examples of these leaders include senior pastors, bishops or denominational representatives. Toxic leadership contributes to clergy exiting full-time pastoral ministry, while steward leadership is recommended to counter this exodus of clergy.

Firstly, participants indicated they experienced being on the wrong end of favouritism by falling out of favour, seeing nepotism practiced, or enduring direct opposition. When a follower (pastoral staff member) is treated as a 'favourite' by a leader (superior) and later 'discarded'; it is disheartening, and disillusionment sets in. There are scriptural examples of being 'in' and then 'out' of favour (Joseph and Potiphar, David and Saul). This author had both experienced and witnessed similar incidents. After critical reflection and constructive dialogue with peers, he has proposed the following guidelines to a number of leaders: (1) avoid acting out on any inclination to show favouritism and (2) prevent the perception of 'favouritism' by other team members when drawing one person closer for a season of mentoring by involving the whole team in the process. Explain that it is for a determined period and once completed the mentee is to repeat the process with another team member, reducing the perceived 'falling out of favour' by the mentee as well as focusing the mentee's time and energy on replicating the process. In addition to these, Elkington's (2013:11–12) suggestions for resiliency training, namely, preparing for the personal cost of a ministry career, and the value of adversity for shaping of clergy are recommended.

Secondly, participants indicated they had leaders who were innovative yet not persistent in seeing tasks or projects to completion. When leaders start new projects, subsequently loose interest, move on to the 'next thing', and ask a follower to convey the termination message and or 'close it down', it has a negative effect on clergy. It may be useful to include the following criteria, which are by no means exhaustive, for leaders to consider before starting a new task or project: (1) the responsibility to communicate termination lies with the originator of the project, (2) no new projects are started without questioning which project(s), if any, are to be replaced, (3) determine the current project holding capacity of the team and or organisation and (4) determine the long-term sustainability of the project.

Thirdly, participants indicated they had leaders who were unresponsive to requests to engage regarding sensitive issues. These issues included conflict regarding who is in charge of a project and who needs to be subordinate, as well

as multi-racial matters. Clearly defined job descriptions, accompanied by key performance areas and key performance indicators, would assist in defining appropriate protocols and responsibilities and minimising misunderstanding regarding job roles and reporting lines. Training in diversity and cultural intelligences (Hughes 2016) and appropriately implementing the training would assist in navigating the diverse multi-cultural landscape within South Africa.

Fourthly, participants indicated they had leaders who negatively labelled subordinates thereby limiting future growth opportunities. The challenge of being 'labelled' and subsequently unable to discard a specific perception by a leader contributes to clergy's decision to exit full-time pastoral ministry. Negatively labelling leads to the belief that personalities are set in stone and thus cannot change (Yeager et al. 2014). It may result in a 'flea or flee' mentality – never extending beyond an artificially imposed 'ceiling' of the proverbial open jar or leaving the organisation to shrug off the specific 'label'.

Fifthly, participants indicated they experienced the negative effects of nepotism. Two specific incidents were observed: (1) the handing over of a ministry that had already been developed by a staff member to a leader's family member and (2) the subsequent adjustment of staff salaries to accommodate the appointed family member's need for a larger salary. Sadly, this is not limited to the church but has also been observed within the context of the current South African government (Pityana 2017).

Sixthly, participants indicated they experienced a lack of clear communication from their leaders. There is a contrast between effective communication and underlying non-verbal assumptions – 'sniffing out' what one needs to know. Clear communication is a quality of an effective leader (Igbaekemen 2014:130). This section links to the third point above stating that clearly defined roles and responsibilities for both leaders and followers need to be communicated.

Seventhly, participants indicated they felt they were not 'heard' or 'listened to' by their leaders. 'Being heard' by a 'crucial other', in this instance a leader, is important to followers (Fernandez 2001:26, 157). If they do not feel as if they are 'heard', they will eventually leave.

Eighthly, participants indicated they equated serving God with serving their leaders. Some followers are under the impression that serving a leader and serving God are synonymous; however, human leaders are imperfect and are not to be obeyed in all instances, for example, when instructing a follower, among other things, to steal or lie.

Finally, participants indicated their leaders exercised an autocratic leadership style not allowing for engagement by subordinates. At the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) both the apostles and elders welcomed and considered the question posed by members of the party of the Pharisees, indicating that there was interaction between the apostles and elders.

Contemporary society, comprising of a majority of Millennials, is moving to a more collaborative leadership style than the Boomer's autocratic style (Brousell 2015).

A practical theological perspective

Swinton and Mowat (2016:3–4) define practical theology as 'performing the faith' (Jn 13:35) – a living out of the gospel. To reflect practically and theologically, Osmer's model of practical theological interpretation provides four tasks with corresponding questions and functions: (1) a descriptive [empirical] task that asks 'what is going on?' and it requires a posture of priestly listening, (2) an interpretive task that asks 'why is it going on?' and it requires a posture of sagely wisdom, (3) a normative task that asks 'what ought to be going on?' and it requires a posture of prophetic discernment and (4) a strategic task that asks 'how might we respond?' and it requires a posture of servant leadership (Smith 2010:99–101). The four questions asked and answered are the following:

- What is going on: 'Are clergy leaving full-time pastoral ministry? Does leadership influence their leaving?' Yes, they are leaving full-time pastoral ministry for at least three reasons and poor leadership contributes to the third group: called but leaving anyway.
- Why is it going on: 'What are the leadership aspects contributing to clergy leaving?' The analysis of the interviews indicate that clergy exit full-time pastoral ministry because they realised they were not called in the first place, they have a dual call (either concurrent or 'seasonal', for example, being called as both a pastor and businessman concurrently or sequentially as a pastor followed by as a missionary), or they are called but leave anyway because of, among other factors, the type of leadership exercised over them (Joynt 2012:217). Toxic leadership contributes to the exodus of clergy. Toxic leaders 'generate a serious and enduring poisonous effect on the individuals, families, organizations, communities and even entire societies they lead' (Lipman-Blumen 2005b:2).
- What ought to be going on: 'What type of leadership (person, trait, situation, etc.) is required to contribute to clergy retention?' It is the assertion of this author that a steward leadership paradigm would aid in clergy retention as leaders overseeing clergy would 'promote the well-being of each individual in the organization ... [ensure] constructive team interaction ... [and ensure] that organizational values and missions remain appropriate' (Geleta 2017).
- How might we respond: Elkington (2013:1–2) asks 'How do we mitigate the current exodus from the pastoral ministry? Are there strategies and mechanisms that can be developed to help churches and pastors see longevity and health within the realm of pastoral leadership?' Suggestions include leadership training in the areas of mentoring and coaching, as well as implementing Elkington's (2013:11) six shifts, listed in the conclusion of this article, to stem the exit of 'those pastors [who] leave pastoral ministry as a calling and as a career'.

Elkington (2013) also asks a few pertinent questions that, although not answered in the scope of this paper, warrant mention for future consideration:

Why does adversity seem to shape business and 'secular' leaders with seemingly positive outcomes whilst within the ranks pastors it seems to cause career termination and loss? What is the difference between the way in which business and secular leaders handle adversity and the way in which pastoral leaders handle adversity? What causes such seemingly different outcomes in the current global milieu of adversity, crisis and uncertainty? (pp. 1–2)

Conclusion and/or implications

Clergy play an integral part in the church. A shortage of clergy negatively affects the church as an organisation, influencing both numerical and spiritual growth. The study identified variables that contribute to this shortage with the code 'leadership' occurring most often, second only to the code 'calling'. Within the study participants indicated that some leaders show favouritism (participants 2, 3, 7), abdicate responsibilities (participant 3), are passive – taking little or no action (participant 2), negatively 'label' subordinates (participant 3), exhibit nepotism (participant 2), don't communicate clearly (participant 2), don't listen actively (inferred by participant 1, indicated by other participants), are served 'as if they are God' (participant 1), or function in an autocratic leadership style (participants 1, 2, 9). The role of poor leadership, described as 'toxic', negatively influences clergy retention while steward leadership is proposed as an alternative paradigm to facilitate clergy retention.

The value of the study is that it identified the category 'leadership' as the second reason, after 'calling', as to why clergy leave full-time pastoral ministry within South Africa. The findings correspond to Hoge and Wenger's (2005) studies conducted in the United States of America. Delimitations of the study include: the time period 1990–2010, clergy who had attained a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Assemblies of God (Global University as it is currently known) as offered by the Hatfield Training Centre of the HCC located in Pretoria, South Africa, clergy who had been employed full-time by a church (who have been active in full-time pastoral ministry and subsequently left) and convenience sampling of clergy within the sample group residing in South Africa. The study was not representative or inclusive of all denominations or theological training institutions within South Africa, nor did it determine or evaluate the preparation and training of clergy within the selected theological training institution, namely the Hatfield Training Centre.

Future research in the area of leadership impact on clergy retention might include (1) assessment tools such as Leadership 360° Feedback, Strengths Finder 2.0 and others to identify specific leadership strengths and weaknesses, (2) training in the areas of mentoring and coaching, (3) debriefing and/or counselling for clergy who have been adversely affected by toxic leadership and (4) dialogue with psychology and sociology research to

better understand and prepare clergy for the challenges of full-time pastoral ministry which includes dealing with toxic leaders and toxic organisational cultures. Future research might include investigating methods of inculcating healthy and realistic expectations in clergy. Participant 7 faced intense adversity in not being his mentor's desired choice as a protégée which aligns with Elkington's (2013:7) research that '75% [of the pastors surveyed] stated that they had also faced intense opposition in the ministry' and Miner's (2007) statement that:

the expectations that pastors have upon entering the ministry, expectations that the parishioners will love them, work harmoniously with them and that the church is a safe and peaceful place to fulfil one's calling. (p. 14)

Finally, Elkington (2013:11–12) suggests the following to mitigate the current exodus of pastors: (1) shift from a Christendom model to a missional mode of church life, (2) shift from high intensity to a balanced life or harmonious lifestyle, (3) shift to include resiliency training in ministry preparation, (4) shift to a better system of care developed by denominational resources, (5) shift to a renewed perspective on the value of adversity in shaping pastors for deeper, richer ministry outcomes and (6) shift to congregational education concerning the high cost of pastoral attrition. These shifts may well be the 'saving grace' of clergy.

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