

Strategies for Effective Pastoral Leadership

Learning to Juggle

Have you ever tried to juggle? After hours of practice, most of us would end still dropping balls all over the floor! Nevertheless, it is often said that a pastor's role is to keep lots of balls up in the air at the same time. Indeed, how many of us resonate with the notion that ministry shapes us to be a "jack of all trades and master of none?" We juggle the pastoral load, guide church governance, manage administration, prepare for worship, teach bible studies, tend to property issues, nurture ecumenical and civic connections, engage in mission and justice work, etc. etc. etc. How do we keep track of it all, let alone figure out the best way to divvy up our precious time!

Knowing *what to do when* is perhaps the most important trait in pastoral leadership. At times parishioner urgencies make our choices obvious. Other times we lean on gut instincts or prayerful discernment. Sometimes we become overwhelmed and throw all the balls as far as we can! Still other times we ask for feedback from colleagues or our leadership team in order to prioritize and strategize about how much time to allot to various tasks (i.e. a block of time for responding to emails, as opposed to sitting at the computer all day). Since most of us entered the ministry, in part, because we enjoy helping people, it comes as no surprise that we struggle to set limits. Consider how reluctant we are to say "No!" Yet time management and ministry prioritizing are critically important for effective pastoral leadership.

Here is a three-question framework some clergy use for their annual review: *What should I spend less time on? What should I spend more time on? What should I spend the same amount of time on?* When considering dropping responsibilities from our plates, it is helpful to think about that work that actually advances the "mission and ministry" of the congregation. This is our primary calling. It may feel very pastoral to prepare and lead a weekly bible study for a few people or to visit the same parishioner every week, but these patterns also limit the time available to push forward on some new exciting new initiatives. Similarly, for those of us who excel at organizing, it might feel absolutely necessary to spend months combing through endless files, organizing and labeling, alphabetizing and color-coding, and recycling all that is no longer pertinent. Yet such valuable time might be better spent training lay leaders in spiritual formation or leading confirmands on an urban immersion.

Ministers are prone to work extremes-some are workaholics and others error more on the minimal side. Finding a balance is crucial. Consider tracking your hours a few weeks each year (perhaps once in fall and spring). No matter the scope of your ministry, there is a sweet spot that will balance wellness with diligence. For example, a typical workweek goal for full time ministry might be 40-50 hours. Similarly for part-time, 20-25 hours. There will always be exceptional weeks, but those who are constantly overworking might consider the need to make clearer choices about when and where to invest their time. At some point, more hours does not equate to better ministry. It's about time management and a willingness to ask, "Is this a valuable use of my human resource?"

It is also helpful to take inventory of our particular gifts and skills, and to recruit staff and lay leaders who have strengths in the areas of our deficiencies. This complementary approach to ministry lifts all.

Finally, Reverend Jugglers need to keep the rest of the balls up in the air even when one falls to the floor. Part of the art of ministry is sorting out how to give disproportional time to a crisis situation while maintaining the bare necessities in all the other areas. Empower others and don't be afraid to ask for help!

Please share your thoughts and learnings on my [blog site](#).

Shalom,

Franz

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