

Resources

Books

[A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life](#)

by **Parker J. Palmer**

An account of the practice of "Circles of Trust" for forming peer group commitments. Provides an evocative framework for peer group rules that invites a participatory dynamic and discourages hierarchical or problem-solving approaches. A helpful resource for designing peer group experiences.

[A Lifelong Call to Learn: Continuing Education for Religious Leaders](#)

by **Robert E. Reber and D. Bruce Roberts**

Offers new approaches to continuing theological education that address the need for programs involving both clergy and laity at the congregational level. The book explores historical perspectives and educational contexts; theory and research in professional continuing education; innovations in continuing theological education; development, management, and promotion of programs; and directions and resources for the future

[For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry](#)

edited by **Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra**

Discusses what it means for pastoral leadership to be "life-giving," as well as the kinds of learning and teaching that best prepare ministers to foster such a way of life in their congregations. Contributors probe and clarify the significance of practical theology in the classroom, the wider academy, and actual ministry settings.

[God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations](#)

by **Jackson W. Carroll**

Draws on the extensive data collected from the Pulpit & Pew project to examine the state of both Protestant and Catholic clergy at the beginning of the 21st century. The book addresses the many factors shaping pastoral ministry today - changing roles of clergy and lay people, the future of women in ministry, the shifting state of clergy supply, and more. Using Paul's image of Christians as "clay jars," God's Potters offers strategies for strengthening pastoral leadership and cultivating excellence in ministry.

[Know Your Story and Lead with It: The Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership](#)

by Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones

Shows clergy leaders how to explore their story of reality, tell it to other clergy peer group members, and consider how it can be used as a resource for leadership. A product of the authors' six years of work with SPE-supported long-term clergy peer groups, this volume provides a narrative perspective about leading through difficult challenges and contexts, where there is always more than one story.

[Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be](#)

edited by Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass

Draws together a wide range of texts - including fiction, autobiography, and philosophy - to raise the question of what we should do and who we should be. Instead of giving prescriptive advice, the editors approach the subject of vocation as an ongoing conversation. This volume will help readers clarify and deepen how they think about their own lives and vocations.

[Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People](#)

2nd ed., edited by Dorothy C. Bass

Explores the Christian faith as an embodied way of life shaped by practices. The contributors address twelve practices for the Christian life in response to God's love for the church and all of creation. A vital resource for sustaining the spiritual, theological, and physical lives of pastors and their ministries.

[Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry](#)

by L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong

Provides the theological basis for exploring pastoral excellence. The authors articulate a theology of excellence in ministry that shuns both competition and mediocrity and rightly focuses on the beauty, power, and practices of living as faithful disciples of the crucified and risen Christ. Resurrecting Excellence portrays the ministries of pastors, lay leaders, and congregations that embody "a more excellent way."

[Sabbath in the City: Sustaining Urban Pastoral Excellence](#)

by Bryan P. Stone and Claire E. Wolfeich

Addresses the specific challenges facing urban pastors and explores practices that help sustain ministers working in urban contexts. Drawing on their SPE-supported research involving urban pastors from across the United States, the authors identify and examine spiritual practices that foster excellence in urban ministry: cultivating holy friendships, practicing sabbath, maintaining lives of prayer and study, and setting appropriate boundaries.

[Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life](#)

by Marjorie J. Thompson

Offers a framework for understanding the spiritual disciplines and instruction for developing and nurturing them. The author captures the beauty of Christian spirituality and the practices of prayer, worship, fasting, self-examination, and hospitality. A powerful account of the spiritual life, well-suited for both individual reading and group discussion.

[The Art of Convening: Authentic Engagement in Meetings, Gatherings, and Conversations](#)

by Craig and Patricia Neal

This book describes a system of convening that includes nine principles and practices for in-depth conversation. These aspects provide a model facilitators might use to assess the life of a peer learning group.

[The Opposable Mind: How Successful Leaders Win Through Integrative Thinking](#)

by Roger Martin

Presents a model of integrative thinking that has broad application to complex organizations.

[The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World](#)

by Ronald Heifetz, Martin Linsky and Alexander Grashow

Discusses the idea of adaptive leadership and provides a practical set of stories, diagrams, techniques, and activities to help assess and address difficult challenges in leadership. An essential handbook for leading in and through complex and rapidly changing contexts.

[This Odd and Wondrous Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers](#)

by Lillian Daniel and Martin B. Copenhagen

Offers an honest, reflective account of the challenges and joys of pastoral ministry. The chapters move from comedy to pathos, story to theology, Scripture to contemporary culture. An ideal read for those who are considering the ministry or who want to understand better the ministry vocation.

[Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation](#)

by Steven Johnson

Examines why good ideas come from good environments.

Articles

[An inmate's perspective on excellence in ministry](#)

August, 2008 | Kenneth Carder explores what prisoners can teach us about excellence in ministry. [Read more »](#)

[But it shall not be so with you](#)

November 3, 2009 | Everyone can't excel in all roles. But everyone can bring out the best in those around them, says Samuel Wells. [Read more »](#)

[Choosing where to be present: A sign of excellence](#)

January 9, 2009 | It was some of the best advice Bishop Kenneth L. Carder ever received: 'Choose carefully where to be present.' [Read more »](#)

[Christine D. Pohl: Grace enters with the stranger](#)

November 23, 2010 | The practice of hospitality is central to Christian institutions and Christian leadership, says theologian and ethicist Christine D. Pohl. [Read more »](#)

[Competition? Among Christian pastors?](#)

May 26, 2009 | Competition isn't necessarily a bad thing. It can push people to do their best in service to God, says the Rev. Louis Weeks. [Read more »](#)

[Elijahs and Elishas: We need each other](#)

February 10, 2009 | Faithful Christian ministry requires holding together memory and hope. After 40 years in ministry, a retired bishop sees that both younger and older pastors have contributions to offer the church. [Read more »](#)

[Entrepreneurship in action](#)

June 1, 2010 | Two "gospel entrepreneurs" share the stories of their businesses at Redeemer Presbyterian Church's Entrepreneurship Initiative Forum in New York. [Read more »](#)

[Evaluation as collaboration](#)

February 10, 2009 | Assessment doesn't necessarily mean judgment. Measuring success should be a collaborative inquiry. [Read more »](#)

[Excellence: Burdensome expectation or gracious gift?](#)

January 9, 2009 | Is "excellence" just one more task for overburdened pastors? [Read more »](#)

[Exhaustion ethics](#)

November 8, 2010 | As the speed of life increases, Lisa Nichols Hickman fears that a too-full life limits one's capacity to care. Yet the parable of the Good Samaritan shows that it is possible to overcome this "exhaustion ethic." [Read more »](#)

[Facilitation 101: Tips for pastor peer groups](#)

January 8, 2009 | Effective peer groups should be communities of learning, mutual support and encouragement. An experienced facilitator offers ideas about how to manage a peer group with a caring heart, a listening ear and a courageous spirit. [Read more »](#)

[Finding spiritual green space](#)

November, 2008 | Excursions into nature reveal the need for spiritual space in our lives, says Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen. [Read more »](#)

[From Fragmentation to Integration](#)

February, 2007 | Move from a fragmented to an integrated system of support and services for pastors. [Read more »](#)

[Illuminating the word of God](#)

March 29, 2011 | The Saint John's Bible combines captivating, original art and hand-inked Scripture to create a Bible that engages readers in a deep way. [Read more »](#)

[Images of the more excellent way](#)

November, 2006 | Kenneth Carder offers images that capture what's distinctive about "the more excellent way." [Read more »](#)

[Imagination, culture making and The Saint John's Bible](#)

March 29, 2011 | Art is both a product of imagination and what sparks it. Pastors, students and others reflect on the illuminations in The Saint John's Bible and make their own books as an act of spiritual and theological reflection. [Read more »](#)

[Liminality and leadership](#)

March 15, 2011 | In order to be fully creative, it is crucial for Christian leaders to spend time in liminal -- or in-between -- spaces. During this time, they need to be supported institutionally and personally, writes Gretchen E. Ziegenhals. [Read more »](#)

Pastoral Excellence

An Educational Resource from Faith & Leadership

www.pastoralexcellence.com

[Pastors and peer groups](#)

September 28, 2010 | A new study indicates that congregations benefit when their leaders participate in peer groups. [Read more »](#)

[Phileena Heuertz: It's not easy to be human](#)

July 27, 2010 | The co-director of the international mission organization Word Made Flesh talks about how she balances contemplative practice with work in the world. [Read more »](#)

[Practicing what they preach](#)

January 29, 2009 | Spiritual practices and Christian leadership. "You can't just preach it," says Jim Wallis, of Sojourners magazine. Wallis and others say daily prayer, Scripture reading and other disciplines give them strength and passion for living the gospel as individuals and in community. [Read more »](#)

[Prayers to God](#)

December 1, 2009 | How and what we pray reveals a lot about our relationship to God and others, says Lacey Warner. [Read more »](#)

[Shane Claiborne and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove: God's counterculture](#)

January 26, 2010 | Two young leaders talk about New Monasticism. God doesn't just work through Lone Rangers, say Shane Claiborne and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. There always has to be a web of friendship. [Read more »](#)

[Story Starvation and Stories that Nourish](#)

September, 2006 | Story is important for understanding identity. Sharing each others' stories might be a part of a first peer group gathering. [Read more »](#)

[Tension gives it groove](#)

September 1, 2009 | Jazz improvisation offers a metaphor for resolving conflict not by eliminating it, but by using it to create something beautiful, says Ross Kane. [Read more »](#)

[The pastor as quarterback](#)

February 1, 2011 | As Super Bowl XLV approaches, John James thinks about the leadership parallels between quarterbacks and pastors. [Read more »](#)

[The practice of faith](#)

Pastoral Excellence

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February 2, 2009 | The book "Practicing Our Faith" grew from an academic examination of Christian practices to passionate advocacy of them. Twelve years after publication, it's still having an impact. [Read more »](#)

[What does God have to do with excellence?](#)

January 9, 2009 | All around us, a culture has emerged focused on vocational and professional leadership and excellence. But what does it have to do with God? [Read more »](#)

[You've come to the right place](#)

September 7, 2009 | Pastors often live lives of public isolation. But Sustaining Pastoral Excellence peer groups point to the need for pastors to find and rediscover the joy of community, a new survey finds. [Read more »](#)

Art

[Serigraph](#)



John August Swanson

His art reflects the strong heritage of storytelling he inherited from his Mexican mother and Swedish father. Rich with biblical stories and social celebrations such as attending the circus, the concert, and the opera, Swanson's art is full both of the everyday and the spiritual.

[St. John's Bible](#)



Explore this hand-written, hand-illuminated work of art that unites an ancient Benedictine tradition with the technology and vision of today, illuminating the Word of God for a new millennium.

Reports

[Becoming a Pastor: Reflections on the Transition into Ministry](#)

[Becoming a Pastor: Reflections on the Transition into Ministry](#) is a 2008 report by James P. Wind, president of the Alban Institute, and David J. Wood, coordinator of the Transition into

Ministry Program of the Fund for Theological Education, on a variety of promising efforts to make the first few years of a pastor's ministry into a time of opportunity and growth for pastors and congregations. These efforts are an intentional experiment to provide practice-based pastoral education and formation that builds on and extends seminaries' efforts to connect classroom learning with the ministry experience. The report draws on the conviction that this period of transition is rich with potential for new levels of collaboration between the domains of congregation, seminary, and denomination to prepare and develop new pastors for lifelong ministry.

[Impact of Peer Learning Groups report](#)

Sociologist Penny Long Marler explores the impact of peer groups on pastoral ministry and Christian congregations.

[Pulpit & Pew research reports](#)

Pulpit & Pew was an interdenominational research project funded by Lilly Endowment to assess the state of the pastorate in the United States. Pulpit & Pew was active from 2001 to 2005 and conducted a nationwide pastor survey, in-depth interviews and conferences and written reports and books. This study was the largest such survey ever conducted of U.S. pastoral leaders. The results of the study served as the basis for numerous books and papers. [Check out the Pulpit & Pew research reports.](#)

[Sustaining Pastoral Excellence report](#)

For an in-depth summary of the grant program, see the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence report written by Holly G. Miller on behalf of the Lilly Endowment Inc.

Coaching

Coaching is a growing industry. The relationship with a coaching is most often a one-on-one relationship focused on the agenda of the client. Coaches ask questions and help the client harvest insight.

Coaching is:

- **Individualized.** Through a one-on-one relationship, a coach helps you identify the issues, obstacles, and opportunities of your particular ministry and address them directly.
 - **Action-oriented.** Coaching uses reflection and discernment as preparation for action. It has a persistent focus on taking quantifiable steps towards your goals.
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Pastoral Excellence

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- **Holistic.** Coaching helps you address the interdependence of your personal faith, your sense of call, your personality and relationships, your capacities and resources, and your context.
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Coaching is not:

- **Mentoring.** A coach helps you to discern and fully realize your own distinctive purpose and potential, not to imitate those of someone else.
- **Consulting.** A coach helps you to identify, set and reach the right goals for your work; a coach does not provide solutions for you.
- **Therapy.** A coach helps you develop your strengths and potential for the future, not heal the brokenness from your past.

Coaching is a growing, unregulated industry. Searching for qualified coaches is done best through organizations with which your church has a relationship, like your denomination or a trusted Christian institution. If nothing is available, you can consult the coaching trade association, the [International Coaching Federation](#).

Sabbaticals

A key component to supporting pastors for excellent ministry is creating space in their working lives to be renewed and restored through rest, prayer, study, and recreation. Sabbaticals allow for that space, but there are denominations and congregations where sabbaticals seem foreign. Convincing parishioners or denominational leaders that a pastor needs a sabbatical can be a challenge.

The Alban Institute's [Congregational Resource Guide](#) has helpful information that explains the significance and positive impact sabbaticals have for both the pastor and the congregation. [Learn more about the importance of sabbaticals.](#)