

## **Improving Professional Relationships and Organizational Leadership in Congregations: Starting with Pastors and Preschool Directors**

By Douglas Krengel

*Editor's Note: This article grows out of the PhD work in Organizational Leadership that the author completed in 2019. His interest in early childhood education has developed out of the two centers his congregation is growing in Houston, TX, where he is the pastor.*

In order to be a leader in the church one needs to consider many aspects of leadership. One of those aspects is the definition of leadership itself. Is leadership an individual phenomenon? Or is leadership a phenomenon founded in human relationships? Sánchez (2010), noted a trend in how humans understand themselves:

Along with the modern, postmodern, and post-colonial turns to individual reason, perspective, and voice respectively, there has also been a move in the West towards an understanding of humans not simply as individuals who exist and function in and by themselves but more fully as “persons” who exist and live with and for another. Humans are social beings who find fulfillment in their relations, or better yet, are fully human through their relations. (p.57)

This definition of humanity affects the definition of leadership in organizations – including the church. This paper considers leadership as a function of relationships in contrast to leadership as rugged individualism. Therefore, the research here presented explores one of the largest professional pairings in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), the pastor and the preschool director (P-D dyad), as one example of leadership defined by relationship.

The idea of relationships being primarily definitive to human fulfillment and church leadership may sound familiar to Lutherans, for these elements have been and continue to be part of the liturgical leadership found in the Divine Service. In the traditional worship of the church “liturgical alternation” has and continues to be celebrated. Peter Brunner (1968) in his classic work on Lutheran worship, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, described liturgical alternation as shared by a pair of church workers, namely, the church fathers, Ambrose and Augustine:

The legend of the genesis of the Te Deum graphically illustrates the spiritual basis of this alternation. It relates that Ambrose intoned the hymn at Augustine's baptism, and that Augustine, prompted by the Holy Spirit, immediately took up the song of praise, and that the two, stirred with a holy zeal, alternately added bit by bit and thus sang the hymn to its end. This legend shows the real basis of the liturgical alternating song in the profession and in other laudations; one person, as it were, takes the words from the lips of another. Both are apprehended by the same Spirit, both are absorbed in the same professing and glorifying devotion. One bears up the other, one leans on the other, one recognizes his own profession and laudation in the other. The congregation's profession and glorification of God does not attain its most perfect form when the whole congregation simultaneously professes and sings the same words, but first when one section of the congregation takes up the words, alternately, from another section. In this duality of alternation the unity of profession and of laudation finds an unequalled expression. Even

professional relationships: affect, contribution, loyalty, and professional respect. These four dimensions of LMX (leader-member exchange) are defined by John M. Maslyn and Mary Uhl-Bien (2001) as they describe the development of LMX:

With notable exceptions, LMX theory has considered the exchange between members to be essentially work-related. That is, they consist of work-related behaviors such as effort toward the job or favorable task assignments. However, in a recent review of the LMX literature, Liden et al (1997) noted that LMX is not based solely on the job-related elements emphasized in the LMX research of Graen and his colleagues (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) but may also include socially-related “currencies.” In this vein, Dienesch and Liden (1986) and Liden and Maslyn (1998) proposed four dimensions of LMX relationships labeled *contribution* (e.g., performing work beyond what is specified in the job description), *affect* (e.g., friendship and liking), *loyalty* (e.g., loyalty and mutual obligation), and *professional respect* (e.g., respect for professional capacities). Other LMX research has produced measures of these constructs and demonstrated validity of the dimensions. (p. 699)

In order to create a chain reaction of improvements throughout the LCMS system of education and care, or educare, the quality of the professional relationships shared in the pastor-director dyads needs to be improved. In order to improve the professional quality of the pastor-director relationship, congregational and educational leadership need to be understood as dyadic in nature, and not the work of one actor (Anand, Vidyarthi, & Park, 2016). Dyadic leadership, in turn, requires a dyadic approach to leadership training. A dyadic approach to training leadership in congregations with educare centers could include publications, workshops, conferences, and leadership initiatives that would invite both the pastor and educare director to learn together as mutual participants in a way similar to how Ambrose and Augustine collaborated in the Divine Service while singing the Te Deum.

### **Training Pastors and Early Childhood Directors in Dyadic Leadership: A Curriculum for Building High Quality Professional Relationships by Building on Relational Strengths**

According to the results of the author’s research (Krengel, 2020), the P-D dyad could be built upon its strongest element with the less strong elements being addressed later in the learning process. In the dissertation research, four dimensions were identified as critical to any professional relationship: affect, contribution, loyalty, and professional respect. Using the Leader-Member Exchange – 24 Survey (LMX-24) (Chaudhry, 2012, 2017), these four dimensions of professional relationships were measured. A sample size of 105 (n=105) professional church workers was received. Out of the 105 participants, 66 were educare directors or assistant directors. In addition, 39 of the 105 participants were LCMS pastors. Of the 113 educare centers in the LCMS district where the study was conducted, there were 80 dyads represented in the author’s research study in some manner. From the 105 participants and the 80 dyads, 26 intact, nonrandom, mixed-gendered, vertical dyads were identified. While survey data of all the participants were analyzed, the 52 individuals who were part of the 26 P-D dyads were the focus of the exploration.

Out of the 26 complete dyads, 6 dyads composed of 6 pastors and 6 educare directors were further studied using semi-structured interviews. Each professional church worker was

male leadership in the LCMS. Christian said, “The majority of early childhood directors in the LCMS are women who often struggle to have their profession affirmed in a church body where the predominately male leadership frequently gives voice to a different set of priorities” (p. 9). This opinion may have been accurate in 2004, but the author’s research (Krengel, 2020) indicates that the pastors and the directors both perceived the professional relationships they shared to be of a high quality in 2019.

In the proposed training, after the current perspective of the P-D dyads is shared with the community of pastors and directors, the second portion of Meta-Inference 1 would be shared: In this study, the pastors perceive the relationships to be of a higher quality than do the directors. In contrast to Christian (2004), not only does the predominately male leadership of the LCMS perceive the P-D dyads as being of a high quality, the pastors (e.g., male leadership) perceive the relationship as being of a higher quality than their corresponding educate directors.

Since Christian’s (2004) report was used as the basis for training throughout the national synod, it is possible that reporting that educate directors “struggle to have their profession affirmed” (p. 9) could still be understood by pastors and directors in the LCMS to represent the current status of the P-D dyad. However, such an understanding would be a misunderstanding of the current state of affairs in the P-D dyads of the LCMS district that were studied.

By addressing the new status of the P-D dyads, both members of the dyads would discover that the “struggle,” while not completely gone, is different than it was in 2004. While there are no formal training courses at either of the LCMS seminaries in the United States regarding the P-D dyad, it appears that pastors’ perspectives regarding the work of educate, and the perspectives of the educate directors, has shifted away from struggle and toward acceptance. While this study found examples of dyads that express great differences, those dyads were part of a small minority of cases.

### **Building High Quality Professional Relationships with the LMX Theory**

In addition to the community of P-D dyads learning that pastors are not so antagonistic to educate, the dyadic learning community would do well to be oriented to relational leadership as defined by the leader-member exchange theory (LMX). Such an orientation would include the four dimensions of LMX and its two domains. With an orientation to LMX theory, the P-D dyads could take the LMX-24 Survey and then receive their results. A facilitator could then walk the dyads through the significance of said results. Since the LMX-24 Survey is made up of just 12 questions, the results of the survey would, more than likely, not be perceived by either the educate directors or the pastors as too much of a burden.

### **Building High Quality Professional Relationships on Professional Respect**

The P-D dyads would begin interacting with their results from the LMX-24 Survey by considering the Dimension of Professional Respect. Even though this dimension is represented by the last three questions on the LMX-24 survey, it would be discussed first, since it is the dimension most likely to register a high level of agreement between the pastors and the educate directors. After the dyads receive an orientation to LMX theory, discover Meta-Inference 1, and then learn that their dyads have a high level of agreement regarding the Dimension of

Question 5. My pastor/director is willing to apply extra efforts, beyond those normally required, to meet my work goals.

Question 6. My pastor/director does work for me that goes beyond what is normally required.

By encouraging the P-D dyads to discuss these three questions, it would be fair to expect the professional exchange within the dyad would improve, mutual understanding between the leader and the member of the dyad would increase, and the organization could fairly expect improvements in organizational commitment, performance, and citizenship behaviors.

### **Building High Quality Professional Relationships Using DDA and APIM**

Lastly, Dyadic Data Analysis (DDA) would be introduced to the learning community, especially the Actor—Partner Independence Model (APIM). The concepts of the intrapersonal affect and the interpersonal affect would be explained and illustrated. The relationship between the intrapersonal affect and the interpersonal affect would be emphasized. In other words, how a member of the dyad relates to himself, or herself, affects how the member of the dyad relates to his coworker.

Within the context of a professional church workers training event in the LCMS, the intrapersonal affect would be addressed using traditional pastoral methods of caring for souls such as Bible study, Holy Communion, prayer, worship, private confession and absolution, and the mutual encouragement of Christian believers by one another. By inviting members of the dyads to improve their intrapersonal factors, one would also be affecting the probability of improving the interpersonal factors within the dyads. In other words, if the individual person is in good care, then the dyad may also be in good care.

### **Training P-D dyads in Dyadic Leadership: The Pilot Training**

#### **The Training Pilot: Materials and Participant Selection**

The order of business noted in this article would be included in published materials that would be especially designed to accompany the dyadic training process. At the end of each chapter, worksheets and interactive exercises would be provided. A pilot version of such dyadic training would be best offered to a select group of P-D dyads representing a variety of Congregation - Educare Center dyads. For example, P-D dyads who serve in congregations that have educare as their only educational full-time agency would be one type of dyad. P-D dyads that serve in congregations that offered both educare and an elementary school would be a second type of dyad. Dyads which serve where educare, elementary school, and middle school services are provided would be a third type of dyad. Additionally, different kinds of educare would also be represented. With a variety of P-D dyads from a variety of organizational types established, dyads would also be sought out which represented the five official regions of the LCMS.

#### **The Training Pilot: The Means of Delivering the Training**

The initial pilot training would be conducted using a virtual platform. This author has taken instruction online from Concordia University Chicago and from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

year in the LCMS may not have “plunged” by 55%. Those participating in the training will be invited by the facilitator to consider that instead of the decline in LCMS educare centers being solely based on exogenous factors, and therefore outside of the realm of effect by the P-D dyads, it may just as possibly have been the absence of dyadic leadership training in the synod. The lack of a dyadic definition of leadership may have led to a lack of training professional church workers dyadically.

### **Further Research Regarding Organizational Leadership in the LCMS**

Further research on the LCMS’ approach to training professional church workers in leadership is encouraged. What leadership styles have been encouraged by the LCMS? Has there been an emphasis on a single male leader being the source of the ministerial initiatives and solutions? Or has the LCMS been teaching that leadership is dyadic? Or has the concept of leadership been defined in some other manner? If there has been a preferred definition of leadership in the LCMS, what has that definition been? Or have there been several preferred definitions of leadership over the history of the LCMS? If so, why were new definitions of leadership undertaken? What was the relationship between the definition of leadership promoted by the LCMS and the actual behaviors of church leaders in P-D dyads and other professional relationships? What were the consequences of the leadership behaviors based on the preferred definition of leadership?

These questions need further research well beyond what has been provided in this brief article, or that which was offered in the research provided by the author (Krengel, 2020). Establishing dyadic training for pastors and preschool directors could be the first step in sharing something like the liturgical alternation enjoyed by Augustine and Ambrose with pastors, preschool directors, and other ministry pairings (e.g., Senior Pastor - Assistant Pastor, Senior Pastor – Director of Christian Education, Senior Pastor – Director of Music Ministry, Senior Pastor – Lutheran School Principal, etc.) that serve in congregational ministry together.

Dave Reuter discussed one such ministry pairing: the Ministers of Religion - Ordained and Ministers of Religion – Commissioned in the LCMS. In his article, after reviewing centuries of teaching and practice about the Office of the Holy Ministry and the helping offices, Reuter (2019) stated the following: “The DCE is a second-chair leader. As such we support the ministry of the pastor and others called to serve on our team. We are there to support them as they are present to support us .... The balance is perfect” (p.52).

This author’s research (Krengel, 2020) moves him to extend Reuter’s (2019) analogy. Is it not true that the second chair and the first chair are to focus on playing in harmony with each other? And are not both chairs (i.e., pastor and DCE) also to perform in concord with the rest of their instrumental section (i.e., the local congregation)? And isn’t the entire instrumental section to play in coordination with the rest of the orchestra (i.e., the broader church) as directed by the conductor (i.e., Jesus) while all the musicians (i.e., the baptized believers) interpret the written musical score (i.e., the Bible) together? As in the orchestra, so in the role relationships within the church. Whether starting with the pastor-director dyad, or the pastor-DCE dyad, all professional church workers are called to pursue high-quality professional relationships for the good of the dyad, as well as the greater good. Since the dyads are embedded in the congregation-preschool dyads, or congregation-youth ministry dyads, the quality of the professional relationships may be

- Garland, D. R. Sherr, M. E., Singletary, J., & Gardner, M. L., (2008). Congregations who care for children. *Family and Community Ministries*, 22(2), 4-17.
- Graen, G. & Schiemann, W. (1978). Leader-member agreement: A vertical dyad linkage approach. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 63(2), 206-212.
- Krengel, D. (2020). *An exploration of the quality of the professional relationships shared by pastors and early childhood directors in congregation-based early childhood centers in the southwest region of the United States: A mixed-methods approach using the leader member exchange theory, interviews, and dyadic data analysis*. [An unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Concordia University Chicago.
- Lutheran School Ministry. (2020). *Early childhood and school statistical report* <http://www.luthed.org>
- MacPherson, R. (2016a). Numerical decline in the LCMS. *The Lutheran Witness*, 135(11), 6-7. ISSN: 0024-757X
- MacPherson, R. (2016b). Generational generosity: Handing down our faith to our children and our children's children. *Journal of Lutheran Mission*, 3(3), 85-121. Retrieved from [blogs.lcms.org/2016/journal-of-lutheran-mission-december-2016](https://blogs.lcms.org/2016/journal-of-lutheran-mission-december-2016).
- Maslyn, J.M. & Uhl-Bien, M. (2001). Leader-member exchange and its dimensions: Effects of self-effort and others' effort on relationship quality. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(4), 697-708. doi:10.1037//0021-9010.86.4.697
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass:
- Neugebauer, R. (1998). Congregations that care: Childcare and religious institutions. *Child Care Information Exchange*, 124, 22-25.
- Reuter, D. (2019). Called to be a DCE. *Lutheran Education Journal*, 156(1), 44-53.
- Sanchez, L.A. (2010). Individualism, indulgence and the mind of Christ: Making room for the neighbor and the Father. In R. Kolb (Ed.), *The America mind meets the mind of Christ* (pp.54-66). Concordia Seminary Press.
- Schmidt, R. (email on September 16, 2019). LCMS Congregational Services – School Ministry.
- Schumacher, W. W. (2017). Demography and mission in the LCMS: A response to Journal of Lutheran Mission, December 2016. *Lutheran Mission Matters*, 25(1), 18-26.
- Teddie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*. SAGE.
- The United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

**Douglas Krengel, Ph.D.** has been serving as Senior Pastor at Faith Lutheran Church and Preschool in Houston, Texas for the past ten years. Prior to his work in Texas, Dr. Krengel served for over ten years in Jackson, Michigan at Trinity Lutheran Church, School, and Preschool.