

Once again, David Anderson has gifted the church with another dynamic book and paradigm for faith formation in the third millennium. Building on his earlier Milestones Ministry Frame of five principles, four key faith practices, and three characteristics of Christians, as well as his encouragement for ongoing use of the weekly “Taking Faith Home,” Shepherd of Souls—in 244 pages—provides significant practical advice while employing theological substance in the service of faith formation.

What is especially helpful—and attractive for busy church professionals—is that this book does not offer simply another program to implement or propose a restructuring that requires multiple days and increased dollars. Shepherd of Souls offers a dynamic paradigm that allows disciples of Christ, including congregational leaders, to see what they might already be doing but from another perspective. Anderson has worked in congregations enough over four decades to know that clergy and lay staff do not need one more program to set-up or more meetings to attend. In a very creative way, the author invites everyone—yes, all the baptized—to understand, remember, and trust that each relationship and every conversation they have can be seen as places for “shepherding souls.” In fact, with such an intensified awareness that each of us has been called by name and commissioned by Christ to care for one another, faith is expressed and healing takes place. Reconciliation occurs when persons become (in Martin Luther’s terms) “little Christs, one to another.”

David Anderson has developed a panoramic view of Christ’s kingdom, a perspective that includes all people and leaves none out. In a world where faith formation has routinely been assigned to the congregation, with the pastor as chief tutor, Anderson’s proposal here broadens the list of occasions when persons of all ages—not just children—are shaped, nurtured, and commissioned. The congregation, with all its activities, remains a primary place for faith formation, but as every congregant gains a broader perspective, faith formation will be happening in town squares, places of learning, centers of commerce, and yes, perhaps more than within the walls of the church building, in every home. If anything, the activities within the congregation proper are the means to “equip shepherds” for nurturing faith outside the congregation, especially in the home.

Shepherd of Souls draws on numerous biblical examples, as well as Martin Luther’s legacy, to display the ministry of shepherding in Christianity’s long history of faith formation. Especially, Luther’s notion of the priesthood of all believers gets attention, as faith shaping and sharing moves from the church institution and hierarchy into homes and families. This approach takes seriously the ministry of all the baptized as constituting care of souls. Authors John McNeil, Thomas Oden, Nelson Thayer, Kenneth Leech, and Eugene Peterson are referenced as others focusing on this
important topic. In an orderly way, the author moves from pastors to parents to lay leaders, all employing his Milestones Ministry Model to shepherd souls; further attention is given to confirmation ministry, congregational life, and finally shepherding in the lives of all Christians.

One comes away from this book with a plethora of touching examples where shepherding of souls has taken place and where lives were transformed by Christ's love. Yet, perhaps the most significant transformation occurs when any of us begins to see things differently and then acts on that new vision. Changed lives come from altered vision and broader perspective. Shepherd of Souls offers a new way of understanding how we see how and where faith is formed in our day, using very tried and true insights and models from the past. Not a program but a perspective, not a narrow focus but a panoramic view is here offered and recommended.

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