

More praise for *Leading Congregations through Crisis*

“The knowledge and experiences Greg shares in this book, although written specifically for congregations, can also be applied in situations with any Christian organization.”

Linda C. Fuller, Co-founder of Habitat for Humanity International and the Fuller Center for Housing

BOOKS BY
The Columbia Partnership Ministry Colleagues

George W. Bullard Jr.

Every Congregation Needs a Little Conflict

FaithSoaring Churches

Pursuing the Full Kingdom Potential of Your Congregation

Richard L. Hamm

Recreating the Church

Edward H. Hammett

Making Shifts without Making Waves:

A Coach Approach to Soulful Leadership

Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60:

Being Church to All Generations

Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age: Building

Bridges Instead of Barriers

Key Leadership Books

Gregory L. Hunt

Leading Congregations through Crisis

Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce

Leadership That Fits Your Church:

What Kind of Pastor for What Kind of Congregation

Penny Long Marler, D. Bruce Roberts, Janet Maykus, James Bowers,
Larry Dill, Brenda K. Harewood, Richard Hester, Sheila Kirton-Robbins,
Marianne LaBarre, Lis Van Harten, and Kelli Walker-Jones
So Much Better: How Thousands of Pastors Help Each Other Thrive

Larry McSwain

The Calling of Congregational Leadership:

Being, Knowing and Doing Ministry

For more leadership resources, see
TheColumbiaPartnership.org
ChalicePress.com

LEADING CONGREGATIONS THROUGH CRISIS

GREGORY L. HUNT



CHALICE
PRESS

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

Copyright © 2012 by Gregory L. Hunt.

All rights reserved. For permission to reuse content, please contact Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, www.copyright.com.

Bible quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (TLB) are taken from *The Living Bible*, copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Cover and interior design: Scribe Inc.

www.chalicepress.com

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

12 13 14 15 16 17

PRINT: 9780827221703 EPUB: 9780827221710 EPDF: 9780827221727

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hunt, Gregory Lynn, 1954–

Leading congregations through crisis / by Gregory Hunt.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8272-2170-3 (alk. paper)

1. Tragic, The—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Crisis management—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Christian leadership. 4. Pastoral counseling. I. Title.

BR115.T73H86 2012

253—dc23

2012010758

Contents

Editor's Foreword	vii
Foreword	ix
Introduction	xiii

Part I: The Anatomy of Congregational Leadership in a Time of Crisis

1 One Minister's Tales of Crisis	2
2 Understanding Congregational Crisis	7
3 Leadership, Management, and Crisis Care: Getting Them Right . . . Together	15

Part II: Crisis Leadership from Onset to Resolution

Congregations in Focus: Wedgwood Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas	24
4 When Crisis Strikes: Dealing with Chaos	27
Congregations in Focus: University Baptist Church, Waco, Texas	46
5 Managing the Mess: Putting the Congregation on the Road to Recovery	50
Congregations in Focus: New Life Church, Colorado Springs, Colorado	73
6 Finding a New Normal: Resolving Crisis	77

Part III: Special Considerations for Congregational Leaders

Congregations in Focus: Crosspointe Meadows Church, Novi, Michigan	90
7 Never Waste a Crisis: Learning from the Trouble That Comes	93
Congregations in Focus: Congregational United Church of Christ, Punta Gorda, Florida	105

8 Getting in Front of Crisis: Prevention and Preparation	108
Congregations in Focus: Sandy Run Baptist Church, Hampton, South Carolina	121
9 Faith and Crisis: Experiencing God in the Eye of the Storm	124
10 Going the Distance: Leading through Crisis without Burning Out	140
Notes	154
Resources for Crisis Leadership	160

Editor's Foreword

Inspiration and Wisdom for Twenty-First-Century Christian Leaders

You have chosen wisely in deciding to study and learn from a book published in The Columbia Partnership Leadership Series with Chalice Press. We publish for

- Congregational leaders who desire to serve with greater faithfulness, effectiveness, and innovation.
- Christian ministers who seek to pursue and sustain excellence in ministry service.
- Members of congregations who desire to reach their full kingdom potential.
- Christian leaders who desire to use a coach approach in their ministry.
- Denominational and parachurch leaders who want to come alongside affiliated congregations in a servant leadership role.
- Consultants and coaches who desire to increase their learning concerning the congregations and Christian leaders they serve.

The Columbia Partnership Leadership Series is an inspiration- and wisdom-sharing vehicle of The Columbia Partnership, a community of Christian leaders who are seeking to transform the capacity of the North American church to pursue and sustain vital Christ-centered ministry. You can connect with us at www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org.

Primarily serving congregations, denominations, educational institutions, leadership development programs, and parachurch organizations, the Partnership also seeks to connect with individuals, businesses, and other organizations seeking a Christ-centered spiritual focus.

We welcome your comments on these books, and we welcome your suggestions for new subject areas and authors we ought to consider.

The Columbia Partnership

332 Valley Springs Road, Columbia, SC 29223-6934
Voice: 803.622.0923, www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org

Foreword

What are you going to do when your congregation experiences an unexpected interruption? A crisis. It is not “if.” It is “when.” Do you have a crisis response plan? A crisis prevention plan? (As if you could prevent an unexpected interruption.)

My friend Floyd Craig, a religious organization communication consultant, has always said that the foolish among us do not have a crisis response plan. The wise among us have one, but know it will never work exactly as the plan calls for when a crisis occurs. It is certainly going to take a whole bunch of prayer and action. It is going to take wisdom that can ultimately come only from our God, who sees the future and the consequences of our actions.

The Situation

On July 12, 2009, I was deacon of the week for my church in Columbia, South Carolina. I attended both morning worship services, enjoyed lunch out with my wife, and upon returning home for the afternoon I turned on my computer to check my e-mail and social networks. Soon I began to see notices of a bus accident involving a youth group and sponsors from First Baptist Church of Shreveport, Louisiana, where my friend Greg Hunt was pastor. It was surreal.

Later I had several contacts with Greg about the situation. I had been engaged by the church a couple of years earlier to consult with them concerning their future. Many of the people impacted by the tragedy Greg describes in this book were people I had met. Eventually Greg and I began to talk about how unfortunate it is that although multiple congregations go through crises like this, seldom are they fully prepared, if it is possible to be prepared.

Further, what happens after a crisis of this nature, and many other types of crises, is crucial to the long-term spiritual and emotional health of the congregational community and many individuals and households connected with the congregation. The six to eighteen months after a crisis are times for essential relief, recovery, and renewal actions. Without healthy responses many people and congregations can be dysfunctional for a lifetime.

The Long-Term Response

This book contains what Greg and I began to talk about a few months following the bus accident. We identified possible types of crises. We conducted a survey to discover the types of crises most frequently experienced

by congregations throughout North America. We identified more than a hundred case studies for consideration. From this list Greg discerned those situations that would fit in a book about leading congregations through a crisis. I am pleased that a person who has spent several decades in pastoral ministry and has also had a focus on healthy marriages and families, could craft this exceptional book.

We cannot ignore these crises. Their memory will not go away. Their impact is felt for a long time. It takes endings, transitions, and new beginnings to work through them. In my consulting work I am often reminded of the crises congregations face, and how they respond well or badly.

I Cannot Get It out of My Mind!

Recently I was thinking about unusual crises congregations face. Here are ten that came to mind:

Number Ten: A tornado comes through a small town, right down Main Street, and fully or significantly destroys all five church buildings in the downtown area. This is a major disruption in the life of all the congregations and becomes the occasion for many other issues of concern in the congregations to rise to the surface. Within a year not only are none of the five pastors still serving these congregations, but none of them are in Christian ministry.

Number Nine: The former pastor of your church is now the pastor of a church in another state. His wife calls you up one day because the two of you are still best friends, and exclaims, "Vickie, our church is on fire!" You reply, "Michele, that is wonderful! It is great to be part of a church that is really on fire for the . . ." "Shut up, Vickie", Michele interrupts. "Our church is on fire and it is burning to the ground!"

Number Eight: The economic recession throughout the world has impacted a congregation to the point that the church must downsize staff. Every staff person has a support group of people in the congregation who declare, "Not my staff person!" The church makes the tough decisions, and all heaven breaks loose. (Or was it another word?)

Number Seven: For some reason the pastor quits preaching in the middle of his sermon. He calls for the congregation to sing the hymn of commitment. He stops the singing after one verse, pronounces the benediction, turns around, and goes to his office crying uncontrollably. Two days later he leaves town for seven weeks, goes to his place of birth, and tries to figure out what is going on with him. It is difficult for the congregation to watch him burn out right in front of them. Many people begin thinking about their own life situation.

Number Six: The remnants of a major hurricane come through a community, and flash floods begin occurring on Sunday morning while the congregation is at worship. As people start to leave, they find that emergency vehicles are blocking the roads around town in low-lying areas.

Many people cannot get home, and multiple people—including the pastor’s family—lose their homes to the floods. Even the church experiences major damage and is unusable for six months. A significant number of families never return to regular worship at the church.

Number Five: A youth minister who once served your church is arrested for inappropriate sexual contact with several teenage girls in his current church. Families question their daughters about inappropriate approaches from this former youth minister, and a spirit of distrust escalates when it is discovered the same thing happened in your church. This comes on the heels of similar accusations about a layman who was the leader of teenage boys in a neighboring church.

Number Four: A new church secretary suspects something about the finances she is required to handle and reports this to the pastor. An audit shows that more than \$86,000 is missing from various church accounts over a three-year period. Evidence points to the former secretary, yet a church committee had supposedly audited those financial records annually.

Number Three: After years of study and debate, your denomination decides to affirm the ordination of gays and lesbians as clergy persons. Your congregation has always said that it would leave the denomination if and when this happened. Yet it still takes your congregation more than a year to decide to leave, and you lose 20 percent of the membership during that year as people move to other congregations in protest of the denominational decision. When your congregation leaves, the denomination’s financial agency executes a clause in the mortgage they hold on your property that calls for the note to immediately be due in full.

Number Two: Three people are killed in a shooting at the high school a block away from your church. One is a teenager from your church. Two others from your church are wounded. The shooter is a teenager who has been to some of your youth meetings and tried to get a certain girl to date him, but she rejected him. She is the teenager from your church who has been killed.

Number One: A three-year-old boy in your church weekday preschool falls off a swing on your church playground when the swing breaks, and he has severe head trauma that requires long-term rehabilitation. The one preschool teacher on the playground at the time had left the area to chase a ball another child had thrown over the fence. The family of the three-year-old boy sues the church, the maker of the equipment, and the installer, who is also a member of the church. Five or six families pull their children out of the preschool program.

Your Response?

On a sheet of paper, your computer, or your digital tablet write down the first five ideas that come to mind as crises that are most likely to happen in your congregation. Next write down the five crises that you think

are least likely to happen in your congregation because “they just could not happen here.”

Next ask yourself if your congregation has a crisis response plan. If one of the crises you have recorded were to happen in your congregation, do you have a plan in place as to what needs to happen, who needs to do it, how communication will be handled, and who will be the authorized spokesperson for your congregation? What will be your spiritual response to any of these crises, and who will lead it? What will be your legal response or shield for any of these crises, and who is the attorney who will handle it for you? Do you have appropriate and adequate insurance to cover unexpected crises?

If your congregation does not have a crisis response plan, how soon can you develop one? Who will do it? What outside resource information or persons do you need to help you develop this plan? While certainly the Triune God will be present with your congregation during crises, it is irresponsible not to do everything that is reasonable and feasible to anticipate crises and protect the church.

Developing a plan is all about what to do when crises happen. Is there another way to look at this?

Crisis Prevention

In addition to having a crisis response plan, every congregation needs to engage in risk management activities. Some crises are preventable. Others are not; they just happen. But has your church undergone a risk management study of the church facilities, and the church policies and procedures, to be sure the congregation has taken reasonable and customary steps to lower risk and liability?

Move Forward

With this background, move forward to read this book. Ponder your ministry setting as a pastor, staff person, or lay leader. What will your congregation do to prepare for and to respond to the next crisis it faces?

George Bullard

Strategic Coordinator, The Columbia Partnership at
www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org

General Secretary, North American Baptist Fellowship of
the Baptist World Alliance
www.NABF.info

Introduction

This is the book I wish I had had years ago. I readily confess that when dealing with congregational crises in the past, I and the leaders with whom I collaborated did a good bit of improvisation. Without a sourcebook such as this one, we had little to go by except our faith, character, experience, and imagination. We fashioned our responses on the fly and hoped for the best. Having put the crises behind us, we seldom took time to record our experiences, evaluate what worked and didn't, or harvest lessons for the future. We had a general sense of how God had used the experience to refine us, but mostly we thanked God for the gift of resilience and moved on. We counted on our collective memory to guide us the next time around.

Now we know a better way. No two congregational crises are exactly alike, but they all share important characteristics and so lend themselves to leadership practices that transfer well from one context to another. We can learn from the successes and failures of other congregational leaders.

Crisis leadership and management have become subjects of special interest, especially in the worlds of business, education, government, and the military. Crisis management has become a science as well as an art. Any corporation, school, government agency, or regiment worth its salt has a plan for avoiding avoidable crises and responding effectively to the crises that come—even unexpected ones.

Taking a cue from these worlds, church-related organizations have developed a wide array of resources to prevent, prepare for, and resolve congregational crises. This rich body of material helps church leaders take the mystery out of crisis leadership and management. We have every reason to take full advantage of the lessons leaders are learning wherever crisis-related issues come into play.

What Brings You to This Book?

A variety of situations may have brought you to this book. You may be a crisis-seasoned leader who wants a handy reference guide to remind you of lessons you've learned the hard way. You may be new to crisis leadership and wise enough to know you need help. You may be leading a congregation through crisis right now. You may have picked up this book not out of a general interest in the topic, but because you want immediate guidance for getting your church through difficult straits. You may belong to a group of leaders who are using this book to develop collaborative crisis plans.

This book has been designed with all these possibilities in mind. It will prepare you to lead more effectively through future crises, if, at the present moment, everything's rocking along nicely. It will serve you right now, if

the congregation you serve finds itself navigating the treacherous waters of trouble. This book will

- highlight key principles for leading through crisis
- share stories from church and culture that bring these principles to life
- provide opportunities for you to reflect on these principles as they come into play in your circumstances as a leader

Crisis Leadership as a Team Activity

Let me encourage you to include others in the study of this book. As will become apparent, crisis leadership is a team activity. No one should go it alone.

For Those Who Aren't Dealing with a Crisis Now. If you haven't already, let me encourage you to identify four to eight key leaders who will work through this book together. It may be a preexisting leadership group or an ad hoc group, depending on your church's current structure and circumstances. Make copies of the book available for each group member. Decide together on the pace at which you will read it and reflect on it. Use the questions at the end of each chapter as starting points for personal reflection. Agree on times to meet as a group and discuss your insights. Use your times together to learn from one another and develop consensus about follow-up action steps you will take to better prepare your congregation for crises.

For Those in the Throes of Crisis Now. Hopefully, you have a team of leaders participating in crisis response. If not, I strongly encourage you to gather other leaders around you as soon as you can. Chapters 4 and 5 include insight into the selection and work of this team. Get a copy of this book into the hands of fellow leaders, encouraging them to read through the book. Schedule a leadership gathering to discuss the book, answering the following questions:

- Based on the information in this book, what have we done well?
- What have we not yet done that we need to do—immediately? In the near future? Sometime?
- What insights from the book stand out as particularly important for us, given our situation?
- What insights beyond this book have come to us during the course of our reading?

You don't have to create a leadership recipe from scratch. The accumulated wisdom of leaders across time can be distilled into key principles. You can build on these principles as you customize your congregation's response. Your congregation can deal with whatever happens and grow stronger as a result. That's the prayer for you that has guided me every step of the way in the creation of this book.

PART I

The Anatomy of
Congregational Leadership
in a Time of Crisis

1

One Minister's Tales of Crisis

Crisis can strike when you least expect it.

At 10:20 a.m., on Sunday, July 12, 2009, a busload of twenty-three youth and adult sponsors from the church I was pastoring—First Baptist Church, Shreveport, Louisiana—headed east on Interstate 20, on the way to a missions-oriented camp in Macon, Georgia. They passed Meridian, Mississippi, making good time toward their destination.

Suddenly one of the two left rear tires blew out, causing the bus to swerve and then flip three times before landing on its side on the shoulder of the highway. Everyone on board got tossed out of their seats, some were thrown through windows, and two ended up trapped under the bus. A few lucky ones got out of the bus with nothing more than bruises and abrasions. Several suffered serious injuries. A bright fifteen-year-old boy, Brandon Ugarte, died at the scene.

Back in Shreveport, we were moments away from beginning our two 10:30 a.m. worship services when word of the accident reached us. One of the adults on the trip—a First Baptist Church staff person—called his wife from the crash scene. In a panic, she came to me with the news. All we knew at our end was that our bus had flipped. Our initial impression was that there were injuries, but none were life-threatening.

We worshiped in a high state of alarm that morning, praying earnestly and hoping for the best. We soon learned just how serious the accident had been. The tragedy thrust us into a state of crisis, calling for leadership under extreme conditions. I and other congregational leaders pooled our wisdom to meet the challenge. I drew on every lesson I had ever learned over the course of decades of pastoral ministry. It wasn't the first time crisis had struck a congregation I led.

Conflict and Crisis

My earliest brush with congregational crisis occurred in my first professional assignment. First Baptist Church, Knoxville, Tennessee, had called me to a one-year seminarian internship as college minister. Soon after my arrival, members of the church came to blows with their relatively new senior pastor over the Saturday-night firing of the long-tenured minister of music. As a bystander for the most part, I watched the stages of crisis unfold. Initial shock led to anger. Then leaders stepped in with damage control and conflict resolution.

I took note of the ripple effects of the crisis when the senior pastor subsequently hired a minister of music with whom he had worked elsewhere. I took further note of the lingering consequences when that minister of music, after only a few months on the job, resigned abruptly and returned to the church from which he had come. It wasn't a pretty picture, with as many lessons about how *not* to handle things as how to get it right.

Disease and Death in Rural Kentucky

The very next year and while still a seminarian, I became pastor of a small, rural church in a town of 385 in north central Kentucky. During my three years of ministry there, the community seemed to exist in a perpetual state of crisis. The most dramatic occurrence involved disease and death. Debbie, a twenty-year-old wife and new mother, contracted a lethal bacterial disease, meningococemia. She died at a nearby hospital within hours of the first signs of illness, leaving behind her one-month-old daughter, Tasha, and her nineteen-year-old husband, Wayne.

Three months later, Tasha, now four months old, contracted the same bacterial disease and died as quickly as her mom had, despite being transported to an excellent hospital in Cincinnati. As if that weren't enough, three other children who were close to the family, including our own daughter, developed similar symptoms the same day, raising horrifying fears among families and grave concern among health officials that we were dealing with a grim epidemic.

In a crazy quirk of timing, doctors determined that our daughter and one other child had nothing more than stomach viruses. The fourth symptomatic child had a mild case of viral meningitis. Adding to this tragedy and trauma, Wayne, while his daughter lay dying, got news that his eighteen-year-old brother had been killed in a car accident while playing "chicken" with a friend on the highway outside of town.

At the age of twenty-six I got a crash course in caring for traumatized families, shepherding a terrified church, and partnering with public officials to manage a community crisis. I also got a bittersweet taste of the impact of a congregational crisis on a leader. It felt gratifying to care for those affected and to help restore sanity to the panicked community, but our

4 Leading Congregations through Crisis

daughter's involvement in the crisis added a layer of trauma to the grief I already felt for people I had grown to love. I had an up-close-and-personal experience with compassion fatigue as the urgent care of the early days turned into weeks and months of dealing with the lingering effects of what had taken place.

A Staff Problem Becomes a Church-Wide Crisis

Three years later, now pastoring another church and working toward the completion of my Ph.D., crisis struck again. This time the crisis involved a conflict with a staff member that spilled into the church. Before the crisis was over, the church had divided into camps, the staff member had been fired, and I—exhausted and disheartened by the process—had decided to resign. I learned some hard lessons about handling personnel matters, working through lay leadership, and managing stress. I walked away from the experience wondering if I would finish my degree or pastor again. I continued to call on the lessons of this experience in the years following as I led other churches through disagreements over personnel as well as over such things as denominational affiliation and ministry direction.

Budget Woes

I did finish my degree and served many years in congregational ministry. In 1989, after four years as an associate pastor, I became the senior pastor of Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Missouri. This proved to be one of my most satisfying and fruitful experiences in ministry. That does not mean the church avoided crisis.

The church had a long history of financial and ministry health. Seven years into my ministry, Holmeswood ran a standard fall stewardship campaign. Unexpectedly, this one ended poorly, raising the specter of severe budget cuts, difficult staff reductions, and serious ministry disruption. Rather than succumb to cutback fever, I challenged church leaders to consider strategies for strengthening member giving. Together we prayed and led the church in a two-month experience of congregational reflection and renewal. The financial crisis became a transformative moment in the life of the church, leading to renewed vision and passion and a \$220,000 financial turnaround.

Mother Nature Strikes

In 2003, I accepted the call to return as senior pastor of the church I had served as associate pastor after my seminary days: First Baptist Church, Shreveport, Louisiana. I had no way of knowing how situational crisis would impact our lives together.

In late August 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf coast and left New Orleans and other communities in southern Louisiana devastated. This natural disaster created a major regional crisis and put unprecedented

pressure on the church and community to respond. An estimated sixty thousand evacuees ended up on the doorstep of Shreveport-Bossier City in northwest Louisiana, prompting a tidal wave of community-wide collaboration. Our church stayed in the middle of the action, providing shelter, supplies, volunteer service, and long-term care. We also extended our efforts with recovery expeditions to southern Louisiana and pace-setting involvement in a new housing initiative in Shreveport in partnership with the Fuller Center for Housing.

Tragedy on the Highway

I put lessons from all these earlier crises into play when leading First Baptist through the early stages of its recovery from the highway tragedy. I say “the early stages” because six weeks before the accident, I had announced plans to transition out of pastoral leadership and devote myself full-time to Directions, Inc., a nonprofit organization my wife and I had formed in 2001.¹ After careful deliberation, other key leaders and I agreed to stick with plans for an August 31 departure. We made the most of my last weeks there, setting things in motion that would serve the congregation for months to come. I devoted my last days at First Baptist to crisis response.

Facilitating congregational recovery involved several things: bringing together a crisis management team, encouraging the faith and hope of the congregation, and helping to channel the congregation’s love into meaningful short-term and long-term action. As we dealt with the inevitable challenges of the aftermath, we also managed unprecedented media attention. What began with the intense interest of local media quickly became a steady stream of interest from national media. Though I served as the principal interface between the church and the media, I had outstanding support from news-related veterans in the congregation.

Faithful leaders and servants in the church, with valuable support from skilled professionals and generous-hearted congregations in the region, responded to our crisis with wise, timely, and compassionate care. The crisis brought out the best in us as a church, enlivening our worship, our prayer, and our self-giving spirit.

None of this could erase the impact of the accident. We joined the Ugarte family as they grieved for their son. Three weeks later, twelve-year-old Maggie Lee Henson, the daughter of our associate pastor, lost her battle for life. Our prayers for her recovery became prayers for God’s mercy toward her mom, dad, and younger brother.

Others suffered acute injuries that would take months to heal. We set plans in motion to support them every step of the way. Everyone involved in the accident—those on the bus, their families, and their principal caregivers—bore emotional wounds from the experience. We anticipated their needs with a “post-critical-incident” strategy that drew on the expertise of mental health professionals.

6 *Leading Congregations through Crisis*

The ripple effects of the bus accident continued for months. Families and friends grieved two untimely deaths. Others rehabbed from injuries and surgeries. Legal questions relating to liability and medical bills had to be resolved. As for congregational learning and development, the church revisited its policies and procedures for church-sponsored road trips and further refined what were already very responsible safeguards.

From my ongoing contact with those who remained in leadership after my departure, I have been impressed by First Baptist's ability to build on the healing that occurred during my final weeks as pastor. They still have issues to deal with, but the cloud of crisis has lifted and the missional spirit of the congregation lives on.

A Career of Lessons Learned

As this chapter makes clear, I came by my interest in the topic of this book naturally. All my experiences with congregational crisis, culminating with First Baptist Shreveport's brave and loving response to a bus accident, have heightened my appreciation for the importance of leading well when crises come.

Combined, these stories suggest several of the ways crises can strike. They introduce themes that come into play as leaders lead their congregations through crisis. Anyone who has led for long at the congregational level has personal stories to tell. Most, if not all, would agree that

- congregational crises are inevitable,
- they come in many shapes and sizes,
- they represent a serious threat to the church and everyone involved,
- how the church responds in the short run makes a big difference in the long run,
- effective crisis leadership is essential.

Reflection Questions

Reflect personally on the following questions. If you are using this book in a group study, share your perspectives with each other.

- What experiences have you had with congregational crisis?
- What leadership lessons have you learned from those experiences?