

Preface

Riding Time to the End!

Time like an ever-rolling stream,

Soon bears us all away;

We fly forgotten, as a dream

Dies at the op'ning day!

—

Isaac Watts, "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," alt.

Perhaps as never before in the history of the world and the Christian church, we who live in the early years of the twenty-first century know that time indeed keeps rolling along. With precise atomic clocks, we can measure time with incredible precision to the nanosecond. In the windows of the digital clocks that grace our night stands and automobile dashboards, we monitor time's incremental click-click-click in ways not so apparent to earlier generations, who watched its flow as second hands swept across the face of a wrist watch or grandfather's clock. In spite of the wonders of modern technology, however, no one has realized the dream of inventing a time machine that can halt, reverse, or speed up the passage of time—nor will such a machine ever be designed. For time is the ongoing, unceasing, and irreversible forward march of history.

Yet, in another sense, time does hold still. At least in addition to its one-way horizontal movement, time is intersected vertically by the One who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Many of us have learned—in a sermon, Bible class or casual chat with a pastor or seminary professor—that in the Greek New Testament there are two distinct words for time. *Chronos*, from which our English words "chronology" and "chronometer" derive, denotes time that can be measured by a clock or by the daily, monthly, and yearly movements of the sun, moon, and stars. *Kairos*, by contrast, points to the deeper significance of time—to its vertical or intersecting and intersect-able nature. Often referred to as "God's time," *kairos* is the word employed when the Bible speaks of the "fullness of time."

In relationship to *chronos*-time, we human ones often feel ourselves to be victims, as did the great hymn writer Isaac Watts, who spoke of time bearing us away into the oblivion of death. If the only marking of time is chronological, then indeed there is literally no ultimate future for us. But for those who cling to the hope of eternity, of a kairotic future beyond clocks and calendars, time is not the bearer-into-oblivion, but rather the way-unto-fulfillment. For those who can see beyond the timepiece, there is an ultimate

sense of peace with God and with oneself. While such a peace is personal, it is not merely individual; it belongs to communities, congregations, and even institutions. Such a sense of time is gift and grace. Indeed, all time—both the momentary and the eternal—is a gift from God.

For those who so understand time in these profound and mysterious dual meanings, the future is seen from two vantage points—from behind and from beyond, as seasons yet to come and as a time wherein God has already staked a claim that cannot be reversed. How we live in the present is governed by the way we view the future—as the holder of fearful threats or as coming at us with adventurous opportunities. If seen as threat, then we face the future in fear and trembling, already victims of the perpetrators lurking in the darkness who are bent on doing us harm. But if we see the future as exciting adventure, as time already redeemed by God, then we can understand ourselves as actors called by God into God’s great redemptive mission of saving (restoring shalom to) the entire cosmos.

Translating the grand themes of time’s dual nature into daily life—and, more particularly and specifically, into churchly communal life—we are faced with tasks to be done, schedules to be established, resources to be garnered, activities to be planned and carried out, budgets to be balanced, schedules to be established, staff to be hired, inspired, and encouraged. In short, we are handed the work of administration! For some in the church, that very word is to be avoided as something tainted or unholy. When it must be done, administrative work is viewed as a necessary evil at worst, bothersome and unrewarding drudgery at best.

The basic premise of this book, the foundation on which we seek to build, is that church administration is a profoundly holy calling, that activities commonly called administration are part and parcel of most ministries, and that one whose work is primarily administrative is no less a faithful servant than those who mostly preach, teach, or counsel. Our English word administrator comes from two Latin roots, *ad* + *ministrare*, meaning literally “one who ministers to.” Thus there is no fundamental distinction between administration and other tasks or manifestations of ministry. To ad-minister is to “add ministry” in any arena, whether ecclesiastical or more secular. It is time for the church to reclaim the holiness of vocations that involve a major measure of administrative work. According to this viewpoint, administration in many arenas—both churchly and “secular”—while burdensome on some days, might be joyful on most.¹

Because time—a gift of God from creation onward—has been reclaimed in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, we who are borne away by its unrelenting forward march are at the same time bearers of its meaning and shapers of its form and functioning. In that sense, while time rides us as a hard taskmaster drives her steed, we also ride the time as we are entrusted with the reins by the One on whose fields and meadows all time-riders travel.

It is our bold claim that in the very daily demands of ad-ministering a church in one of its expressions—parish, judicatory, national office, agency, or institution—one called to leadership discovers *kairos* in the midst of *chronos*, eternity embedded within momentary duties, the divine hidden amid the mundane. And if such leaders rise to and

embrace their administrative callings, they will on occasion capture a feeling or catch a glimmer of the reality of being both borne and bearers, those driven and those called and compelled by God also to sit in the driver's seat for a season.

“Riding time to the end” is an audacious heading for a preface! It could be misunderstood as utter arrogance to presume that we ride and give any direction to *chronos*, let alone serve as agents of the working out of God's good *kairos* in history. But by so entitling this preface to a book about administrative callings in ecclesiastical settings, we express our belief that the work of setting tables where faith communities feast on holy food, and serving as stage managers for theaters in which the divine drama of salvation is worked out amid the daily lives of ordinary folks, is indeed work unto *kairos*-eternity. But it is work that must be done in *chronos*-time. It is temporal, passing away, yet its temporality does not lessen the importance of doing it well. It is always unfinished, so we indeed keep riding time until the end. In *On Religion*, John D. Caputo writes:

If the religious sense of life is sometimes thought of in terms of eternity, under the influence of Plato, my advice is to rethink it in terms of time, as a temporary way to be, a way to ride the waves of time, trying to catch its swells while trying not to end up like a drowned rat.²

In this book we attempt to cover many of the key topics of interest to those serving in or preparing for administrative leadership. While some areas and examples will be most applicable in parish administration, our hope is that colleagues currently engaged in or aspiring to leadership in church-related agencies and institutions will find valuable insights and guidance for their work as well. We hope the volume will be a helpful textbook for students and their professors in classroom contexts and equally a valuable teaching tool and reference resource for busy administrative practitioners. Beyond sharing good managerial principles and insights from the broad field of administrative practice, our intent is to weave throughout the chapters biblical themes and examples from the history of God's people. In other words, we intend in this book to incorporate a *theology of administration*.

No single volume can address adequately all aspects of the complex and multi-faceted areas treated in the chapters that follow. In many areas, references cited will provide additional resources that further elaborate on key themes and topics. While somewhat arbitrary, the ordering of chapters is intended to offer the reader a brief historical overview of ecclesiastical administration; then provide a framework for pondering governance, board work and board-staff relations, planning, budgeting, fund-raising, and general oversight, including personnel matters. Ensuing chapters offer background information and practical suggestions with regard to exercising effective leadership through good communication, dynamic teamwork, and ever-expanding networks. Two topics that would not even have occurred to most authors of church administration materials in previous generations—conflict and legal matters—round out

the book, followed by some personal reflections on how a faithful and effective steward-leader might embrace church administration not just as the necessary work but also as my holy calling.

The two of us together have been blessed with opportunities to engage in more than seven decades of ecclesiastical administrative work—as parish pastors, judicatory and national church executives, and consultants to a host of church leaders and organizations in areas of strategic planning, fiscal management, creative use of conflict, and other topics as well. Our callings have included personnel supervision and support for hundreds of coworkers engaged in complex communal workplaces. Our teachers have been legion, including students involved in courses on church administration at Gettysburg and Philadelphia Lutheran Seminaries. Particularly noteworthy are students of the 2006 Gettysburg Seminary course 3.521 (Church Administration, Leadership and Polity) who “field-tested” most of the chapters. Likewise meriting special acknowledgment are several persons—all outstanding administrators in their own right—who kindly read all or portions of manuscript drafts and offered their helpful feedback and suggestions: Shirley Bacher, Emried Cole, Pamela Cooper-White, Phillip Harris, Lita Brusick Johnson, Jennifer Peters McCurry, Eric Shafer, John Spangler, and Marty Stevens.

Acknowledged with gratitude is permission from the New Pig Corporation of Tipton, Pennsylvania, to describe the RealResults® approach to planning included in Chapter 4. Cited frequently are websites of several church bodies, chief among them the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (<http://www.elca.org>), and we thank all involved in the design and posting of their vast array of helpful resources.

We hope readers will find helpful the many workbook forms we have created, adapted, and imported into the appendices. They can structure and facilitate your work. We have also created a companion website for the book, at www.churchadm.com, where we have lodged more forms and checklists, study materials, and an interactive feature for mutual conversation and consultation about these topics. Please visit!

We are grateful for the assistance from the editorial staff at Fortress Press, particularly Scott Tunseth, Michael West, and Jessica Puckett, and we are indebted to Augsburg Fortress CEO, Beth Lewis, who urged us to write the book. Hearing of our project, many colleagues, particularly at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, have encouraged us to persist. We are also indebted to Nancy Vaughn, who typed multiple versions of manuscripts for some of the chapters. Finally, each of the coauthors acknowledges the other as a respected colleague, lively conversant, and fast friend.

In offering this treatment of church administration, the authors acknowledge the limitations of our own social location. Privileged by race and gender within a predominantly middle class and diversity-challenged North American denominational system, we have nevertheless had the opportunity to work in partnership with richly diverse and gifted colleagues whose values, perspectives, and styles of working have challenged and changed us. Our attempts to be broadly inclusive in sharing insights about administrative leadership notwithstanding, all readers will need to engage in a measure of translation, seeking to adapt, apply (or sometimes perhaps even

reject) our insights and suggestions for each ministry context.

One means of getting outside the sphere of our own limited social location has been a re-reading of some of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's work during the year commemorating the centennial anniversary of his birth. Readers will find Bonhoeffer's work cited with some frequency, second only to scriptural references. The great German theologian's martyrdom stands as a sobering reminder (for surely Adolf Hitler and the Nazis were efficient organizers) that administration can be used for the most egregious evil as well as for great good. Administrators should always ask themselves, and be critiqued by others, "Are we not just doing things well, but are we doing the *right things*?" Bonhoeffer also inspires through his own recognition of the call to grasp onto the time that is given us, and ride it to the end. Just months before his execution, when if ever the focus might have been on eternity, he wrote of the importance of keeping on with mundane earthly tasks:

The difference between the Christian hope of resurrection and the mythological hope is that the former sends a man [sic] back to his life on earth in a wholly new way. . . . The Christian, unlike the devotees of the redemption myths, has no last line of escape available from earthly tasks and difficulties into the eternal. . . . This world must not be prematurely written off.³

Each of us has been blessed over the years with administrative callings rich in "earthly tasks and difficulties." For several years we served together in the Office of the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, entrusted with marvelous opportunities and major responsibilities by Bishops Herbert Chilstrom and H. George Anderson. Together with a handful of other colleagues, we shared the privilege of guiding the day-to-day work of a wonderfully diverse servant corps of persons occasionally branded harshly by some critics as "bureaucrats." To all these faithful, dedicated servants of God, and to our families, who have patiently awaited our homecomings from long days at the office or landings from yet another road trip, we dedicate this book. To all who read it, we extend our hope that you will gain helpful insights, and respond to our invitation to continue the conversation and share your wisdom as you ride and bide the time in your own callings.