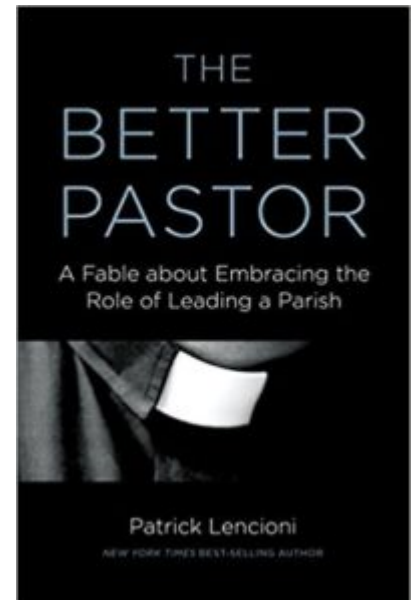


Book Review: The Better Pastor



Patrick Lencioni, [*The Better Pastor: A Fable about Embracing the Role of Leading a Parish*](#) (Lighthouse Catholic Publishing, 2016)

I picked up a copy of Patrick Lencioni's latest book, after attending a short retreat for pastors, where we discussed team building and leadership. Lencioni's work is widely known and accepted among business leadership enthusiasts, but I was surprised to see this title when browsing his list of books.

This is a very short book at one hundred pages, and it is also an easy read, because of the style the author has chosen. Lencioni tells the fictional story of a Catholic Priest, who finds himself serving as the Pastor of a large parish. One evening, he is approached by a man (Ken) who attends the church and who works as a consultant to CEOs. Ken bravely confronts the priest with his concerns about the lackluster way in which the parish is being run, and encourages the

priest to embrace his role as parish pastor with the same enthusiasm and care that he approached his role as priest.

The critique Fr. Daniel (the protagonist) received has three main parts: 1) he must proactively seek to become a better leader by recognizing leadership as part of his call and actively working to learn how to lead more effectively; 2) he must begin holding himself and those who serve under his leadership (staff and volunteer) accountable for the quality of their work; 3) he must publicly model prayer for the people in his parish in order to teach them how to pray.

Throughout the remainder of the parable the reader follows Fr. Daniel as he wrestles with these challenges, ultimately embraces them, and sees the fruit of his labor. Along the way he finds colleagues who join him in his efforts, has difficult accountability conversations, and struggles with implementing significant changes within the parish leadership. In the end, he looks back and is able to see that Ken was right all along, and that his roles as pastor and priest go hand-in-hand.

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This book was an interesting, if brief, introduction to some topics of interest to anyone serving in a senior leadership role within a church. The context of the story means that there are many things peculiar to the Catholic Church and its structure. However, as a protestant pastor in a mainline denomination (United Methodist Church), I was able to very easily see the correlation between Fr. Daniel's context and my own.

There are two main lessons which this book reinforced for me.

- 1. People need to see their pastors pray.** Not so that the

pastor will receive recognition for doing so, but so that people might learn how to pray themselves. This doesn't mean the pastor should only pray publicly; rather, that the pastor should create public opportunities to pray in front of and with people, as a model for them to follow.

- 2. Pastors need to hold people accountable in the church** (themselves included). It is far too easy, when you run a mostly volunteer organization, to ignore poor performance, poor attitudes, and poor quality. And yet, if the church – and especially worship – is the primary place where people encounter God in a new or different way, then we should do everything in our power to ensure we do everything we can to remove barriers that interfere with that encounter.

It is not unloving to confront someone gently with their shortcomings and encourage them to grow. It is very unloving to sacrifice the experience of the whole church body in the interest of avoiding an uncomfortable conversation with one or two people.

Overall, I found this to be an interesting and encouraging book. I was disappointed at the length and the perfect and tidy way everything worked out, though to be fair some parishioners left because of Fr. Daniel's new leadership. But the lessons were simple to explain, if difficult to address, so a full length book on the topic would have been difficult to pull off.

If you are a pastor who struggles with seeing leadership as part of your call, or if you need a bit of encouragement to continue in the things mentioned above, then I recommend this book. However, I'd recommend you save some money and wait for the paperback to come out.