



The Lewis Pastoral Leadership Inventory™ (LPLI)

Lewis Center for Church Leadership
Wesley Theological Seminary
www.lpli.org

Background

There are many fine secular inventories. The Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary has used a number of them with clergy over the years. However, we found that even the clergy most open to learnings from any source would finally say that the surveys were helpful but the questions did not match well what they did as clergy. They were correct since most of the other instruments were developed out of business or another context. So, in the development and implementation of the LPLI, the Center sought to maintain the same standards of secular instruments while keeping the content very church specific. It was to meet a need for an inventory designed explicitly for clergy that the LPLI emerged.

Design Methodology

There were several stages in the development of the LPLI. The Lewis Center contracted with an organizational psychologist with experience in the development of 360-degree inventories to guide the Center in the development and testing of what became the LPLI.

In addition to using the protocols commonly used to develop a 360-degree assessment instrument for the LPLI, the Center also wanted to take full advantage of what others had learned in developing and using 360-degree instruments. The first step was to identify the relevant research literature on the subject and to review a select group of widely used and evaluated instruments. At the same time, there was a literature search regarding clergy effectiveness. Another literature search focused on identifying similar or related leadership instruments. An abstract of the project was prepared and shared with academics and denominational leaders as a way of seeking input and references.

The initial phase of specifically developing the LPLI involved defining criteria of effectiveness in ministry. The Lewis Center used a “wisdom of the crowd” method to gather initial data. The Center gathered information from multiple denominations and

judicatories on how they defined clergy effectiveness with the objective of identifying those elements held in common. The Center found that most groups have published criteria for clergy effectiveness, usually developed through fairly elaborate processes involving clergy, laity, and supervisors. This work supplemented and informed the literature research. Through a content analysis of all this information, a three-fold framework began to emerge around the core concepts of **character, competence and contribution**.

These categories, along with subcategories and practices that go with each of the three components, were shared broadly through focus groups with judicatory supervisors, ordination officials, clergy, laity, and seminary faculty to test the general concepts. The first formal iteration of this framework included 70 specific criteria of effectiveness. Again, conference leaders, seminary faculty, clergy, and laity were asked to review the criteria and provide feedback to help refine them. The Lewis Center also consulted with an organizational psychologist and secular experts in the field of human development.

This framework became the basis of the first pilot version of the LPLI that was field tested in 2006 with more than 500 clergy. Participating clergy, their denominational leaders, and observers were all invited to give their feedback on the process. Based on feedback and results from the first pilot, the Lewis Center refined and expanded the criteria of effectiveness, bringing the total to 75. Adjustments were made to questions, procedures, software, and the reporting format. Out of this work came a second pilot version that was field tested in 2008 and 2009 with approximately 1,000 clergy from across the United States.

During the field tests, various tests of statistical reliability were applied to the results. External evaluators were used to analyze the results. Statistical analysis indicates strong internal reliability (coefficient alpha was over .80) for the instrument as a whole. Where this was not initially present, additional clarifications and changes made to the LPLI questions enhanced

reliability. Great care was given in the analysis of results to make sure that no inadvertent bias might be built into the inventory, especially regarding race and gender. The most recent reliability analysis was conducted by external researchers in the spring of 2017 and the results continue to indicate strong internal reliability and correspond closely to the original analysis done in 2009.

Following the two pilots and after a few years of formal use, a modification was made to about a dozen questions to make them more inclusive for clergy serving in congregational staff roles that may not include the full range of pastoral responsibilities. This change made the LPLI more useful for United Methodist deacons, and was done in collaboration with deacons and boards of ordained ministry. The changes have worked well. It is important to note that the LPLI does not fit for clergy who serve in settings other than congregations, whether elders or deacons.

Learnings

As time goes by and the number of users increases to grow, there will be more data from which to draw. We collect from the clergy personal and demographic data that can be used for such analysis. From the beginning we have found no difference in scores of male and female clergy. So far we find that the longer a pastor has been serving the higher they tend to rate themselves, though that is not always the case for their observers. The “halo effect” seems to apply in that observers tend to rate clergy more highly than clergy rate themselves.

The Lewis Center has found one important exception to the pattern of clergy tending to rate themselves lower than their observers. In the early years of the LPLI, the Center used a method in which United Methodist district superintendents and board of ordained ministry leaders had the opportunity to identify from among the clergy of their conference those few clergy that they felt were the clearest examples of highly effective, effective, and less than effective clergy with definitions given for each category. They made their lists individually and never shared them with others. The Lewis Center took those individual lists and identified the pastors where there was overwhelming consensus placing them in a particular category. Then a coding was built into the system permitting the results of these three groups of

pastors to be compared. The lists of names were destroyed and never used for any other purpose. Among the findings from these three groups was that the highly effective and effective consistently rated themselves lower than their observers while the less than effective group consistently rated themselves higher than their observers.

The things clergy do well and those things they find challenging today do not vary much across conferences. The Lewis Center finds that clergy score highest in “character” (spiritual authenticity, integrity, wholeness, and self-awareness) and next best in “competence” (various skills and aptitudes related to pastoral ministry). This matches other findings that indicate that while there is much talk of ineffective clergy today, most laity have confidence in their clergy as people and professionals. That being said, clergy and laity understand that many churches are struggling despite having trusted and capable pastoral leadership. This is reflected in the area of “contribution” or fruitfulness, where clergy typically score lower than in character and competence.

Use in the United Methodist Church

So far over 3,000 clergy have used the LPLI with the majority being United Methodists. Many individual clergy use it but most often it is used in connection with a group.

Some boards of ordained ministry use it mid-point in the provisional process not so much for assessment as for the provisionals to use the information to develop an action plan for the time between taking the LPLI and when they come up for ordination. (Memphis, Northern Illinois, Tennessee, and Virginia)

Some conferences and districts make it available to clergy who wish to take it. (Mississippi Conference in connection with a Pastors’ School; Cookeville District, Tennessee; Flint District, West Michigan; and Western North Carolina connected to a leadership program)

Some conferences and districts have had all clergy take it. (North Georgia; West Virginia; North Central and South Districts, Texas; and East Central District, Florida)

Coaches sometimes use it with pastors with whom they are working use it. (Great Plains)

Use Beyond the United Methodist Church

The United Church of Christ uses the LPLI as one component of their Next Generation Leadership Initiative funded by their pension agency. Clergy use the LPLI after they have been in a church for about a year and then two more times during their first ten years.

The Salvation Army uses the LPLI for all of their officers in the Central Region. Given the special nature of the work of Salvation Army officers in which they are both pastor and head of a service agency, the Lewis Center worked with them to develop an additional set of 25 questions to add to the original LPLI questions. So far, 325 officers have used the LPLI.

The United Jewish Alliance of New York has worked with the Lewis Center to adapt the LPLI for use with their Rabbinic Fellowship for Visionary Leaders over the next several years.

At least one seminary where virtually all their students are currently serving churches uses it as part of a senior seminar experience. Other seminaries are more likely to use LPLI with D.Min. students. One such D.Min. course is “Growing as a Pastoral Leader through Feedback” for which the LPLI is one resource.

Benefits Reported from LPLI Use

The LPLI is designed to give clergy clues about their strengths on which to build and the areas where further attention could increase their effectiveness. It can show where there is the greatest congruence between self perceptions and those of others as well as the greatest gaps. All of these things lead to perhaps the greatest gift to clergy — the opportunity to have meaningful conversations about their performance apart from general conversations, often driven by anecdotes or personal impressions. The testimonials received from pastors indicate the benefit they experience from the LPLI experience.

The report that users receive puts heavy focus on the importance of the conversations. What happens in those encounters is more significant, participants report, than the report itself. The report gives guidance for the conversations so they might be most productive. Recently a new guide has been developed as well as

an online educational component someone can add in which they get individualized feedback and CEU credit.

For boards of ordained ministry, districts, or annual conferences using LPLI with a significant number of clergy, aggregate data can identify those areas in which clergy and laity agree that the pastors are doing very well and also the areas where clergy and laity agree about challenging aspects of pastoral leadership. Fortunately, there are few instances in which laity are identifying challenges that are not also identified by the clergy themselves.

Research Utilizing the LPLI

The literature emerging from researchers using the LPLI in conjunction with their research is limited, partly because the LPLI is still relatively new. Some projects include:

Jasmin O. Brown, *The Importance of Integrity in Christian Leadership*, D.Min. thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2014.

William Ralph Cannon II, *Prior Pastoral Leadership Experience and Post-Seminary Effectiveness: A Mixed Method Study*, Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015.

Renee Ford, *Factors Influencing Clergy Leadership Effectiveness*, Ph.D. dissertation, Penn State University, 2015.

Leslie P. Towsey, *Emotional Intelligence Testing with Clergy*, D.Min. thesis, Wesley Theological Seminary, 2008.

Ownership of the LPLI

The LPLI was developed by the Lewis Center for Church Leadership, a wholly owned component of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC. The Center operates under the governance of the Seminary’s Board of Governors and is supervised through the Seminary’s administrative and academic structures. Wesley Seminary holds ownership of the LPLI and the trademark for Lewis Pastoral Leadership Inventory.

Examples of Unsolicited Feedback

“I want to thank the Lewis Center for providing the *Lewis Pastoral Leadership Inventory*. I recently completed a secular 360 instrument for a leadership retreat. As I started filling it out, I grew concerned. Did I have

international offshore direct reports? Was I a CEO? What did this have to do with church leadership? The questions confused my lay observers. When I asked what a pastor could learn from this assessment, they said: 'Leadership is generic; it's the same everywhere.' But as someone who ran a law practice for 11 years, I can tell you the work of a pastor is a very different from that of a business leader. — *United Methodist clergywoman*

"The LPLI is user friendly. I have had many opportunities to participate and administer like instruments. I soon discovered that this instrument was different, it *really* was user friendly. It was user friendly not only for me, the student, but for the observers. Often times, observers fail to report because the instrument they are asked to complete is time consuming and difficult to understand. My observers were pleasantly surprised and relieved at the ease of the process just as I was." — *United Methodist clergywoman and former superintendent*

"Wonderful! We are so grateful for the LPLI, and it's working well. We have used just today the chart you developed for us (summary of highs and lows) with our Board. We are changing some of our interview practices as a result." — *Conference Board of Ordained Ministry staff person*

"I took the LPLI to help me understand my strengths and opportunities for growth concerning my leadership style and how that might impact my church's visioning process. I was finishing three tough years of laying groundwork for change, and I wanted to have an

objective measure of how folks saw my leadership. The results of the LPLI re-oriented my understanding of how I am perceived as a leader, and it gave me greater clarity concerning how I might interact and develop relationships in the church. By sharing the results of the LPLI with my church's leaders, we were better able to have meaningful conversations concerning how we would work together, based on my strengths as a particular kind of pastoral leader. What I learned from the LPLI literally changed my life. The church and I had a better understanding of how we might work together as we affirmed and nurtured each other in a common mission." — *United Methodist clergyman*

"Completing the LPLI provided a critical angle of vision on my pastoral effectiveness as I entered a fifth year serving as lead pastor of a large downtown church. My Personal Leadership Profile revealed that I had been seriously undervaluing my effectiveness and contribution to the church. The LPLI played a significant role in discerning my commitment to a longer tenure. Following the LPLI and subsequent conversations, I experienced increased energy, hope, and determination to persevere in this ministry setting." — *United Methodist clergywoman*

"My experience with my LPLI report gave me a chance to realize that I had too low a view of my leadership. Even though there are certain areas I need to improve, my leadership is more appreciated by others than by myself. My low estimate of myself was excused in the name of humility, but the view of my leadership from my observers helped me regain my confidence as a leader." — *Lutheran clergyman*

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