

Scaffolding for a Church-Based Residency for Pastoral Formation

Written by Matt Rogers



Introduction:

The place to begin is to consider the goal of pastoral formation. What are we hoping to accomplish? It seems that there are three main goals worth mentioning, and each is essential to form the whole person:

- 1) training designed to develop knowledge and convictions,
- 2) training designed to assess the heart and grow character, and
- 3) training designed to instill pastoral skill and practices.

It's worth considering the implications of removing any of these facets of development. Without knowledge and convictions, a future pastor will be susceptible to deceptive theology, heretical teaching, or social gospel liberalism.

Without character, the most knowledgeable and skillful leader will obscure the truth of the gospel through hypocritical living and will, in many cases, bring great harm to God's church through moral failure.

Without skill, the future pastor will be unable to bring their character and convictions to bear on other people in the church in a way that moves God's people forward in sanctification and mission. Combined, however, these three aspects of pastoral formation provide a vibrant context of growth and change when placed within the local church.





Training Designed to Develop Knowledge & Convictions:

First up is the area of knowledge and convictions. This area easily provides a sense of the scope and sequence of the developmental process.

It's certainly true that future pastors are receiving much of this type of development through a steady diet of healthy exposition in their churches.

Supplemental training is important for future pastors who can delve deep into the unique nuances of these topics. Each of the topics below is suggested based on the perceived importance of this topic in the life of a pastor.

It's worth noting that a church, depending on numerous contextual factors, may spend an entire semester on each topic, or they might try to condense these into a shorter time.

As a normative rule, however, a healthy pastoral formation process will take two to three years to allocate adequate time for training.

While this time period might be intimidating for some, there are many benefits of a lengthy residency process:



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It allows time for the developing leader to get older and wiser and slows down the trend to younger and younger men being sent to plant churches;

It fosters time for the pastoral staff to get to know the developing pastors and speak truth into their lives over an extended period;

It encourages the church to get to know the developing leaders and be able to truly lay hands on them and commission them into the work;

It facilitates an extended period for training in the various competencies needed for pastoral ministry;

It gives time for the character of the developing leader to rise to the surface and his true strengths and weaknesses to be known;

It provides a context for relationships to form among the developing pastor and his family and others who might be on the planting team.

The intellectual development tracks provide a basis for determining the primary flow of the pastoral residency. What follows is a suggestion based on a 2-3 year residency program broken up into 4-6 semesters.

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Most churches find that the best model is to select a specific time to meet with all the residents together each week.

While work is required to make these gatherings conversational and not merely a teaching forum, discussion is often profitable in facilitating engagement around the topics and shared learning.

In addition, if you approach this teaching individually with a pastor meeting with each resident separately, then it is difficult to ensure that all of the residents are getting the same content and quality instruction. I would suggest a 90-minute meeting during the semester that follows this basic pattern:

1. Welcome / Prayer
2. Devotional / teaching from one of the residents
3. Presentation on the topic of the week
(led by the pastor or another pastor with noted wisdom in this area)
4. Questions and discussion from the residents
5. Homework for next week



Suggestions for Topics:

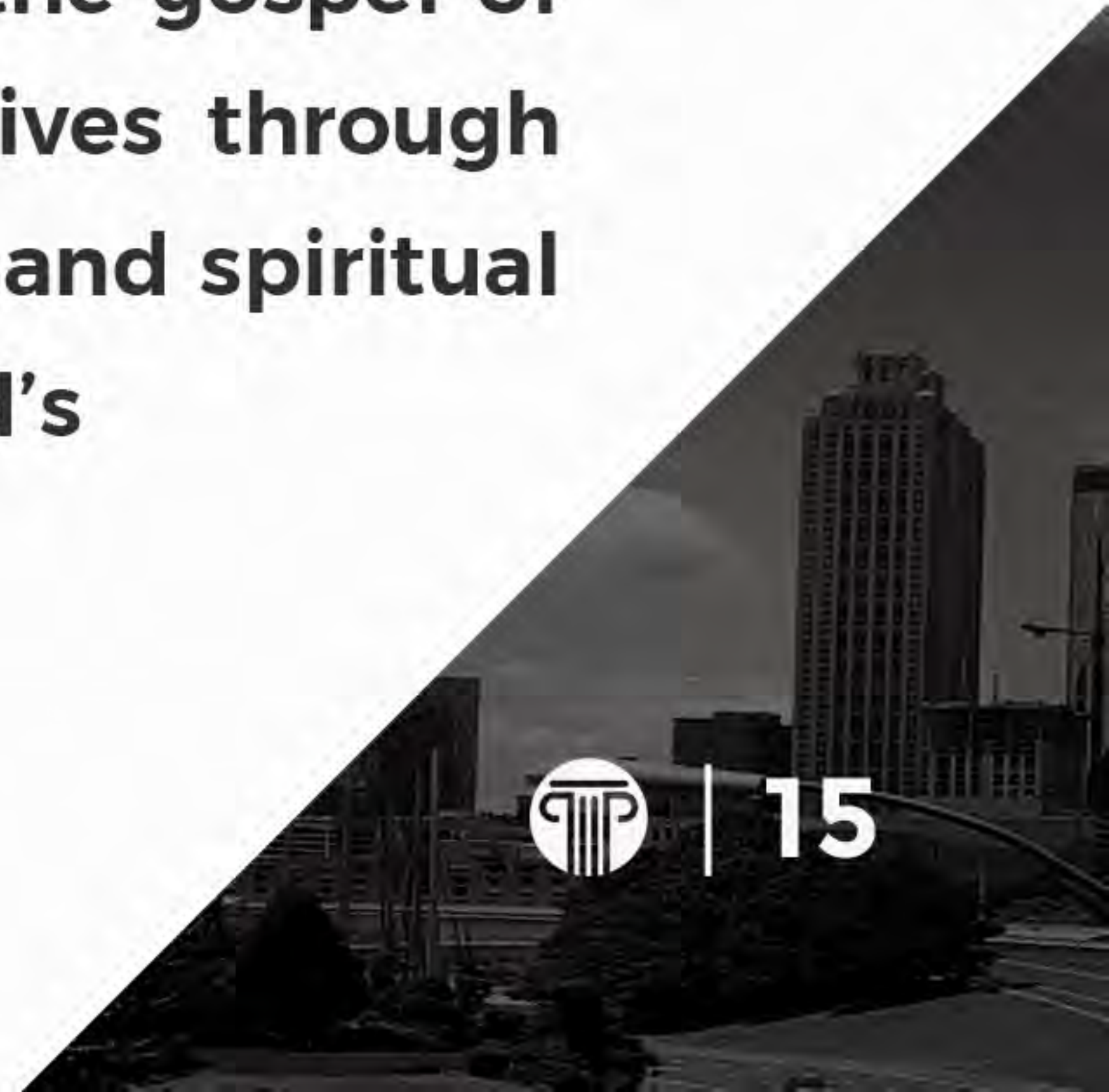
In this section, we will consider seven essential topics for a residency program and provide a list of suggested resources that could guide the formative training. This abridged article is a part of a lengthy essay that also contains reading lists and projects. You can find this longer article on the Pillar Resource Page.

#1: Pastoral Character and Spiritual Disciplines

Start with a season of focus on personal character and spiritual disciplines. The motive for such a starting point is multifaceted:

- It emphasizes the reality that character is more important than competence.
- It forces the developing leader to consider his heart—a topic that should be returned to throughout the training process.
- It provides a baseline for Christian maturity that applies to all types of leaders, even those who will not continue to move toward pastoral ministry.
- It allows for strategic mentorship with existing pastors who demonstrate care for these young men.

The aim for this semester should be that the men understand the gospel of Jesus Christ and daily apply the truth of the gospel to their lives through worshipful obedience. Gospel clarity, seen in personal character and spiritual disciplines, is the baseline for any persevering work in leading God's people in the church.



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#2: Biblical Ecclesiology and Polity

The next step in the developmental process is to ensure that you are building healthy ecclesiology into the lives of the residents. The nature of this ecclesiological instruction is happening by virtue of their membership in the life of the church body.

There they are passively picking up on the habits of a healthy church. Many, however, come from backgrounds where they participated in unhealthy churches with paltry ecclesiology, so it takes time for them to see the benefits of biblical paradigms for local church ministry. Even those who've grown up in healthy churches need the benefit of active teaching on the why behind the what. They need to understand why the church does what it does and why the leaders make the decisions they do.

They need to hear leaders process the non-negotiable themes of biblical ecclesiology and discuss how to triage the secondary or tertiary issues. Those who will soon be leading churches need to understand church polity to such depth that they can plant or move a church in this direction in the future.

During this semester, it would be wise to allow the developing pastors to sit in on the elders' meetings and observe how the church is led in a practical way. This would also allow these leaders to meet other pastors in the church and discern how unique gifts and passions shape the leadership of the church. This protects these future leaders from developing a stereotype of the ideal pastor based on what they observe in the pastor leading the residency program.



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#3: Preaching and Teaching

Derived from biblical ecclesiology and polity, the work of preaching and teaching is an essential task of pastors and vital for the growth of the church. It's an important place to turn next.

When it comes to those entering residency programs, there are several challenges to consider. First, many have had limited experience in teaching and preaching, and it's difficult to give them many opportunities in the normative church structure (more on this later).

Next, many young leaders have not had the benefit of careful evaluation in this area. They may have preached once a year for youth Sunday, but they've not consistently had to teach adults in an environment where someone loved them enough to give them feedback on needed areas of growth.

Finally, like all of us, young leaders are prone to idolize the great preachers of our day and listen to podcasts of their sermons regularly. It can be difficult to help them think beyond the specialized role of highly gifted communicators and consider the form preaching will take for them in a church planting context or revitalization project where they have to do so much other than preach.

#4: Evangelism & Mission

Next up is a focus on the work of evangelism and missions. You'll notice that many of these topics are interrelated. In the ecclesiology semester, we've already considered the role of the healthy local church as the focus and vehicle for God's ongoing mission in the world.

Now we can drill down deeper on the work of personal evangelism, the collective work of the church in evangelism, and the task of global mission.

A healthy approach for this topic could be to either start on the personal level with the task of evangelism and work to the global level with a focus on the nations or vice versa.

Either way, you'll want to give active consideration for how a pastor lives out evangelistic zeal, particularly in the work of planting or revitalization, and how they labor to create a culture that's magnetized to God's work among all nations.

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#5: Leadership

Those who are still committed to the development process are now ready to give active consideration to the tasks of leadership, pastoral care and counsel, and church planting/revitalization. These categories are essential skills in the pastor's toolbelt.

As mentioned already, we do not want to get these topics at the front end of the process. We want to focus on personal character, gospel clarity, and healthy ecclesiology at the outset before turning our attention to these topics. With that foundation in place, we can begin by discussing the leadership practices required to give care for the church and the form of distinctively Christian leadership.

The current resources in the area of leadership are inadequate, and much of the learning that takes place in this area simply can't be derived from studies of books on the subject. You'll need to give the developing leader some real leadership to turn up the temperature in this area. In my estimation, this leadership should have a missionary or evangelistic focus rather than something like running the student ministry at the church. This outward focus, and especially the work of building something from nothing, is critical preparation for the work of church planting or revitalization.

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#6: Pastoral Care and Counsel

Pastoral care and counseling are vital for ongoing ministry. The hope is that by this point in the journey, those in the residency program are actively giving care to church members through ongoing relationships but also through church structures like small groups.

You want to equip them to enter these burden-bearing relationships and give meaningful help to those they serve. Not every future pastor will be a gifted counselor, but they all need to have the basic skill sets necessary to aid others in applying the gospel to their lives.

Those predisposed to mercy and care gifts should be given further development in these areas through supplemental forms of training. The supplementary benefit of this form of training is that the person in development is better positioned to apply the gospel to their life and their process of sanctification.

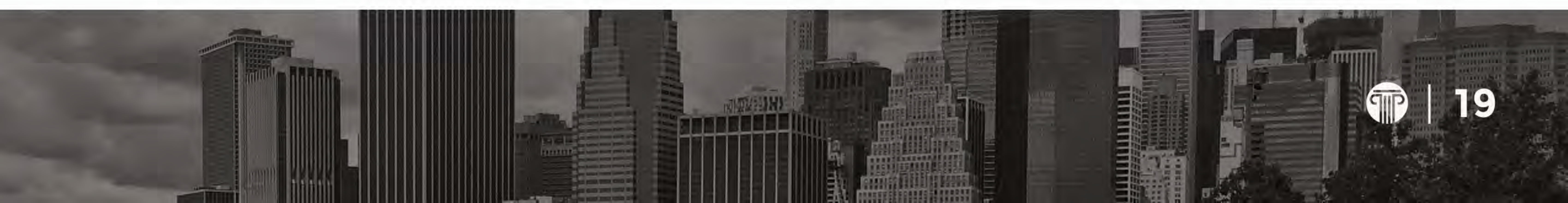
#7: Church Planting & Revitalization Methods & Models

Finally, the process concludes with a consideration of church planting and revitalization methods and models. Obviously, you need to think through how to begin some of this training with enough time for those you send to engage in these themes before they begin their planting or revitalization work.

For example, it would be unwise for someone to end their residency with a consideration of these subjects and then move to start a church plant the very next semester.

It would likely be wise to have a period of preparation after the residency and before the church plant to give them time to execute on topics discussed here.

While books and resources will prove helpful, it's likely that each church will need to iterate on these topics in order to develop planters who are practicing the distinctives that the church and their pastors deem most important.





Training Designed to Assess the Heart and Grow Character:

Now that you've got a standard path in place for theological training, you can layer those preparatory tracks with the other two forms of training essential for holistic development:

- 1) training that focuses on the heart and
- 2) training that focuses on the hands and feet.

You'll notice that we've already built a framework for much of this in the aforementioned semesters of development. Along the way, you likely noticed training that was about character formation (semester 1 and 6, for example) and training that was more practical in orientation (semester 5 and 7, for example).

However, you want to work to make sure that each semester involves formative training in the mind, heart, hands, and feet.

The best means of assessing the heart of a developing leader and working him through a systematic process of growth is through personal mentorship. There is simply no way to adequately press into the heart of a leader apart from deep, intentional, ongoing relationships. A classroom is insufficient for this, which is one of the reasons that a seminary alone is an insufficient training context for the holistic formation of future pastors.

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The size and scope of your training process will likely dictate how you handle this part of the process. If you only have one resident, then it's likely wise that the work of discipleship for this person lies with the lead pastor. If, however, you have several residents, then you will have to be more selective and intentional. Here are some options:

1.

Pair each developing leader with a different pastor on your team in areas that seem to align with the gifts of both. For example, pair those who give indications of seeking to preach and teach with the pastor who does this most often and pair a developing leader with gifts in evangelism with someone leading the charge in mission.

2.

Pair the developing leaders with the pastor on your team who is best at soul care and individual discipleship. This may not be the lead pastor, but someone else on the team who has more margin to invest in meeting with future leaders, listening well, asking good questions, and giving them help to grow.

3.

Pair the developing leaders with some pastors and some non-pastors. Some churches may have a residency program that is too large for the pastoral staff to provide the level of care needed. In such situations, you should reach out to skilled disciple-makers in the local church who've proven competency to help others grow in their faith.

In addition to the weekly content tracks for the internship, it should be an expectation that each residency is meeting with a mentor at least twice a month, if not weekly. While these meetings may involve discussion of the training content, the main goal should simply focus on the heart of the future leader.

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In a way, the residency is a process of exposing what needs to be exposed rather than it being exposed later in a destructive way. We recognize that the work of church planting and pastoral ministry is likely the most sin-exposing activity you'll ever undertake, perhaps second only to marriage and parenting.

Since this is the case, leaders should expect these future leaders to see their sin exposed and their need for the gospel heightened during this time of preparation. Here are a few things you should keep your eye on during these mentor sessions:

- The Leader's Self-Talk - Spend time helping the leader see how they apply the gospel to their lives.
- The Leader's Sin Patterns - These are sin patterns that will kill a ministry, and this time of mentorship can help a leader kill them now.
- The Leader's Family - A mentor should listen to how the developing leader speaks of his wife, how he involves her in decisions, and how he leads her to know and love God. In addition, should the developing leader have children, a wise mentor will help the resident think through how to establish parental authority and lead family devotions to promote the gospel in the home.
- The Leader's Ability to Handle Pressure and Burdens - As these developing leaders step into this work, you'll need to see how they handle the increasing levels of burden they are exposed to and provide them with resources to relieve some of the pressure.
- The Leader's Fight through Spiritual Warfare - You can't replicate the nature of this spiritual warfare in a residency, nor can you manufacture the level of pressure a leader will face, but you can help the developing leader see the Enemy's attacks and arm themselves for battle.



Training Designed to Instill Pastoral Skills and Practices:

The final area of holistic development is work on pastoral skills and practices. Again, as noted above, this work is woven into the various topics of consideration, with the later stages of the development process being more practical in orientation.

Such a progression allows you to weed out underperforming residents before giving them too much leadership in the church. Once you are fairly certain of a leader's capacity, you are ready to begin to instill the skills and practices that this person will need to excel in the work. There are several different ways that you might approach this type of training:

#1: Skills and Practices that All Pastors Will Need

You know some of the areas that all pastors and ministry leaders are going to need development in order to be fruitful in the work. Some of these are outlined in the content-based training above. They are going to need to know how to share the gospel. They must know how to preach. They will need basic skills in counseling. There will surely be aspects of leadership and administration required in the role.

#2: Skills and Practices that Your Church Needs

Another model of skill-based training takes the resident pool and places them in roles that the church needs at that time. For example, the church might need someone to lead college ministry, so a resident or two are selected to head up that ministry area. Or the church might need a capable evangelist to foster connection with the local community, so a resident might be given this task.

This model is particularly valuable in smaller churches or church plants that do not have the resources to hire someone full-time in these key ministry roles.



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#3: Skills and Practices that Play to the Strengths of the Developing Leader

In this model, effort is made to match the developing leader with a role that fits their gifts and future role within the church. For this to work, you will likely need to know something about the developing leader early in the process or wait to match them to a role. Once you have some sense of the leader's future role, you can begin to pair them with ministry objectives that lend toward cultivating those spiritual and innate gifts. For example, if it's clear that a developing leader has the aptitude and passion for international missions, then it might make sense to align them with the work of a missions team within your church or even give them some level of oversight of that team for a time.

You might consider asking them to head up holding the rope for your international missionaries or develop a team for a short-term mission objective. Or, if a person is a clear lead pastor or planter, you will want to give them more experience learning how to lead meetings, run an elder team, or develop a budget. There is no shortage of “but what about” questions when we talk about church-based residencies. Our aim is that these thoughts have prompted you to consider the form and structure of a residency program in your church.

Please reach out if we can help answer any questions you have along the way. Contact Matt Rogers, the author of this article, at matt@thepillarnetwork.com. He will work to help you build a system that is the best fit for your church. Let's work together to develop the scores of pastors who are needed to faithfully plant and reestablish healthy churches until Jesus returns.