



SHAWNA SONGER GAINES

*THE  
PASTOR  
AS  
MIDWIFE*

LIFE-GIVING LEADERSHIP FOR  
THE HEALING OF THE CHURCH



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# 1

## *MIDWIFING A METAPHOR*

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[A metaphor is] capable of saying that which  
may be said in no other way.

**JANET MARTIN SOSKICE,**  
*METAPHOR AND RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE*

Out of the blank abyss a picture is formed by means of metaphor:  
people see what they did not see before and are changed  
by the image from anonymity into love. Words create.  
God's word creates; our words can participate in the creation.

**EUGENE PETERSON,** *THE CONTEMPLATIVE PASTOR*

I COULD HEAR MY HEART beating in my ears as I tried to listen carefully to the interview question the church board was asking. They were interviewing me to be their pastor. They had never had a pastor who looked like me: female. I had never pastored a church quite like this one: complex. I wanted to earn their trust, put them at ease, help them believe that if God was calling, we could do this together.

They asked the question every church board asks, the one I should have been prepared to answer, but I wasn't. "What ideas do you have for our church? What kinds of things would you like us to do if you were to become our pastor?" All my seminary training told me that pastors don't come into churches with all the ideas and impose them on congregations. The Spirit is already at work in a congregation, and the pastor is the lead



listener. But try telling that to a board that is anxious about the future of the church and wants to guarantee this next season won't be their last. They looked across the table and saw a possible shepherd, the primary metaphor, the symbol used to imagine the work of a pastor. They were saying, "Please tell us you know the way to green pastures and still waters?" (see Ps 23:2). I clumsily explained that we would find the way together, that I would listen to them, trusting God to work and lead us. But there went that heartbeat in my ears. Their eager faces leaned in, waiting to hear something concrete, a firm picture they could hold on to of the future of their church, like a new parent waiting to see the ultrasound. I couldn't help but pepper in a few ideas. After all, I knew a thing or two about church life and what works and what doesn't. Maybe I could relieve them of this anxious moment and give them the picture they so desperately wanted. My sweaty palms were trying to grasp onto a shepherd's staff, trying to live into this imaginary image I assumed they had for my role. I stammered to find words that fit into this metaphor that shaped their paradigm for pastoral ministry. Like a kid playing dress-up, I put on the shepherd's costume and stumbled around to see what it would be like to lead the sheep of this flock.

Imagination is the womb of human activity. Words shape worlds of imagination. The words we use to describe pastoral vocation not only say something descriptive about the task we have done and are doing; they also cast trajectory and point our aim at the kind of work we aspire to do. Metaphors are one type of symbol created through words that fills our human activity with meaning and direction.

We use metaphors every day, every minute, in fact. They are such a ubiquitous part of language that we often take for granted the power they hold. I've listened to sermons in which a well-used metaphor is planted in the soil of my soul, a tender seed that can bear fruit long after the final *Amen*. And I have heard preachers abuse metaphors, overextending some perfectly fine bit of rhetoric until the original meaning is unrecognizable and the listener is utterly lost. But pastoral metaphors are not necessarily or singularly about the words we use in sermons. Metaphors matter for

more than sermons. They are about the images that orient our purpose and shape our way of being in the world. Spirit-inspired metaphors can take root in our imagination and in the imagination of our congregations, changing us so profoundly that it's as if we are born again. But before we can understand the significance of metaphors for pastoral ministry, we must dive deeper into the sea of rhetoric and sift through both the brilliant and the perilous possibilities.

### WHY METAPHORS MATTER

A birth takes place in every metaphor. While metaphor is primarily an act of language, language is powerfully creative. *Metaphor* is a Greek word composed of two simple words that together mean “transfer” or “carry over.” A metaphor transfers meaning from one word, object, or idea onto another, often dissimilar object or idea. By taking two different things and inviting them to interact with each other, a metaphor creates an entirely new meaning out of the two. This interactive understanding of metaphor suggests that when one is used it creates a “fusion of horizons,” in which both terms of reference take on new meaning in light of this connection.<sup>1</sup> When William Shakespeare’s Romeo says, “Juliet is the sun” (*Romeo and Juliet*, act 2, scene 2, line 3), the burgeoning knowledge of the character of Juliet and the experience of the sun create a brand new understanding of Romeo’s experience of Juliet as it interacts with the audience’s experience of the sun. We hear these words, and a fresh understanding of love emerges. The metaphor is generative; it produces a perspective that did not exist before. Each metaphor has the power to give birth to a new horizon of possibilities.

Like birth, language is eventful, especially for people who believe in a God who spoke the heavens and earth into existence and entered the world as the Word become flesh. We depend on metaphors to say that

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<sup>1</sup>Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 44. Janet Soskice defines *metaphor* as “that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another.” Her work with metaphor and religious language argues that metaphor is primarily an act of language. Any imaginative event that takes place is secondary to the language act.

which cannot be said in any other way. Janet Soskice's work with metaphor recognizes that metaphors provide a vital resource for Christians in our "seemingly paradoxical conviction that, despite [our] utter inability to comprehend God, [we are] justified in speaking of God and that metaphor is the principal means by which [we do] so."<sup>2</sup> Rather than fall silent about the mystery of God, we dare to use language in creatively generative ways.

Metaphors hold power far beyond rhetorical persuasion. The outcomes of metaphors have real impact in the world, more frequently than most speakers even realize. In their groundbreaking work *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson examine conceptual metaphors, in which abstract concepts are represented in terms of concrete, embodied images. When Johnny Cash tells us love is a burning ring of fire, an abstract concept, love, meets a concrete image, a burning ring of fire, and a new understanding is born. The listener grasps the anguished nature of love that can burn out of control. Lakoff and Johnson argue that we need conceptual metaphors to make sense of abstract ideas such as love and trust. Relatively few concepts are understood directly without conceptual metaphor.<sup>3</sup>

Since *Metaphors We Live By* was published, a whole field of research in social psychology has explored the power and influence metaphors have on the way we interact with these concrete realities. For instance, the idea of morality is often described in metaphorical terms of purity, opposing cleanliness with dirtiness. In their chapter "Dirt, Pollution, and Purity: A Metaphoric Perspective on Morality," psychologists Chen-Bo Zong and Julian House explore linguistics, anthropology, and psychology to better

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<sup>2</sup>Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, x.

<sup>3</sup>George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago Press, 1980). My discovery of Lakoff and Johnson's work is thanks to the work of Mark Landau, Michael Robinson, and Brian Meier, eds., *The Power of Metaphor: Examining Its Influence on Social Life* (American Psychological Association, 2014). In this work they not only develop the conceptual metaphor theory Lakoff and Johnson pioneered but also clarify the controversy surrounding it. While a broad range of researchers and theorists affirm and support the claims of conceptual metaphor theory, it is not universally accepted. For the purposes of this project, I am accepting conceptual metaphor theory and the research built around it. Developing the arguments against it is beyond the scope of this project.

understand how metaphoric language describing abstract concepts such as morality reveals and shapes our embodied human experience. This begins when we are very young. “During conceptual development, human beings first acquire lower level, concrete knowledge through direct experience with the environment before grasping more complex and abstract concepts. The concrete concepts learned early on can then serve as a metaphoric scaffolding to aid the comprehension of abstract concepts.”<sup>4</sup> Young children first experience the concrete difference between temperatures, hot and cold, or distance, near and far. These experiences later help them to make sense of things such as anticipating a future event that feels “far away” or understanding a tense social interaction as being “cold.” Zong and House demonstrate how our understanding of morality is shaped by our concrete experiences with cleanliness and contamination, so much so that we make moral judgments about people based on how literally clean or dirty they are. In one study, individuals standing nearer to a hand-sanitizer dispenser made harsher moral judgments than those not placed near a dispenser.<sup>5</sup> The closer a person was to a symbol of cleanliness, the more critical they were of the moral “cleanliness” of others.

Metaphors connect our interactions with the physical world with our earliest experiences, but they also affect how we act and interact in the physical world today, much more than we realize. No matter how old we get, we still have that child in our brain who needs to make sense of this complicated world of emotions and ideas through things we can see, touch, taste, hear, and smell. Pastor, your job description leaves a lot to the imagination. Every day you have to choose what you will tackle, what tasks you’ll make time for, what people you’ll make time for. Your decisions do not come out of a vacuum. You have been shaped by symbols and metaphors more than you realize. You have created, over time, a pastoral imaginary. Hopefully, that formation is grounded in the symbols and metaphors of Christian Scripture. The Holy Spirit has

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<sup>4</sup>Chen-Bo Zhong and Julian House, “Dirt, Pollution, and Purity: A Metaphoric Perspective on Morality,” in Landau et al., *Power of Metaphor*, 115.

<sup>5</sup>Zhong and House, “Dirt, Pollution, and Purity,” 109-26.

inspired Scripture to capture the power of metaphor, and we would do well to pay attention.

Scripture is bursting with metaphors. After all, the Word became flesh, not metaphorically but literally. The indescribable God entered into concrete physical, human reality. In the incarnation, God meets our childlike brain by becoming a child. In her book *The God Who Provides*, Juliana Claassens argues, “The Bible speaks the language of imagination and articulates beliefs about God and the world’s relationship to God in metaphor, symbol, and myth.” As a biblical scholar, Claassens recognizes the power of metaphor for understanding Christian faith. Metaphors have the potential to create new meaning and give birth to new understanding of our relationship with God and others. *The God Who Provides* is dedicated to giving a fuller examination of biblical metaphors for God’s divine nourishment because these metaphors bridge our imagination of a God we cannot see with the concrete realities in our world, such as a mother nursing her child. The concrete realities then give new understanding to God’s character, nature, and work in the world. A pivotal task of pastors and theologians, Claassens argues, is to uncover metaphors that have “the power to lure us into the world [Scripture] imagines and shape the way we view God and life in the world.”<sup>6</sup>

We will be shaped by metaphors whether we are aware of it or not. But we still have to ask: Are these metaphors faithfully pointing us to the scriptural witness of God’s life and work in this world? Will we be shaped by these metaphors in such a way that we resemble more and more the heart of God who took on flesh?

As a seminary student, I was asked to write a philosophy of ministry. What could be more abstract than a philosophy of ministry? To be fair, this was meant to be a practical tool, something I could send to churches searching for a pastor whose philosophy and worldview might fit well in their particular context. The work of pastoral ministry is highly contextual and fluid, adapting to locality, history, relationships, situations,

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<sup>6</sup>L. Juliana M. Claassens, *The God Who Provides: Biblical Images of Divine Nourishment* (Abingdon, 2004), xvi, xvii.

and so on. For most, it's a role that does not come with many clearly prescribed schedules or an instruction manual. As I have pastored in four states in a variety of congregational settings, that philosophy of ministry I wrote twenty years ago has been rather useless, a string of disembodied, abstract theological statements that are difficult to translate in concrete ministry circumstances. I've come to rely more and more on metaphors to help translate those abstract concepts. But I am realizing that using a metaphor is doing more than translating an abstract concept to make it understandable; it is creating a fusion of horizons between my hopes and aims for ministry and the place and people God has given me to serve.

Religious metaphors are much more than rhetorical seasoning on the meat and potatoes of theology and biblical studies. They provide new avenues to embody abstract concepts such as faith, hope, and love. The work of pastors and theologians in employing metaphors is to invite others into the world of God's new creation. My deep hope for my work with the particular metaphor I explore in this book—pastor as midwife—is to invite pastors and church leaders into a world where God is making all things new and we have been called on to assist in the birth of the new creation. But I recognize that our imagination is much more shaped by other metaphors—too many to explore, to be sure. Just as no one metaphor alone can fully describe God, no one metaphor can singularly sum up the work of Christian ministry. We need a variety of metaphors, knowing that each and every one falls short of fully describing God's work in the world. Even metaphors from Scripture are co-opted by our experiences in a world of empires and enemies rather than our experiences in God's kingdom of neighbors. Those images, then, are running like a filter for the metaphors of Scripture, interpreting the abstract nature of God's salvation with concrete actions and identities that might be a far cry from the scriptural witness. As much as metaphors can be life-giving and generative, it is vital to note that metaphors can go very, very wrong.

## A METAPHOR GONE WRONG

Somewhere in nearly every pastor's study I have even been in, there's an image of a shepherd's staff, maybe even a picture of cuddly sheep with a surprisingly well-groomed shepherd tending to its needs. Pastor as shepherd is perhaps the oldest and most vivid image metaphor for pastoral ministry still in use today. It is deeply rooted in Scripture, as we see that God is the shepherd and we are the sheep, loved, protected, fed in green pastures, and led by still waters (e.g., Ps 23). Jesus functions as the perfect model of the Good Shepherd—the one who binds up the weak, searches for the lost, and lays down his life for the sheep. In John's Gospel, when Jesus declares, "I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11), it's clear that he is drawing a comparison with bad shepherds. The people of Israel would have remembered Ezekiel's scathing critique of the shepherds of Israel: "You eat the fat; you clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatted calves, but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak; you have not healed the sick; you have not bound up the injured; you have not brought back the strays; you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them" (Ezek 34:3-4). Ezekiel declares to these bad shepherds that God is coming to take back the shepherd's staff they have abused.

Jesus, then, is not like any shepherd. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to the people of Israel. The staff is back in divine hands. Peter is then compelled to take on the work of Jesus and feed his sheep in Jesus' absence as a labor of love (Jn 21:17). Obviously, Jesus is not asking Peter to literally go out to a pasture and graze a flock. Jesus is using a metaphor to create an imaginary role for Peter to live into. Pastors down through the centuries have imagined themselves, like Peter, feeding and leading the flock of Christ. Even the term *pastor* is derived from the Latin word for "shepherd." But somewhere down the line of the tribe of Peter, the metaphor of pastor as shepherd has gone terribly wrong.

In a devotional blog reflecting on the Good Shepherd in John 10, Mark Driscoll unpacks his understanding of the metaphorical application of the sheep and shepherd and what that means for a congregation and pastor.

In Driscoll's imagination, sheep are described only in terms of their vulnerability and inability. Neither smart nor strong, they cannot defend themselves against the many perils that lurk around them. The shepherd, on the other hand, is described as the protector, who lives in isolation, dedicated to the work of defending the flock, and is the only hope these sheep have of survival. The message is clear: Without the spiritual leadership of a pastor, the Christian is in danger.<sup>7</sup>

Driscoll's use of the metaphor assumes several things. First, the goal of the Christian sheep is merely to survive. Second, the world is a danger from which Christian sheep need protecting. Third, the primary responsibility of the shepherd is to defend the sheep against predators. While Driscoll's vision of this metaphor is shared by many pastors today, even by some pastors who would want to distance themselves from Driscoll's leadership tactics (which we will explore later), it is a great departure from the actual scriptural depiction of a shepherd who leads the flock to green pastures and beside still waters, opens the gate so the sheep can come and go, and—perhaps most significant for the Christian faith—lays down their life for the sheep.

In *The Shepherd as Leader*, an edited volume of several popular addresses from the Shepherds Conference led by John MacArthur, Steven Lawson takes the image of the shepherd as defender and protector to a different task. In a chapter titled "Guarding the Gospel," Lawson argues that it is the gospel that needs defending, like vulnerable sheep under attack. Specifically, attacks are aimed at the purity and exclusivity of the gospel, evoking fear at the idea of the gospel being defiled. He notes a slogan in an athletic arena that reads, "We must protect this house," a rallying cry to pump up a room filled with gladiators. He goes on to charge, "Shepherds, we must protect this gospel."<sup>8</sup> In the chapter, he tells stories of martyrs who have laid down their lives—not in the care of sheep/people

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<sup>7</sup>Mark Driscoll, "Jesus Is Our Good Shepherd," Real Faith, 2021, <https://realfaith.com/daily-devotions/jesus-is-our-good-shepherd>.

<sup>8</sup>Steven J. Lawson, "Guarding the Gospel," in *The Shepherd as Leader*, ed. John MacArthur (Harvest House, 2016), chap. 8, Kindle.

but, according to Lawson, in the defense of the purity and exclusivity of the gospel. He tells many stories to illustrate his point, but in all these stories the only woman Lawson mentions is Mary Queen of Scots, the repentant villain who is spiritually slain by the sharp words of John Knox and begins howling “like a wounded animal.”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps she sounded like a bleating sheep. Like Driscoll, Lawson’s image of the shepherd is geared primarily toward defense and protection, placing the church in a defensive posture toward the world. This metaphor of pastor as shepherd, not only in Lawson’s description but throughout MacArthur’s edited volume, takes on a hypermasculine, aggressive paranoia in which enemies are everywhere—a vision of a shepherd that would be unrecognizable to the biblical authors who first spun this metaphor into our imagination.

One of the first shepherds we see in Scripture is David, the youngest son of Jesse. David is small, and nothing about his physical appearance suggests that he is a natural warrior or defender. When David battles Goliath, he brings only the weapons of a shepherd: a slingshot and a few stones. In contrast, 1 Samuel 17 contains several verses describing the height, strength, and impressive weaponry of Goliath. Goliath is the gladiator anyone would want fighting for them. The sight of David preparing to battle Goliath is laughable only because we know how God will work and how the story ends. If we didn’t know how the story ends, this scene would be grotesque, horrifying, and unjust. The little shepherd boy is seemingly marching to his doom to be mangled for sport in front of a crowd with the blessing of the authorities. Incredibly, the little shepherd boy is not brutalized by the giant. He manages to bring down the aggressor with a child’s toy. This is the delightfully surprising and almost laughable image that Scripture gives to us of the shepherd leader. He is far from John Wayne on horseback and much closer to the suffering servant we see in Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Lawson, “Guarding the Gospel.”

<sup>10</sup>I am borrowing the image of John Wayne as the hypermasculine Messiah created in Western White culture from Kristen Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (Liveright, 2020).

Our modern society knows little of the humble work of animal husbandry. In the place of that knowledge gap, we have developed a vision of leadership from the corner office. We have heard the story of the great King David so often that we have forgotten the joke, and it is easy to speak of the shepherd leader while imagining someone much more like Goliath than David. To be fair, who wouldn't choose the gladiator over the runt?

The problem for the shepherd metaphor for pastors today has nothing to do with the beautiful Christlike imagery offered to us in Scripture and everything to do with the fusion of horizons created when we replace the image of David with that of Goliath. The shepherd leader becomes a CEO pastor or a dogma gladiator. The rod and staff can be used metaphorically to excuse any number of forceful tactics to prod people along, couched in the language of "protecting the flock." While the psalmist finds comfort in the rod and the staff of the shepherd, the irony of this deformed image of the shepherd as protector/defender/gladiator is that it actually serves to protect the control and power of the pastor and not the flock.

In 2021 *Christianity Today* produced a podcast, *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*, that documents Mark Driscoll's abuse of power at Mars Hill Church in Seattle. The story is complex, and *Christianity Today's* telling of it is not without its own controversy. But the reporting makes clear that Driscoll's authority and position led many to excuse his behavior toward staff and pastors and his dehumanization of women.<sup>11</sup> He was their shepherd. According to Driscoll's logic, without a shepherd the flock would be in danger. Fear is an easy tool to control people. When people are afraid, they will flock to gladiators. It is tempting to scapegoat Driscoll, to send him off into the wilderness (or in this case, Arizona, where he is currently pastoring) carrying our sins far away. His platform was so wide, and his offenses made so public; like Goliath, the bigger they are, the harder they fall. The church should be careful not to hide in his shadow the thousands of pastors who suit up to be the gladiator in the pulpit every

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<sup>11</sup>Mike Cospser, "Aftermath," *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill* (podcast), December 2021, [www.christianitytoday.com/podcasts/the-rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/mars-hill-podcast-driscoll-finale-aftermath/](http://www.christianitytoday.com/podcasts/the-rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/mars-hill-podcast-driscoll-finale-aftermath/).

Sunday with this image of the pastor as shepherd in mind, excusing tactics of control and manipulation of spiritual authority for the sake of the flock. It is no wonder that when the people of Israel wanted to make Jesus—son of David—their king, he left his role of shepherd to become the slain lamb.

These abuses of the shepherd metaphor don't mean we need to abandon it altogether and lose all the illuminating images Scripture gives us to light the way of the Good Shepherd. But we desperately need new metaphors for pastoral ministry that create new fusions of horizons if we hope to break our obsession with power and control and be surprised with the goodness of the gospel. The pastor as midwife disrupts the assumptions of pastor as Goliath/shepherd. And just like the shepherd metaphor, there is a treasure of biblical narratives and illustrations to feed our imagination. Before we turn to those images, I hope you will take a moment to consider how the metaphor of pastor as shepherd might have shaped your imagination of pastoral ministry, the role of the body of Christ, the work of the Spirit, and the presence of neighbors and strangers. Hold it all loosely as we explore some new possibilities for life in ministry.

### MIDWIFE AS A METAPHOR

Midwifery is among the oldest of vocations in every corner of the world. Instead of inquiring about chicken and egg, you could just as easily ask, *Which came first, the baby or the midwife?* It's a timeless metaphor that has been used across cultures and generations as a concrete practice that makes sense of other more abstract vocations. In Plato's dialogue between Socrates and Theaetetus, Socrates muses that he, as teacher, has been midwife to the new understanding dawning on Theaetetus.<sup>12</sup> The use of this metaphor is incredibly revelatory about the way Socrates imagines and engages his work as teacher. The Socratic method is a unique mode of teaching in which the teacher assumes there is wisdom already within the student—like a baby within a mother—and the role of the teacher is to deliver that already existent wisdom. It also reveals what Socrates is *not*

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<sup>12</sup>Plato, *Theaetetus and Sophist*, ed. Christopher Rowe (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 27.

attempting to do. He is not imposing his knowledge on the pupil. He is not molding, shaping, imparting, or constructing (all very different metaphors) the knowledge of the student. Socrates comes alongside the laborer and welcomes the arrival of new wisdom.

The metaphor of midwife is used to describe hospice ministry with the dying. In her book *Midwife for Souls*, Kathy Kalina draws parallels between the progression of birth and the progression of death. As a veteran hospice chaplain, she began accompanying a midwife friend on her prenatal visits. She was struck by the similarities between birth and death. Kalina sees this metaphor as a way to help hospice workers restore dignity to the dying, since in their death they are born to new life. Instead of seeing death as an enemy against which we must employ the full arsenal of the medical system to wage all-out war, Kalina takes a “natural, gentle approach to an intimate and life-changing family event, with careful attention to the body, mind and spirit of the patient as well as to the family throughout the process.”<sup>13</sup>

Margaret Guenther uses midwifery as a fertile depiction of the art of spiritual direction. In her book *Holy Listening*, Guenther uses the metaphor of midwife to highlight the reality that the Spirit is at work in the life of the person to whom the spiritual director is attending. Like a midwife, Guenther’s role is to come alongside the laboring process in another person’s life and care for them as the new creation arrives.<sup>14</sup>

Reflecting on her experience giving birth alongside a midwife and doula, Pastor Libby Tedder Hugus sees the metaphor of God as midwife as one who leads us by invitation. She describes this leadership style as reflective of the “uncontrolling, mutually empowering, cooperative way” in which God creates.<sup>15</sup> She invites leaders to consider the way in which God leads, like a midwife leads in birth, and model their leadership as such.

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<sup>13</sup>Kathy Kalina, *Midwife for Souls: Spiritual Care for the Dying* (Pauline Books and Media, 1994), 21.

<sup>14</sup>Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1992).

<sup>15</sup>Libby Tedder Hugus, “God Leads Like a Midwife,” in *Open and Relational Leadership: Leading with Love*, ed. Roland Hearn, Sheri D. Kling, and Thomas J. Oord (SacraSage, 2020), 62.

In each of these uses of the midwifery metaphor, there is an assumption of new life being born out of the old. It assumes that there is something deep within us aching to find its way into this world or the next. Metaphor helps us say what we can't say any other way, making sense of our complicated reality, but it also helps us imagine what we can't imagine any other way, and in doing so, helps us act, dare, try, and dream in a new fusion of horizons.

While I've found the literature employing this metaphor helpful and illuminating, it left me with more questions than answers. Is that really how a midwife works? Does our assumption about the concrete practice of midwifery we use to make sense of these rather abstract vocations faithfully depict the expertise of those who have given their life to birth work? These were questions that could only be answered by real midwives, OB-GYNs, doulas, and birth workers.

The church board that interviewed me eventually called me to be its pastor. Over the years, the congregation and I have developed an imagination of pastoral work as midwifing God's new creation. I probably ask more questions of them than they do of me, questions such as, "What might God be up to? How have you seen God at work in your life, in our church, and in our neighborhood?" The most beautiful things that have developed in our ministry together have not been my ideas. The Spirit of God was already at work in this congregation and in our neighborhood. We have discovered the seeds of God's new creation. As we turn to the scriptural story of God birthing creation, salvation, and sanctification, you might come to see the work of God in a new light. Pastor, I hope the story of Scripture gives you a holy imagination for the way you live and move and have your being (Acts 17:28) in this concrete world enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

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