



# Recommended by Presbyterian Leaders in Canada: 12 MUST-READ BOOKS

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Presbyterians love to read! We get asked for book recommendations on all different topics related to ministry on a regular basis. This time, we decided to ask you—leaders in Presbyterian ministries in Canada—what books you’d recommend for other leaders. Responding to the question, “What book has most influenced your ministry in the last year,” your colleagues and peers provided the following recommendations.

## ***Rehearsing Scripture: Discovering God’s Word in Community*** (Eerdmans, 2018)

By Anna Carter Florence

*Rehearsing Scripture* is a book that has changed my ministry. Thirty years of positioning myself as the resident expert “Bible Guy” who went to school and read big books had made me deaf to the insights that reading Scripture in community can reveal. I had the good fortune to hear Anna Carter Florence present at a conference in Winnipeg, and her humour and her straightforward wisdom born of teaching and preaching experience comes through on every page. This book has transformed Bible study and sermon preparation for me—and for the people I discover God’s Word with.

*The Rev. Rob Murray, Pinawa Christian Fellowship, an ecumenical shared ministry in Pinawa, Manitoba*

## ***Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just*** (Penguin, 2012)

By Timothy Keller

Over the past few years, I’ve found myself drawn to issues of social justice. This book opened my eyes to how we can and should use God’s example to approach justice. In this book, Keller does a wonderful job of looking at justice both theologically and practically. He delves deep into how and why Christ has called us to live in peace with and love our neighbours, especially those who are vulnerable, financially poor or in need. Keller’s use of concrete examples and helpful anecdotes provide readers with a clear vision of what justice looks like when it is rooted in God’s grace and modeled on Jesus’ example.

*The Rev. Torrey Griffiths, Kensington Presbyterian Church and St. John’s Presbyterian Church, Prince Edward Island*

## ***A Bigger Table: Building Messy, Authentic, and Hopeful Spiritual Community*** (Westminster John Knox Press, 2017)

By John Pavlovitz

I would encourage those in our church to read *A Bigger Table: Building Messy, Authentic, and Hopeful Spiritual Community*. In this insightful book, John Pavlovitz writes about the many blessings and challenges that come with creating and maintaining diverse spiritual communities. Pavlovitz makes

the case that, while it can present some challenges, diversity is our strength. It is a thought-provoking and inspiring read for congregations (and denominations!) that are coming to recognize the differences within them.

*The Rev. Brad Blaikie, Summerside Presbyterian Church, Prince Edward Island*

### ***The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*** (Doubleday, 1979)

By Henri J.M. Nouwen

As Presbyterian leaders, our service and ministry has stresses and strains. We have concerns on many levels around finance, attendance, doctrine, division and burnout. Nouwen's book helps to keep us centered on true Christian ministry and leadership. It's through our weaknesses and woundedness that we find points of connection where ministry can grow, and the ministry of Christ can flourish.

*The Rev. Peter Ma, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Markham, Ontario*

### ***Love Big, Be Well: Letters to a Small-Town Church*** (Eerdmans 2017)

By Winn Collier

This book of letters begins with a search committee trying to find the right pastor for their small Presbyterian congregation. Jonas responds; he is a minister who been disillusioned by the contemporary church but who is ready to try again. What follows are beautiful letters from a pastor to the congregation he loves and imperfectly leads. With these letters, themes of embodied theology, pastoral care, congregational conflict and vocation are explored through the small congregation and their pastor. While this is a book of fiction, it rings true. Read this book to be reminded of why you were called into ministry.

*The Rev. Theresa McDonald-Lee, Executive Director, Camp Kintail*

### ***This Odd and Wonderful Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers*** (Eerdmans, 2009)

By Lillian Daniels and Martin Copenhaver

If I had to choose the one book that has had the greatest impact on my ministry, it would be *This Odd and Wonderful Calling*. This book, which is a brilliant blend of the practical, theological and pastoral, is a beautiful reminder of the small joys of faith in daily life that often get overlooked. Daniels and Copenhaver encourage readers to be present in the moment and to find things to be grateful for—even if it is the 53rd minute in a meeting!

The authors also reframe the challenges, heartbreak and struggles of pastoral ministry in a way that helps readers see things in a new light or, at the very least, find a little laughter. One other aspect of this book that I deeply appreciate is that it includes the ministry experiences and perspectives of a young woman. Women's voices can be hard to find in books about ministry, so I really valued learning from Lillian Daniel's experience. This book is a wonderful read and one that is easy to come back to often.

*The Rev. Amanda Henderson Bolton, St. James Presbyterian Church, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island*

### ***Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*** (InterVarsity Press, 2016)

By Tish Harrison Warren

This is a great resource for leaders wanting to encourage congregational members to make greater connections between what happens on Sundays with the rest of the week. In this easy-to-read

book, Warren takes the reader through the ins and outs of a regular day and shows us how overlooked moments such as brushing teeth, sitting in traffic and fighting with spouses are really moments of formation and transformation. Since reading this book the way I experience my days has changed. Waking has become a call to worship, losing my keys has become a reminder of my need for confession and sending emails has become an opportunity for sending and blessing.

This resource is suitable for a book study for congregations looking for a good discipleship tool.

*Jen de Combe, Associate Secretary of Canadian Ministries, Toronto*

### ***As One with Authority, Second Edition: Reflective Leadership in Ministry***

(Cascade Books, 2011)

By Jackson W. Carroll

When I am asked what the best book on clergy leadership in a congregational setting is, the answer is easy: *As One with Authority* by Jackson Carroll. Carroll, a retired sociology of religion professor, observes congregational leadership with an academic's mind and a pastor's heart. He brings a wide range of wisdom to the topics he covers. This book's most critical contributions to this field include:

- a helpful and nuanced description of clergy authority in leadership in congregational settings, including what it is and what it isn't in the cultural climate of our age;
- a framing of leadership as a "reflection-on-action" habit that continuously reframes a situation from different points-of-view and experiences until a situation requiring leadership is understood;
- an explanation of how a pastor "represents the sacred" so congregational change is an act of faithfulness.

Just writing this review has reminded me that I'm ready for my fourth read of this book. It's that good.

*The Rev. Peter Coutts, Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church, Calgary*

### ***Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World*** (Zondervan, 2018)

By Andy Stanley

In a world where young people are leaving the church at an increasing rate, Stanley challenges us to rethink the origins of our faith and how we communicate about it with the next generation. "The Bible tells me so" approach just won't cut it anymore. Instead, Stanley suggests that we need to give context to our teaching.

Stanley argues that Jesus left us with one rule "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). This simple, albeit challenging, command no longer asks, "What do I have to follow to be right with God" but instead, "What does love require of me?" When we focus on the power of the resurrection and leave the rules and expectations of the old covenant behind, we have the potential to transform a generation of new Christians. This book is a must read (or listen for audiobook lovers) for ministers and lay people looking to teach and speak into the lives of kids, teens and young adults in today's world.

*Lauren Wasylyuk, Christian Educator, Kitchener, Ontario*

### ***An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*** (HarperOne, 2010)

By Barbara Brown Taylor

In *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor weaves earthy practices into spiritual life. But far from being a new-age resource, Taylor offers ancient, practical paradigms and liturgies for everyday

life. From the practice of blessing, to the practice of paying attention, from the practice of walking on the Earth, to the practice of saying no, she cleverly uses pedestrian tasks and points out where God is already at work in the seemingly mundane.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes, “My life depends on engaging the most ordinary physical activities with the most exquisite attention I can give them. My life depends on ignoring all touted distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul.” This is a helpful resource for the pastor looking to restore their soul or the newcomer to the faith looking for meaning in the midst of minutia.

*The Rev. Konnie Vissers, St. Paul’s Presbyterian, Leaskdale, Ontario.*

### ***The Equipping Church: Serving Together to Transform Lives*** (Zondervan, 2001)

By Sue Mallory

This book is an excellent guide for churches looking to create a culture in which lay people know their spiritual gifts, have places to use those gifts, and are trained and supported as they serve. The Biblical foundation of the model Mallory proposes is based on the concept of “the priesthood of all believers.” This model works best when churches train and support lay people in the roles God is calling them to fulfill in church while also supporting them to live fully the lives God has gifted them with beyond the church walls.

Mallory gives practical tools for assessing how to equip fully while not overwhelming people. She also reminds readers that building an equipping culture and system in churches is slow work. This book contains encouraging stories of churches who took years to build strong foundations that are now bearing fruit. This kind of patience and holding the vision over long periods of time is essential for Christian discipleship to flourish. Mallory shares her church’s story of success as well the stories of other churches that successfully applied a similar equipping approach to ministry but in very different ways. This book provides many helpful insights for ministry leaders looking to creatively and contextually equip lay people.

*Ashlee Campbell, Discipleship Pastor, Knox Presbyterian Church, Toronto*

### ***Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation*** (Gouvernement du Québec, 2008)

A Report by Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor (available as a PDF online)

I recommend that Presbyterian leaders read this report with our roles as theologians, pastors and servants of Christ in mind. It will help us to advocate for fair and peaceful living for all people in the current climate of secularism within which many of us find ourselves. Our aim in spreading the news of salvation through Jesus Christ must be inclusive in nature in multicultural and intercultural contexts. We must be willing to get to know and support the people in our neighbourhoods and cities, even if they are different than us. As stated in this report at the end of the first page, we must engage in dialogue to come to mutual understanding. This beautiful document argues that the main objective of modern society should be the desire to cultivate harmonious living together. In my opinion, this includes the practice of reasonable accommodation, which is an act of pastoral care on the socio-cultural level. The church can also draw inspiration from this report to develop modern and inclusive missionary and evangelizing strategies.

*The Rev Eloi Agbanou, Siloam Congregation, Montreal*