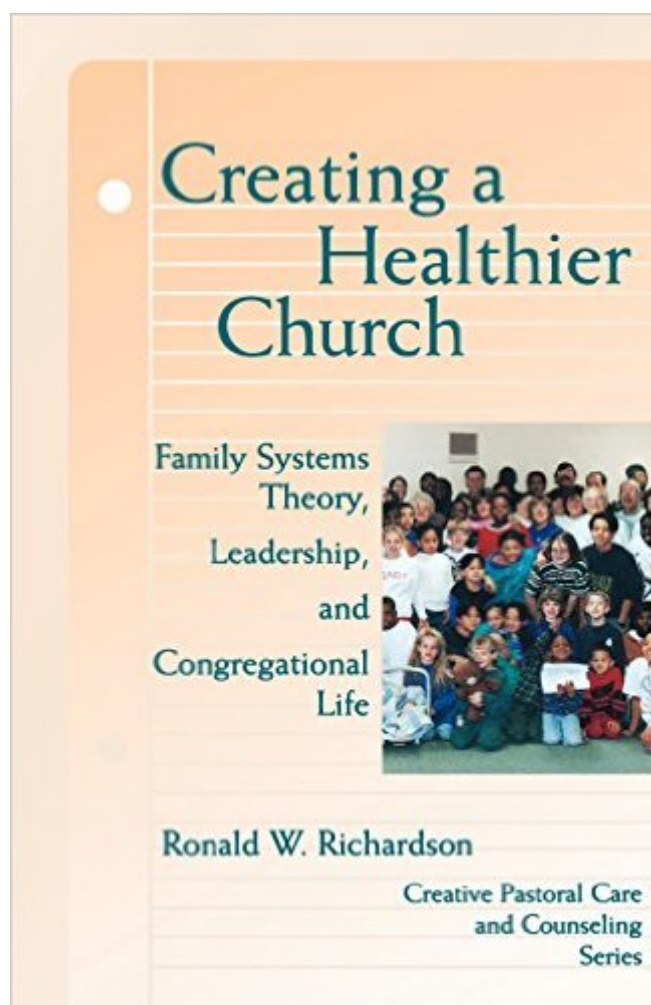


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# Creating A Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership And Congregational Life (Creative Pastoral Care And Counseling Series)



## Synopsis

Ronald W. Richardson helps us to understand how congregations function emotionally. Without being simplistic, he gives clear directions on how to improve their quality of life together and function more effectively in achieving mission goals. This book offers: A theory about human behavior that will aid understanding of how things can get out of control in the human community of the church; A practical set of leadership ideas and behaviors; Guidelines for how to behave in the midst of upsetting and conflictual circumstances; Personal steps that leaders in the church can take to become more positive forces for healing and cooperation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ronald Richardson is a retired pastor and counselor who has written "Creating a Healthier Church" as an introduction to and explanation of Family Systems Theory and especially how such emotional systems operate in a church. The book begins with a description of a series of stressful events that (coincidentally) take place at two neighboring churches on a Sunday morning; one church reacts reasonably calmly to the events while the other church quickly sinks into a pattern of alternately attacking and withdrawing from one another. One can understand these events through an understanding of Family Systems. While Family Systems Theory is complex and requires an understanding of many interlocking parts, Richardson does an admirable job of explaining the various components that explain why people act the way they do. His method is eclectic as he uses many object with which the reader is probably familiar (a mobile, the concept of wisdom, etc.) to

explain the various motivations of people in church situations and the way in which these people relate to one another. Especially interesting in this book is a chapter on the relationship between birth order and personality traits—a topic not normally included in Family Systems books. This reader found the book both well written, well explained, and helpful. Personalizing (via the above mentioned fictitious accounts as well as other stories) was appreciated as was the order in which various concepts were introduced. However, while Systems Theory was explained well, where the author is weak is his advice on how to conduct oneself within a System...yet the idiosyncratic nature of particular Systems make such a section difficult to author.

A review of Ronald W. Richardson's book, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life*. Richardson does a fabulous job of applying Bowen's theory (family systems theory) to church congregations. He illustrates the differences between two congregations dealing with similar problems. In 1986, Richardson offered courses for clergy based on the Family Systems Theory (FST) after clergy reported how his application of FST was revolutionizing how they dealt and thought about problems within their own congregations. Yet, the most notable change that they reported was "their own role in relation to these problems" (22). Richardson clearly states that his book is not about the one and only correct way for leaders to lead. Instead, he suggests that his book can be a tool to assist clergy in thinking about their function within their churches and how they relate to others. Leadership is any kind of decision-making position or role and therefore, FST is not just for the top clergy or leaders (20). The questions Richardson addresses are: 1) What is happening when a church gets into difficulties and the leadership seems to be making things worse rather than helping resolve the problem? 2) How can we explain things going well at one church where leaders are able to avoid the emotional outbursts and turmoil that is common in another church? 3) What in our human nature including our strengths and liabilities, and in the way we organize ourselves in groups make things go well or poorly as we deal with difficult situations? Richardson addresses these questions and offers the reader the following resources.

A Review by Eric F. Newell April 10, 2002 An insightful understanding of interpersonal dynamics, this writing affords an insightful look at relations in the church. Using as a point of reference, the author describes two churches that meet a situation within the church from two opposite positions. Using the Family Systems Theory as a basis for the writing, Richardson tells that the dynamics of relationship, "specifically in the church, are based in cultural, structural communication, decision,

and economic systems. These systems are fairly easy to change if necessary. The system most difficult to change is the emotional system." (p.29) Using the model of a mobile, he speaks of the delicate balance with which it hangs. There will always be times of imbalance in the churches emotional system. "What is important is how these times of imbalance turn out. The outcome as to whether they are positive or negative depends upon the action and reaction of the church leadership as well as the lay leadership." (p.30). Differences in these emotional systems are more difficult to address as persons begin to personalize the issues. "The skill for learning how to deal with these systems is the ability to be a good observer. Stepping outside of what we feel is happening and being able to see what is actually taking place." (p.31) Anxiety can bring unbalance to the system. This is intensified in proportion to sense of threat that persons feel within a given situation. When there is the sense of not having control, the feeling that one does not know what is going on, there is a higher sense of anxiety. As the leadership is able to step outside of the subjective to the objective side of the situation, they will be able to bring a sense of calm to people around them.

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