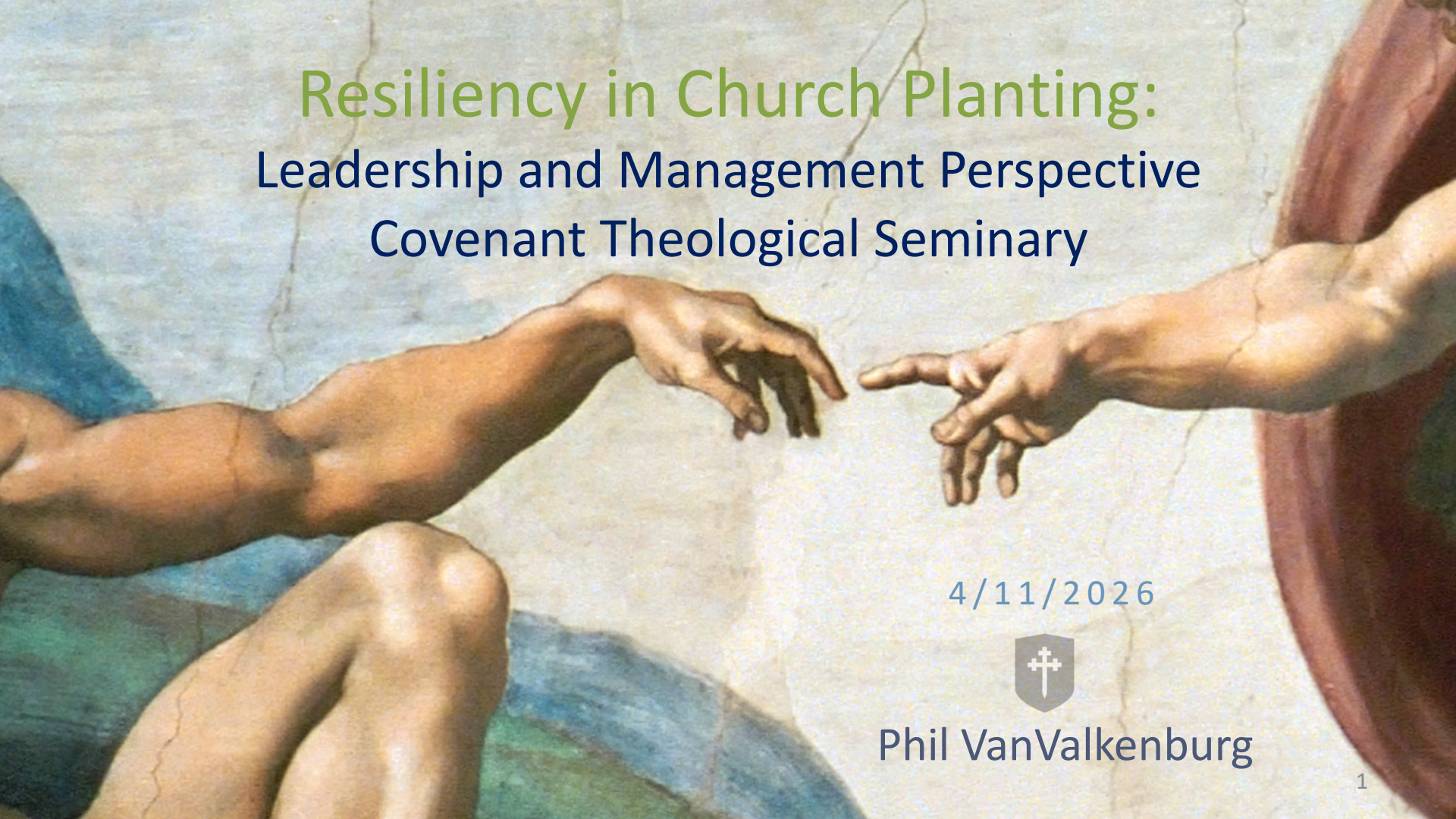

Resiliency in Church Planting:

Leadership and Management Perspective

Covenant Theological Seminary

4/11/2026

Phil VanValkenburg

TITLE and OUTLINE FOR THE SESSION

Presentation by
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What Seminary May NOT Teach about Leading and Managing a Church, but you Need to Know as a Planter and Pastor.

- **Outline:**
  - Perspectives on church leadership complexity
  - People ministry and management ministry
  - Leading a healthy church
  - Managing a healthy church
  - Church plant launch/management pathways

Dilemma: Churches must perform many essential functions, but the pastor can't and shouldn't focus on and excel at all tasks. How can you survive and thrive with this challenge?

MY LIFETIME PERSPECTIVE: Blend of ministry and business leadership and management

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- Ministry executive for >25 years
  - Consultant to planters, established churches, and ministries
  - PCA church executive at The Kirk (STL) & Grace North Shore (Chicago)
  - National EPC: Chief Operating Officer (COO)
  - Board member: Auxilio, Nicene Network, Ministry to State (in MNA)
  - Training and Personnel Manager at Cru headquarters
- Officer in church plants plus small & large Presbyterian churches
  - Ruling elder: EPC churches (10 years), PCA church (26 years)
  - MO Presbytery: Moderator, Chair of 2021 GA host committee, MNA Committee Chair, temporary Session clerk (Columbia, Cape Girardeau)
  - National PCA: Administrative Committee (chairman 2 years)
- Business executive (with MBA) for 25 years
  - Major and startup product & service company experience
  - Marketing, supply chain, & financial management
  - Consultant: business process, systems & performance improvement
  - Project director: IT & strategies (communications, transition, legal)

Perspectives on church leadership complexity

Christ as Head leads his Church as Prophet, Priest, and King*

Inter-connected leadership roles for the local church

Prophetic role: What is God telling us now? Truthful, contextual, and applicable proclamation of Scripture; visionary leadership.	Priestly role: How to care for and guide God's people? Relationships, compassion, counseling, intercession.	Kingly role: How to organize and govern for desired outcomes? Plans, strategies, structure, management, resources, policies.

Challenge: All functions are essential. Can pastors effectively fill all roles by themselves. On what should church planting pastors focus? How will all roles be accomplished?

** Calvin's three-fold office, WCF 8-1, John Frame (triperspectivalism), Tim Keller, Dan Allender*

Perspectives on church leadership complexity

Source: Jim Dethmer, former teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church

Perspectives on church leadership complexity

A healthy church must balance and integrate all three elements

Church Element	Goal	Core Values	Leader Roles
Cause (Military)	**Mission & Winning**	**Strength & Commitment**	**General, Prophet**
Community (Family)	**Fellowship & Care**	**Love & Acceptance**	**Father, Brother, Priest, Shepherd**
Corporation (Business)	**Effectiveness & Efficiency**	**Order & Stewardship**	**CEO, King, Overseer**

Leader rarely excels in all three roles. Which are typical church planter strengths? What happens when we work outside our ”strike zone?” Which roles are best shared?

Perspectives on church leadership complexity

Vines need a trellis to grow and be healthy

Source: The Trellis and the Vine
By Colin Marshall & Tony Payne

- Only healthy vines produce fruit (**John 15**).
- Vineyard workers create an environment, blessed by external factors for abundant grape production.
  - Internal controllable factors:
    - Cultivate, nourish, water, protect, prune to help vines grow and bear fruit.
    - Build and maintain trellis structure on which vines can and must grow.
  - Balance and harmony: Sufficient design and strong stable structure to support the living organism, but they are never primary vineyard goals. Trellis should be barely visible as a means, not an end.

What are examples of vines in a church? What would serve as a trellis in a church?

Complementary elements of church leadership

What happens to a church that over-emphasizes one element at the expense of the other? What skills are required to achieve both goals? Align personality profiles to elements.

* Resilient Ministry

Leading a Healthy Organization

From ***The Advantage***
by Patrick Lencioni

- Build a cohesive team
- Create clarity*
- Overcommunicate clarity
- Reinforce clarity

Need to agree on answers to six simple but critical questions:

1. Why do we exist?
2. How do we behave?
3. What do we do?
4. How will we succeed?
5. What is most important, right now?
6. Who must do what?

*Another resource: Vision Clarity (Auxano consulting)

Leading a Healthy Church – Create Clarity about…

Mission: Why do we exist? What is our primary purpose? Short success definition.

Vision: What God wants to do with and through us in our context. What direction are we headed? What we will be most known for in 3-5 years.

Values: Who we are. Our identity. How do we behave? What enduring traits make us unique. Our built-in DNA.

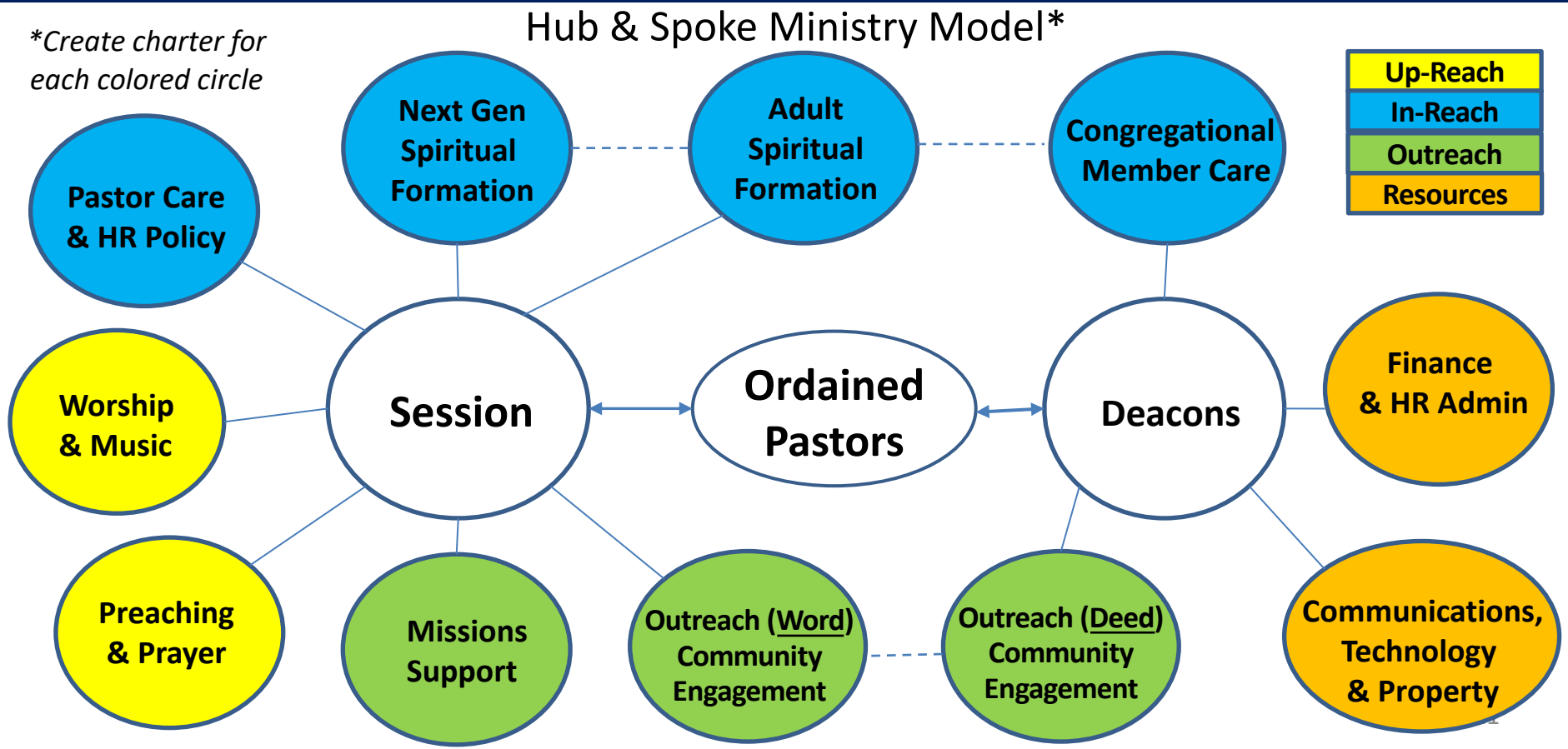
Strategy: How will we succeed in achieving our vision and mission? What anchors and initiatives leverage our strengths and grasp our best opportunities.

Goals: What is most vital now? Alignment across functions. Link actions with metrics. SMART = Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, & Time-bound

Functions: What do we do? What are our primary and essential activities?
Organization structure: Who must do what? How does each contribute to the above? Use RACI matrix.

How would collaboration help in developing these? How often should each one be refreshed? Who cares about this? How would you communicate these to church members?

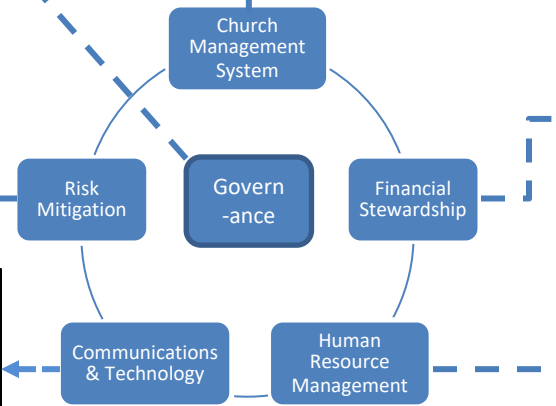
Organizing a Healthy Church – Functional Clarity



Managing a Healthy Church

- Legal identity & non-tax status
- Bylaws – members, officers, committees, meetings
- How org. decisions get made
- Strategy/operations alignment

- Record of members, visitors, families, event participation, check-in, volunteers, groups
- Receive contributions and track donors
- Communicate – email/text people & groups



- Organization stewardship plan
- Policies and procedures
- Commercial insurance
- Local legal counsel

- Budgets and reporting
- Manage income & expenses
- Accounting/payroll system, processes, and staff
- Guidelines & internal controls

- Website, e-giving, & social media
- Computers, office devices, & AI
- Shared email & document storage
- Unified communication system

- Hiring, organization, job duties
- Salary, benefits, raises
- Performance management
- Employee Handbook policies

Church must perform all these functions, but the pastor <u>can't and shouldn't do all.</u>

Church Plant Launch/Management Pathways*

Ways to manage church plant business

A. Church Planter OJT
B. Volunteers
C. Hire in-house admin
D. Partial Outsource
E. Expert Resource / Project Management
F. Complete Outsource

Complexity grows by stage of development

1. Vision and preparation (pre-field)
2. Launch and outreach (on-field)
3. Gather and worship (group formation)
4. Growth and viability (critical mass)
5. Leader development (team-building)
6. Particularization (independence)

***Legal/business complexity much higher for "scratch" vs. parent/child plant (details here)**

What other factors affect how a planter will manage the church's business? When would be key decision points in choosing or changing the management pathway?

Church Plant Launch/Management Pathways

Church Planter's Choices

1. Grow as a business manager and handle it yourself.
2. Rely on parent church until independent; then choose best pathway.
3. Recruit and manage volunteers &/or staff with right dedication, time, and skills.
4. Partner with partial or full outsource firm to manage all possible business functions.

How To Get It Done		Stages	
		Pros	Cons
Options	Church Planter [OJT]	Complete control Taps entrepreneurial talent May utilize past experience No extra expense	Distracts from core mission More time on task, less with people May not possess all right skills Learning curve inefficiency Adds stress to challenging job
	Volunteers	Good stewardship of available resource Utilize insider(s) with first-hand knowledge and access No extra expense	May lack all right skills Admin volunteer may be lower priority Face trust/accountability dilemma Risk of limited available time on task Could be short-term commitment Harder to "terminate" from role
	Hire In-House Admin	Control of employee Provides dedicated focus May be p/t position to fit need Can be insider with church knowledge Could hire externally = more options Reasonable expense	Won't cover all needed skills Provide & pay for office space & tools Member/employee risk More sensitive performance mgt. Difficult or risky to terminate
	Partial Outsource	Hire expert(s) for unique capabilities Free up to hire needed ministry staff Moderate control Can be replaced	Won't cover all needed skills Need knack & time to manage one or more vendors Transactional relationship Low or no church knowledge Information access and security risk Perhaps higher expense vs. hiring
	Project Management [Mix & Match]	Access expertise where needed Tap proven adaptable resources Get knowledge of integrated church functions and ministries Accomplish right activities at right time Maintain focus/time on mission Get big picture advice about particularization process	Requires time to guide/respond Must know how to utilize consultant Temporary not permanent active support One-time expense = cost/benefit funding Requires local learning curve Still need admin staff or outsource
	Complete Outsource	Get instant staff, technology, policies, and procedures No admin gaps to fill internally Access expertise in church operations Known predictable expense No office space or tools needed	Potential loss of local control Expense may seem greater Need vendor utilization skills Culture of church must be taught Different type of staff engagement

Questions?

Copy of Slides

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1. What happens when a pastor seeks to fill all three roles (prophet, priest, & king or cause, community & corporate)?
2. Which comes first in church planting, growing vines or building the trellis? How would you keep these in sync?
3. What happens if leadership emphasis (i.e., people or mgt. ministry) gets off-balance? How do you stay balanced?
4. Why is “creating clarity” sometimes difficult or confusing?
5. During crises or big organizational changes, how is clarity tested or helpful (as an element of church health)?
6. What aspects of managing the business of a church need explanation or examples? What if this is outside your zone?
7. What pro/con of different ways to manage church business need explanation? Which “cons” most concern you or which “pros” excite you? Who will decide which path to take?
8. What can you do in this and your next life/ministry stage to build your leadership & management skills?

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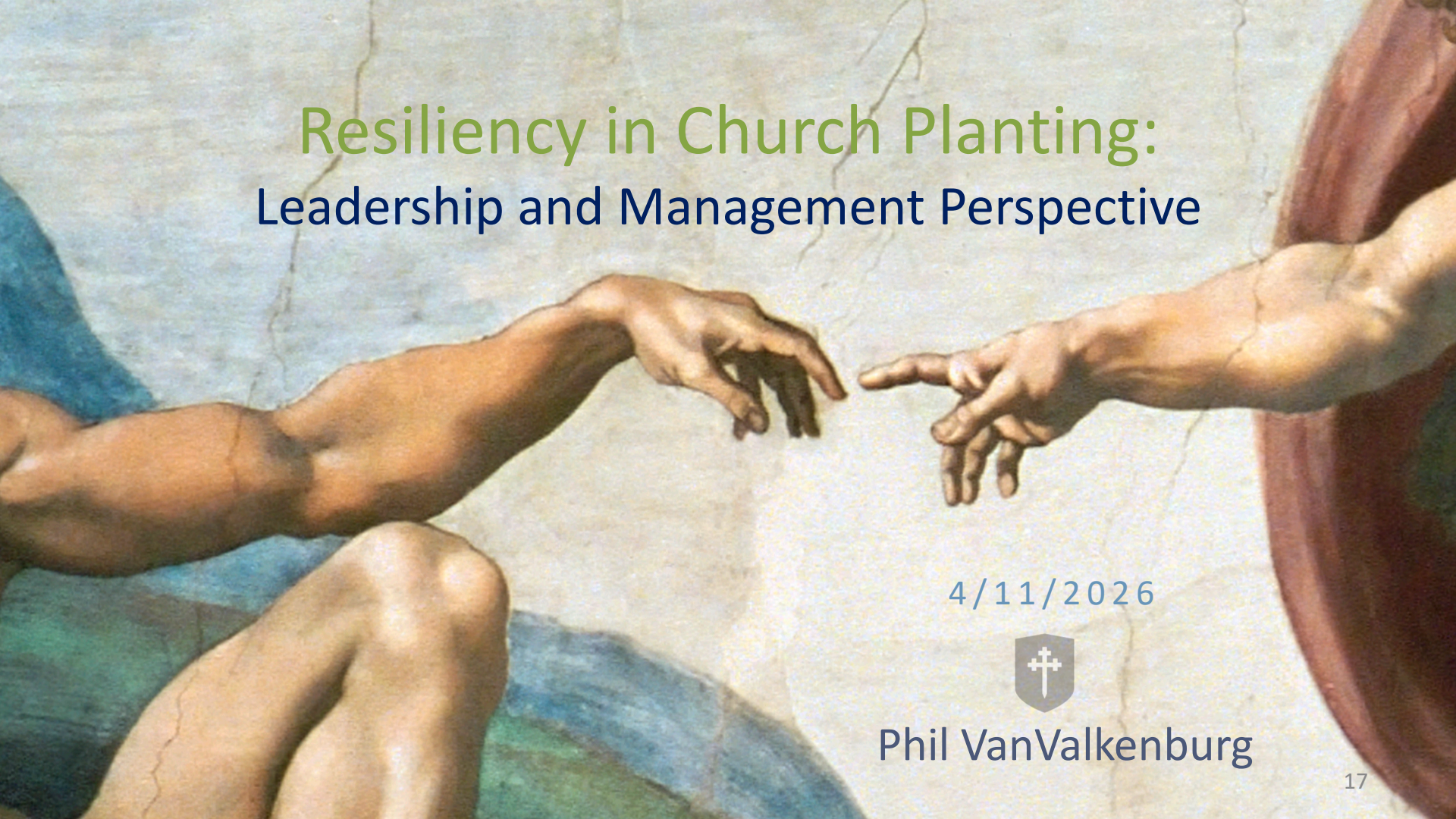

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