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## ABSTRACT

### The Discovery of a Church's Purpose through Corporate Spiritual Discernment

J. Gary Campbell

The Church of the Saviour United Methodist in Westerville, Ohio practiced management by objectives for several years. Although this congregation "planned its work and worked its plan," it failed to achieve its goals. These goals were aimed at the fulfillment of the church's purpose as set forth by its Administrative Council. Ultimately, the Council recognized the reason for this problem: The stated purpose lacked the power to unify and motivate the congregation. This conclusion revealed the limitations of the management model for church planning: If a congregation shares a sense of identity and mission, then management by objectives is an effective planning tool. This model, however, offers no way for a church to discover its reason for being.

How can a church discover its God-given purpose? Is there a planning process which enables a corporate body to "listen" to God in order to understand what God is doing

and what God wants them to be? In describing "a Christian decision making procedure" in her book Prayer and Action, A Growth Experience, Miriam Murphy draws upon the concept of corporate spiritual discernment found in St. Ignatius of Loyola. Murphy's work was the basis for an alternative approach to church planning, the corporate spiritual discernment planning model.

Chapter 1 describes this model for church planning and reviews the growing body of literature on corporate spiritual discernment. Chapter 2 develops the theme of corporate spiritual discernment in terms of Scripture, tradition and reason--three criteria of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Chapter 3 is devoted to the final point of the Quadrilateral, experience. Here the ministry project itself is described. This was a six-month planning process completed by the Administrative Council of the Church of the Saviour.

Chapter 4 defends the thesis that the Church of the Saviour did discover its purpose, and that it did so through corporate spiritual discernment. Tangible results of the project were a statement of purpose, a church motto and a logo. More important, the ministry project and its results have helped bring renewal to the Church of the Saviour. The discernment model of church planning is offered as the planning process appropriate to certain decisions and problems church planners are required to consider from time to time.



THE DISCOVERY OF A CHURCH'S PURPOSE THROUGH  
CORPORATE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

by

John Gary Campbell

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Approved by *Steve Hays*  
Department *Spiritual Formation*  
Second Reader *Stephen Seaman*  
Date *May 20, 1990*

## Authorization

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Signed 

## Acknowledgments

Grace is the basis of everything Christian. In the course of my Doctor of Ministry studies, the ministry project, and this project-dissertation, many have been gracious to me. They have, perhaps without knowing it, been channels of God's grace to me.

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The congregation, the Administrative Council, and the Congregational Reflection Group at the Church of the Saviour United Methodist in Westerville, Ohio, supported my continuing education and provided time, financial support, and a ministry-setting for my work. We lived through eight years together as pastor and people, and mine was the inexpressible joy of preaching the riches of Christ in their midst. From my point of view, the ministry project was a genuine effort in our common ministry, and I count these people as beloved friends in the Lord. One of them, Mr. Bronson Smith, was the first to encourage me to enter the Doctor of Ministry program, and he added a private donation each month for my tuition!

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Chapter 1  
Corporate Spiritual Discernment as a  
Model for Church Planning

Two Models for Church Planning

It is common practice for United Methodist local churches to plan their activities using a model called "management by objectives" borrowed from the field of organizational development. This planning tool calls for the clear statement of goals, objectives and strategies. Typically, the District Superintendent provides a report form in which proposed goals and objectives are presented for adoption by the annual session of the Charge Conference. A representative body such as the Administrative Council or Council on Ministries prepares the report. Three or four goals may be formulated, with several objectives under each goal.

In some congregations a more sophisticated planning process results in the adoption of a "long range plan." A five-year plan, for example, establishes goals to be fulfilled during the next five years. Objectives under each goal may be modified from year to year, and strategies are formulated from time to time so the church can achieve its objectives.



Goals may be called "key result areas:" A statement of goals sets forth the church's expectations of results. A statement of goals answers the following question: What are the main things the congregation intends to accomplish in the given period of time?

A statement of objectives is a step-by-step plan for fulfilling a particular goal. Objectives help planners make their church's goals manageable: The statement of objectives divides the goal into its parts. Each component can be achieved in a given period of time.

The need to make goals manageable and practical is further served by the adoption of strategies. A strategy is an action-plan. A church program or activity is a strategy if it is planned and carried out for the purpose of achieving one or more of the church's objectives.

"Plan your work and work your plan." This admonition is proverbial among the practitioners of management by objectives. The advantages of doing so are readily observed: Churches can plan their work in clear terms. They can divide their work into manageable components. Since their accomplishments can be measured, they can evaluate their work. Evaluation brings the plan full-circle and provides the foundation for a new plan. Management by objectives is a logical approach to planning which is rewarded by genuine achievements in the life of a congregation.

#### The Need for an Alternative Planning Model

The Church of the Saviour United Methodist in Wester-

ville, Ohio practiced management by objectives for several years. I was pastor of the Church of the Saviour from July 1, 1980 to June 30, 1988. I was familiar with the management-by-objectives model for planning. In addition, several key lay persons were capable of leading our Administrative Council in planning sessions of this type.

Planning during these years consistently resulted in the adoption of church-growth goals. Westerville was growing very rapidly, and several area churches of various denominations, worship styles and theological persuasions were growing. The Church of the Saviour, however, was not reaping its "share" of this burgeoning harvest-field. Accordingly, our goals called for growth in membership, increased attendance at worship services and church school, and more effective youth ministries. Objectives aimed at accomodating younger families with children and youth; improving our program of Christian education and promoting attendance at classes; strengthening our youth work and encouraging young people to participate in Youth Fellowship; and advertising our church more effectively.

We adopted specific strategies for achieving these objectives. These included: providing for the training of church school teachers; hiring a minister to youth; conducting attendance contests; and selecting a communications chairperson. Some strategies brought changes to the church's schedule and traditions: a coffee-fellowship time between worship and church school each Sunday morning;

modifications in the order of worship and the mode of serving communion; and occasional experiments with alternative styles in church music. Other strategies brought permanent changes in our church building: the construction of a new nursery; and the installation of a small-sized elevator to make the building more accessible.

Nevertheless, our goals were not fulfilled. On the contrary, the actual membership of this congregation--which peaked in 1978--had declined sharply by the end of 1981, and remained on a plateau for the balance of my eight-year pastorate. The all-time high for average worship attendance was in 1977, and this figure went down each year thereafter. In the church school, attendance dipped dramatically in 1980, preceding by one year the record-low in membership. The church school membership and attendance have remained essentially unchanged since then, but decline in the youth population has continued unabated! In short, this church could not reverse its decline by using the management-by-objectives planning model.

#### The Search for an Alternative Planning Model

This report of the situation at the Church of the Saviour summarizes a thorough analysis of the church's membership and attendance trends for the decade 1976-1986 which I completed in the summer of 1987. I presented this study, with its statistical tables and graphs, to the Administrative Council at an all-day planning session on October 3, 1987. In the discussion which followed, we

probed beneath the facts to discover the reason our church was not accomplishing its goals.

The stated purpose of the Church of the Saviour, taken verbatim from minutes of the Administrative Council, was "to be a soul-saving center on this corner of Westerville." In the service of this, the ostensible mission of the church, we adopted goals aimed at church growth. Objectives designed to help us achieve these goals were reasonably clear, and they were pursued rather vigorously through strategic actions. Why did we fail to accomplish our goals? Why has a congregation so favorably situated, and motivated by an evangelistic purpose, fallen into such a critical decline?

To answer this key question, the Administrative Council and I were forced to face the fact that few within the congregation actually are motivated by our stated purpose. As a whole, the congregation is not comfortable with programs and activities which are considered to be evangelistic. The statement of purpose by which the Administrative Council described the Church of the Saviour did not match the actual self-understanding of our people, whatever that might be. We concluded that the Church of the Saviour was in an identity-crisis. We were confused about our church's purpose. We had no common understandings nor symbols powerful enough to unify and to motivate us as a congregation.

It had become clear to me that our church had reached

the limits of the planning model we had been using. Management by objectives is an effective tool for accomplishing a church's mission, but this model offers no assistance in discovering that mission. Furthermore, if our congregation was as confused about the church's purpose as we had come to believe, then we could not establish a purpose by majority vote!

### The Discovery of an Alternative Planning Model

How can a local church recover its sense of purpose? Is there a planning model which will enable the leaders of a congregation to discover their church's mission when there is no corporate consensus? Is it possible, as the result of such a planning process, to formulate a statement of purpose with which the church's people can identify? Can other symbols emerge from such planning which will be powerful enough to unify and to motivate them?

I had been introduced to Miriam Murphy's book Prayer in Action. Murphy--a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame--develops "A Christian Decision-Making Procedure," utilizing the principles of corporate spiritual discernment set forth by St. Ignatius of Loyola. To help a decision-making body in plotting a course of action, Murphy provides a chart to guide the group's evaluation of options.<sup>1</sup>

I recognized in Murphy's method for corporate Christian decision making a planning model which might prove useful

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<sup>1</sup> Miriam Murphy, Prayer in Action: A Growth Experience. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979) pp. 101-116. The procedure is at pp. 113-116, and the chart is on p. 116.

to the Church of the Saviour. With the Congregational Reflection Group (CRG), I began to consider using this model to help us make one decision only--the crucial matter of the purpose of our church. I am now convinced that corporate spiritual discernment provides the alternative planning model which is needed when the concern is not the selection of means to achieve a church's purpose but is, rather, the identification of the purpose itself.

Subsequently, our Charge Conference on November 1, 1987 adopted the following goals and objectives:

1. To discover, using methods of corporate spiritual discernment, who we are as the Church of the Saviour.
  - a. To meet with the pastor for instruction and practice in the methods of problem-solving and group discernment.
  - b. To seek God's guidance in the discovery and acceptance of who we are.
  - c. To interview members and others, and to conduct home meetings with members and constituents, to broaden the base of our search and to cultivate ownership of our discoveries.
2. To develop a Mission Statement which will reflect our sense of identity and our purpose as a church.
  - a. To interview not only members and constituents in order to discover areas of needed ministry to which our church might respond.
  - b. From the above, to identify "key result areas" and new ministry directions.
3. To cultivate a clear-cut identity for our church.
  - a. To develop, from the Mission Statement, a slogan.
  - b. To promote the mission and ministry-direction we have discovered through every possible means.

This statement of goals and objectives conforms to the management-by-objectives model, and lays the groundwork for returning to that model after the church's purpose has been clarified. It also points to the Administrative Council's commitment to work with the pastor not only intensively, but also in a different mode. I then began to plan the ministry project being described in this project-dissertation.

#### Corporate Spiritual Discernment as a Church Planning Model

This ministry project was designed to test the following hypothesis: The Church of the Saviour can discover its purpose through corporate spiritual discernment. Specifically, we used Miriam Murphy's model for corporate Christian decision making as the basis for our Administrative Council's corporate discernment of God's will and direction for the mission of our church. This ministry project, then, provided the practical test, in a parish setting, of existing theory developed by Dr. Miriam Murphy. The results of our planning sessions were: (1) the formulation of the statement of purpose of the Church of the Saviour; (2) the expression of this statement of purpose in the form of a brief motto or slogan; and (3) the representation of this statement of purpose by a logo.

#### The Ministry Project

Sister Miriam Murphy was a leader of seminars on prayer at the Center of Continuing Education at Princeton Theological Seminary for several years. She had tested her

procedure for corporate Christian decision making in such seminars, and was eager to have it tested in a local church setting. The Church of the Saviour was prepared to provide that setting for several reasons. Our corporate identity-crisis and the inadequacy of the management-by-objectives approach in solving the problem gave the Administrative Council a sense of urgency. Our congregation also had the benefit of some exposure to Sister Miriam's teaching on prayer, since I had distributed copies of Prayer in Action to a dozen people. Following this, at the urging of the CRG, Sister Miriam spoke at the Church of the Saviour on July 29, 1987.

In the course of planning the project, I consulted with Sister Miriam twice--once in Princeton, New Jersey and once in Columbus, Ohio. In late November, 1987, I attended one of her seminars at Princeton. I had the opportunity, in this "laboratory" setting, to direct other seminar participants in a simulation exercise in this method for corporate spiritual discernment. The need for instruction in Murphy's method of corporate spiritual discernment was apparent, so a series of three meetings, all with educational components, was planned for our Administrative Council's process. These three sessions, separated by several weeks, were also designed so the Council could practice Murphy's method through a simulation exercise. In addition, time is required if one is to enter into the mode of "listening prayer" (Murphy's terminology).



There were two other important aspects of our planning process: (1) Reflection upon the purpose of the church, and the early church's discernment of that purpose, in the New Testament; and (2) receiving input from the congregation of the Church of the Saviour by means of a questionnaire and Lenten home meetings led by members of the Administrative Council. These two features of the design of this ministry project were essential if the discernment of our church's purpose was to be scripturally valid and experientially unifying and motivating.

#### Some Working Definitions

This ministry project was undertaken to enable us at the Church of the Saviour in Westerville, Ohio to discover our purpose as a Christian congregation. The statement of purpose is a concise sentence, setting forth the identity and mission of the Church of the Saviour United Methodist in broad biblical and theological perspective. As a fundamental statement, the purpose is not subject to frequent change. It is more basic than goals, objectives or strategies. In fact, the latter are the means by which the church seeks to carry out its purpose, once that purpose has been established. The function of the statement of purpose is to describe the church in such a way as to express or even create unity among its members and to inspire their affirmation, command their loyalty, and motivate their active participation in the church.

In this ministry project, we utilized a procedure for

corporate spiritual discernment as a model for church planning in contrast to the management-by-objectives model. The distinction between the two models can be understood in terms of the dominant mode of operation the models require of the church planners using them. For example, both models require prayer: It goes without saying that people who plan the ministry of their churches pray for God's guidance. This is as true for management-by-objectives planning as it is for corporate-spiritual-discernment planning. However, the dominant mode in the former is logical activity: Divide the problem into manageable, measurable parts, devise strategies, and then put the plan into action. The dominant mode in the latter model, on the other hand, is passive waiting. As noted above, Murphy calls this "listening prayer."

This is a description of the prayer of discernment which emphasizes the need to pray in a relaxed and devotional mood, not presenting to God our "agenda" of petitions and intercessions. Rather, we spend time allowing God to speak to us. God sets the agenda, not we! God "speaks" in many different ways. For example, God speaks through the Bible, through one's conscience, through conversations with other Christians, perhaps through one spokesperson who seems to exercise a "gift" of discernment or wisdom. However God may speak, our main business is to "hear" God and attend to what God is saying. In any case, the prayer of discernment is communicating with God about

what God is doing in our situation, and about God's purpose for us. In corporate spiritual discernment, we pray as a group that God will cause us to know what God is doing and what God is directing us to be.

To assist us in this kind of prayer, we are guided to pray in four dimensions: (1) Ask God for discernment of what God is doing. (2) Acknowledge God as our Source. (3) Commit ourselves to cooperate fully with God. (4) Thank God for what God is doing, and for directing us. In our three planning sessions, I instructed members of the Administrative Council about this mode of prayer, as Miriam Murphy had done both in her seminar and in her teaching session in our church. Whether we prayed individually, in small groups, or as a Council; whether in stated or free prayers; whether silently or aloud: we corporately awaited a word from God--Murphy is willing to use the term "revelation"--about what God was doing at the Church of the Saviour and what God wants this church to be.

Spiritual discernment, then, is to come to know what God is doing in the situation. It means to become aware of God's purpose for us. Discernment is not merely the selection of a good course of action; rather, it is choosing to be what God wants us to be. Indeed, according to the discernment model, we pray that we may receive the decision from the Lord. Once the decision about what to be has been received, then a Christian group may logically select a good course of action according to the management model.

### The Criteria for Evaluation

No claim is being advanced that the corporate-spiritual-discernment model is superior to the management-by-objectives model. At issue is only the selection of the planning model which is appropriate to the actual circumstances: Our church was in an identity-crisis, the chief symptom of which was our statistical decline.<sup>2</sup> This crucial situation called for a different approach to planning for the time being. The alternative planning model was appropriate for the Church of the Saviour in 1988.

That the dominant mode in the discernment model is

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<sup>2</sup> Some observers diagnose the ills of the entire United Methodist Church, with our membership decline as the main symptom, in terms of an identity-crisis. Kenneth Kinghorn in "Why The Church Has Declined" (Good News XXI:3, Nov./Dec., 1987, pp. 24-27) believes our current plight stems from spiritual confusion which results, in turn, from our denomination's failure to seek God's direction. It may be that the 1984 General Conference appointed the Commission on the Mission of The United Methodist Church only in response to the symptom. This Commission, however, understood its work to be a response to the identity-crisis. James C. Logan in two articles entitled "Grace Upon Grace, God's Mission and Ours" (Circuit Rider, Feb., 1988, pp. 6-8; and Quarterly Review 8:1 Spring, 1988, pp. 3-17) casts the issue in this light: "When...we are confused or have lost a unifying sense of mission, our very identity as a people is in question" (QR, p. 6, his italics). He believes the Study Commission's statement as adopted by the General Conference will cure this illness; but see the "pro" and "con" responses in Circuit Rider (issue cited, pp. 8-10). Logan opens his QR article by quoting Leonard I. Sweet's 1985 critique, "The Four Fundamentalisms of Oldline Protestants" (Christian Century 102:9, March 13, 1985, pp. 266-270), and agrees with Blaine E. Taylor ("A Church and a People Formed by Grace," Quarterly Review, issue cited, pp. 18-29), who argues that the new Mission Statement avoids the "oldline fundamentalisms." Nevertheless, Sweet, still unconvinced six months after the 1988 General Conference, wrote "From Catacomb to Basilica: The

listening prayer does not mean our planning or our planners are more "spiritual" than others. At the same time, they are no less rational than others! In fact, the rational dimension is a given in Murphy's methodology, which combines insights from the tradition of Ignatian discernment with those learned from a contemporary approach to problem solving. Murphy has done work at the Creative Problem Solving Institute in Buffalo, New York, and her worksheet for "A Christian Decision-Making Procedure" is actually an adaptation of materials used by the Institute.<sup>3</sup>

It can be said, indeed, that the discernment model for planning has its own rationality. Definitions of terms like "purpose," "discernment," "prayer of discernment," and "listening prayer" as used in the alternative planning model are as precise as the definitions of terms like "goal," "objective," and "strategy" in the management model. It is to be hoped that both sets of terms will be used with equal consistency.

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Dilemma of Oldline Protestantism" (Christian Century 105: 32, Nov. 2, 1988, pp. 981-984).

In the meantime, proponents of management by objectives have emphasized the need for discernment; see Neil M. Alexander and others, "Is God At Your Planning Table?" (The Interpreter, June, 1986, pp. 8-10); Alexander, "Dare To Discover" (The Interpreter, June, 1986, pp. 8-10); and Anita G. Bledsoe, "Two Churches That Dared" (The Interpreter, same date, pp. 12-13).

<sup>3</sup> See Murphy's footnote on p. 116. Thus, the model combines scriptural authority and traditional precedent with a rational approach to decision-making. The fourth criterion of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, experience, is satisfied by the actual participation in this project by members of the Church of the Saviour.

Because the discernment model has its own rationality, the evaluation of this process and its results is also idiomatic. To evaluate whether a group has rightly discerned what God is doing and God's will and direction for their church is not subject to the criteria of the management-by-objectives model. For example, no time-value can be assigned to achieving an expected result. In a real sense, the fact that our Administrative Council arrived at its discernment of our new statement of purpose when we did was a gift of God's grace--it could not have been dictated by the timing of the ministry project. Likewise, there is no way to measure the results of our process: While an actual statement of purpose, a church slogan and a church logo were produced, the increased effectiveness of this congregation's future ministry remains to be seen. Furthermore, we cannot expect certainty in the evaluation of this project, any more than Abraham could have offered proof that God directed him to sacrifice Isaac!

We can expect a degree of certitude or confidence as we reflect upon our process and its visible results. We can apply the tests given or implied in the formative spiritual tradition regarding discernment. With this understanding, the CRG monitored each phase of the project's implementation. In evaluating the process, the CRG asked the following questions:

- (1) Was the stated purpose of the activity fulfilled?
- (2) Does any change need to be introduced into the design?

- (3) Is the process itself invigorating for our church?  
Is new energy being released through the experience of prayer?
- (4) What unanticipated factors have emerged?
- (5) How well is the leadership functioning?

Following the third planning meeting, in which a clear statement of purpose emerged through corporate spiritual discernment, the CRG applied traditional criteria to test whether we have truly discerned what God is doing and what is God's will and direction for our church:

- (1) Did the statement of purpose seem to emerge from the process as a direction or decision which was given to us?
- (2) Was there an awareness on the part of the participants that we were hearing God rather than deducing the result ourselves?
- (3) Were we in agreement about the result? Did it meet with enthusiastic response? Did it produce a sense of unity?
- (4) Did our discovery of our purpose leave us, individually and collectively, with a sense of settled peace?

At its regular business meeting in May, the Administrative Council adopted the statement of purpose and the church motto which resulted from the planning process. There were two designs for a church logo, so the Council asked that further work be done on it. A few days later, the CRG held its last meeting. This final evaluation was guided by a comprehensive set of questions:

- (1) Did all participants understand the process of corporate spiritual discernment?
- (2) Was there a sense of common "ownership" both of the ministry project and of the process which was utilized?

- (3) Were the participants energized in the midst of the process? Did we sense that God truly was guiding us on a pathway to discovery?
- (4) Did we successfully involve most of our congregation in the ministry project at appropriate times?
- (5) Did a clear sense of purpose for our church emerge?
- (6) Are we convinced that the statement of purpose is our God-given reason for being, as the Church of the Saviour?
- (7) Is the Administrative Council enthusiastic about our new church slogan? Are members of the congregation "caught" by it? Are we finding it easy to communicate? Is the unity of our congregation being enhanced by it?
- (8) Does it now appear that large numbers of our people will be motivated by our statement of purpose?

The CRG made a full report on the ministry project at the Administrative Council meeting of June 27, 1988, including this final evaluation. At this meeting, the Council reached a stalemate vote on the preferred logo design (the official logo was adopted at a later time), but did receive the report. As had been agreed, this brought the ministry project to its formal conclusion.

#### A Review of the Literature of Spiritual Discernment

The questions to which the CRG responded in evaluating this ministry project were derived, directly or indirectly, from a body of literature which is small but impressive. These writings are also characterized by great disparity, because the term "discernment" means many things to many people. This situation was anticipated in the CRG itself in the early stages of refining the project proposal: One



member of the group did not readily identify "spiritual discernment" with a decision-making process, whether individual or corporate. For him, the term meant strictly "discernment of spirits," that is, distinguishing between good and evil spirits. This "charismatic" understanding is reflected in Discernment of the Spirit and of Spirits,<sup>4</sup> published under Episcopal auspices; and also in the Contemplative Ministries Newsletter, Inscape,<sup>5</sup> issued by George Maloney, a Roman Catholic priest. Another Roman Catholic priest, Edward O'Connor, lays down the following definition: "Discernment of spirits has to do with determining whether the inspirations or impulses that come into our minds originate from God, Satan, or ourselves."<sup>6</sup>

This is also Kenneth Kinghorn's understanding of the spiritual gift of discernment, though not within the so-called charismatic framework; and he interprets the gift in the individualistic sense.<sup>7</sup> While he shares the same general perspective, Morton Kelsey interprets good and evil spirits in terms of religious experience.<sup>8</sup> This usage

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<sup>4</sup> C. Floristan and C. Duquoc, editors, Discernment of the Spirit and of Spirits (New York: Seabury Press, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> George A. Maloney, "Discernment of Spirits" in Inscape 7 (Dec., 1986) pp. 1-9.

<sup>6</sup> Edward O'Connor, "Discernment of Spirits" in New Covenant (April, 1975) p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth C. Kinghorn, Gifts of the Spirit (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976).

<sup>8</sup> His phrase is "ecstasy and evil:" See Morton Kelsey, Discernment (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

and its various nuances, to be sure, is found in St. Ignatius of Loyola.<sup>9</sup> He certainly believed that human beings are influenced by both God and Satan, and by the good and evil spirits (spiritual beings) who are their respective emissaries. In his Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius provided "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits." These directives for first- and second-week exercitants would enable them to distinguish between divine, human and satanic spirits. It is equally correct to say, however, that discernment in Ignatian spiritual formation aims at self-understanding, that is, an accurate assessment of the state of one's own soul.<sup>10</sup>

For William C. Spohn, discernment is the context for making moral decisions.<sup>11</sup> His usage, therefore, is directed more to the world about us than to the world within us. This orientation is shared by James Fenhagen, for whom discernment is a skill to be developed by pastors.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> St. Ignatius of Loyola, The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, translated by W. H. Longridge (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1955).

<sup>10</sup> I have found the new translation of The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius by Thomas Corbishley (P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1963) to be especially useful. It is handbook-size, abbreviated, and uses contemporary English expressions. For example, in the heading for Ignatius's Rules, "discernment" becomes "distinguishing," and "spirits" becomes "spiritual influences."

<sup>11</sup> William C. Spohn, "The Reasoning Heart: An American Approach to Christian Discernment" in Theological Studies 44:1 (March, 1983) pp. 30-52. He defines discernment as "the skill of moral evaluation" (p. 30).

<sup>12</sup> James C. Fenhagen, Ministry and Solitude (New York:

Within this diversity of connotation we can identify the underlying denotation of the term "discernment:" It is the ability to distinguish the spiritual aspects of experiences and situations and to perceive the relationship between these aspects in such a way as to know what can or cannot fit together.<sup>13</sup>

### Discernment and Individual Decision-Making

Clearly, then, discernment is a process related to making decisions in life. For Spohn, discernment "plays a central role in making moral decisions."<sup>14</sup> For a charismatic Christian who senses a battle raging in the spiritual realm, not only must one make sound judgments, but also one must make right decisions. And for St. Ignatius of Loyola, the broader context of the "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits" is that of making an "election," that is, making a decision--in response, say, to one's vocation to enter the Society of Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

The fact that discernment on any level whatever is a decision-making process may be one reason that few works have been written on the subject: We make decisions all

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Seabury Press, 1981) pp. 47-57 = Chapter 5, "Developing the Gift of Discernment."

<sup>13</sup> Compare James M. Gustafson, Theology and Christian Ethics (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1974) p. 104, quoted in full by Spohn, p. 30, footnote 1.

<sup>14</sup> Spohn, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> Several works by one of the foremost authorities on St. Ignatius, the Jesuit John C. Futrell, will be reviewed below. In his book Making an Apostolic Community of Love

the time, but this common experience, like walking, is difficult to analyze!<sup>16</sup> Perhaps another reason is the fact that this topic carries the implication of mysticism. Especially among Protestants, Ignatian discernment may be shunned, along with all other "mystical theology." The Spiritual Exercises are cast in that light by Harvey D. Egan in particular.<sup>17</sup>

This work is one of several published by The Institute

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(St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), he notes with regret that commentators treat Ignatian "discernment of spirits" exclusively, overlooking the fact that this is but one aspect of "a larger, much more complex, dynamic process of discernment or deliberation leading to both individual and communal decisions" (p. 6, footnote 8). In the light of this, I provide a further review of The Spiritual Exercises below.

<sup>16</sup>Spohn, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup>Harvey D. Egan, The Spiritual Exercises and the Ignatian Mystical Horizon (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1976). An article by Herbert F. Smith, "Discernment of Spirits" in Review For Religious 35:3 (May, 1976) pp. 432-454, goes far in overcoming this reticence. Smith begins with the felt need for discernment in modern life, assures the reader that discernment of spirits "is not the abandonment of intelligence, experience and good judgment" (p. 434), and offers several experiments so the reader can get involved at the very outset (p. 435). His definitions and descriptions of spiritual discernment should not be threatening for modern, anti-mystical Americans. His final comprehensive description of the discernment process seems attractive indeed:

Discernment of spirits is the consoling experience of being impelled by the Spirit to a deeper union with the Father in conjunction with a particular course of action which is judiciously sensed through discernment... to be the course which the Father wills me to adopt because it most intimately joins me to the slain and risen Christ in his body the Church, and most effectively advances the Kingdom. (p. 454)

of Jesuit Sources in St. Louis, Missouri. The Second Vatican Council recommended that the religious institutes seek to recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt them to modern times. Therefore, the Fathers Provincial of the Society of Jesus in the United States appointed The American Assistancy Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality, and several of their papers and books are relevant to this project-dissertation. The fact that little such research was done before 1968 is the main reason there are so few works on Ignatian discernment. Those now available, however, are impressive indeed.

St. Ignatius of Loyola was the first person in the formative spiritual tradition to work out a way for the individual to discern the will of God. As indicated already, this way is to be found in his Spiritual Exercises as a whole, and not just in the "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits." As with any process of decision-making, time is required--in this case, the time needed for spiritual formation. Essentially, the Spiritual Exercises lead the exercitant through a process of imaging scenes in the life of Jesus,<sup>18</sup> and then of identifying with Jesus. By imaginatively imitating Christ, one is formed into the likeness of

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<sup>18</sup>The Exercises also include the examination of conscience as a staple of spiritual formation. In addition, the power of creative imagination is applied to sin and even hell, both to be shunned. Still, the overall pattern involves positive reinforcement with reference to Christ's Incarnation and Nativity, the Last Supper and the Garden of Gethsemane, and finally the Resurrection.

Christ. In the course of these exercises, which were designed to take four weeks, the exercitant makes decisions ("elections") regarding God's will for his or her life. The "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits" are guidelines for those in the earlier stages (the first two weeks) of their formation. The Rules are not laws to be legalistically enforced. Rather, they are directions to aid the immature in making decisions when their inclinations are in conflict and they have no clear "leading." How can one distinguish between the various spiritual influences which affect one's soul, examine them, reject the bad and admit the good? And how can one be assured that one's decision (election) is of God?

His biography tells how St. Ignatius himself had struggled with decision making, i.e. with discerning the will of God for his own life.<sup>19</sup> His teaching was hammered out on the anvil of personal experience, and Ignatian retreats make his learnings available to people yet today.<sup>20</sup>

#### Discernment and Corporate-Decision Making

While the model for individual-decision making has been prominent in the Ignatian formative spiritual tradition,

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<sup>19</sup> See Piet Penning de Vries, Discernment of Spirits According to the Life and Teachings of St. Ignatius Loyola, translated by W. Dudok van Hell (New York: Exposition Press, 1973).

<sup>20</sup> For example, see Karl Rahner, Spiritual Exercises, translated by Kenneth Baker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965). Compare David M. Stanley, A Modern Scriptural Approach to the Spiritual Exercises (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1971).

this has not been true of the model for communal decision-making. The practice of spiritual discernment as a corporate process of decision-making fell out of use in Jesuit houses within a generation of Ignatius. Only the Quakers have consistently used the corporate-spiritual-discernment model of decision-making. It is most interesting to note that a recent study of "voteless decisions in the Religious Society of Friends" was done by Michael Sheeron, a contemporary Jesuit in search of his roots!<sup>21</sup>

Among Jesuits, the way for corporate spiritual discernment which was fashioned by St. Ignatius of Loyola is known as "The Deliberation of the First Fathers" or simply the Deliberatio.<sup>22</sup> Which of Ignatius's associates actually authored it is not known, but the Deliberatio contains a brief record of the method the founders used in their discernment meetings during Lent of 1539 to discover whether the Lord wanted them to found a new order and, if so, what its nature should be.<sup>23</sup>

That so basic a document should have been neglected by the order which began in this manner is due primarily to

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<sup>21</sup>Michael J. Sheeron, Beyond Majority Rule (Philadelphia: Society of Friends Book Service, 1983). This is the published version of Sheeron's Ph.D. dissertation, done at Princeton.

<sup>22</sup>Jules J. Toner, "A Method for Communal Discernment of God's Will" in Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits III:4 (June, 1974), p. 122.

<sup>23</sup>Futrell, Making an Apostolic Community of Love, p. 187.

the fact that its directives for communal discernment have been applied to the superior's discerning of God's will for either an individual member or for the community--though the act of discernment by the superior was not autocratic, since it involved dialogue and prayer.<sup>24</sup> Thus, John Carroll Futrell's doctoral dissertation, now published in a much-abbreviated form as Making an Apostolic Community of Love, is "A Study of the Role of the Superior according to St. Ignatius of Loyola." Fortunately for me, Futrell has also included his English translation of the Deliberatio (which was written in Spanish) in this volume.<sup>25</sup>

Futrell has certainly probed very deeply into his spiritual roots. In his first contribution to Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, "Ignatian Discernment,"<sup>26</sup> he describes discernment as the dynamic process of continuous interaction with the Word of God which leads to individual and communal decisions. The technical materials in this article consist of Futrell's exegesis of the Spanish terms Ignatius used in writing about discernment. He also gives major attention to Ignatian communal discernment, comments on "The Deliberation of the First Fathers," and calls upon his fellow-Jesuits to renew this practice.

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<sup>24</sup>Toner, p. 122.

<sup>25</sup>Futrell, Making an Apostolic Community of Love, pp. 187-194.

<sup>26</sup>Futrell, "Ignatian Discernment" in Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits II:2 (April, 1970) pp. 47-88.



After two-and-a-half years, Futrell wrote a second essay for the series.<sup>27</sup> Entitled "Communal Discernment: Reflections on Experience," this article seeks to clarify the dynamics of authentic communal discernment, and emphasizes the dangers of misusing this method if members of the religious community fail to fulfill the three prerequisites of common vocation, common agreement on the basic expression of this communion in words today, and common commitment to carrying out the decisions reached through the discernment. Futrell believes that communal discernment is not the only method for making corporate decisions, but that it is the best method for certain kinds of situations. This is my own understanding of St. Ignatius himself: in the crucial decision of whether the Society of Jesus should be an order, and what sort of order it should be, only corporate spiritual discernment could yield a reliable perception of God's will. On the other hand, ordinary day-to-day decisions can be made by ordinary rational procedures.

On this point, another eminent contributor to the Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits series disagrees. Jules Toner in "A Method for Communal Discernment of God's Will," asserts that the main reason for failure in communal discernment is using a method which is inappropriate to the nature of such an undertaking, that is, a model of decision-

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<sup>27</sup>John C. Futrell, "Communal Discernment: Reflections on Experience" in Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits IV:5 (Nov., 1972) pp. 159-192.

making taken from legislative bodies and corporate boards. He underscores the differences between a community which is seeking to discern the will of God and one which aims at an efficient, administrative decision by majority vote, and he draws a sharp contrast between their respective models of decision-making.<sup>28</sup>

Toner, writing in 1974, goes on to derive from The Spiritual Exercises and the Deliberatio a step-by-step method for communal discernment. His description of the method is not unlike that given by Futrell in his 1972 article. Curiously, while Toner carries on a footnote dialogue with Futrell's 1970 article, he was apparently unaware of the later contribution. Both authors outline the need for individuals within the corporate body to arrive at private discernments of alternatives; for all members to present reasons for and reasons against each alternative; and for each member to pray before and after every step in the discernment process. In both schemes, dialogue (but not debate) is a key to communal discernment,

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<sup>28</sup> Since this project-dissertation is not testing the relative merits of the alternative models for decision-making and/or church planning, I have been content to evaluate them only in terms of appropriateness, and to suggest that they are complementary, not conflicting, models--see above, pp. 13-14. Toner eschews any merely prudential decision-making in any Christian community, even a temporary or ad hoc group, regardless of the spiritual depth of motivation in the group. Futrell, on the other hand, urges that contemporary Christian communities use their knowledge of group dynamics in their spiritual discernment. As noted above, Miriam Murphy includes the "brainstorming" approach of current problem-solving techniques in her recommendations regarding spiritual discernment.

and there is always the possibility of revising the alternatives being considered. Finally, the decision is made by voting, but the voting is done without campaigning or other political moves.<sup>29</sup>

Earlier in his article, Toner includes a section on "Remote Preparation for the Act of Communal Discernment." At the Church of the Saviour, much of the first two planning sessions (and even the third prior to the actual act of discernment) was given to such "remote preparation:" cultivating the desire to know and do God's will; learning to trust God more explicitly and completely, and also to trust one another's judgment; readiness to give the time and energy needed in order to hear God speaking; freeing oneself from prejudgments of the issue; and cultivating what Ignatius called "indifference," i.e., not investing one's status in his or her own idea or alternative.

Both of these interpreters also emphasize the confirmation of the communal discernment in Ignatian terms. Such assurances as a settled peace, spiritual consolation, the appearance of the unanticipated, a sense of having the decision given to us, the release of renewed spiritual energies through the process of the discernment, and the

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<sup>29</sup>Michael Sheeron, one of whose works is included in this literature review, discusses Ignatian discernment of God's will in "Discernment as a Political Problem" in Woodstock Letters 98 (1969) pp. 446-464. Toner (p. 151, footnote 3) calls this "an interesting and scholarly discussion," but criticizes Sheeron for giving so little attention to the Deliberatio, stating that "he does not throw light directly on communal discernment."

unifying influence of the decision--these, as indicated above, are the bases for evaluation in the corporate-spiritual-discernment model.

Beyond the direct and implied theological justification of corporate spiritual discernment to be found in the literature we have reviewed, two works undertake the systematic theological evaluation of communal discernment: Ladislav M. Orsy's slender volume, Probing the Spirit and Philip S. Keane's article, "Discernment of Spirits: A Theological Reflection."<sup>30</sup> The former is noteworthy for the way it puts five key questions and answers them by framing thirty-five theses. The latter provides a clear definition of communal discernment, an excellent summary of biblical and historical materials, and a helpful discussion of the way communal discernment happens.

This project-dissertation, however, is not a treatise in systematic theology. Instead, this is to be an integrative paper, describing an application of the theological concept of corporate spiritual discernment in a parish setting. Hence, the concern of the next chapter will be to justify and understand corporate spiritual discernment as authorized by Scripture, illuminated by Church

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<sup>30</sup>Ladislav M. Orsy, Probing the Spirit (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1976); and Philip S. Keane, "Discernment of Spirits: A Theological Reflection" in The American Ecclesiastical Review 168:1 (Jan., 1974) pp. 43-61. The Orsy volume also originated with Assistancy Seminar. It is an expanded version of this author's essay "Toward a Theological Evaluation of Communal Discernment" in Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits.

tradition, and confirmed by reason. Chapter three will be my report of our practice of corporate spiritual discernment at the Church of the Saviour and will, as such, demonstrate the ministry project's conformity to the fourth heading of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, experience. Here will be displayed the corporate-spiritual-discernment model for church planning as it was drawn from Miriam Murphy's Prayer in Action.

The CRG served as a monitoring and evaluating committee throughout the project, and their evaluations of each phase of the ministry project and their final evaluation of the whole project are included as part of the church's experience. My own evaluation appears in the final chapter. Here I will reassess the theological and theoretical dimension with reference to this practical application, summarize my learnings, and suggest the general usefulness which may be derived from our experiment.

## Chapter 2

### Corporate Spiritual Discernment in Theology

#### The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

In theological discussions, United Methodists commonly appeal to four criteria: Scripture, tradition, experience and reason. The Wesleys, Albright, Otterbein and Boehm "understood themselves as standing in the center stream of Christian spirituality and doctrine." Like these pioneers, The United Methodist Church today identifies a "marrow" or a "living core" of Christian truth which is "revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason."<sup>1</sup>

In connection with this ministry project, this way of identifying the sources of our theology is significant for the following reasons: First, we are not left without direction. In the Bible, discernment of spirits is revealed as the means by which God communicates with us about what God is doing and what God wants us to do. A biblical theology of corporate spiritual discernment holds the promise

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<sup>1</sup>All quotations in these two paragraphs can be found in The Book of Discipline, Part II (Doctrine and Doctrinal Statements and the General Rules), par. 68, sect. 1 (Historical Background), editions of 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984 and 1988.

that divine direction can be received, and locates the authority of God's directives in the Bible itself.

Second, this scriptural revelation is clarified by Christian tradition. Especially illuminating in the matter of corporate spiritual discernment are the insights, interpretations and practices of St. Ignatius of Loyola. And there need be no hesitation about drawing upon this "non-United Methodist" source: The debate about doctrinal pluralism aside, the principle of religious toleration typifies our denomination's irenic and inquisitive spirit. As the Church is catholic, so truth is catholic.

Third, we have little interest in dogma as such. We expect to build a bridge between theory and practice. Such bridge-building is, in fact, the function of this project-dissertation. That theology can be put into practice is a test of its validity. To use current terminology, United Methodists attempt to "do" their theology. In general, Christian truth is to be lived. This is certainly the case when, by corporate spiritual discernment, our congregation seeks to be and do what God intends.

Fourth, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral does not ascribe to human reason veto power over doctrine. Reason's function is to confirm the truths which are revealed in Scripture, illuminated by tradition, and vivified in experience. As demonstrated in the introductory chapter, corporate spiritual discernment has its own rationality. Given its own basic assumptions and definitions, corporate spiritual dis-

cernment can be the subject of rational discourse, and can be described as a method for congregational planning. This means of receiving communications from God is, therefore, eminently reasonable. This confirmation of the doctrine and practice of corporate spiritual discernment has been a source of edification for the Church of the Saviour.

### The Scriptural Sources

#### Old Testament Survey

The Old Testament recognizes the influence of various spirits on human life. The story of Saul will serve as our primary example: Both the Spirit of God and "an evil spirit from Yahweh" influenced Saul, and these spiritual influences were corporately discerned. In the first instance, "the terror of Yahweh fell on the people...as one man." In the opposite case, Saul's attendants all recognized that "an evil spirit from God [was] tormenting" the king (I Samuel 11:6-7; 16:14-23).<sup>2</sup>

One Old Testament means of practicing corporate spiritual discernment was the use of the Urim and Thummim. These were oracular media--perhaps dice, pieces of metal, or precious stones--by which the will of God in relation to particular problems was ascertained. They were carried by the high priest in a small, square pocket of the ephod (Leviticus 8:8), the breastpiece of the priestly garments.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are from the New International Version, except that "the LORD" is read "Yahweh."

<sup>3</sup> According to Deut. 33:8, the whole tribe of Levi



Leaders turned to the chief priests for decisions of national importance.<sup>4</sup> The matter was laid before Yahweh with the expectation of a simple "Yes" or "No" answer.

The account in I Samuel 14 is instructive: Jonathan, Saul's son, attacks the Philistines and, empowered by Yahweh, overwhelms them. While Israel routs the Philistines, they are in distress because Saul has pronounced a curse on any soldier who eats before evening. Jonathan takes some honey before he hears about his father's oath. After the troops have been refreshed with both meat and worship, the king proposes that they continue their attack through the night. But when the priest inquires of Yahweh, "God did not answer him that day" (I Samuel 14:37b).<sup>5</sup> The discernment is that Yahweh says "No" to Saul's plan because of some transgression. By discernment, therefore,

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had access to them. At Ezra 2:63 and Neh. 7:65, no action could be taken "until there was a priest ministering with the Urim and Thummim." Note that the ephod itself is substituted for the Urim and Thummim at I Sam. 23:9-12; 30:7-8. At I Sam. 14:18, Saul sends for the ark of God, in which were the ephod as well as the Urim and Thummim. Deut. 28:29-30 emphasizes both the intuitive and the corporate aspects of the spiritual discernment practiced by the Aaronic priests: Aaron is to come before Yahweh with not only the Urim and Thummim, but also the names of the sons of Israel "over his heart," and thus he always "bears the means of making decisions for the Israelites."

<sup>4</sup> For example, Num. 27:21. There are no examples of the Urim and Thummim being consulted for individuals. While David consulted them as the leader of a small band (I Sam. 23:10-13), apparently these implements were used only for corporate decision-making.

<sup>5</sup> Compare I Sam. 28:6--"Saul...inquired of Yahweh, but Yahweh did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets."

the transgressor must be discovered. So Saul prays,

"O Yahweh, God of Israel, why hast thou not answered thy servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Yahweh, God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in the people of Israel, give Thummim." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped" (I Samuel 14:41, Revised Standard Version).<sup>6</sup>

We do not know the exact meaning of the words "urim" and "thummim." Both are Hebrew plurals, and urim probably means "lights" or "flames." The brilliance of the Urim was symbolic of Israel's "walking in the light" of spiritual discernment. "Thummim" can be translated "perfections," and the Thummim was emblematic of the complete truth to be discerned for Israel's guidance.<sup>7</sup> Although the use of such implements of divination seems superstitious to us today, we can readily appreciate the confidence with which they were used: God has a will for the people, and

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<sup>6</sup>The RSV follows the Septuagint, while the NIV follows the Hebrew: "Then Saul prayed to Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'Give me the right answer.' And Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot, and the men were cleared."

<sup>7</sup>In this discussion, I have depended heavily on the article "Urim and Thummim" in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible IV (Nashville, Abingdon, 1972) pp. 739-740. The NIV Study Bible, edited by Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1985) p. 129 [note on Exodus 28:30], attaches significance to the fact that "urim" begins with aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and that "thummim" begins with tav, the last letter of the alphabet. Furthermore, "urim" is translated "curses" instead of "flames" or "lights." However, the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament I, edited by R. Laird Harris and others, (Chicago, Moody Press, 1980), p. 26, cites evidence apparently not yet known when The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible was done, showing conclusively that "urim" means "lights." The former source, therefore, translates the phrase "Urim and Thummim" as "lights and perfections" or, more freely, "illumination and truth."

this will can be spiritually discerned.<sup>8</sup>

Besides the possibility that the Urim and Thummim might lend themselves to a superstitious view of God's relationship to human beings, there is an apparent limitation of spiritual discernment to the priestly caste. It was Moses, of course, who ordained his brother Aaron and committed to the Aaronic priesthood the care and use of the Urim and Thummim; and Moses also was a Levite. Still, his spiritual discernment was not a function of his priestly lineage, but of his prophetic spirit. While not everyone is a prophet, the prophetic tradition in the Old Testament has within it a universalizing tendency. On more than one occasion, the spirit of prophesy fell even upon Saul!

As the first and greatest prophet of Israel, Moses was without peer or parallel in his discernment of the will of God for the people (Deuteronomy 34:10). However, Moses himself anticipates a broader exercise of corporate spiritual discernment. When the Spirit came upon the seventy elders, Joshua was alarmed that two of them, Eldad and Medad, prophesied in the camp instead of at the Tent of Meeting. Moses discerned that the same Spirit spoke through them as through the others. Furthermore, it was Moses' wish "that

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<sup>8</sup>The Old Testament itself--specifically its Wisdom Literature, to which we turn below--draws the distinction between discernment and superstition: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh" according to Proverbs 16:32. The NIV Study Bible comments: "God, not chance, is in control" (p. 969). Compare also the insistence of the article on "urim" in the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament I, p. 26, that Israel's practice of communal discernment was not superstitious.

all of Yahweh's people were prophets and that Yahweh would put his Spirit on them" (Numbers 11:16-30).

When David was consolidating the Kingdom, such general corporate discernment was evidently exercised in at least one tribe of Israel: The "men of Issachar" are described by a phrase strikingly descriptive of corporate discernment: they "understood the times and knew what Israel should do..." (I Chronicles 12:32).

The later prophets frequently call upon the people to test the validity of prophetic messages. Clearly they expect the exercise of corporate spiritual discernment in reference to prophetic claims. There are reliable criteria for such discernment, including the prophet's own direct encounter with God.<sup>9</sup> False prophets can be spotted by a discerning people,<sup>10</sup> and are to be condemned.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the Wisdom literature in the Old Testament provides evidence for corporate spiritual discernment. The Hebrew form "chakmah," translated "wisdom," is also used as an adjective, meaning "skillful," "cunning," or "subtle." Wisdom, in this tradition, is not primarily an

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<sup>9</sup>The accounts of the call of Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-8); of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4-10); and of Amos (Amos 7:14-15) are well known.

<sup>10</sup>See, for example, Isa. 44:6-28; Jer. 23:9-29.

<sup>11</sup>According to Jer. 23:30-40; 28:1-17; Ezek. 22:28. See the discussion of this topic in Martin McNamara's essay in Discernment of the Spirit and of Spirits, pp. 8-13. This theme appears in the New Testament also, at I John 4:1 ff. However, the connection between the Testaments is being drawn along another line in this paper, namely the Wisdom tradition.

intellectual grasp, but a practical ability. Its beginning, in the oft-repeated words of Scripture, is "the fear of Yahweh." The ability to live successfully, in other words, begins when a person "tunes in" to God. To know what God is doing and what God wills is the foundation of right living. It is natural to make the connection between this view of Old Testament "wisdom" and the dimensions of the prayer of discernment described earlier.<sup>12</sup>

#### New Testament Survey

The Wisdom tradition in the New Testament is found primarily in the epistle of James. The author has in view the practical life of faith, and he urges all believers to pray for the wisdom to live such a life. One may be confident that God will give wisdom, when one prays with singleness of heart (James 1:5-8). As in the Old Testament, wisdom in James is not primarily a matter of the intellect, to be learned. Rather, it is a gift to be received. To be wise in this sense is to be "tuned in" to what God is doing and what God wills. This "heavenly wisdom" is in sharp contrast with the so-called "wisdom" which is "unspiritual, of the devil" (James 3:15). Where such "wisdom" prevails, there is "envy and selfish ambition...disorder and every evil practice" (James 3:14,16). On the other hand, where the heavenly wisdom is received, there is peace, submissiveness and other "good fruit" which the later tradition has identified as confirming signs of a true

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<sup>12</sup>Above, pp. 11-12.

discernment of God's will.<sup>13</sup>

That there is a contrast between James and Paul is a commonplace of New Testament studies. Such is the case when the subject is spiritual discernment. In Paul's Corinthian correspondence, the "ability to distinguish between spirits" is one of the charisms of the Spirit given to individual members of the Church for the good of the whole.<sup>14</sup> Its purpose is to prevent confusion arising from false teaching. Since God is not the author of confusion, lack of clarity about God's will is itself a sign that spiritual influences unfriendly to the purpose of the Church are at work.

However, the gift of discernment is not merely negative. "The operation of the spirit of discernment will give approval to teaching and preaching that brings fresh truth from God."<sup>15</sup> The community of faith is in special need of such discernment in times of persecution and danger--the situation in which James writes about heavenly wisdom; and in times of transition--the situation in which Paul writes

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<sup>13</sup> See James 3:18. This verse also includes, as one of the fruits of the true wisdom, "impartiality," that is, the "indifference" which is an important condition for Ignatian discernment.

<sup>14</sup> II Cor. 11:14-15. According to Kinghorn in Gifts of the Spirit, pp. 77-82; 117-124, this means the ability to judge between divine, human and demonic influences. It is one of the "serving" gifts (as distinguished from the "enabling" gifts).

<sup>15</sup> Kinghorn, p. 82.

about discernment as a special giftedness.<sup>16</sup>

Given the contrast and complementarity between these two strands of New Testament teaching about spiritual discernment, it is fortuitous that we have a clear example of corporate spiritual discernment in the earliest Church, and one in which both James and Paul (along with Peter) are prominent. This is the Jerusalem Council, recorded in Acts 15.<sup>17</sup> The importance of this early Apostolic Council can hardly be overstated. At stake was the future, not only of the Gentile mission, but also of the Church as anything more than a Jewish sect. The eminent New Testament specialist, F. F. Bruce states that

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<sup>16</sup> The general transition from Jewish to Gentile Christianity which is now to be considered was immense. In such a Gentile setting as Corinth, this transition was mind-boggling! How true it is that "without the gift of discernment operating in the church, the Christian community would be totally vulnerable" (Kinghorn, p. 82).

<sup>17</sup> Significantly, Kinghorn (p. 8) quotes Acts 15:36-39 in his treatment of the gift of spiritual discernment. Ladislav M. Orsy, (Probing the Spirit, pp. 15 ff.) also sees the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem as an early example of communal discernment. Since Paul seems to have an individualistic understanding of discernment, the following observation by Herbert F. Smith ("Discernment of Spirits," p. 441) is important: "...when Paul's doctrine conflicted with that of the other apostles, he traveled to Jerusalem to consult with the Twelve, and it was the Church hierarchy at the highest level who conducted a communal discernment there to arrive at the truth."

Acts 15 was also taken as the explanation of George Fox's method of voteless decision-making among the Quakers according to Appendix A of Sheeron's book, Beyond Majority Rule (p. 119).

That Acts 15:1-29 was a redefinition of the earliest Church's mission and purpose is the whole thesis of a recent volume on the Christian world mission by Wesley Haines: The Other Side of the Gospel (Greenwood, IN, OMS International, Inc., 1980).

The Council of Jerusalem is an event to which Luke plainly attaches the highest importance; it is as epoch-making, in his eyes, as the conversion of Paul or the preaching of the gospel to Cornelius and his household.<sup>18</sup>

The young Church finds itself in confusion because a changed external situation has created pressure for internal change. The question of the Church's purpose is being raised: Is the Church to be an expression of Jewish Christianity, or even a sect of Judaism, with a Gentile mission? or will the Gentile converts be allowed to help determine the character of the Church itself? The discernment questions are begging for answers: What is God doing in the Gentile mission? and What does God intend for the Jerusalem Apostles to do?

"Certain men came down from Judea," sent by James, the president of the Jerusalem Church. However, they exceeded their commission by insisting that submission to the Mosaic law is necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1).<sup>19</sup> Paul and Barnabas, who had been duly authorized to undertake this phase of the Gentile mission (Acts 12:25; 13:2-3), debate this implication, so there is doubt and confusion in place

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<sup>18</sup>In The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1954), p. 298. I leave to such commentators as Bruce the discussion of the critical questions: If Paul and Barnabas, Peter and James, reached the agreement recorded in Acts 15:1-29, why was there continued tension between them, as reflected by Paul's Galatian and Corinthian letters? Why does Paul make no mention of the Council's letter to the Gentile churches? and What is the relation of Acts 15 and Galatians 2:1-10? See Bruce, pp. 298-302.

<sup>19</sup>According to Bruce, p. 303, these were the Judaizers of Gal. 2:12.



of assurance and peace (Acts 15:2a). Peter was evidently still in Antioch when this delegation arrived. Because of his earlier, individual discernment,<sup>20</sup> Peter had participated freely with the Gentile converts. Now he withdraws, and suffers the opposition of Paul (Galatians 2:11). The dissension at Antioch is carried to Jerusalem, and on their way "to see the apostles and elders about this question," Paul and Barnabas report the success of the Gentile mission to the Gentile Christians in Phoenicia and Samaria (Acts 15:2b-5).

This type of reporting was, in fact, the primary data the Jerusalem Council had to consider: the actual outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles. A basic discernment question is, What is God doing? The answer is presented by Peter himself as he addresses the Council (Acts 15:6-11):

God...accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith (Acts 15:8-9).<sup>21</sup>

Whatever the reason for Peter's withdrawal from the Gentile Christians at Antioch,<sup>22</sup> he had a clear understanding of

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<sup>20</sup>That is, not to "call any man common or unclean," Acts 10:28. See Bruce, p. 303.

<sup>21</sup>Peter's place in the fulfillment of divine intention was to exercise the "power of the keys," Matt. 16:19 cf. Isa. 22:22. In the Book of Acts, Peter opened the doors of the Church first in Jerusalem (2:14 ff.) and Judea (5:12-16), then in Samaria (8:9-25), and finally at Antioch (10:1-48). Thus, Peter played the key role in the purpose of God per Acts 1:8!

<sup>22</sup>Bruce, p. 303, speculates that Peter was solicitous

what God was doing among them, and he had understood this for some time. When ministering in the household of Cornelius, he referred to what God was doing, and he had shared this discernment with the Jerusalem Church (Acts 10:34-35; 11:1 ff.).<sup>23</sup>

Peter also raises the other basic discernment question: What are we to do? He does so by acknowledging the impossibility of legalism for Gentile or, for that matter, Jewish believers. Immediately there follows, in Luke's record, a highly significant and easily missed moment: "The whole assembly became silent..." (Acts 15:12). Once the Council has received its discernment of what God is doing in the disturbing events of this transition in the Church's life, it ponders the question about what the Church is supposed to do. How should the Church respond, since it certainly does not wish to oppose God? How does the Church take action--not just any action, not even just any good action, but the action which the Lord directs?

Such questions give the body pause. During the pause, Barnabas and Paul add corroborating evidence as to what God is doing. But it is neither Paul nor Peter, but James who leads the Council in its epoch-making discernment of

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of the "weaker" consciences of his Judean brethren.

<sup>23</sup>Our historian, Luke, also had no doubt about what God was doing. In connection with the stoning of Stephen and the subsequent persecution of the Church--events in which discerning divine intent would understandably be difficult--Luke sees divine action aimed at fulfilling the statement of purpose at Acts 1:8--see 8:1,4; 11:19-21.

the Church's mission, nature and purpose (Acts 15:13-21). James the wise, their president, first among equals, calls for the Council's attention with the conciliatory address, "Brothers, listen to me" (Acts 15:13).<sup>24</sup> He then summarizes all that has been said--for discernment begins with attentive listening--and introduces his conclusion with the words, "It is my judgment, therefore..." (Acts 15:19).<sup>25</sup>

No details are given as to how the Council concluded its business. Was the Jerusalem Church bicameral? Luke records that "the apostles and elders, with the whole church..." made the decision. Was there a procedure for voting? Luke records simply that they "decided." Was there consensus? Luke records that "...we all agreed..." (Acts 15:22,25). In any case, James's proposal commended itself to the Church, the decrees of the Council were committed to writing, and emissaries were dispatched to Antioch (Acts 15:22-29).

That the decision was the result of corporate spiritual discernment is suggested by three features of the final section of our passage (Acts 15:24-35): One is the way the message is introduced: "It seemed good to the Holy

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<sup>24</sup> Compare James 2:5, "Listen, my dear brothers." It is noteworthy that James (2:1-13) forbids discrimination and favoritism among Christians, precisely on grounds of a non-legalistic reading of the Decalogue as the "royal law of love," and he exultantly concludes, "Mercy triumphs over judgment!"

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Bruce, p. 309.

Spirit and to us..." (Acts 15:28).<sup>26</sup> The Jerusalem leaders were so conscious of "being possessed and controlled by [the Holy Spirit] that He is given prior mention as chief Author of their decision."<sup>27</sup> We note, secondly, the tone of the message: New Testament Greek has plenty of verbs of commanding, but none is used here.<sup>28</sup> The purpose of the earliest Church is now redefined in terms of free grace, not law. Corporate spiritual discernment operates without imperatives. The third feature is Luke's description of the consolations with which the message was received:

The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. Judas and Silas...said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them (Acts 15:31-33).<sup>29</sup>

#### Conclusion: Corporate Spiritual Discernment is Scriptural

We have adduced evidence in both Testaments sufficient to justify the conclusion that there is a means by which a faith-community can corporately become aware of what God is doing and wills the community to do. While some aspects of our Old Testament example are remote from our experience, there is a bridge from the Old to the New Testament--the

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<sup>26</sup>Bruce, p. 315, note 51, quotes W. L. Knox: "There is no parallel for such a phrase to pronounce a corporate decision by a deliberative body."

<sup>27</sup>Bruce, p. 315.

<sup>28</sup>Bruce, p. 315, who also cites F. J. A. Hort.

<sup>29</sup>In the tradition of Ignatian discernment, joy, encouragement and peace are included among the "consolations" of a right discernment.

Wisdom tradition.<sup>30</sup>

Our New Testament example enabled us to consider corporate spiritual discernment not only as wisdom but also as charism. Furthermore, this example displays the need for such communal awareness of God's action and will during times of transition, when the need to change has thrown the body into confusion. In addition, we noted some of the conditions for right discernment, and some of the consolations which result from it. These materials make it "clear that discernment of spirits is a highly significant part of the New Testament's approach to decision-making."<sup>31</sup>

### The Tradition of Corporate Spiritual Discernment

#### General Reference to Tradition

Discernment has always been a popular theme with writers in Christian spirituality. Patristic sources include Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Augustine, Cassian and St. Gregory the Great. Prominent medieval authors in this tradition were Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard of St. Victor, John of Ruysbroeck and Thomas a Kempis. The Protestant revivalists of the eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards in America and John Wesley in England, also take

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<sup>30</sup> See Philip S. Keane, "Discernment of Spirits," pp. 45-46 for a summary of Old Testament references to discernment.

<sup>31</sup> Keane summarizes the New Testament references, pp. 46-47, and makes this statement: "...the New Testament epistles theorize on discernment, while in the Gospels discernment is practiced without any theorizing" (p. 47).

their places in this tradition.<sup>32</sup>

Since spiritual discernment is a biblical theme, it comes as no surprise that such a listing of spiritually formative writers can be catalogued. What is a surprise, given the communal dimension of spiritual discernment in the Bible, is the relative lack of attention the tradition has paid to this aspect of the theme. Among Roman Catholics, only the Jesuits have a body of materials on corporate spiritual discernment. Among Protestants, only Quakers have consistently practiced communal discernment.

#### The Quaker Tradition

The Religious Society of Friends embodies the tradition of corporate spiritual discernment today, and has done so since 1647, the year George Fox first began to gather those who would "walk in the light of Truth."<sup>33</sup> The unique feature of this tradition is that decisions are reached without voting. Thus, every decision is uncontested, there is no majority-versus-minority mind-set, and there is no expectation of compromise and concession. Frequently, the harmony achieved from the variety of opinions present is little short of miraculous.<sup>34</sup>

Quakers convene meetings for worship and meetings for

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<sup>32</sup>Keane, pp. 47-48.

<sup>33</sup>Sheeron, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup>Sheeron, p. 119. All descriptions of the Quaker tradition here are based on Sheeron's study.

business, and the latter flow from the former.<sup>35</sup> At a meeting for business, Quakers seek to minimize emotion and maximize attentive listening, calm reflection, and plain speaking. "Central to the Quaker understanding of unity-based decision-making is Fox's idea that there is 'that of God in every one.'"<sup>36</sup> Beyond this essentially mystical faith, there may be a belief system which is more-or-less shared by the Friends. However, a religious dimension is not necessarily desirable, since the goal was unity rather than uniformity.<sup>37</sup>

Historically, various "tests of leadings" were invoked as a means of assuring the body that its decisions were compatible with such scriptural check-points as the cross of Christ and the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Later tests also included the extra-canonical and typical Quaker values of silence and unadorned speech. Such tests represented the practical recognition that the spiritual discernment of individual Friends might be limited. George Fox, like many of his non-Anglican, non-Puritan contemporaries, believed that his discernments were infallible. However, the fall of James Naylor in 1656 forced the early Quakers themselves to recognize the possibility of error in discernment,<sup>38</sup> and

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<sup>35</sup> Sheeron, pp.4-7.

<sup>36</sup> Sheeron, p. 3. Fox's phrase, "that of God" meant the presence of Christ = The Inner Light.

<sup>37</sup> See Sheeron's chapter on "Belief Systems Underlying Quaker Decision Making" (pp. 73-89).

<sup>38</sup> Sheeron's historical section includes a description

communal "wisdom" began to balance personal charism.

Today, a Quaker meeting for business, like a meeting for worship, begins and ends with silence. The advice (not a law!) of their Book of Discipline is that Friends come to meeting expecting the guidance of the Spirit and wanting the will of God rather than human wills to prevail. Both the individual member and the corporate body seeks to be "centered," or in touch with the divine presence. A meeting for business proceeds with preliminary discussion: a problem may be presented, for example, along with the options available to the meeting, and the pros and cons of each course of action. Next the meeting turns to "serious discussion:" the Friends speak of their individual leadings regarding the options before them. There is a mood of confidence at such meetings, based on the egalitarian relationships between Friends, past experiences of creative problem-solving, and the general mood of respect and expectancy. Because of these factors, there are few shy Quakers! The discipline and habit of silence is not to be confused with lack of confidence.

The leader of the meeting is the clerk. A gifted clerk formulates the right questions, and moves the decision-making process along without dominating it. The clerk may elicit the opinions of members who have not yet spoken. Eventually, the clerk formulates the Minute, which is in-

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of George Fox's views and of various crises, such as the Naylor affair (pp. 3-18); and also a discussion of the "tests of leadings" (pp. 19-43).



tended to express the "sense of the meeting." The Minute is a summary statement of the agreement reached in a meeting for business. No business is concluded without unity.<sup>39</sup> The communal discernment thus achieved leaves the members with a sense of "clearness" or confidence that the action is consistent God's will. Such a decision is said to be "in the Life," which means it was reached under divine influence.

### Ignatian Discernment

Where did George Fox get his extremely practical theology of divine guidance? Yes, he had read his Bible, but his views were also shaped by the historical milieu. In the Established Church of the mid-seventeenth century, both Roman Catholic and Anglican, people believed the Holy Spirit actively directs the outcome of decision-making. Fox's was also the century of English Dissent, and reliance upon direct divine guidance in human affairs characterized many anti-establishment movements which predated the Quakers.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>This is an extremely brief summary of the materials in Part II of Beyond Majority Rule, beginning at p. 47. What Friends typically do and say as they work together toward unity, the inherently human foibles of the Quaker way, and the possible abuse of leadership, are discussed by the author. He also gives examples of practical decisions reached by specific meetings. This rescues the account from a merely theoretical description, and the reader can appreciate the creative problem-solving which actually occurs. The key word is "unity," and Friends are careful not to speak of either unanimity or consensus (see p. 63).

<sup>40</sup>These included the English Anabaptists, the Seekers, the Familists, John Smyth and the General Baptists, and Cromwellian Congregationalism. See Sheeron, pp. 123 ff.

It is an irony of history that the Society of Jesus, more than a century older than the Religious Society of Friends, had no discernible influence upon George Fox and the Quakers. Yet the former Society offers the most extensive directions for personal spiritual discernment available to the Church, the "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits" in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. Furthermore, the Jesuit Order was constituted because of the corporate spiritual discernment of the First Founders.<sup>41</sup>

We can trace no historical link between the Jesuits, a Roman Catholic Order of Spanish provenance and the Quakers, a Dissenting movement in England. Had there been total openness on the part of the English Mystics to Spanish Catholic mysticism, the Quakers still would not have learned about corporate spiritual discernment from the Jesuits. For within one generation of St. Ignatius, his Jesuits were no longer practicing corporate spiritual discernment.<sup>42</sup>

Ignatius, born in Spain in 1491, was involved with the nobility and the military as a young man. The story of his conversion is well known: Wounded in battle in 1521,

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<sup>41</sup>I suggest that the First Founders, whose communal discernment is recorded in the Deliberatio, are to Jesuits what the First Publishers of Truth are to Quakers. The First Publishers were 48 men and 12 women (also called the Valiant Sixty) who, along with George Fox, were itinerant preachers of the Quaker gospel.

<sup>42</sup>Compare "About the Author," frontispiece to Sheeron, Beyond Majority Rule.

he spent a long convalescence in re-orienting his entire life around God and Jesus Christ. Subsequently, he went to unusual lengths to express his devotion to the Holy Trinity, fasting every day but Sunday, staying on his knees seven hours a day in prayer, and doing deeds of penance. He was given visions, and miracles were performed at his hand, and so the Church canonized him in 1622.<sup>43</sup>

In spite of this degree of union with God, Ignatius was troubled by what he called "scruples." Therefore, he had to learn to distinguish carefully between his own feelings and even his own conscience, on the one hand; and the inspirations and leadings of God, on the other. What he learned, he reduced to the so-called "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits." Discernment of spirits is required when one is faced with a decision (an "election" in Ignatian terms), but cannot make it because of inward confusion.

St. Ignatius had observed that there are "three times of election." These are three ways in which Christians experience the process of decision-making. First, it is sometimes the case that God moves and attracts the will so strongly and surely that there is no question, and no desire to question, what the decision will be. Second,

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<sup>43</sup> Some biographical details are to be found in The Catholic Tradition, edited by Charles J. Dollen, James K. McGowan and James J. Megivern (Wilmington, NC, McGrath Publishing Co., 1979), Spirituality I, pp. 353-372. This resource includes chapters from the autobiography of St. Ignatius, and the full text of his letter to St. Francis Borgia. This letter is an amazing summary of Ignatian teaching.

when we make decisions during a time of tranquillity, we can simply trust ordinary reasoning power. Daily decisions are mostly of this nature. Third, there are those times in life when we have such mixed feelings and insights about a course of action that we simply do not know which way to turn. It is in this confused state of soul that the Christian needs to practice spiritual discernment.<sup>44</sup>

By means of spiritual discernment the Christian sorts out the various influences in the inward, spiritual life which are creating the confusion. In Ignatian terms, this means evaluating the consolations and desolations of one's interior state. Desolation is experienced as darkness and confusion of soul, tastelessness, emptiness, discontent, attraction to base and earthly things, consternation, agitation and mistrust, and in this we recognize the movement of the Evil Spirit. Consolation is the movement of the Holy Spirit, and is experienced as the love of God, shedding of tears for sin or in praise to God, an increase of faith, hope, charity and joy, contentment, quietness and peace.<sup>45</sup> The Enemy suggests false reasons, subtleties and fallacies without end: this is desolation. The removal of sadness and inward disturbance, the renewal of gladness and

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<sup>44</sup>I have reversed the order of the second and third times of election for purposes of this discussion. Egan devotes a whole chapter to the three times of election (pp. 132 ff.).

<sup>45</sup>According to Rules III and IV for the First Week. See the Longridge translation of the Spiritual Exercises, p. 186.

spiritual joy: this is consolation.<sup>46</sup> Piet Penning de Vries catalogues the consolations: (1) Intense consolation comes from receiving more and more illumination until one has a physical feeling of warmth because of the fire of God's love within. (2) Tears are mentioned by St. Ignatius as being very consoling--tears of grief for sin, tears in praise of Christ's passion, tears of joy in the anticipation of heaven. (3) Ordinary consolation comes with every increase of hope, faith, love, joy, attraction to heavenly things and to the salvation of the soul.<sup>47</sup> In a word, consolation is to be aware of union with God, whether to a small or greater degree and even though this awareness waxes and wanes.<sup>48</sup>

Now the real test of discernment--the essence of Ignatian discernment, in fact--is whether the consolation is without prior cause.<sup>49</sup> If, in the welter of confused inward motions and spiritual influences, the discerning Christian finds no identifiable reason for the experience of consolation, then he or she can act with the assurance that God and God alone has granted consolation. "When God

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<sup>46</sup> Rule I for the Second Week in the Spiritual Exercises (Longridge translation), pp. 190-191.

<sup>47</sup> Penning de Vries, pp. 16-20.

<sup>48</sup> Penning de Vries, pp. 14-15.

<sup>49</sup> Karl Rahner sees consolation without prior cause as "the first principle, the touchstone and utterly basic experience of Ignatian supernatural logic" (quoted by Egan, p. 15).

alone consoles, He consoles in precisely this way."<sup>50</sup>

It would be correct, therefore, to describe spiritual discernment as distinguishing the voice of God from one's own voice, especially when God uses one's own voice to speak!<sup>51</sup> For this reason, St. Ignatius also advocated the principle of "indifference" in the practice of spiritual discernment.<sup>52</sup> One must enter into the discernment process, insofar as possible, without a strong preference for the outcome, with a certain open-mindedness about the result, simply being submissive to the will of God which the discernment will reveal.

This exposition of individual discernment can readily be applied to the situation calling for corporate spiritual discernment. Here, too, it is recognized that day-to-day decisions are made routinely, on a common-sense basis. Certain directions may clearly beckon the body as its

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<sup>50</sup>Egan, p. 33. This interpreter sees consolation without prior cause as "the instant when Eternity becomes temporal and the temporal becomes eternal" and as "the Father's entry into the soul" (p. 12). It is, therefore, a concentrated "miniature" of the whole mystical experience. Apropos of decision-making, this experience cannot deceive and cannot be measured. Such a discernment carries its own evidence and measures all other leadings (p. 15).

<sup>51</sup>Compare Stanley, p. 32.

<sup>52</sup>"Indifference" in corporate spiritual discernment impacts not only the prejudices and preferences of the members, but also their attitude toward the leader. A question discussed by Orsy is "How Far Did Ignatius Inspire the Group?" Probing the Spirit, pp. 21 ff. This was one of Ignatius's own concerns, especially when he was selected as the first general of the order, a post he filled until his death in 1556.

divine vocation. Discernment is needed when the group is confused, especially as to its basic identity, mission and purpose. Such was the case when St. Ignatius and the other First Founders began to consider whether it was God's will for them to form a society. All were devoted to the service of God, the Church and humankind. These basic Christian commitments were in place. To form a new society in the Church could be considered a good course of action, but this was not the question. It was solely a matter of whether God had a mission and purpose for such a society as they were proposing.

The First Founders joined together in discernment meetings. The principle of "indifference" was expressed by Ignatius's counsel of "desnudsare"--his native Spanish term meaning "to denude" oneself: to be detached and objective about the outcome.<sup>53</sup> Of key importance in their conversations was listening, so that each one could share any thoughts without interruption or argument. They gave themselves adequate time for reflection on all sides of the question, then went back and presented the matter to God. Piet Penning de Vries records that they were to "debate first without deciding, write this down, then celebrate three masses, etc."<sup>54</sup> When the discernment was completed and an agreement was reached, corporate consolations confirmed the decision: a new unity, a sense of settled peace

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<sup>53</sup> Penning de Vries, p. 63.

<sup>54</sup> Penning de Vries, p. 63.

and the joy of knowing and serving the Lord.

Conclusion: Corporate Spiritual Discernment  
is a Living Tradition

We conclude that there is a living tradition, both among the Quakers and among the Jesuits, which embodies the scriptural revelation of corporate spiritual discernment as a means by which the community of faith can discover what God is doing and what is God's will. Furthermore, the tradition clarifies the biblical materials by giving us ways actually to practice corporate spiritual discernment. While no human practice is infallible, we can expect an assurance that we have made the decision which God intends. This assurance is of the nature of faith, not sight. Like biblical "wisdom," it is a knowledge of the heart, not of the head; it is certitude, not certainty; it is a moral persuasion, not a logical demonstration.<sup>55</sup> And yet, it has its own rationality. We turn now to the consideration of this aspect of corporate spiritual discernment.

The Role of Reason in Spiritual Discernment

Clearly the "discernment of spirits" practiced by a Christian or a Christian community is a process of decision-making based more upon interior and subjective responses than upon a thorough analysis of objective factors. The basic idea of discernment is that various influences, both divine and otherwise, vie with one another for the service of human beings. The task of discernment is to know which

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<sup>55</sup>Compare Spohn, p. 30.



of these influences is from God, so as to arrive at an awareness of what God is doing and what God wants us to do.<sup>56</sup>

That spiritual discernment is interior and subjective does not, of course, mean it is unreal. Spiritual discernment is not playing a hunch nor acting upon impulse. Indeed, if the result of right discernment is knowing what God is doing and what God wills, then the discernment deals with realities more solid than any other.<sup>57</sup>

And yet a discerned decision is different from a reasoned decision. The one comes by contemplation and dialogue. The other comes by argument and the weighing of evidence. The one is "totally interior and totally passive,"<sup>58</sup> the other is active and decisive. The one finds its assurance in spiritual consolation, the other finds its assurance in sufficient data and correct logic.<sup>59</sup> The one

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<sup>56</sup>See Keane's definition of discernment of spirits in "Discernment of Spirits," p. 44.

<sup>57</sup>Smith, p. 435.

<sup>58</sup>Smith, p. 445. Consequently, he recognizes that we "cannot force the essential act of discernment."

<sup>59</sup>Penning de Vries observes (p. 30), "In his activities as well as in his contact with the Lord, Ignatius is often guided by consolation, not by reasoning....Reasoning can obscure consolation." In my opinion, we need not invoke so absolute a cleavage as this suggests; but I, too, have experienced the loss of consolation on some occasions when I had "won the argument" by good reasoning! And I, too, have made several decisions by intuiting God's will when the prudential evidence suggested another direction to be more logical.

decision may, on occasion, fly in the face of the evidence. The other decision is always limited to the evidence.

In spite of these contrasts, reason both confirms the use of discernment in decision-making and also assists our understanding and description of this mode. Specifically, there are four positive ways in which spiritual discernment and human rationality are related. In the first place, the faithful Christian or the faith-community can understand and decide when to use a rational approach to a problem and when to use a discernment approach. Sometimes, God comes to us through the consolations. If not, the decision must be made by an intellectual weighing of things, pro and con.<sup>60</sup> As we have seen, St. Ignatius himself recognizes the "third time of election," namely those day-to-day decisions in which we are guided by common sense.<sup>61</sup> The implication is that even God expects us to make some decisions apart from the discernment of spirits; on what other basis, then, but the reasonableness of people whose sole aim is God's praise and human salvation?<sup>62</sup>

If Christians experience some limitations in the prac-

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<sup>60</sup>Penning de Vries, p. 62. Chapter IV of this scholar's work is entitled "Limits of the Discernment of Spirits."

<sup>61</sup>In his Spiritual Diary, St. Ignatius reflects on the fact that he would sometimes come to a point where, in the absence of a clear discernment and its consolation, he must end deliberation and make a decision. "In that case, if we do what we can, we may rely on God. He lets us choose what He prefers" (quoted by Penning de Vries, p. 62).

<sup>62</sup>Penning de Vries, p. 62.

tice of discernment, they also have times when every reasonable consideration fails to solve a problem. This ministry project was undertaken because the management-by-objectives model--a thoroughly rational method of church planning--had failed to produce desired results. It was in the gathering and analysis of data--a thoroughly rational enterprise--that we realized the need for a different model. It was by making comparisons between the two approaches--a rational exercise--that we concluded that the corporate-spiritual-discernment model was more appropriate for the time being. And when our Charge Conference resolved to undertake this planning-project, our goals and objectives were cast in the rational language of management-by-objectives.

Secondly, reason complements spiritual discernment by preparing the way for its practice. Although discernment makes a judgment about subjective factors, there are relevant objective considerations as well. At the very least, it is necessary to gather data related to the options being considered or the problem which is posed. In all likelihood, some analysis of these data will be factored into the ultimate decision.<sup>63</sup>

In this ministry-project, our Administrative Council prayed for a discernment of the church's purpose. Since this was a "listening prayer," we listened: to biblical data relating to the process of discernment itself, and

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<sup>63</sup> Keane, p. 45; Smith, pp. 433 and 445.

biblical data relating to the purpose of Christ's Church; to the feed-back of our congregation in Lenten Home Meetings and by way of an extensive questionnaire; to the recent history of our church; to one another in our formulations of proposed statements of purpose.

The fact is that spiritual discernment involves a deep resonance between pertinent concrete experiences and our deepest self-awareness before God. Therefore,

...if we wish to discern well in a given area..., it is important for our subjectivity to learn as much as possible about the area. It would be foolish to think that we could discern competently without such preparation.<sup>64</sup>

In the third place, reason protects the practitioners of spiritual discernment from excesses. This is not to concede to reason the authority of God when God's will becomes known in the "first time of election;" nor yet the assurance of the consolations, especially the strongest consolations, by which God's will is confirmed in the "second time of election." But it is a practical recognition of human fallibility and, therefore, of the fallibility of human discernment. Biblical wisdom is pragmatic; and even God-given charisms seldom motivate decisions which are totally irrational and out of character.<sup>65</sup> Had our corporate discernment led to the

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<sup>64</sup>Keane, pp. 52-55 (the quotation is from p. 55). He adds, "Our role in discernment is not to tempt the Spirit of God to help us when we have not helped ourselves."

<sup>65</sup>Smith, p. 434, insists that discernment is not the abandonment of intelligence, and lays it down as a

formulation of an anti-Christian statement of purpose, for example, we would have had reasonable grounds to question our perception and/or our method.

Fourth, any method properly so called is intrinsically rational. Since there is an orderly, reasonable and appropriate procedure for practitioners of spiritual discernment to follow, we recognize a fourth area of complementarity.<sup>66</sup> True, discernment is not a syllogism leading to a clear and precise answer about God's action and will. Nor can discernment be reduced to right steps with guaranteed results.<sup>67</sup> Still, generations of Christians have been helped in their decision-making by St. Ignatius's "Rules" for the discernment of spirits. Similarly, it is my conclusion that the Administrative Council of the Church of the Saviour was enabled to discover this church's purpose by following Miriam Murphy's method for corporate spiritual discernment. I will now give an account of this experience.

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principle (the fourth among 13 which he adduces, pp. 436-444) that "Reason informed by faith must play its proper role in every discernment of spirits" (p. 437, his italics). The failure to understand this led to the excesses of the early Quaker, James Naylor (see above, pp. 48-49). There are a number of such examples in Quaker history. One of the most shocking is the story of a 17-year old Quaker girl who walked the streets of Oxford naked, as a step toward evangelizing the students. On the other hand, retrospect has long since exonerated Joan of Arc and Abraham!

<sup>66</sup>Smith, pp. 446-447.

<sup>67</sup>Keane, p. 51.

## Chapter 3

### Corporate Spiritual Discernment in the Planning Process at the Church of the Saviour

#### The Elements of Corporate Spiritual Discernment

We now have before us some scriptural and traditional examples of decision making by means of corporate spiritual discernment, including the Jerusalem Council, a Quaker meeting for business, and the founding of the Society of Jesus. Several common elements are drawn from these examples: the need to understand what God is doing; the desire to discover God's will; the prayer of discernment; attentive listening to God and to fellow members of the body; earnest and honest, but uncontentious, discussion; the sharing of individual discernments or proposed courses of action; finding out whether the body is prepared to act, that is corporately to settle on its discernment; and some means of discovering whether the members of the body individually assent to the decision.

Miriam Murphy's method for corporate spiritual discernment adds two elements to those listed above. First is the now-familiar method of creative problem-solving which starts with "brain-storming:" With the problem or need

before them, all members are invited to engage in a free-association exercise. In short order, the body has many ideas to consider. Initially, no one is permitted to criticize or reject any idea, however unusual, out-of-context or unexpected. Only after all ideas have been recorded does the group begin its weeding-out process. Discussion of the ideas is first allowed for clarification only. Afterwards, the conversation turns to the relative merits of the ideas. Finally, the group settles on a previously agreed-upon number of ideas, and these become "candidates" for action, proposed solutions to the problem, or possible group decisions.

The other feature of Murphy's method for corporate spiritual discernment is the selection of criteria. The proposals which are now before the group through the problem-solving exercise are evaluated by means of standards which the group itself has set. The criteria can themselves be arrived at through creative problem-solving, or by any other means the body believes to be appropriate.

At the Church of the Saviour, the Administrative Council selected the criteria from their study of the purpose of the Church both in the Bible and in the several theological resources used on successive planning days; in addition, the process of listening to the congregation of our church became a source of the norms which we applied. Having narrowed the set of proposed statements of purpose to a manageable number, Council members then rated each

proposal in the light of each of the norms on a scale of 1-to-4. It was then possible for each member to report a "score" for each statement of purpose which had been proposed. The proposal receiving the highest total score was identified. This became the basis for the final acts of discernment, which consisted of further prayer; my inquiry about whether each member was assenting to the statement of purpose thus isolated; the refinements of the statement; and the final evaluations of the planning process.

Since the Administrative Council makes decisions on behalf of the entire congregation of the Church of the Saviour, it was important to secure input from the constituency. Consequently, in addition to the elements of corporate spiritual discernment just summarized, the Council distributed a questionnaire and sponsored Lenten home meetings as part of the planning process. As a result, Council members were "in touch" with the general membership of our church, and there is no doubt that this awareness figured in their decision-making. Furthermore, since our prayer was that God would give us a discernment of our mission in such a way as to unify and energize the entire congregation, the active involvement of all parishioners was essential. We turn now to a step-by-step description of our experience of corporate spiritual discernment.



The First Discernment Meeting

Administrative Council Meeting,  
January 30, 1988

The Administrative Council of the Church of the Saviour in Westerville, Ohio held its first Planning Day on Saturday, January 30, 1988, from 8:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon. The session began with worship which had as its focus "The Authority of God's Word." My prayer of invocation was:

Almighty God, whose word is authority and power and whose way is love, grant unto us today clear minds, understanding hearts, and willing spirits so that we may wisely appropriate your word of truth. In the name of Christ. Amen.

In the quietness of the church sanctuary, the Scriptures were read by lay members, without comment, and with about five minutes of silence after each reading. A "Reading for Reflection" and "Prayers for Church, Self and Others" were also done in silence, and then members were invited to share their reflections aloud. The service closed with the unison reading of a hymn and the benediction.<sup>1</sup> The mood of "listening prayer" was established, and prevailed throughout the morning.

The "meeting for business" was held in a large room behind the sanctuary. The goals for this first planning day were stated and printed as follows:

1. To understand the entire planning process and to agree to be involved in each phase of it.

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<sup>1</sup>See Appendix A, "Agendas and Orders of Worship for the Three Planning Days," section II.

2. To understand the meaning of corporate spiritual discernment.
3. To understand our church's present situation.<sup>2</sup>

Although the goals were clear and the agenda was complete, the style of the meeting was relaxed. Seating was in a semi-circle, and a chalk board and newsprint were used. Coffee was available, and people were invited to imbibe at will. We moved into smaller groupings several times; there was variety in teaching methods; and members were able to "interrupt" and engage in free discussion.

My undertaking the Doctor of Ministry program had been approved formally, but this was the first time the Administrative Council had been involved with the ministry project in any depth. Therefore, some time was spent describing the genesis of the project in my meetings with the CRG, and also the CRG's role as a monitoring and evaluating group. In addition, we studied the question, "What is corporate spiritual discernment?" using biblical, traditional and theological sources.<sup>3</sup>

#### A Report of the First Discernment Meeting

The first planning day was flexible enough that several things occurred which I did not anticipate. The chairperson of the Administrative Council had conducted an

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<sup>2</sup>See Appendix A, section I.

<sup>3</sup>These included several authors cited in the literature survey in chapter one, the study of some of the Old Testament background given in chapter two, and a thorough discussion of the Jerusalem Council as given in chapter two. For the outline of these studies, see Appendix A, section I.

informal survey of the membership unrelated to the ministry project, and he shared some observations which provided input from the parish. The chairperson of the Finance Committee, a much-respected member of the Council, described the motto and logo of his son's church, and spoke of the unity of that congregation, its success in presenting itself to its community, and the guidance afforded the congregation in developing its program. The church treasurer described the mission statement of the bank where he is employed, and the way in which it determines business strategy and guides the bank in its marketing.

Meaningful sharing likewise occurred during the opening worship. The church lay leader spoke of the need to use our problems and not to be defeated by them. The chairperson of the Commission on Evangelism emphasized the need to take all the time necessary in order to listen and learn to hear God speak. Twenty-one of the thirty members of the Council attended the first planning day. Due to their energetic participation, the last part of my agenda for the day was cut short.<sup>4</sup>

#### Evaluation of the First Discernment Meeting

On February 8, 1988, the CRG met for its evaluation of the first planning day. Committee members remarked that the four hours went very fast, and they sensed the high

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<sup>4</sup>Appendix A, section I: Outline of the day, part 3.b.(3).

degree of motivation on the part of the Administrative Council. In response to the agreed-upon evaluation questions,<sup>5</sup> the CRG reached the following conclusions:

(1) The stated purpose of the activity was partially fulfilled. Discussion centered around whether we actually secured the agreement of the Administrative Council to participate in the entire planning process. Although the CRG felt that such agreement was understood, it was not formalized by vote.

(2) The CRG did not recommend any basic changes in the design of the ministry project. However, they emphasized the need to return to the part of our discussion which had been cut short. In addition, the CRG advocated two procedures: They asked that the "dry run" of Miriam Murphy's method for corporate spiritual discernment which I planned to include in the second session be a real issue rather than a simulation. They felt we could practice the discernment process on such an issue as "evangelism" or the question of reversing the times of worship and Sunday school (a topic our Administrative Council had previously discussed without reaching a conclusion). Secondly, the CRG urged that there be more time for prayer in subsequent sessions than there was at the first planning day.

(3) The CRG agreed that the first planning day was invigorating for the participants, but observed that it was too early to know if new energies would be released in the

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<sup>5</sup>See above, p. 16.

life of the entire congregation. One CRG member who was not a member of the Administrative Council had attended the first planning day as an observer. However, the meeting generated such a high level of energy that she was drawn in, and became a full participant. It was she who first noted how quickly the session seemed to pass: she stated bluntly that she had planned to "look in" as an observer for an hour, and could not have imagined that any meeting could have held her interest for four hours!

(4) Unanticipated was the rather active sharing on the part of the participants, and both the CRG and I were grateful for the unexpectedly strong support which was given to the ministry project. Several examples of this are reported above. The chairperson of the Finance Committee was also a member of the CRG, and is recognized by the congregation for his spiritual as well as his business leadership in the Church of the Saviour. His reference to the experience of his son's church was extremely helpful to our Council. It was reassuring to know that other churches had done just what we were now attempting to do. Then the treasurer, one of the youngest persons ever to become an officer of The Huntington Bank, explained the concept of "mission" in business terms. The concept became concrete for the members of our Council. They began to appreciate the importance of what we were doing, and they could understand how a statement of purpose could guide program planning and public relations.

(5) Especially given the need for flexibility, the CRG felt that my leadership had been effective. It was recognized that the spontaneous sharing just described had been as important as the prepared instruction, and that I had been wise in encouraging it. Furthermore, a flexible and conversational style, rather than a more formal style, was appropriate to a discernment process. Since a free style of leadership does allow the members to use meeting time, the CRG felt I had done well to cover as much of my prepared instruction as I had.

#### The Second Discernment Meeting

Administrative Council Meeting,  
February 27, 1988

Our Administrative Council met for its second four-hour planning session on Saturday, February 27, 1988. The focus of the opening worship was our common life in Christ, and the worship atmosphere was quiet listening. My prayer of invocation was as follows:

Almighty God, you have called the church into being and have gathered us into one family. By the power of your Holy Spirit help us to live in unity and peace with all your children. May our actions this day be the fruit of our faith in your kingdom. In the name of Christ. Amen.

Two other prayers in the service were based on Paul's prayers for the church in Ephesians 1 and 3. A longer period was spent in the mode of listening prayer than at the first planning day. Indeed, my response to the CRG's evaluation was to design the entire session with more and

longer times for prayer, especially in the listening mode.<sup>6</sup>

This second planning day was intended to accomplish three things:

1. To provide an understanding the nature of the Church in the New Testament in addition to what had been studied at the first session. The specific reference was to be the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God; and Ephesians was the specific text to be studied.
2. To provide training for Council members who would be leading Lenten Home Groups during the month following this session.
3. To provide a practice exercise in Miriam Murphy's method of corporate spiritual discernment.<sup>7</sup>

#### A Report of the Second Discernment Meeting

I did not concur with the CRG's recommendation regarding the usefulness of a simulation exercise in Murphy's method of corporate spiritual discernment. It was my judgment that to work on any real issue could only detract from the actual discernment for which we were praying. Furthermore, I was not convinced that spiritual discernment is the appropriate means for determining issues less basic than the purpose of the Church of the Saviour.

Consequently, we practiced Murphy's methodology on a moot question: What should our church have been named? This simulation was carried out after we had completed a diagnosis of our church's ills, the topic which had been

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<sup>6</sup>See Appendix A, sections III and IV.

<sup>7</sup>We also discussed the definitions of terms related to church planning, both on the management-by-objectives model and the corporate-spiritual-discernment model--see Appendix B, "Handouts at Planning Days," section I. Compare above, pp. 10-13.

cut short at our January session; and had done a Bible study on the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God. These discussions formed a very challenging context for the naming of a church, and the simulation produced some creative discernments!

To complete this simulation exercise, the Council was divided into four small groups of four or five persons each. Each small group followed the creative problem-solving procedure, then developed its own criteria (most of them related to our previous discussions), and scored each "candidate" for a church name on a 1-to-4 scale as to how well any proposed name satisfied the various criteria.<sup>8</sup>

During the six weeks following the second planning day, members of the Administrative Council were to meet with the church membership in a series of home meetings, prior to Easter and before our final discernment meeting. Congregational input into the planning process was solicited in two ways: A rather extensive and well-tested questionnaire called the Parish Profile Inventory (PPI); and an unscientific one-page opinion-poll. Church members received the PPI by mail the week following our second discernment meeting, and were asked to submit it to the Administrative

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<sup>8</sup>See Murphy's "Creative Problem Solving Procedure" worksheets in *Prayer in Action*, pp. 115-116, preceded by her guidelines to "Creative Discernment," pp. 112-115. Compare Appendix C, "A Worksheet for Corporate Spiritual Discernment." This worksheet, which is my adaptation of the Evaluation Sheet (Murphy, p. 116), was used by our Administrative Council for the simulation on February 27, 1988 and for the discernment process on April 23, 1988.



Council member leading the Lenten home group they attended. At the group meeting, the Council member was asked to lead a study of the metaphors describing the Church in Ephesians. Then the opinion poll would be requested, and the leader would encourage group discussion about our church. Each Council member who led a group was asked to report a summary of the opinions expressed. In preparation for this phase of the planning process, Council members received a Lenten home group assignment, an outline of the group meeting, a set of Bible study notes, and a quantity of our simple opinion-polls.<sup>9</sup>

#### Evaluation of the Second Discernment Meeting

Again, the the CRG commented on the experience of a four-hour planning day passing so quickly. The group also expressed satisfaction that more time was provided for prayer than in the first session. Since I had not followed the group's recommendation regarding the simulation exercise, it was significant that the CRG was, nevertheless, pleased with the exercise on "Let's Name Our Church." Though it was a game, the results were rather suggestive of the realities of our church.

In reference to evaluation question #1, the CRG judged that the goals of this planning session were fulfilled, but they raised a flag of caution: One small group of the four which did the spiritual-discernment simulation apparently did not understand the process. As the leader--and this

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<sup>9</sup>See Appendix D, "Lenten Home Meetings Packet."

is the response to question #5--I needed to provide more careful instruction in the method of corporate spiritual discernment we were attempting. While no unanticipated factors have emerged (question #4), the CRG fully expected that there would be a release of new energy (question #3) with the involvement of many church members in the Lenten home group program.

Evaluation question #2 suggests the possibility of in-course modifications of the ministry project's design. The CRG discussed our plan to use the PPI: Though well-tested and widely-used, this questionnaire is long and rather complex. Responding to the questionnaire is difficult for many people, and assessing the results is a rather technical matter which we may find ourselves unable to accomplish. I was asked to reconsider the way in which the PPI was to be utilized. A second design-modification was suggested by the CRG, that Administrative Council members leading Lenten home groups be requested to assist in the evaluation of this phase of the project, scheduled for April 7, 1988.

### Listening to the Congregation

#### The Parish Profile Inventory (PPI)

Because the CRG had expressed reservations concerning the PPI and our ability to interpret it, I reconsidered the role of this instrument in our planning process. The PPI, with instruction sheet and cover letter, was sent to the church's mailing list on February 29, 1988. Its results

were not assessed by means of statistically valid measurement, and direct attention was given to only two of its nine parts. All of the PPIs which were returned have been retained by the Church of the Saviour, and are available to the present pastor and the Administrative Council to use, as appropriate, in the on-going planning process.<sup>10</sup>

As an incentive to promote congregational involvement in the ministry project, this limited use of the PPI--especially in conjunction with the Lenten home groups and our informal survey--was, I believe, justified. For one thing, distribution of the PPI by mail enabled some church members who could not attend the Lenten home meetings (shut-ins, for example) to participate. Also, the report of PPI responses on "Tasks of the Church" and "Organizational Characteristics" given to the Administrative Council at its third discernment meeting became an occasion for the Council seriously to listen to the congregation. This was especially the case because I chose to report the average scores of Administrative Council returns separately from those of the rest of the congregation.

Thirteen of the thirty Council members made returns, or nearly 44%. Just under 20% of the other church members

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<sup>10</sup>The PPI, developed by Hartford Seminary, has been used by more than 200 congregations for program evaluation, needs assessment, planning, and in the process of pastoral searches. There are also two shorter versions of the PPI, one of them for planning. Information is available from the Center for Social and Religious Research, Hartford Seminary, 77 Sherman Street, Hartford, CT 06105.

responded (53 of 270), or a higher proportion when we discounted non-resident members (most of whose responses, if received, would be of little relevance to the current situation of our church). Thus, the total returns for our entire congregation, discounting non-residents, was about 25%, a statistically significant response. On the other hand, making allowance for members who did not return the PPI because of its difficulty or any other extraneous reason, we may see this response as the total number of our highly-motivated members! And in the sub-set of the Administrative Council, fewer than half expressed a sense of ownership and high motivation! While these observations may place the Church of the Saviour among the "average" of United Methodist churches, they also characterize the congregation, including its elected leadership, as lacking a unifying sense of mission. Nevertheless, of those responding, there was a higher degree of assurance about the church's identity and commonly-held beliefs than I, as pastor and as the originator of this ministry project, would have thought. Still, this is actually a predictable result, given the high motivation of PPI respondents.

While the responses gave little direct evidence of the "we/they" syndrome, they highlighted the absence of feedback mechanisms and hinted at an oligarchical pattern of decision-making. But the general congregational responses expressed considerable confidence that the Administrative Council was a truly representative body. The Council's own

responses on this point indicated even more strongly its belief that it is adequately representative. However, at many points the Council's average scores were well below those of the general membership.

Cause for greatest concern, however, and underscoring the need for the ministry project, are those responses in which members expressed the low morale current among them, and a corresponding lack of excitement about our church's future.<sup>11</sup>

#### The Lenten Home Meetings

The plan of the ministry project called for a series of home meetings throughout our parish during Lent, a natural time for such an activity. These occurred in March, 1988. Since shut-in and non-resident members could not be included, 230 members were invited to participate. 66 attended, or about 29%. The leaders of these home meetings --members of the Administrative Council--reported that all but two had a good spirit with free sharing and an encouraging degree of energy. Specific comments of participants included: "It was time well spent." "The Bible study was excellent." "The prayers were meaningful." One group sent back the word that they were pleased to be asked to give input regarding their church's program.

The leader of each group submitted a summary of his or her group's discussions and written opinion-polls. Most prominent among these responses was the idea that the

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix E, "Some Results of the PPI."

Church of the Saviour is like a family. It became apparent that this metaphor was extremely meaningful to those participating in Lenten home groups. Critical comments complained about poor communications, about our discomfort with conflict, and about our resistance to change; but such problems are typical of family-type (primary) relationships. While looking for improvement, those making the criticisms also valued the Church of the Saviour because it is like "home," like "family."<sup>12</sup>

#### Evaluation of the Congregational Listening Phase

When the CRG met on April 7, 1988 to evaluate the congregational listening phase of the ministry project, they were joined by several members of the Administrative Council who had led Lenten home meetings. Given some disappointment that not more parishioners had participated, there was enthusiasm about the experience, and it was felt that the purpose of the program had been fulfilled (evaluation question #1), not only in receiving feedback from our people, but also in the sense of expectancy in the groups (question #3). The fact that two groups did not "get off the ground" was attributed to the dynamics prevailing in those particular configurations of people. Should this aspect of the project have been repeated, a more careful grouping of church members could be attempted (question #2). It is possible, of course, that the problem

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<sup>12</sup>See Appendix F for the full "Summary of Lenten Home Meetings."

in these two groups was one of leadership as well (question #5), but this could not be accurately assessed. Two unanticipated factors (question #4) emerged in the course of the home meetings: the very strong emphasis upon our church as a family, noted above; and the opinion of many members that the times of worship and Sunday school should be reversed--a decision the Administrative Council had skirted for two years!

### The Third Discernment Meeting

#### Administrative Council Meeting, April 23, 1988

The final planning day was held on Saturday, April 23, 1988. This was an 8-hour session beginning at 8:00 a.m., with luncheon provided at noon, and concluding at 4:00 p.m. The purpose of our third gathering was to discern God's will as to the mission of our church, and to express this as a statement of purpose.

The focus of the opening worship was "The Gathering of the Resurrection People." It included the reading of the entire book of Ephesians, one chapter at a time, interspersed with six quiet times. There were additional periods of listening, as I guided the group in exercises of physical, mental and spiritual relaxation. This included the use of the "Jesus Prayer." Such exercises had been conducted by Sister Miriam Murphy in her seminar at Princeton, and also when she spoke at the Church of the Saviour. This approach, so essential as a context for spiritual discernment, was not unfamiliar to Council mem-

bers by this time.

A time of reflection followed this, and I encouraged Council members to make written notes about the mission of our church, their insights about God's action and will, and possible statements of purpose. The service concluded with a leisurely observance of the Lord's Supper.<sup>13</sup>

The first 45-minutes of the "meeting for business" was a report of the PPI and of feedback from the Lenten home meetings.<sup>14</sup> In the light of the CRG's advice, I also gave a thorough review of Murphy's method for corporate spiritual discernment, taking great care to be sure the procedure was comprehended by everyone.

After lunch, there was an in-depth study of Ephesians 1:1-14 on the theme, "The Church in God's Eternal Plan." Then we had a 45-minute period for private note-taking and prayer. This was introduced by a time of corporate prayer in the sanctuary using the meditation, "Called to be the Church."<sup>15</sup> When the group reconvened, there was discussion and agreement on the norms which must be met by any statement of purpose for our church. With these criteria written in, we gave consideration to eight "candidates" for the statement of purpose of our church. Following the procedure adapted from Miriam Murphy, we selected the one which formed the basis for our new mission statement.

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<sup>13</sup>See Appendix A, section VI.

<sup>14</sup>Summarized above, and in Appendixes E and F.

<sup>15</sup>See Appendix B, part II.



A Report of the Third Discernment Meeting

The norms which we wrote into the final selection chart emerged through open discussion and ready agreement on the part of the Administrative Council. Each of these criteria is derived in an obvious manner from the various kinds of input into our planning process. Discussion provided some clarification of these standards, but there was little need for close definition. The six norms were:

1. Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Right theology generally, especially the Trinity.
2. Outreach, caring, service.
3. Witness and evangelism.
4. Personal spiritual growth through faith-development, Christian education and nurture, including the education and nurture which occurs in worship.
5. A sense of family: love among church members, fellowship of Christians.
6. Easy to apply: Any statement of purpose must be practical.

A total of eight statements of purpose were offered by Council members. Therefore, we agreed that there was no need to eliminate any; all became part of the final discernment process. The eight "candidates" for our statement of purpose were:

1. To be a part of Christ's Church through sacrificial love in discipleship, reconciliation, and caring ministries.
2. Serving one another for Christ.
3. Loving, caring and sharing the Good News of Jesus.
4. Teaching people of all ages about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit so that we will be able to go out and reach those in need.

5. To provide an environment, programming, or means by which all age groups (both physical and spiritual) can work toward the ultimate goal of Christian Perfection, Jesus Christ our Lord. To include:
  - A. Fellowship and uplifting;
  - B. Plan of salvation and Holy Spirit;
  - C. Presentation of biblical principles;
  - D. Environment conducive to worship and prayer;
  - E. Opportunity to serve.
6. To actively save souls; to promote spiritual growth and obedience; to provide a family center of Christian friends and activities.
7. As a part of the Body of Christ, we strive to encourage and equip each person to accept Christ; then to worship, serve and love him in caring for themselves, their neighbor (brother or sister), with a love that will establish faith in the hope we all have in our Lord.
8. To serve the church and be served in the community and home.

These proposals were written on newsprint and numbered (as listed above), so the number could be inserted in the final selection chart. There was a Prayer of Discernment. Each member rated each statement of purpose for each norm on a 1-to-4 scale (poor, fair, good, excellent) based on that member's perception of how well the statement would satisfy the norms. Individual totals were drawn, and the group totals added, as follows:

(1) = 114; (2) = 93; (3) = 114; (4) = 121;  
 (5) = 128; (6) = 124; (7) = 132; and (8) = 92.

The group saw that Statement #7 was its first choice; #5 was second; and #6 was the third choice. There was further conversation, and scores were double-checked. I indicated the importance of the various "consolations" in the literature of spiritual discernment with which we had become familiar: a sense of settled peace; an awareness

that our decision was "given" rather than "made;" and each member of the community being satisfied and pleased with the group's selection. I suggested that we compare the three top choices once again, and pray further before making our discernment final.

However, each person in the circle reported a sense of peace and satisfaction that the right choice had already been shown to us. It was stated that, in addition to mere editorial changes, the statement of purpose selected (#7) needed to be strengthened in reference to norm #5, the sense of family. It was agreed that a small committee would be convened to accomplish the editorial work. The committee should also reduce the statement of purpose to a church motto or slogan and, if possible, design a church logo expressive of our purpose. These three items would be brought to the Administrative Council at its meeting on May 23, 1988 for possible adoption.

#### Evaluation of the Third Discernment Meeting

The CRG met on May 5, 1988 to evaluate the Administrative Council's planning day of April 23, 1988. At the CRG's invitation, the chairpersons of the Council itself and of the program Commissions of the church met with the CRG. The evaluation was guided by the set of questions found above.<sup>16</sup> Several verbatim responses have been preserved in the CRG's minutes of this meeting, shown here as direct quotations: (1) The group believed the statement of

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<sup>16</sup> See above, p. 16.

purpose truly did emerge from the process we had followed. It was observed that "all the proposed statements had a common element," so that everyone who made a proposal was essentially led to the same vision of our church's mission.

(2) Were we hearing God's direction as to our mission rather than deducing it for ourselves? The evaluating group concluded that "it is not possible to make this distinction with certainty." However, "since the group did not find it necessary to do the final selection steps given in Sister Miriam Murphy's method for communal discernment, we feel all the more confident that we have [rightly] discerned the mission of our church."

Indeed, (3) everyone present at the discernment meeting was in complete agreement about the result. The new statement of purpose met with immediate enthusiasm, and we left the meeting unified and grateful. (4) "Everyone felt a sense of peace with the results." "We felt very relaxed, and [we] believe the matter is in God's hands."

#### The Conclusion of the Ministry Project

##### Three Tangible "Products"

An ad hoc committee was recruited from the general church membership to complete the editorial work requested by the Administrative Council. I convened the group, but the members (four persons) had not been involved heretofore, except in the Lenten home meetings. Three meetings were held in preparation for the Administrative Council meeting on May 23, 1988. By that time, the statement of

purpose had been edited as the Council had directed, and was formally adopted by vote of the Council:

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

As a part of the Body of Christ, the Church of the Saviour United Methodist:  
 encourages and prepares people to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior;  
 leads them to worship, serve, obey and love Him;  
 helps them to care for themselves and others; and  
 provides a center for Christian family fellowship.

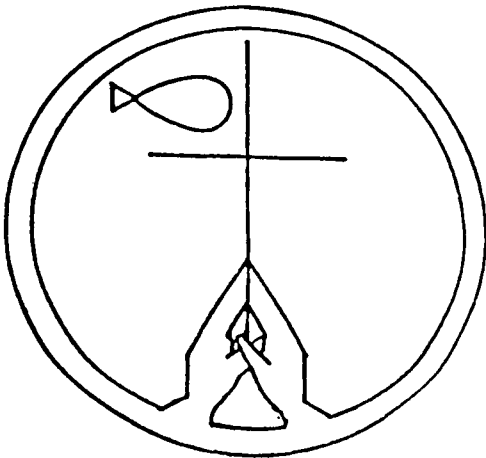
The longer Statement of Purpose had been reduced to a slogan. This was also adopted by the Council's vote:

CHURCH MOTTO

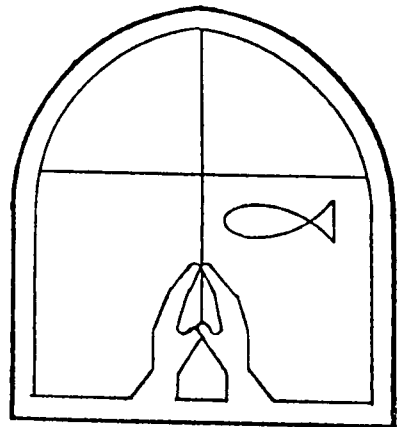
"Fostering a Fellowship of Faith"

Two designs for a church logo were presented. The Council accepted the stylized hands and cross of (1) and the fish of (2) and directed that a descending dove be added above the left crossarm at a 45-degree angle. The perfected logo was to be presented at the Council's June meeting.

(1)



(2)



### The Final Evaluation of the Ministry Project

The final meeting of the CRG took place two days later, on May 25, 1988. The statement of purpose and the church motto received a positive evaluation on the basis of clarity, unity and communicability. The statement of purpose was seen not only as a model of clear prose, but also as an inspiring vision of the mission of the Church of the Saviour. CRG members believe that the statement of purpose and motto will be motivational tools in and of themselves, and that the statement of purpose is the foundation for successful church planning following the management-by-objectives model.

Next the CRG turned to its evaluation of the total ministry project. This was a planning project utilizing the principles of corporate spiritual discernment, seeking to discover the purpose of our church. The final evaluation of the project was completed by answering the questions as previously agreed.<sup>17</sup> The questions are repeated here, with the CRG's responses, taken from the minutes of their final meeting.

- (a) Did all participants understand the process of corporate spiritual discernment?

Two of the Lenten Home Meetings had difficulty, and did not have the positive experience typical of the other 12 meetings. Also, at the February 27th planning day, one subgroup failed to understand the process being used for

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<sup>17</sup> See above, p. 17.

corporate discernment. However, at the final planning day on April 23, this difficulty had been cleared up. Everyone involved in the final discernment of the mission statement was "tuned in."

(b) Was there a sense of common "ownership" both of the project and of the process which was utilized?

The Administrative Council entered into the project as an act of friendship for the pastor, who was involved in the Doctor of Ministry program. However, it is now felt that we have done something useful for our church. If we can follow up on what has now been accomplished, we can see strong program development and, possibly, church growth.

As discussed at the CRG's evaluation of the first discernment meeting, there was uncertainty whether the Administrative Council members had actually agreed to participate in the entire process. As a matter of fact, the number of participants declined with each planning day.

While these problems by no means invalidate the project, the level of "ownership" was less than desirable.

(c) Were the participants energized in the midst of the process? Did we sense that God was truly guiding us on a pathway of discovery?

At the planning meeting on April 23, there was a genuine sense that God was "speaking" to us. Also, the emergence of the idea of a church logo was not anticipated in the project proposal. The CRG can affirm this as resulting from divine guidance.

(d) Did we successfully involve most of our congregation in the project at appropriate times?

The effort was made, and participation was satisfactory. All of us would like to have seen PPI returns and Lenten home group participation at more nearly a 100% level. However, statistically, our returns were above average.

(e) Did a clear sense of purpose for our church emerge?

Yes.

(f) Are we convinced that the statement of purpose is our God-given reason for being, as the Church of the Saviour?

Yes, because of the sense of peace and unity on the part of all participants; the sense of divine leadership in the editing sub-committee; and the enthusiastic acceptance by the Administrative Council in formal adoption.

(g) Is the Administrative Council enthusiastic about our new church slogan? Are the members of the congregation "caught" by it? Are we finding it easy to communicate? Is the unity of our congregation being enhanced by it?

1. Administrative Council: Yes.
2. Congregation: Too early to tell.
3. Communication: Immediate use is planned.
4. Unity enhanced: Too early to tell.

(h) Does it now appear that large numbers of our people will be motivated by our sense of purpose?

It is too early to know for certain. However, we believe there is promise of a renewed sense of mission.

#### The Final CRG Report to the Administrative Council

On June 27, 1988, the CRG presented a summary of the ministry project and its own role in planning, monitoring and evaluating the project, to the Administrative Council.



There was a formal vote, accepting the report, which had also been filed with the Doctor of Ministry office at Asbury Theological Seminary. These actions brought the ministry project, in a formal sense, to its conclusion.

A few weeks before this time, I was appointed to a new pastoral charge. As the former pastor of the Church of the Saviour, I continue to receive that church's monthly newsletter, "The Witness," and I note the church's motto always appears on the masthead. The Administrative Council had a stalemate vote on the design of the logo, and the June 27th minutes show that the adoption of a logo was tabled. A recent issue of "The Witness," however, carries the following on its masthead:



The reports coming to me from the Church of the Saviour certainly indicate a new spirit within the congregation, and there is now an increased participation in worship and rather rapid membership growth. At the same meeting at which the Administrative Council received the final CRG report, on June 27, 1988, it made the long-delayed decision to reverse the times of Sunday school and worship! This action, one would assume, resulted from the feed-back

we received in our Lenten home meetings. In itself, such action shows a new openness to change, a new willingness to venture.

It would be too much to claim that these good results were all brought about by the ministry project. A change of pastors often creates a new situation for a congregation. But it is my hope--indeed, my firm belief--that the ministry project laid a foundation upon which my successor and his congregation can build.

Chapter 4  
Corporate Spiritual Discernment as a Tool  
for Church Planning

Evaluation of the Ministry Project

This ministry project has tested the following hypothesis: The Church of the Saviour can discover its purpose through corporate spiritual discernment. The model we followed in our practice of corporate spiritual discernment was drawn from Miriam Murphy's book Prayer in Action, chapter IX, "From Inner Renewal to Social Renewal,"<sup>1</sup> including an adaptation of the chart on page 116. Has the Church of the Saviour discovered its purpose through corporate spiritual discernment by using this model?

The Power of Purpose

The planning process described in chapter three resulted in three "products:" a statement of purpose, a church motto, and a church logo. The statement of purpose is clear and concise; and, while it is orthodox theologically, it is also broad and generic. Certainly such a statement could be the foundation upon which a church might build. Years of ministry, guided by conventional planning methods, might fruitfully be devoted to the fulfillment of such a state-

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<sup>1</sup>Murphy, pp. 101-116.

ment of purpose.

The motto is poetic and attractive, motivating and unifying, easily remembered and full of deeper meanings. It communicates warmth and offers hospitality to a weary world full of lonely people looking to "come home" to God. The logo is artistic and pleasing. It is readily identified with the local church, yet its symbolism is universal.

But these products are not, of course, the purpose of the Church of the Saviour. If the hypothesis tested by this ministry project can be defended, then these three products are legitimate, valid and very important expressions of the purpose of the Church of the Saviour. Otherwise, they are only three clever examples of good public relations. To satisfy the definition of a statement of purpose,<sup>2</sup> this statement must set forth the actual identity and ministry of the Church of the Saviour.

When I was appointed pastor of the Church of the Saviour, I was excited by the statement of purpose given me by the Administrative Council: "to be a soul-saving center on this corner of Westerville." On this basis, I attempted to provide our church with evangelistic leadership. By the time I realized that this statement did not reflect our church's actual purpose, several evangelistic programs had failed. Relatively few souls were being saved, the congregation was shrinking, morale had slipped, and there was

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<sup>2</sup>See the definition of a "statement of purpose or mission statement," Appendix B, part I and above, p. 10.

confusion about who we were as the Church of the Saviour.<sup>3</sup>

This is precisely the point of purpose: It is the question of identity. To discover the purpose of the Church of the Saviour is to find out who we are as such. It is not a question of doing evangelism, nor of doing anything at all. Says Murphy, in a sentence we could paraphrase in dozens of ways, "Just because a cause is religious is not a mandate to get involved."<sup>4</sup> Choosing to be precedes choosing to do, and no amount of doing, even doing good things, can overcome the deadness, dullness, sorrow and sadness of a failure to be what God wants the Church of the Saviour to be. Consequently, even evangelism--certainly an excellent thing to do--was unfruitful: Not knowing who we ourselves were, we did not know what to invite others to be, and many simply stopped inviting. Given the general malaise which had set in, few who came to us on their own stayed!

Now this "general malaise:" the "deadness, dullness, sorrow and sadness"--these are the "desolations" of which we learn in the literature and practice of spiritual discernment, the clues to help us realize we are not "tuned

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<sup>3</sup>Significantly, one leader's comment, recorded at the final CRG evaluation meeting, was her wish that we had known to undertake our search for a purpose five years sooner!

<sup>4</sup>Murphy, p. 109. I hasten to point out that the problem with the Church of the Saviour's statement of purpose in 1980 was not its form: "to be a soul-saving center" is, in form, an identity-statement, not an action-plan. The problem was that the congregation, the environment, and the times had changed. Given what "evangelism" was understood to mean, the statement no longer expressed who we were.

in" to what God was doing in our situation and what God wanted us to be. We were doing many good things in terms of evangelism, many correct things in terms of church-growth principles. This was our agenda, and we frequently presented it to God in earnest prayer. Both the doing and the praying, however, were premature: Being and listening are always the priorities. Our crisis truly was a "crisis of contemplation."<sup>5</sup>

This analysis of the situation prior to the ministry project displays in bold relief the issue of the church's corporate purpose, and makes clear the distinction between stated purpose and actual purpose. The question remains, however, whether our church has now discovered its actual purpose. Can it be said, with any degree of certainty, that the new statement of purpose does express the actual purpose of the Church of the Saviour?

After the final discernment meeting, the evaluating group responded to the question:

Was there an awareness on the part of the participants that we were hearing God rather than deducing the result ourselves?

The group stated that this distinction could not be made

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<sup>5</sup>Carlo Caretto in The God Who Comes states that "When there is a crisis in the Church, it is always here: a crisis of contemplation" (quoted in A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants edited by Reuben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, Nashville: The Upper Room, 1983, p. 74). We were in a position analogous to that of Joshua following Israel's defeat at the first battle against Ai. When petitioning gave way to listening, Joshua learned that Israel was to be a holy people before they could do battle successfully (Josh. 7:1-8:29).

with certainty,<sup>6</sup> but went on to cite some evidence from the meeting to suggest that the statement of purpose which had emerged truly was God's directive. I was at first nonplused by this response, since I was sure we had arrived at wisdom! On second thought, I realized how authentic this evaluation truly is. As indicated at the outset of this dissertation, a discerned purpose may be marked by certitude or assurance, but not by certainty. Furthermore, our historical review included the lesson the Quakers learned through difficult experience, that making absolute claims for one's discernments is dangerous.

In any case, we need not make the distinction between hearing God and deducing our own conclusion. Murphy puts it well:

With our roots and foundations in love and at home with Christ in our growth center, we will be strong in our decisions. Decisions involve both head and heart and must be made in quiet silence.<sup>7</sup>

I am satisfied that our process included all the components of a sound discernment: Listening to God and seeking our decision from God (learning to listen, taking time to listen, praying the prayer of discernment); refining our decision by consulting Scripture (biblical and theological studies on the nature of the Church); referring our decision for a rational check (parish feed-back and analysis); then bringing our insights back to God in an

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<sup>6</sup> See above, p. 85.

<sup>7</sup> Murphy, p. 108.

effort to isolate the best alternative.<sup>8</sup>

There had been an increase of confidence before we met for our final evaluation of the ministry project. At this time, the CRG was aided and augmented by the congregation's elected leaders. Two of the questions discussed were:

Did we sense that God was truly guiding us on a pathway to discovery?

Are we convinced that the statement of purpose is our God-given reason for being, as the Church of the Saviour?<sup>9</sup>

The group cited such experiential evidences as "peace" and "unity" to corroborate the belief that we have discovered the actual purpose of the Church of the Saviour. That there was an element common to all the "candidates" for a statement of purpose was also an indicator: That is, the discernment received by the Council at its final planning day was of the purpose of the church. All the selection process accomplished was to isolate the most adequate statement of that purpose.

Ultimately, the test of purpose is the power of purpose. For a corporate body as for an individual, harmony between the inner being and the outward life is the source of strength. Acting out of what we truly are is to have simplicity in place of division. Like an athlete who plays "within" herself or himself, there is the ability to focus

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<sup>8</sup>Compare Murphy, p. 108: Diagram, "An Approach to the Prayer of Listening."

<sup>9</sup>See above, pp. 88-89.



all the body's energies upon the task at hand.<sup>10</sup> This is a situation of health, and it is very attractive to others.

If the Church of the Saviour begins to enjoy good corporate health in place of the malaise of the past few years, doubtless it will begin to attract people. In this case, it will have become more truly evangelistic than when its misstated purpose was evangelism! Time is needed, of course: All bodies, individual and corporate, need time for healing when there has been a protracted illness.

Not only the steadily increasing confidence that we had discovered our church's purpose, but also the energies released in the course of the planning process itself signal the beginning of the healing. As the chairperson of the Council remarked at the final evaluation meeting, "Even if our new pastor does not continue the planning process, it has been good for us to have done what we have done."

Then, at the same meeting which brought the ministry project to a formal close, the Administrative Council decided an issue which had gone unresolved for several years. This was further indication of the step-by-step recovery of health. At the date of this writing, some eighteen months later, reports of renewal at the Church of the Saviour testify to the power of this congregation's purpose. I conclude that the Church of the Saviour did, in

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<sup>10</sup> Compare Murphy, p. 109: "Life from the center, [Thomas] Kelly insists, is one of unhurried peace and power. It is simple. It is serene. It is amazing. It is triumphant. It is radiant. It....makes our program new and overcoming."

fact, discover its purpose.

Corporate Spiritual Discernment as a  
Pathway to Discovery

For the hypothesis being tested by this ministry project to be defended, we must not only demonstrate that the Church of the Saviour was able to discover its purpose, but also that it did so by means of corporate spiritual discernment; specifically, by a method drawn from Miriam Murphy's work.

It is extremely important to realize that Murphy does not merely offer a "technique" of corporate spiritual discernment. In a personal conversation, she went on at some length to be sure I understood that I could not simply reproduce her chart from page 116, have my church planners fill it out, and expect a discerned decision to have been given. When I limited the decision we would make to the single most important and basic decision any church will ever make--the perception of its reason for being--then it was abundantly clear that no technique would suffice. I was led to investigate the backgrounds of corporate spiritual discernment--the centuries of formative spirituality brought to a focus in the few pages of Murphy's chapter, with its diagrams and charts. This was in itself a "pathway to discovery" which took me back to St. Ignatius and the Jesuits, forward again to George Fox and the Quakers, and then back again to the roots in the Bible.

Like the question of purpose, the quest of spiritual discernment has to do with who we are. Inevitably, the

quest leads to the question of what God is doing and what God wants us to be. For the quest and the question to be honest, we have to admit at the outset that we do not know the destination or the answer: both remain to be discovered. We first are wise when we ask God for wisdom (James 1:5).

For the quest and the question to be earnest, we must also commit ourselves to being what God wants us to be and doing what God wants us to do, however that turns out. Without whole-heartedness, we cannot expect the wisdom we seek (James 1:6-8). God does not answer questions asked merely out of curiosity, nor does God call us to a pathway which leads to no place or to many places.

The real reason we at the Church of the Saviour did not undertake this pathway to discovery five years sooner than we did is that we thought we knew our purpose at that time. We were, in fact, acting upon what we thought our purpose to be. Soon after we perceived our own confusion, we embarked upon an unconventional planning process which looked, for all its method and technique, its research and careful staging, like a pathway to discovery.

Besides realizing that our evangelistic statement of purpose did not accurately reflect our congregation's actual purpose, we had to divest ourselves of the idea that our purpose should be evangelistic. As St. Ignatius knew, the attitude prerequisite to corporate spiritual discernment is that of indifference. It was extremely difficult

to be "indifferent" about evangelism. Without this trademark of our "evangelical" church, we really did feel "denuded" (recalling Ignatius's term, "desnudsare").<sup>11</sup>

Then there was the amount of time the planning process took. Could not a mission statement have been composed in a much shorter time? If corporate spiritual discernment were only a matter of following a model with technical accuracy, the time factor might have been different. But discernment is not a model; it is a mode: a mode of being with God, walking a pathway of discovery. Even with a Miriam Murphy as guide, such a pathway may take time! It takes time to pray. It takes time to reflect. It takes time to listen to God.

Time was also required for the "remote preparation" for our acts of discernment.<sup>12</sup> This included our studies of discernment in theology, in the spiritually formative tradition, and in the Murphy model. All three of these sources required that we take the time not only to pray, but also to learn to pray with no action contemplated; not only to reflect, but also to reflect when there is no agenda, and more time yet to discover and disarm a hidden agenda; time not only to listen to God, but also to listen to the others walking the pathway, and more time yet to listen to those of the broader constituency who seemed less-than-committed to walking the pathway.

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<sup>11</sup> See above, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> See above, p. 28.

Another feature that marks our discovery of purpose as a gift of spiritual discernment is the manner in which the decision was reached. In three successive meetings of the Administrative Council and numerous committee meetings, there was not one strident speech seeking to win votes for a point of view. No compromises or shortcuts were proposed. The final acts of discernment required no motions, no pros and cons, no vote. When I, as leader of the meeting, proposed additional steps to be sure we had "the sense of the meeting,"<sup>13</sup> the meeting itself assured me that the consensus was clear. This truly was what Friends call "a meeting for clarity."

Finally, there was given to all of us an experience of the "consolations:" a settled sense of peace running more deeply than mere elation that a task was done; a sense of the joy of receiving in contrast to the happiness of achieving; a readiness to rest, knowing all is in the Lord's hands; clarity about our purpose independently of the editing of the statement of purpose, the selection of the motto and the design of the logo; and a strengthening of the bonds of unity between us.

Most importantly, the "consolations" were, in Ignatian terms, "without prior cause." At that moment, there was no particular reason to feel positively about things. In fact, we were on the "down" side of Easter. We were facing some

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<sup>13</sup> See above, pp. 83-84.

vexing financial problems and a perplexing case of maladministration. And there would soon be the always-painful process of a pastoral transition. We had a direct experience of the truth that "when God alone consoles, He consoles in precisely this way," without prior cause!<sup>14</sup>

The characteristics of our planning process described in these paragraphs mark it as a process of corporate spiritual discernment. I conclude that the Church of the Saviour discovered its purpose, and that it did so through corporate spiritual discernment. With this defense of the hypothesis, I offer the ministry project as an adequate and successful test, in a parish setting, of Miriam Murphy's theory of corporate spiritual discernment.

The Problems of the Corporate-Spiritual-Discernment  
Model for Church Planning

Based on the above evaluation, it is my assessment that the theology of corporate spiritual discernment is eminently practical. I regard the discernment-model as a tool for use in my own ministry, alongside the management-by-objectives model. The two are complementary.

I moved to a new pastoral appointment just as we were concluding the ministry project in Westerville. When parishioners in Dayton, Ohio have inquired, I have shared a brief description of the ministry project. Several times the question was asked: Do you plan to do a similar thing here in Dayton? My negative answer was met with surprise

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<sup>14</sup>Quoted above, p. 55. See note 50 on that page.

until I explained some ways in which the situation is very different at the Dayton church from what it had been at the Church of the Saviour.

#### The Issue of an Appropriate Model

The corporate-spiritual-discernment model for church planning is not offered as a panacea for all ills, as the best of all methods, or as the only good method. As stated in the introduction, so now in the conclusion, it is one of the two methods I am glad to have in my collection of ministry tools. The discernment-model and the management-by-objectives model are complementary in two important ways. On the one hand, many decisions in congregational life can and should be made by ordinary rational processes, that is, on the basis of a management-model. This is to be expected when a congregation has a clear sense of its identity which is biblically and theologically sound. Whether or not there is a formal statement of purpose is not the issue. Rather, it is the question of a unifying and empowering vision of what the church is as a Church of Jesus Christ. In the parish to which I have moved, for example, there is an extremely strong sense of the church's mission. This congregation's life and ministry is guided by its long range plan. The plan is carefully monitored, its goals are restated from time to time, and its objectives and strategies are developed at least annually. It would be inappropriate for me to import "my" ministry project into my new pastoral assignment at this time!

On the other hand, there are times in every church's life when there is a major departure from the ordinary. If the congregation is no longer unified and empowered by its ostensible purpose; if the environment has changed rapidly and the church has not kept pace; if new times have (to quote Lowell's phrase) made "ancient goods uncouth;"<sup>15</sup> if the congregation is faced with a major decision (to relocate, or to expand the facilities, for example); or if a very special ministry-opportunity is being considered (to open a retreat-center, let us say), especially involving great risk (perhaps to mortgage our property and use the proceeds to build a mission church in Africa): in such extraordinary situations, I fail to see how ordinary planning methods help.

In instances such as these, corporate spiritual discernment can lay, or lay again, the foundation upon which management-by-objectives can build. The use of the discernment-model should be carefully limited, therefore, to such foundational and basic concerns. The chairperson of the Administrative Council at the Church of the Saviour expressed the hope that the new method we had experienced might be used to elect officers and make many other decisions. I do not advocate this.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> From "Once to Every Man and Nation," a hymn by James Russell Lowell.

<sup>16</sup> The Quakers continue to make discerned decisions in every "meeting for business." Theirs is an ethos, a veritable sub-culture, which I do not criticize. Nevertheless, I hold to this limitation of appropriateness.



### The Need to Act

While corporate spiritual discernment is the appropriate model for church planning from time to time, its usefulness is not primarily in planning for action. Its appropriateness in the situation at the Church of the Saviour was precisely its usefulness in helping the church find its reason for being. Without the discovery of the church's mission, there would be no action, of course. Our congregation was less and less motivated to engage in ministry as, with the passing of time, its malaise spread. As the healing process began, there were the stirrings of life; first, Council members and then others were energized. But what were they going to do as a church? This remained to be seen. Had I been reappointed as their pastor, I would have expected to undertake a new round of planning on the management-by-objectives model. The planning process would have included educational programs within the congregation, so that more of us could experience the power of the purpose. It would also have included social research, both among the membership and in the city, so that we could identify new areas and opportunities for ministry.

As Murphy says, "prompt action is not always the best action."<sup>17</sup> This is the reason for corporate-spiritual-discernment planning. But it is also true that prayer

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<sup>17</sup> Murphy, p. 107.

leads to action and that mission requires action. This is the reason for management-by-objectives planning.<sup>18</sup> The parameter of appropriateness, then, relates not only to the type of issue before congregational planners, but also to the need to act.

#### The Difficulties of Corporate Spiritual Discernment for Church Planners

Another set of problems faces those who, at appropriate junctures, attempt to enter into the discernment mode: The organization of United Methodist local churches is quite different from that of a Friends Meeting. In the latter case, every Friend is part of the Meeting. In the typical United Methodist church, however, the Administrative Board, Council on Ministries, or Administrative Council is made up of elected officials. In only the smallest of congregations would all the members participate in congregational decision-making. In most cases, the elected officials are the decision-makers for the larger congregation. In addition, our polity requires that the congregational leaders function according to individual conviction. Those elected do not have a constituency, and they cannot be "instructed" on how to vote on any issue.

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<sup>18</sup> When Joshua came before the Lord after the defeat at Ai, his frantic petitions had to give way to listening. In the listening, he discerned that Israel had failed to be what God purposed they should be, and that they could not act with success until their mode of being was set right. Once Joshua understood this, however, it was up to him to devise a systematic, rational action-plan to correct the problem. Joshua then moved from "spiritual discernment" to "management."

In some situations, therefore, it may be questioned whether the decision-makers actually represent the congregation. Also, it may be asked whether these decision-makers exercise spiritual leadership in their congregations, or are elected as leaders for reasons of personal power and status, business acumen, or because of local tradition and family ties. Unfortunately, it cannot be assumed that the elected officials are the spiritual leaders of a church.

At the Church of the Saviour, we could have had a maximum of 30 out of 300 involved in the corporate discernment. For the first period, only a handful of members outside the Administrative Council even knew about the planning process. We attempted to overcome this difficulty by collecting the PPI and by involving our people in the Lenten home meetings. It can be said that any similar instrument would have been equally effective; in fact, since a statistical analysis did not seem essential to the ministry project, a less complex instrument would be better than the PPI. The home meetings were important because of the study of the doctrine of the church in Ephesians and the simple, direct feed-back received. However, participation on the part of members was disappointing.

Besides feed-back, it is important that as many of the congregation as possible develop "ownership" of the process and of its results. Here, the difficulty extends not only outward to the larger membership, but also inward to the representative body itself. Even at the Church of the

Saviour--a church of moderate size--the largest attendance at a discernment meeting was 21 out of 30. This number declined with each additional meeting, so that just one-third of the Council participated in the final acts of discernment. This circumstance was partially offset by the fact that the full Council affirmed the ministry project and officially adopted its tangible results. However, I would hesitate to say that the full Council, let alone the congregation, had the same appreciation of their meaning as did the participants.

This same difficulty is likely to be encountered in any approach to church planning. If the process and result of corporate spiritual discernment were to be discounted because of this, then we should have to discard the process and result of management-by-objectives sessions as well. The church is a voluntary association, and active participation cannot be required. In the case of a discernment process, it should not be required even if it could be. The spiritual labors and prayers of Christians are given them freely, by grace. Not even God forces these gifts upon us! As in Quaker "meetings for business," the "laws" or "rules" are actually "advices."

The difficulty of low participation in such an invigorating growth experience as corporate spiritual discernment also relates to the sheer amount of time it takes. As we continued the ministry project at the Church of the Saviour during Lent, 1988, I was keenly aware that ours was a very

different sense of time than that of St. Ignatius and the other First Founders during Lent, 1539! That our people are too busy for walking very long with God on a pathway of discovery is sadly true, and we found no solution to this problem at the Church of the Saviour.

The Prospects of the Corporate-Spiritual-Discernment  
Model for Church Planning

Fortunately for all pastors and all churches, there are in every place some who will walk that pathway. As we observed in our Old Testament survey, Moses evidently looked for a time when all the people would be spiritually discerning. From that time until now, this has been the hope, but it is not commonly realized. Perhaps among Friends...or Jesuits...or small spiritual cells here and there...but not in the average United Methodist congregation.

Nevertheless, corporate spiritual discernment commends itself as an important and useful mode of church planning. For basic, foundational questions, I believe it is the only way for church planning to proceed. Spiritual discernment opens to us possibilities which are simply not accessible by any other means.

Furthermore, we do live in a day when local churches and denominations "vie with corporations in their reliance on procedural niceties and rational decision-making." So it is good that we are reminded by Miriam Murphy of Thomas Kelly's insistence that

a majority vote never indicates the right or wrong of a situation, rather it is the power of the presence of God which spells victory.<sup>19</sup>

The first discernment question is always, What is God doing? Corporate spiritual discernment holds the promise of a church seeing God at work in their midst. At the Church of the Saviour, God was at work in our crisis and decline, leading us to a new sense of purpose. Any place that God is doing something is a place of renewal! It was renewal when the earliest Church held the Jerusalem Council, and renewal when the Society of Jesus was founded. It now appears that the Church of the Saviour is at the beginning of a renewal. The possibility and prospect of the corporate-spiritual-discernment model for planning is nothing less than the renewal of the Church.

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<sup>19</sup>The Kelly quote and the previous quotation in this paragraph are from Murphy, pp. 104-105.

## Appendix A

## Agendas and Orders of Worship for Three Planning Days

## I

Agenda for the First Administrative  
Council Planning Day  
January 30, 1988

1. Overview of the Planning Process.
  - Authorization: 1987 Charge Conference Goals.
  - Schedule: Jan. 30, First Planning Day
  - Feb. 17, Council members receive PPI
  - Feb. 21, Council members return PPI
  - Feb. 27, Second Planning Day
  - March 1, Parish receive PPI
  - March, Lenten Home Groups
  - April 23, Third Planning Day
  - May 23, Adoption of Purpose, motto and logo  
at regular Council meeting
  - June 27, Final report on the Planning  
Project at regular Council meeting
  - CRG: Congregational Reflection Group to serve as a  
monitoring and evaluating committee.
  
2. What is Corporate Spiritual Discernment?
  - a. Definition.
  - b. Descriptions from Kinghorn, Nouwen, Fenhagen,  
Kelsey.
  - c. Reference to the Jesuits; the Quakers.
  - d. Corporate spiritual discernment as a model for  
church planning.
  - e. Some biblical background:
    - (1) Urim and Thummim in the Old Testament.
    - (2) Wisdom in the Old Testament.
    - (3) Wisdom in the New Testament.
    - (4) The gift of discernment in the New Testament.
  - f. A New Testament example: the Jerusalem Council,  
Acts 15:1-29.
  
3. Why does our church need to be concerned about our  
purpose?
  - a. How the earliest Church received its decision from  
God in Acts 15:
    - (1) What was God doing?

- (2) "Making" a decision or "receiving" a decision.
- (3) The early Church's situation before and after the Jerusalem Council.
- (4) What was the early Church's new purpose? What might have been its Statement of Purpose? What might have been its motto? its logo?
- (5) What were the practical results?
- b. How does this relate to our church?
  - (1) The previous statement of purpose was "to be a soul-saving center on this corner of Westerville."
  - (2) Analysis.
  - (3) What really is our purpose?  
Reference to Peter Wagner's book,  
Your Church Can Be Healthy.

## II

The Opening Worship  
January 30, 1988  
Theme: THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD<sup>1</sup>

### INVOCATION

### PSALM 9

GOSPEL: Luke 8:40-46

### COLLECT FOR GRACE TO PROFIT BY SCRIPTURES

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

### A READING FOR REFLECTION

We need loving communication, we need the presence of the Spirit.

That is why I do not believe in theologians who do not pray, who are not in humble communication of love with God.

Neither do I believe in the existence of any human power to pass on authentic knowledge of God.

Only God can speak about himself, and only the Holy Spirit, who is love, can communicate this knowledge to us.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, pp. 71-76.



When there is a crisis in the Church, it is always here: a crisis of contemplation.

The Church wants to feel able to explain about her spouse even when she has lost sight of him; even when, although she has not been divorced, she no longer knows his embrace, because curiosity has gotten the better of her and she has gone searching for other people and other things.

The revelation of a triune God in the unity of a single nature, the revelation of a divine Holy Spirit present in us, is not on the human level; it does not belong to the realm of reason. It is a personal communication which God alone can give, and the task of giving it belongs to the Holy Spirit, who is the same love which unites the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit is the fullness and the joy of God.

It is so difficult to speak of these things. We have to babble like children, but at least, like children, we can say over and over again, tirelessly, "Spirit of God, reveal yourself to me, your child."

And we can avoid pretending that knowledge of God could be the fruit of our gray matter.

Then, and only then, shall we be capable of prayer; borne to the frontier of our radical incapacity, which love has made the beatitude of poverty, we shall be able to invoke God's coming to us, "Come, creator Spirit!"

--from The God Who Comes by Carlo Carretto<sup>2</sup>

PRAYERS: For Church, Self and Others

SHARING OUR REFLECTIONS

HYMN by Samuel Longfellow<sup>3</sup>

Holy Spirit, Truth divine,  
Dawn upon this soul of mine;  
Word of God and inward light,  
Wake my spirit, clear my sight.

Holy Spirit, Love divine,  
Glow within this heart of mine;  
Kindle every high desire;  
Perish self in thy pure fire.

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<sup>2</sup> This selection is printed in A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, pp. 74-75.

<sup>3</sup> This selection is printed in A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, p. 76.

Holy Spirit, Power divine,  
 Fill and nerve this will of mine;  
 By thee may I strongly live,  
 Bravely bear and nobly strive.

Holy Spirit, Right divine,  
 King within my conscience reign;  
 Be my Lord, and I shall be  
 Firmly bound, forever free.

#### BENEDICTION

### III

#### Agenda for the Second Administrative Council Planning Day February 27, 1988

#### 8:00 a.m. OPENING WORSHIP AND PRAYER

Review of our First Planning Day: Pick up thoughts about the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Parallels with our church today.

1. Is evangelism our purpose?
2. Why isn't it happening?
3. Review of our local-church history.
4. The Elijah-Complex; or, the idea of the Remnant.
5. The real purpose: family-fellowship.
6. The disease called "koinonitis" (Peter Wagner).<sup>4</sup>
7. The question for spiritual discernment:  
 WHAT IS GOD DOING?

#### A Time of Prayer:

- (a) Discernment of what God is doing
- (b) Acknowledgement that God is the Source
- (c) Commitment to co-operate with God
- (d) Thanksgiving for past, present and future

The Church and the Kingdom: A Study of metaphors for the Church in the book of Ephesians. Materials from theology about the nature of the church, its purpose, and its relationship to the Kingdom of God.

1. Small-group discussion: What is the Kingdom of God?
2. Knee-groups for prayer: Pray, "Thy Kingdom come."

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<sup>4</sup>The suggestion made at the First Planning Day (compare above, p. 113) was discussed in detail at this Second Planning Day, namely Peter Wagner's term "koinonitis" as a description of our church's corporate illness. See C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Be Healthy (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1979), pp. 77-87.

Training for Lenten Home Groups Handouts, Questions

An Exercise in Corporate Spiritual Discernment

Simulation: "Let's name our Church"

Process: Creative Problem-solving

Discussions, Selections of "candidates"

Setting the Kingdom Criteria

"Listening prayer" or "Prayer of Discernment"  
Selection

Tests of Discernment, especially:

- a. The decision seemed to be given, not made
- b. Unity
- c. Peace
- d. Love

IV

The Opening Worship  
February 27, 1988  
Theme: LIFE TOGETHER<sup>5</sup>

INVOCATION

PSALM 133

NEW TESTAMENT READING: Ephesians 4:1-16

A PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH based on Ephesians 1:16-23

I give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

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<sup>5</sup> Compare A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, pp. 178-183.

A READING FOR REFLECTION with a period of silent meditation. As you wish, move to the altar rail and kneel, continuing in silent prayer and listening.

Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. He will only do harm to himself and to the community. Alone you stood before God when he called you; alone you had to answer that call; alone you had to struggle and pray; and alone you will die and give an account to God. You cannot escape from yourself; for God has singled you out. If you refuse to be alone you are rejecting Christ's call to you, and you can have no part in the community of those who are called. "The challenge of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Everyone must fight his own battle with death by himself, alone.... I will not be with you then, nor you with me" (Luther).

But the reverse is also true: Let him who is not in community beware of being alone. Into the community you were called, the call was not meant for you alone; in the community of the called you bear your cross, you struggle, only one member of the great congregation of Jesus Christ. If you scorn the fellowship of the brethren, you reject the call of Jesus Christ, and thus your solitude can only be hurtful to you. "If I die, then I am not alone in death; if I suffer they [the fellowship] suffer with me" (Luther).

--From Life Together by Dietrich Bonhoeffer<sup>6</sup>

PRAYERS (after all have knelt for a time of silent prayer and listening, the pastor will call for spoken prayers)

A PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH based on Ephesians 3:14-21

I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

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<sup>6</sup>This selection is printed in A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Others Servants, pp. 179-180.

## BENEDICTION

A PRAYER-HYMN by Henry H. Tweedy,<sup>7</sup> spoken in unison:

O Spirit of the living God,  
 Thou light and fire divine,  
 Descend upon thy Church once more,  
 And make it truly thine!

Fill it with love and joy and power,  
 With righteousness and peace,  
 Till Christ shall dwell in human hearts,  
 And sin and sorrow cease.

Blow, wind of God! With wisdom blow  
 Until our minds are free  
 From mists of error, clouds of doubt,  
 Which blind our eyes to thee!

Burn, winged fire! Inspire our lips  
 With flaming love and zeal,  
 To preach to all thy great good news,  
 God's glorious commonweal!

Teach us to utter living words  
 Of truth which all may hear,  
 The language we all understand  
 When love speaks loud and clear;

Till every age and race and clime  
 Shall blend their creeds in one,  
 And earth shall form one brotherhood  
 By whom thy will is done.

So shall we know the power of him  
 Who came us all to save.  
 So shall we rise with him to life  
 Which soars beyond the grave;

And earth shall win true holiness,  
 Which makes thy children whole,  
 Till, perfected by thee, we reach  
 Creation's glorious goal! Amen.

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<sup>7</sup>This selection is printed in A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, p. 183.

V

Agenda for the Third Administrative  
Council Planning Day  
April 23, 1988

8:00 Gathering. Coffee and Conversation

The opening time of worship, listening, individual prayer and discernment, communion.

Recess.

Input: Summaries of portions of the PPI, and of feedback from the Lenten Home Meetings.

Discussion

Time for private note-taking

Input: Review of communal discernment, its theology.

12:00 LUNCH PROVIDED BY THE CAMPBELLS

1:00 Input: Study of Ephesians 1:1-14

Discussion and Sharing

Prayer Time: See sheet, "Called to be the Church."

2:30 Input: Review of communal discernment, its method.

Agreement on the norms

Presentation of each member's Statement of Purpose

Prayer of Discernment

Final Selection of a single Statement of Purpose

Decision about next steps.

4:00 Prayers of Thanksgiving

## VI

The Opening Worship

April 23, 1988

Theme: GATHERING OF THE RESURRECTION PEOPLE<sup>8</sup>

## UNISON PRAYER

O God, The King eternal, who dividest the day from the darkness and turnest the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far off from us all wrong desires; incline our hearts to keep thy law; and guide our feet into the way of peace, that having done thy will with cheerfulness while it was day we may, when the night cometh, rejoice to give thee thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>9</sup>

RESPONSIVE PSALM 90, "The Eternity of God"

## GLORIA PATRI

## A TIME OF QUIET LISTENING

There will be a series of six quiet times of about five minutes each, divided by the reading of the six chapters of Ephesians, each in turn.

## A TIME OF QUIET, RELAXED PRAYER

...during which the following reading will be heard:

"A New Way of Struggling" by Susan W. N. Ruach<sup>10</sup>

To struggle used to be  
To grab with both hands  
    and shake  
    and twist  
    and turn  
    and push  
    and shove and not give in  
But wrest an answer from it all  
As Jacob did a blessing.

But there is another way  
To struggle with an issue, a question--  
Simply to jump

---

<sup>8</sup> Compare A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, pp. 329-334.

<sup>9</sup> This selection is printed in A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, p. 329.

<sup>10</sup> This selection is printed in A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants, pp. 331-332.

off  
 into the abyss  
 and find ourselves  
 floating  
 falling  
 tumbling  
 being led  
 slowly and gently  
 but surely  
 to the answers God has for us--  
 to watch the answers unfold  
 before our eyes and still  
 to be a part of the unfolding

But, oh! the trust  
 necessary for this new way!  
 Not to be always reaching out  
 For the old hand-holds.

Led by the pastor, we will continue in physical, mental and spiritual relaxation, and begin to pray the "Jesus Prayer."

In the silence, let us interceed for our Council, our Congregation, and ourselves.

A TIME OF REFLECTION including written reflections, particularly your thoughts about the Mission of the Church of the Saviour, God's will for our church, and possible statements of purpose.

THE INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE (responsively)

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and whoever loves is born of God and knows God.

IN THIS THE LOVE OF GOD WAS MADE MANIFEST AMONG US, THAT GOD SENT HIS ONLY SON INTO THE WORLD, SO THAT WE MIGHT LIVE THROUGH HIM.

Christ our Paschal Lamb is offered up for us, once for all, when he bore our sins in his body upon the cross; for he is the very Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

WHEREFORE LET US KEEP A JOYFUL AND HOLY FEAST WITH THE LORD.

The Lord be with you.

AND WITH THY SPIRIT.

Let us pray:

ALMIGHTY GOD, UNTO WHOM ALL HEARTS ARE OPEN, ALL DESIRES KNOWN, AND FROM WHOM NO SECRETS ARE HID: CLEANSE THE THOUGHTS OF OUR HEARTS BY THE INSPIRATION OF THY HOLY SPIRIT, THAT WE MAY PERFECTLY LOVE THEE, AND WORTHILY MAGNIFY THY HOLY NAME; THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN.

THE LORD'S PRAYER



## RESPONDING TO THE INVITATION

As we gather at the altar rail, let us sing:

"Let us break bread together....

Let us drink wine together....

Let us praise God together...

...on our knees."

Lift up your hearts.

WE LIFT THEM UP UNTO THE LORD.

Let us give thanks unto the Lord.

IT IS MEET AND RIGHT SO TO DO.

It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto thee, O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God. But chiefly we our bound to praise thee for the glorious resurrection of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who by his death hath destroyed death, and by his rising to life again hath restored us to everlasting life.

Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name, evermore praising thee, and saying:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, LORD GOD OF HOSTS: HEAVEN AND EARTH ARE FULL OF THY GLORY! GLORY BE TO THEE, O LORD MOST HIGH! AMEN.

## SHARING THE LORD'S SUPPER

## VOLUNTARY PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING

## A BLESSING

## Appendix B

### Handouts at Planning Days

#### I

#### Handout for Second Planning Day "Some Working Definitions"

##### Spiritual Discernment

1. To come to know what God is doing in the situation.
2. To become aware of God's purpose for us.
3. To become aware of God's direction and will. Discernment is not merely the selection of a good course of action; rather, it is choosing the course of action which God wants.
4. To receive our decision from the Lord.
5. Corporate Spiritual Discernment or communal discernment is the group's awareness of what God is doing among them, and becoming aware of God's direction and purpose for them.

##### Prayer of Discernment

1. The prayer of discernment is communicating with God about what God is doing in our situation, and about God's purpose for us.
2. In corporate spiritual discernment (communal discernment), we pray as a group that God will cause us to know what God is doing and what God is directing us to do.
3. The prayer of discernment is also called "listening prayer."

This means that we pray in a relaxed and devotional mood, not presenting to God our "agenda" of petitions and intercessions. Rather, we spend time allowing God to speak to us. God sets the agenda, not we!

God "speaks" in many different ways; for example: through the Bible, through our conscience, through our conversations with other members of the group, perhaps through one spokesperson who seems to exercise a "gift" of discernment. However God may "speak," our main business is to hear God and attend to what God says.

4. To assist us in this kind of prayer, we are guided to pray in four dimensions:
  - a. Ask God for discernment of what God is doing.
  - b. Acknowledge that God is our Source.
  - c. Commit ourselves to co-operate fully with God.
  - d. Thank God for what God is doing, and for directing us.

### Statement of Purpose or Mission Statement

The Purpose Statement is a concise sentence, setting forth the identity and ministry of the Church of the Saviour United Methodist in broad biblical and theological perspective.

As a fundamental statement, the purpose (mission) is not subject to frequent change. It is more basic than goals, objectives, strategies or priorities. (See below for additional definitions.)

### Goals

A statement of goals sets forth the expectations of results when we implement our Purpose or Mission Statement. Another way to refer to goals is "key result areas:" What will be the main things we will accomplish if we follow our God-given mission/purpose?

Goals may take several years to fulfill; consequently goals change infrequently, although they may change more often than a purpose statement would change.

### Objectives

A statement of objectives sets forth actions which are designed to help us achieve any given goal. Objectives are short-range, and may change from time to time, in order that the goals may be satisfied or fulfilled.

### Strategies

Strategies are programs or actions by which objectives are put into practice. An actual church program or activity is a strategy, if it is planned and carried out for the purpose of achieving a definite objective (or more than one objective).

## Priorities

Priorities define the order of importance of all Goals, Objectives and Strategies. There may be times when we should do things in a certain order, when our plan will be more effective or when a particular item depends on something else coming first. This is important also if we find that we don't have the person-power or the money to do everything. In this case, we need to do the most important things, and let things of lesser importance go.

## II

### Handout for the Third Planning Day "Called to be the Church"

Being the church  
is ever and always  
and forever  
tied with  
    YOU and ME and US,  
        the PEOPLE  
        the BODY.

    "Now you are the body of Christ and individually  
members  
    of it" (I Corinthians 12:27).

YOU and ME and US,  
a PEOPLE  
    on  
    the  
    move.

A church is not a place that stays put  
but a PEOPLE-on-the-move.

YOU and ME and WE  
    the church in the  
    midst of the world  
    as the body of Christ.  
Jesus Christ has opened for us  
"the new and living way" (Hebrews 10:20).

YOU and ME and WE--the church in the midst  
of the world as the body of Christ.

God continues love for the world  
    through human beings,  
    through YOU and ME and US,  
    a CALLED PEOPLE.

The PEOPLE of God  
    the BODY of Christ

are  
 the  
 CHURCH  
 made visible in the WORLD.  
 I mean you and me  
 and the next person,  
 my neighbor,  
 my co-worker,  
 those people on the other side  
 of the globe,  
 ...fellow citizens with the saints  
 and members of the household of God  
 ...(Ephesians 2:19).

We belong to the family of God.  
 We are all brothers and sisters.  
 We are part of the body of new creation.  
 We break bread,  
 We are for and with one another;  
 We are in touch  
 sharing life  
 and loaf  
 and love!

YOU and ME and WE are CALLED to be visible  
 in the midst of the world through acts of ministry.

To belong to the PEOPLE that calls Christ  
 its Head is to be  
 in ministry  
 among the world's people  
 in a flesh-and-blood world.

The Body of Christ  
 is visible  
 through acts of Love,  
 Peace,  
 Healing,  
 Reconciliation,  
 Justice,  
 To everyone in Christ's name.

People in ministry is the style of the  
 body of Christ.

YOU and ME and US turning our energies  
 toward a ministry of proclamation.  
 Proclamation is a blend of doing  
 and telling God's story among the people.  
 Telling and being in a way that  
 makes possible new or renewed responses to God.

YOU and ME and US turning our energies toward  
 a ministry of care.  
 Doing specific acts of caring.

Using our abilities to meet the  
 complexity of human need around us.  
 Personal, practical service of one person to  
 another.

YOU and ME and US turning our energies toward  
 a ministry of teaching.

Being available to one another for  
 Christian growth.

Persons together learning the  
 story of  
 the Christian faith,  
 wrestling with its meaning  
 and reflecting on the  
 work of ministry.

Helping one another to see and  
 feel the dimensions of depth in  
 the Christian faith.

YOU and ME and US turning our energies toward  
 a ministry of witnessing.

We are called to give witness to the  
 Gospel of Jesus Christ in a world  
 where there is need and hurt,  
 "grinding and humiliating poverty,"  
 injustice and inequality  
 and bitter loneliness.

We are a people,

We are God's people.

We are the Body of Christ:

Called

to

stand

with

humanity

for

the

sake of Christ.

We are the church made visible in the  
 world.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Called to be the Church" (no author given) in The Interpreter 24.7 (July-August, 1988), pp.18-19.



## Appendix D

Lenten Home Meetings Packet  
Lenten Home Meetings  
March, 1988Instructions for Administrative Council Leaders

1. State your name (don't assume everyone knows you).
2. Thank everyone for attending. Let them know their participation is important to the church.
3. Ask each person to state his/her name, and to tell approximately how long he/she has been a member of our church.
4. Explain the Planning Process the Administrative Council is working on. Share your own enthusiasm for what we are doing. Convey to the group your own devotion to the church and your faith in its future. Tell them how you believe this Planning Process will improve our church.
5. Have a prayer.
6. Lead a brief Bible study (see notes below).
7. Collect from the participants the questionnaire they received by mail. Invite them to participate further by completing a less formal questionnaire and joining in group discussion.
8. Hand out the brief questionnaire (see below).  
A few explanations are in order:
  - (1) On this questionnaire, their name is important. We can get back to them about specific suggestions, etc.
  - (2) It is a good idea for people to tell their age, because there is a myth that younger members and older members disagree about things. Let's find out if this is true!
  - (3) We are being asked about worship attendance and financial support because we can learn from each response: For example, it's just as important to



know why people do not attend church as it is to know why others do!

9. Give enough time for the questionnaire to be completed. When most people are finished, collect them.
10. Now, spend the balance of the time letting the group discuss questions 6-9. Try to cover each question. Try to give everyone a chance to speak. Take notes on the responses.
11. Thank the host/hostess for opening the home. Have a prayer, and the meeting concludes with refreshments.
12. Be sure the pastor receives both sets of questionnaires you collected, and the notes you made during the group meeting. You will also have the opportunity to report significant items at our planning day on April 23.

### Bible Study Notes for Leaders

#### Your Background Studies

1. The Bible focus for the Lenten Home Meetings is Ephesians.
2. The writer was the Apostle Paul. He wrote to the Church at Ephesus from Rome, between 60 and 64 A.D.
3. Paul's ministry at Ephesus:
  - First visit, Acts 18:18-21.
  - Second visit, Acts 19:2-7, they received the Holy Spirit.
  - His work continued with remarkable success, Acts 19:9-20.
  - His conflict with the silversmiths, Acts 19:23-41.
  - His address to the Ephesian elders, Acts 20:17-35.
4. The converted Jews in the early churches tended to remain separate from converted Gentiles. The theme is CHRISTIAN UNITY. The main image is of the BROKEN WALL (2:14-18). The key text is 4:13.
5. Two key words carry the theme:
  - (1) "together:" 1:10; 2:5; 2:6; 2:22.
  - (2) "one:" 2:15; 2:16; 2:18; 4:4; 4:5-6.

The Bible Study

1. We are studying Ephesians at this meeting to discover and discuss the ways Paul describes the church here. The most prominent description is BODY OF CHRIST:  
1:23; 3:6; 4:4; 4:16; 5:29-30.  
What does it mean to call the Church the Body of Christ?
2. Several other comparisons for the church are used in Ephesians:
  - (1) Saints: 1:1,15,18.
  - (2) Fellow-Citizens: 2:19.
  - (3) God's Household: 2:19.
  - (4) God's building: 2:20-22.
  - (5) God's people: 4:12.
  - (6) Children of Light: 5:8-9.
  - (7) God's army: 6:13-18.
3. As time permits, discuss each of these. What does it mean to us today? What should it mean for the Church of the Saviour?
4. Close the Bible study with the reading of two prayers for the Church in Ephesians:  
1:16-23  
3:14-21

Questionnaire

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Age \_\_\_\_\_
3. Groups, programs, committees, activities in which you are now active.
4. Frequency of public worship attendance at this church per month:  
\_\_\_\_\_ time on the average
5. Do you regularly contribute financially to the general fund?  
Yes (circle one) No
6. Why do you attend this church?
7. What are the strengths of our church?
8. What are the weaknesses of our church?
9. If you could change anything in our church at the present time, what would you choose as the most important thing to change?

## Appendix E

## Some Results of the PPI

## I

Summary of PPI Results on the  
TASKS OF THE CHURCH

The Parish Profile Inventory (PPI) surveys people's opinions about the following six groups of tasks. Each task is rated as to (1) how important it should be in the congregation and (2) how satisfied the person is with the congregation's current performance of the task. Ratings are: "Very Much," "Much," "Some," and "Little or None."

These ratings were assigned numerical values and averaged. The Administrative Council returned 13 of 30 which were tabulated separately from the 53 of 270 from the Congregation.

Worship and Sacraments

Seven tasks under this heading were surveyed. In every case, the Congregation sees the tasks as being somewhat more important than does the Council. This suggests that worship should be given specific attention for our statement of purpose.

Of the seven tasks, the most significant difference between the two groups was the importance of providing worship that (4) helps members share each other's faith,

doubt, joy and sorrow.<sup>1</sup>

The second most significant difference was the importance of providing worship that (5) reaffirms the familiar traditions of your religious heritage, e.g., hymns, liturgy, sacraments, etc. However, neither group showed significant dissatisfaction with this aspect of our present performance.

By contrast, several other worship-related tasks are sources of significant dissatisfaction on the part of both groups: Worship which...

1. Deepens members' understanding of the sources and meaning of the Bible, the Church, and the Christian tradition.
2. Nurtures, uplifts and strengthens individuals to carry on their daily lives.
3. Challenges members to relate the Gospel to the issues and situations that confront them in the world.

The Council was less happy than the congregation on (7) providing worship that helps members express their joy and thanksgiving for God's gifts to them. While the congregation rated the importance of this aspect slightly higher than did the Council, they are also more satisfied than the Council with our present performance.

### Mission and Outreach

In assessing the importance of tasks in this area, the greatest difference between congregation and Council comes

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<sup>1</sup>The numbers in this summary, whether in parentheses or not, correspond to the numbers of the queries on the PPI.

on (2) carrying out acts of charity to needy persons. Though neither group is very dissatisfied with our performance, the congregation rates this as much more important than does the Council.

On only one item is the Council's view of the importance of the task greater than that of the congregation: (6) Sharing the Good News of the Gospel with the unchurched. Both groups indicate more unhappiness with our church's performance on this item than any other. This suggests the need to retain this item in our statement of purpose, but there needs to be a more effective way of doing the task.

One task in this group is a source of satisfaction for both groups: (4) Supporting the world mission of the church through study and giving. Again, both importance and satisfaction are rated higher by the congregation than by the Council.

Both Council and congregation are dissatisfied with our performance on the task of (1) encouraging members to view their daily life and work as a place for ministry; and of (5) encouraging members to understand and act on the relationship of the Christian faith to social, political and economic issues.

Again, there is considerable discrepancy on the importance assigned to the task of (3) involvement in community issues.

### Spiritual Development

While the congregation rated the four tasks in this area as being more important than did the Council, there was less of a difference than in the tasks discussed above.

The most significant distinctions were in:

2. Helping members develop practices of prayer and meditation.
3. Helping members develop a stronger personal relationship with God.

All four of the tasks in this group are sources of significant dissatisfaction for both the congregation and the Council. However, item 2 causes the greatest dissatisfaction for the congregation, while the most unhappiness for the Council is at the point of (4) helping members to encounter God in serving persons. This item (4) creates the least unhappiness for the congregation.

For both groups, the performance of our church which is the second greatest source of dissatisfaction is task (1): providing for the guidance and growth of members' spiritual life.

### Caring and Community

Again, all four tasks in this section create dissatisfaction for both congregation and Council. Furthermore, both groups report the four items in the same order, considered as sources of frustration from high to low:

2. Encouraging members to care for and support one another.
1. Developing fellowship opportunities in which members can be with and get to know one another.

3. Providing pastoral care and counseling to help members deal with their problems.
4. Providing a caring ministry to sick and shut-in persons.

In this area, the two groups are most nearly matched in their understanding of the importance of the items. However, the Council rated 2,3 and 4 of equal importance, and 1 is less important than the other three, while the congregation rated their importance in the following order: 4,3,2,1.

For the Council, item 2 in this area is the greatest source of unhappiness in the entire survey and item 1 is the third-greatest source of unhappiness (item 4 under Education, below, is second-greatest source of unhappiness for the Council).

#### Stewardship

In this area, once again, there are significant differences in how the congregation and the Council rated the tasks in importance, especially on item (3) helping members understand their Christian responsibility for the care, development and conservation of the earth's natural resources.

Both groups expressed the greatest dissatisfaction with our church's performance on item 1: educating and challenging members to support the work of the church. This seems unexpected, in the light of the usual opinion that our church is marked by high levels of stewardship.

There is also dissatisfaction arising from our per-

formance of the second task, (2) helping members understand and view their use of money, time and talents in all areas of their life as expressions of Christian stewardship.

### Education

The educational tasks show some of the most interesting discrepancies between the congregation and the Council in the PPI. First of all, it is more important for the Council than for the congregation that we (4) provide educational events that allow children, youth and adults to share with each other; and the Council reported the greatest dissatisfaction in the entire survey with this item--although the congregation is also dissatisfied with our church in this regard.

The single greatest source of unhappiness for the congregation in the entire PPI, however, is with our failure in (3) providing opportunities for youth to be together in a Christian context--also a source of much unhappiness for the Council. Both groups rate this item high in importance --the congregation moreso than the Council.

While the Council shows little dissatisfaction with the way two other tasks are being performed, the congregation reports significant unhappiness:

5. Providing adult education that teaches about the Bible, church and Christian Tradition.
6. Providing adult education that deals with contemporary issues, topics and problems.



## II

Scoring of PPI Responses on  
ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Respondents were asked to check "Strongly Agree," "Moderately Agree," "Slightly Agree," "Disagree" or "Don't Know." These were scored 4,3, 2,1,0 respectively. The Administrative Council was polled separately from the congregation: 13 of 30 returns came from the Council, and 53 of 270 from the congregation. For each group, the average score is shown after statistically significant extremes were discounted. In our discussion of these scores at the planning day on April 23, 1988 we considered the variation between the Council on the congregation significant if it was 0.5 or more. For each question, the first number shown is the average congregational score; the second number shown is the average of the Council.

Assessment and Planning

- |   |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|
| 1. The congregation has a clear statement of goals and a plan for meeting them.   | 2.000 | 2.574 |
| 2. Study of the needs of the congregation and community is regularly undertaken as the basis for church planning.                         | 1.333 | 2.282 |
| 3. Committee and group chairpersons regularly attempt to discover how members feel about the way their committee or group is functioning. | 1.750 | 1.957 |
| 4. There is a regular process for laypersons to give feedback to the pastor about his/her performance.                                    | 1.500 | 2.045 |

Decision Making

1. Those who make important decisions about the life of our church consistently re-

present the thinking of the majority of members.	2.333	2.085
2. Important decisions about the life of the church are rarely made without being openly discussed and debated by a broad spectrum of church leaders and members.	2.250	2.282
3. The theological and biblical implications of important decisions are always thoroughly and explicitly discussed.	2.583	2.288
4. It cannot be said of our church that "some members seem to have a lot more influence over policy than others."	1.583	1.829

### Church Identity

1. It is easy to summarize for visitors and non-members how our congregation differs from other congregations in the area.	2.461	2.893
2. There is common agreement among members as to what our congregation stands for.	2.231	2.893
3. There are clear expectations for being a member of this church (for example, belief, participation, giving, etc.)	2.615	3.042
4. When I think of this congregation, I usually think of "we" rather than "they."	3.231	3.255

### Church "Climate"

1. Disagreements and conflicts are dealt with openly rather than hushed up or hidden behind closed doors.	2.166	1.765
2. The predominant attitude of the membership is that conflict and disagreement can be a positive force toward growth rather than something to be avoided or suppressed.	1.416	1.804
3. There is considerable acceptance and appreciation of differing opinions and beliefs among members.	2.000	2.066
4. All things considered--worship, programs, policies, people--our church appears much the same today as it did ten years ago.	2.750	1.895

5.	Most members view change in policies and programs as a necessary and desirable dynamic in our church's life.	1.500	1.622
6.	There would be little negative reaction among members to experimenting with the style or order of Sunday worship.	1.333	1.630
7.	Members place considerable importance on doing things in the church in traditional ways.	3.083	2.893
8.	The current morale of our church members is high.	1.583	2.000
9.	There is a sense of excitement among members about our church's future.	1.416	1.765
10.	The church leadership (clergy and lay) has the full confidence and support of the membership.	2.333	2.574

## Appendix F

A Summary of the Written Comments Given at the  
Lenten Home Meetings

1. Often-mentioned strengths of the Church of the Saviour:
  - (1) We are small enough to know one another. It is like "home," like "family."
  - (2) The Bible teaching, a compatible theology, and a genuine belief in prayer.
2. Missions is often considered a strength of our program; but there are also those who question the emphasis on world missions, and feel that more money should be retained within the church.
3. While the biblical preaching is often given as an attraction, two criticisms are offered: (1) The preaching needs to be simpler, more "basic." (2) With rare exceptions, services should not go overtime.
4. The following are often-mentioned weaknesses of our church:
  - (1) Poor communications.
  - (2) We are uncomfortable with conflict, and do not handle it well. There are cliques.
  - (3) We are not open to new ideas, new ways.Generally, there is resistance to change of any sort.

(4) We need more social events, family times, etc.

Though we are small and "family," and do care for each other, we do not get deeply involved in each other's lives and needs.

5. Needed at our church:

(1) A full-time secretary and a full-time custodian.

(2) In worship, more opportunities for testimonies; prayer requests; more familiar ("old favorite") hymns; fewer responsive readings; some contemporary songs, including use of guitar, Scripture choruses, etc.

(3) Many people urged that we shift the times of Sunday school and worship.

(4) A significant number also urged that we have genuine options: several people suggested two different worship services on Sunday mornings, and several urged that new things be tried in our services.

6. Some purpose-related concerns which were expressed: outreach, community service, evangelism. By far the greatest number of parishioners expressed the concern that we program ourselves to appeal to youth and young adults.

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