ABSTRACT

THE JOURNEY OF DECISION MAKING

IN WORD-DIRECTED CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

by

Craig J. Smith

This ministry pre-intervention research explored how Word-directed Christian churches in Illinois utilized common practices of the discipline of spiritual discernment in decision making. A questionnaire and follow-up interviews were part of an explanatory mixed-methods design with quantitative and qualitative features, determining which practices promoted healthy dialogue in the boardroom. While many church leadership teams make their decisions more like the corporate world, this research sought and encouraged churches whose starting point was the Bible to consider and use the discipline of spiritual discernment when making important decisions.

The project viewed decision making in the local church setting as a journey more than an event. By reviewing classic approaches to the discipline of spiritual discernment, such as Ignatius of Loyola, the Quakers, and more recent works of John Howard Yoder, Charles Olsen, and Danny Morris, common practices surfaced that resemble the Christian church's Word-directed ecclesiology. Research disclosed that all five common practices of the discipline of spiritual discernment were necessary for important decision making in the local church. While Word-directed church leaders deemed all five common practices as necessary, they concluded also that *studying and exploring* and *framing and centering* were the most effective discernment practices considered in both quantitative and qualitative research steps taken.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

THE JOURNEY OF DECISION MAKING

IN WORD-DIRECTED CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

presented by

Craig J. Smith

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

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<tr><td>Representative, Doctor of Ministry Program</td><td>Date</td></tr>
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<tr><td>Dean of the Beeson Center; Mentor</td><td>Date</td></tr>
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A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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December 2010

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my dear wife, Brenda, and my children: Tyson, Tanner, Josiah, Mikayla, and Devin—We are a team! You have all sacrificed so much. This project has each of your names, my favorite team, written all over it. I could not have done this project without you.

And to my new family, Grinnell Christian Church—Thank you for your patience with me in finishing this work during the first months of our ministry partnership. I can hardly wait to see what God has on his heart in the coming years!

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

When I was a senior in h igh school, the baseball team on which I was catcher played a first round, post-season game against our cross-town rivals. Rated as one of the top ten team s, coaches an d sports writers expecte d us to represent the so uthern half of Indiana in the state f inals a few weeks later. Our team led by four runs late in the game when our opponents loaded the bases with two outs. I was familiar with the batter because I played baseball w ith him the prev ious sum mer and knew he preferred hitt ing low pitches. We quic kly got two stri kes on him with fastba lls pitched through the to p of the strike zone, so I ga ve the si gn to throw anot her fastbal l high and out of the strike zone to entice the batter to chase a third str ike. The pitcher shook off my sign and wanted to throw his downward-breaking knuck leball. Afte r a conference at the mound with the coach, we agreed that a p itch high and hard was best for the team. Mak ing a uni lateral decision, the pitcher went a gainst what was best for the team and threw a knuckleba ll. The batter proceeded to hit the pitch out of the ballpar k for a game-ty ing, grand slam home run. Our seaso n ende d an inning later, when our riv als rode the mo mentum of the home run and scored the gam e-winner to beat us b y one ru n.

In the past 2½ decades of serving in the local church, I have attended approximately two church board meetings per month. I have partic ipated in more than five hundred meetings and invested easi ly one tho usand hours in dial ogue w ith elders and staff members in those meetings during that same time period. At a recent performance evaluation with key volunteer leaders, I reflected on how m uch m ore I enjoyed t he

meetings this year than l ast. I was enamored b y the interaction bet ween elders and ministry staff members during board meetings. I thought of few plac es where I would rather be than in the room where men an d women share with one another in the context of growing a hea lthy church. I was, and stil l am, fasc inated by watchin g the var ious g ifts and perso nalities on display as professional and vo lunteer servant leaders in the loca l church interacted with one another to make decisions and offer direct ion that was best for the church.

Over the course of hundred s of meeting hours in four differ ent ministry sett ings in central Illinois, the var ious leadersh ip teams of which I was a part had man y very positi ve experiences and a few negat ive encounters. Admittedly, I was as energ ized by the negati ve deve lopments as the positive. For e xample, when I w itnessed administrators sparring w ith visionaries, I innately saw the importance of such battles as tension fil led the room. I recognized the va lue of hav ing d ifferent perspectives on oppo site sides of the circle. I longed for ful l team par ticipation where al l viewpoints were expressed before the decision event.

However, one problem repeatedly recurred for which I d id not find consistent resolution. In each min istry setting, a person with a strong personality dominated the meeting and the decision-mak ing process whenever he or she chose to d o so. While the specif ic deta ils differed f rom each located ministry, th is problem recurred —some leaders behaved in ways that thwarted healthy dialogue and shut down t he circul ar interact ion necessary for leading and growing a hea lthy church. By not acting in the best interests of the team, these leaders acted in a sim ilar way as the pitcher who sing le-handedly ensured the early departure of our baseball team from the state tourna ment.

During my years of study at Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS), I pursued a solution to this recurring leadership dilemma. When I came to DM802—Biblical Interpretation for Life and Ministry, I chose Ephesians 4:1-16 in an effort to gain a better biblical and theological grasp of the meaning of being gifted as a leader and found that I was in good, and large, company. While I gained a clearer understanding of what Paul intended when he wrote the letter, I did not find the answer to my question about why some individuals dominate church leadership meetings and dictate the decisions and direction of the church. The same literature review and scriptural study that unveiled the beautiful variety of giftedness within the plan of God for leading and growing his church was surprisingly silent in respect to that which humans do, sometimes unknowingly, to discourage the same plan. Just as God gifted men and women to work cooperatively and conjunctively "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:12, NIV), paradoxically, he gave them freedom of choice to work individually and selfishly to stand in his way.

A fellow staff member described this paradox as a black cloud hanging over board meetings. He reminded me of something obvious that we both saw in our years of serving together. In cyclical fashion all went well on the leadership team for a period of time, sometimes even several years. Then the intimidating personality of one leader crept in to drown out other important voices and darken an otherwise dialogical circle. Without healthy interaction and a meaningful calling forth of spiritual gifts from men and women within the circle, one loud voice dictated direction by unilaterally making key decisions. I maintained this result did not have to be forever recurring.

The foundational study of Ephesians 4:1-16 affirmed this conviction. Dr. Joseph Dongell spoke phrases in class, such as "word-bearer, word-saturated and ab dominal." His instructions about being a gifted man or woman of God commissioned and charged with word-bearing responsibility resonated within my heart because the church where I serve functioned under a Word-directed philosophy of ministry. Within these Word-directed parameters, I recognized that our leadership circle utilized several common practices of the classic spiritual discipline of discernment in our decision making. Far more often than not, light prevailed over darkness in the boardroom where decisions were made. In that context I began to notice the intrinsic value of every voice within the leadership circle to the overall health and effectiveness of a church. God used a loss on the baseball diamond twenty-eight years ago as a turning point in my life. I discerned that a team should not allow a single player to indulge his or her individual desire to the detriment of the team. I carried that passion into this research project.

Purpose

The purpose of this pre-intervention study was to identify the most effective practices applying the discipline of spiritual discernment to decision making as defined by leadership in Word-directed Christian churches in Illinois, to promote healthy dialogue in the boardroom.

Research Questions

To discover the most effective practices applying the discipline of spiritual discernment to decision making, I asked two research questions.

Research Que stion #1

Which of the com mon practices applying the d iscipline of spir itual discernment to decision mak ing were present in Word -directed congreg ations?

Research Que stion #2

What were the most effective pract ices in helping leadership teams discern and execute Christ's purpose thro ugh the ch urch?

Definition of Terms

Some p hrases and term s required defin ition or c larification of meaning.

Word directed describes both a way of life and a philosophy of ministry com mon to a movement within Christian churches known for al lowing God's W ord to serve as the beginning and ending point for a church to establ ish and preserve a unif ied course. The elders and staff in a *Word-direc ted ch urch* choose to let the text speak first and foremost in their preaching , teach ing, and decis ion making. Because being *Word direc ted* is a way of life, a wor ldview, *Word-direc ted* leaders take thei r cues from the Word of God a nd allow the text of God's Word t o shape t he ministry of the church.

The *Word* is Jesus and the Bible . In the dir ection statement for Jefferson Street Christian Church, we chal lenge worshipers to wal k with the L iving and Written Word.

The phrase *disc ipline of s piritual discernment* is used as the the ological equiva lent to a corporate business m odel for decis ion making. In contrast, the former begins w ith God and brings his w ill to bear, whereas the l atter beg ins w ith the huma n race and what a man or woma n wills. A research ref lection team (RRT) he lped create a list of word pairs that ser ved as pract ices applying the disc ipline of sp iritual discernment to decision making.

The *practices* included the following five word pairs: (1) framing and centering, (2) studying and exploring, (3) remembering and listening, (4) waiting and resting, and (5) deciding and implementing.

Ministry Pre-Intervention

By utilizing people resources near me, I organized the research into four phases. First, I consulted with key personnel at Lincoln Christian University (LCU) and established a panel of experts to help me identify Word-directed churches in Illinois and make initial contacts with key leaders in these churches. These personnel included (1) my field mentor and the Christian ministries department chair who trains Word-directed preachers at LCU, (2) the director of the graduate leadership program who teaches Christian leadership courses at LCU and serves as a church consultant and advisor to many church leaders, professional and volunteer, in the area of growing healthy churches, (3) the LCU associate vice president of alumni services, known for his vast knowledge of people in Christian churches, and (4) the academic dean of the undergraduate school.

Second, the RRT and I drafted and piloted a survey with three Word-directed churches to sharpen the content of the questionnaire. Then I distributed questionnaires to forty people in twenty Word-directed congregations, two from each church—a senior staff member and an experienced elder. I asked them to evaluate their decision making in the leadership circle using the practices of the discipline of spiritual discernment. Third, I narrowed the list of ten common practices (in five word pairs) to the four effective practices (in two word pairs) from the responses received and held a personal interview with eight Word-directed church leaders drawn from the sample. Fourth, I conducted a similar interview with three Word-directed, veteran senior leadership partners (i.e., an

experienced minister and e lder from the same church) selected by the panel o f experts.
All interviewees were men. After e valuating the results, I held face-to-face interviews
with these men to val idate the most effecti ve pract ices apply ing the disc ipline of sp iritual
discernment to the journey of decision making as defined by the sample of Word -
directed, Christ ian churches in I llinois.

<center>**Context**</center>

Christian churches were born in the frontier movement during the early years of
the birth of this country. As pioneers made their way across the eastern part of our
country into the Midwest, pursuing re ligious freedom from the Ch urch of England,
historians recorded events surrounding such movement as a Second Great Awakening. A
common date assigned to the beginning of Christian churches was 1801, when camp
meetings were he ld in Cane Ridge, Ken tucky. Some of those wh o settled into what would
become t he states of Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana, decided that they wan ted freedom
from any de nominational t ies as we ll. "The purpose [of this movement was] to restore the
church to its orig inal state in doc trine, pol ity, and l ife. The standard for this r estoration
[was and] is the Word of God, or more specifica lly, the New Testament" (Dowl ing 3).
This historical return to the Word was known as "the Restoration movement, Nineteenth
Century Reformation … Chris tian Church, Ch urch of Christ, Disc iples, Disciples of
Christ … Campbell ites and Stoneites" (3) . The latter "milder ep ithets" were the last
names of two primary voic es from with in the movement: Alexander Campbell and
Barton W. Stone. However, Thomas Campbell, Alexander's father, pron ounced this mo st
significant and re levant statement of the Restoration m ovement: "W here the Scriptures
speak, we speak; and where the Scr iptures are s ilent, we are silent" (Murch 4 0-41).

Honest and humble leaders within this movement today would say historically we have done a better job with the "speak" part than the "silent" part. Regardless, Christian churches highly value the Bible.

Paul S. Williams shares research revealing how Christian churches were among the fastest growing movement of churches in the country:

> The Glenmary Research Center study of growth within American denominations in the 1990s recorded the increased standing of independent Christian churches, reporting that among religious fellowships with more than 1 million members, the Christian churches grew faster than any other group, with 18.5 percent total growth.

Within this growing movement of churches, LCU ranked within the top three schools annually during the same period of time in terms of enrolling undergraduate and graduate students who train specifically for ministry ("Christian Colleges"). Because these churches were no ndenominational from inception, the larger schools within the movement took on greater responsibility in assisting local churches especially in times of crisis. Highly regarded by nearly all churches within the movement, LCU was most influential with churches in Illinois.

The 2000 census revealed that Lincoln, Illinois, was home to 15,369 people and the Logan county seat whose population was 31,183 ("Summary File 1"). Two colleges were founded in Lincoln. Lincoln College is a two-year school that began in the mid-1800s. LCU, previously known as Lincoln Bible Institute and Lincoln Christian College, began in the 1950s with a seminary added a few years later. The mantra for LCU from the beginning was *the preachers are coming*. On a typical Sunday morning during the school year, about 25 percent of those attending Jefferson Street Christian Church (JSCC), the church where I serve in ministry, had a direct connection to LCU. The Word-

directed phi losophy of ministry, ref ined and intensif ied over the years, was c learly no accident.

JSCC began meeting in 1 971 when thirty fam ilies decided to start a new church in Lincoln. These p ioneers planted the church o n the o utskirts of town away from Lincoln Christian Church, which was located downt own. The desire was to re ach more people in a less forma l setting. In the fi rst thirty-five p lus years, JSCC experienced slow and steady growth with an ave rage worship attendance toda y of a little over seven hundred pe ople. Over the years JSCC developed a reputation as a church known for solid bib lical preaching, exce llence in marr iage and fami ly training, and a compassionate heart toward the com munity. Two important factors merged over the past decade. First, JSCC pioneered a Word-directed philosoph y of ministry, and secon d, LCU tr ained many new Word-directed church leaders. I referred to these churches at times throughout the research as peer churches to JSCC. Based on these real ities, I saw no other way to conduct a research -based, ministry pre-intervent ion project without first consulting the panel of experts who ha d a close connection to b oth JS CC and LCU. Members of the panel knew which churches in I llinois we re Word directed. As we ll they earned the trust and respect of the leaders in churches that represent the sam ple for the project. The contributions of the ex pert panel from LCU proved invaluable.

Methodology

This study was a ministry pre -intervention, explana tory mixed-metho ds design because it was conducte d to explore and discover how elders and staff members wh o exist in a Word -directed ministry context make decis ions. The research-desi gned instrument util ized both q uantitative and qualitat ive compo nents. While many church

leadership teams made their dec isions more l ike the corporate world, I contende d that these churches t ook their cues from the B ible and sought to discern God 's will. I consulted with the expert panel, wh ich led to the fol lowing research ste ps.

Participants

From all the churches in I llinois, I concentrated on the W ord-directed population as advised by the panel. One of the LCU panel members also served as preach ing minister at JSCC for nine years. Whi le preach ing for JSCC, he continued to ser ve as the Christian min istries department chair at LC U where he was we ll-known as a teacher of preachers. He insisted and mo deled during his preach ing years at JSCC that our congregat ion let the Word of God speak in al l matters from the platform on Sun day mornings to the b oardroo m on Wednesda y evenings. H is influence spread we ll beyond JSCC, and t his influentia l teacher of preachers sent severa l men and women out from LCU with a Word -directed ecc lesiology. Seve ral of these tra ined preachers now lead or serve on ministry staffs in the churches of Il linois. I chose the partic ipants for this study based o n selection cr iteria establ ished by the pa nel of which he was a part. The panel of experts determined which congregations were Word directed. From the pop ulation, I selected a r andom sa mple of twenty JSC C peer churches.

Variables

A pre-ministry intervention project has no dependent or independent variables. Variables that may inf luence the research results included the size of congregat ions, the size of leadersh ip circles, and the potential ly uneven distribution of equipping g ifts at the time of assessment.

Data Collection

Before distributing the questionnaire, I personally visited or telephoned the twenty sample churches. I composed a cover letter of introduction with a referent paragraph from the panel of experts appealing to a specific senior leader in each of the Word-directed congregations to whom the correspondence would be addressed (see Appendix D). I then electronically mailed these letters with the survey and asked the senior leader and one experienced elder from the church to complete the survey using a Likert-type scale, rating their use of the practices in the leadership circle where decisions were made. I followed up with telephone calls to those who did not respond to the survey in a two-week window of time. Next, I conducted on-site interviews with eight church leaders, four ministry staff, and four elders as identified by the RRT and transcribed the content. Finally, I surveyed and interviewed the veteran senior leaders and transcribed the dialogue of the interviews.

Data Analysis

With the help of the RRT, I tallied and sorted the quantitative results of the initial survey. From the practices, we identified the two most effective practices and evaluated the results. The same team synthesized the qualitative results of the interviews with eight Word-directed church leaders to develop a richer context. Finally, I reported the second set of qualitative results taken from interviewing the experienced senior leaders to determine if the results validated the two most effective practices using the discipline of spiritual discernment in decision making in Word-directed, Christian churches in Illinois.

Generaliz ability

This study did n ot address c hurches outsi de of no ndenominational, Chr istian churches in Il linois. The research observed only decision -mak ing pract ices in Word - directed churches. This study might not be useful for church leadership teams who apply spiritua l discernment to decision making yet uti lize another approach for co urse setting, such as following a purpose -driven or seeke r-ori ented philosoph y of ministry. This study was genera lizable in the fol lowing two ways: F irst, most churches agreed that a Word - directed philosophy of ministry was a worthy pursuit, thus util izing the disc ipline of spiritua l discernment in decis ion making was a next log ical step for those who cho se to be Word-directed, and seco nd, assu ming church leadership boards u ndersto od a business model was not necessari ly biblical. All they rea lly needed was for someo ne to prese nt them with a v iable alternat ive.

Theol ogical Foundati on

Several passages of Scripture and instructors who shared their wisdom shaped the theologica l foundation of this ministry project. Dr . Stephen Seaman ds reminded st udents, "The trin itarian c ircle of Father, Son and Holy Spir it is therefore an open, not a closed circle" (12). Seamands includes a picture of the *Icon of the Holy Tri nity* painted b y Andrei Rublev in 1425 in his book as a rem inder that the three persons of the God head were not looking inward toward one another. Rather, the painter turned the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit towards the one looking at the icon to convey the message that humanity could be drawn into their re lationship. Seamands sa ys, "The ministry we have entered into is the min istry of Jesus Christ, the Son, to the Fat her, through the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world" (9-10). I want more than anything to participate in

God's plan for his church and discern his wi ll when mak ing important decisions in the open circle of servant leaders, and Seamand s' words forme d a new foun dation for me as a Word-directed church leader.

Upon this foundation of minister ing in the image of God, I began to search for a more bibli cal way of mak ing dec isions in the church. The apostle Paul challenged believers in Rome: "Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed b y the renewing of your mind. Then you wil l be abl e to *test and approve* [emphasis mine] what God's will is—his good, pleas ing and perfect w ill" (Rom. 1 2:2). When writing to the church he helped start in Phi lippi, Paul prayed near the beg inning of the letter "that your love may abou nd more and more to knowledge and dept h of insight, so that y ou may be able to *discern* [empha sis mine] what is best and may be pure and blameless unti l the day of Christ" (Phi l. 1:9-10). The italicized words come from the same Greek root word d???µ???, which means to test, examine, or prove something. God did not intend to keep his wi ll secret from his fo llowers. This project increased my awareness of how serious God is abo ut revea ling his p lan to Christ fol lowers committed to the discipl ine of spi ritual discernment. Danny E. Morris and Charles M . Olsen effect ively wed these f irst two points of theologi cal foundation: "The process of discernment invites us into the heart and li fe of the tr iune God" (75). I began to see similarities between spir itual discernment and t he Trinitarian shape of ministry.

As well I learned from this project that spir itual discernment is countercultural . Discernment takes t ime, often more than o ne is wi lling to give it. Consistently I witnessed servant leaders (elders) in the loca l churches where I se rved bow to time demands. The l eadership team moved to the decision event far before they were ready

and circumvented the important decision journey God may well have had in store for them. The time and resource demands upon volunteer and professional leaders in the church were many. Luke recorded an important happening in the life of the early Church in Acts 6:1-7 when the apostles addressed similar demands on their time and resources. While feeding hungry widows is a very important ministry, the apostles recognized this task could be managed by capable others. With this recognition, Luke recorded the apostles' priorities by repeating "Word of God" and "ministry of the Word" (see vv. 2, 4, 7) three times. This repetition resounded within me through out completion of this project. For my personal and professional comprehension and development, these words established a clearer priority for the leadership circle in a local church.

As mentioned previously, JSCC abided by a Word-directed philosophy of ministry. In the last decade, this church in Lincoln, Illinois, was very consistent and perhaps even more insistent than in previous years in taking her cues from the Word of God. In other words, while it had clear statements of vision, purpose, and core values, its ecclesial starting point was always the Word of God.

In early 2008, I entered Dr. Joseph Dongell's class at ATS and formally selected Ephesians 4:1-16 as a text for exegetical study. Dongell's phrases, "Word-saturated," "Word-bearer," and "abdominal" quickly became useful and meaningful descriptors of men and women who are part of the JSCC circle of leaders. These conclusions were significant and ministry shaping for me in laying a theological framework for this project. Prior to attending the class, I interpreted Ephesians 4: 11-13 specifically as a gifts passage. During and after the class, I drew two important conclusions. First, I would no longer be too quick to systematize these gifts and, in turn, identify which leader at JSCC

had what gift. Second, the passage in question was a description of gifted believers more so than a listing of gifts to be distributed to believers. The gifts take the shape of specific men and women through whom God had entrusted the maintenance and preservation of the unity that he initiated and exemplified through a Trinitarian expression.

I began referring regularly to the men and women in the JSCC leadership circle as Word bearers. Dongell refers to the leadership gifts listed specifically in Ephesians 4:11 as "abdominal or hyper-essential roles." In Ephesians 4:12-13, Paul reiterated the purpose of Word bearers. God gave these leaders to the body for the purpose of equipping all believers toward unity and maturity. Combining the impact of Acts 6:1-7 and Ephesians 4:1-16 upon my understanding, the priority of "ministry of the Word" and the "abdominal role" of Word-bearer clarified where this project and my future leadership was headed. I saw senior leaders and elders in the local church as Word bearers in their various communities of faith, given to the body, so God's people might mature and remain unified "until the times will have reached their fulfillment—bringing all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10).

These two passages instructed that church leaders are first and foremost Word bearers. How Word bearers interact with and treat one another became the focus of this project. God set the standard. God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not mutually exclude one another. One leader within a circle of leaders should not have the freedom to dominate group interaction to the exclusion of others. Each perspective within the Word-bearing dynamic of the local church should highly value the various other perspectives. Gifted apostles should encourage expression of gifted prophets. Gifted prophets should seek to listen carefully to gifted evangelists. Gifted evangelists should welcome the input

of gifted pastor -teachers. Problems developed when any o ne Word-bearing perspecti ve was not heard, or m ore likely, drowned o ut by the loud an nounceme nts of an other perspective. Such behavior d iminished healthy decision making.

In his remarkab le grace, God al lowed a cre ated being to thwart the plan and purpose of the Cr eator, yet God ch ose to build his k ingdom through pe ople, ?????s ʿa, the Ch urch. I found this stu dy to be timely for me personal ly because I was so passionate about leadership circ les and g rowing a healthy church. Also, I env isioned the research would serve as a purposeful means of assisting others desir ing to min imize the human element of l eadership. M inimization would maximize God's m ovement t hrough Word- bearing men and women w ho lead churches utili zing the disc ipline of spi ritual discernment in the decision-mak ing circle of the local church.

Overview

Chapter 2 contains the fou ndational rev iew of literature upon which a loca l church leadership team may build a hea lthy system for making decis ions by u tilizing effective practices of the disc ipline of spir itual discernment. Chapter 3 offers a more extensive explanation of the design of the stud y and t he meth odology. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study, and Chapter 5 offers an analysis of the results and a discussion of the stu dy an d pote ntial relevance for min istry praxis.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

In a recent leadership discussion about the content of church board meetings, a respected elder shared a conversation he had with a friend. The friend challenged the elder about being Word directed with this question: Since JSCC claims to be Word directed, how much time in board meetings is spent reading and studying God's Word? When this question was posed to the full eldership, many in the room felt the stab of the proverbial dagger to the heart. A Word-directed congregation must be led by servant leaders who are, according to the title of a book by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word*. Mulholland concludes that "every human being is a word that God speaks into existence" (34). The journey of living a Word-directed life begins with a clear understanding of what God does when he creates a human being.

Mulholland contends that the Word-directed journey continues when the word of a Christ follower is transformed by the Word of God. He writes, "There is some profound sense in which our 'word' is hidden in the Word" (37). When guided by their word, Christians are naturally inclined to start each new day with an agenda that pursues a personal goal. When directed by his Word, the same Christians are somehow supernaturally compelled to pursue an agenda, other than their own, that pursues a divine plan. Rather than come to the Word of God with their own agenda, Word-directed men and women choose consciously to allow the Word to shape their lives and set them on a course in step with God and his agenda.

This chapter reviews literature on spiritual discernment and decision making in the church first from a biblical and theological perspective then from a classical and historical perspective. The chapter concludes by moving the former and latter perspectives into the contemporary church boardroom. Before embarking, a concise summary is important. To make decisions that honor God, one must start with God, not self. Word-directed people are committed to making both the living word, Jesus, and the written Word, the Bible, their starting point. If Word-directed people are commissioned to lead within a particular church family and want to make decisions that honor God, the discipline of spiritual discernment helps them consistently arrive at the right starting point. Mulholland poetically affirms this assertion:

> The core of spiritual formation is the process of breaking the crust of self and bringing forth a new creation in the image of Christ—breaking the garbled, debased, distorted word we have become and bringing forth the word God speaks us forth to be in the world. (111)

When the Word of God is placed in the position of deserving prominence in a church leader's personal life, he is in a better position to help the leadership team make God-honoring decisions. Cultivating a Word-directed life involves applying the discipline of spiritual discernment in both private and corporate ways.

Biblical and Theological Foundations

This study of decision making in the church was developed in two rooms: the boardroom and the classroom. Having attended church board meetings led primarily by parliamentary procedure for over twenty years, my experience urged me to find a better way. While most of these meetings were productive, I noticed that a vast majority of those seated in the boardroom were uncomfortable with Robert's Rules of Order when making decisions. If proposed, these leaders would welcome a different plan. After

sitting in Seamands' classroom for a week and lea rning to m inister in the image of God, a clearer picture of leadership dec ision mak ing began to emerge upon the biblic al and theologica l foundation of a three -in-one God.

Model—Trinita rian Circle

While I labored to find a more effect ive method, thro ugh the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God had already re vealed the answer. More accurate ly God simply is the answer. God is unity personif ied. The c learest expression of how leaders are to function as servants in the church is a Trinitarian c ircle. Seamands describes the ministry his servants are prone to claim as the ir own to be his ministry :

> Partic ipating with the tr initarian God in mission is like that. He is the chief actor in the unfolding story, not us. To keep from hindering God, we've got to risk giving up control so that he can be in control. (17 7)

The more I y ield to this bib lical way of doing m inistry, the more open I become t o partic ipating in the mission he created long a go. "The min istry we have entered into is the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son, to the Father, through the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church an d the world," says Seaman ds (9-10). Learning to discern God's wil l for his church corp orately f lows out of un derstanding the remarkab le relationship between the Father, the Son, and t he Holy Spir it.

Because the Godhead co nsists o f three persons, one tends to think geometrically of a tr iangle because it has three points. George C ladis encourages church leaders to consider the three person s of the Tr inity in the shape of a ci rcle. He uses the Greek word pe???? ??s?? to offer what he ca lls the master ima ge of a c ircle dance: "A *perichoretic* image of the Trinity is that of the three persons of God in con stant m ovement in a circ le that impl ies intimacy, equal ity, unity yet distinct ion, and love" (4). These beautifu l words

describing the incredible partnership within the Triune God remind those who labor in the local church not just that the ministry is God's but how ministry is to be conducted. While some find dancing awkward, the circle dance of leadership is a dance that even those who are uncomfortable should attempt.

Following a Trinitarian model discourages solo acts in ministry. Dale Galloway describes how God models the value of working together with others:

> Leaders have a sense of task and purpose, but they must never promote a lone ranger attitude.… Consider the beautiful picture of relationships in ministry we see in the Trinity.… The members of the Godhead communicate with each other. They represent unity in diversity. Each member of the Trinity serves as a model of relational ministry with the other members. (49)

Leading by oneself may be lonely, but it is sometimes easier. Solo leaders do not have to wait for others or be confronted by the different perspectives other people hold, yet just because leading by oneself is easier, it is not necessarily biblical or better.

The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthian church, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Cor. 3:6). The natural course of a church is to grow. However, through Paul, God instructs that growing a church is a group effort. Two of eight quality characteristics of healthy churches described in Natural Church Development research point to the importance of not going solo: "empowering leadership" and "gift-oriented ministry" (Schwarz 242). God intends for leaders to give ministry away rather than do all the work themselves. The apostle Peter writes, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet. 4:10). The Trinitarian example implies a circle of leadership where members are empowered to contribute to the cause of the whole by using their individual gifts.

In the book of Exodus, Moses saw two markedly different approaches to leadership. Growing up in Pharaoh's household in Egypt, Moses witnessed leadership that looked like a hierarchical triangle and manifested itself in individual rule. This Egyptian style of leadership was "a model of authoritarian power and whiplash persuasion employed by taskmasters, princes, and Pharaohs" (McNeal 11). After his trek into the desert, Moses experienced a strikingly different approach to leadership. While in the land of Midian with his father-in-law, Jethro, Moses went to the "desert school of leadership built upon accountability and stewardship" (11). Employed by Jethro, Moses grew to value the importance of working together with other shepherds.

When leading God's people out of Egypt many years later, Moses had an opportunity to revert to the style of leadership he learned in Egypt. Jethro made sure Moses did not make that mistake. Instead, he urged Moses to solicit the help of others and not attempt leadership solo. Jethro instructed Moses to get help from trusted others:

> What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.… [S]elect capable men from all the people.… Have them serve as judges for the people at all times.… That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. (Exod. 18: 17-22)

Jethro led Moses out of a triangular, hierarchical, or linear form of leadership and into a more circular, relational, Trinitarian expression of leadership ministry.

In Word-directed Christian churches, elders function as the primary decision makers. Summarizing the role of an elder in the local church, Alexander Strauch succinctly says, "The distinguishing mark of Christianity was not found in a clerical hierarchy, but in the fact that God's Spirit came to dwell within ordinary, common people" (*Biblical Eldership* 111-12). For those entrusted with the responsibility of

making dec isions on behalf of a local church, eldersh ip is shared leadership. In the shape

of a Trinitarian circle, no one pers on is in the position to dictate a course of action for the

church. Strauch adds, "Our Lord never trained any man alone. He called and trained men

as a team" (*Meetings That Work* 14). God, the Father, chose to share leadership w ith the

Son and the Holy Spirit to offer a model for ministry to the church of yesterday, to day,

and tomorrow. Following the tr iune God into ministry is the bib lical and theologic al

starting point.

Priority—The Word of God and Pra yer

Even w ith such a perfect model for ministry as the Trinitarian circle firmly fixed

in place, time demands s till distract and disrupt church leaders from functioning

effectively. On many occasions, I witnessed wel l-intentioned elders in local churches

miss opp ortunities to min ister the Word and pray for peo ple because of their bu sy

schedules. Lack of "functional structures" and "gift-oriented ministry," wh ich invite a

higher percentage of congregat ional participation, cr ipples the min istry of the Word

(Schwarz 2 42). The by -product of d ysfunctional structure is poor or, at best, ru shed

decision mak ing. W ithout attention to t he priority of the min istry of the Word and prayer,

leadership often misses out on the imp ortant decision journe y God had within his plan.

Not unlike the story of Jethro an d Moses in Exo dus, the leaders of the e arly

Church had more respon sibilities than they ha d time to fulf ill. The histori an Luke

recorded in Acts 6 :1 that the num ber of new discip les was on the rise; thus, the num ber of

needs to meet was also incre asing. The apostles c learly establ ished their pr iority when

they claimed as most important not leaving behind (?ata?e ʹp?) the Word of God to wait

on tables (6 :2). ?ata?e ʹp? could also be translated neg lect, forsake, or abandon;

therefore, ear ly Church leaders expressed here in Acts a very strong sentiment. What they chose n ot to aba ndon was *the Word of God or ministry of the Word an d prayer*. The author, Luke, le ft no dou bt in the reader's mind b y his word choice. In verses 2, 4, and 7, he repeated these ital icized words to indicate something specif ic and heavy was we ighing on the min ds of the ap ostles.

The apostles saw an important task that needed acco mplishing. W idows were without food. The apostles created a functional structure of se   ven men to oversee the task of distributing food and set guidel ines for the select ion of the seven, ev en lay ing hands on and praying for those selected. The apostles recogni zed the task of distr ibuting food fair ly could be managed b y others while they simultaneously made a b old statement ab out the specif ic task to which God had called them: the m inistry of the Word and prayer. God used the unfortu nate circumstance of these widows to ena ble the apostles to establish a clear min istry prior ity.

Adherence to this ministry prior ity is vital to ef fective functioning of the leadership c ircle in the loca l church today. The bib lical examples of Moses and Jethro in Exod us an d the apo stles in Acts 6:1-7 have long ser ved as a formative model for help ing elders disce rn their roles. Keeping the prior ity of the ministry of the Word and prayer in front of time-conscious mem bers of church leadership team s is dif ficult. The chal lenge is even greater when important decisions need to be made. The decision made by the apostles in Acts 6 is one of approximately thirteen such group decisions made in the l   ife of the early Church. In this second volume written by Luke, a scr iptura l precedent for group decision making is set in motion. Quantity and the q uality of attent ion gi ven to the decision-making process are both important considerations.

Precedent —The Early Church

Seven of the thirteen decision-making events in Acts include language that specifically speaks of explicit gatherings of people (1:15-26; 4:31; 6:2-7; 13:2-3; 15:6-21, 30-35; 21:18). The other six are more implicit narratives that detail the making of important decisions (8 :14-17; 9:26-28; 11:1-18, 19-26, 27-30; 15:1-3). From these explicit and implicit corporate gatherings where important decisions were made as outlined by Gary Lee Olsen, I envision several precedent-setting practices of the early Christians (26-29). Decision-making practices repeated by the leaders of the early Church in Acts are normative and worthy of repetition in the church today.

First, the early Church leaders referred to the Word of God, Scripture, or a voice from heaven often when making important decisions (see Acts 1 :16; 4:31; 6:2, 4, 7; 8:14; 11:1, 9; 15:35). Consistent reference to the Word of Go d as important an d central in decision-making settings underscores the relevance for contemporary church administration.

Second, Luke emphasized how dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit the early Church leaders were (e.g., 1:16; 4:31; 6:3, 5; 8:15-17; 11:12, 15-16, 24; 13:2; 15:8). More accurately the apostles saw themselves as facilitators of the work of the Spirit. For example, as the gospel message spread to Samaria as recorded in Acts 8, the apostles living in Jerusalem gathered in one of the aforementioned implicit meetings. With growing dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit as the truth about Jesus was spreading beyon d the boundaries of Judah, the early Church decided to dispatch Peter and John to pray for the new Samaritan believers to receive the Holy Spirit.

Third, as directed by the Word of God and prompted by the Holy Spirit, the early Church leaders practiced the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, laying on of hands, and casting of lots (1:24, 26; 4:31; 6:4, 6; 8:15, 17; 13:3). Accustomed to praying to God through a priest or making sacrifices to honor God, the apostles led the early Church into a new covenant relationship with God. Their commitment to practicing the spiritual disciplines bore much fruit. When they prayed together in Acts 4:31, Luke wrote that "the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." In summary, recorded history of the early Church indicates the importance of the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual disciplines when church leaders gathered to make important decisions. The writings of the apostle Paul advance the value of disciplined decision making.

Discipline—Spiritual Discernment

In Romans 12:2 and Philippians 1:9-10, the apostle Paul exhorted respective churches he was writing to in the first century to *discern* or *test and approve* what God wanted them to do. Jesus was a disciplined, spiritual discerner of his Father's will. God's plan from the very beginning was to send his Son who would discern and be absolutely obedient to the Father's will.

The Bible records purposefully how a people of God emerged, beginning with the horde Moses faithfully led out of bondage to the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses delivered the law directly from God to his people. While his people were not always faithful, "there remained a sense of being a people together under the rule of God" (Foster 176). Despite a lack of faith, even because of unfaithfulness, Paul writes, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.… God demonstrates his

own love for us in th is: Whi le we we re st ill sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5 :6, 8). As the plan of God unfolded, his purpose for sending Jesus became increasingly evident.

With Christ's coming, a new way of l iving in faithful commu nion with the Father manifested itse lf. Richard Foster wr ites, "Once aga in a people we re gathered who lived under the imme diate, theocrat ic ru le of the Spi rit. W ith quiet persistence Jesus showe d them what it meant to li ve in response to the voice of the Father" (1 77). Indiv idual ly and corporately, Jesus m odeled a l ife of disce rning the w ill of God on ear th. Before Jesus began a day in minister ing to the needs of ot hers, Mark states about him, "Very early in the morning, whi le it was st ill dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solita ry place, where he prayed" (1 :35). When chal lenged by the e nemy, Matthew records, "After fasting forty days an d forty nights, he was hungry" (4: 2). Next, about Jes us as he faced the tempter, Foster writes these time ly words: "We would be wel l advised to encourage groups of peo ple to fast, pray, and worship togethe r until they have discerned the mind of the Lord" (17 8). Jesus' practice of d iscernment set the exceptional example for discerners.

Jesus' discipl ined l ife of disce rning h is Father's wi ll teaches e ven more. Pr ior to selecting those who would be designated apostles, in Luke's words, Jesus "we nt out to a mountainside to pray, and s pent the night praying to God" (6 :13). Knowing what lay ahead the ne xt day, Jes us went to t he garden of Gethsemane t o pray. In the final hours of his life on earth, Jesus discerned the Father's will in a profound exchange between Father and So n:

> "Father, if you are w illing, take this cup from me; yet not m y will, but yours be do ne." And an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was l ike drops of blood fal ling to the ground. (Luke 2 2:42-44)

Jesus' obedience exceeds ex pectation. He completely trusted his Father and practiced the discipline of spiritual discernment with remar kable passion.

In Christ, spir itual discernment finds its most discipl ined expression. Jesus lived his life in total communion with his Father. For Jesus, discernment was never about making a decision. Disce rnment was always about discovering a dec ision already made. In what was arguably his most huma n moment there in the garden, Jesus expressed discomfort with his Father's decision. Jesus knew he would soo n give his life for his followers. Christ followers ar e challenged to abide by his example. Spir itual discerners come so near God in hi s triune nature that they arrive at dec isions as i f already made, and all other thoughts of h uman origin fall to the g round like Jesus' drops of blood. Indee d, Morris and O lsen share, "The process of discernment invit e[s] us into the heart and lif e of the triune God" (75) . Thus, for those com missioned to lead with in the loca l church, God outlines a speci fic role.

Philosophy — Word-Beare rs

R. Paul Stevens offe rs a Trinitarian ecc lesiology when he records what Go d's people have been com missioned to d o and be: "Not only d oes the Father sen d the So n, and the Father an d Son se nd the Spirit, but the Father, Son an d Spirit send the church into the world. M ission is the sending of God from f irst to last" (194). Christ fo llowers have one specific th ing in commo n—they are all part of the sending of God. Within the context of his church, God has s pecifically commissioned servant leaders w ith these words of Paul: "It was he who gave some to be ap ostles, some to be prop hets, so me to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:1 1). Explor ing this verse in its context over the past four years with var ious A TS instructors and peers led to so me

transformative b iblical and theolog ical conclusions. A deta iled rev iew of Ephesians 4 :11-13 illuminates a phi losoph y of ministry for church leaders.   Understanding the entire   letter in its context is the appropriate beginning   point.

  Authorship and destination. As trad itional ly underst ood, the apos tle Paul wrote this lette r to the church in Ephesus. The l etter was probabl y intended to be read widely. D. Stuart B riscoe refers to Ephesians as "the letter w ritten by Paul to Ephesian bel ievers and, in al l probabil ity, those in nei ghboring towns" (6). Dona ld Guthrie adds, "[N]o doubt therefore that these early fathers (Irenaeus, Clement, and Tertu llian) re garded the Epistle as addressed to the Ep hesian Church,… b ut it might we ll ha ve been a c ircu lar letter" (509-11). Other facts a re c lear based on historical   data from the book of Acts. First, Pau l was in the c ity of Ephesus o n no fewer than two occasions d uring his t ravels—while on his return from Macedonia on his second jo   urney and o n his way toward Macedonia on his third journey. His second sta   y in Ephesus (Acts 20: 31) included three years of "teaching in the 'hall   of Tyrannus' and laying the foundations for the ch urches of Asia" (Aharoni and Av i-Yonah 155).

  Second, clear ly, Paul w as impr isoned whe n he wrote the letter (see Eph. 3 :1; 4:1). Where Paul was imprisoned as he wrote the letter   is not so clear . Of the three possible locat ions where Ephesians was written, Rome, Caesarea, or Ephesus, most   plausibly, Paul was in Rome. From h ouse arrest in Rome, he wrote and se nt three letters : a personal letter to Phi lemon o n behalf of runaway slave   Onesimus, the letter   known as Colossia ns to respo nd to heresy that ha d arisen in that church, and the more general   letter to the comm unity of believe rs in Ephesus, which was at the center of the reg   ion known as Asia Minor. Then Paul sent the   letters via courie rs, Onesimus (Phi lem. 17) and Tych icus (Eph.

6:21; Col. 4:7). While he had a very specific purpose for writing Colossians, to address the heresy there, Paul followed by writing Ephesians with a more general purpose. The biblical record reveals that the apostle Paul spent more time in Ephesus than in any other located ministry (Acts 20:31). Hence, he invested more in the lives of these leaders than others. While general in content, the letter reflects a specific knowledge of the recipients because Paul probably knew this group of church leaders very well (Acts 20:36-38). Entrusting this important letter to these leaders, he anticipated the letter would reach the ears of many first century Christ followers.

   Literary context. Dr. David Thompson translates Ephesians 1: 4b as "to be holy and blameless in his sight in love" and advocates that the phrase is purposive of the letter. A closer look at the literary context of Ephesians 4:1-16 reveals that some translations do not include the conjunction "therefore" at the beginning of 4:1. The New American Standard Bible not only includes the word but types it in all capital letters, THEREFORE (???). This translation is both accurate and compelling because the first three chapters lay a theological foundation for holy and blameless living in love, as Thompson recommends, and conclude with a prayer accented with "Amen." Kenneth S. Wuest states, " 'Therefore' reaches back to all the blessings and exalted positions in salvation which the saints enjoy, and reaches ahead to the obligations which such privileges put upon the saints" (92). An emphatic ??? at the beginning of Ephesians 4:1 establishes the theological foundation Paul set in place in the first half of the letter. Paul uses a causal move to implore his audience to move from theory to practice. In the first half of Ephesians, Paul elucidates that Christ is the perfect example of holy and blameless living. In the second half, Paul admonishes his readers to go and do likewise.

Immediately fol lowing Ephesians 4 :1-16, Paul uses ??? once again. While this word is smal l, it does much work in the Gree k language. Walter Bauer, W illiam F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich claim, "[W]hat this word introduces, by inference,   is the result of what precedes it" (593). Most translat ions render ??? as *so* or *therefore* to begin verse 1 7. Either translation indicates Pau l is preparing his reader for a contrast, which is exactly where he takes the reader in verses 1 7-24. In Ephesians 4 :1-16, Paul first descr ibes what will be requi red to keep the body of Christ unif ied and moving toward maturity in holy and blameless l iving. In Ephesians 4 :17-19, Pau l describes the op posite of Christian unity, which is the Gent ile culture of darkness in Ephesus. Then,   in Ephesians 4 :20-24, Paul returns to what l iving in the light resembles, which he re fers to twice as a "new self." Using Ephesians 4 :1-24 as a p ivot point, beg inning in verse 25, Pau l shares arguably his most practica l teaching in all of the New Testament.

The connection between the rich theolog ical, worldview statements in the f irst chapter and their impl ication in the fourth chapter is unmistakable . Paul procla ims the Lordship of Christ as he admonishes the large, anticipated audience in Ephesus and the surrou nding area :

> And he ma de known t o us the myst ery of his wi ll according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring al l things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ....
>   And Go d placed al l things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is h is body, the fullness of him who fi lls everything in every way. (Eph. 1 :9-10, 22-23)

Paul's twin appeals for "unity of the Spirit"   (4:3) and that "we wil l in all things grow up" (4:15) are rooted in the person of Christ. Doing the   latter, "grow[ing] up," is impossible without first hear ing and abiding in the former, "unity." Thus Paul can conclude, "Fro m

him [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (4:16).

Most translations begin Ephesians 4:7 with the conjunction *but*. Paul is either offering a contrast or changing directions. The immediate context indicates a subtle change of direction. Whereas he was laying a foundation for unity by speaking of "all [and] every" in the worldview statements of the first chapter and in 4:1-6, Paul ever so carefully narrows the focus to begin speaking about how Christ has grace gifted "each one of us" (4:7-13). In other words, Paul has focused on those whom God gifted to lead his church, and he begins a specific appeal to them. This one who "fill[s] the whole universe" (4:10b) accomplished something before his ascension to heaven about which Paul next offers instruction.

Though Ephesians 4:11-13 is three verses, most translators agree it is one very long sentence. Interestingly, three words or ideas in this sentence appeared previously in verses 1-7: "unity" in verses 3 and 11, "body" in verses 4 and 12, and "measured" in verses 7 and 13. Obviously, Paul is continuing a train of thought from verses 1-6 to verses 7-16. In Ephesians 4:1, Paul used the Greek word ?????, translated *worthy* or *deserving*, to summarize the holy and blameless life spoken of earlier in the letter. Lawrence O. Richards says, "The Greek ????? means literally to balance the scales.… [D]octrine is to be balanced by way of life" (800). The adjective form of ????? has to do with weight and measurement. Continuing with the scale metaphor, Paul is saying that the behavior of Christians should match their profession of faith. Calling and conduct should be equal in measure (Wuest 93; Walvoord and Zuck 632). Paul chose two words, ??? and ?????, to turn his letter from its theological foundation to practical application.

Therefore, Ephesians 4:11-13 describes people who have been grace gifted to lead the church by modeling a holy and blameless life.

Ephesians 4:11-13. Paul uses five words to describe church leaders in verse 11: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Collectively and traditionally, these five words are known as leadership or ministry gifts. Dongell describes Ephesians 4:11-13 as perhaps the preaching text cited most in the last five years and advised students not to be too quick to systematize the five words as leadership gifts. In Acts 6:1-7, the apostles set a precedent for those who serve in leadership roles in the church. The apostles established a ministry that their priority would be "prayer and ministry of the word" (6:4). Whereas many tasks in the church, such as giving food to widows, are essential, Dongell instructs that "abdominal or hyper-essential tasks" exist in the church. Ephesians 4:11 continues and clarifies these *hyper-essential tasks*: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." Then Ephesians 4:12-13 gives purpose to the *hyper-essential tasks*: "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up … reach unity … become mature." As the abdomen is the center, or core, of the body and the necessary starting point for preserving health within the physical body, these five words are central or *abdominal* to the health of Christ's body, the church.

Being too systematic or linear in thought, church leaders can miss what these *abdominally* gifted leaders have in common: "They are word-bearing cadre of folk," according to Dongell. Ephesians 4:11-13 is less a list of leadership gifts and more a description of Word-bearing, speech-oriented church leaders who must contribute each time the leadership circle gathers to discern God's will and purpose for his church. Paul

was calling the Word -bearing church leaders of Ephesus to fulf ill their *abdominal*, central, core min istries of bui lding the body u p and eq uipping al l believers toward unity and mat urity (4 :12-13). Summari ly, under the Lordship of Jesu s, living holy and blameless lives, God has grace g ifted Word bearers in various communities of faith to use their *abdominal* leadersh ip capacity in such a way that his people might mature and remain unif ied "until the t imes wi ll have reached thei r fulfillment—bringing all things in heaven and o n earth together under o ne head, even Christ" (Eph . 1:10). Descr iptions of the Word-bearing church leaders whom Paul mentions in Ephesians 4:1 1 follow. At the risk of being systematic and itemiz ing them as specif ic gifts, I w ill elevate the Word - bearing nature and responsibil ity each of the f ive words has to the ot her for effect ive leadership and decis ion making in the local church.

    Apostles. The first Word bearers of whom Pa ul speaks are apostles. Literally, an apostle is "one sent away from or one co mmissioned with a specif ic task" (Sos 3 7). Words t hat help convey the mea ning of apostle include representati ve, ambassador, envoy, delegate, messenger, and agent (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingr ich 99-100). Apostles extend t he reach of the gospel, often advancing into the darkest areas of the world of unbelief. Apostles a re always think ing about the future and co ntinually search ing for ways to establish the church in new conte xts (Hirsch 3 4; M. Green 1 47). Gifted apostles remind others in the leadership c ircle of the church abou t the true so urce of their power and that God is in control. K eenly awar e of the transforming power of the gospel message, apostles search for ways to retel l God's st ory creative ly and fa ithfully (Wehr li 33). Michae l Frost and Alan H irsch make a plea in the ir book for "a rediscove ry of the fullness of Paul ine teaching about Christian m inistry.… [T]his w ill mean for many

traditional-Christendom churche s a full inclusion of the inv igorating roles of apostle and prophet and evangel ist in the church to day" (168). Christ ian churches tend to agree wit h the tradit ional churches that confine the apostles in Ephesians 4: 11 to the fi rst century, as church leaders who witnessed the resurrection and n o longer exist in the church today. In contrast I prefer to ca ll the apostles of the f irst century foundation al apostles, whereas the gifted, Word -bearing apostles of the present-day church are functional apostles.

Paul placed apostle first in his list of gifted Word bearers. I am learning through careful attention to etymology n ot to relegate apostle to the fi rst century. The New Testament inc luded muc h information abou t the Twe lve who Jesus called, appointed, and sent ou t to preach, drive out demo ns, and heal the sick. Others in the New Testament, such as Paul, were desi gnated apostles. Unfortunately va rious ch urch traditions took this word intended more to describe function and made an office or t itle out of it. Whi le I agree that Jesus appointed a foundational group of leaders known as Apostles, I also conten d leaders blessed with the Word -bearing gift of apos tle serve a ve ry important function in churches to day. Paul did not introduce a new office in the church; rather, he described a beautiful and necessary gift that must be present in a church leadership c ircle and assigned it the hi ghest prior ity in his list of Word bearers. F rost and Hirsch describe a Word-bearing apostle as one who "pioneers new missional works and oversees their development" (169). Apostles are entrepreneurs and vis ionaries who do not hesitate to try new things. Skye Jethani descr ibes apo stles as "s piritual entrepreneurs, space makers, extenders, co nnectors, an d shepherds of shepherds" (38 -39). Gifted apostles are essentia l partic ipants in the discussion abo ut the direction of a church in the leadership c ircle.

Bob Russell affirms the need for both visionaries and administrators on a leadership team in the local church. Russell argues that both kinds of leaders are necessary. He writes, "Without the visionary, the church becomes predictable and fails to reach its potential. Without the administrators there is no one to organize and follow-through with the visionary's plan" (139). Apostles are the visionaries. Churches without Word-bearing, apostolic leadership may develop a pervasive, settler mentality that disables the church from envisioning the taking of any new territory for Christ. Jethani records the words of Dave Ferguson, senior pastor of Community Christian Church in Naperville, Illinois, who articulates well the work of an apostle:

> People with the apostolic gift see over the horizon. They're able to look at the spiritual landscape and see where God is working .... [They] get great joy from disappearing into the background and allowing room for the other gifts to emerge and grow. (38)

Word-bearing apostles are big-picture thinkers who serve as catalysts for others in the congregation who are not gifted in the same way. Paul moves from Word-bearing apostles to Word-bearing prophets in Ephesians 4:11.

Prophets. Like the apostle, the Word-bearing prophet should not be considered a first century only church leader. Prophet is not a very contemporary word. The concept of a prophet seems dated in churches today, largely because that which is prophetic connects people to something dated, such as the Old Testament books of prophecy. As well, prophecy is often equated with prediction. Klyne Snodgrass clarifies by saying that while prophets did sometimes predict outcomes, more often, prophets explain how the gospel message pertains to everyday life (204). Word-bearing prophets are very sensitive to the will of God being accomplished. When room is created for prophets in the mind of twenty-first century church leaders, they likely think of the preacher. However, the

preacher is not the only prophetic voice. Churches without Word-bearing, prophetic

leadership may be stale, lacking a sense of divine presence and movement in the midst of

the people, struggling for clarity regarding God's will.

Frost and Hirsch say the "prophetic function discerns the spiritual realities in a

given situation and communicates them in a timely and appropriate way to further the

mission of God's people" (169). While an apostle is one sent away from, a prophet is one

who speaks forth. Word-bearing prophets speak what God is speaking; they are heralds,

announcers, and spokesmen (Sos 88; M. Green 147). Elijah and John the Baptist are

biblical examples of how prophets think and use words in very concrete, even blunt, ways

to express themselves. Appearing presumptuous, even arrogant, these Word-bearers

appear certain of themselves, because their confidence is in God's plan. Frost and Hirsch

refer to prophets as questioners or agitators who disturb the status quo and challenge the

church to move forward in obedience at whatever the cost (173-74). Word-bearing,

speech-oriented prophets seldom remain silent in the leadership circle, but if they do,

imagine the mediocrity and complacency of the church they are commissioned to help

lead. The third Word-bearer in Paul's list is the evangelist.

Evangelists. Evangelists proclaim good news. The etymology of the word

evangelist, informs, "He [is] particularly a missionary who [brings] the gospel into new

regions" (Rienecker and Rogers 531). Further, Word-bearing evangelists, like apostles,

are pioneers, in the sense that, unashamedly, they prioritize the proclaiming of the truth

about Jesus above any church program (Gaebelein 58). Word bearers of good news and

preachers of the gospel Philip (Acts 21:8) and Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5) serve as examples in

the New Testament. Modern-day apologist Lee Strobel says that only a small percentage

of those in churches are grace gifted as evangelists, somewhere between 5 and 6 percent. Discovering who these Word bearers are and encouraging them to use their specific, core-speaking gift can dramatically change an entire church.

Evangelists are not satisfied remaining inside a church building. The gospel message is for sharing with those who have yet to hear, and those people are not to be found inside the church building. Evangelists are also recruiters who are zealous about the cause of their organization or church and take "the message to those outside the walls and sell it to them" (Frost and Hirsch 174). Then, evangelists enlist those who respond with a commission to do likewise. Sounding much like the apostle, an evangelist is a catalyst in the life of the church.

The primary difference between these Word-bearing apostles and evangelists is that an apostle focuses on tomorrow while an evangelist has a sense of urgency about today (Frost and Hirsch 170). Churches without Word-bearing, evangelistic leadership may stay inside the church walls too much, lacking the compulsion to cultivate relationships with the uncommitted to Christ and showing little regard for directing and resourcing the church in ways that effectively spread the gospel. The leadership circle is more complete as evangelists faithfully and consistently remind the church of the primary task given to all who follow Christ: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

Pastor-teachers. Grammatically, two words run together to form one, final Word-bearing gift at the end of Ephesians 4: 11. The same Greek article, t??s de, which appears three other times in the verse before apostle, prophet, and evangelist, appears only once before pastor-teacher. Warren W. Wiersbe writes, "The fact that the word 'some' is not repeated indicates that we have here one office with two ministries" (38).

Eugene S. Wehrl i concludes, "The absence of a repeated art icle suggests that the phrase 'some past ors and t eachers' refers to a sing le group of persons" (91). Whether they are viewed as two diff erent g ifts or one g ift with two ministr ies, as suggested by Wiersbe, the reality is that a vast majority of churches in North America today are led by indi viduals who can best be described as gifted, Word-bearing pastor-teachers.

To pastor is to shepherd, nurture, herd, tend, pr otect, or supervise (Bauer, A rndt, and Gingr ich 683-84; Sos 163). When describing the leadership style of Jesus, M ichael Youssef begins by describing a shepherd. Youssef summarizes the parable of the Good Shepher d (Joh n 10:1-18) by saying, "Good s hepherds know t heir sheep. Good leaders know their fo llowers" (31). Youssef conten ds that a past or as shep herd does n ot fit the image of a leader in corp orate Americ a:

> Most of us think of a leader as the person at the start of a l ine, the senior statesman, the great genera l, the head of a parade —somewhat aloof from the fol lowers.... Jesus Christ cal ls leaders to serv e.... Whi le he ca lls us servants, we prefer to g ive orders. (31)

Word-bearing pastors function as she pherd s of the peo ple of God. Sheep need guidance and instructions. Linked together w ith teachers, these two speech -oriented gi fts combine to ensure th ose wh o are committed to C hrist mature in the ir faith. Whereas, innovati ve and gifted apostles and evange lists enlar ge the sheepfold, g ifted pastor -teachers concentrate o n keeping the sheep enfolded.

To teach is to study, the n explain, the truth. Frost and Hirsch eluc idate, "The teaching function commu nicates the revea led wisdom of God s o that the people of God learn how to obey all that Christ has commanded them" (169). Word-bearing teachers comma nd resp onse to truth. As C hristians respond to trut h, they remain enfolded, which pleases teachers. Observing d isciples apply truth to everyday l ife is of paramount

importance to gifted teachers (Wehrli 79). Again, Russell distinguishes between visionaries and administrators. While apostles tend to be visionaries, teachers are more likely to be administrators. Gifted teachers know "disciples are made, not born" (Willimon 204). Less interested in the destination and more interested in the journey, teachers value training disciples who are taking steps forward in faithful obedience to Christ. Frost and Hirsch speak of the gifted teacher as "a systematizer [who] organizes the various parts into a working unit and articulates that structure to the other members" (174). Wehrli summarizes, " The goal of a teaching pastor is to cause an existing congregation to mature—to grow up in the Lord" (101). Churches without Word-bearing, pastor-teachers in the leadership circle may create an environment with too much movement and tension and not enough stability. Gifted pastor-teachers provide constancy and steadiness in the ever-changing world where God's people live.

Application. Paul advises that gifted apostles must experience freedom to contribute in the church boardroom or other Word-bearing leaders will struggle with creativity and innovation. Gifted prophets should speak forth in the elder and staff circle, so that God's will clearly manifests itself. Gifted evangelists need to participate in church leadership gatherings, or other members of the team will miss opportunities to spread the gospel. Finally, pastor-teachers ought to remind those entrusted to lead the church consistently of the value God places on each of his family members. With eyes and ears open to one another's contributions, and careful attention given to the priority of a ministry of the Word, church leaders preserve harmony. Not a list of leadership gifts but a beautiful description of gifted leaders maintaining unity in his church, Ephesians 4:11-13 resembles Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existing alongside one another.

As Word-bearing gifts function together, the fol lowing occurs. Around t he circle are creative, visionary pioneers who are always think ing about the future and are eager to go into uncharted territory to g ive new, exciting direction to a fa ith commu nity (apostles). Next to apo stles will be leaders who are certa in of God's m ovement in the midst of his people. They exude confidence and q uestion an ything that is not moving by emp hasizing the need to kn ow and follow God's wil l (prophets). Not wanting to be stuck in a boardro om, ne xt to ap ostles and prophets, are leaders eager to engage the uncommitted to Christ. Such reluctant boardroo m occu piers want to explore ways in which the church can build bridg es of re lationship to pre -Christians (e vange lists). Finally, in the same room with apostles, prophets, and evangelists, a re leaders who function more l ike settle rs than pioneers. T wo distinct leaders function as one. The f irst focuses o n the need s of the people who claim this part icular church to be their home. They show genuine love, concern, and protection as they n urture the b ody of Christ (pastors). The second com mits to careful, articulate, and systematic presentation and ap plication of God's W ord. With patience and longsuffer ing, they intend to see everyone mature as fully devoted fol lowers of Jesus C hrist (teachers). Working together in the same boardro om, this leadership c ircle helps the bo dy of C hrist atta in unity and beco me mat ure, all the whi le, resembl ing Christ. Within this c ircle God cult ivates the gift and disc ipline of spir itual discernment, as those who faci litate the work of the Holy Spir it in the local church lea rn over t ime how corporately to arr ive at God's be st decisions for his people.

Spiritual Discernment

Sensing you ng Solomon is nervous an d feeling inadequate to follow in the footsteps of his father, David, the Lord chooses to appear to Solomon in a dream. The

Lord says to S olomon, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (1 K ings 3:5b). Of the myriad of choices in f ront of him, Solomon resp onds, "Give your servant a d iscerning heart to govern your peo ple and to distinguish between r ight and wrong" (3 :9a). As the story u nfolds, the reader lea rns that "the Lord was pleased that Solomo n had asked for this" (3:10). Not only does the Lord grant Solomo n's wish, He g ives him many others things for which he does not ask. T im Chal lies concludes, "God values discernment and honors those wh o seek after it" (21). I concur with his assert ion and the exa mple from King So lomon 's life that teaches d iscernment is very important to Go d.

Definition

Defini tions for spir itual d iscernment are many and varied, yet one visua l image appears in the l iterature more than others. Many a uthors describe discernment as a sorting out between tw o options that is often expresse d with one or more of these wor ds: sifting, differentiat ion, discr imination, or separation (Chal lies 60; Lampen 43; L iebert 8; Morr is and Olsen 23; Trauffer 13; Wolf f 3). Chal lies of fers a most thorough definit ion of spiritua l discernment (53 -71). Particular ly poi gnant is this statement : "Discernment invol ves seek ing points of diffe rence and deciding wh ich path veers towards error and which le ads to truth" (60). God gi fts, or bestows, some people, such as King Solomon, with discernment that exceeds the n orm. Chall ies' definit ion undersco res that G od expects all who would follow h im to exercise and cult ivate the disc ipline of spi ritual discernment. Chall ies summarizes, "Discernment is the sk ill of understanding and applying God's W ord with the purp ose of separating truth from error and ri ght from wrong" (6 1). Therefore, without exercis ing the disc ipline of spir itual discernment, decisions made in the loca l church are r ife with error.

God is not a bystander in the discernment process. Discernment is a process whereby a person differentiates between what is of God and what is not, yet God is very active in the exercise of this discipline. Elizabeth Liebert states that discernment is when people recognize God is present in their daily living. His presence leads people to greater faithfulness. Discernment is not so much finding out what God wants from the decision events of life, as it is joining God on a decision journey where he illuminates options. Christians are invited to "recognize God's desires in each moment" (8). Moments then add up to a decision journey.

Thus, discernment is much less an event than a journey, and scholars consistently speak of discernment as a process that necessarily takes much time (Challies 67; Isenhower and Todd 50; Liebert 9; Wolff 7). Valerie K. Isenhower and Judith A. Todd refer to discernment as *countercultural* because it seems opposite to most everything society promotes (50). Those living in the twenty-first century prefer everything in an instant, and discernment does not come quickly. Two classic, historical applications of spiritual discernment, Ignatius of Loyola and the Friends' Society, or Quakers, resemble the "countercultural" nature of the discipline of spiritual discernment. Studying these noteworthy discerning groups will assist in discovering how the discipline can encourage healthy boardroom decision making in the local church.

Ignatian Discernment

Born in 1491, Ignacio Lopez, later Ignatius of Loyola, was the youngest of thirteen children in his family. His mother died when he was seven years of age. Ignatius descended from a family devoted to knightly ideals of the late Middle Ages (Kiechle 26). During a seven-month recovery from surgeries needed to repair his legs after Ignatius

was cut down at the knees by a cannon ball, Joseph A. Tetlow records, "In his bored om,

he turned from daydreaming romances to spiritual books.… God seized him in the midst

of this, one of the great convers ions recorded in huma n history.… [H]e learned to see

himself and his life world d ifferently" (20). Ignat ius foun ded a re ligious order in Rome

called the Society of Jesus, comm only known as t he Jesuits.

Two things set Ignat ius' work apart from others. First, Ignat ius did not set out

initially to wr ite a specif ic theolog ical treatise. Tetlow transl ated Ignat ius' most famo us

work known as the *Spiritual Exercises* . In his introduction, Tetlow wr ites, "He [I gnatius]

did not, conse quently, elaborate a theology of spi ritual de velopment.... Ignatius adduced

theology only when he wanted to clari fy or to emphasize some practical d irective" (32).

Interested in being a pract itioner, Ignat ius instructed spir itual d irectors w ith gu idance

methods. Mark A. McIntosh describes Ignatius' passion:

> The yearn ing for contemplati ve unity w ith God has taken the form of a
> deep desire to discern and serve the di vine w ill in all things. Few figures
> in the history of Christian ity could be said to have woven a continuous,
> living act of d iscernment so entirely into the fabric of Chr istian ex istence.
> (67)

Ignatius' writ ings w ere more re flections on person al life experiences than observations

about how to do spiritual discernment.

Second, Ignatius' lif e and wr itings prompted the formation of an or der that

continues to t his day, the Jesuits. Ignatius did not simply wr ite about spiritua l

discernment. Instead McIntos h adds, "The guidance of Ignat ius on discernment ha s been

taken up into the unf olding life of the commu nity he fou nded" (67). The best way to

understa nd Ignatian discernment is not to read abo ut it but to witness the discipl ine lived

out am ong a com munity of Jesuits.

Combining the practicality and communal nature of Ignatian discernment, Timothy M. Gallagher concludes, "For Ignatius, discernment of God's will is always accompanied by a competent spiritual guide" (59). Thus, Ignatius' famous exercises of spiritual discernment are both a reflection of his own personal experiences and a manual of practical instruction for spiritual guides to equip others in the journey of spiritual discernment. Although Ignatius' instructions are more notes for spiritual guides than they are theological steps to take, "there is a deep structural integrity to the Spiritual Exercises and to the journey of growth in self-knowledge and discernment of God's will that the Exercises are meant to facilitate" (McIntosh 67). Within the body of Ignatius' work that Tetlow translates, the eager discerner of God's will finds many practical steps to take on the discernment journey.

Spiritual exercises (the exercises). The exercises are a four-week retreat in a setting away from distraction. They are a structured religious experience that begins and ends with God. Tetlow writes, "Ignatius and his Companions introduced a spirituality that begins in a resounding affirmation: All comes from God, all moves under God's governance and care, all returns to God, in and through Christ Jesus" (34). In his own words, Ignatius summarizes succinctly what he hoped to accomplish through the exercises:

> I should beg God our Lord to be pleased to move my will and to put into my mind what I ought to do in regard to the matter proposed, so that it will be more to his praise and glory. I should beg to accomplish this by reasoning well and faithfully with my intellect, and by choosing in conformity with his most holy will and good pleasure. (qtd. in Wolfteich 165)

Guided by a spiritual director, participants agree to withdraw from all other activities, commit to silence, and invest four to five hours in prayer per day. During the retreat

participants also ignore media, telephone, and mail (i.e., contact with the outside world). The first week is devoted to God 's mercy and humankind's sin. The second week considers Jesus ' Incarnation and public life. The third week experiences Jesus' Passion and death, and the fourth week covers his resurrection and continued life in the world (Tetlow 36).

Ignatius challenges the propensity men and women have to "bend God to their disordered affections" (Wolfteich 165). American society tends to push for the decision event that short-circuits the work God is doing through his Spirit to direct and inform an important decision during a journey of discernment. Four hundred fifty years after the time of Ignatius, the exercises are even more popular today (Tetlow 15). Truly countercultural, certain facets of the exercises can inform the practice of spiritual discernment.

Centering. Ignatius did not practice spiritual discernment to find out what God wanted him to do. Coming to know God's will is a by-product of the real purpose of discernment. "Drawn always beyond himself in an ever deepening conversion with God" best describes Ignatius' purpose for entering into the exercises (McIntosh 67). Ignatius cultivated the discipline of discernment granted him by God. As a result of his passionate pursuit, Ignatius found out what God wanted him to be and do. Ignatian scholars call this first facet of the exercises, centering. McIntosh writes, "[A]ttunement to Christ becomes the chief means by which a capacity for true discernment grows" (68). Some scholars add that the Eucharist is at the very heart of the discernment process (Gallagher 51). To discern, along with God, his will, centering begins in the Eucharist and then is crucial to all that transpires, up to, and including, the point of making a decision within his will.

Indifference. While indifference has negative connotation in English, meaning apathetic or insensitive, understood in Ignatian terms, indifference is an important second facet of the exercises. For people to become holy indifferent, they must free themselves of any self-serving motivation of the heart. While some claim holy indifference is impossible and cannot be attained entirely, Ignatius instructs that becoming indifferent is disciplining oneself not to allow self-serving motivations to influence one's decisions. He claims self-serving motivations to be " 'disordered' because they bring disharmony and chaos into our lives" (Kiechle 31). Holy indifference is no small task in a cultural milieu wherein expressing and condoning one's feelings is both honored and prized; however, devoted discerners must cultivate this seemingly impossible practice if they value arriving at God's will, not their own.

Ignatian scholar, Pierre Wolff writes, "Reaching the point of indifference means no longer being enslaved or led by any strong interior impulse or attraction toward any of the alternatives presented by our mind in the decision process" (62). Morris and Olsen call indifference "shedding" (140). I refer to the practice as letting go of one's own agenda in favor of God's agenda. Liebert describes indifference as having a purity of intentions:

> Our first task in discernment, then, is to dispose ourselves to God's love, to become aware of God's presence, and then to frame our intentions to follow God insofar as possible. This purity of intention is itself a gift of God. Our part is to sincerely *desire* [original emphasis] it; God's part is to work it in us over time. (33)

On the journey of becoming more adept at discerning God's will in God's way, spiritual discerners find profound freedom when they no longer have to get their way or are no longer driven by the inner desire to be right.

Consolation/Desolation . Perhaps the most fam ous facet of Ignatian disce rnment is the battle between cons olation and desolation . When pondering a decision, Ignatius recommen ds "three times of elect ions" in the e xerc ises. In other words Christians make decisions in three ways. F irst, God makes the decision so clear sometimes that he leaves no reason t o question or do ubt what he is doing. I gnatius uses as an examp le the apostles Matthew and Paul when they were cal led by Christ (Tetlow, annotation 175). Second, Ignatius decl ares, " The second time is when someo ne draws sufficient c larity and ins ight from the experiences of cons olations and des olations and from the ex perience of discerning various spir its" (Tetlow, annotation 176). Third, c ircumstances of l ife create times when discerners have v ery mixed fee lings. They experience ne ither consolation nor desolation, or perhaps the y cycle between the two and can not arriv e at a conclus ion (Tetlow, annotations 177 -78). Ignatius continues by offering seve ral examples under the third e lection time (Tetlow 123-25; Campbell 52-53). This final facet of consolation and desolation has sparked muc h debate am ong discerners over the past fi ve centur ies.

The def inition offered ea rlier for discernment (i .e., sifting, different iation, discr imination, or separat ion), comes mo st clearly into focus during this facet of Ignat ian discernment. Know n as "Rules for Disce rnment of Spirits," in Ignati an terms, the sorting out proce ss is tied to understanding what the Jesuits mean by consolation and desolation. First, consolat ion is the interior movement of the Holy Spirit in one's so ul result ing in an increase in love of Creator and Lord. When co nfronted with sin, consolation produces tears and an increase of fa ith, hope, and joy. The discerner exper iences ca lmness, contentment, and a leading toward God in peace.

Second, the s orting out process involves desolat ion, which produces the o pposite interior movement. Desolation is mar ked by darkness of soul and tur moil of spi rit, a feeling of rest lessness, a lac k of peace as if be ing stifled and i ll-at-ease. In desolat ion discerners are confused, disco ntent, and e mpty with a corresponding decrease in tha t which brings f aith, hope, and j oy to life. Discerners are led away from God in distress (Campbell 3 2; T. Green 97-99; Morr is 45; Mor ris and Olsen 3 3).

Therefore, an internal experience of consolation ref lects a dec ision w ithin God's plan whi le the inter ior turmoil known as desolation indicates a need not to act or, at least, to wait on God to clarify another course of action. Ignatian discernment puts important matters for decis ion to the test b y "resting them near the heart" (Morris and O lsen 33). Coming full circle, Ignatius instructs that discernment is a process that occ urs over a period of time. When the decision event is of utmost importance, he urges patience and an invitation to insist upon divine part icipation, plac ing the decis ion near the heart in an attempt to co me close to the heart of God.

Thomas H. Green ca lls the Exerc ises by Ignatius of Loyola "the church 's canonical locus on discernment" (14). Somewhat out of respect, bu t mostly because of its Jesus-centering contribution, Ignatius' seminal wor k ser ves appropriate ly as the starting point for an historica l and literary re view of the d iscipline of spir itual disce rnment. The objective of this d iscipline for d iscerners is not to find out what Go d wants the m to d o. Instead, discerners engage in the disc ipline of spir itual discernment for the purpo se of drawing so c lose to God that the y experience "a sen se of having the dec ision g iven to [them], the rele ase of renewed spir itual energ ies through the process of the discernment, and the unifying influence of the decis ion [itse lf]" (Campbell 28-29). As spir itual

discernment results in this kind of overwhelming sense of God making the decision, discerners grow immensely on their Word-directed journey. Ignatius of Loyola and his companions known as the Jesuits speak directly to how individuals discern God's will. The Quaker community known as the Friends model how to practice corporate spiritual discernment.

Quaker or Friends Discernment

About a century following the founding of the Jesuits, the Religious Society of Friends was founded by Englishman George Fox. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Friends made significant contributions to the practice of spiritual discernment that continue to this day. "They looked to the presence of the Spirit to provide guidance, listened to the promptings of the Spirit in the gathered community, and followed the Spirit's lead" (Morris and Olsen 37). Regarding discernment, Quakers have some things in common with Jesuits. For example, both movements recognize classic spiritual discernment includes identifying what spirit is at work in a given situation—the Spirit of God or some other spirit. Also, Ignatian and Quaker traditions alike recognize that spiritual discerners must be willing to turn loose of their egos and personal agendas in favor of God's plan. Finally, each of these classic models of spiritual discernment clearly expects to experience a lengthy timetable when seeking God's will. The similarities between Ignatian and Quaker discernment include definition and motivation. The differences are in the areas of method and practice.

Silence. The community of Friends may best be known for the way in which they value silence. Whether convening for worship or business, Quakers begin and end their meetings in silence (Farnham et al. 3). A compilation of articles written by adherents to

the Society of Friends includes this statement: "Ours is a gentle process of quiet waiting, of using the tried and tested ways of discernment" (Lampen 43). Within the community where JSCC is located are two families who have taught and/or studied at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas: my field mentor mentioned in Chapter 1 and a pastoral friend and mentor who attends JSCC with his wife. My spiritual formation and professional development over the past decade are marked significantly by the lives of these very dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Their daily walk with the Lord was shaped by their association with notable Friends instructor and author Richard Foster. I witnessed their maturity as spiritual discerners specifically in the area of silence and attentive listening. I learned from firsthand experience the value and importance of silence and "quiet waiting" (Lampen 43) when deliberating about important decisions. John H. Yoder reflects on his experiences with Friends: "Quaker silence in meeting … is a time of expectant waiting until someone—and the point is that it can and will be anyone—is moved to utterance" (68). While I did not observe a Friends gathering as part of this project, Yoder's work and my personal relationship with those who once lived among the Friends, reveal that church leaders stand to gain much about spiritual discernment when following the Friends example of applying the discipline of silence to life.

Consensus. Consensus means general agreement on a matter and is a useful step in decision making. While consensus sounds rather simple, when a decision-making body experiences a situation or circumstance when not all are in agreement, the decision event becomes more challenging. If a vote is taken without consensus, the majority gains an advantage. Sometimes, the majority draws its conclusion because one person influences

the decision. Consensus discourages unilateral decision making, and the Quaker tradition takes an understanding of consensus to a much deeper, yet still very practical, place.

Quakers reach decisions without voting. Because Quakers do not contest a decision, I find their approach to be unique. No majority or minority, no compromise or concession, the Quakers apply consensus to spiritual discernment in a different way. Danny E. Morris writes, "They wait for the inner prompting of the Spirit and share their 'leading.' If not everyone confirms the leading, their reasons are considered, allowing for the possibility of reshaping the leading" (131). In other words, the decision journey is more important to Quakers than the decision event.

Another important parallel voice on the subject of consensus is that of the famed Mennonite, Yoder. In a book written in tribute of Yoder, he is described as "probably the major theologian/ethicist of this half century in America" (Hauerwas et al. back flap). Yoder was primarily a theological educator and interpreter of biblical pacifism, yet he also wrote a concise treatise on the life of the church. Sounding like founders of the Restoration movement mentioned earlier, Yoder writes, "Our model ... will be the practice of the early church as reflected in the writings of the New Testament" (ix). In describing "The Rule of Paul," Yoder authoritatively summarizes the consensus decision-making procedure in strikingly similar language to the Quaker tradition:

> All across the beginning Protestant movement, we can observe the same theologically motivated conviction about the process whereby God's will is made known.… [T]he conviction was understood to be prefigured in and mandated specifically by 1 Corinthians 14. Consensus arises uncoerced out of open conversation. There is no voting in which a majority overruns a minority and no decision of a leader by virtue of his office. The only structure this process needs is the moderating that keeps it orderly and the recording of the conclusions reached. (67)

Clearly countercultural, both Yoder and the Friends movement challenge discerners to consider the practice of consensus and no voting in the discipline of corporate spiritual discernment that is uncommon among church leadership teams today.

Sense of the meeting. The Quaker consensus process minimizes personal agendas and maximizes the need for development of such skills as attentive listening, calm reflection, and straightforward dialogue with peers (Campbell 48). John Lampen describes how Friends arrive at a sense of the meeting "[through] a sifting process of discarding what is not necessary, and by doing so, to reach a clarity, a lightness in which the Spirit can fly free" (43). The leader of the Quaker meeting is known as the clerk. The clerk facilitates an "open conversation" as mandated by Yoder (67). The clerk asks questions, elicits contributions from all necessary voices on either side of the decision, and ensures all happens in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Through the work of the clerk, the Spirit guides the consensus process until a sense of the meeting is reached. The goal is not unanimity but that "no one can be opposed as to feel obligated to resist" (Farnham et al. 62). Morris describes what happens next as Friends seek to arrive at the sense of the meeting:

> Consensus among Friends does not mean that such a process continues until absolutely everyone can and does agree. Sometimes it means that a leading is reshaped until a consensus *not to block it* [original emphasis] prevails. A Friend may say, "I am not totally satisfied so that I can enthusiastically support the proposition, but I feel good enough so that I am not compelled to oppose it in order to be true to my conscience." (131)

Those Friends involved in moving the conversation toward a decision leave the meeting unified. Quakers describe a sense of the meeting as "a settled place to which the Holy Spirit has led the group.… Unity and concord are other terms that Quakers sometimes use

interchangeably w ith sense of the meeting" (Fa rnham et al. 128). The c lerk then records

the minute, which is a summation of the conclusion drawn in the bu siness meeting.

Clearness. On very diff icult issues, Fri ends form a clearness committee to

antic ipate the need for specif ic illumination by the Spirit . For example, couples w ithin the

Society of Fr iends might as k for a clearness committee to help them decide whether or

not to marry. Potential new leaders among the Fr iends might consult with a c learness

committee abo ut accepting a cha llenging role within the Soci ety. The famous Quaker

convict ion first uttered by f ounder Fo x guides this process: "There is that of God in e very

person" (Liebert 7 6). Pursuing c learness includes recogniz ing that God shape s people to

depen d and rely up on one anot her. Working together as a commu nity committed to

discernment increases the likelihood t hat decisions made reflect the wor k of God's Spirit

in the midst of his people.

The committee's objective is not to offer adv ice. Parker J. Pa lmer instructs, "The

Clearness Committee is testimony to the fact that there are no external authorities on

life's deepest issues, not clergy or therap ists or scholars; there is only the authority that

lies within each of us wa iting to be heard." D iscerners g ain c learness or confidence on

these diff icult matters when they discover thei r own answers. The task of the committee

is to set the r ight conditions in p lace for the person to find wholeness within. "Members

of the com mittee do not attem pt to s olve the issue but rather seek through the use of

question s or com ments t o draw the focus pers on towards a de eper un derstan ding of what

God's will might be for that dec ision" (M cCarthy 3). L ike gardeners or fa rmers, c learness

committee mem bers culti vate the env ironment wherein spir itual discernment can occur.

Hav ing looked at ways in which the trad itions of Ignat ius and the Quakers contribute to

the practice of the discipline of spiritual discernment, a recurring similarity deserves attention before progressing to Wesleyan discernment.

Process and unity. Spiritual discernment is a process and unity in the Spirit of God will not be compromised to arrive more quickly at the decision event. God seems to be more interested in the journey upon which his followers find themselves than any specific decision over which they fret and labor.

Morris is convinced that spiritual discernment by consensus is not an easy or a quick way for a group to do its work (131). He cites the example of well-known Friend John Woolman who did not agree with the Friends' position regarding slavery in 1745 (131; Foster 183). He opposed the holding of slaves. In other words, Woolman "registered non-concurrence" (Morris and Olsen 37). Because of their commitment to the spiritual discernment process, which encourages decision making by consensus, the Friends maintained fellowship with Woolman and included him as a leader in the Society. This inclusion communicated a clear commission to Woolman:

> We cannot accept it for ourselves, but we want you to follow your leading. We will do your work, tend your crops, look after your family, and provide you with income to free you to travel the land and call Friends to free their slaves. They did just that for twenty years while John Woolman went up and down the Atlantic coast doing what God had called him to do. And Quakers freed their slaves more than a century before the Civil War. (Morris 131)

The Friends' discernment process produces remarkable results while unity is both preserved and amplified. Yoder was so committed to the value of spiritual discernment that he hints it may be called a "sacrament" of the church (73). Spiritual discernment by consensus is not necessarily a quicker way, but it is a better way (Morris 135). The

Wesleyan tradit ion offers a third appl ication of spir itual discernment to ad d to the classic works of Ignat ius and the Friends.

Wesleyan Discernment

When co ntemplating appl icable, contemp orary mo dels for decis ion making in the context of the church that correlate with a Word-directed phi losophy of ministry, my faculty mentor, Dr. Thomas F. Tumbl in, introduced me to the work of Morris and O lsen. After re ading a few pag es into thei r combined work, I understoo d and c oncurred with Tumbl in's recom mendation. As stated previously, I firmly be lieve the ir assertion that spiritua l discernment is a better way to make dec isions, and I affi rm their statement that other current practices have the ir limitations (Morris and O lsen 13). "Lim iting the church's ways of making decis ions creates discordant tones t hat cann ot come t ogether in a hym n, whereas spiritua l discernment creates an ode to jo y" (17). Contemplating the work of Morr is and Olsen has been the mos t formative step in helping me discover a clearer future path for how decisions in the church, especial ly difficult ones, can and should be made. While the work of Morr is and Olsen is not so m uch a model for spir itual discernment, as perhaps t he auth ors them selves do not presu me (18-19), I find their descriptions of the practices of spi ritual discernment to be b oth very helpful for church praxis and valuable for ma intaining a Word -directed course in the loca l church setting.

Limitations and dance. Any decision-makin g procedure whose de sign is of human orig in is not inherently wrong but is dubiously l imited. Rational , courteous dialogue among board members helps but d oes not assure the discernment of G od's will. Indiv idual spi ritual d iscernment, even applying Ignat ian practic es of center ing, indifference, and consolation/desolation, is purposeful yet lacks the assurance that God's

will has been ascerta ined. Parl iamentary procedures are benefic ial in mainta ining order in the boardro om. "But parliamentary procedures are based on a n adversaria l system that provides a structure for combat. It is a process in which people who are verba l, rationa l, and extroverted have a decided edge" (Mor ris and Olsen 15). In other words, God 's will is discove red in more than one way.

Church leaders with linear mind -sets such as mine prefer step-by-step instructions on h ow to arriv e at the r ight decis ion that is c learly God's wil l. Church leaders must be willing to step outsi de of their comfort zones to u nderstan d better that s piritual discernment is a journey. Isenh ower and Todd imagine d iscernment resembles a dance:

> Picture two dancers. They move back and forth and across the dance floor.
> If we could tr ack the ir movement, w e would see that the dancers
> eventual ly cover the ent ire floor, wh ile touching seve ral places more than
> once. The process of discernment takes us back and forth thro ugh man y
> activities, touching some places more than o nce. (18)

The only being who is not limited is God. Therefore , limited women and me n should n ot determine a church's co urse of action by u sing limited procedures in the boardro om; rather, limitless God pleads for access into the boardro om where he offers his unfath omable wisdom. Ch urch b oard mem bers and I need t o grow more comfortable with the dance of corp orately discern ing God's wil l and tapping into his w isdom.

Business and worship at the table . As was true of the Soc iety of Fr iends, the Wesleyan tradition instructs that business meetings should resemble worship gather ings. I was fi rst introduced t o this idea by some elderly people in a smal l Methodist church in western Il linois, dur ing my col lege years. Afte r worship one Sun day, I was surprised when the co mmunion ta ble became the table fo r noon potluck. Later I learned the same table was used for church board meetings. Charles M. O lsen wr ites, "Just as the altar, the

place of offe ring, is sacred and set apart, so the board roo m is holy ground" (14). For

spiritua l discernment to be p ossible in the boardroom, the S pirit of God must preside. To

represent his presence, some leadership teams l ight a Chr ist candle to pl ace in the center

of the room w here board discussion occurs (Isenh ower and Todd 35). Isenhower and

Todd oversee Water in the Dese rt Ministries, once known as Worshipful-Work®. In the

Worshipful-Work® approach, fou nded by Olsen, business meetings are conducted as

worship. Th is organ ization existed to help make the business of the ch urch share more

similarities than dif ferences w ith the worship of the church. Many ch urch board members

want to say with Isenhower an d Todd, "A ch urch can anticipate that meetings of the

various boards a nd committees wi ll become spiritua lly renew ing experiences r ather than

mentally exhausting" (3 3). Churche s that acco mplish spir itual renewa l in their

boardro oms appear to be the exce ption rather than the rule.

At JSCC the worship advisory team consistently reminds elders and staff

members of two primary sym bols to up hold: the Word an d the table. As a Word -directed

congregat ion, the same sy mbols upheld in the space where God is corporately worshiped

in the church building should be upheld in the space where church b usiness is conducte d:

> The meet ing becomes a worshipful experience of the presence of the Holy
> Spirit when partic ipants consciously offer their agenda to God. The pla ce
> of the meeting becomes h oly ground, just as t he sanctuary does during
> worship. The tab le of the board is not far from the table of the Lord, and
> the bread of meetings becomes life -giving. (Morr is and Olsen 1 7)

With these foun dational, Wesleyan pract ices to build upon, Morris and Olsen offer a

discernment process they claim to be "appropriate for our day" (78).

Discernment Proce ss

In 1997 Morris and Olsen describe ten pract ices of spi ritual d iscernment: fr aming, grounding, shedding, rooting, listening, exploring , improving, we ighing, closing, and resting. In 2009 Isenhower and Todd build upo n the work of Morr is and Olsen with n ine practices, three of those in word pairs, giving a total of tw elve pract ices: naming and framing, center ing, remembering and l istening , sorting, path building , offe ring, wa iting and resting, implementing, and God -centered eva luation. Be ginning w ith the former work of Morris and Olsen, I offe r descr iptions for e ach of the ten practices (77-110). I allow the latter wor k of Isenhower and Todd to thicken these descriptions (4 7-110). Fo llowing their descr iptions at the end of this section, I share the summative work of the RRT prepared for the research phase of this dissertation. Table 2.1 includes a side by side by side listing of these three versions for comparison p urpo ses.

Table 2.1. Discernment Proces s Comparison

Morris and Olsen	Isenhower and Todd	Research Tool
Framing	namin g and frami ng	framing a nd centeri ng
Grounding		
Shedding	Centering	
Root ing	Rememberi ng	studyin g and exploring
Listenin g	Listenin g	rememb ering and listening
Exploring	sorting, path building	
Improving		
Weighing	Offering	waiting an d restin g
Closing	waiting an d restin g	
Resting	Implementin g	Deciding and imple mentin g
	God-centered ev aluation	

Framing. Unlike most of the practices, framing must occur in a specific place in the order (i.e., first). Identifying the focus for discernment begins the process. One does not begin a long trip without consulting a map. Neither should discerners begin the journey without framing intentionally the problem or focus for discernment. If discerners want to end in the right place, they must also begin in the right place. During framing, the discerning group agrees the will of God is the destination rather than the will of man. Inside the frame is a reasonable discernment issue, about which the group may ask, "God, may we consider this as a matter for discernment?" (Morris and Olsen 108). The discerning group commits here to a discernment journey, not simply a decision to make.

Isenhower and Todd broaden the description by adding naming to framing. In addition to encouraging discerning groups to begin with a sincere desire to include God in the decision-making process, those discerning are encouraged to commit their time and energies to the matter for discernment. Next, the group frames the right questions. Isenhower and Todd challenge discerners to be as concerned about asking questions as receiving answers (50). During this phase of the journey, discerners emphasize the importance of calling out or naming the area of discernment. By clearly giving a name to the discernment issue, all involved can agree or disagree that the matter selected is deserving of consideration. Morris and Olsen refer to naming as grounding, the designation for the second practice of spiritual discernment.

Grounding. Morris and Olsen invite the discerning group to ask the question, "What is the guiding principle?" (86). Giving a name to the guiding principle brings the discernment issue clearly into focus. For example, when a group of discerners is commissioned to seek a new pastor, a guiding principle may be that candidates must be

educated at an accredited B ible col lege and o rdained into ministry. Grounding both defines the aim of the disce rnment effort and establishes clea r boun daries for the discerning group (87). After grounding in a guiding principle, Morr is and Olsen encourage a step that moves self away from the decis ion-making center.

Shedding. Morris and Olsen ca ll this step shed ding, whi le Isenhower and Todd refer to it as c entering . Morr is and O lsen describe this pract ice as laying aside e go, preconceived notions, false assumptions, predetermined co nclusions an d, generally, anything perso nal that wi ll keep a d iscerner from focusing on God 's will as that of highest importance (8 1, 88). Isenhower and Todd add that t his practice is about releas ing one's agenda and t he values and assum ptions o ne holds personally so God 's agenda might come to the forefront (56) . In his chapter ent itled "Team Learn ing," Peter Senge uses the p hrase, "s uspension of ass umptions" (243) . Senge offe rs that before enter ing the decision-mak ing process, teams choo se to examine an d explore their perso nal conv ictions and biases which may influence thei r objective decis ion-making capacity (243-44). An unbiased m ove forward on the discernment j ourne y requires what Ignat ian discernment called holy indiffe rence.

Acknowledg ing the di fficulty of th is facet of sp iritual discernment, Morr is and Olsen invite disce rning groups to ask, "How ma ny are indiffe rent to al l but God's wil l?" (90). They hasten to add t hat progress does not mean taking a yes or no vote at this ear ly point in the discernment process; rather, honest co nversation and attentive listening often result from ask ing such a question (92) . Isenhower and Todd challenge discerners to make holy indif ference the goa l of th is pract ice and to "be o pen to God's leading rather than [to] remain bou nd b y expect ations about how God 'should' act" (61). While a close,

daily walk with God places those who claim to be Christ followers in a better position to know what he wants, such proximity to God does not permit Christ followers to presume what they are thinking and feeling will always line up with his agenda. This practice of shedding, or centering, does not necessarily lead to the next practice.

Rooting. The presentation of these discernment practices is in linear fashion, yet I remind both reader and researcher that the discernment process is more like a dance than a series of steps. Hence, rooting may or may not be the next practice of discernment, as Morris and Olsen suggest (93). In fact, rooting may be practiced here and then occur again later on the discernment journey. The process is more circular or spiral, than linear or sequential, in actual practice. Either way rooting is connecting the situation under consideration by the discerning group with biblical stories and images, church or religious traditions (78). It asks the question, "What biblical images or texts come to mind?" (93). Discerners ponder and study passages of Scripture relating to the issue for discernment and discuss implications from their church context.

Isenhower and Todd call this discernment practice remembering. They enhance the description by adding that remembering includes listening to the church's history, exploring the past, and talking with the larger community. Often the discerning group asks questions of, and hears testimony from, various generations of people within the church family. Isenhower and Todd instruct, "Stories transmit to each successive generation ... the act of telling the narratives over and over becomes a way to 're-member' an event, to put all the pieces back together so that we bring the event into our present" (69). Stories help discerners root the situation or issue both biblically and historically in the life of the church. Isenhower and Todd encourage leadership teams to

hear their congregation tell its stories so bridges might be built to the next practice of spiritual discernment recorded in both books.

Listening. Morris and Olsen say listening begins as discerners discipline themselves to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and it continues as they commit to hearing the variety of words, gifts, and actions of all those counted in the circle of decision makers. Listening concludes with attentiveness to the voices of any others influenced by the discernment process. This practice asks the question, "Whose voices do we need to hear?" (94). The purposeful battle between consolation and desolation, as described in Ignatian discernment, enters the discernment process during the practice of listening. As participants are sitting in silence, praying, and open to the prompting of the Spirit, they should be aware of distress, trouble, confusion, and a lack of peace (95). Such signs indicate a need to wait patiently for the Lord's will to manifest itself.

Isenhower and Todd combine listening with the previous practice of remembering, or rooting. They build upon the work of Morris and Olsen by advising that this practice will likely open up some emotional wounds from the past, as well as inviting joyful memories of previous ministry successes, as congregational members share their stories and testimonies (80). Fears will undoubtedly surface during the practice of listening because the tension between what was, what is, and what might be is evident to a larger number of people (81). Listening invites another discernment practice.

Exploring. While Morris and Olsen use the word exploring, Isenhower and Todd choose to use sorting. Morris and Olsen describe exploring as the point in time when discerners' imaginations are engaged and choices surface. Brainstorming happens during exploration to answer the following question: "What are the possible paths for us to take

within the gu iding princ iple?" (96). Isenhower and Todd widen this pract ice when they

share, "In an atm osphere of prayer the discernment team s orts thro ugh recurring themes,

ideas, and needs and t hen identifies the strengths and g ifts of the church" (83). The body

of Christ is both beautiful and vast.   Members of the bod y of Christ accom plish so much

when they recognize their God-given g ifts and natural ab ilities, as we ll as skill sets they

have earned through educational and vocational tra   ining. Isenhower and Todd enco urage

pondering as an appropriate posture for discernment team me   mbers wanting to discover

God's will, and they add the practice of "path building" to descr ibe in greate r detai l what

Morris and O lsen mean by ex ploring (96).

  Improving. Exploring depends s omewhat up on improving, as discerners examine

the var ious option s that surfaced d uring the discernment journe y. The pract ice of

improving ur ges disce rners to discover the v ery best way possible to address the issue or

situation, w ithin the yearning of God. In the pract ice of improv ing, Morr is and O lsen

suggest that spiritua l discernment sets itself apart f rom other forms of decision making

that function according to majority rule, say ing, "In the process of maj ority rule, the goa l

is to f ind the lowest commo n denominator, the prop osition on which mo st of the peo ple

can agree. In discernment, the goal   is to make each option the best it can be" (9 7). Morr is

and Olsen ask the question, "H ow can each optio n be improved?" (97). Isenhower and

Todd do not record a practice that compares to improving.

  Weighing. Morr is and Olsen describe the spir itua l discernment practice of sort ing

and testing the options in response to Go d's leading by ask ing the question, "Upon which

option or pat h will the Spir it rest?" (98). I see the pract ice Morr is and O lsen cal l

weighing as too subtle a dist inction from the previous two practices of explor ing and

improving to separate it. The authors' enc ouragement for discernment grou ps not to rus h through t his practic e is appreciated. Be fore ca lling for each member's vote or voice, weighing a ffords a good opp ortunity to enco urage a ll invol ved to be si lent and to pray in order to check for consolati on or desolation once again.

Isenhower and Todd refer to wei ghing as of fering. Dur ing the offer ing part of the discernment jo urney, discerners exhort o ne anot her to recognize and partic ipate fu lly in the work the Holy Spir it has been doing. A follow-up practice to the ear lier pract ice of shed ding, or center ing, offering encourages each disce rner to let go of control and invite the Spirit to indicate clearly the path God is reve aling, whi ch makes clos ing possible (97).

Closing. Morris and Olsen finally come to the decision event at the end of the decision journey. Only now d o discerners land specif ically on a course of action deemed to be God 's decision for them. In the Quaker tr adition, the discerning group tests for conse nsus in one of four wa ys:

      a) I like the minute as stated. (Consensus)
      b) I am concerned b ut wi ll supp ort the minute. (Conse nsus)
      c) I am uneasy for these reaso ns but wi ll stand aside. (Consens us)
      d) I cannot su pport the minute. (Non -consen sus) (102 -04)

When t he discerning group cho oses o ne of the first three responses, it moves on in the discernment proces s to the final pract ice. An impasse occurs whe n the group ch ooses the fourth response. The discerning group concludes without rushing to judgment. Table 2.2 provides additional informati on regard ing what to do in case of a consensus impas se.

Table 2.2. Consensus Impasse Procedure

Steps to Take in Case of a Consensus   Impasse
1. Reconsider the guiding princi ple, test a gain for in differenc e, and repeat t he rest of the discernm ent proces s—discussion ma y shed new light on t he proposal, so go b ack to the guiding principle and reaffirm or resh ape it, t hen work through the process a gain.
2. Take time for further pra yer and refle ction—prayer and reflection ma y shed more lig ht on the proposal than further dis cussion will.
3. Cast lots—when a situation offers several good c hoices an d the group does not want to vote down a good option, consider casting lots but first agree to support the outcome.
4. Appoint one per son to decide for the group —before action is taken, select someone everyone trusts, pra y for this person and agree to follow the option.
5. Vote b y majorit y rule (simple majorit y, 2/3, 3/4, or 4/5)—the body may properl y decide that voting is both fair a nd expeditious once ever yone has been included thr ough th e discernment process.
6. Count only the *yes* votes—this option is hel pful when a specific number of people are needed for starting a project or ministr y
7. Drop it—if the bod y or group discer ns no lea ding i n the matter, c elebrate the discern ment, drop it, and move on . Accept th at the decision journe y was more important tha n the decision eve nt.

Source: Morr is and Olsen 1 04-05.

Isenhower and Todd do not record a practice in thei r disce rnment proces s that actual ly makes a dec ision. However , they do enco urage the discerning group in three additional pract ices: waiting and resting before implementing the decis ion (102). Church leaders tend to be quick to move to implementing the chosen path   s. In other words, in order not to ap pear as indecis ive, they rush to the decision event. Isenhower and Todd recommen d living with the results of the disce rnment proces s for awhi le. Confidence grows when discerners al low God to continue to transform t he path t hat has bee n offered to them (102). As we ll, Morris and Olsen ref er to this disce rnment practice as rest ing.

Resting. Morris and Olsen conclude that this practice tests the dec   ision by allowing it to rest near the heart. Again, fee lings of consolation or desolation may occur that affirm the work God has done within each disce rner. Morr is and O lsen pose the final

question to the discerning group during the resting phase of the journey: "Is our decision God's will: nothing more, nothing less, nothing else?" (106). The temptation is to move ahead quickly to the next item on the agenda, but resting disciplines discerners to wait upon God and his direction.

Isenhower and Todd recommend the discerning group meet again after a period of resting with the decision for one month or longer in hopes of hearing God's continuing voice on the matter. They offer two steps beyond Morris and Olsen: implementing and God-centered evaluation. During these practices Isenhower and Todd urge patience and follow-through. Patience allows those not involved in the discernment process to become better informed about the decision made. Follow-through recognizes the discerning group's acceptance that discernment is never quite done (108). The discerning group invites participation of many gifted others in the implementation phase. The group and those recruited to implement the plan provide oversight of ongoing evaluative measures to accomplish the decision's intent.

Originally, I viewed the works of Morris and Olsen as prescribing a discernment model for decision making. I experienced more feelings of desolation than consolation at the thought of using such a model for research with Word-directed Christian churches. I was unable to convey the inner struggle I was experiencing during the review of literature, when Tumblin posed the following question in a personal conversation: "Is discernment a process leading to decision making or a type of decision making?" I encountered the same question in a journal article he coauthored (Berlinger and Tumblin 86), which led me to other resources claiming emphatically that discernment is not a model for or type of decision making (Wolff 18; Oswald and Friedrich 6). For example,

Oswald and Friedr ich wr ite, "Discernment is not to be equate d with consens us decision

making,... [and] it is not to be equated with making dec isions.... [T]he d iscernment

process is one of unc overing the dec ision—not of making it" (6). Discernment is v ery

much a pr ocess leading to dec ision mak ing, where in those partic ipating as discerners

seek to move everything out of the way of the decis ion that is a lready with in the heart of

God.

There fore, the works of Morr is and Olsen and Isenhower an d Todd serve the

purp ose of identifying and gi ving def inition and applicat ion to severa l speci fic pract ices

of the discip line of spir itual discernment. In other words, this project is not about

discover ing if Word-directed Christ ian churches follow a d iscernment mo del of decis ion

making. The project explores the effect ive/ineffect ive use of severa l pract ices of the

discip line of spir itual discernment to help church boards make healthy decisions. Hence,

what fol lows is a br ief summary of the practices described by Morris and Olsen and

Isenhower and Todd fro m the perspective of the Jefferson Street Christ ian Church RRT.

These word pairs form the centerpiece of the r esearcher -desi gned instrument developed

for this project with the ass istance of the RRT (see Appendix E).

Framing and centering. The discernment process begins with practi ces that

clearly identi fy the matter for discernment by asking the r ight questio ns. In the framing of

the discernment issue, partic ipants challeng e one another to let go of personal agendas,

become h oly indiffe rent to any choice except what God wa nts, and place the pursuit of

God's leading at the center of the process.

Studying and exploring. The disce rning group engages God's W ord in exegesis

for the purpo se of determining what O ld and New Testament texts co me to bear on t he

matter for discernment. This practice is emphasized to connect m ore closely w ith Word-directed congregat ions. As a natural corollary to the pract ice of studying, part icipants invite God to help free their imaginations toward identify ing the possibil ities and pathway s he has in his heart and mind.

Remembering and listening. A specific order ing of these pract ices is not necessary. The disce rnment proces s includes the practice of reflecting on the stories that reveal how current situat ions con nect with the bibl ical narrat ive. Such ref lection requires meditating on the promptings of the Spirit and l istening to the impo rtant voices of wisdom b oth inside and ou tside the com munity of faith. The discern ing commu nity experiences both heartache and jo y, as God leads his people.

Waiting and resting. The discernment team resists the temptation to act immediately when the decis ion event seems to be so clearly at hand. Rather, they agree to live with the results of a ll previous practices on the discernment jo urney. Participants lay the work God has been doing near their hearts in reflection and engage God and o ne another very closely, reminding themsel ves that any outc omes must align w ith his w ill and purpo ses.

Deciding and implementing. While the dec ision journe y is va lued more highly than the decision event, the matter for discernment must m ove to the p oint where al l involved par ticipate in the unve iling of God's decision. Discerners hear all voices in the decision-mak ing circle. The team draws its conclusion but not witho ut a plan for enacting the decision. The discern ing group closes the discussion o nly after a satisfa ctory plan develops for implementation and evaluation (see Table 2.1, p. 58).

Boardroom

This review of literature began with a biblical and theological foundation for church leaders to view themselves as Word bearers. A historical review of the discipline of spiritual discernment, specifically as it relates to individual and corporate decision making in the church, followed. Consideration of what specifically happens in the church boardroom remains.

Group Dynamics

While group decision making is the primary subject of this dissertation, group dynamics and polity influence how decisions are made. Luke Timothy Johnson admits to two biases to which I also admit and concur: "There ought to be some connection between what a group claims to be and the way it does things.... When the church makes decisions, the Bible ought somehow to be involved" (10). Previously, I covered the latter bias about how decision making needs to include the Word of God. I attend next to the former bias about how a group's behavior should match its beliefs. For example, if a church believes in being Word directed, then the Word should be the primary determiner of how she does things. Unfortunately, my experiences indicate that the Word of God does not always steer group dynamics, group polity, and group decision making in the local church. Corrective measures are needed, beginning with group dynamics.

A Trinitarian shape for ministry requires that church leaders think differently about how their group or team operates. For example, in most church board meetings I have attended, official prayers begin and end the meeting. The Bible is a devotional tool used at the beginning of the meeting. Aside from these two ritualistic pieces of spirituality, church board meetings resemble meetings of any other business or civic

organization. Olsen challenges this traditional church board view of self by saying that the missing element in most church boards is spirituality.

> The collective board is not to see itself as a coordinating cabinet or an advisory group but as the people of God in community.... Board members have a sense of working toward God's agenda and God's glory instead of their own. (10-11)

Again, the model in front of the church is God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, existing together in community. Church leaders need to view their team in similar expression.

A new view of self for church boards will influence the way group members interact with one another. "Elders are not simply members of a board of directors, as they are in many churches today, but are men active in ministering among the people of the congregation" (Swartley 20). If board meetings are to resemble worship gatherings as previously suggested, then interaction and decision making should resemble a close family where group members view one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. C. Olsen describes what might happen when church leaders consider their work as board members afresh as worship: "[T]hen prayer no longer can be relegated to a book-end position; it will saturate the agenda and thread its way throughout the meeting" (20). As well the Bible is not simply for delivering a devotion to start a meeting; rather, the Word of God will serve as the steering mechanism for discussion and group interaction. Also, with board meetings resembling worship gatherings, relationships among board members will improve.

I learned that when church leaders highly prioritize their relationships outside boardrooms, they make better decisions inside boardrooms, even when they disagree. Aubrey Malphurs offers this motto for healthy church boards: "We can disagree and still be friends" (58). Writing specifically about elder's meetings, Strauch concludes, "People

are more important than meetings.... An e ldership team that is sole ly work-oriented is imbalanced" (*Meetings* 11). Members of the Word-bearing leadership c ircle make better decisions when they know one an other. Mutual trust and respect develop as church leaders cu ltivate re lationships with one anot her, which does n ot mean ch urch leaders must always think and act al ike.

On the contrary, God created pe ople with di fferences for very good reason. Differences cre ate a hea lthy, grow ing dynamic in the local church when the y are managed wel l. In the context of a ci rcle dance, or the model of God's perfect tr iune nature, divers ity begets cre ativity. Fol lowing the D iSC, D—dominant; i—influencing; S—steady; C—conscientious, or Perso nal Prof ile System, Ma lphurs identif ies four basic team member styles:

(1) The chal lenger, like the *D* temperament of the DiSC profi le, is character ized by openness, boldness, and candor, is not afraid to disagree, ask questions, and take risks.

(2) The motivator, *i*, character ized by f lexibility and optimism, exh orts team members t o see the church 's vision.

(3) The col laborator, *S*, is caring and has goo d listening sk ills. He or she provides an informal and re laxed atmosp here for optimal teamwork.

(4) The contributor, *C*, character ized by attention to detail and hi gh standards, provides the team with good technical informat ion and data, presses t oward quality control matters, and emp hasizes performance (56 -57). When team members view thei r differences as strengths, remarkab le productiv ity in a hea lthy envi ronment follows.

On the contrary whe n team me mbers allow the ir differences to gover n behav ior, chaos an d/or discord often reigns. For example, Ma lphurs offers a negat ive side to each

of the four team mem ber styles. Chall engers can be insensiti ve, stubborn, impatient, and inflexib le; they wi ll at t imes strugg le with contributors who meas ure every step and action. Moti vators can be impulsi ve, manipulat ive, and ob noxio us; these be haviors provoke col laborators who strive to prov ide a re laxed env ironment. Collaborators can conform t oo easily, a void confl ict, and otherwise, simply be too passiv e; thus, they slow down t he moveme nt of m otivators or chal lengers. F inally, contributors can be perfectionist ic and too focused on the program instead of the peo ple; these behaviors discourage the team envi ronment, p otentia lly hurting any of the other team member styles (5 6-57). In a functiona l setting, team members acknowledge and welcome differences. The di fferences do not beco me the focu s of attention; instead, by capital izing on the differences in the room, the team functions at a higher level.

Challenges occur when the team has dysf unctional group mem bers. Katha Kissman suggests trouble comes most often in the boardro om either when indiv idual board me mbers d o not understan d their place on the team or as a by -product of p oor team development (9). Whi le searching for answers to the self ish behavior of the baseball pitcher described in the introduction, the l iterature review unvei led two rea lities. First, no church is immune to d ysfunction within the congregat ion. Word -bearing leadership teams should accept and prepare for dysfu nction b ut not allow it to dictate m ission and vis ion. Second, attempting to force change on another person is not advisable. Those in the leadership circle should respect one another enough to trust that transformation is the work of God.

Kissman offers three steps for handling dysfunctional group members witho ut forcing change. F irst, K issman prop oses, "Label the behavior r ather than the indiv idual"

(13). In h is chapter tit les, Eli Mina labe led problematic board members, suc h as the

disengaged, the sing le-issue advocate, the rebel , the accuser, the bul ly, the know -it-all,

the contrarian. K issman challenges the re ader to focus on the misbehavior, not the

misbehaver. For example, instead of v iewing a person as a mic romanager, the board

should agree upon what leve l of management elders w ill have in the l eadership c ircle

where staff and/or volunteers are commissioned to manage. A board faci   litator can lead a

discussion abo ut how micromanagement co nfuse s and ex hausts, how it duplicates ef fort

unnecessarily, and how it de-motivates and demoralizes (27). If necessary, the Word -

bearing c ircle of leaders can draft a management policy and set appropriate bou   ndaries

for team members.

Second, Kissman recommends, "Deal with each case directly and in a timely

manner" (13). Time delays between unhealthy interchanges in the boardroo   m can have

devastating e ffects. Because boards often meet o nly one or two times per mo nth, too

much time elapses between meetings for trouble to be tabled.   The leadership c ovenant for

those in the Wor d-bearing c ircle needs to include a t imetable for resol ving confl ict

between team me mbers.

Third, K issman offers that which makes many leaders most u   ncomfortable:

"Going with the resistance requires staying close to troubleso me board mem bers instead

of isolat ing them" (13). When tension is in the room, board me   mbers ma y be tem pted to

avoid it, but this act ion only increases res istance. K issman wisely instructs that board

members increase quality and quantity time together with troublesome board members.

As Word-bearing apostles pioneer new projects, and pro   phets question t he status

quo, t hose ab dominal ly gifted as pastor -teachers may grow uncomfortable. While pastor-

teachers focus time, energy, and resources on training disciples, evangelists grow restless with the structure that keeps people within the four walls of the church. When these diverse, Word-bearing elders and staff members come together in the church boardroom, their differences create tension. Skilled board chairmen recognize and value interaction between diverse group members. With board facilitators committed to calling forth the various abdominal gifts in the room, enriching and informative discussions prevail. Maureen K. Robinson reminds readers, "It falls to the chair of the board to facilitate and support good decision making" (53). The discussion of how board members interact with one another, group dynamics, leads to a discussion of how boards function, group polity.

Group Polity

This project is about group decision making and not group dynamics or polity. However, both group dynamics and polity influence group decision making. Thus, discovering what practices of the discipline of spiritual discernment leads to healthy decision making in a church boardroom requires a review of group dynamics and polity. Having reviewed how group dynamics affect decision making, I next consider how group polity links with decision making in the church boardroom. Dan Hotchkiss writes, "Too often in congregational life, boards are left to tend themselves. The structures and patterns of governance are simply allowed to be what they always have been. Organizations and even their meeting agendas remain static and unexamined" (viii). In other words, boards do not usually employ someone to help them consider potentially more effective ways of doing business; hence, they continue to function as they always have without questioning their *modus operandi*.

The way a church board views itself is as important in this look at group polity as it was when reviewing group dynamics. Elders are not merely members of a board of directors. They are caregivers and shepherds who lead, feed, and intercede as if caring for a family or tending sheep (Getz 264; R. Thompson 38). Again, C. Olsen's book recommends steps toward moving a church board from directing the affairs of the church to developing a *community of spiritual leaders*. The Bible does not offer a specific plan or pattern for how church board meetings are to be conducted. Her silence on the subject does not make the matter unimportant. However, biblical silence on group polity is not a license exclusively to use parliamentary procedure in church boardrooms. Space in this project will only allow challenging the most common method of directing church board meetings and offering an alternative form of church governance that would reshape the agendas of church boards.

Parliamentary procedure. For 2½ decades, I have attended church board and committee meetings in four different congregations in central Illinois, who use some form of parliamentary procedure for conducting the business of the church. To my chagrin, I learned the origin of *Robert's Rules of Order* during this recent literature review. Simply put, I discovered the *Rules* were written as a means for managing conflict by an officer in the Army with the last name of *Robert*. Thus, they serve the purpose of keeping people from doing harm to one another, yet they also create a formal environment for meetings and decision making which often discourages interaction and a healthy dialogical circle of abdominally gifted leaders in the church. Whereas parliamentary procedure is intended to maintain an environment for dialogue in a church

leadership circle, this method of group polity often serves a very different purpose. Like

C. Olsen, I have witnessed people using *Robert's Rules of Order* to meet their own needs:

> [The *Rules* allow boards] to have fights, display their knowledge, massage
> their egos, vent their anger, test their opinions, punish their opponents,
> cover their fears, and hide from anything personal. The parliamentary
> method assumes that no community base exists from which to interact and
> decide. There are appropriate places for its use—even in church boards.
> But it is not the foundation on which discernment is built. (94)

This method encourages rule by the majority and board dysfunction because certain team

member styles, for example challengers and motivators (Malphurs 56-57) tend to use the

Rules to finish the business meeting by getting to the bottom of the agenda.

Such an approach to group polity thwarts use of the discipline of spiritual

discernment. In ten years at JSCC, I have noticed increasing dissatisfaction and

discomfort with parliamentary procedure as the primary method of board polity. As JSCC

becomes more Word directed, emphasis on prayerful and scriptural discernment

increases. These practices slow down verbal and aggressive Word bearers in the circle,

creating an environment where the input and wisdom of less verbal and more

contemplative, introspective team members flourish. C. Olsen adds this kind of

"discernment lays aside ego-driven 'convictions' and relinquishes corporate self-will. It

seeks to see things whole, through the eyes of God" (94). When the objective is to pursue

consistently God's agenda, rather than someone's personal agenda, a transformation of

group polity is in order.

This ministry *pre*-intervention study stops short of offering answers and solutions.

The project does not dictate a better way of running board meetings, yet the scope of this

project encourages an exploration of better ways and alternatives. Carver's Policy

Governance® is not group polity metho dology, but even a quick re view can suggest steps that wi ll help reshape existing pract ice in the loca l church.

Carver's Policy Governance ®**.** John Carver beg ins with the premise that board problems are not inherently a problem of people but of proce ss. A board wh o understan ds better why it exists functions more effect ively. Car ver writes, "Pol icy deve lopment is not an occasional board chore, but its chief preoccupation" (5 4). Car ver and his wi fe, Miriam Mayhew Carver, recommen d, "The secret of modern governance l ies in policy-making ... of a finely cr afted sort" (*CarverGu ide* 1). This system offers the loca l church the healthy alternat ive of c larifying and limiting the work of the board to focus its attention o n the development of polici es that create boundaries to sup port a church 's vision. With these clarifications and self -impose d limitations in place , boards have fewer items for discussion, as wel l as fewer and more re levant dec isions to make. The Car vers offe r these points of emp hasis for the board wh o governs by p olicy:

(1) outward vision rather than interna l preoccupation,
(2) encouragement of diversity in viewpoints,
(3) strateg ic leadership more than administrati ve deta il,
(4) clear dist inction of board and chief executive roles,
(5) collective rather than indi vidual dec isions,
(6) future rather than past or present, an d
(7) proactiv ity rather than react ivity. (*Reinven ting Your Boa rd* 94)

These seven foca l points do not stan d as an alternati ve form of g roup polity to parliamentary procedure. However, as they become the guide -post s for church b oard member participat ion and co ntribution, these points wil l narrow the focus and shape of meeting ag endas in ways that increase dia logue and interact ion amo ng Word -bearers.

Donald L. Green, a member of the panel of experts mentione d in Chapter 1, recently completed a dissertat ion on the to pic of Pol icy Governance®. H is assessment led

to the conclusion that Carver's principles lack contextualizat ion when an indiv idual attempts t o transfer them directly to the church boardro om. For exa mple, Carver's princip les elevate the va lue of ownership in an organizat ion. In this scenar io, without plac ing the princ iples into the context of a local church, somet hing non -biblical occurs: the *congregation becomes t he owner of the churc h*. Green informed me that his dissertation offers an adaptation of Carve r's princip les to assist a church l eadership team in transit ioning from less ef fective forms of church governance in the past to pote ntially more effecti ve methods of churc h governance in the future.

The Car vers and O lsen state the struggl e which many churches have is not with people but pr ocess an d the proce ss has remained lar gely unchallenged. It is my opinion that local churches who co nsider improving group dyna mics (i.e., recogn izing the va lue of each team mem ber's co ntribution) and group p olity (i.e., restructur ing governance to encourage a healthy dia logical circle) are in a better posit ion, than churche s who d o not, to apply the discipl ine of spir itual discernment to decision making in the boardroo m. See Table 2.3. for a summary of Policy Governance®.

Table 2.3. Basic Principles of Policy Governance®

Basic Principles
1. "[The principles begin with] The Trust in Trusteeship .... [B]oards exist to own the organization on behalf of some identifiable ownership to which they are answerable.... [T]he board governs on behalf of persons who are not seated at the board table" (1).
2. "The Board Speaks with One Voice or Not at All.... The only way the board can speak as the board, then, is by bringing its diverse points of view to one point" (2-3).
3. "Board Decisions Should Predominantly Be Policy Decisions" (6). The wisdom of a board is to be "reflected in these policies.... When policy-making is properly construed, the board *is* [original emphasis] its policies" (7).
4. "Boards Should Formulate Policy by Determining the Broadest Values Before Progressing to More Narrow Ones.... A 'large' policy decision will contain all smaller, related policies—a large containment that omits nothing" (7).
5. "A Board Should Define and Delegate Rather Than React and Ratify" (9). Rightly understood, boards monitor rather than approve. "The practice of monitoring compares plans to pre-stated criteria" (10).
6. "Ends Determination Is the Pivotal Duty of Governance. The justification for any organization lies in what difference it can make;... [thus], careful, wise selection of ends is the highest calling of trustee leadership" (11).
7. "The Board's Best Control over Staff Means Is to Limit, Not Prescribe .... [A]ppropriate control without meddling [requires two things]: (1) Resist the temptation to prescribe staff means,... [and] (2) Tell your CEO, in writing, which staff means would be unacceptable, unapprovable, or off limits" (14-15).
8. "A Board Must Explicitly Design Its Own Products and Process.... [T]he board outlines its own code of conduct, the way it will control and plan its own agenda, and the nature of its linkage with the ownership" (16-17).
9. "A Board Must Forge a Linkage with Management That Is Both Empowering and Safe.... The board and CEO constitute a leadership team.... The CEO has the right to expect the board to be clear about the rules and then play by them" (17-19).
10. "Performance of CEO Must Be Monitored Rigorously, but Only Against Policy Criteria .... Good monitoring is necessary if a board is to relax about the present and get on with the future" (19-20).

Source: Carver and Carver, *CarverGuide* 1-20.

Group Decision Making

All those in favor, say "Aye." All those opposed, "Same Sign." Majority rule is not the best way to conduct business in the local church. This project moves forward in search of more effective ways of making decisions in the leadership circle of the local church. While this research sought to discover practical applications of the discipline of spiritual discernment to church boardroom decision making, this section acknowledges

that a more com prehensive rev iew of decis ion-making theory has been acco mplished by others, as I touch o nly brief ly upon one suc h theory.

Lee Roy Beach offers a relatively concise d istillation of the short his tory of decision-mak ing theory: "[E] mpir ical research on decis ion making only bega n in earnest in the 1 960's" (13). Whi le a thorough description of decision -making theory is beyond the scope of this research project and my pers onal knowledge and time constraints, Beach's assess ment of the s hortco mings of rationa l choice theory are benef icial to this stud y. Beach describes how econo mist's rational choice theory, the so -called economic man, so d ominated t he psychologica l study of decision making in the 1960's, that psychologists provisionally adopted economic man as the descriptive psychol ogical theory of decision making (6).

Econo mic man is fundamentally about the bes t way to make bets ; thus, the foundation for econo mic decis ion-making theory is that a ll dec isions invol ving risk are essential ly gambl ing about the o utcome (6). Beach conten ds decision makers do not frame their decis ions as bets:

> They v iew dec isions as tools for acti vely managing the future so it conforms to their values and preferences; they simply aren't trying to do what rational choice theory does .... [G]amblers must make their bets and then wait passive ly to see if they won o r lost—inter vention is cheat ing. In contrast, decision makers se ldom are passive and almost always intervene to make sure things come out t he way they want t hem to. The fact is the gamble ana logy is irrelevant to real -life dec ision making . (7-8)

Beach theorizes an a lternati ve approach. People use stories to understa nd their l ife experiences better and to build bridges among their past, present, and future. Beach then suggests that decision makers process life by managing the deve lopment of these stories,

which he cal ls "cognit ive narrat ives," and in so doing, they manage the progress of their

lives (6).

Rational choice theory promotes t he decision event. Gambl ing is about wager ing

what one is wi lling to risk for a pay -off or to gain a rewa rd. Economic man seeks winning

and gaining a return on one' s wager as its goa l. This theory focuses attention o n the event

or the revelation of the outcome at a specific moment in time. Some boardrooms

resemble Economic Man, where board members limit d iscussion and interaction for the

purpose of getting things done. Moments of decision are all important because those

points in time represent movement in the direct ion of reward. Reward is def ined

differently by board members. For so me board mem bers, pay off comes when t he agenda

is completed. For others, their aw ard is gett ing to the end of the evening and ho me at a

reasonable hour.

Cogniti ve narrat ive theory encourages the decision journey. Board mem bers co me

together at an intersect ion of the stories of many li ves. In the Word -bearing c ircle of the

church b oardroo m, gifted leaders r eprise what happene d previously and what is currently

occurring in the lives of the people of the congregat ion this g roup has bee n commissioned

to shep herd. The agenda becomes an important means of staying on task in the sharing of

said narrat ives. Dec isions are unfolding stories that r eveal prog ress toward rea lizing the

vision God has granted this specif ic body of disciples. The dec ision e vent is less

important than t he decision journey.

Hazel C. V. Trauffe r contrasts the rational choice paradi gm w ith discernment.

First, she says the predominate approach for making decisions in the church "relies upon

a paradigm that reduces decis ion-making to a s imple c ause -effect and analyt ical process"

(6). In other words, the narrow focus of decision making in the church boardroom is to get to the decision event and avoid all the narrative. Then Trauffer assesses that practicing discernment provides a healthy alternative to the rational choice paradigm of economic man:

> [It] goes beyond the physical form and embraces the leader's holistic system of body, mind, and spirit, allowing the leader to think contextually and allegorically and to reach into the future and to grasp potential and possibilities, and act upon them. (12)

When consistently exercised in the boardroom, the discipline of spiritual discernment transforms the board itinerary from human to divine. Discernment is neither a theory, nor a model of decision making, but both a spiritual gift supplied by the Father to the diligent disciple and a spiritual discipline to be cultivated over a lifetime. Once again, "the triune nature of God's activity" serves as the best example or model for shaping the course of one's ministry (Vertefeuille 23). Trauffer begins where I find need to conclude this section: "A study of discernment contributes to the literature through the introduction of a new paradigm and cognitive ability that places the divine centre stage" (3). Decision making is a journey that includes the discipline of spiritual discernment.

Research Design Review

Spiritual discernment improves decision making in the church boardroom. I developed a plan to discover which practices prove to be most effective. Robert K. Yin refers to the plan as the research design and defines it this way: "[a] plan that guides the investigator in the process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting observations. It is a logical model of proof that allows the researcher to draw inferences concerning causal relations among the variables under investigation" (*Case Study Research* 21). The plan uses a mixed methods design which involves both quantitative and qualitative

methodologies, because the research includes more than one type of data: survey or questionnaire, case study, and interview. Using mixed methods offers a better and more comprehensive understanding of the data while building a stronger study overall. The quantitative methodology encourages statistical precision and freedom from bias. The qualitative methodology demands time in analysis equal to time in the field, requiring an ongoing analysis of the data. In the latter methodology, the researcher becomes the research instrument who develops the skill to observe and record human behavior (Lowe).

The research is an explanatory design, in that I collect the quantitative data first, which becomes a primary focal point in the assessment. Then qualitative data follows to add contextual information and improve upon the initial phase of assessment (Lowe). The first research tool in the quantitative stage is survey work in the form of a questionnaire. The experts claim, "All surveys face a common challenge, which is how to produce precise estimates by surveying only a relatively small proportion of the larger population" (Dillman, Hox, and de Leeuw 2). Benefits to using a questionnaire in the initial step include the efficiency of data collection and the relative ease of data tabulation, scoring, and analysis (Patten 1). The disadvantage of a low response rate is minimized by having the panel of experts serve as a reference in conducting the survey (2). Because this project concerned ministry pre-intervention and sought to discover information, a before and after context did not exist. Rather, the questionnaire encouraged church leaders to consider decision making from their own frame of reference.

Before sending the questionnaire for response, to increase validity and reliability, I took the following steps. First, the JSCC RRT reviewed the survey instrument and

suggested severa l revisions over a four -five month period prior to distr ibution. Second, the team developed a Li kert-type scale that asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or d isagree with statements. While other attitudina l measuring tools exist, Patten wr ites, "[E]xtensive research indicates that none are c learly superior to Likert-type items, which are easy to write and easy for respon dents t o understan d" (34). Third, I field tested the qu estionnaire in three locations. "Testing is the only way of assuring that the survey questions written, do indeed co mmunicate to respon dents as intended" (Di llman, Hox, and de Leeuw 176). These steps prod uced a signi ficantly reworded ques tionnaire, re vised intentional ly to reduce what responde nts saw o n paper. Fewer words in the questionnaire reduced ambiguity within questions that otherwise may have caused errors in the ir response s (177).

Common of the mixed -methods approach, the researcher -designed instrument included case studies with in the questionnaire in the quantitati ve step to add so me qualitat ive context. To help prov ide context for the case studies, I instructed respo ndents to cons truct or visual ize mental ly an important decision fac ing the church board of which they are a partic ipant. Expecting some respo ndents to str uggle with this request, the RRT developed two case studies or ministry v ignettes to set the questionnaire into a potentia l decision-making context. Y in prepares the researcher with the fol lowing statement: "Although a case stu dy is a distinct ive form of empir ical inquiry, many research investigators neve rtheless disda in the strategy" (*Case St udy Researc h* 10). He aring Yin's critique and recommen dations, the R RT assisted in rewor king the case studies to address potential resear ch sloppiness, wordiness, and over -genera lization (10). The RR T concluded the case studies were worth the risks outlined by Yin to help respondents

better context ualize the questions within the survey. The intent is not to lead or mis lead

respondents but to offer the necessary information for completing the survey. Yin

proposed an option of single or mult iple case studies. We chose multiple case studies

over a single case study, because so me respo ndents were profess ionals and others were

volunteers. Hence, one case study was designed to assist professionals while the other

case stud y was written w ith vo lunteers in mind (*Applications* 5).

A mixed-methods design allowed me to extend the research. Building upon the

quantitative findings, I used tel ephone an d personal inter views (qual itative methods) to

grow the research. Responde nts ha d no physical pressure to respo nd in the qua ntitati ve

survey. The more anonymous and private setting of completing the questionnaire

"reduces the tende ncy of resp ondents t o present t hemselves in a favourable light and

induces fewer problems of self -presentation, which is a great asset when sensiti ve

question s are asked" (D illman, Hox, and de Leeuw 115). Responde nts an swered the

question s in the pri vacy of their study or wherever they chose. However, the qualitat ive

steps of telepho ne and pers onal interv iews introduced a p otential bias, the inter viewer.

Whether in the contex t of a telephone cal l, video conference, or in person, my verbal and

nonverbal cues unavoidably inf luence respon ses. While inviting more meaningfu l

context, intervie ws and case studies, in a very rea l sense, require more of a spontaneo us

approach t o research. Don A. Di llman, Joop J. Hox, an d Edith D. de Leeuw ca ll this the

"intervie wer e ffect" (1 15).

Qual itative methodology is not an exact science. I fac ilitated a dia logue to enr ich

and val idate prev ious analytica l findings or to a llow for a lternat ive recommendation s.

Understanding the hearts of church leaders who sincere ly desire to improve the qual ity of

decisions being made in the boardroom req uires something more than exact science (i .e.,
quantitative ana lysis). This research desi gn requires more t ime, but I bel ieve it prov ides a
helpful blend of head and heart.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

This research project wrest led with the rea lity that how churche s make decisions was at le ast as important as the actual decisions they made. I la id this present rea lity on the foun dation of Ephesians 4:1 -16, where Pau l instructed that God gifted men and women as W ord bearers and co mmissioned them t o equip the pe ople of God to serve faithfu lly in the context of the bo dy of Christ, yet in an a lmost inexplic able paradox, God chose to give h is people freedom to confo und his p lans. At times, church l eaders proved themselves to be very good at fol lowing personal whim or desi re, rather than working in concert with the ci rcle of leaders in whi ch God placed them.

Recognizing that int imidat ion was not an effectiv e pract ice for decis ion making in the church b oardro om, I rev iewed both classica l and conte mporary l iterature on the discip line of spir itua l discernment. I d iscovered sever al commo n practices of spir itua l discernment helpful on the decision-making journey. I saw severa l of these pract ices present in the JSCC circ le of leaders where I facilitate the ministry and supp ort staff and coordinate the work of the church board. Therefore, I proposed a ministry pre-intervent ion project to o bserve and assess what was presen tly happe ning in JSCC peer churches in the area of mak ing important decisions. The intent and sco pe of the project was to discover and lea rn, rather than to inter vene and change. This study identif ied the most effective pract ices of decis ion making in Word-directed Christian churches in Illinois. By applying what was ga ined from the l iterature re view and the research, the goal was to encourage meaning ful interact ion among church b oard me mbers .

The purpose of this ministry pre-intervention study was to identify the most effective practices applying the discipline of spiritual discernment to decision making as defined by leadership in Word-directed Christian churches in Illinois, to promote healthy dialogue in the boardroom.

Research Questions

To discover the most effective practices that apply the discipline of spiritual discernment to decision making, I asked two research questions.

Research Question #1

Which of the common practices applying the discipline of spiritual discernment to decision making were present in Word-directed congregations?

To observe common practices of the discipline of spiritual discernment as applied to decision making, I first had to acquaint myself with those practices. Therefore, the initial phase of the literature review was an exploration of a contemporary model that applied spiritual discernment to decision making. The authors described ten common practices of discernment for decision making. After an additional review of both classical and other contemporary works, these ten practices served as a template for the RRT to develop five common practices that took the shape of word pairs. These common practices became the primary subject matter for the quantitative survey distributed to the sample of forty leaders in twenty different Word-directed Christian churches. The goal of this first research question was to learn which of the common practices were present.

Research Question #2

What were the most effective practices in helping leadership teams discern and execute Christ's purpose through the church?

I crafted th is question to help determine which of the fi ve common practices were defined by the leaders to be the mo st effecti ve pract ices. To observe these practices of the discip line of spir itual discernment further and how the y impact decision making in church b oardroo ms, I con ducted tw o qualitat ive research steps to enrich the context. First, the RR T advised me in se lecting eight candidates for personal interviews from among the origina l sample of church leaders and partic ipated in synthesizing the r esults. Second, the panel of experts recomme nded t hree veteran senior leadership teams, a professional and a volunteer leader in the same church, who m I inter viewed to va lidate results. The goa l of th is second q uestion was to learn which of the prese nt practices we re most effective . The quantitati ve step establ ished a basel ine from which to explore and observe data, whi le the qual itative steps built upon the ba seline, of fering a more robust research outcome.

Population and Participants

I consulted two important teams of people to determine who would participate in this study: a panel of experts from LCU and the research re flection team. The panel of experts helped me identify Word-directed churches in Il linois, and make in itial contacts with key leaders in these churches. As mentione d previously, panel members inc luded (1) the Christian min istries department leader who trains Word -directed preachers, (2) the director of the g raduate leadership progr am who serves as church cons ultant and advisor to man y church leaders, (3) the LCU associate vice pres ident of alumni serv ices who knows peo ple in Chr istian churches, especia lly in Illinois, and (4) the academic dean of the un dergraduate scho ol.

To determine wh ich congregat ions were Word directed, the panel d iscussed and agreed upon the following informat ion as a guide to which churches fit into the population. Christ ian churches orig inated among pioneer groups wh o crosse d the new territory of America in search of freedom. Rather than al igning with an exist ing denomination, a movement of C hristians began who wanted no creed b ut Christ and n o book b ut the Bible . More recently, an ecc lesial movement am ong Christian churches chose to organize themsel ves primar ily around God 's Word, preferring to describe thei r philosophy of ministry as Word directed. Word -directed church leaders a llow the text of God's Word to serve as beginning and ending point for their respecti ve churches. After agreeing upon these principles, the panel identified a population of more than thirt y Word-directed Christian churches across the state of Il linois. Each church was rando mly assigned a number, and t he first twenty numbers drawn became the research sam ple. Churche s not in the sam ple were a lso drawn and assigned num bers in order above twenty. These churches became part of the sam ple when a church o pted n ot to participate. The panel and I determined that congregat ional age and specif ic locat ion, whether rural or urban, were not vari ables of considerat ion for the scope of the project.

The panel also helped with an important consideration as a f inal qual itative research step by selecting three vete ran senior leadership teams. These teams (1) were leaders in Word -directed churches, (2) had two or more decades of ministry experience, and (3) had a recogni zed record of leading grow ing churches. From the criter ia the panel chose three senior leadership teams representing a smal l church (under fi ve hundred), a mid-sized church (five hundred to one thousand), and a large or megachurch (over one

thousand). The panel of experts and I developed an interv iew protocol I used when meeting w ith these veteran leadership teams.

The RR T assisted in examining the results of the quantitati ve and qualit ative research and narrowing those results in the initial sampl e to inter view candidates. The RRT included ski lled stat isticians, administrators on loca l school boards, a representative of our ministry staff, a past JSCC elder, and fa ithful co-laborers at JSCC during the enti re time I have serv ed there. This te am help ed shape the q uestion naire by pi loting, revising, and distributing the docume nt to the twent y churc hes selected by the pa nel of experts. The RR T evaluated the survey results and, from the results, helped to determine four churches from t he sample to partic ipate in fo llow-up telephone or video-conference interviews. Finally, this te am establ ished the interv iew protocol that I fo llowed to enrich the research context.

Design of the Stud y

This project was a min istry pre -intervent ion designed to lay a foundation for future work in developing resources to assist churches in using the most effecti ve practices of the disc ipline of spir itual discernment to aid in healthy decis ion making. The objective was observat ion and discovery as op posed to intervention and chang e. The research used mixed met hods in that it incorporated bot h quantitative and qualitat ive metho dologies. The desi gn was explanatory, beginning w ith a collection of quantitative data. Th is data was e valuated before subse quent qualitative results were add ed and synthesized for the purpose of providing a better understanding of the data and building a more potent study overall.

Instrumentation

Prompted by sources considered in the literature review, the RRT and I developed the questionnaire to survey the twenty churches quantitatively. This researcher-designed instrument included two case studies to assist participants in contextualizing the questions. Following personal visits to sample churches or telephone calls of introduction and invitation to the senior leader to participate, the Likert-type questionnaire was distributed to the sample churches. I trusted the senior leader of each church to determine which elder should complete the survey. I kept field notes of personal observations and interpersonal interactions with participants during all visits and telephone calls.

The RRT assisted in tabulating the results of the quantitative study: the questionnaire and recorded field notes. I informed the RRT of the three veteran senior leadership teams selected by the panel of experts, in order that there was no duplication in the coming two steps of interviewing church leaders. The team used the evaluated data to direct me to follow-up interviews with ten participants. I proceeded to conduct interviews with four professional and three volunteer church leaders as chosen by the RRT from the total sample of forty participants. The RRT created an interview protocol I used when meeting with those selected for this first follow-up phase of qualitative research. The team developed a template prior to quantitative research, then they made adjustments using questionnaire results to develop an interview script called Interview Protocol A (see Appendix A).

The panel of experts previously selected three veteran senior leadership teams from the sample. I affirmed these expert selections to the RRT before proceeding with the selection of interview candidates. While selecting the three senior leadership teams, the

panel of experts created an inter view protocol template for me to use when I met with the veteran leaders. A fter conducting the ten interv iews for the f irst follow-up phase of qualitative research, the RRT made necessary adjustments to the panel's template to correct for contextual and research f indings. I shaped the rev isions into another interv iew script that became the secon d follow-up phase of qualitat ive research ca lled Inter view Protocol B (see Appendix B) .

Pilot Test

Before composing even one question for the questionnaire, RRT members asked, "Who are yo u going to try this out on before y ou distribute to the twent y churches?" JSCC elders granted me a ministry sabbatica l from late 2009 through early 2010. I conducted several steps prel iminary to the research during the sabbatica l. For example, time away afforded me severa l Sunday s to travel and vis it Word -directed churches. I utilized these v isits to introduce ch urch leaders to the project and invite part icipation. On two occasions, Wor d-directed l eaders asked if they could f ill out the question naire. W ith each completed questionnaire, the RRT and I made improvements ba sed on my field notes. The JSCC preaching minister and elders, as w ell as a s ister congre gation located in Lincoln, a lso assisted by pi lot testing the resea rcher-designed instrument.

Variables

A pre-ministry intervention project has no dependent or independent variables. Variables included size of congregat ion, number of peo ple in the leadership c ircle or boardro om, and the potential ly uneven distribution of the Word -bearing gifts in the ci rcle at the time of assessment.

Reliability and Validity

Yin describes test re liability as demon strating that a study can be repeated with the same results (*Case Study Research* 34). In other words a later investigator, following the same proce dures, sh ould be able to re plicate the findings and conclusions of an earli er investigator. Yin writes, "The goal of reliability is to min imize the e rrors and biases in a study" (37). I informed survey partic ipants by telepho ne, elect ronic mai l, or postal mai l of their recommendation by an LCU panel of experts. Then, as w ith Interv iew Protocols A and B, I de veloped a Questionnaire Del ivery Protocol (see Appendix C) to stan dardize the preparatory information shared with each partic ipant. Hence, each person com pleting a questionnaire received the same introduction, (i.e. , a cove r letter and docu ment; see Appen dixes D and E). To provide construct va lidity, the RRT held me accountable for tracking these operational steps as I recorded with consistent docu mentation an d reported question naire response rates to them periodical ly.

This project did not measure change in attitude or behavior; r ather, it observed which practices of spiritual discernment inf luenced healthy decision making in the boardro om. Hence, the research did not meas ure a ca use-effect re lationship. The quantitative and qual itative instruments so ught to o bserve how past practices influenced previous decis ions of the church board. Thus, internal validity was not in question. Regarding case study research, Y in describes externa l validity as addressing the "pro blem of knowing whether a study' s findings are genera lizab le beyond t he immediate case study" (*Case Study Resea rch* 37). Because this study did not include churches other than those with a Word-directed philosoph y of ministry , it has l imitations. In other words, the results might not apply to church b oards with a sign ificantly different ecc lesiology. This

study was general izable or externa lly valid because, uniformly, church boards agreed that following the Word of God was a w orthy pursuit. Church b oards also agreed a bib lical approach t o decision making was a v iable alternati ve to any corporate business model for decision mak ing.

Data Collection

The field research phase of this ministry pre -intervention, explanatory mixed - methods project took three mo nths to complete. After the panel of experts identif ied more than thirty Word-directed Christian churches in I llinois, with the help of the RRT and three pi lot tests, I cra fted the f inal copy of the q uestion naire. Before the f ield research began, I a lso personally v isited or te lephone co ntacted two s urvey partic ipants from each church an d recorded these in my field notes. During th is contact, I asked the part icipants how the y preferred to rece ive the questionnaire. Then I distr ibuted the questionnaire electronica lly or by mail prec eded by the cover letter of introduction (see Appendixes D and E). In the cover letter, I reminded partic ipants of the previous conversation I had with them an d of the panel of experts' reco mmendation to e ncourage part icipation.

The questionnaire contained a ll pert inent information for completion, including my contact information in case part icipants had q uestions. I gave the forty respondent s two weeks to complete and return the questionnaire. I personally fol lowed up with telephone cal ls to those wh o did not resp ond to the s urvey within the two -week window of time. The RR T and I re ceived and processed s urvey results over the next two weeks.

In the fol lowing s ix weeks, I conducte d four o n-site interviews with seven church leaders (four professionals and three volunteers) identified by the RRT using Interv iew Protocol A (see Appendix A). I audio-taped the responses a nd transcribed the co ntent.

Over the next three weeks, I interviewed the three pairs of veteran senior leaders using Interview Protocol B (see Appendix B). Again, I audio-taped responses for recording and transcription purposes.

Data Analysis

During the two weeks while respondents completed questionnaires, RRT member helped me think through ways of tabulating and interpreting the results of the survey that would soon be forthcoming. With RRT assistance I developed a spreadsheet to tally the quantitative results of the forty plus questionnaires. From the five common practices, we identified the most effective practices and evaluated the results. This evaluation informed Interview Protocol A. I transcribed and synthesized the qualitative results of the interviews with the Word-directed church leaders to develop a richer context. This evaluation informed Interview Protocol B. Finally, I analyzed the second set of qualitative results, taken from interviewing the experienced senior leaders. The results validated which practices applying the discipline of spiritual discernment in decision making in Word-directed, Christian churches in Illinois, were most effective.

Ethical Procedures

When acquiring contact information from prospective participants in the sample churches, I assured them data returned on the questionnaire would be held in strictest confidence and viewed only by RRT members. Respondents completed an informed consent form that they received with the questionnaire (see Appendix F). While they had the assurance of not being identified by an outside source, with their consent, I kept their contact information, so I could send a copy of the results to all who made the project possible by participating. I encouraged participants to use the information however they

deemed it might be useful in ministry praxis. I reminded participants I was available to meet with them after the distribution of the results to answer questions or offer personal observations. I stored all data on my personal computer and secured the data on a backup hard drive held in a separate location from the personal computer. After I transcribed and archived audio recordings for evaluative purposes, I destroyed the recordings.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

God is the architect of h is Church. People are part icipants in God's strategic p lan for build ing and grow ing a church. The Apostle Pau l clarifies who serves in what role when he writes to the church in Corinth, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So ne ither he who plants nor he wh o waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Cor. 3:6-7). Problems ar ise not when church leaders use their creat ivity to dream of, env ision, and decide about h ow to grow a big ger and better church; rather, the diff iculties come when o ne or a few of the leaders dictate a course for a church without co nsult ing the arch itect and/or ir respecti ve of input from ot her members of the leadership team. I embarked upon this study in search of positive and productive examples of corporate decision making in church leadersh ip circles.

After re viewing biblical, histor ical, and contemp orary ways of al igning the human aspect of corporate decision making in the local church more fully to God's p urpo se, this study set o ut to ex plore healthy practi ces in church leadership teams that apply the discip line of spir itua l discernme nt to decision mak ing. The research observed how Word - directed Christ ian churches in I llinois foster and preserve a productive dia logical environment in the church b oardroo m by util izing d iscernment practices discove red during the l iterature re view. The pu rpose of this pre -intervention study was to identify the most effective pract ices applying the d iscipline of sp iritua l discernment to decision making as def ined by leadership in Word -directed Christ ian churches in I llinois, to promote healthy dialogue in the boardroo m.

Participants

A panel of experts from Lincoln Chr istian University and I met in late November 2009 with the goa l of identify ing twenty or more Word -directed Christian churches in Illinois. After discussion and reaching consens us on the defini tion of Word directed, the panel agre ed upo n thirty churches that closely resembled the definit ion. Table 4.1 contains the churc h pros pect list arranged a lphabetica lly by locat ion in Illinois.

Table 4.1. Word-Direc ted Church Prospect List

Church	City
Church 1	Beardstown
Church 2	Carbondale
Church 3	Champai gn
Church 4	Clarendon Hills
Church 5	Danville
Church 6	Effingham
Church 7	Erie
Church 8	Herscher
Church 9	Macomb
Church 10	Mattoon
Church 11	Morris
Church 12	Mt. Vernon
Church 13	New Lenox
Church 14	Normal
Church 15	Patoka
Church 16	Peoria
Church 17	Quincy
Church 18	Raymond
Church 19	Robinson
Church 20	Rochester
Church 21	Rochester
Church 22	Rockford
Church 23	Smyser
Church 24	Springfield
Church 25	Springfield
Church 26	Taylorville
Church 27	Tuscola
Church 28	Wapella
Church 29	Woodlawn
Church 30	Woodlawn

Of the thirty churches on the prospect list, the goal was to survey twenty churches. The participants included two leaders from each church, in most cases: a senior staff member and an elder. Before proceeding with the survey questionnaire, I pilot-tested the questionnaire with three Christian churches —two in Lincoln, Illinois, and a third at a church in Rockford, Illinois, where I did some consultation work during a ministry sabbatical. I contacted all thirty Word-directed churches in the sample, and twenty-three of the thirty responded to my personal visit or telephone call. In all but one church, I spoke directly with a senior staff member. I gave the senior leader discretion in selecting which volunteer leader (elder) to partner with in completing the questionnaire (see Appendix E). I encouraged senior staff leaders to consider selecting an experienced volunteer leader who has witnessed important decisions in previous years. A member of the panel of experts contacted the one church leader with whom I did not speak personally.

Of the twenty-three churches who agreed to complete the questionnaire, I received responses from twenty-two churches, a 95 percent response rate. Of the anticipated forty-four questionnaires, forty-three were returned. Two churches submitted three questionnaires: one church submitted questionnaires from one elder and two staff members, including a minister of administration, and a second church sent back questionnaires from two elders and one staff member. Three churches submitted only one questionnaire. In these churches the senior leader and elder volunteer leader decided to work together on the questionnaire; hence, I received one less questionnaire than expected.

In one instance respo nses came from tw o staff members an d no elders. Church leaders returned a ll responses to the question naire in a two-week window of time. Table 4.2 includes question naire respon se information that describes leaders by p rofessional ministry position or volunteer role who part icipated and from which specific Word-directed churches in I llinois. No si gnificant findings were discovered among churches that su bmitted one, two, or three que stionnaires. The word "Grou p" in the ch art represents when o ne questionnaire was submitted b y two peo ple, an e lder and a senior leader.

Table 4.2. Questionnaire Response Information

Church/# Respondents	Title
Church 1—2	Minister, Elder
Church 2—2	Minister, Elder
Church 3—2	Minister, Elder
Church 4—1	Group
Church 6—2	Minister, Elder
Church 7—2	Minister, Elder
Church 8—2	Minister, Elder
Church 9—2	Minister, Elder
Church 10—2	Minister, Elder
Church 11—2	Minister, Elder
Church 13—2	Minister, Elder
Church 14—2	Minister, Administrator
Church 16—3	Minister, Administrator, Elder
Church 17—1	Group
Church 18—2	Minister, Elder
Church 20—2	Minister, Elder
Church 21—3	Minister, Elder, Elder
Church 22—2	Minister, Elder
Church 24—1	Group
Church 26—2	Minister, Elder
Church 27—2	Minister, Elder
Church 29—2	Minister, Elder
TOTAL: 22 chu rches	**43 respondents**

Participants in this first phase of research, the questionnaire, served churches ranging in average weekend attendance from eighty -seven to forty-five hundred worshipers. Those who completed the questionnaire lived in rural communities that ranged from one of only a small number of people to one of the Chicago suburbs that number in the hundreds of thousands. When asked to circle the word that best describes how well the churches they serve match the definition of a Word-directed church in the questionnaire, respondents selected *strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree* (see Appendix E). Of the forty-three participants, thirty selected *strongly agree*, and thirteen chose *agree* (see Table 4.3). Apparently the panel of experts excelled in picking churches whose leaders resonated with this statement from the questionnaire: "The elders and staff in a *Word-directed Church* choose to let the text speak first and foremost in their preaching, teaching, and decision making. Because being *Word directed* is a way of life, a worldview, *Word-directed* leaders take their cues from the Word of God and allow the text of God 's Word to shape the ministry of the church." Questionnaire participants viewed close relationship to the Living and Written Word of God as central to completing any survey on the topic of decision making.

Table 4.3. Definition of Word-Directed (N=43)

Word-Directed	Responses
Strongly Agree	30
Agree	13
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

During the second, qualitative phase of research, I conducted seven interviews. The interviews themselves took place in two steps. First, I traveled to four different communities to conduct follow-up interviews with church leaders who completed the questionnaire. The RRT assisted in the selection of follow-up interviewees in Peoria, Macomb, Rochester, and Tuscola, Illinois. In selecting church leaders to interview, the RRT considered different sizes of churches and communities. The church worship attendances of the four interviewees were eighty-seven, three hundred, 375, and 950. The communities ranged in population from rural to a few thousand to several hundred thousand. Seven men participated in these interviews. On three occasions I interviewed the senior leader and elder pair who completed the questionnaire. The other interview was a church administrator who completed the questionnaire. In total I interviewed four senior ministry staff and three elders in the four churches.

Second, I traveled to three different communities to interview veteran senior leadership teams. The panel of experts helped select these interviewees in Bloomington, Morris, and Taylorville, Illinois. The panel recommended three senior leaders of a small (349), medium (768), and large (4,500) church in a small town, a suburb of Chicago, and a mid-sized city. The average tenure of the senior and volunteer leaders in this select group was slightly less than thirty years serving in the same church. Eight men participated in these interviews. In the interview of the large church, interviewees included the senior minister (fifteen years), the retired senior minister (thirty-two years), an elder (thirty years), and my field mentor who recently joined the staff as a minister of discipleship. In the mid-sized church, interviewees included the senior minister (thirty-eight years) and an elder (twenty years). In the small church, interviewees included the

senior minister (over thirty years in two different ministries) and an elder (over forty years). From the questionnaires and the interviews, I gained much wisdom and insight from the experiences of other church leaders that informed answers to the two research questions.

Research Question #1

To be Word directed implies being dependent upon God. More specifically a Word-directed person chooses to attend first to what God is saying to him or her through the example of his Living Word and the teaching of his written Word. Being a Word-directed person is much more challenging than writing the definition on this page. Living a Word-directed life takes discipline. The first research question explored which of the common practices applying the discipline of spiritual discernment to decision making were present in Word-directed congregations.

Practices Present—Questionnaire

Using the input from three pilot studies, the RRT and I developed the research questionnaire as a tool to demonstrate which of five common practices of the discipline of spiritual discernment were present and which were not present in decision making in the Word-directed sample of Christian churches (see Appendix E). This tool became the research centerpiece and was distributed to the twenty-two churches who agreed to complete the questionnaire. The practices were presented in word pairs and respondents assessed decision making in their respective churches by assigning a number from one to six (one being *more important* and six being *less important*) for each word pair. Using a case study written into the questionnaire or a real-life case, respondents gave five numerical responses, one for each word pair practice. For the purpose of this study,

responses below the neutral response of 3.5 were practices present. Smaller numbers indicated a practice that was more fully present in that church. Larger numbers revealed a practice that was not present or barely present. The research questionnaire measured the strength of each common practice in Word-directed Christian churches in Illinois. As indicated in Table 4.4, all five common practices were fully present in the sample of Word-directed Christian churches. The mean response on the scale of one to six was 2.21, which was well below the neutral response of 3.5.

Table 4.4. Practices Present (N=43)

Common Practice	Mean
Framing and centering	1.84
Studying and exploring	1.79
Remembering and listening	2.30
Waiting and resting	2.86
Deciding and implementing	2.24
All Practices	**2.21**

Forty-three respondents gave five responses each in their questionnaires for a total of 215 specific responses to the common practices. Only thirty-two out of the total of 215 responses to the questionnaire were above, or larger than, the neutral response of 3.5. In other words over 85 percent of the responses were a one, two, or three, while slightly less than 15 percent of the responses were a four, five, or six. Because smaller numbers indicated a practice that was more fully present in churches, the research demonstrated

that al l five common practices of the disc ipline of spir itual discernment were fu lly present in this sample of churches (see Fi gure 4.1).
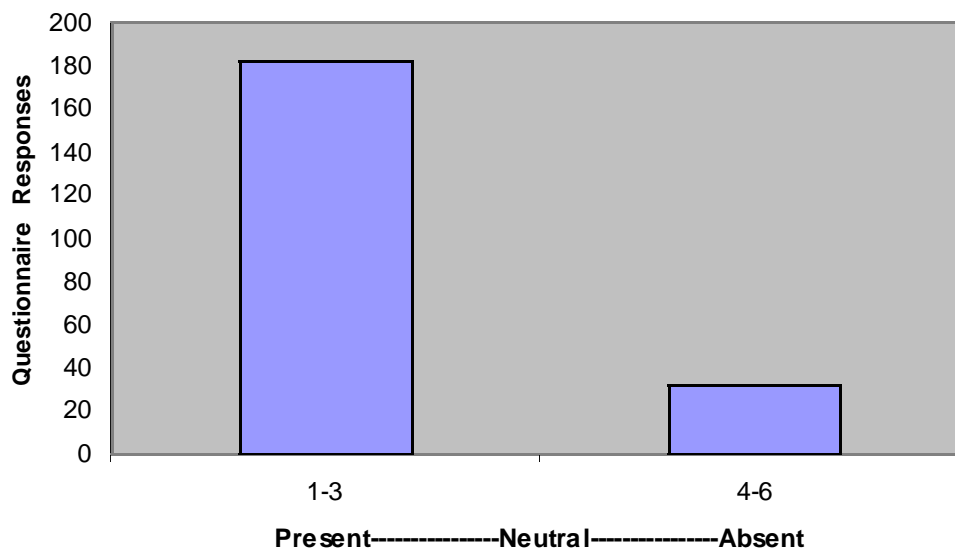

Figure 4. 1. Respon ses related to neut ral response of 3.5.

Figures 4.2 through 4.6 a re a se ries of f ive scatter p lots, one for each of the f ive common discernment practices. I arranged the scatter plots from the practice most ful ly present to least ful ly present. In other words, while all five pract ices we re fu lly present, some were more fully present than others. I discuss respo nse deviation under research question #2 below, but notice in this context the number of respon ses that are low on the scale. In Fi gure 4.2, twenty -two of forty-three respon dents assigned *studying* a score of one. Eighteen more responde nts gave *studying* a two or three making the mean score 1. 79 the lowest of al l the practi ces. On ly three of forty-three responde nts scored *studying* above the neutral response of 3.5 indicat ing this pract ice is present almost always when the church leadership cir cle makes dec isions.
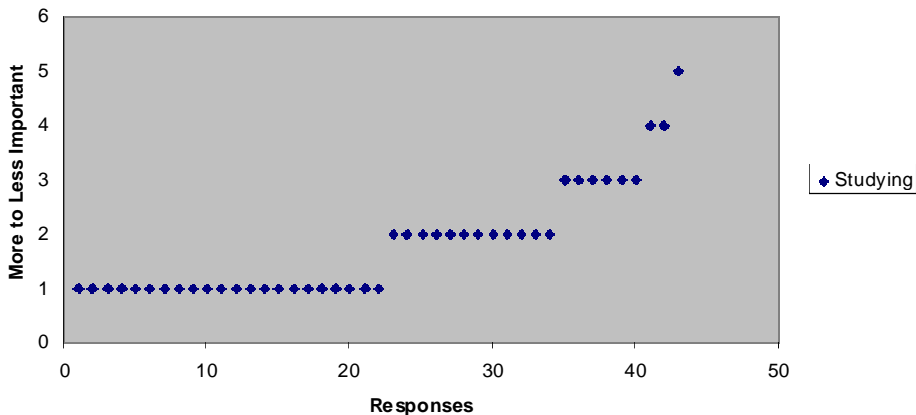
Figure 4. 2. Discernment practice of studying pre sent.

Very simi lar to the spir itual discernment practice of *studying*, Figure 4.3 reveals that *framing* is also a very ful ly present pract ice among the sample of Word -directed church leaders with a mean score of 1 .84. Twenty -two respo ndents assigned *framing* with a score of one, whi le thirty-seven of forty-three respondent s gave *framin g* a one or two. Only six scored *framing* above the neu tral response of 3.5. Almost 90 percent of respon dents scored *studying* and *framing* above the neutral response of 3.5.
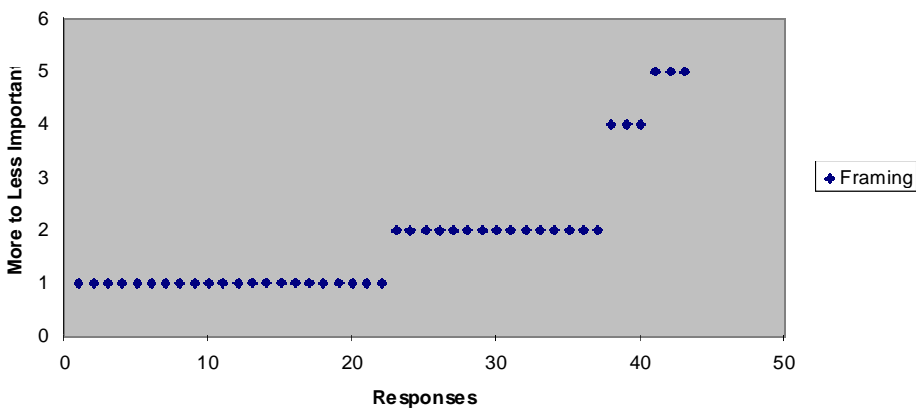

Figure 4. 3. Discernm ent practice of framing present.

While responde nts assigned the score of o ne less often in the pract ices of *deciding*, *rememberi ng*, and *waiting*, scores were wel l below the neutral score of 3.5. Figure 4.4 indicates that thi rty-eight of forty -three respond ents assigned *deciding* a score below the neutral score for a mean score of 2.2 4. Mere ly five responded with a num ber higher than 3. 5; hence, the discernment practice of *decidi ng* is fully present among this Word-directed sample of church leaders.
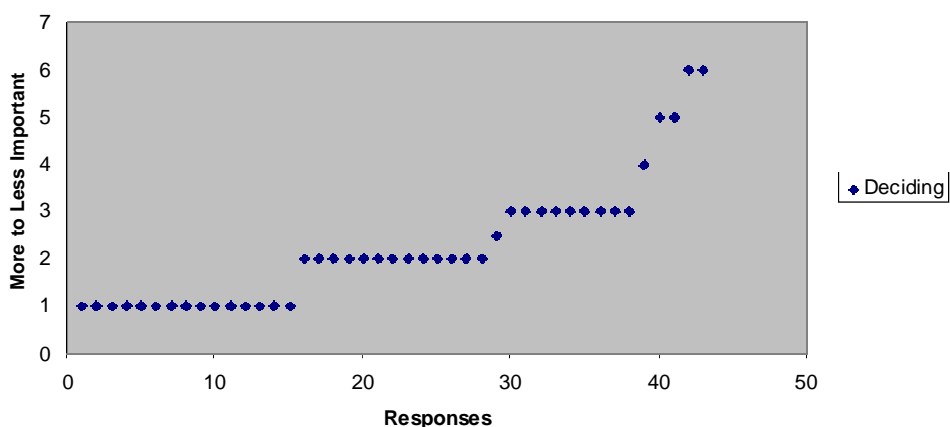
Figure 4.4. Discernment practice of deciding present.

In the fina l two pract ices, scatter plots rev eal that responses m ove closer to the neutral response b ut remain wel l below 3.5. Only ten respondent s scored *remember ing* with a one, but twenty-eight of forty-three ga ve it a two or three; thus, 89 percent of respon dents rated the practice of *remembering* below the neutral response for a mean score of 2.3 0. *Rememb erin g* is a fu lly present discernment practice but perhaps less fully present than t he practices of *stu dying* and *framing*.
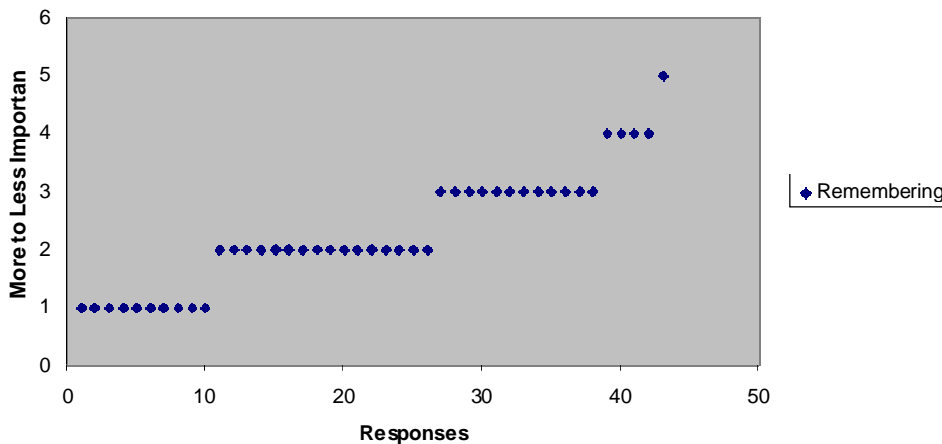
Figure 4.5. Discernment practice of remembering present.

Finally, the pract ice of *waiting* is also fully present according to the responses of the Word-directed church leaders. Thirty of forty -three responde nts (or 70 percent) gave *waiting* a number below the neutral score of 3.5 for a mean score of 2.8 6. For purposes of this study, therefore, the practice of *waiting* is a very important part of the process of spiritua l discernment that leads to important decision making in church leade rship c ircles.

Figure 4. 6. Discernment practice of waiting present.

Discussion of response deviation will be resumed under research question #2. The interviews conducted add credence to the results of the questionnaire further indicating that all the practices were fully present among the Word-directed sample of Christian church leaders.

Practices Present—Interviews

Qualitative research also demonstrated that all five common practices of the discipline of spiritual discernment were present in the sample. In all seven interviews conducted, an interviewee asserted that each of the five co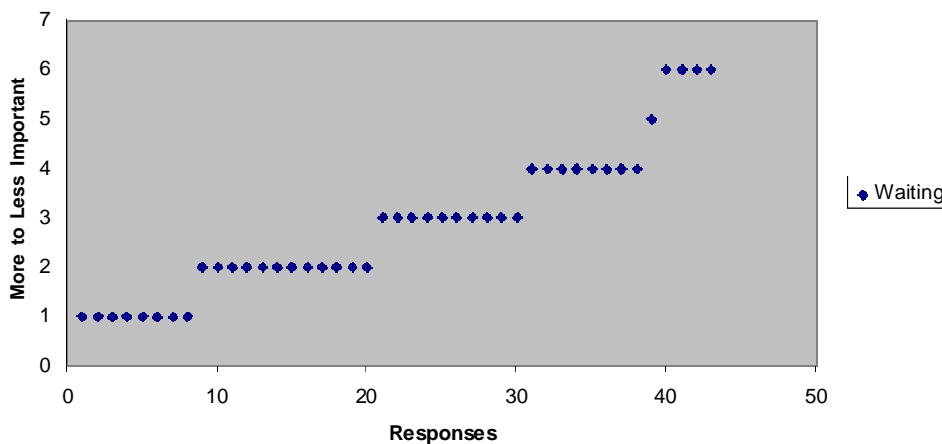mmon practices, as presented in word pairs, was necessary to healthy, corporate decision making in the local church context. Interviewees' responses to questions seemed to assume that all the practices are important and necessary. One leader said, "I put waiting and resting as less important for our team because by the time we've done the first four practices, it is time to go." His response demonstrated a pattern among respondents that revealed all the practices were necessary but some practices were deemed more important, or more relevant, for a particular decision than others.

After considering the five common practices in the questionnaire, a summative question near the end of the survey asked respondents: "What (overall) grade would you give your team for effectiveness in applying the discipline of spiritual discernment to decision making?" Of forty-two responses to the question, seven respondents gave their team an A or A- grade; twenty-eight responded with a B, B+, or B- grade; and, seven graded themselves with a C or C+ (see Table 4.5). The mean, median, and modal letter grade across the sample was a B when offered options A, B, C, D, F, which parallels the mean response of 2.21 when offered options 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 to determine which practices

were present. The data demon strated a solid propensity amo ng respon dents toward

applying a ll of the pract ices of the disc ipline of spir itual discernment when making

decisions in the local church context.

Table 4.5. Decision-Making Grade (N=42)

Grade	F
A or A-	7
B+, B, or B-	28
C+ or C	7

f = the frequency of occurrences of the letter   grade ac ross the sam ple

I observed a f inal recurr ing theme re lated to resear ch question # 1 during the seven

interv iews. Whi le the resea rch clearly demon strated that all pract ices were present in

these var ied leadership ci rcles in Word -directed Christ ian churches in I llinois, a part icular

leadership qual ity or character istic emer ged as senior s taff members described elders and

elders descr ibed staff members, especial ly those with long tenure in one specif ic church

setting. To apply these common practices, church leaders needed to set their own agendas

aside and hu mbly depe nd upon God. One interv iewee staff member remark ed about a

long-term staff member's impact o n the co ngregat ion and her healthy decision making

over the years: "What makes this possible   in our setting is the senior min ister's humil ity.

That's a huge part of the equation." Another interv iewee staf f member quote d an eighty

year old e lder still serving in the church he serves: "I look for ways to get past my ow n

personal preferences in hopes of accomplishing what   is best for the church." Perhaps

these practices are all present because they point in the direction of a decision journey that invites God's input in multiple ways before the time of the actual decision event.

Clearly this sample of Word-directed church leaders value highly all five of the common practices in decision making in their churches. Alongside this desire to take the journey of decision making seriously in the local church context, several leaders mentioned frustration with decisions taking too long, yet no one said their leadership team would move forward with one or more members adamantly opposed to an important decision. However, in terms of practical application, I sensed a common, almost collective, hesitation among respondents to the questionnaire and interviews. Those participating in this research wanted to know how best to strike a balance between the important, even necessary, journey of decision making and the reality in most churches that churches seem to take such a long time to make decisions. One interviewee poignantly concluded that he was frustrated and impatient with the length of time between leadership meetings:

> I've spent the past thirty years in ministry and the one characteristic the churches I've served have in common is that they don't move quickly enough. If elders only meet once per month, how difficult it is to move a church along. We have to wait twenty-nine more days until there is another meeting! There is a frustration with the church —can't get things done. I know that God does call us to wait, and we have to be sensitive to that. But, most of our waiting is not about God, but our traditions and habits.

While this research did not offer a clear solution to his dilemma, I contend that his leadership representative voice prompts a tension or mystery with which Word-directed leaders need to grow comfortable.

Research Que stion #2

The data for research question #1 shows a pattern that having all of the common practices of apply ing the disc ipline of sp iritual discernment present when making important decisions in the church elder and staff leadership c ircle is benefic ial, even necessary. The results of the questionnaire and fol low-up inter views re veal that ce rtain practices, ana lyzed for resea rch question #2, were more effect ive in help ing leadership teams discern and execute C hrist's purpose t hrough t he church t han ot hers. The second research question addresse d the matter of effecti veness by invit ing responde nts to self - assess their Word-directed strengths and weaknesses in applying the pract ices.

Practices Effective—Questionnaire

The research questionnaire addressed the question of spiritual discernment practice e ffectiveness in two quantitati ve steps. Fi rst, as aforementioned, respon dents recorded answers as to h ow important s pecific pract ices we re from a range of one to six. While the r esearch demon strated al l practices we re present, a s light spread existed among the five common practices. Word-directed church leaders responded to the practice of *studying and exploring* with a 1.79 and the practice of *framing and centering* with a 1.84. Of the five commo n practices, according to the data, these two practices appear to be most effective among Word -directed leaders. The pract ices of *deciding and implementing* (2.24) and *remembering and listening* (2.30) fall very c lose to the mean of 2.21. Whi le still below the neutral response of 3.50, the 2.86 score for the pract ice of *waiting and resting* is worthy of attention. The difference between the lowest and highest common practices was 1.07. Table 4.6 reviews the distance from the mean of the total respon ses (2.21).

Table 4.6. Most Effective Practices

Common Practic e	Mean	Distance from Mean (2.21)
Framing an d centerin g	1.84	0.37
Stud ying and ex ploring	1.79	0.42
Rememberi ng and listening	2.30	-0.10
Waiting and resting	2.86	-0.65
Deciding and imple menting	2.24	-0.04

The second way in which the research questionnaire quantitat   ively assessed the effectiveness of the f ive commo n practices was by asking responde nts, "Which practices have proven most an d least effect ive for the elder and staff leadership t eam in mak ing important decisions at your ch urch?" Figures 4 .7 reveals what practic es were deemed the *most effect ive*. Two le aders did not respon d to the question w hile two gav e two responses as their *most effect ive*, equaling a tota l number of forty -three responses.
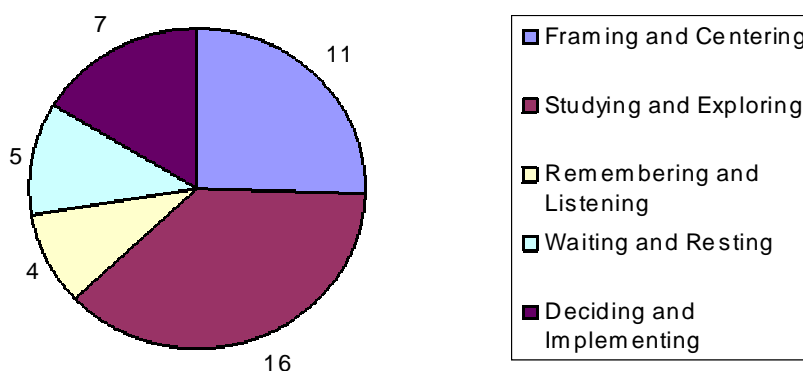
Figure 4.7. Most effective practices (N = 43).

More than 37 percent of respondent s reported st udying and exploring as the *most effective* practice. The data revealed that when combining the two *most effect ive* practices, 63 percent chose either studying and exploring or fr aming and center ing as the *most effect ive* practice.

In the *least effect ive* responses, three peo ple chose not to resp ond, leaving a total of forty respon ses. A rev iew of the *least effect ive* is even more stri king, as half or 50 percent of church leaders gave waiting and resting as the *least effec tive* of the five spiritual discernment practices offered in this survey.
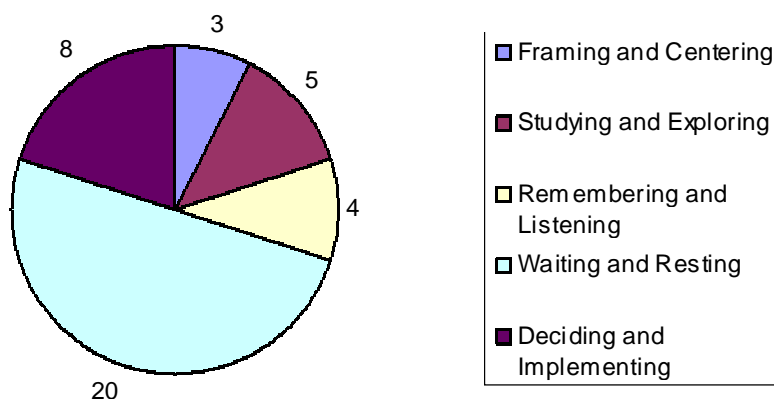
Figure 4.8. Least effective practices (N = 40).

The results of the questionnaire were conc lusive. Word-directed church leaders were more sk illed at the discernment practices of studying and exploring and fram ing and centering and less equipped at wait ing and resting . No f inding indicated that wa iting and resting we re unnecessary; rather, responde nts ex pressed rem orse at not being better discip lined in this pract ice. The interviews affirmed these f indings with much intensity.

Practices Effective—Interviews

The qualitative research step of interviewing church leaders provided significant additional insight into the least and most effective practices of spiritual discernment in the sample of Word-directed Christian churches. All seven interviews pointed specifically to waiting and resting as a practice necessary but in need of improvement in the local church decision-making context.

Waiting and resting. I recorded already the remark of one interviewee who claimed that he was frustrated because he spends days waiting, but not waiting on God as an act of spiritual discernment; rather, his church is mired in the habits and traditions of the past and stymied from making decisions. Another interviewee said simply, "Our least effective practice is waiting and resting by a long margin." Still another interviewee acknowledged, "For the senior minister and me, waiting and resting is a very hard thing. We have learned to depend upon other leaders to help us be more patient." Finally a senior minister in the last interview I conducted summed up what I heard others saying:

> The weakness is probably the same for us as you are finding in other churches of our movement. It is the waiting and resting. While we need to engage all of these practices, we tend to be a bit more active and ready to make a decision. I think we almost need to consciously program the time in to rest on the decision.

Several Word-directed church leaders admitted their weakness was in allowing for time and space to hear God's voice. What follows are several comments from questionnaires and interviews regarding the other common practices from weakest to strongest.

Remembering and listening. Perhaps because it landed near the mean response, the practice of remembering and listening had fewer comments than any other in the survey. One senior leader wrote, "The act of listening allows us to see if we have

correctly heard from God's Word." An elder commente d, "Remembering voices from our past and listening to the voices of those who li ve among us now is very important. We need to improve here." A few commen ts were reg istered about how so me members of the leadership team do too m uch listening .

Deciding and implementing. An elder sa id, "We are much better at simply deciding than wa iting and resting ." A sen ior leader said, "We great ly value the engagement of al l team members in making the dec ision. Wait ing is a cha llenge in our transient culture, as lack of dec isive movement so metimes feels like spiritual failure." Still another senior leader sa id, "Many times, we are emotional ly spent by the time the decision is made, and so we spe nd less time decid ing on how to implement t he idea." Interviewees ac knowledged the tension between working through the decision -making process an d being decis ive.

Framing and centering. An elder wrote re garding the practi ce of framing and centering that "We discussed extensively the importance of the matter; then developed reasons for and against diffe rent scenarios and prayer over seve ral months for Go d's will." Another elder wrote, "Leaders are adept at centering on the issue at hand." Stil l another elder said, "Once you get the questio n ironed o ut, you can m ove on in the mo st effective manner." A senior leader respon ded to t he question naire by saying, "Our greatest gains come when we step away a nd bec ome centered o n God's will. We don't reflect well." Another senior leader wrote, "We do a good j ob of talk ing through the problem and arriv ing at a conclusion and implementation. We don 't let it mar inate enough though." Wrestling with the idea of *holy indifference* on the q uestionnaire, an elder wrote, "We always try to understand and remove our wills, and, we a lways listen,

but remembering tends to happen more among the older elders. Another elder remarked, "The prayer 'God help me to make this decision be about You and not about me' is critical and effective." The interviews indicated that framing and centering is one of the most effective practices of spiritual discernment, yet it is also a very challenging practice.

Studying and exploring. Whereas respondents spoke honestly about their weakness of waiting and resting, they seemed to speak with one voice about their strengths of studying and exploring God's Word. A senior minister interviewee reflected on how God directs even the devotional time in the leadership circle:

> We open the word each time we meet, devotionally. Rotating who does the devotions, it has been remarkable to see how that topic has come into play in the kind of decision that we are making. As we stick with this plan, we are growing to understand that God is already leading us in the Word.

Another senior leader commented, "The engagement with God's Word gives us confidence in decision making, while waiting and resting have often been used as a stalling tactic for making tough decisions." An elder interviewee put forth, "The Word is the grid through which we filter all things. Not necessarily do we open It upon every decision, yet It is always there directing what we decide." Finally another elder interviewee asserted, "[The preacher] makes the Word the center of all of his sermons. Most of the elders conclude that we start with the Word; it is of utmost importance to us." These loud value statements about how important and effective studying God's Word was in leadership decision making in Word-directed churches demonstrated the accuracy of the quantitative research and served to fortify the finding that studying and exploring was the most effective practice of spiritual discernment in this sample.

No significant differences appear when analyzing the data according to size of church or location. The research did not measure differences according to personality

type or spiritual gifting, so I cannot offer data re levant in these areas. The interviews led me to belie ve that those with stronger, more dri ven personalit ies strug gled with the practices of listening and wait ing. Interviewees with more contemplative personality types indicated a closer a ffinity to these same practices.

Summary o f Major Finding s

Chapter 5 covers the fol lowing major f indings:

1. Research e vidence suggested that a Word -directed way of life and philosoph y of ministry support well a decis ion-making approach that includes the Christian discip line of spir itual discernment.

2. The data re vealed that the strong va lue of studying and exploring God's W ord among W ord-directed church leaders overshadows ot her important practic es of corporate spiritual discernment.

3. Whi le questionnaire responde nts and interv iewees re cognized the importance of wait ing and rest ing, they yearn for g reater experience and practica l insight as to how to apply the common practice of laying the work God has been d oing near thei r hearts in reflection.

4. Whi le many respon dents rep orted comf ort with Word -directed preaching and visionary leadersh ip, several expressed discomfort with Word -directed polity and decision mak ing. A few respon dents acknowledged a genuine disconnect between the pulpit and the boardro om by sa ying they know how t o use Go d's Word for serm on preparation, but they do n ot always see how to u se God 's Word in board meetings.

5. Whi le the purpose and sc ope of the st udy was ministry pre -intervention, respon dents consistently asked for somet hing prescr iptive. In other words, Word -directed

leaders we re eager to di alogue about a decis ion-making process that effect ively appl ied the fi ve pract ices of the disc ipline of spir itual discernment.

6. The research c larified that a ll five pract ices are necessary for mak ing important decisions in the church leadership c ircle.

7. Both question naire responses an d interv iews unve iled Word -directed l eaders want very much to be humbly depe ndent up on God in deci sion makin g. One interv iewee said, "We very much want to make our decisions about Go d, rather than us." The practices of the disc ipline of spir itual discernment bring a decis ion-making group closer to making the decis ion be about Go d.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

This research project was born out of an earnest desire to see Christian church leadership teams function in the church boardroom in more God-honoring ways. I set out on a journey to explore how churches committed to a Word-directed philosophy of ministry aligned the human element more fully to God's purpose when making important decisions in their leadership circle. I analyzed how leadership teams moved their respective churches forward on paths God had marked out for them. Having participated on teams where one leader dominated in the boardroom on occasion, I searched for better practices to create and preserve healthy environments for decision making on church leadership teams. The theological and biblical study along with the literature review prior to the research provided significant foundational work upon which to build and lay the actual project. I attempted in this chapter to pull all of these things together and offered seven significant findings with reflections pertaining to life in the church boardroom.

Word-Directed Living and Leading

Research evidence suggested that a Word-directed way of life and philosophy of ministry supported well a decision-making approach that included the Christian discipline of spiritual discernment. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, Word-directed church leaders resonated with all five word-pair practices in the questionnaire. Questionnaire respondents assigned an average score of 2.21 (on a one to six scale, one being more important and six being less important) to all the practices. For this Word-directed sample, all the practices were important and necessary when making important decisions

in the church leadership c ircle. In other words l iving and lead ing from a Word -directed

perspective and making decis ions by utilizing the commo n practices of spir itual

discernment fit comfortably together.

While a few leaders who partic ipated in this research project admitted they tend t o

rush to t he decision event, many more saw the importance an d value of the dec ision-

making journey. Explic it in the working def inition crafted for the questionnaire, be ing

Word directed is a lifestyle, a journey, more s o than a single dec ision, an event. Church

leaders who l ive as Word -direct ed men and w omen of God are more l ikely to lead a s

Word-directed elders and staff members in thei r churches. As wel l a church leadership

team who discipl ines itse lf to apply the fi ve common practices of spi ritual discernment to

the decision-making journey in the church elder and staff le adership c ircle chooses a way

of life. Rather than v iewing board meetings as an agenda to complete with a se ries of

decisions to be made, leaders who practice spi ritual discernment va lue the development

of relationships with one another. They select journey over event. Be ing Word dir ected

and practicing spiritual disce rnment are partner discip lines that are more about jo urney

than event.

Strength to Improve Weakness

The quantitat ive and qualitat ive compo nents of the que stionnaire rev ealed that the

strong value of studying and exploring God's Wor d amo ng Word -directed church leaders

overshadowe d other important practices of corporate spir itual disce rnment. Before

beginning th is study, I could not imagine studying and exploring being scored as

anything but t he mo st important an d most effecti ve pract ice among Word -directed

Christian church leaders. As mentioned in the historica l back ground description,

Christian churches are part of the larger Restoration movement of churches known for their emphasis on God's Word, so I was in no way surprised by the results of the questionnaire. However, the qualitative work of interviewing senior leaders and elders taught me something fresh. Word-directed leaders tended always to lead with the Book. While I am very comfortable with this approach, I must also admit that any strength taken to an extreme can become a weakness. I suggest two ways in which the most effective practice of studying and exploring among Word-directed leaders might become a hindrance to healthy decision making.

First, Word-directed leaders who excel at studying and exploring God's Word may be blinded to other practices of spiritual discernment. As some expressed in interviews, once God's Word speaks on a subject, a decision needs to be made. Such an approach bypasses the importance of hearing the personal and corporate stories within the life of the church (remembering and listening) and sidesteps the practice of laying the work God has been doing near the heart for reflection (waiting and resting). By moving before practicing these disciplines, Word-directed leaders may close off any new understanding of the Word of God that might come during reflection and meditation. Overreliance on the written Word may produce under-reliance on the living Word. Second, Word-directed leaders fixated on study and exploration must be careful to remain humble and dependent upon God and others. Christian church leaders should reclaim a meaningful piece of their heritage by inviting the Holy Spirit back to a position of prominence alongside the Bible.

When Word-directed leaders, trusting the Holy Spirit, allow the example of the living Word and the teaching of the written Word to serve as central to the application of

spiritual discernment to their lives, but not as the only practice of importance, they are using their strength to improve upon weaknesses. For example, before coming to the study of a biblical text, framing and centering one's mind and heart by releasing previous acquaintance with the text and placing God's leading and direction at the center of the study are healthy practices for Bible students. Likewise, competent exegesis of any text of Scripture invites walking the text into the lives of the audience. In other words, studying and exploring depend upon remembering and listening.

Learning How to Wait and Rest

While questionnaire respondents and interviewees recognized the importance of waiting and resting, they yearned for greater experience and practical insight as to how to apply the common practice of laying the work God has been doing near their hearts in reflection. Twenty of forty respondents (50 percent) reported this practice as their *least effective*, yet no respondent wrote or spoke a word to me about this practice being unimportant. The prevailing comment I heard about the practice of waiting and resting was, "I do not do that very well." Still other respondents remarked that this practice is simply not something with which they have much experience.

Much can be gained when one looks outside his or her own heritage. For example, the community of Friends has much to teach my Christian church comrades. The Friends are well-known for the way in which they value silence. Lampen records, "Ours is a gentle process of quiet waiting, of using the tried and tested ways of discernment" (43). Yoder reflects on his experiences with Friends, "Quaker silence in meeting … is a time of expectant waiting until someone —and the point is that it can and will be anyone —is moved to utterance" (68). One interviewee who worked with me as an intern remarked,

"The wait ing and resting, I saw th is lived out very we ll on my internship with you. People tend to want to make quick dec isions, want things to happen instantly." The respon dent reflected upon how he o bserved leaders at Jef ferson Street Christ ian Church during his internship painstak ingly wor king through important decisions rather than rushing to the decision event. As I mentioned previously, I was b lessed to serve seve ral years at Jefferson Street Christ ian Church alongside two fami lies who studi ed and/or taught at Friends' Uni versity. I w itnessed and nurt ured dil igently the contemplative practices of listening, meditat ing, waiting, and resting to hear God speak. Word -directed church leaders who genuinely desire to become m ore effect ive in the pra ctice of waiting and resting w ill learn much abo ut spiritua l discernment when following the Fr iends example.

The first step in appl ication is to res ist the temptation to act immediate ly when the decision event seems to be so clear ly at hand. If a learning discerner can so resist the temptation, he or she wil l create the opportu nity to wait and rest, which w ill otherw ise pass the m by. One must practice the d iscipline before it can become a meaningful habit of life. Some of my richest mome nts in personal dis cipleship have come when I have experienced the aff irmation that comes with having laid a decis ion close to my heart in reflection. For example, I dec ided recently to accept the ca ll to a new min istry in Grinnel l, Iowa, as the church's lead minister . Witho ut the practice of w aiting and resting, I would not have chose n to leave Je fferson Street Christ ian Church.

In a time of reflecting on God's W ord and listen ing for h is voice during a min istry sabbatical, I sensed an urgency to preach m ore often than I d o in ministry at JSCC. Rather than bru sh the incl ination to the side or act hasti ly, I chose to lay the decis ion near

my heart for a period of two weeks. Dur ing that season of time, I invited God to o pen

doors of ministry opport unity and promised n ot to clos e the do ors, as I did on occasion in

years past because of my co mfortable f it at JSCC. Whi le waiting and rest ing those two

weeks, I rece ived three inquiri es about su bmitting a resume´ to le ad midsized churches. I

allowed God to confirm the direct ion I sens ed he wante d me to take.

When Jes us was praying on the night of his betraya l, the New International

Version translates Luk e's words: "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and

his sweat was like drops of bloo d falling to the g round" (22: 44). Whi le Jesus' acceptance

of his fate was a gruel ing exper ience, he re ceived the aff irmation from God necessary to

abide by his wi ll. When the decision event is very c lose at hand, Word -directed leaders

learn to wa it and rest. God speaks with enormous clarity a nd aff irmation, when his

followers observe this pract ice of waiting and resting .

From Pulpit to Boardr oom

While most respon dents an d interv iewees reported comfort with Word -directed

preaching and v isionary l eadership, seve ral expressed discomfort with Wor d-directed

polity and decision mak ing. A few respon dents acknowledged a genuine disconnect

between the p ulpit and the boardro om b y saying they know h ow to u se God 's W ord for

sermon preparation, but they do n ot always see how to u se God 's W ord in board

meetings. In response to an intervi ew question abo ut keeping the Bible at the center of

the boardro om, o ne veteran senior leader sa id, "We begin our board meetings with

sing ing songs and devotions, twent y to thirty minutes u sually. We create a worship

environment then have our meeting. Sometimes I invite the worship leader in. This sets

the tone for decision making." The e lder who was part of this same interv iew responde d,

"This re-sets my agenda." As I listened to the interviewees, I remembered C. Olsen's words, "Just as the altar, the place of offering, is sacred and set apart, so the board room is holy ground" (14). My mind wandered back to that small Methodist church in western Illinois, where I first witnessed the multipurpose communion table. Such personal experiences and gleanings from literature reviewed for this project transformed my view of that particular piece of furniture.

For those respondents to the questionnaire and interviewees searching to erase the very real disconnect between the pulpit and the boardroom, I admit being in that same place myself. With gratitude I enjoyed learning how Wesleyan tradition approaches business meetings as worship gatherings. My view of board meetings was radically reshaped as I added this new finding to the Friends practices of silence, sense of meeting, and the clearness committee. In order to arrive at the sense of meeting that the Quakers describe as "a settled place to which the Holy Spirit has led the group" (Farnham et al. 128), I felt compelled to reflect on the foundational instruction from Seamands' book: Ministry is Trinitarian in shape. What is practiced corporately in the worship center and what is practiced in the boardroom are not far removed from one another.

God is the same in one room as he is in the other, and the behavior of church leaders must reflect this sameness. As a Word-directed church leader, I choose not to divorce the written Word from the living Word when considering church polity. As the research demonstrated, Word-directed leaders tend to lead always with the Bible. I am convinced the Bible does not give specific answers to every question faced in life. As the Father depends upon the Son and Son depends upon the Spirit, Word-directed church leaders strike a balance between walking with the living and written Word in their lives

and leadership in the local church. With intentional ity God did not offer a perfe ct prescription for how to lead the church; instead, he inv ited his people into re lationship with himsel f and offered pr inciples within his written Word to help them on their journey of wal king with the living Word. What Word -directed indiv iduals do should resemble what Word-directed church leaders do, which sho uld also resemble what large group assemblies do.

When business meetings are conducted as worship gatherings, the business of the church wil l begin to share more simi larities than diff erences w ith the worship of the church. I long for the day when church b oard meetings are invigorating corporate experiences that bring renewa l and encouragement rather than lengthy evenings of discussion where decisions are tabl ed until the team meets aga in. To he lp a team of leaders in the local church reach a place where they al l viewed board meetings as invigorating, spiritua lly upli fting, and life-transforming experiences is a large goal of mine. I r ecommen d C. Olsen's b ook, *Transfo rming Church Bo ards into Comm unities of Spiritual Leader s*, to tho se who wish to b uild a purposeful bridge between the pulpit and the boardro om.

Decision-Making Proce ss and Team Environment

While the purpose and sc ope of the st udy was ministry pre -inter vention, respon dents consistently asked for somet hing prescr iptive. In other words, Word -directed leaders we re eager to di alogue about a decis ion making process that effec tively appl ied the fi ve pract ices of the disc ipline of spir itual discernment. Whil e I wrote repeatedly about t he importance of seeing decis ion making as a journey, I do not t hink the journey looks the same each and every time an important decision needs to be made in the local

church. The research d id not indicate any required, spec ific path a team takes in mak ing a corporate decision. The research d id indicat e how important and valuable the f ive practices of spi ritual d iscernment in decis ion making are in the team context.

Every team member m atters. Morr is and Olsen offe r a process for decis ion making when they use visual images of stepping stones, a spira l around a magnetic core, and a fie ld of g rain (79-83). I find the images he lpful, but I apprec iate e ven more their introductory words to this description: "The movements of spiritual discernment are not meant to bec ome a mecha nical set of procedures, but rather a creati ve m ix that can be adapted b y discernmen tarians to the situation in wh ich they are inv olved" (7 7). Whi le research data for this project indicates a long ing for a procedural answer, it de-empha sizes a speci fic prescr iption in favor of cu ltivating the disc ipline of spir itual discernment in a team environment.

The interv iews rev ea led the impo rtance of va luing the perspecti ve of the other leaders in the room when imp ortant decisions are made. One ret ired senior leader who had been at the same church for over thirty years said that no team member loses in their church leadership ci rcle:

> There are nev er w inners and losers in the boardroom, o nly winners. We push bey ond consens us to una nimity: Not only do I ag ree w ith a dec ision, but everything that goes along w ith it. The latte r is a much stronger expression of the former.

I respect this leader's experience and success; thus, unanimity must be a more effective metho d for making important decisions in his part icular sett ing. Howeve r, I do not believe unanimity is the ult imate expression of discernment. Instead, I argue that thei r church leadership team discovered a method for decision making that inc ludes and values every team member's inp ut above and beyond the decision itse lf. Word -directed leaders

are yoked together purpo sefully w ith others who p ossess Word -bearing gifts in the church leadership boardroo m.

Cultiva ting relati onship s important. In each of the seven interviews, one interviewee expressed the utter impos sibility of leadership ministry w ithout the other person w ho was in the interv iew or other elders/staff members. One elder af firmed th e work of the senior leader in his church and used the interview as an opport unity to develop further thei r relationship:

> Before [he] came we we re very inward focused. He helped us quit focusing on ourselves and begin look ing at the needs of others. Th is is a very excit ing time in our church, a place where we have never been before.

A senior leader sa id of the elders in his church, "I sense n o tension w hen making major decisions here. I ha ve no problem taking my lead from these men. I trust their w isdom." Writing speci fically about elder's meetings, Strauch concludes, "Pe ople are more important than meetings.… An eldersh ip team that is sole ly work -oriented is imbalanced" (*Meetings* 11). Members of the Word-bearing leadership c ircle make better decis ions when they know one another. Mutual trust and respect develop as church leaders cultivate relationships with one another. The interv iewee e lder and senior leaders took advantage of the op portunities I afforded them to make solid va lue statements to grow their relationships with one another.

An elder chairman talked about his team: "We have some men in our group who do a very good job of keeping us focused on t he issue at hand. [The senior m inister] and I have a hard time w ith waiting and rest ing, so the other m en in the room help us with that practice." After he made this statement, we discussed the W ord -bearing g ifts in Ephesians 4, and these two men proceeded to describe themselves as a gifted apostle and

prophet respective ly. The interviewees concluded that t he other elders are primar ily gifted pastor -teachers. What they were saying to me and o ne another is that God has gifted us diffe rently but put us t ogether purp osefully. Unity begets d iversity in the leadership c ircle where Word -directed church l eaders agr ee to work together in processing information, mak ing important decisions, and leading faithful ly their congregat ions in God -honoring ways. Th is happens best when leaders respect the differences between one an other and see t hose differences as arranged and orchestrated by the only head of the Church, Christ himself. Such respecting of differences comes as a result of a commitment to developing re lationships with others in the leadership c ircle.

All Practices Necessary

The research c larified that a ll five pract ices are necessary for mak ing important decisions in the church leadership c ircle. The common research thread o bserved was the close proximity of assessment given to each of the f ive commo n practices. Farthest from the mean score of 2.21, waiting and re sting was spread a mere -0.65, wh ich is not a considerable distance from the mean. Hence the RRT and I concluded al l five pract ices were deemed effect ive, important, even necessary, by t his sample of Word -directed church leaders. Ref lecting on the research , I concluded that s ome W ord-bearing church leaders who tended to respond as gifted apostles, prophets, and evangelists valued the more conte mplative practices of remembering and listening and wa iting and resting as much as the other practices. Simultaneously so me Word -bearing church le aders who tended t o respo nd like pastor -teachers va lued high ly the practice of decid ing and implementing as much as the former and more co ntemplative pract ices. The evidence

suggests Word-directed leaders desire to include all five practices of the discipline of spiritual discernment when making important decisions in the church.

Implicit within the conclusion is again the importance of teamwork. Paul describes the body of Christ:

> The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body.... If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Cor. 12:12, 26)

The design and function of the human body is complicated beyond comprehension for me; however, one thing I do comprehend is that each part influences the other parts. Respondents to the questionnaire and personal interviews demonstrated that the contribution of each team participant is necessary to the effectiveness of the whole team. When important decisions face the leadership team in a local church, God wants all team members to use their Word-bearing gifts in an environment conducive to the practices of the discipline of spiritual discernment being corporately observed.

Dependence upon God

Word-directed leaders want very much to be humbly dependent upon God in decision making. I was greatly encouraged to observe how this sample of Word-directed leaders eagerly pursued God's plan for decision making in the Church. I did not quantitatively test for this attribute, but the interviews of Word-directed leaders revealed the characteristic of humble dependence upon God. Reflecting on the eighty year old elder who found himself most interested in setting personal preference aside, I also recorded the musings of a senior leader in a church affirming how the eldership where he serves is committed to being shaped by the Word of God. He said, "Once that

commitme nt is made, it is less about what I want and more about does it match up with God's Word and w here his Word wi ll take us." I listened literally in awe of the consistency with which these kinds of statements were made whe n discussing the man ner in which church le aders go about making important decisions within thei r churches.

As I enjoyed o bserving this att ribute of hu mble depen dence up on God, I sat for a moment an d invited God to help me beco me more *holy in differen t*, as I partner with a new leadership team of e lders and staff here in Gr innell, Iowa. Word -directed leaders learn the value of free ing themselves of any sel f-ser ving motivat ion of the heart. What has been referred to in this project as shedding, I like to ca ll letting go of my own agenda in fa vor of God's agenda. Wor d-directed church leaders disc ipline themselves over t ime to minimize, or even e radicate, personal and pri vate impulses from inf luencing the ir decisions. The wr itten Word is the objective standard, and the liv ing Word is the perfect example to follow. Wh ile perfect are the standard and exam ple, how equally imperfect are leaders in positions to make important decisions in the loca l church; hence, the attribute of humble depen dence ma y well be the most signif icant finding of this study.

Implications of the Finding s

I love the church. When charged to procee d with research that w ill influence its course, I was hum bled and ho nored. I also love the Chr istian church, not to the exclusion of other churches, b ut God first caught my attention in a small Christ ian church in southern Indiana by s howing me how imp ortant the Bible is through the care and devotion of teachers in that l ittle church. I learned much thro ugh the liter ature re view and research in recent mont hs abo ut the way a few churches ap proach decision making. I discovered ve ry little written work or r esearch from Christ ian church auth ors and

researchers in this field of decision making in the church. I opted not to offer a prescription for decision making in Christian churches because I sensed what was more important was observation and clarification of what is currently happening in Word - directed Christian churches.

The results of this study are not intended to imply that churches I included in the research are better off than others who do not use discernment practices, yet the study points clearly to the importance of discernment practices to corporate decision making in the local church setting. Likewise, the project does not imply that a Word -directed philosophy of ministry is special beyond any other ecclesiology. Rather, the research results invite further dialogue among Word -directed leaders about how to integrate discernment practices between pulpit and boardroom. I hope and trust that the findings of this research project will lead to something helpful to Christian church leadership teams specifically, and church leadership teams generally, who desire to become more disciplined in their approach to making important decisions in their churches.

Limitations of the Study

The self-report questionnaire was a very subjective research methodology, though I knew of no other way to collect the necessary data. As well this project narrowed the focus of decision making in the local church to a sample of Word -directed Christian churches in Illinois. Therefore, the results may prove applicable only in churches who match the definition we created for Word directed. Christian churches not in Illinois, or at a distance away from the influence of Lincoln Christian University, may view decision making in the church differently. The research questionnaire went through several revisions, yet it needed improvement. First, I would add a specific question to help the

RRT analyze the attribute of humble dependence upon God. Second, I would ask respondents on the back page to rank the practices from most to least effective from one to five in their current setting rather than simply listing their most effective and least effective practices While I was very encouraged by the response rate I received, without time constraints, I would have invited larger participation on both research questionnaires and interviews. I learned too late to include software that transcribes audiotapes in the data-collection procedure. The process would have been simplified and more time could have been invested analyzing the content of the interviews had I been able to transcribe the data with such software.

Unexpected Observations

I experienced two notable observations that I did not anticipate before the study began. First, I was pleasantly surprised by the consistent refrain noted, especially during the interviews, that Word-directed leaders tend to be humbly dependent upon God as they make important decisions in the local church setting. Second, I observed a decision-making outcome that exceeds consensus in an interview with a veteran senior leadership team. I learned from a retired senior leader that "unanimity" takes a corporate decision-making body beyond "consensus":

> Consensus is where we all agree in concept, and even though we might choose different vocabulary to describe our conclusions, we all contribute. On the other hand, unanimity is when we all agree not simply on the concept but everything else that goes along with it, including the vocabulary.

I envisioned consensus as the highest accomplishment in decision making before this interview. While my focus of attention throughout this project was on the decision journey and not overemphasizing the decision event, I learned that the event itself can be

journey-like. In other words coming to conse nsus or una nimity is more of a process than a sing le event.

Recommendations

My aim in conducting this research and writ ing about the findings has been the leadership c ircle in the loca l church. I be lieve that ministry staf f and e lders in Christ ian churches sta nd to gain the most fro m this project's c onclusions. I hope for o pportunities to share abo ut the importance of seeing decis ion making as a journey in church leadership retreat or seminar settings. I also env ision Word -directed leaders applying the practices of the discipl ine of sp iritual discernment to their personal and corporate l ives for the purpose of aiding the ir churches in mak ing dec isions that reflect God's heart and desire. As a result of such a disc iplined approach t o decision making, church leadership teams will grow c loser to one anot her in unity and purp ose, as they travel the road of spir itual discernment together.

Postscript

As I come now to the e nd of this jour ney, I recognize I am at the beg inning a gain. My assistant coaches an d I have been trying to send this same message to the eighth graders on the junior high basebal l team we coach during th is season of the year. Once they get to the end, they begin again. Making the most of every opportunity that presents itse lf along the way is of such importance. Th is project reminded me of the twin va lues of journe y and team. Go d cho se the m onths of dissertation comp osition to redirect my professional journey an d assign me to a new team. I wr ite these f inal words whi le in Lincoln, Illinois, yet I moved this past weekend to Grinnel l, Iowa. I come to the end of the journey only to start again.

As this research project on how to make important decisions in the local church unfolded, God placed before me a very important decision. While the timing of transitioning to a new community and ministry seemed inappropriate to me personally, I know now that God was affording me the opportunity to apply the practices of the discipline of spiritual discernment to my life. With the input of trusted others, a Word-directed student of God's Word embarked upon a journey, wanting nothing more than to be obedient in following God's agenda for my life and family. I have framed and centered. I have studied and explored. I have remembered and listened. I have waited and rested. I have decided and now implemented the decision, and, I might add, I could not be any more certain of this being God's decision than any other I have ever made. I resisted this transition with every fiber of my being because these past eleven years in Lincoln have been some of the most productive and satisfying years I can remember. I love Lincoln; my family loves Lincoln. To do anything less than move my family to Grinnell, Iowa, would be throwing a knuckleball when my catcher called for a fastball.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIE W PROTOCOL A

(Four fol low-up interv iews using the research instrument as a template)

1. Tape record.

2. Tell me about the ch urch you serve.

3. Describe who is in the room when important decisions get made in this church.

4. What d o you think of our working def inition of *Word directed*?

5. Share in gener al the *impo rtant decision* you framed before answering the questions about spiritual discernment and decision making.

6. How important is *spiritual discernmen t* to the decision -making process in the local church?

7. What new idea did you learn about s piritual discernment?

8. Restate back to interv iewee *most* and *least* effective. What made you answer the way you did?

9. What wo uld you have liked for me to ask that I d id not? What is mi ssing in the survey?

10. What que stions can I answer for you?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIE W PROTOCOL B

(Three interviews of veteran leadership teams)

1. Permission to record the interv iew

2. Selection of dissertat ion topic —When I began the DMin program f ive years a go, I was encouraged to ch oose a dissertation topic that I could l ive with for a long time. I am a student of pe ople, specif ically in the church boardro om, so I chose the topic of how leaders make dec isions in the local church.

3. My stud y has bee n a journe y of gaining wisdom an d insight f rom other peo ple, specif ically in the ar ea of how one applies the c lassic d iscipline of spi ritual discernment to decision making (review questionnaire): *framin g/centering* the matter for decis ion; *studying/exploring* the Word of G od; *rememberi ng/listening* to the stories of our congregation and the move of the Holy Spirit; *wait ing/res ting* on the decision to co me from God; *deci ding/implement ing*—moving the decision to a point where we actual ly make it and implement.

4. Coming near the end of the research phase, I am now interview ing people who have been in the same locat ion for long per iods of time. Reminder: Interv iewees recommen ded by LCU panel of expert.

5. How man y years have you been in ministry? How many years have yo u been at this church? In what ministry capacity?

6. *Word directed*—see definit ion
    a. Where did the inf luence of being Word directed beg in?

    b. How has being Word directed shown up in everyday ministry experience?

    c. What wo uld you want t o pass along to y ounger leaders about a Word - directed min istry?

7. Keeping the Word at the center of your teaching and preaching is one thing, keeping the Word at the center of boardroom discussion is another. Ta ke me into the decision-making circle at your church: Who is there, and how have yo u and the leaders been able to keep the Word in the center over so many years?

8. How important is *spiritual di scernmen t* to the decision -making process at the church y ou serve? Is one of these practices more important than an other? If so, which and why?

9. From your perspective, what do you t hink that Christian churches do wel l in the area of mak ing important decisions in the church?

10. Where do y ou find Christian churches to be lack ing?

11. In the area of the importance of the leadership ci rcles (preacher/e lders), how would you advise a re cent col lege/seminary graduate embark ing upon his first preaching min istry experience?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE DELIVERY PROTOCOL

1. Introduction: Craig Smith, Jefferson Street Christian Church, Lincoln, D Min student at Asbury Theological Seminary, field research for dissertation on the topic of how we make important decisions in our churches.

2. You have been selected by a Panel of Experts from Lincoln Christian University— J. K. Jones, Lynn Laughlin, Karen Diefendorf, and Don Green —as one of several *Word-directed* churches and church leaders in Illinois.

   > Our working definition of what it means to be a *Word-directed Church*: describes both a way of life and a philosophy of ministry common to a movement within Restoration churches. This movement is known for allowing God's Word, both living and written, to serve as the beginning and ending point for a church to establish and preserve a unified course. The elders and staff in a *Word-directed Church* choose to let the text speak first and foremost in their preaching, teaching, and decision making. Because being *Word-directed* is a way of life, a world-view, *Word-directed* leaders take their cues from the Word of God and allow the text of God's Word to shape the ministry of the church.

3. The research begins with a Questionnaire that explores the importance of applying the discipline of spiritual discernment to decision making in the church boardroom (leadership circle). I have piloted the study several times, and it takes participants between 15-30 minutes to complete. After some introductory information, you are asked to consider an important decision in the life of the church (one you have/are recently made) or case studies are offered.

4. I hope this research blesses Christian churches by eventually assisting church leaders with helpful practices for making God-honoring decisions. I would be glad to share results with you later this year when the project reaches conclusion.

5. If you are willing to participate, I could send you the questionnaire either through electronic (publisher) or postal mail. Then, I would also send a letter of introduction and a consent form to sign that assures you that your responses will be kept confidential.

6. You could return these to:

   (a) Postal mail (I'll send you an envelope) or
   (b) Electronic mail (craigs@jeffstreet.org) with informed consent sent through postal mail

7. Deadline: Wednesday, May 5, 2010.

APPENDIX D

COVER LETTER PRECEDI NG QUESTIONNAIRE

April 21, 2010

Dear   ,

     This ministry project is part icularly interested in what happen s in the leadership decision-making circle of elders and senior ministry staf f in the loca l church. Antic ipating that none of us d o it exact ly the same way, this project also assumes that all who participate a re interested in mak ing good decisions that ho nor Go d and are in step with his w ill for each respect ive church body. W hile some who partic ipate may use *Robert's Rules of Order* (or some var iation thereof) in conducting a meeting, others may utilize *Carver's Policy Governance* model around which to organize themselves.

     The reason for which you have been asked to participate   in this survey is not because of these differences in how you organize yourselves or choose to faci   litate a meeting. Rather, there are two things a ll who are part icipating hav e in commo n: (1) The church y ou serve is located in the state of I llinois and is part of the Restoration movement of churches; an d (2) You and/or the ch urch y ou serve were r ecommen ded to me by a panel of experts from Lincoln Christ ian University consisting of K aren D iefendorf, Don Green, J. K. Jones and Lyn n Laughlin. The goal of the Panel was to identi fy 20 or more Christian churches in I llinois who fol low a *Word-directed* ecclesiology or approach to ministry. Our def inition of *Word-direc ted* can be fou nd on page two of the survey.

     Thank you in advance for part icipating in this resea rch project. I pl an to send o ne copy of the research results to each church that participates. If you prefer <u>not</u> rece iving a copy of the results, please e-mai l me at craigs@je ffstreet.or g. I hope and trust that God will use the discover ies we make to benefit the health of decis ion-making in leadership circles w ithin Christ ian churches b oth in Illinois and beyon d. Please answer a ll questions to the best of y our knowledge. **Please return the survey by Wednesday, May 5, 2010 .**

Sincere ly,

Craig J. Smith, Minister
Jefferson Street Christ ian Church
1700 N. Jeffe rson St.
Lincoln, IL 62656
(217) 732-9294 (work)/(217) 314-0207 (cell)

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONNAIRE

(page 1)

Decision Making In the Church
Research Questionnaire

Conducted by Craig J. Smith
Doctor of Ministry Student at Asbury Theological Seminary
Wilmore, Kentucky

Name: _____ _____

Address: _____ _____

City: ____ _____ State: _ _____ Zip: _____ ____

E-mail Address: _____ _____

Phone Number: _____ _____ Cell Number: _____ _____

Church: _____ _____

Number of Years at this Church: _____ _____

Average weekend worship attendance: _____ _____

Your participation in this survey is greatly appreciated!

Questions—contact Craig at 217-314-0207

(page 2)

Word-directed Church

Your church, as a representative of Restoration movement churches, has been selected as a Word-directed congregat ion by a panel of experts from Lincoln Christ ian University in Lincoln, Illinois. Please read our work ing def inition of what it means to be a *Word-directed Church*:

> *Word directed* describes both a way of life an d a philosophy of ministry comm on to a movement within Restoration churches. This movement is k nown for allowing God's Word, both living and written, to ser ve as the beginning an d ending point for a church to establish and preserve a unified course. The elders a nd staf f in a *Word-directed Church* choose to let the text speak first an d foremost in their preaching, teaching, an d decision making. Because being *Word directed* is a way of life, a w orld-view, *Word-directed* leaders take their cues from the Wor d of God and allow the text of Go d's Word t o shape the ministry of the church.

Circle the word which best describe s how wel l our church matche s this definit ion:

STRONGLY AGREE   AGREE   DISAGREE STRONGLY   DISAGREE

Explain your a nswer (s):

_____
_____
_____
_____

Consider an important, or even controversia l, decision your leadership team made recently or re flect on these two case studies a church ma y experience before completing the survey questio ns on the next page. In other words, it is important that y ou have a decision framed in your mind before procee ding.

Case A: *The preach ing minister of the congregation for which yo u serve as p art of the leadership team has departed after a five -year ministry. The chu rch saw steady growth before th is preaching minister ar rived. Dur ing his tenure the church declined dramatically in a ttendance. Faced with d iscerning the will of God, the leadersh ip team of which yo u are a part is commissioned with defining the church's next step.*

Case B: *As senior leader on staff at the church where you serve, a new fam ily who recently joine d the church comes to you and asks why so few women seem to serve in leadin g and teaching roles i n their new church h ome. You are aware this family comes from a d ifferent church backg round and you wa nt to offer a Word-direc ted response to their question. After s haring with the chairman of the elders, how does yo ur church leadership team proceed in discerning God's will?*

(page 3)

Spiritual Discernment and Decision Making

The following word-pairs with descriptions are common practices applying the Christian discipline of spiritual discernment to the decision making journey in the church elder and staff leadership circle. With a decision your church recently made and/or the case studies on the previous page in mind, please write the appropriate number in each of the five blanks below which you think best describes the importance of that common practice to your team's decision making journey:

MORE IMPORTANT 1 ——- 2 ——- 3 ——- 4 ——- 5 ——- 6 LESS IMPORTANT

_____ *Framing and Centering*—clearly identifying the matter about which we are making an important decision by asking (framing) the right questions. While the discernment issue and questions are being framed, participants are challenged to let go of personal agendas, become *holy indifferent* to any choice except what God wants, and place the pursuit of God's leading at the center of the process (centering). The prayer during this discernment practice: God, help me to make the decision be about You and not about me.

_____*Studying and Exploring*—engaging God's Word in exegesis (studying) for the purpose of determining what Old and New Testament texts come to bear on our pending decision. This practice is emphasized to connect more closely with Word-directed congregations. During engagement with God's Word, participants invite God to help free their imaginations toward identifying the possibilities and pathways God is opening up for us (exploring). The discerners might ask during this practice: What examples, principles, or lessons can we glean from God's Word to help us make this important decision? What are the possible options in front of us?

_____*Remembering and Listening*—reflecting on our current situation to discern how our personal and corporate stories within the life of our church connect with the biblical narrative (remembering). While reflecting the team commissioned to make this important decision meditates upon promptings of the Spirit and listens to important voices of wisdom both inside and outside of their community of faith (listening). Decision makers ask of their inner selves: Am I experiencing peace or lack of peace about this decision?

_____*Waiting and Resting*—resisting the temptation to immediately act when the decision event seems to be so clearly at hand (waiting) and instead living with the results of all previous practices on the discernment journey for awhile. As participants wait on this journey, they lay the work God has been doing near their hearts in reflection (resting) and engage Him and one another very closely. The prayer during this discernment practice: God, it seems that You are clearly directing our paths. Allow what You are telling us to penetrate our hearts before we move on with this decision.

_____*Deciding and Implementing*—moving the matter for discernment to the point where all involved participate in the actual decision event (deciding) and giving all voices an opportunity to be clearly heard. Decision makers realize it is not enough simply to draw a conclusion, they develop a plan for enacting the decision and put it firmly in place (implementing). Before their commission is completed, the discerning group closes the discussion with a satisfactory plan in place for implementation and
evaluation.

COMMENTS:

_____

(page 4)

Summary Questions

1. Of the five word-pairs in the survey, which have proven most an d least EFFEC TIVE for the elder and staff l eadership team in mak ing important decisions at your church?

_____   _____
         (most)   (least)

Explain your answer:

2. What grade would you gi ve your team for effect iveness in applying the disc ipline of spiritua l discernment in decis ion making?

A	B	C	D	F

3. In light of th is survey, are there other decis ion making mo dels you would recom mend?

COMMEN TS/RECOMMENDA TIONS : _____
_____
_____

Thank y ou for taking the time to complete this survey.
If you have questions or comments while c ompleting the survey,
do not hesitate to contact me (see below).

Craig J. Smith, Minister
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(work) 217-732-9294
(cell) 217-314-0207
craigs@jeffstreet.org

Paul wrote , *"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and maybe pure and blameless until the day of Christ."* (Philippians 1:9 -10)

APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

April 21, 20 10

Dear   ,

For a dissertation at Asbu ry Theol ogical Seminary, I am co nducting research on the topic of how church leaders ma ke decision s. I am surveying forty peo ple in tw enty churc hes, a professio nal and volunteer leader from each c ongregation. Yo u ha ve bee n reco mmen ded by a pa nel of expe rts from Lincoln Christian University to participate in the sur vey.

The imp ortant decisions we ma ke are c ontent -sensitive, thus c ontent information is not being requested. I am asking participants to explore the vario us practices of t he discipline o f spiritual discern ment to decision making in t heir co ntext. Your res ponses will be reviewed by a Research Reflecti on Team at Jeffer son Street Christian Ch urch and ad ded to the res ponses of the othe r churc h leaders. I want to ass ure yo u that yo ur responses will be ke pt con fidential within this small team, helping me tally the results.

I believe the process we go t hrough in making decisions may well be as important as the decisions themselves. I hope the findings from this s urvey will serve to assist leaders hip teams in congregations as they seek to make Go d-honoring decisions . I envisio n that Ch ristian churc hes will be helped because yo u and others like yo u have take n the time to participate in the sur vey.

Once the research is co mpleted, in approximately three months , I will destroy the in dividual surveys and keep the an onymo us data electronically for an in definite perio d of time, at least unt il my dissertation is written, defen ded and approved this fall.

Please kno w that yo u can refuse to res pond to any or all of the questio ns on the survey. I realize that your participation is entirely volu ntary and I appreciate your willingness to co nsider being part of the stu dy. Feel free t o call or write me at any time if you need any more information . My number is 217 -314-0207 and my e -mail is craigs@jeffstreet.org.

If you are willing to assist me in this study, please sign and date this letter below to indicate your voluntary participation; then retur n it to me in t he postage -paid en velope. Thank yo u for your help.

Sincerely,

Craig J. Smith

I volunteer t o participate in the study describe d above and so indicate by my signature belo w:

Your signature: _____ Date: _____

Please print you r name: _____

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